

Blackfriars

From his letters Bill Brock's character emerges as something simple, lovable, and essentially humble. 'He is a perfect example of what good stuff men really are, and how, if their minds were only helped a bit, they would come quick towards Christianity and into the Church.' And it is Father Martindale's genius that he can give to such minds as Bill's (and others) just the kind of help that is needed. His method is far removed from that of the average 'catechism': the religion he imparts is a 'life.' Not only is he able to approach the truths of faith from an entirely new angle, but he has found a fresh way of expressing them. Then, just because religion *is* life and not merely a system of thought or code of conduct, he links it up at every possible point with everyday life. Therein lies the author's powerful appeal. He is nothing if not practical. But the illustrations he uses are more than arbitrary examples: they are types, symbols, of the truth he is stressing.

Non-Catholics could have no better introduction to the Church than this book. Even to many Catholics it must come as a revelation of the faith that is in them. We are grateful for the coming of 'Bill.'

E.E.

SOME CATHOLIC NOVELISTS; THEIR ART AND OUTLOOK. By Patrick Braybrooke. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.; 7/6.)

The 'some' are seven; four living, three have passed—we dare not say are dead. G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, 'John Ayscough,' R. H. Benson, Sir Philip Gibbs, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and Katherine Tynan are Mr. Braybrooke's choice. These writers are 'Catholic Novelists'—so Mr. Braybrooke tells us; and they 'lead in the curious and romantic world of fiction.' (But how they lead, or whither he tells us not). Of course many other 'Catholic Novelists' left out of Mr. Braybrooke's team may be named. Maurice Baring, Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes, Isabel Clarke, 'Darley Dale,' Enid Dinnis, Compton Mackenzie, Miss Grace Ashton, Canon Sheehan, 'Lucas Malet,' Mrs. de la Pasture, Mrs. Victor Rickard, Mrs. Wilfrid Ward, Mrs. Yeo. Why these distinguished writers of fiction, excluded from Mr. Braybrooke's list of winners, not even given a place, but banished utterly, should be thus dismissed in silence only the arbitrary will of the author could disclose. However, there it is; and since Mr. Braybrooke is satisfied that not one of his seven but is a 'Catholic Novelist of the first rank' we can only leave it at that. An essayist, after all, must be allowed to choose his own subjects. As the choice of subjects is the fruit of Mr. Braybrooke's private and per-

sonal taste so are the particular novels he selects to illustrate his author's 'religious and literary genius.' For example *Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and *The Flying Inn* are the selection from the works of G.K.C.; and Mr. Braybrooke thinks it only fair to remind us that 'as a novelist Chesterton has a valuable and direct message for those who are members of the Catholic Church.' From Mr. Belloc's many volumes we are invited to meditate on *The Green Overcoat*, *Mr. Petre*, and *The Emerald*. Here the good word is that 'Belloc is a serious writer who makes periodic excursions into the realms of fiction.' Also that 'Mr. Belloc has given to the world a body of serious historical and apologetic work which the world could ill have done without.' Also that 'Belloc comes to his task of writing fiction strengthened by that broad and permanent sanity which underlies the mind which is both Catholic and literary.' Which nobody can deny. Similarly with the other five novelists, bouquets are presented by Mr. Braybrooke and lengthy quotations extracted from not more than two or three of their novels. 'We may think of John Ayscough joined to the band of English novelists who have ever kept the art of fiction both pure and controlled.' Certainly we may, the more so since 'his message is of course the only possible message for a novelist who is also a Catholic priest.' As to Robert Hugh Benson—'all his work breathed a reasonable and large philosophy. Kindliness and its attendant virtues of gentleness stand out in his works.' Far different is it with Sir Philip Gibbs. He is 'an evolutionary successful novelist because he is a fascinating novelist.' In fact 'it is difficult if not impossible to find any fault with Gibbs's style.' On the other hand Sheila Kaye-Smith is 'not only a first-rank novelist but a first-rank Realist, and her employment of Realism has no blemishes whatever.' The late Katherine Tynan passes creditably but not so high; for she 'is not in any sense a great novelist' (yet in the preface she is picked out as 'a leader' in the 'first rank'). Still, if Mrs. Tynan-Hinkson 'is clever without being in the least subtle,' her *Denys the Dreamer* is 'a really delicious story to snuggle into over a roaring fire.'

Mr. Braybrooke certifies our 'Catholic Novelists.' Grave are their responsibilities; for they are 'entrusted with the guardianship of fiction.' Yet hardly will it be 'suggested by any one that they have failed in this guardianship.' Nevertheless they 'dwell alone'—our Catholic Novelists—'and on all sides the busy world rushes heedlessly by.' So there it is. And what can be done about it?

J.C.