

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SWORD BLADE OF MICHAEL. By Cecily Hallack. (Sands & Co; ?).

Miss Hallack has written her book—a sequel to '*Beardless Counsellors*'—'*For those who find it Good to be Young.*' Now I venture to speculate that, however old in years Providence may see fit to permit Miss Hallack to grow, she will find it difficult to grow old in the one sense that is reprehensible—that is to say, disillusioned, bitter, unkind. Her robust optimism, her wide charity of outlook are evidently the fruits of a live Catholicism. Away with the nonsense that a novel to be a work of art, must have no moral! Tales told solely to amuse are good, but tales with a moral, other things being equal, are better. They touch profounder deeps. And Miss Hallack is a true writer. Her motive in writing does not spring from that vanity of these days of indiscriminate printing, the itch to cover paper with ink, to see oneself in print. She desires to say something important beautifully, evidently because she sees beautifully. And she nearly always succeeds. She succeeds, moreover, with humour, and that means that she has a sense of proportion. Her characters live, even those who appear very little on her scene—except, perhaps, Margery, who doesn't convince me as the attractive young woman her creator evidently sees her. Joe is a joy, and so is Lady Augusta. The scene of the healing of Mrs. Crew is delicious and so is that of the buck-jumping of the Vicar of Wallhurst. The sick call is, quite seriously, a heavenly episode, the conversion of Mrs. Mace is completely convincing and so is the 'call' to Hilary, the last two most subtly difficult to do. If I were to search for destructive criticism, I should protest that *Il Maestro* irritates me, that Giovanna is not convincingly Italian and that her 'hate' of Jim is the least successful episode in the book. One or two typographical errors have no doubt been already pointed out by earlier reviewers. But these are flaws only in a fine piece of work whose main value is its clear exposition of the Catholic attitude to life and eternity—propaganda never irritating, as it might easily be, especially to the non-Catholic, because it is an essential part of the development of the characters within the limits of the plot. If the author had realised how well her book stands on its own feet I think she would have omitted the unnecessary prop of the Preface. However, few people read Prefaces, except reviewers, who are generally believed to read little else!

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