

BLACKFRIARS

MISCELLANEOUS

CHARISTER. By Violet Clifton. (Hague & Gill; £1 is.)

This poem is a dialogue between Dante and "The Woman," his disciple, about the splendours of the Trinity, and man's fall, rebirth and final glory in the Vision. The subject-matter is thus the most exalted possible, but because of its abstract nature immensely hard to make concrete and therefore poetical. As far as the language is concerned this difficulty has been tackled with very great success by the free use of imagery, especially homely imagery. Thus, the evil angels are "stalled in error," Dante's thought is "the purl and plain of knitted reasoning," and St. Thomas Aquinas is

"anchored of Aristotle
chartered of Christ, . . ."

Most skilful use is made of archaisms, both semantic and grammatical. Take, for instance, the use of "discovered" in

"Dante discovered
To me his servant
The things of God," . . .

The word is given more life than it has had for a very long time. Almost Miltonic use is made of inversion and other Latin grammatical and rhetorical devices:

"Me
God amazes
by the things seen
tasted or touched;
smelled as in blossom of bean;
heard as in riot of rain."

The kenning, common in Germanic epic poetry and also in Milton, is often effectively employed:

"(The Godhead)
The Fecund, the Beautiful,
It would not bind man's will."

And "gay womb of the morning" is an extremely descriptive kenning for the East. By these and other devices the material is made thoroughly poetical. But *Charister* is nevertheless not a very good poem; it has the weakness of so many other modern poems, that of formlessness. A dialogue is almost bound to become shapeless in a poem of this length when there is no story or plot to back it. The extreme looseness of the versification, lack of a sufficiently strong or regular beat, make it difficult for the poetry ever to become intense. Without regularity of versification the "overplus" of emotion, which is the experience to be got from good poetry, would be impossible. Its steadiness acts as balance

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to the excess of experience. Good poetry is a sort of marriage. It is the result of a poet, rich in matter, falling in love with a form. The poet must love a verse-form, say the octava rima, so that he can take the craftsman's delight in writing it well. The failure of our poetry is a failure in loving. If the author of *Charister* had loved, as Shelley finally loved, the terza rima of Dante, her master, as well as she loves her subject-matter, the result might have been great poetry.

GEORGE SAYER.

CLEMENT BRENTANO, par Albert Garreau. (Desclée de Brouwer; 20 frs.)

Familiar in the role of Catherine Emmerich's secretary, or as the favourite brother of Goethe's Bettine, Brentano is here presented satisfactorily in the round; justice is done to his kaleidoscopic personality; events, perplexing in isolation, fall into some sort of perspective. A breathless life, at any rate in the earlier days. The background of the German Romantic school is set; and across it Brentano flashes, to and fro, occasionally quiescent for a moment, singing his verses in the drawing-room, accompanying himself on the guitar, but more often swirling dizzily through a succession of amourettes, of hurricane friendships, of incessant changes of abode, writing the great work *Godwi*—so called, he says, that from the first page the reader will be able to say *Gott wie dumm!*, God, what rot! Then the unfortunate marriage episodes: and his second wife poisoning herself in desperation, refusing medical aid, and then failing to die after all because in fact she has taken a harmless powder; and Brentano flees and is pursued, and losing ground just manages to make his getaway by the back door of the inn as she enters at the front. Then the religious crisis and conversion; and Catherine Emmerich and the Dülmen period where he makes himself a nuisance but remains until her death; and the *Dolorous Passion*, his precise share in the writing of which has caused so much perplexity. A fascinating personality; brilliant versatility which saintliness does not destroy; awkward indeed—he will not dress respectably himself, and to *une élégante* he remarks: "I never willingly converse with a lady with a feather on her head: she thinks of nothing but the feather, and waves her head about to make it swing"—but lovable; pathetic because, to some extent at least, *manqué*. "One of the greatest poets of Germany," says the blurb; perhaps; those who have German will be able to decide for themselves from the long quotations in the appendix.

GERALD VANN, O.P.