

PETER'S BOAT: A CONVERT'S EXPERIENCE OF CATHOLIC LIVING. By Daphne D. C. Pochin Mould, B.Sc., Ph.D., T.O.S.D. (Clonmore and Reynolds; 12s. 6d.)

Miss Pochin Mould described how she became a Catholic in *The Rock of Truth* (Sheed and Ward, 1953). Now, in *Peter's Boat*, she writes of her first seven years in the Church. Six of these were spent in Ireland, and she claims herself that her formation as a Catholic 'is very largely an Irish thing'. This explains much of her book. We are taken on a tour of Catholic Ireland, and perform all the traditional acts of piety—the rounds of the holy wells, the chapels, the mountains, the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick. Miss Pochin Mould is full of a naïve enthusiasm, and she pursues her zest for 'the Catholic' even to the rosaries on sale in Woolworth's in Dublin. How different are her experiences from those of Newman! It is a pity that someone trained in a scientific discipline should lay such emphasis on external to the extent of ignoring the vital challenge that living the faith presents.

JOYCE WHALE

THE LIFE OF JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY. By F. A. Lea. (Methuen and Co.; 30s.)

Mr Lea has written an excellent documentary, and it is not his fault if John Middleton Murry emerges from it as a figure of the past, and of the distant past. This definitive life, in itself a model of research and criticism, may come to be of more value as a highly competent survey of the past half-century, than as the biography of a man who could admit to T. S. Eliot in 1954, 'I feel myself to be very old-fashioned: or rather like a sort of *revenant*', and to the pages of his *Journal*, 'completely out of step with the age'. His wife is prompt with an assurance that Murry's last years were the happiest of his life, productive of work good enough to be approved by the critics who mattered, and that his 'wise and noble influence' left its mark on the village community of Theltenham. Whether, at the same time, Murry was haunted by a sense of failure, as some have suggested, is a speculation it would be idle to pursue. Murry may have felt remote, isolated—a ghost of his original self. But it was his own choosing, and he may have realized towards the end that he had always been an ephemeral prophet.

What Mr Lea achieves so admirably is the portrayal of a man who was regarded by many of his contemporaries as a psychological enigma. It was Murry himself who said that nobody could understand even his public life who did not understand his private; and his biographer remarks that if ever a man strove, not only to understand, but to record, the truth about both, it was he. In fact, most of his writing—

and how varied and voluminous it was—strikes one as a sustained, if sometimes despairing, attempt to unravel himself, not only for his own personal satisfaction, but for the enlightenment of the world at large. And Murry had certainly quite enough to analyse, if the diversity of epithet and invective that came his way is any criterion. Even if he was never to approach it, he could be rapt into ecstasy by the idea of an ultimate harmony in the soul of man: 'somehow within that are all philosophies comprehended, all beauties, all desires'. But not everybody took him seriously, some even made fun of him. Mr Lea, who has had every available source to work on, manages to reach a balanced appraisal, but his task must have been a daunting one.

The trouble with Murry was that, besides having to contend with a character of a dozen different and often conflicting facets, he would always insist on having too many irons in the fire at once—he had to be evangelist, moralist, prophet and philosopher all in one. And that meant he had to become a man of countless contacts, throwing open the door of his ever 'public private life' for all and sundry to enter in. The result of this was, in many an instance, disastrous. Quarrels, betrayals, every sort of vicissitude came upon him; and half of them, the impression is, need never have happened. If only Murry could have lived within himself and, as he put it to a friend, 'let the waves—welcome joy, welcome sorrow—go over him'. He had all the equipment, and enough mental and physical industry for two.

Mr Lea's objective presentation of his subject makes first-class reading, especially for those who are old enough to look back at the time *entre deux guerres*. And dozens of charming photographs illustrate a book which amply deserves the title of an 'official biography'.

EDWIN ESSEX, O.P.

THE HISTORY OF BELMONT ABBEY. By Dom Basil Whelan. (Bloomsbury Publishing Co.; 25s.)

This very readable book, written for the centenary of Belmont Abbey, is intended no doubt primarily for those who are in some way connected with the house, but it will be found interesting by anyone who enjoys odd legal situations.

Three chief factors contributed to the foundation of the monastery. Bishop Browne, a monk of Downside, was authorized by a decree from Rome in 1852 to set up a Benedictine monastic chapter in his diocese of Newport and Menevia. And the English Benedictines, on their side, wanted to open a common noviciate and house of studies for the congregation. That Belmont, not far from Hereford, and rather on the outskirts of the diocese, became the site of the foundation, was due to the great generosity of a recent convert, Mr Wegg-Prosser,