

PIUS XII. By Oscar Halecki. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson; 18s.)

The other day, an agnostic said to me with conviction: 'Of course you will never have a bad Pope again.' When one considers the history of the Papacy during the past century, it does seem that the Holy Ghost has guided the conclaves in a very special way to give the Church Popes as holy in their personal lives as they have been wise in their government, Professor Halecki's biography of Pius XII provides added evidence of this, not only in its comprehensive account of his life and policy, but also in its references to the achievements of his predecessors from the time of Pius XI. The fact that the Pontificate of Pius XII has coincided with the Second World War and with its aftermath—an aftermath of Communist aggression and atomic threat—has underlined the traditional role of the Papacy in the quest for peace.

This book effectively destroys the slander that in modern times the Popes have favoured one particular nation or one particular political philosophy in order to strengthen the temporal power of the Vatican. In no field of international relations is this more true than in that of the conduct of Eugenio Pacelli (both as adviser to his predecessor and as Pope) towards the Nazis and Fascism. Few statesmen have had a clearer insight into the greatest peril of our days, the menace of the God-State, than Pius XI and Pius XII. Solid evidence of this may be seen in Professor Halecki's record of their public and private endeavours and his examination of *Mit Brennen der Sorge* and *Divini Redemptoris*, those realistic condemnations of the two extremes of totalitarianism.

The preservation of peace was the theme of Pius XII's first encyclical after his election—*Summi Pontificatus*—and through the years of war and of peace that is not peace, it has remained the first aim of his policy. The Pope is interested in the removal of all the causes of war, social, economic, political and moral. The task of the Holy See in its striving for peace is not confined to diplomatic activity.

The value of Professor Halecki's work and that of his collaborator, Mr James F. Murray, cannot be over-estimated. It triumphs over the handicap of being overloaded by American turns of phrase and by some awkward translations from the Latin and Italian. Professor Halecki has not attempted to write a full-scale biography of Pius XII, nor to cover the contemporary history of the Catholic Church in all its many facets. What he has attempted is a study of the problem of peace and war as seen by the present Pope. It takes us from the Spring of 1917, when he was appointed Nuncio in Munich, to the papal battles for the rights of the Church against Fascism, Nazism and Communism. There are valuable chapters on the 'Church of Silence' behind the iron curtain, on Vatican relations with Italy, and on the place of American

Catholicism in the free world. This is a book for all who wish to understand the history of our times.

UVEDALE TRISTRAM

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE OLD LOW COUNTRIES. By Stephanus Axters, O.P. Translated by Donald Attwater. (Blackfriars Publications; 6s. 6d.)

As the Preface tells us, this book is made up of a series of Conferences originally delivered at Le Saulchoir, and previously published in French. The Conferences sketch in outline the spirituality of the old Low Countries from the earliest Christian ages to the seventeenth century. Inevitably and rightly the central figure is Ruysbroeck, and it is his teaching on contemplation which is made the touchstone for the authentic spirituality of the old Low Countries. Great as the influence of Ruysbroeck undoubtedly was, such a procedure is open to objection, for although what may be called the practical school of the *devotio moderna* may have been indebted to Ruysbroeck in so far as it dealt with mysticism at all, this, as the author admits, was not very far, and the temper of the two schools was essentially different. The attempt to defend a thesis, in fact, somewhat detracts from the usefulness of the book. A representative list of the spiritual writers of the region is considered, though necessarily in a somewhat cursory manner, and it would have been more satisfactory to have considered them objectively, stressing what was characteristic and valuable in their teaching, rather than examining the often abstruse points for which they seem to be indebted to Ruysbroeck. When all is said and done 'the old Low Countries' remains a geographical division, but it serves as well as any other to delineate a group of writers to discuss.

The translation reads easily, but it is a pity, though no doubt not the fault of the translator, that there is a considerable amount of what can only be called theological jargon, due perhaps to the fact that the Conferences were originally delivered to an audience of theologians.

The book provides a useful guide to a body of writers many of whom are little known, but its value would have been considerably enhanced by an index.

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NOTICES

SONNETS AND VERSE, by H. Belloc (Duckworth; 12s. 6d.), appears in a new edition, with additional poems and an introduction by Reginald Jebb. Mr Jebb reminds us that in his latter years Belloc often said he would wish to be remembered by his verse, and *Sonnets and Verse* provides a noble memorial.