

in China, where experience is supported by a dreadful subtlety and perverted wisdom. Not even Orwell devised anything so frightening as their prison system which makes of prison life a travesty of monastic life and is so effective in achieving its objects.

That it was not effective in the case of these priests is due to their own faith and courage and, as they so freely admit, to the prayers of Catholics inside and outside China. This simple acknowledgment, backed by the modest account of the ordeals that lay behind it, makes the book a most eloquent appeal for prayer for the brave priests and faithful still suffering persecution.

M.T.

PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN. By William Langland: a new translation by J. F. Goodridge. (Penguin Books; 3s. 6d.)

Mr Goodridge set himself the task of making the full meaning of Langland's poem intelligible to the general reader, and he has made a very good shot at accomplishing it. He has used a prose which in spite of (or perhaps because of) retaining a fair sprinkling of the alliteration of the original and even, in places, catching something of its rhythm, reads easily and makes clear sense. A very cursory and random comparison with the original shows the meaning to have been pretty accurately caught and though the version is modern in the structure of its sentences it still has much of the directness and immediacy of imagery that are such a feature of the poem.

The introductions to the individual books together with the notes help considerably in making clear the meaning: possibly many of the latter would be found even more helpful by non-Catholic readers. The weakness of the introduction (and since the remarks are intended to introduce the general reader to the subject it is a grave weakness) lies in the account of allegory and allegorical writing. Mr Goodridge rejects with short shrift the idea of there being 'levels of meaning' in Langland and believes that he 'generally confines himself to saying one thing at a time'. He offers no real alternative interpretation of allegory and at least once in his remarks he appears himself to discern several meanings in a single passage—so perhaps he is jibbing at the phrase rather than at the reality. Had Langland really only been saying one thing at a time then I hardly think that his poem would have remained so absorbing as this latest edition proves it still to be.

M.T.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT. By St John Climacus. Translated by the Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, with an Introduction by Dr M. Heppell. (Faber and Faber; 25s.)

St John Climacus became a monk on Mt Sinai. Later he adopted the

life of a hermit, as often happens in eastern monasticism, and lived at a place some five miles away from the monastery. After forty years as a solitary he returned to the mother house where he became abbot. Little is known of his origins or even of the exact span of years covered by his life. The various problems connected with the writing of his biography are discussed by Dr Heppell in the introduction. It would seem that the saint lived towards the end of the sixth century.

The *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is divided into thirty chapters or steps. These in turn are split up into numbered paragraphs which vary in length, some being no more than pithy sayings after the fashion of the Wisdom literature such as 'a malicious hermit is an adder hidden in a hole'. There are also a number of stories designed to illustrate the author's teaching. Those familiar with the quotations from the eastern ascetics to be found in *The Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtue* of Father Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J., will know the style. Some of the sayings are extremely shrewd, while others, perhaps because of the translation, are rather obscure. Interesting side-lights are given on oriental monastic life. We read that a penitentiary, separated from the main building, existed where recalcitrant monks were kept in solitary confinement to weave baskets of palm leaves. This book, which has had great influence on Greek and Slavonic monasticism, should be read by all those interested in the eastern Church.

RICHARD BLUNDELL, S.J.

SYMBOLISM IN THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH. By Gilbert Cope. (S.C.M. Press; 30s.)

One of the most vital questions in theology at the moment is the subject of Christian symbolism. What is the symbolism of the Bible and the Church? And what is its relationship to all the other forms of symbolism, such as those we find in the cosmic pagan religions, and those archetypes which Jung claimed to discover as the inheritance of the collective unconscious of mankind? This is the nucleus of the problem raised in this book. The author shows us how deeply symbolic thought pervades revelation and the whole traditional presentation of Christianity. He is alive to the real difficulty as to how the man of today can enter into modes of thought and expression which are alien to our scientific contemporary civilization. He is right too when he says that it is possible to re-awaken the response of man to these symbols, through an appeal to that whole inheritance of the non-primitive mentality, which lies buried below the level of conscious thought.

The worship of the liturgy, as he says, should appeal to man as a whole, not only to the rational aspects of his nature, but to everything in him which responds to the sacramentalism of signs, images, and