

enough to benefit by the rite of Baptism. Whereas, the truth is that Grace is not only the force that redeems the Gravity that is in us and in the world; it is in a sense born of that Gravity. Gravity itself has been redeemed. The rite of Baptism is not what we make it: it is the rite of Baptism that makes us.

MARK BROCKLEHURST, O.P.

PIERS PLOWMAN AND SCRIPTURE TRADITION. By D. W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé (Princeton University Press., Geoffrey Cumberlege; 25s.)

The authors have analysed the B-text of *Piers Plowman* in the light of the medieval exegesis of the time, thus revealing a developed unity which so often escapes the modern student of Langland. The subject is a fascinating one. But it hides many pitfalls for the modern scholar who may so easily be carried away by his own science and come to imagine the clerk who began to write on the Malvern hills as similarly preoccupied with the details of gloss and commentary. The authors have attempted to avoid these dangers by explicitly excluding any enquiry into Langland's direct sources from which he drew his doctrine and interpretation. They have chosen instead to relate the whole poem to a somewhat piece-meal assessment of the kind of interpretation that was used in the fourteenth century. Thus they shut out the Franciscan and Dominican biblical commentators on the ground that Langland disliked the Friars. This leads to a somewhat fantastic display of unrelated learning with strange conclusions. For example the ordinary teaching in the schools regarding the bishop as holding the state of perfection *par excellence* is set down as proper to the 'secular masters' and as attacked by the Friars (p. 21). A few minutes with St Thomas's *Summa* would have revealed a different perspective. And surely all this is laboured unnecessarily. Langland was bred in an atmosphere redolent of Scriptural phrase and interpretation. The biblical teaching was a huge river to which every school provided a rivulet and from which in one way or another all the people drank. He was no constant student ready to distinguish what was proper to the interpretation of the Friars (though the authors themselves ought to have acquainted themselves of this). In his capacity as bedesman he must have heard a great many sermons and read often the homilies in the Breviary. His sense of Scripture is for the most part sound and general, and it is in tune with the whole thought of his day. It is hard for us now to visualise how much the imagery of the Bible and of the Cross ran through the minds of men of that age. The Bible was the principal book. Now we breathe the atmosphere of science: but when Mr T. S. Eliot mentions a motor-car in a poem we need not analyse all the technical scientific works on

internal combustion machines in order to appreciate his meaning, or to discover the influences behind his work.

At the same time, if it is true that people have no idea that the Bible and its interpretations did colour Langland's thought as that of all his contemporaries, this book will be of immense value. It contains a great deal of interesting material on Scriptural tradition in the fourteenth century—greatly derived from Père Spicq and Dr Beryl Smalley (whose book is erroneously ascribed to Cambridge). And it does in fact succeed in giving us an interpretation of *Piers Plowman* which brings a unity to the poem even if it is not always accurate in detail or profound in insight.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

RETURN TO CHESTERTON. By Maisie Ward. (Sheed and Ward; 21s.)

A gigantic and beaming G.K.C. is framed in an open doorway in Mr Thomas Derrick's dust jacket for this book; he is holding the door open with one hand and welcoming the reader with the other. It is a friendly greeting, appropriate to this friendly book, which is filled with happy reminiscences of the great man collected assiduously by Miss Maisie Ward. These are not simply strung together, for Miss Ward weaves her narrative with a craftsmanship which compels admiration.

Clearly, a man of Chesterton's stature could not be always faultless and infallible; his idiosyncrasies, his whims, his enthusiasms which were engaging to many, could cause irritation and annoyance to others. A very real and also very lovable person emerges from these pages, for the defects enhance the high qualities. The reader returning to Chesterton has his earlier impressions refreshed and confirmed. The reader less familiar with G.K.C. will discover a man of fantastic inventiveness and wit. Both could envy those who knew this man of noble rotundity and immense intellectual power with his zest for life and his capacity for friendship.

There is much that is serious in this book: a careful history of *G.K.'s Weekly* and the origins of his Distributism; the place of religion in his life and his reticence about it. There is much more that is gay and amusing, and rightly so, for this was a giant who strode gaily through life. This book would be justified if only for the superb *jeu d'esprit* on 'The Tomato in Prose and Prosody' with its alleged quotations from illustrious poets on the subject of the tomato. But there are many other delicious things, witty poems dashed off for his young admirers, the clever drawings and burlesques. How lucky indeed were those who knew this friendly giant well!

KIERAN MULVEY, O.P.

EZRA POUND AND THE CANTOS. By Harold H. Watts. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 12s. 6d.)

Pound once remarked that a paragraph by Yeats had 'done more to prevent people reading the Cantos for what is *on the page* than any