

## REVIEWS

the Abbé's philosophy is optimistic; he does not deny the goodness and beauty of the Creation; he is speaking of the World and its refusal to accept God and serve Him. He reiterates in similar words the judgment of St. John on the men of his generation. Which only goes to show the formative value of this book.

BRENDAN MAGINTY, O.P.

THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN. Newly rendered into modern English by Prof. H. W. Wells. (Sheed & Ward; 8/6.)

That title is a literary event. A reviewer is in happy case, knows a repayment for much, when the sum of his review should be, as mine is now, "Buy this book: read it: read it again. Behold an enduring masterpiece!" Here, most agreeably presented, the print is a pleasure to look on and the text a pleasure to read, is a masterpiece, made of the very stuff of Christendom and of England, of humanity then and now, first written in the common tongue in the London of the fourteenth century, now given in the common tongue of life and poetry to the England of the twentieth. No book could be more appropriate, more contemporary, more lasting. Prof. Wells has produced a complete version, worthy of the original from which he has transliterated into modern speech—a poetical translation which results in poetry is by no means common!—for which we all owe him a deep debt of gratitude. He has performed lovingly, faithfully, a work of love; and worthy of that love should be his reward. This is a book to rejoice in the handling of, to buy, to "take up and read." It is an effective, changing book, from which the reader will not escape unchanged.

It is a book to read anywhere and everywhere, for all things and the perpetual heart and case of man are its subject. If it is a portrayal of common life in the Middle Ages, it is also intimate to the stuff of our own time. It is shocking, consoling, tragic, humorous, satirical, compassionate, confused, luminous and unique. It is profoundly original and absolutely convinced of eternal things. It is as colloquial and modern as slang and as timeless as the liturgy. It is "all things to all men" and a question to everyman.

But what, you query, is it about? What is it? It is a poem, written in alliterative metre, that kindled, changeable speech which Paul Claudel has created for himself in French, written in the latter fourteenth century by one William, or more likely Robert Langland. It is about you and me and the other fellow, "nunc et in hora mortis nostrae," and the life God wants us to live and the shape of the world as we know it and have made it. No one, not even Mr. Coghill in his excellent but too tidy introduction, can give it a clear plan. It contains, it breeds every

## BLACKFRIARS

kind of comment. It is exceedingly interesting and immensely readable. It is about that "fair field full of folk" men call the world and "one man in his time." It is common: common as the common day, the commonweal, and the Common of the Missal. All three have their part in it. Open at any page and you will find a line to quote, to read aloud, to think about, to remember. It is compounded of laughter and tears: of criticism that is sharpest in self-criticism, of an immense pity and an equal interest. It is the book to read and keep and remember to know Mediæval England, and it will speak directly to you out of to-day.

The author originally wrote three versions of the one theme, and Prof. Wells has used all three in his rendering. It is, as I said, about you and me and the other fellow—that "other fellow," Piers Plowman, is the mystery of the book, its open secret. Piers is the labouring man and the greatest aristocrat of them all. He is the good life and more. He is goodness and the works thereof:

"Came from the nipping north Righteousness running—"  
for all the many, brief words of this book turn round that one open secret—"Et Incarnatus Est."

MARGOT ROBERT ADAMSON.

NOSTRADAM. A Sequence of Poems. By George Reavey. (Europa Press, Paris; pp. 28).

Nostradamus astrologized in the sixteenth century and was condemned by the Roman Curia for saying rude things about their future. Mr. Reavey with no need of stars, for his concern is with our present, prophesies about the post-War world, and it is unlikely that anyone will accuse him of falsehood. Our eyes are open. Yet on the other hand one is not swept away by a sudden sharp realization in reading his poems. They are good; Mr. Reavey is a craftsman. But there is a lack: they do not make one feel what they portray. It is not for lack of verbal music; it is rather perhaps that in the genesis of these verses there was too much cerebration and too little intuition. The subject-matter of great poetry is felt, viscerally; reason is only the efficient nurse.

But, though there are lines in this book which are poor, there are others which are gripping. And there is the theme to be pondered, for if cerebration in the poet is apt to be dangerous, in his audience it is a duty:

What parapets of ours can check the hours  
That stride inevitably armed for spoil?

GERALD VANN, O.P.