

THE PLEASURES OF POVERTY. An Argument and an Anthology. By Anthony Bertram. (Hollis and Carter; 15s.)

Readers of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT must not expect to find in this delightful book the description of 'religious poverty' from the pens of theologians and mystical writers who have sought the hand of Lady Poverty. It is important that they should realise the wider, more humane field in which poverty is practised and enjoyed by all types of men and considered and described by many writers and poets, many of them perhaps 'good pagans'. Mr Bertram, who has compiled this anthology, contained in a strong and clear argument of his own (thereby making it possible for us to drink of his vintage with the additional pleasure derived from cut-glass), takes occasion to criticise Eric Gill for being narrow-minded in this respect, and Catholics may too often share this restricted view. 'Eric Gill falls into some confusion of language. He speaks of "evil poverty"'. But poverty cannot be evil; wealth may be: full destitution always is; but poverty cannot be. And he further complicates matters by dragging in the idea of holiness. Holy Poverty is quite a different thing.' (p. 6.) There is a whole collection of wholesome earthly pleasures which the poor man can enjoy, and there is above all 'the escape from the burden of wealth'; and these two aspects of poverty occupy the first two of the three parts of the book. Only in the third part—'The Long Reward'—does Mr Bertram enter the exclusively Christian realms where St Francis and Lazarus are the familiar figures. The Christian reader will, however, do well to begin the argument at the beginning and learn to relish the ideal joy of poverty and its contentment. The selection from English writing, mostly poetry, itself brings a contentment and a pleasure that the poor unruffled man can taste of more fully than the rich. So the Christian should not fall into the habit of regarding himself as a martyr and most of the way to sanctity just because he has to remain poor. And the religious who vows himself to detachment from earthly goods, and so to be free of the cares of wealth and the *vanitas vanitatum*, is evidently better off than the man who worries over his possessions or lack of them, so that it is foolish for him to pretend that he has done anything heroic. Christians both rich and poor, both vowed and free, should follow the broad view of this anthology to obtain a true perspective in an age far too preoccupied by the concerns of property to be free to laugh and love as men—

Ah, what is love? It is a pretty thing
As sweet unto a shepherd as a king—

CONRAD PEPLER. O.P.