

KARMA AND REBIRTH. By T. Christmas Humphreys. (John Murray; 3s. 6d.)

This is one of the weaker volumes in that very unequal series, *The Wisdom of the East*. The writer's status may be not unfairly judged from a passage in his opening chapter. 'This law of merit and demerit, Karma in the sense of the reign of moral law, is neither particularly Hindu, Buddhist nor Theosophical. It is fundamental in all Oriental philosophy, and was preached by St. Paul. "Brethren, be not deceived. God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."' For the first few centuries of Christianity it remained a cardinal belief in the West. But at the Council of Constantinople, in A.D. 551, the Christian Fathers, finding the doctrine of Rebirth incompatible with the curious system of thought which they were in the process of creating, decided that belief in Rebirth should be henceforth anathema, and with this doctrine went that which makes it necessary of acceptance, Karma. Now, under the double influence of English translations of the Hindu and Buddhist Scriptures, and the reproclaiming by Mme. Blavatsky of the Ancient Wisdom, or Theosophy, of which all religions are part, Karma and Rebirth have returned to the West.'

The author of this remarkable utterance shows himself as remote from the true Oriental as from the true Christian tradition. On the Oriental side, the linking of Theosophy with Hinduism and Buddhism is sufficient evidence of a sort of modern eclecticism which has repeatedly been denounced by the greatest European exponent of traditional Eastern doctrines, namely René Guénon (see *L'erreur spirite*, ch. 6, for some devastating criticism of such teaching about 'Rebirth' as is offered here). On the Christian side, the quotation given displays ignorance enough, but to this may be added the assumption (p. 20) that a personal God is an anthropomorphic God, and the assertion (p. 63) that Christ said of the man born blind that 'it was he who had sinned, not his father.' To save himself from ignominy, Mr. Humphreys had only to consult one verse of St. John, yet he could not be at the pains to do that.

I write this as one who considers it most important that East and West should be reconciled and that either side should endeavour to understand the other's main traditions. But that implies intellectual effort of a kind which in this book is neither accomplished nor attempted.

WALTER SHEWRING.

THE MEVLIDI SHERIF. By Suleyman Chelibi. Translated by F. Lyman McCallum. (John Murray; 1s. 6d.)

This poem (*The Birth-Song of the Prophet*) dates from about 1400 and is a Turkish counterpart of earlier Arabic poems on the same theme. From the time of its writing to the present day it has been

recited in Turkey on ceremonial occasions, and it has a more or less liturgical status. There are nine sections in it, the more important being the invocation to Allah, the account of Muhammed's birth with attendant miracles, and the description of the *Miradj* or Heavenly Journey. This translation is too weak in its handling of English verse to make it a satisfying work on its own account, but the introduction is very good and informative. Among the material provided is a long description of the poem's recital in the eighteenth century; and the traditional tune (very 'non-European') is transcribed in ordinary notation. Altogether an interesting little book.

W.S.

MY LEADER IN LIFE. By George Burns, S.J. (Burns Oates; 2s. 6d.)

Father Burns has done a fine piece of work: a book for boys and girls from the age of reason till their death, though it provides first of all for that most critical of all ages, the 'school leaving' age. It is not exactly a prayer book, though it does contain some prayers, all practical, simple and straightforward; it is not exactly a book of instruction, though it has plenty of good advice to give; it is not exactly a book of meditations, though it certainly provides much food for thought. It combines the qualities of all three with something more besides, for Father Burns has achieved that balance of dignity and informality so essential and at the same time so elusive in talking to young people. He has produced a book which any boy, and no doubt girl too, would be proud to possess, a pocket companion to the Catholic Faith.

The foundations of doctrine are explained simply and attractively and then shown in their applications: important emphasis is laid on the practice of a good Catholic life as well as knowledge, and the important part prayer must play in this practice. The reader will want to re-read and ponder, particularly the section on Our Lady: devotion to Our Lady is shown as something real and beautiful and the ingenuous spirit forestalls any spurious charge of sentimentality. Burns Oates must be congratulated on a most attractive format—a not unimportant item when producing a book for boys and girls.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

OUR GREATEST TREASURE. By John Kearney, C.S.Sp., with a memoir of the author by Edward Leen, C.S.Sp. (Burns Oates; 8s. 6d.)

Readers of Father Kearney's earlier works will welcome this posthumous publication for the brief biography of the author which helps towards a deeper understanding of his writings.

The body of the book is written in the downright foursquare style of his earlier works which, though it may deter the more fastidious,