

the problem of recreating a stable union is being considered so carefully. Insofar as a moral could be drawn from the story it is the familiar one that ecclesiastical unity is not enough, even in ecclesiastical terms, and also, less familiar, that the neglect of reform within shows a lack of the vitality needed to achieve true unity with an outside body. Indeed Father Gill omits to emphasize the repeated failure of Eugenius to use his power in support of a thorough programme of reform.

As in his earlier books, Father Gill is a brilliant expositor of the labyrinths of European diplomacy and Italian condottieri-warfare, amid which Basel, the Pope and the Greeks pursued one another. The sense of drama is seldom absent from a presentation which is only occasionally blurred. The economic, diplomatic and doctrinal levels are cleverly interwoven.

But it may be that this book provides a more significant land-mark of a different kind: in the biographical treatment of the medieval papacy. Behind the mask of the supposedly formal and depersonalized material relating to medieval popes, who were anyway, it is tacitly assumed, stereotyped individuals, there has been a great reluctance to study the characters of the men, who included one who exclaimed, 'The Lord did not say "I am tradition", but "life"', and another who, accused of nepotism, protested, 'If I had no parents or brothers, I should be Melchisedek'. The chapter devoted to Eugenius's character is full of insight, but perhaps a little cautious and defensive. Despite the defects of quasi-popularization, this sort of writing is not only palatable and thematic, it also penetrates to a psychological layer of historical perception, which medievalists seldom trespass upon except when they want to be funny. Let us hope that the series will exploit this opportunity, avoid the higher flights of hagiography, and not fear to exercise prudent imagination in explaining characters who seldom had the leisure to be dull.

ANTONY BLACK

THE BHAGAVAD GITA. A new translation by Juan Mascaro; (Penguin Classics); 5s.

Of translations of the Bhagavad Gita there is no end, but Mr Juan Mascaro's deserves a high place among them. He is not only a good Sanskrit scholar but he has also an ear for good English and tries to convey something of the poetic quality of the work which is something very rare. His translation of the Upanishads, published under the title *Himalayas of the Soul in the Wisdom of the East* series, is quite unique in this respect, and here he has attempted to do the same thing for the Gita. He has certainly made a very readable translation, which conveys the 'spiritual message' of the Gita, as he says, with remarkable power. But in doing so he has allowed himself very great liberties with the text. It is not simply that he tries to give the meaning of the Gita in good English, but that he offers what is, in fact, a very personal interpretation of the Gita,

which the ordinary reader can hardly be expected to recognize.

In his Introduction Mr Mascaro gives a very moving description of the doctrine of the Gita, in which he compares it among others with that of Dante, St Teresa, and St John of the Cross. Such comparisons are legitimate, as long as one understands clearly the fundamental difference in the metaphysical and spiritual doctrine of the Christian and the Hindu. But it appears that Mr Mascaro does not understand this and imagines that they are really identical. Thus in the course of his translation he is led to introduce a Christian meaning into the poem, which has no real place there. To take an example in Book 2. 55, Mr Mascaro writes: 'When a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart and by the grace of God finds the joy of God, then his soul has indeed found peace! The literal translation of this is: 'When a man completely casts off all desires of the mind and is satisfied in the Self (Atman) by the Self (Atman), he is said to be one of steady wisdom'. To translate Atman, in the first place, as 'God', with all its Christian and Jewish overtones is apt to be misleading, but to introduce the specifically Christian concept of the 'grace of God' as well, is surely to be giving an interpretation not a translation of the text. But this becomes even more explicit when at the end of Book 2. 72, Mr Mascaro translates: 'man can reach the Nirvana of Brahman, *man can find peace in the peace of his God*'. The first part 'man can reach the Nirvana of Brahman' is an exact translation of the original, but the words 'man can find peace in the peace of his God' are a gloss added by Mr Mascaro which have no place in the original and simply translate the doctrine of the Gita into Christian terms. To give a Christian interpretation of the Gita may be legitimate—I believe that there is much to be said for it—but Mr Mascaro should let his readers know what he is doing. This translation can only be recommended therefore with definite reservations.

BEDE GRIFFITHS, O.S.B.

Notices

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