

REVIEWS

seemed to consist of almost uninterrupted marvels, and in the first twenty-five pages Sister Anne Hardman gives references to no less than twenty apparitions of Our Lord, His Holy Mother, and the Saints. And these wonders continue in great number throughout the book, gathered from the original biography written by the nuns' chaplain, Canon Edmund Bedingfield, in the year following Margaret's death.

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

MARK SYMONS. By Stephanie Wines. (Sheed & Ward; 5/-.)

"He knew how to live life fully, but he did not mind when he knew he had to die. He would like, he said, to paint some more pictures, and he hated to leave his wife alone, but apart from that he was perfectly content." These words show had necessary it was that this book should be written. It is to be hoped that it will reach all those who had heard his name and knew him only as a sensation-monger, as a painter of problem pictures. For that has been his fate since the Academy made him newspaper "copy."

And indeed, it is not only in justice to him that it should be read. It throws light on something that was obscure in his pictures. One always felt that there was something that they lacked, and now it is clear that they lack complete co-ordination with the artist. They fail to "represent" him. He might have been a saint, or he might have been the mountebank that Fleet Street, with its customary charity, led the world to believe. And it is clear too, that this circumstance is the outcome of the false restraints that were imposed on his artistic development. One has only to glance at his pictures to get an idea of the vigour with which he treated all the material that came to his hand, but at times it is very much like the vigour of a circus performance, of a clown going through a paper hoop. And in course of his development he had too many paper hoops. His pre-occupation with detail as such, his repertoire of "styles," etc., were all so unnecessary and useless. His art owed too much to them and too little to himself. Hence the sense of fiction. This book does something towards dispelling the fiction. There is a sense in which what is bad can be explained away. With this knowledge of the man, we, quite rightly, come to regard the imperfections of his pictures as of less significance.

Throughout the book it is his character that is the predominant interest, and the authoress presents it in the best way possible. She states facts. She tells of his everlasting talk, of his zeal and integrity, and above all makes it clear he "escaped from the conventions in the manner of the artist, but also in the deeper manner of the saint." Perhaps it is a sign that it has been well done when the reader is left wondering how to arrive at an estimate of this

BLACKFRIARS

incalculable man who was fond of machinery, and was a rustic by choice, who was a quiet and forceful mystic and thought of the growth of the Church in terms of a chart showing the number of converts an hour.

MARK BROCKLEHURST, O.P.

LETTERS TO HIS FIANCEE. By Leon Bloy. Translated by Barbara Wall. (Sheed & Ward; 5/-.)

"For some time I have been rather embarrassed in writing to you. I have been afraid of your criticism. You have made fun of my way of expressing myself in the absolute . . ." The prevaricator! When she reassures him, he confesses "Those were exaggerated remarks . . . I would not be what I am—an artist—if I could prevent that bitch, literature, from penetrating even into the most naïf stirrings of my heart."

Marchenoir being deeply in love, and enticed away from his high horse, appears very lovable himself: very simple and essentially humble. This can be verified only in the dominant tone of the letters. Yet to risk a brief quotation: "But, my love, every good that I could possibly have in me has been given to me and has remained in me in spite of myself; because I have committed such great sins as to banish me from grace altogether." Or again: "I am profoundly moved by the idea that you are going to enter the Church, that you are going to become *effectively* a daughter of the Holy Ghost, and that it is partly my doing—in the sense that you are receiving this magnificent reward for your compassionate love for this poor and desperate man." But it cost him more than this to confess to her quite flatly, quite undramatically, as he did, his morbid love for suffering, his tendency to nourish and deck out his own misery. Recovering from his bitter moods, it is forgiveness he asks as much as pity.

Any doubt one may have had is dispelled of the worth of the residual irreducible suffering he tells of: of his grief because he is not a saint. "The spirit of prayer has forsaken me . . . I have abandoned myself to the unbridled lusts of my sensuality and have never been able to recapture my former holiness." Like a bird that knows what it is to soar in the light of heaven: but now it "has its wings cut off and is shut up in a dark cellar where it has to crawl about among the most disgusting reptiles." The greatness of Bloy and his power to move and shame us rise from the attitude that underlay this suffering: from his refusal, even when he was failing to become a saint, to lower his Christian standard one inch, to allow his eyes to become blinded to the glory of God. He would not make a truce with his ignominy. As for the cause of his spiritual failure, in so far as there was