

In addition, it is always well to remember that even religion must dress up; and religious thought must dress up also. When we read the truth about Christ or the moral Law in the measured tones of Jeremy Taylor, or the profound verse of Henry Vaughan, we are not only informed, we are moved. If it is to be possible not only to inform the minds but to move the hearts of modern agnostics, then poetry and fine prose must take on the task. They are another form of what the theologians call sufficient grace. It was a great preacher who once said that the most important part of his work was, after he had prepared the ground, keeping out of the Holy Ghost's light; the poet's mission is similar. He must keep himself and his ego out of the light of the truth. And it is at this point that literature and religion do in fact meet; the priest and the poet are both ministers to and helpers in the work of the Holy Ghost, in so far as they prepare the ground and then leave room for the Spirit to breathe where he will.



REVIEWS

ISLAM, BELIEF AND PRACTICES. By A. S. Tritton, M.A., D.LITT. (Hutchinson's University Library; 7s. 6d.)

The eleven line preface does not tell us the purpose of this book. It is therefore impossible to criticise it on its own premises. What the book conspicuously fails to do and is probably not intended to do, is to present any coherent picture of what Islam *is*. Coherence is a quality it entirely lacks. The chapter headings bely this sweeping statement: they follow the traditional divisions one has come to expect in any modern work on Islam. Within the chapters, however (except the first two and the last), the connection of one section or even sentence with what follows or precedes is often far from apparent. Characters who may be well-known to Islamic scholars make meteoric appearances without introduction, and this can only confuse the general reader for whom the series is presumably intended. No references of any sort are given—a method in itself likely to discourage interest. Further, no attempt seems to have been made to distinguish what is essential to Islam from what is incidental. The book is of necessity selective, but it is impossible to see on what principles selection has been exercised. This is particularly true of the chapters on sects (VI and X).

The book might be described as a short *Guide bleu* to Islam; it has the rare merit of being objective, the author only expressing his views in the last chapter and the conclusion. The objects are, however, presented pell-mell; and since they are themselves a subjective selection, the objective merit of the book must be a shade illusory.

Those of us who are interested in finding out what it is that gives Islam its attraction and its apparent coherence will here find no answer, for the subject is, I fear, treated with dislike and contempt. These sentiments are quite comprehensible but are not likely to increase our understanding of a very persistent and fanatically held heresy. As a collection of heterogeneous facts the book is a success, and perhaps this is what it sets out to be. For a humble attempt to interpret the facts, the reader will still find that Prof. H. A. R. Gibb's *Mohammadanism* has not been superseded.

R. C. ZAEHNER

AVICENNA ON THEOLOGY. By A. J. Arberry. (John Murray; 4s. 6d.)

The matter of this book represents something of a new departure both for the Wisdom of the East Series, of which it is the latest, and for its author, most of whose numerous publications have been in the field of mystical speculation and poetry. Faithful to its title, it is precisely a compilation of selected passages from Avicenna's writings bearing broadly on theological questions: The Nature of God, Predestination, Prophecy, Prayer, and The After-Life. It makes no claim to exhaustiveness—the present state of Avicenna scholarship and the enormous volume of his known writings would both effectively prohibit such a claim, even did the Series allow of its being put forward—but offers, in a most palatable form, matter of the greatest interest and importance to Orientalists and students of religion alike. The translation, in all its sureness and accuracy of terminology, might well have been made in all but perhaps one instance ('evil is annihilated' on page 40) by a professional theologian; but only one who has striven with Avicenna's stiff Arabic style will appreciate the transmutation that has been effected into charming English prose. While dealing, on this occasion, in somewhat sterner stuff, neither publisher nor author have sacrificed the wonted attractiveness of their wares.

In addition to the body of the text, there is a most helpful Introduction, albeit somewhat marred in my opinion (page 6) by a regrettably exultant failure to appreciate the fundamental reasons for Avicenna's attitude (and ultimately that of any non-Christian thinker) towards the 'paradox of a physical resurrection'; also a translation of Avicenna's intriguing little Autobiography, and of its continuation by his pupil Jûzjânî; further, a translation in Professor Arberry's best manner of the Poem on the Soul, and, in keeping with the work's scholarly character, an indispensable little index. One unfortunate omission, from the point of view of the many Orientalists who are certain to use this work, regards the *locus* of the passages translated.

Triumphing over current publication hazards, the work appears in