

THE WAY. By Joseph Mary Escriva. Cork: The Mercier Press Ltd., 19 Maylor Street. 15s.

MONSIGNOR ESCRIVA is the founder of *Opus Dei*, the first of those secular institutes which the Church has lately recognized as societies of layfolk who seek after evangelical perfection while living in the world. The book of which this is the first English translation has sold in scores of thousands throughout the Continent, because, while it incorporates Monsignor Escriva's formative counsels to the apostles of *Opus Dei*, it has a wider appeal to all men and women of the professional class who recognize their responsibilities as Catholics in that position and who feel 'how absurd it is to try to leave one's Catholicism aside on entering a profession, like a man leaving his coat at the door' (§ 353). Father Eugene Boylan, in an illuminating foreword, does not hesitate to say that Monsignor Escriva's work is as significant for our century as was that of St. Ignatius for the sixteenth. Still, in its construction, *The Way* should be compared—and Father Boylan compares it—to the *Imitatio*, rather than to the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is arranged in 999 short pericopes, each one of which could provide matter for a practical and stimulating mental prayer. The paragraphs are arranged under headings like Character, Prayer, Presence of God, Cheerfulness, The Apostolate, Holy Mass, The Communion of Saints. But this arrangement is obviously subsequent to the writing of the whole, which was occasional and highly personal, and which retains the freshness and intimacy of a series of detached directions, counsels, commendations and warnings. The individual remarks must originally have come with the haphazardness of a master-tradesman's advice to his apprentice, or of the head of a military college to his pupils; but the effect of this long process of apparently systemless coaching is that the young layman who has attended to it must have become a trim, alert cadet of God, who has no ounce of excess weight and carries himself with grace and vigour.

The earlier sections attack the young university student's besetting faults and defects: his spiritual aimlessness and flabbiness, his moral cowardice, his waste of time. Then are set forth the formulas for leadership and for the formation of a character of clear and simple outline; impressing the young man with true pride in being a son of God; training him to the habits of prayer, and of the presence of God, and of 'the little daily rectification' (§ 290); with stark Gospel logic bringing him up against the dichotomy of the Two Masters and the unavoidability of the Cross. God needs a handful of men 'of His Own' in every activity (§ 301), who will carry out a professional and highly specialized apostolate (§§ 338, 346-7). And yet the Director insists on the virtue of 'naturalness,' of passing unnoticed like Mary among the women of her country (§§ 499, 848, 959). One admires the manly vigour and tenderness with which the great Christian truths are treated, e.g. the Eucharist, the Communion of Saints; and the astringent quality of the commentary on the evangelical counsels. It is thrilling to see the author leading his young eager charges to the heights: restraining their impatience—'When will the break-through come?'—and pointing out unexpected kinds of

heroism—'The heroism of a bourgeois death, in a good bed, unnoticed, but of Love-sickness' (§ 743)—until there emerges a young Layman that might have been a companion of the Beloved Physician who wrote the Acts, but who knows how to suffer the martyrdom of being an unknown apostle.

And all through, the young man will find himself being handed aphorisms and paradoxes that are never merely smart. 'Sanctity is more attainable than learning, but it is easier to be learned than to be a saint' (§ 282). 'All our strength is on loan' (§ 728). 'Drop that craze for foundation-stones' (§ 42). 'You are no less happy with too little than with too much' (§ 770). 'Don't say: So-and-so exasperates me.—Think: So-and-so sanctifies me' (§ 174). 'It's never too late to begin again' (§ 711). 'The Christian's prayer is never a monologue' (§ 114)—These quotations show how unlike a translation the translation is.

The least, and the most, that one can hope for from this book and the work it represents, is that they may give to our Irish professional classes such new vision and enlarged horizons as they are giving to people of similar status in other countries.

D. Ó F.

THE WORKS OF ST. PATRICK. Translated and annotated by Ludwig Bieler. Ancient Christian Writers, Vol. XVII. Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press. London: Longmans Green and Co. 1953. Pp. 121. Price 25s.

THIS translation should make the name of Dr. Ludwig Bieler much more widely known as a Patrician scholar. Within the last year or two he has produced what must remain for many years the standard Latin text of the *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad milites Corotici*; in this volume of the 'Ancient Christian Writers' series he has added an English translation of these two documents. As well, there is a translation of the canons of the *Synodus I Patricii*, the hymn of St. Secundinus, and of the *Lorica* attributed to St. Patrick—all three of which, even if not quite so directly as the two letters which are certainly attributable to the saint himself, bring us into very close contact with the apostle of Ireland.

These documents should be well known to all who claim a share in the spiritual heritage of St. Patrick, for they light up his character in a way which no accretion of later legend can obscure. They give us a picture of a holy and humble man, aware of his limitations, but aware also of the mission which he has been given by God. The psychological insight which they afford is much more valuable than their witness to the chronological details of his mission, for to give these was in no way St. Patrick's primary purpose in writing. Now, with this translation available, there should be much less excuse for not knowing the man who was Patrick.

Special problems arise in translating his writings, for his language is basically a colloquial Latin of the fifth century, and even in this medium all, beginning with himself, have admitted that he did not write well.