

## *Blackfriars*

THE WATTLEFOLD. Unpublished Poems by Michael Field. Collected by Emily C. Fortey. The Preface by Fr. Vincent McNabb. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 7/6 net.)

One of the mysteries of modern literature is that the works of Michael Field (the name under which Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, aunt and niece, hid and fused their identities) have so far received such scant recognition from the poetry-reading public. Their earliest volumes excited interest and speculation; everybody who was anybody was curious to know who the new poet, with the inspiring name, could be. But when it was found to be the happy pseudonym for two ladies of retiring disposition, the interest of the critics and others suffered a sudden eclipse, because, so the learned ones reasoned, such a literary collaboration was *prima facie* impossible, and, though it had started well enough to deceive even the elect, it was bound to collapse sooner or later. Besides, the fact that the allied poets were intimately related did not sound interesting; at any rate, 'Michael Field,' if he had really existed in the flesh, would have been infinitely more interesting. So the regular output of verse and drama was not hailed with enthusiasm by the world of letters. But the discerning few understood, and were prompt in expectation and appreciation.

The complacent prophecies that the collaboration of the secluded ladies would collapse, far from being fulfilled, were completely confounded. Volume after volume appeared with amazing regularity, and each succeeding volume added new beauty and vigour to the swiftly-expanding body of verse. So it went on until the end of life, though their reception into the Catholic Church brought a new note and a new inspiration into their work.

And now, several years after their death, comes *The Wattlefold*, wherein are gathered together 'all that could be called religious poems' of those left in MS., a play in three acts, and an interlude on the stigmata of St. Francis.

The poems here printed have the same mystic quality as those in *Mystic Trees* and *Poems of Adoration*. Their appeal is purely spiritual and personal; indeed, many of them would lose their significance for an outsider unacquainted with the loyalties that existed between aunt and niece. But perhaps this genius for finding the stuff of song in homely incidents, together with the power of informing them with a spirit that enlarges and transforms, is the predominant characteristic of the later volumes. The classical touch of the earlier years almost disappears—the old detachment of form and phrase has gone. Some will even

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say that the poets have thereby declined from the first, soaring heights.

The play, *Iphigenia in Arsacia*, is built round the miracle worked by St. Matthew, the Apostle, in restoring Iphigenia to life. It moves through scenes of exquisite language and imagery to a dramatic close. Hirtaecus, the betrothed of Iphigenia, foiled in wedlock by the risen maid's vow of virginity, stabs her as she summons the people to honour the body of Matthew, martyred at the altar. The action is swift and incisive, the characterisation clear cut. Our Catholic players should certainly not miss this specimen of the religious drama at its best.

*Above Mount Alverna*, the story of the famous stigmata, needs careful reading. It reminds one of a richly-coloured window, in which every jewelled detail, perfect in itself, only serves to enhance the full effect of the whole. This piece is to be pondered privately in sympathetic mood; only thus will its transfigured language convey its message of torture and triumph.

E. E.

THOUGHTS OF THE CURE D'ARS. Compiled and arranged by W.M.B. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne; 2/6.)

THOUGHTS TWICE-DYED. By Father Vincent McNabb, O.P. (Sheed and Ward; 2/6.)

IN PRAISE OF DIVINE LOVE: An Anthology of Prose and Verse compiled by Alice Lady Lovat. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne; 6/-.)

These three books can be grouped together under the general heading, 'Thoughts.' The first is by a saint, some of whose moral sayings and fragments of wisdom are here gathered together in the form of a calendar, one suggested thought being presented for every day in the year. Their authorship is their sufficient recommendation.

Father Vincent McNabb's Thoughts—'my tangle of thoughts,' he calls them—have been retrieved by himself from his own voluminous notes and commonplace books—though no book of Father Vincent's could ever be fitly described as commonplace. Their literary brilliance and epigrammatic quality brought to mind the line 'orient pearls at random strung' as an apt description; but it falls short because Father Vincent's little paragraphs are not placed together at haphazard: there is a very definite connection of one thought with another, and every sentence is but a comment on the ONLY THOUGHT, the