

Yeats demands more understanding of Irish history, literature and folklore than has been brought to it so far. Mr Henn's book is yet a stimulating work, vitiated in places by diffuse speculation, but containing many good judgments. The illustrations are excellent, and so is the general format.

ROGER MCHUGH.

SELECTED POEMS. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter; 12s. 6d.)

A good test, though not a perfect definition, of poetry is that given by W. H. Auden and John Garret in *The Poet's Tongue*: memorable speech. Despite certain gifts and with some exceptions, Fr Merton's poems do not pass this test well. To begin with, though there is much accurate description and striking imagery appealing to the mind's eye, there are few of the qualities that catch the ear, whether of the formal order of stanza and rhyme, or the more subtle but still auditory and sensual appeal of more 'free' modern verse, qualities which, as Eliot has said of himself, are frequently antecedent to the idea and the imagery in the genesis of the poem. This 'taste' of a particular poem is the foundation of its memorability, and is that which catches and compels the attention of the reader, drawing him to re-read it and conquer, if necessary, its obscurity; and this fundamental attraction is lacking in Fr Merton's poems. Not that they are particularly obscure—it is, paradoxically, this lack of obscurity which causes the first uneasiness, at any rate in regard to the specifically religious poems, for it gives the impression that they have been 'thought' out and only later turned into verse. Nor is the imagery, which is perhaps his best gift, controlled by a sufficient critical sense: the impact of a particular image, however interesting in itself, is worthless if it adds nothing to the poem as a whole, worse, if it detracts from its integrity. An example may help, the opening lines of a poem called 'The Greek Women':

The ladies in red capes and golden bracelets
Walk like reeds and talk like rivers,
And sigh, like Vichy water, in the doorways. . . .

These are criticisms which can be made of poems throughout the book, the earliest poems of which appear to have been written in 1939. But a more serious one must be brought against those later poems which are explicitly religious in theme. Mr Speaight in his Introduction is able to say, 'Nowhere. . . is there a falsification of experience, nowhere a trumped-up emotion.' But the impression left by too many of these is that they have been written out of a willed and not a felt assent, that they are about what the poet wants, or thinks he ought, to feel, rather than about what he does feel. This is often and rightly brought against much religious verse, for it seems to require years of conscious effort and unconscious assimilation before the truths of faith

accepted by will and reason, so become part and parcel of the poet's mind, memory and imagination that they can be said to be part of his experience and appear naturally in his poems. But it is surprising that it should need to be said of a poet who is a monk. The reason may perhaps be seen in the success of a little poem, 'The Reader', which is, in intention, evocative and not reflective.

B. W.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE. Selected Writings edited by Roger Shattuck. (Harvill Press; 12s. 6d.)

This selection from the writings of Guillaume Apollinaire is very interesting, both as a study of surrealist poetry of which he was the theoretician—he is credited with having been the first to use the word—and because it is ample enough to let us arrive at a personal appreciation. Apollinaire gave a direction to modern poetry. He stands out conspicuously in the confused and shifting group of young poets, writers, artists, who in the Paris of the early years of this century lived a Bohemian life of experiment and adventure, without moral, social, or artistic anchorage, seeking absolutely original self-expression.

His critic rightly insists that we cannot accept 'the division of Apollinaire into man, myth, and poet'. The three threads are inextricable. He was born in Rome in 1880, of an unmarried Polish mother. The fantastic suggestion thrown out about his fatherhood, and pointed in this book by the inclusion of a Picasso frontispiece, must be taken in the light of his joy in mystification, of the 'glee' with which he 'cultivated his own myth and his own mystery'; and we might have been spared the innuendo conveyed in the words 'the question is not yet closed'. He was baptised and got a Catholic education in French boarding-schools, read widely and even abstrusely, and for four years travelled in many countries as a tutor, before settling in Paris. He made friends, passing amongst his young associates 'like some joyous god', writes Francis Carco, and much loved by them. From 1903 onwards his literary production was immense: stories, novels, plays, poems, criticism. His first important work, we are told, was a collection of short stories *L'Hérésiarque et Cie*, of which the tone is thus indicated: 'the dogma of the Church of Rome is treated on a par with the extravagant tales of a sailor from Amsterdam'. In 1911 he was unjustly charged with the theft of La Gioconda from the Louvre and underwent a short imprisonment. In 1912 he published *Les Peintres cubistes*, in 1913 *L'Antitradition futuriste*. He took French nationality at the outbreak of the war, fought with enthusiasm, was wounded in the head in 1916 and obliged to take a post in Paris, married—after many passing love-affairs—in 1918, and died a few months later.

From his life and writing two distinct tones emerge: 'a huge gaiety and vitality which carried him through life with apparent assurance,