

## BLACKFRIARS

created with impressive vividness the figures of the women, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Dinah. As for Jacob, the whole book is an effort to recall the experience of that great life: some of the interpretations seem exaggerated and even false: but the effect of its entirety is magnificent and unforgettable. Perhaps the greatest compliment one can pay it is to confess that it forced us to re-read with delight the famous chapters of Genesis.

A.M.

**THE LOST HERO.** By Robert Speaight. (Peter Davies; 7/6 net.)

A book which is worth while. The author has artistry of word: his rhythm is dignified and smooth, his adjectives are always vivid (very occasionally a stricter economy would have avoided a momentary tendency to verbal exuberance), he writes with detailed knowledge and sympathy as well of South America as of Assisi and Rome. In contrast to the cruder realism which is the more usual medium of the modern writer, Mr. Speaight often adopts the method of a more delicate limning of a situation, achieving the same end without the possible danger of a too blatant brush.

The background of the novel is Catholic; the author deals with insight, through his characters, with many important issues (there is a fine paraphrase of a passage from the *Summa* of St. Thomas); the delineation of the character of Alvarez, the ex-priest, is particularly striking, and the main issue of the plot, the struggle between love and hate (of God and man), is finely and profoundly worked out.

L.S.G.V.

**SEED OF ADAM.** By Violet Campbell. (John Murray; 7/6.)

Sincere, understanding, strong; stronger had it been more pruned; valuable for its thesis, worked out with sense of drama to a powerful climax: that the inexcusable vice is that of the Pharisees (not, surely, the Sadducees, p. 132?), since sin and folly are in all the sons of Adam; while on the other hand the thought occurs that in the muddled disharmony of all our lives 'there is something grand . . . there appears the enormous significance of God' (p. 384). The character of the sadist-maniac finely drawn: the influence of birth, environment, on character, making the crime not a sin but a disease. An incidental discussion of comparative religion, stressing the parallel naturalism of all, presents the obvious appearance from the viewpoint of the unbeliever: one is anxious to urge in reply how from the opposite standpoint of the faith the parallelisms in other re-

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ligions are seen as the to be expected evidences of tentative fulfilments of exigencies which the grace of Christ, which perfects nature, itself supremely fulfils.

A book to read : for its sensitive vision and its lesson in that tolerance which is the humility of truth.

L.S.G.V.

### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

**CIVITAS DEI.** By L. Curtis. (Macmillan; 10/6.)

It is regrettable that the author of this book should have chosen for his title the name of the most famous work of one of the greatest of Christian thinkers. There is a certain courtesy to be extended to the creative writers of the past, and that courtesy is infringed when, as in this case, the new writer uses the old title to head a work whose ideas its author would have abhorred. Mr. Curtis's book belongs to the genre of 'Outlines' of mankind's development from the apc to modern Oxford. Mr. Wells wrote his outline for the grocer; Mr. Curtis writes his for dons. We infinitely prefer the version for the grocer; it is less pretentious. It would be tedious to follow Mr. Curtis on his long pilgrimage to the ultimate values of the spiritual dawn. It would be hard to keep one's temper. What are we to think of a writer who in this period of immense and tragic crisis solemnly offers us at length the ineffective figure of the Liberal Jesus? What are we to think of a writer who presumes to give his book the title of 'Civitas Dei' and then utters his precious remark about St. Augustine: 'The Church as so conceived (*i.e.*, by Augustine) is Judaism freed from its nationalist limitations assimilated to the Roman Empire and based on authority, and is thus the antithesis of the Commonwealth of God as conceived by Jesus.'! After this one may pause to take breath. Has Mr. Curtis ever heard of Karl Barth? The two should meet: Mr. Curtis's next book might be interesting.

A.M.