

**Barth's Theology of Crisis.** He has succeeded in presenting very forcibly the doctrine of a Church reforming herself continually in the light of Divine Revelation, but, like so much writing of a similar nature, it derives most of its strength from the zeal and sincerity of its author. The book shows signs of too hasty writing and in many places the argument is weak, particularly in the section concerned with the Ministry. It is at this point, indeed, that we find the weakness of Mr. Jenkins' premise. The total rejection of the natural implied in Barth's teaching inevitably leads to the rejection of the Church as a visible community. Mr. Jenkins' attempt to meet this difficulty is not happy.

The book is unfortunately marred by many expressions of opinion somewhat overzealously worded, and by imputing to the teaching authority of the Church doctrines, particularly on the subject of papal infallibility, which are very far from being accurate. We strongly recommend Mr. Jenkins to enlarge his knowledge of Catholic doctrine and we are sure that thoughtful reflection will deliver him from such conceptions as, for example, his failure to find anything more in the Papal Encyclicals than 'dreamy platitudes' and 'complacent self-congratulation.' With all its defects, and they are the defects of youth, the book does represent a courageous attempt to present the problem raised by a divided Christendom in terms which are far from being contemptible, and which by their very positive and dynamic character are charged with promise for the future.

IAN HISLÖP, O.P.

**THE FOOL'S PROGRESS.** (By Rom Landau. (Faber; 5s.)

It is not a good thing for a nation when its national characteristics acquire a publicity value. They tend to become fashionable, and the personality of individuals is too valuable a possession for its suppression under the veneer of a cultivated normality to be anything but a tragedy. The increased contacts with European ways of life which, in recent years, have been possible for the people of these islands, have shown most of us that there are differences, often profound, between our modes of life, our reactions to the everyday situation, and those which obtain in other countries. Being what we are, we are inclined to make virtues of these differences, and to see in them the strength of our national character. Inevitably we find vice where our own particular idea of virtue is absent, and set up a code of behaviour based more on our own peculiarities than upon any fundamental ethical principles. Mr. Landau has analysed the British character in just over a hundred pages. In a book of this size, which treats the people of Yorkshire and Sussex, Wales and Somerset, Inverness and Glasgow, all under one head; which cites Lord Grey of Fallodon, Mr. Montagu Norman, Lloyd George, Bernard Shaw, and Neville Chamberlain as examples of the same national quality—in this case boyishness—generalisations must of necessity abound. All

Mr. Landau's generalisations point to the super-excellence of John Smith, and all the John Smiths who read this book will feel instinctively the desire to be as quixotically honest, as mentally lazy (but determined in action, of course!), as brilliant an amateur, as sportive in old age, and even, perhaps, as vaguely religious, as Mr. Landau's version of themselves. At five shillings the book should sell well, for if there is one thing John Smith enjoys, it is to be able to read in private a confirmation of his own beliefs about himself.

CEDRIC BURTON, O.P.

THE FABER BOOK OF COMIC VERSE. Edited by Michael Roberts. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)

'The frontiers of comic verse are, at the best, shifting and uncertain,' says Mr. Roberts. Perhaps it is best that they should stay so: in other spheres where frontiers count, experience certainly suggests that the artificial boundary is worse than none at all.

We are told in the *Poetics* that 'the aim of comedy is to exhibit men worse than we find them; that of tragedy, better.' It is odd—and possibly fortunate—that literary theory has done very little more to reach the roots of the comic spirit. By to-day, the connotation of the 'comic' has become so loose that it includes almost the whole range of the unserious—from the jocular-sportive to the subtle. 'Funny,' 'humorous,' 'witty,' 'satirical,' 'light': there are infinite gradations, and the present anthology is the better for being arbitrarily confined to 'nonsense, parody and comic satire.' Such a limitation, even so, will include Lear and Carroll, 'intellectual' limericks and Bentley clerihews, the Belloc of 'Lord Hippo suffered fearful loss' and the Chesterton of *Songs of Education*, the ruthless rhymes of Harry Graham and Don Marquis's *archy and mehitable*.

Yet however confused its territory may be, comic verse generally retains something of Aristotle's sense of comedy as a criticism of life, exploiting all that is ridiculous in a man; a comedy that evokes laughter indeed, but the laughter at a face in a distorting mirror; laughter at a man caught out. Even the usual funny story has that for its point: it 'exhibits men worse than we find them' in that its purpose is implicitly satirical. The stockbroker slipping up on a banana-skin can make us laugh because the conjunction of the two is in itself ludicrous; it is still more so when we see a man's self-importance suddenly deflated. We know that the stockbroker is *more* than that: he may be just, courageous, pious. But for the moment the relevant thing is that he is rather less than the total of his virtues. He is 'worse' than we find him—and we laugh. It might not be too much to say that humour is one of the guardians of humility.

The Comic, too, presupposes a fully human situation. We do not, strictly, laugh at animals or scenery unless they are given some human participation. Our laughter is a continuing recognition of