

MEDIEVAL SPIRITUAL WRITERS, by Dom Gerard Sitwell; Burns and Oates, Faith and Fact Books, 8s. 6d.

Since no single age of the Church can possibly afford a complete picture of what the mystical body looks like, historical perspectives are vital for integrated Christians. Dom Sitwell has produced, in broad outline, a very good perspective of the several currents of spirituality that developed from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. I can imagine it being enormously helpful at that stage, which is sometimes passed, but which can become permanent, at which the interior life seems to begin and end in one particular aspect of the whole; it might be the Little Way, or Saint Francis of Sales, or the Carmelite reform. It is almost inevitable, and quite understandable, that everyone must have a predilection for some particular aspect or manifestation of the Christian life, but it is sad that a predilection should so often turn into an exclusive fixation. Here then is a valuably corrective book, that sets our more familiar devotions into an outline of tradition. It offers in brief compass, as the author modestly puts it, 'a few broad movements rather than . . . a catalogue of the vast number of individual writers'. The perspective that emerges is all the more interesting for containing some of the less talked-of, more representative figures in the main movements—John of Fécamp and Peter of Celles in the Benedictine current, for instance, and in the *devotio moderna* that very agreeable writer, Denis the Carthusian. From the golden age of *lectio divina* to the meditation methods devised for the less composed people of the declining middle ages, Dom Sitwell knows his material thoroughly, and the account which he gives of it is complete, well proportioned, and of exactly the right size.

GEOFFREY WEBB

ENGLISH SPIRITUAL WRITERS, ed. by Charles Davis; Burns and Oates, 21s.

This volume is a reprint of sixteen essays selected from a series of twenty-five which appeared in the *Clergy Review* between November 1959 and July 1961. It was found impossible to include more, but an excellent closing essay by Lancelot C. Sheppard on 'Spiritual reading for our Times' has been added. The first essay treats of the work of an eleventh century Benedictine, Aelfric, abbot of Eynsham, near Oxford; the final one, of the writings of Mgr Ronald Knox. The collection is certainly a representative one, including as it does Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Dame Julian of Norwich, St Thomas More and Cardinal St John Fisher. Two excellent essays are devoted to Cardinal Newman, and Bishop Beck contributes a valuable account of the writings of Cardinal Manning. Some regret may be felt at the exclusion of those two monumental spiritual writers Alban Butler and Archbishop Ullathorne, but in view of the space difficulty it would be ungracious to express it.

All the writers here chosen are included as writers in English, although the

language of Aelfric, Rolle and even Hilton requires translation almost as much as the Latin which still enshrines the work of the great majority of English spiritual writers from the days of St Bede the Venerable. Perhaps someone someday may find leisure to put some of those forgotten treasures into English, and money to put them into print.

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

THE LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS, by H. Delehaye; Chapman, 30s.

The first edition of *Les légendes hagiographiques* appeared in 1905. It was then considered in some quarters offensive to pious ears. It is the measure of its success that what was then suspect as the work of a revolutionary or a modernist is now accepted as a standard work of Catholic scholarship. Modern writers go further than Delehaye in repudiating the many worthless stories that still find a place in the Breviary. The recent suppression of the feast of St Philomena shows that this critical spirit is not obnoxious to the highest authorities. Hence this book after nearly sixty years has lost much of its importance and appeal. The author's original preface to the first edition now appears to be stating, not a startling 'new look' but a tame commonplace. The book first appeared in English in 1907: the present translation is from the edition of 1955. During those fifty years the text has not been substantially changed; a selection of more recent works has been added to the references, but surprisingly few considering the studies published over the last half-century. The translation is, on the whole, an improvement on that of the earlier one, but in phrase after phrase the reader is reminded of the French, and irked by a leisurely style, that now seems somewhat archaic. What is entirely new in this edition is the valuable bibliography of Delehaye's multitudinous books and articles, and a memoir that is interesting though out of harmony with the rest.

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.

THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, THE CHURCH AND CHRISTENDOM, by Lorenz Jaeger; G. Chapman, 21s.

The author of this book is Archbishop of Paderborn and a member of the Preparatory Commission for the impending Vatican Council: he writes, therefore, with special authority. The book is intended to 'place' the new Council in the context of the conciliar tradition, the pastoral work of the Church in the modern world, and the delicate problems of relations between Catholics and their 'separated brethren'. Archbishop Jaeger is admirably equipped for his task. Immensely well-read, he ranges over historical problems, theological issues, makes acute observations on contemporary problems, shows prudence and, above all, an informed and quite unsentimental charity. His thesis is that the new council will be thoroughly within the traditional conception of a Council, and like the other councils it will have its unique con-