

of our hymns. That dependence was a good thing all the time that it lasted; without it we should have had hardly anything at all. Now that we have had time to take stock of all that we possess, however, we can see that in every period of the Church's history there is plenty of poetry and many hymns written by Catholics both in England and in exile.

Many nineteenth century hymns, well-loved by the Catholic body, have been retained in this new edition, while writers of later date are also allowed to make their contribution, so that to the familiar works of Faber and Caswall are now added the vigorous dignities of Mr. Shewring, the happy ingenuities of Mgr. Knox, and the vivid fervours of Mgr. John O'Connor.

Bishop Mathew contributes as a preface a brief survey of English Catholic hymnology which sharpens the appetite for a much larger dose than he has given us. An expansion of it would provide a valuable educational work, but perhaps the whole book will do much to fulfil this need.

DANIEL WOOLGAR, O.P.

ON THE PLACE OF GILBERT CHESTERTON IN ENGLISH LETTERS.  
By Hilaire Belloc. (Sheed and Ward; 3s. 6d.)

There has been remarkably little public comment on Chesterton since he died four years ago. The critics hardly mention him and the public seems only to read him now and again. There has been far less post-mortem discussion of Chesterton than of D. H. Lawrence. Of course Lawrence's name has a notoriety that Chesterton's entirely lacks; and Lawrence, who wrote for the generation which grew up during the Great War, died at the height of his powers, whereas Chesterton had done his best work (I consider, *pace* Mr. Belloc) by the mid-1920's and outlived the full activity of his genius by a decade. Even so, the fact is worth noting. It is no good our pretending that the *name* of this great man is something to conjure with at the present day. To use the initials G.K.C. like a magic spell would not only be futile, it would be also unfair to the man behind the name. It would be to repose in the rosy glow of those qualities which everybody allows him—wit, humanity, Englishry, simplicity—while not recognizing those other qualities in him, far harder to appreciate, which the general public seems to have missed. Perhaps it is safer to pay no attention to the ordinary public estimation of Chesterton; to do so is to run the risk (following the easier way) not only of missing the depth of the man, but also of supposing that because the public esteems him for some of his qualities it therefore rates him

as highly as we do. If Chesterton were only an uncommonly witty and humane Catholic journalist there would be no reason for regarding him (as some of us, including the present reviewer, regard him) as a leader and master. But he was a far greater man than the public imagines. In a sense he was greater than his books; certainly the mannerisms of his style, increasing as he grew old, can obscure his greatness.

The value of Mr. Belloc's little book is that although it has two clear defects, one positive and one negative, it does take Chesterton seriously and so compel us (Mr. Belloc is compelling) to take him seriously too. This honest way of going about the business of writing of his friend is all that one expects from the old realist who is Mr. Belloc; it is none the less something to be grateful for. The book is not an *In Memoriam*. It should be pondered by those who idolise Chesterton as well as by the indifferent. Of course these last are not likely to read it at all. Yet they need it more than the idolators, perhaps. People will never understand Chesterton until they have learnt to do as he did, to think hard about everyday things. *Then* they will be ready to appreciate not only his arguments, but also his wit and fun and those 'paradoxes' the scorners of which Mr. Belloc so rightly holds up to scorn. And a first step towards imitating Chesterton's intellectual alertness may be to take him seriously (and this may mean forgetting that he did not go to Oxford or Cambridge, that, like Shakespeare, he had 'small Latin and less Greek'). If Mr. Belloc's book can persuade the not wholly prejudiced that G.K.C. was neither a silly old Edwardian on the one hand, nor an inimitable marvel on the other, it will have earned its place beside the hundred-odd volumes of its predecessors. He was clearly a genius—I like to think that he was the greatest Englishman of his time—but he was of the kind that is given to men to be imitated.

There are some fine strokes in this book. There is that comparison of Chesterton with Kipling for which Mr. Belloc has already been rebuked and which is really only an illustration, slightly forced, of a wider and quite exact comparison. There are the excellent and surprising remarks on the English use of Logic. There is the just appreciation of Chesterton's wonderfully rapid and luminous judgments of English literature: 'He summed up any one pen (that of Jane Austen, for instance) in exact sentences; sometimes in a single sentence, after a fashion which no one else has approached.' Chesterton had indeed an extraordinary power of analysis, but it acted with such speed and gaiety that dull minds are left blinking and unimpressed.

Hence I do not think that mere 'lucidity' is 'the heart of his style'; rather it is Wit, whose soul is brevity, delighting in the strangeness of things. Then there is a good and brief discussion of that 'verbalism,' that hardening of the great journalist's style as his mind grew tired. Much might be said of that tiring of Chesterton, the effects and echoes of which are still with us. But enough.

And yet, after all, where is the passionate young giant of the earlier works? This question has something to do with the 'two clear defects' of Mr. Belloc's book that I have dared to assert without justifying my assertion. 'But if they are so clear let others find them out for themselves.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

## NOTICES

CONVERSATION WITH GOD. By Anthony Thorold. (Sheed and Ward; 3s. 6d.)

Fr. Thorold's first book, *The Mass and the Life of Prayer*, was criticized for leaving the 'and' in the title disjunctive instead of making it conjunctive. He gave the reader profound thoughts both on the Mass and on the life of prayer, but failed to show how the two were vitally joined in the unity of the Christian life. In the present volume, the value of which far outstrips its small dimensions, he remedies that defect, and, perhaps almost unintentionally, produces the synthesis towards which the first book was leading. In eighteen short chapters or meditations, full of sound doctrine expressed in simple and readable terms, the author shows how conversation with God begins with the Crucifix and one's first waking thoughts; the Crucifix is realized in the Sacrifice of the Mass; and there all one's personal self-giving or self-sacrifice is gathered together and placed at the foot of the Cross. He shows, too, that this should be identified with the 'Little Way' of the Saint of Lisieux, the way of hidden daily sacrifice. To see that saint's way to great sanctity in terms of the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Christian life in the Mystical Body is to reveal it in all its greatness, and to avoid the possible abuse of canonizing mediocrity. Genuine and constant conversation with God, then, depends on one's personal attitude to God, and this must be the attitude of a fellow-sufferer with His Son, of a 'Co-victim' with Christ on the Cross. It is in this way that Fr. Thorold teaches