

quite fearlessly in the light of it; among the more delightful of his 'personal observations' is that on the writer in the country: 'The southern counties of England are dotted with the "country cottages" of cultivated and literary persons. The man writes or paints and drinks manful pints with silent labourers in bar parlours or, worse, seeks to jolly them into an unnatural animation. The wife with inadequate and reluctant help toils distressfully at the oil stove to give the husband the kind of meals to which he and she have been accustomed in town. . . . Having thus surrounded himself with a social and intellectual vacuum, the man proceeds to write.' A minor point, perhaps, but illustrative of the author's lightness of touch and penetrating judgment which are applied to more urgent problems.

EDWARD QUINN

RELIGION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. Edited by Vergilius Ferm.  
(New York Philosophical Library; 5 dollars.)

Twenty-eight religions, each expounded by a recognised representative, for a little over a guinea! It may even be more expensive by the time these lines appear. It is not the purpose of the book to set a choice before the reader or to invite him to weld the various religions into one comprehensive whole—under such conditions the Catholic contributor could not have participated—but having got his team into print, the editor expresses the hope of a 'coming religion that will cut across the streams of religious tradition and merge the values of all the faiths'.

E. Q.

THE APPROACH TO METAPHYSICS. By E. W. F. Tomlin. (Kegan Paul; 12s. 6d.)

The author's title and claims are so modest as rather to disarm criticism from the start. We will therefore state a few simple facts with little comment. At the head of the book there stands a text from Collingwood defining metaphysics as 'no futile attempt at knowing what lies beyond the limits of experience, but primarily at any given time an attempt to discover what the people of that time believe about the world's general nature. . . . Secondly it is the attempt to discover the corresponding presuppositions of other peoples and other times, and to follow the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another'. If this be metaphysics, a mixture of history and sociology, we are bound to admit that the author has more or less justified his title. Sparks of hope are now and again kindled in the reader that some truths about knowledge are going to be stated and defended, but he is disappointed. Thought is not, it would seem, destined to discover truth; it is only an endless adventure in which it is important that

people should indulge if free institutions are to be maintained. The history itself is not beyond cavil. Aristotle is held to have assigned 'Pure Being' as the object of Metaphysics. It is an ambiguous phrase and leaves one guessing. St Thomas most certainly did not formulate the philosophical view 'that man and his natural environment were both necessary, if imperfect, manifestations of the same creative principle'. He used much ink in shewing that they were not necessary but contingent effects. The author strongly desires to keep the Logical Positivists at bay; these are not the weapons likely to bring success. Besides, semantics have certain just claims, which we feel to be violated when we find: five misprints in three short Greek words, the only ones in the book; 'to écraser l'inflame'; and 'the World had been made flesh'.

Ivo THOMAS, O.P.

ON THE *ILIAD*. By Rachel Bepaloff, Translated from the French by Mary McCarthy. Introduction by Hermann Broch. (New York: Pantheon Books, for The Bollingen Series: \$2.50.)

BLACKFRIARS recently reviewed the learned work in which Fr Hugo Rahner, S.J., had studied early and medieval Christian re-meditations of the 'Holy Homer'. Here we have a contemporary's deep re-meditation of the same perennial theme. There have been many more scholarly, more detailed and more bulky commentaries on the *Iliad* than this slim volume, which also successfully takes in the Bible and *War and Peace* as reciprocally illuminating terms of comparison. But there can be few that have displayed a profounder insight into the principal figures of the *Iliad*, and simultaneously its unique power as a commentary on the meaning of human life and its timeless significance for all times. Rachel Bepaloff and her excellent translator write with a rare economy and lucidity; almost effortlessly they carry the reader into a world in which:

'Both the Bible and the *Iliad* link ethical experience and metaphysical questioning very closely. The ambiguous universe of demoniac forces is just receding from view; the world of rational symbols has not yet been constituted. Magic no longer possesses anything but ineffectual rites to impose on recalcitrant nature, and philosophy has still to invent its own incantations for bringing beautiful abstractions to life. At this possibly privileged moment, in the lyric preaching of the prophets of Israel and in the epic of Homer, a particular mode of thought is evolved which cannot be expressed and transmitted to successive generations in conceptual form, but which reappears and holds good every time man comes up against himself at the dark turn of his existence.'

The book may be read with profit even by those who have never read Homer; and perhaps it will be chiefly valued by many for the new light whereby it will—by presenting Homer as a point both of likeness and of contrast—enable them to re-read the Bible. Her