

ORION MARCHES. By Michael Roberts. (Faber and Faber; 6s.)

This verse is like a gentle glassy stream whose mild face reflects with seriousness the somewhat too numerous objects and influences of our intellectual world. The reflections on which Mr. Roberts likes to dwell are drawn to a great extent from the poetry of his contemporaries. But from the thoughts and feelings of, say, Spender or Auden or Macneice he takes only what he can use in certain characteristic moods of his own. It is easy to recognise Stephen Spender's voice in a passage like this:

The arms were brittle doom, the lips in trembling
Pronounced their whispered fate, the eyes
Burned with their inner blindness and their strength,
And when the prophet ran in the doomed city
With eyes turned outward like a gun, the fatal flash
Threw back its huge recoil on the small frame,
The fragile bones, the guts thin as a dream.

Mr. Roberts shares in the justified fears of his age. But he goes on:

And in the street,
Where the stray bullet killed, and the bully fell,
Men paused to see those phrases in the mind
More real than ships and trees, and saw the words
Grow strong and pure, and spread their shining wings
Sharper than death across the shining square:
'Woe to the miserable and damned, the doomed city,
The idle word that sprawls across the page
Cut off at last from all its source of life.'

This poem is called *Under the Eye of Heaven*, and it is concerned, as Mr. Roberts often is, with the poetic and, as it were, practical expressions of the central problems of philosophy. The relation between catastrophe and eternal values, between individual experience and ultimate reality, between man's inner freedom and his apparent helplessness—this is the theme which underlies most of these poems and forces us to read and re-read them.

I am far from certain, nevertheless, that Mr. Roberts has succeeded. His facility in writing is remarkable, his rhythms are pleasing and interestingly subtle, his pictures are often extremely vivid. We know that what he is talking about matters vitally, and that he agrees that it does. But there is no doubt that the writing of philosophical poetry is a task of exceptional

difficulty, and I wonder whether in this case the writer's philosophical perceptions are profound and intense enough to carry all obstacles before them. Mr. Roberts has not yet mastered his discipline, he has not entire control of the power of concentration. It sometimes seems as if he were too conscious of a pale critical spirit watching his gestures from a corner of the picture.

Those poems which rejoice in most freedom are, to my mind, the group of mountaineering poems, and in particular *St. Ursanne* and *La Meije* 1937 :

Going down from the Aiguilles d'Arves, toward la Grave
 With sunlight on the corn sheaves, and the evening voices,
 The fields already ripe with autumn crocus,
 We said nothing, but saw the Meije rise up across the valley.

This verse in fluent correspondence with a lovely landscape is, I think, more satisfying than the slightly forced liveliness of *Temperance Festival*, or the lengthy wrestlings of the more 'thoughtful' pieces.

Mr. Roberts' book may not have reached the distinction of some 'philosophical' poetry, that of being useful as well as enjoyable. But enjoyable it certainly is, and it will be read by anyone who is interested in the ulterior development of the poetry of the 1930's.

FRANK PRINCE.

PERE LACORDAIRE. *Leader of Youth*. By M. V. Woodgate.
 (Sands and Co.; 3s. 6d.)

This short book on Père Lacordaire is not just a life of the great Dominican, for it attempts to portray three successive impressions of him corresponding to three periods of his life. Lacordaire the priest is the first of these impressions. The great event in this phase of his life was his conversion to the faith of his childhood when he renounced his study of law and certain fame as a lawyer, which his own ambition as well as his mother's had mapped out for him. 'And now that he had been taken back into the Church and had gained a gift surpassing any other, he must repay it with the greatest he could offer; he could not fall behind in generosity. He must be a priest and thus able to give to others the spiritual freedom which he had himself received' (p. 27). His association with Lamennais and his final triumph in the pulpit of Notre Dame bring this first impression to a close. The second period of his life was that of the Dominican; his noviciate, his ambition to restore the Dominicans to France, the return to Notre Dame and the great