

sense of literary flourish, but because they have found a satisfactory means of interpretation. By contrast Sir Harold Spencer Jones writes like a text-book of astronomy, and Dr Seligman makes the atom rather dull. Two of the more dubious sciences are boldly, and well, included: Dr Porter has a lively yet wholly serious account of the possibilities of space-travel, and Professor Rhine describes those mysterious and rather disquieting experiments which have made the letters ESP familiar to us all. Lastly there is a straightforward cheering account by Lord Amulree of the achievements of modern medicine.

The essays concerned with the arts are perhaps the most successful at finding a unifying point of view. Mr Ironside, who deals with painting, puts forward the thesis that 'the characteristics of Impressionist painting and of every subsequent movement must be considered as in some measure a response to the disturbing influences of the camera', and maintains it with wit and learning. Mr Richards writes well on architecture, explaining lucidly how the modern 'revolution' has been brought about by new materials and new social requirements. Sir Mortimer Wheeler describes with his usual skill the new methods of archaeology and some of their results. Mr Mellers has a fine essay on 'the creative and theoretical aspects of the four great central figures, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartok and Hindemith' of which the intelligent non-musical public will understand not a word; Mr Fraser has suggestive things to say about English and French literature of this century; Sir Leigh Ashton writes about sculpture. Finally Mr Grisewood in a careful analysis of present-day broadcasting and cinema discusses under what conditions they might one day develop into arts.

There are also six essays on politics and economics by well-known authorities, and one by Professor Goodhart on law; these the present reviewer cannot competently assess.

Clearly the range of subjects has been due to the personal choice of the editor, and it would be foolish to criticize his judgment. Better to praise the wisdom of pin-pointing particular aspects of a subject, genetics instead of biology, archaeology instead of history. The book has a daunting Gollancz dust-jacket, emphasizing that it contains 280,000 words, but inside it is sensitive and civilized.

LAURENCE BRIGHT, O.P.

THE GOTHIC CATHEDRAL. By Otto von Simson. (Routledge & Kegan Paul; 42s.)

The normal English approach to Gothic architecture is either descriptive and photographic, with Francis Bond and his successors, or strictly material, with Messrs Knoop and Jones and Mr Salzman. The romantic or mystical approach, of which Pugin and Ruskin were in

different ways exponents, had a long innings, and is still not altogether unknown, but it has not thriven in the mental climate of the last forty years. Most sophisticated English people have in consequence what is almost a split personality in the matter. They abhor the idea of building a Gothic church for their own use, but are willing to be duly impressed by Lincoln Cathedral and even to feel that there was something in those who built it that does not appear so clearly in our piles of concrete, steel and glass.

At first sight, Professor von Simson's book might seem to be in the romantic tradition, and there is throughout its pages an underglow of enthusiasm and something of a nostalgia for the so-called ages of faith that the romantics of old would have recognized as familiar. Essentially, however, it is something different; it is a work of scholarship putting forward an original thesis. Ruskin and the romantics saw in Gothic architecture the spontaneous blossoming of a faith. Later generations have seen it as the gradual evolution of an art-form in the hands of generations of practitioners growing ever more skilled to calculate thrusts and quantities. Von Simson sees it as part of the intellectual activity of the age, and of an age which was, or which aimed at being, on its highest levels guided by a Platonic blend of metaphysics and mathematics. The rediscovery of Aristotle and the ultimate victory of so much of Aristotelian thought in the thirteenth century has distracted the minds of most medievalists from the twelfth century, when Plato, not Aristotle, was 'the Philosopher', and when the Platonizing school of Chartres, and that of the Victorines, reflecting so much Dionysian thought, seemed to most contemporaries to have the future with them. Though they had nothing of Plato but the *Timaeus* and the *Meno*, they had Augustinian Neoplatonism and a distorted conception of Platonic forms, and it is one of the most fascinating might-have-beens in the history of Western thought to imagine what would have happened if the whole Platonic corpus, instead of that of Aristotle, had been made available to Albert the Great and Aquinas. This was not to be, but it may well be that we owe the Gothic idea to Plato and the pseudo-Denis.

