

AN HUMBLE SUPPLICATION TO HER MAJESTIE. By Robert Southwell.
Edited by R. C. Bald. (Cambridge University Press; 15s.)

This little book should interest at once those who treasure the memory of the English Martyrs, those who find delving into the life of the sixteenth century a fascinating occupation and those men of letters to whom Blessed Robert Southwell is a poet. The work, an apology for the Catholics and an appeal against the brutality of the penal laws, underlines one of the most tragic aspects of the persecution. If Southwell, Campion and the rest were men of a single purpose, working purely for the love of God and the spiritual welfare of their countrymen, the bluff hunting, shooting, and fishing magistrates who hounded them to death were convinced that they had to do with agents of a foreign power. The authority of Popes over princes, long discussed, had become tragically topical. One can understand the point of view of Father Persons and some of the exiles and of their patron King Philip. One can understand also the point of view of the Queen and her councillors, whose end was purely of this world. One sees why the missionaries wished to be free of all political entanglements. But irresistible historic forces put all three into conflict and the last mentioned had to foot the bill.

There are sidelights on the period in plenty. The Queen is deemed ignorant of the sufferings of the Catholics and therefore not responsible for them. The cry is against her evil councillors, for according to tradition the Sovereign can do no wrong. A royal proclamation, which Mr Bald prints, accused those abroad of being, among other things, 'very base of birth'. Father Southwell felt obliged, in consequence, to say a few words on the pedigree of the majority of his colleagues. (The editor of the French version of the Autobiography of Father John Gerard found it necessary to append a little note explaining, for the benefit of the citizens of the Fourth Republic, the importance of pedigree in Tudor England.) The description of the traditional methods of torture (p. 34) leaves nothing to be desired. The defence, taken from the Scriptures, of his disguise (pp. 8, 9) is delicious. The passages on page 13 and pages 43-45 must be among the finest the Tudor age produced. There are some shrewd hits, too, scored against the government.

The Introduction, putting the work in its context and giving some account of its subsequent history and the use made of it in the unhappy Appellant controversy, is excellent. There are three appendices: the Proclamation of 1591, which largely provoked the Humble Supplication, extracts in Latin from the proceedings in Rome in 1602 in connection with the Appellant affair, and a discussion of the relations between Donne and Southwell.

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