

again and again that 'the world has no need for us to present it with any new "formula" or any new "state of the religious life"; people are dying of hunger and thirst because they are so far away from him who is Life, and what they want is a presence—the presence of Life; unknowingly, they are seeking a person—a divine person.'

If you think this vague and are tempted to label it 'mystical', read on and learn how a Little Brother must always be available to anyone who needs him, how he must seek a life of real poverty among people who are unknown and obscure, how his life of prayer and disciplined austerity must penetrate his work as a stevedore, clerk, farm labourer, engineer or anything else, how he must be content never to see the fruits of his labours and die an apparent failure. His aim is to live exactly as our Saviour lived and because he himself is part of Christ this will redeem people from the tedium and despair of their lives. It is hardly necessary to say how important this is in a world oppressed with fruitless speeding hither and thither. It is a very moving experience to read this book—and that is a thing one can rarely say about a 'spiritual' book—because all the old ideas come to life, and because of the quite outstanding humility with which the head of a religious congregation writes to his subjects. We should read this book not only to learn something about the Little Brothers but because it will tell us many invaluable things about our own lives whether in the cloister or the world. No Dominican will miss Father Voillaume's deep love for and complete understanding of Blessed Martin, and no one else should miss what he has to say about prayer, poverty, chastity and obedience, vowed or otherwise. And lastly, the translator, Willard Hill, must be thanked for putting this into English where it is much needed.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

HISTORY AND LIBERTY. The Historical Writings of Benedetto Croce.

By A. Robert Caponigri. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 18s.)

Benedetto Croce was for fifty years the dominant figure in Italian culture, and his death in 1952 seemed to many the end of an epoch in the history of his country and indeed of Europe. To call him the last great European liberal is to beg the question whether Europe will ever see the last of liberalism; but in the course of his long life Croce so persistently, variously and brilliantly expressed the liberal outlook as to become perhaps its outstanding symbol in the eyes of all Europe. And this was just, for although the theoretical basis of that vast literary output is open to question, it is at least comprehensive and profound, and it was worked out with astonishing energy and erudition in the fields of history, biography and literary criticism. Croce never proved

his fundamental presuppositions (his theory of the human spirit as creator of human history), but he did reveal them as a cluster of insights into the springs of human activity, especially in art and politics, which cannot be ignored and which remain a challenge to Catholic thinkers in particular, who are *ex professo* obliged to attempt to assimilate all that is positive in humanism.

And here is the interest of this admirable survey of Croce's historical work by a young professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of Notre Dame. Professor Caponigri's style may be found somewhat heavily abstract, but his book as a whole is so well-ordered, so compact and to the point that it provides a first-rate introduction to Croce for any reader who is prepared to postpone the more precise definition of its fundamental concepts and surrender himself to a fascinating account of Croce's development as a historian from the early Neapolitan studies, through the anatomy of Italian post-Renaissance decadence, to those masterpieces of liberal historiography, the *History of Europe in the 19th Century* and the *History of Italy from 1871 to 1915*. History, for Croce, was 'the only concrete mode of philosophizing', and this view has obvious dangers for both history and philosophy. But to a large extent the intrusion of abstract theory into history is offset, in Croce's writings, by his prodigious and intimate knowledge of the subjects he chose to describe. This is of course particularly true of his studies in Neapolitan history, but in the wider Italian and European field also Croce's judgments are still very far from negligible. Of especial interest to Catholics is the old aristocrat's lifelong anticlericalism; but on this, as on other matters, Caponigri is content to state his subject's mind as he sees it, without engaging in controversy. And such fair and scholarly observation is exactly what we need to begin with.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

THE ENGLISH CHURCH IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY. By W. A. Pantin. (Cambridge University Press; 25s.)

ENGLISH MONASTERIES AND THEIR PATRONS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY. By Susan Wood. (Oxford Historical Series. Oxford University Press; 21s.)

Despite their title Mr Pantin's Birkbeck Lectures make no pretence of presenting a comprehensive picture of the Church in fourteenth-century England. Their purpose is rather to isolate certain aspects of the ecclesiastical history of the period, and treat them not, as is usually done, as anticipations of the sixteenth century, but as developments from the thirteenth.

In this context, Mr Pantin's comments on the 'anti-papal' legislation of Edward III and Richard II are of particular interest. He sees it less