The two leading propositions in Professor von Simson's book are these. First, that Gothic architecture was created at St Denis by Abbot Suger in order to have a church full of light and colour to serve as a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, and thus to capture in stone and glass a great flood of that earthly light that to Denis was not only a symbol but a counterpart of the heavenly light in which the Light of Lights is seen. *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen*. This church of lights, once realized in stone, was taken up and perfected first by the Cistercians and then by the masters of Sens and Chartres. Secondly, the master

builders of the twelfth century, familiar either from their own schooling or from their patrons with the Platonic doctrine that all beauty and harmony, whether of sound or form or thought, has its origin in mathematical (i.e., geometrical) harmony and proportion, consciously designed the areas and proportions of their churches in accordance with the ideal proportions of the geometrical and musical scales, and that the peculiar beauty of early Gothic architecture lies in its correspondence in all its measurements with such ideal proportions and figures as the pentagon, the octagon whorl and the golden section.

The first of these two opinions, that regarding Suger, is not new. It was developed at some length ten years ago by Panofsky, whose work must have influenced von Simson, though he alludes to it only in passing, and to criticize minor points. Its plausibility will depend partly on the view we take of Suger's intellectual integrity. In the past he has been chiefly regarded as the extroverted, ambitious, efficient statesman-prelate, duly converted (at least in part) to the Bernardine ideal of monastic behaviour. How far was his light-metaphysic (to use a thirteenth-century term anachronistically) or light-mysticism the genuine attempt of a reflective mind to interpret supernatural reality, or how far was it merely a jargon used to dignify an aesthetic creation? Such a view as the last may seem crude, and so many landmarks have been shifted recently in the religious world of the early twelfth century that it would be rash to rule out the possibility of a complete rehabilitation of Suger, but it cannot be said that Professor von Simson has as yet fully proved his point here.

As regards his second contention, the evidence he brings forward is, within certain fixed limits, compulsive. This also is not altogether new. Medieval and Renaissance architects, and Viollet-le-Duc (that great man) a century ago, made it clear (if indeed it needed proving) that the architects of Chartres and Notre Dame did not achieve their exquisitely harmonious proportions by chance or by some genial skill in freehand drawing. No one, however, has shown so clearly as Professor von Simson how certain basic geometrical proportions are used again and again in these great cathedrals, and how particular masters, such as the unknown master of Chartres, show such familiarity with the ratios of harmony and the mathematical proportions as to suggest that they themselves had passed through the arts school.

Such are the chief topics of this book, but there are many others, some of them controversial, such as the suggested influence of St Bernard on the side of the new architecture, some purely historical, such as the description of the immense effort expended in the rebuilding of Chartres after the fire of 1194. The whole is buttressed by a vast learning which embraces the intellectual and architectural, as well as

the literary and historical, literature of the period, both primary and secondary; all of which is cited at length in the notes. Even for those who are left unmoved by the primary theses, there is much of value in the background. In addition there are many excellent plates and plans, a full bibliography, and a long and at times extremely technical appendix on the measurements of the towers of 'Chartres West' (as we learn to call it) by Professor Ernst Levy. As the price for all this, printed in America, is only forty-two shillings, it can only be supposed that a subvention of some kind has lightened the burden.

This will surely not be Professor von Simson's last word on the subject. Indeed, stimulating, suggestive, brilliant and learned as this book is, the reader may feel that a year's reflection after writing, followed by a careful recasting, might have made its arguments both clearer and more telling. Meanwhile, we may be grateful for a book that has gone further than any other to set forth the unity, the solidity, of medieval thought and art.

DAVID KNOWLES

THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN IN VALLETTA. By Sir Hannibal P. Scicluna, M.B.E., HON. M.A. (OXON.), F.S.A., L.P., with a Foreword by Sir Harry C. Luke, K.C.M.G., D.LITT., LL.D. (Printed in Rome for the Author; 12 guineas).

On November 22, 1573, work was begun on the Conventual Church of the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem (the Knights of Malta). The church was built in the new city of Valletta and was dedicated to St John. It is the most important building of Gerolamo Cassar and now, as the co-cathedral, is Malta's chief architectural glory. It is a matter of great satisfaction that this noble church survived the war. No visitor to St John's can fail to be impressed by the striking contrast between the severe, almost forbidding façade and the richness of the Baroque interior. The church is rectangular in plan and, with its tunnel-vault, produces a remarkable concentration on the High Altar, an eastward drive so strongly marked that a visitor standing at the west door experiences a curious effect of suction towards the altar.

This church, one of the great monuments of the Early Baroque, is of singular architectural interest, and it raises some interesting questions; the slight pointedness of the tunnel-vault, the peculiar rhythm of the bays inside the church, the absence of an entablature and cornice, all pose their problems. The very striking interior glows richly with the paintings of Mattia Preti, and the great Flemish tapestries happily minimize the tendency of the arches of the side chapels to draw the eye away from the High Altar.

In this superb book Sir Hannibal Scicluna, after his retirement as