

Book Reviews

frank and witty, engaging and lovable, thoroughly *human* men who ever lived and wrote. The little volume is crowded with incident, and on the whole Père Labat is very satisfactorily translated. We could have wished, indeed, for a few elucidating notes, *e.g.*, it is not everyone who knows what a 'Jacobin friar' is, and it is a pity the book could not have been revised by someone with a knowledge of Catholic technical terms. Then we should have been spared such jarring phrases as 'holding Mass' and 'attending Communion,' the Dominican habit would not have been described as 'my full dress, clothes, both black and white,' a province of the Order would not have been confused with the Duchy of Provence, and Père Labat would not have been numbered among 'French Jesuits'!

F.R.B.

A CONVERSATION WITH A CAT AND OTHERS. By Hilaire Belloc. (Cassell; 7/6.)

It was no ordinary cat that leapt at one graceful bound into Mr. Belloc's lap as he sat in the bar of a railway station taking a glass of beer and meditating upon the necessary but tragic isolation of the human soul. A quadruped, so rare and bold, deserves its place of honour in the title of this book of Essays, themselves likewise both rare and bold. After the sixth page we part company with the cat and pass rapidly on to the other things and renew our acquaintance with those discourses, moralizings, dogmatizings, musings, reflections, contemplations, speculations, animadversions and discussions which gave us delight when we read them in the pages of one of the weekly reviews.

Mr. Belloc confesses that a certain *pudor* restrains within him the impulse that might otherwise stir him to autobiography: he has the desire, but he says (though it doesn't sound exactly like *pudor*), 'Why should I cast these pearls before my snouted fellow-citizens? Why should I open the Holy of Holies?' Yet the desire always gets the better of him and he is constantly straying into autobiography. Why not? Are these not conversations? And when a man is administering conversation, what else do you expect if not a good deal upon the one subject in which everyone is an expert? I do not mean that the autobiographical touches are of the kind that would help anyone to set about writing a Life of Hilaire Belloc; but then what autobiography ever helped towards the writing of a real Life? I mean that there is much that is more revealing than any set attempt to record the facts, no matter who made it.

Blackfriars

It is interesting to read that Belloc wrote his *James II* on the edge of the Sahara in not many consecutive days well away from the reference libraries. 'So God be praised!' he says, 'But in that book there were innumerable slips of the pen and half a dozen good, honest, howlers, the fruit of hermitage and liberty.'

Tastes will differ, but for me 'Laud on the Scaffold' is the pick of the book; and the essay on Jonathan Swift comes a good second. The dictum, 'Prose style is excellent in proportion as it is lucid' will come as a hard saying to the moderns whose aim is not to be understood, but to seem clever. 'There never was a man who could say what he had to say more clearly, nor with a better certitude that every reader of every class would immediately understand him' than Swift. I think the same applies to Mr. Belloc. His easy command of the language, his crystal-clear, effortless style ought to commend him to the readers of to-day, yet they prefer the best seller.

C.N.L.

MIRROR FOR TOBY. By Cecily Hallack. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.; 6/- net.)

In 'Mirror for Toby' Cecily Hallack has found an unusual title for an unusual tale. The story deals with Toby's spiritual development, Virginia being the still, patient and beautiful mirror of his soul, reflecting him with the eyes of love and therefore with something of the regard of God for him, and so stimulating him to become what she would finally have him be. And Virginia too finds her own soul, for Toby teaches her, through his unflagging pursuit of his ideal, that the logical soul must be a Catholic soul.

It is a tribute to Miss Hallack's writing that she makes us feel kindly towards Toby, who is really rather an impossible young man, giving his love, quite arbitrarily, a very bad time of it. She writes vividly, slashing in the scene with swift, incisive—to use a word she is fond of—gesture. She has great wit, not hesitant, where it suits her, of knockabout clowning. But I wish she had not twice described the Poles as 'tired,' and I cannot see the significance of the episode when Juan and Estella find Tony in the pub. Her anxiety to get in the Catholic point of view, too, is responsible for a tendency to overload her pages with propaganda. However, these are mere flaws in an otherwise very good thing and Miss Hallack deserves a vote of thanks from the Catholic public for producing so good a tale, especially one with so beautiful an ending.

A.H.