

## - BOOK REVIEW -

### PASCAL

By Morris Bishop (Reynall & Hitchcock, New York)  
(Reviewed by George Gillespie, M.A.)

For the reading Catholic, a new book on Pascal inevitably raises the hope that here at last the whole question of the Jansenist movement and Pascal's place in it will be gone into. This hope is only partially fulfilled in the present book. Professor Bishop is a charming and urbane writer, he seems to make every effort to be complete and authentic; but he almost certainly knows little of theology—seems unaware indeed of the serious and separate existence of such a science. Nor is such knowledge to be expected, for in matters of religion he is avowedly an agnostic and an indifferentist. As a complete picture of Pascal, therefore, his book will have to be set down as partly unsuccessful.

But this does not mean that the book is anything but well worth reading. Professor Bishop makes it abundantly clear that his hero justifies the subtitle—genius is the inevitable word. One of the great names in 17th Century science and mathematics, inventor of the adding machine and the omnibus, founder and among the greatest of writers of modern French prose—Pascal was all these things. To the ordinary reader, however, he is perhaps most interesting as the author of the "Pensee"—that bundle of disjointed fragments of the monumental defence of Christianity that he never lived to finish. It is in these strange sentences and paragraphs and short essays that the essential quality of Pascal—immensely penetrating intelligence — reaches its most memorable expression. The great mathematician and physicist turns his gaze inward, and the result is a haunting picture of the lot of man and his need of God.

In dealing with the Jansenism question, Professor Bishop, despite a pretty obvious weakness in theory, gives a very entertaining picture of the clashing personalities. And he is not so in love with his hero as to refuse justice to his opponents, the Jesuits. He senses a certain priggishness in Port Royal.

The book contains a complete treatment (with diagrams) of Pascal's achievements in science and mathe-



matics. Altogether, it gives a living and memorable picture of the great Frenchmen.

### PROBLEM ISLAND

By Most Rev. Francis C. Kelley. (St. Anthony Guild Press)  
(Reviewed by Frederick Howatt, '39)

"Problem Island" is the latest book from the pen of that versatile author, and alumnus of St. Dunstan's, Bishop Francis C. Kelley of Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

The story deals with an experiment undertaken by Old McLean, an eccentric millionaire with strong, though hidden, religious convictions. McLean has taken aboard his yacht a number of children, refugees from the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. He feels that man by his own natural reason, unsupported by revelation or teaching, can come to know of the existence of the Creator. In order to prove this, he sets the children upon an island in the Pacific, and arranges for their care and education. There, isolated from the outside world, they are to be taught the arts, letters, and the sciences, all in such a way that they will hear no mention made of a Creator or Omnipotent Being.

The bulk of the novel is devoted to the result of this experiment. When the children attain the age of 24, a committee, consisting of a scholar-priest, a scientist, a journalist, and others, comes to the island to examine the young people and to find out what conclusions they have reached concerning God. Their conclusions are definite and amazing.

An apology for the existence of God is the main theme of the book. This dominates plot and characterization, but all three are so cleverly interwoven, and so well handled in the author's lucid and rapid style, that they make up an interesting and well-knit whole. The purely philosophical portions have been set down in such a fashion as to make really absorbing and instructive reading. They bring out some of the fundamental truths of the Catholic faith, and prove these truths from the standpoint of pure reason.

The main plot is unique, yet simple; there are also several minor stories woven into the whole. Among the latter, the account of the struggles of Decimus and Decima in the outside world will present itself to the reader as a tale of exceptional beauty and tenderness.



Some will probably find fault with the precision with which the several parts of the story fit together, and with the amazing conclusions reached by the children. It must be remembered, however, that improbability is not a defect in a novel of this type. The author has made no attempts towards realism. The plot and characters form a setting, and a most interesting one, subordinate to the philosophical principles set forth in the book.

There is a hint of another book to follow, concerning the adventures or "quest" of Electus, one of the characters of the present story. Let us hope it will soon be available. It will be accorded the same enthusiastic reception that "Problem Island" has received.

#### OUR FELLOW MEN

By H. V. Morton. (Methuen & Co., London)

(Reviewed by Charles McQuaid, '39)

Once again we renew our acquaintance with Mr. Morton, and spend a few pleasant hours in his company. This time, however, instead of travelling to the East or journeying through the British Isles, he takes us to meet our fellow men.

The book takes the form of a series of very informal interviews with the faithful servants of a nation's civil and domestic organization. Wandering about the streets of London and its vicinity, Mr. Morton selects those persons upon whom we unconsciously depend for our daily comforts, and then follows them about for a day in their regular routine of life. In his own inimitable manner, he reveals to us the fruits of his investigations.

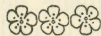
We go about the streets with him as he seeks out the ways of the cabman, the taxi-driver, and the bus operator. A sail down the foggy Thames, and we learn something of the life of a tug master; we sit in a signalman's box as trains roar by. Various office workers, the typists, the clerks, and even the unseen office cleaner have something to tell us. Rising at dawn, we follow the milkman, and the postman on their respective routes. In a jaunt to the country, a farmer, a commercial traveller and a miner talk with us. And so on we continue, until all struggling humanity is laid before us.

A continual struggle is the story of their lives. They tell us about it frankly, their troubles, their grievances, and the bright side of their own small world. The personal



aspect, too, is laid bare. Salaries, and how they are budgeted; living conditions; snatches of characteristic procedure; all is revealed to us. An interesting background is provided as they tell us a bit of the history of their individual callings, with interesting recollections of affairs in "grandfather's day."

Mr. Morton has again gained the applause of his many admirers. Not only has he written a most diverting book, but has also paid a long overdue tribute to the forgotten man of today, the public servant. In the compass of one hundred and seventy pages, his easy fluent prose has given us some appreciation of the people we take for granted, but without whom no nation may exist. It has brought us a step nearer to those important but unobtrusive men—and women—so indispensable to us in their own quiet way.



I put aside the garment that I wore—  
The homely household tasks that I had planned.  
Yet, Though I turned with eager steps to rove,  
Love held me captive with one dimpled hand.

—L. G. Clarkin.

