

Book Reviews

Helen Oppenheimer
Profitable Wonders
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Helen Oppenheimer is well known as a prolific writer and lecturer on moral and philosophical theology and a former President of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics. She has served on half a dozen Anglican commissions and is the holder of a Lambeth DD. This book is a collection of poetry and prose pieces culled from her wide reading over the past sixty years. The title is taken from a phrase of Thomas Traherne. As she describes her choices: 'Some of the pieces are serious and some more lighthearted. Some of them are more wonderful and some more profitable, but most have something of both profit and wonder about them. Each one says something which matters to me'. While pretending to no great erudition she includes pieces in French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek (mercifully with translations in every case). The book, she says, is addressed to Christians and fringe believers. It makes a glorious feast, and the more slowly it is digested the more it will be enjoyed.

Like Lord Wavell's *Other Men's Flowers* this book is arranged thematically and a list of the sections gives a good idea of its scope: Faith, Creation, Humanity, Mercy, Grace, Dying and Rising. Apart from the Psalmists (in the Coverdale version) and Saint Paul, her favourite authors are Augustine of Hippo, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Traherne, Robert Browning, Edwin Muir, C.S.Lewis and Austin Farrer. No surprises there. But hidden in the crannies there are some more exotic flavours, some to shock and some to make one laugh aloud. There is evidence in some juxtapositions of a wicked sense of humour. Lady Oppenheimer hopes the book will appeal to those who care about language and thrive on words. In that it cannot fail. For me it will be compulsive bed-time reading over many months to come.

Hugh Beach TSSF