

A BOOK OF ESSAYS RIGHTLY CALLED THE THING. By G. K. Chesterton. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6 net.)

Mr. Chesterton's apologetical method may be described as the gentle art of cancelling out. His opponents' arguments are set one on top and one below and then struck out one against the other until nothing is left except the evidence of the inconsistency of the opposition. For instance an eminent historian complains that the monks were inhuman because of their harsh, ascetical rules and then later he complains of the laxity of the same monks for not keeping their rules. Another writer will not allow to Our Lady the title, Immaculate, and yet neither will he allow that there is any original sin at all, thereby implying that we are all conceived immaculate. Again Catholics are accused of leaving children entirely unwarned about the moral dangers of the body by the very same people who abuse the same Catholics for the infamous suggestions of the Confessional. You see the idea? The method is really only an application of the homely phrase, 'You cannot have your cake and eat it.' Mr. Chesterton has a merry time of it balancing these contradictory charges and he has done more than any other apologist to convict if not convince the modern world of its middle-headedness and its mentalwoolliness especially where the Catholic Church is concerned: and he does it very effectively in his professedly apologetical and controversial book, *The Thing*,—an unhappy title which we hope will not discourage any would-be reader.

I am just old enough to have been fairly young when G. K. Chesterton first began to write for the papers. I can remember the eager thrill with which every Saturday I read his column in *The Daily News* and, whenever I could lay hands on it, his weekly article in *The Illustrated London News*. That was about a quarter of a century ago and, since then, I think I have kept up with most of what he has written. I know I am condemning myself and admitting that I have settled down into the inevitable stodginess of middle age when I say that now when reading G.K.C. I do not always experience the first fine rapture of those earlier days. The freshness and surprise of the verbal conjuring disappear when one has studied all the tricks: familiarity dulls the sharp edge; and moreover when youth departs not only innocence but the sense of wonder goes with it. But the marvel of G.K.C. is that he himself does not grow old or shed innocence or wonder: he remains as bright and genial as he was twenty-five years ago. It is true, I think, to say that he does play with words and he does

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indulge in what may be called verbal conjuring ; but it would be a pity if readers were to see nothing more in him than that ; because, apart from his tricks of style (which please some people and irritate others), he is unmatched in his perfect way of hitting the bull's eye nearly every time. He is brilliant, so superlatively brilliant that sometimes outlines are blurred and weak eyes are dazzled with excess of light. What Professor Elton said of Meredith may sometimes be said of Chesterton—he sheds around a 'sparkling mist or spray of commentary, an emanation of bewildering light.' But there are different sorts of brilliance. There is the blinding blaze of the noonday sun ; there is the hard cold glare of electricity ; there is the sharp, hard sparkle of a perfectly cut diamond ; and there is the soft, mellow brilliance of old gold. I think the unprejudiced reader of G.K.C. will be very often rewarded with the gold-and-precious-stone brilliance and rarely find it necessary to put on his tinted specacles. Anyhow brightness and lucidity are not carried to excess by all of our modern writers and there are already too many people nowadays wearing mental blinkers.

B.D.

LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD. By Giovanni Papini. Translated by Alice Curtayne. (Sheed & Ward ; 7/6.)

In *Labourers in the Vineyard* Giovanni Papini is typically Italian in his frank self-revealing and in his feeling for humanity. It is a book so unequal that the inequality accentuates its vitality. It has no Olympian perfection or preciousness—but it writes Papini as one who certainly loves his fellow men. The first essay on Petrarch might be read by young scholar and Petrarchian authority together with equal advantage, for it is a worthy miniature, in natural colours, of the too often too legendary Aretine. You read it—and the grey statue comes alive. Did space permit, many a phrase of acute perception might be quoted from this essay. One only can be taken—haphazard. 'Like all sensitive and cultured people, the world allured him so long as it was remote, and disgusted him the moment he descended to it. Like all the victims of genius, he sought for the impossible and succeeded **only** in arresting some fragments of the possible.'

Michelangelo he makes approachable. His sympathy with Romanelli is charming. In the essay on St. Francis you have at its best an example of his gift of writing for the average