

BLACKFRIARS

out any formed opinions about the local, national, or racial problems of the country. But during his tour he read dozens of books on African topics and as he writes he gives necessary facts and information in order to make the reader understand the conglomeration that is Africa. He mentions events and the impressions they produced practically in the order in which they reached him; amid the adventures we hear him thinking aloud.

There is hardly a dull page in the book. The episodes are delightful and the impressions valuable. And there are many fine passages of descriptive writing. He saw the big cities and towns, the compounds, the leper settlement; he went down mines and went up in aeroplanes. He lived in the veldt and spent many happy days with the natives, sharing the lives of the missionaries and roughing it with them. He visited dozens of convents and pays tribute to the splendid work of the Nuns of the Assumption, the Sisters of Notre Dame and the ubiquitous Dominican nuns. Incidentally, the famous pioneer Assumptionist, Mother Gertrude de Henningsen, contingently might have been Lord Kitchener's aunt.

The impressions are really the essential part of the book. The opinions are the author's own. But we see the background in which they are formed, the facts which support them, the reasons for holding them, and we find them convincing. General politics, social conditions, education, morality, the colour question, etc., all are reviewed. He praises what he thinks is worthy of praise and he is not afraid to condemn what he thinks is wrong, whether in the present or in the past. He left Africa 'depressed but not un-Christianly despondent.'

His message to English Catholics is this: Native Africa needs more priests, more brothers, more nuns. It needs laymen—men and women, who can do things. Catholic lay-doctors, school teachers, nurses, right down to drain designers.

C.N.L.

ART

PARK. By John Gray. (Sheed & Ward; 30/-.)

Those acquainted with the more recent of Canon John Gray's poems will come to his latest work prepared for its

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distinctive quality, the ascetic fastidiousness of mind and language, which in this book finds its counterpart in Mr. Eric Gill's type and printing. The theme of this fantastic tale, as it is sub-titled by its author, is essentially Catholic. Catholic, that is to say, in the sense not that it points some present moral or retells some older religious legend, but that its conception must in itself make it almost unintelligible to those who approach it without taking the Catholicity of its atmosphere for granted.

What Canon Gray has to put before us is the picture of an imaginary future world, divided into two strata, that above inhabited by 'nobles, cultivators and noblemen's servants' and controlled by a coloured hierarchy, with below a subterranean population which rarely comes to the surface, a 'dreadful type . . . showing no variety that he could distinguish . . . The eyes were large and prominent, looking to right and left, rabbit style; the noses were hooked and thin, teeth prominent. Rodents, thought he.' Reduced to its barest terms, this book is the projection into this strange half-ritual existence of a priest, Park, who faints as he walks along a country road. It is in this priest's perceptions that we share, passing slowly with him from amazed bewilderment to comprehension of this new world as a coherent whole.

This subjectivity of treatment must, one fears, limit the book's appeal; not only is it a description of a religious world, but of a religious world seen through the eyes of a religious. The manner is of a type that can broadly be paralleled in other modern works; if you examine a symphony of Sibelius, for instance, you will find thrown at you shreds of thematic material whose inter-relation it is impossible to realise until, in the coda, they are resolved into an impressive unity, while in the same way in much of Mr. T. S. Eliot's poetry the theme is stated, not, as first appears, by inversion after the developments to which it gives rise, but after an exposition of the preliminary stages by which it matured in the poet's mind. Thus in this case the reader is limited to participation in the reactions of the priest, who, of course, is unconscious of having fainted and for whom the sense of oppression, the impersonality, the timelessness, the unrelated people and events which

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experience is gradually reducing to an intelligible sequence, have a tense unreality, conveyed to the reader by the self-conscious aridity of the prose. The cumulative effect of colourlessness makes it like some Schöngauer print, heightened as it is by contrast with such water-colour passages as this:

He could not see the horses, but there was Cotswold, earth and sky; the familiar golden soil and cool green, the coloured pattern of fields, crop, stubble, grazing, early ploughing; hedges of quick, draped with clematis and tangled with black briony.

Canon John Gray's restrained understatement, in short, has produced a remarkable and sometimes a beautiful book.

J.P.-H.

A HALF-DAY'S RIDE. By Padraic Colum. (Methuen; 7/6.)

We expect from the poet when he writes prose an essay differing from that produced by the avocation of the mere prose writer. Possibly, and often, wrongly. What we expect is not a difference of language; fundamentally it is that we look in the poet's essay for the same initial impulse, the same acute, almost revelational perception that is the basis of the satisfying poem. It is, therefore, unfortunate for Mr. Padraic Colum's considerable reputation as a poet that the majority of the essays included in this volume fail even by prose standards to justify their disinterment from the weekly press to which they were originally contributed.

Two, however, stand out from the rest, *Henry Ford versus the Toilers of the Sea* and *Plautus and the Comic Inheritance*. What Mr. Colum has to say about Plautus is not, of course, of greater critical value than his rambling meditations on Burns or Blunt, but the circus scene with which the essay opens is in its uneven emphasis of essentials a good piece of descriptive writing. In the other essay there is joined to this descriptive prose facility the poet's more meticulous workmanship and a broader sympathy which raises it alone of the twenty-four above a low level of efficient journalism.

J.P.-H.