

BLACKFRIARS

education need no reminding that even down to the close of the thirteenth century ' Holy Scripture ' and ' Theology ' were synonymous.

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I. JAMES WHITTAKER. (Rich & Cowan ; 7/6.)

This book is of great interest in several ways. It is the story, by a young man of 28, born in the slums of Edinburgh, and now a greaser in Rochdale, of his desperate efforts to lead an intelligent human life within the framework of our civilization. This grim narrative of admirable courage, told without ostentation, is well worth reading for its own sake ; in the fewness of his years James Whittaker has had more experience of ' reality ' than members of the comfortable classes manage to obtain by the time they die.

The author draws no conclusions ; he has no thesis ; he does not ' indict ' modern society. He simply tells his story. But his restraint does not exempt us from reflection. The book compels us to think ; particularly compels Catholics to think. We cannot bluff ourselves by assuming that this is an exceptional case ; of course it is exceptional in the sense that of the millions who suffer, only very few are able to express their suffering ; the masses are inarticulate ; but any serious investigation would show that the conditions here revealed, far from being exceptional, represent the common distress of our proletariat. The general fact that emerges is that in this country there are still two nations, that equality in any real sense is a miserable myth, that social justice is intolerably lacking. It is a fact to which Catholics must awaken. If we desire to bring in the social reign of Jesus Christ, we must remember that He is a Ruler whose subjects have an equal *right* to the means not only for a decent natural human life, but also for a life befitting those who are called to be the sons of God. If we fail to follow the Holy Father and refuse to put social justice in the forefront of our programme, we are betraying the people to whom we offer the Gospel and justify the accusation that religion is a dope for their evils.

There are two incidental problems brought out by this story. The first is that of education. In England education is still governed by class privilege. For wage-earners of the working-class, access to a first-rate education is almost always an impossibility. The amiable theory that any boy of ability can climb the intellectual and social ladder is perniciously untrue. Once now and then such a boy has luck ; that is all that can be said. There are countless others of equal ability whom economic circumstances crush down and keep down. James Whit-

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taker has the instincts of a student; all his life he has striven to obtain that knowledge which is necessary for a reasonable human development. He has had to face the enduring obstacle of sordid poverty, endless disappointments and, finally, chronic ill health. Given the present 'established disorder,' given a civilization which is the enemy of the human person, the story is inevitable.

The second problem is that of the essential instability of the working career of wage-earners who do not belong to the strictly skilled class. Apprenticeship is almost non-existent; a boy leaves school at 14 and drifts aimlessly into any sort of a job. No thought can be given as to his suitability for the particular work, or as to the character of the employer. Consequently he shifts from job to job, never finding his professional vocation, never achieving a real function in society. This phenomenon of rootless individuals is terribly widespread, and it is fundamentally immoral. Having no organic position in the commonwealth such workers are literally outcasts, and it is by this characteristic that Marx defines the proletariat. The unfinished *Odyssey* of James Whittaker, the abrupt transitions from occupation to occupation, from town to town, will give the gentle reader a clear vision of how a human being born into this situation is able to cope with it. Comforting thoughts need not be expected.

There is only one solution for this particular issue. When it is a question of environment an effort to salvage individuals is totally inadequate. What must be done is to create in that environment by means of the workers themselves, Christian *institutions*, that provide an integral formation (intellectual, professional, religious, moral, artistic, social, and physical, *i.e.*, embracing *every* aspect of life), for all young workers and working girls from 14 to about 25. In this way alone can the wastage of these uniquely valuable years be prevented and the environment transformed.

Many other points arise in this book—*e.g.*, the unreality and anaemia of religion that is unrelated to the social situation, the author's sound diagnosis of Spiritualism, the psychological effects of machinery, etc. There is no space to discuss them here, and in any case they are all bound up with the question of formation mentioned above. A word must be added, however, about the book regarded purely as literature. James Whittaker wants to be a writer. He can certainly tell a story, describe an event in a concise, vivid way. He can look at an object with detachment and sometimes make it into a symbol. The incidents selected from his childhood, his journey to and life on the island, his employment during the war at Liverpool Docks, and accounts of life within the factories and of the

'leisure' hours outside them—all these are well done and live in the memory. The literary fault of the book lies in its construction; if it had been built up by more precisely marked-off incidents it would have gained in force. Its present continuity tends to be muddling. Further, the author must learn that our language is clogged with dead metaphors for natural beauty, and that advertisements have killed superlatives. If he prunes vigorously and achieves a universal detachment (autobiography is a dangerous experiment for a young writer, and only a faith in something bigger than himself will liberate him), there is no reason why the hope that has survived all his setbacks should not be fulfilled.

Mr. Whittaker, like every honest artist, hopes to make some money through his book, especially for his wife and child. He richly deserves to.

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DOSTOIEVSKY. An Interpretation by Nicholas Berdyaev. Translated by Donald Attwater. (Sheed & Ward; 6/-.)

An able and useful attempt to achieve the impossible task of producing a manual of Dostoevskyism, a systematic account of Dostoevsky's conception of the world to which, the author acknowledges, he has added a considerable part of his own. The work, otherwise admirable, is vitiated throughout by its naive and far-fetched interpretation of the crucial *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*. The author shirks the deep problem of the *Legend* by presenting it in terms of the struggle between Christianity and Bolshevism! He assumes, in common with previous interpreters, that the *Legend* represents an irreducible antithesis, thereby ignoring the final reconciliation of Jesus and the Inquisitor. He is consequently compelled (since he cannot ignore totally its obvious import) to conclude that 'in his religious conceptions Dostoevsky never attained a total unity.' Doubtless, as M. Berdyaev says, he misunderstood Catholicism. But we believe that there was no inconsistency between his philosophy of freedom and his attachment to institutional Orthodoxy, but that he was fundamentally in sympathy with Soloviev's 'free theocracy,' which M. Berdyaev dismisses as a self-contradiction. Is it not more in accord with his thought and conduct to see in his figure of the Prisoner and the Inquisitor, not two irreconcilably opposed forces, but two complementary elements in essential Christianity, opposed only when functioning independently, the spirit without the body and the body without the spirit? At least we cannot lightly attribute a glaring inconsistency to 'Russia's greatest metaphysician.' He was, perhaps, less *simpliste* than even the best of his countless interpreters.

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