

BLACKFRIARS

than Machiavelli. Michelangelo, Contarini, Erasmus and More were men of that age. Machiavelli did not come into his own until the eighteenth century, and then precisely because his ideas suited the eighteenth century.

Again one has a sense of an imposed picture in Mr. Gregory's account of English history. There is no evidence, except in nineteenth century writers, for saying that the English were always anti-Catholic because insular and living on the fringe of European civilization. In the eighth, tenth and twelfth centuries England was, perhaps, the most cultured state in the West, and as often as another country Catholic in life and outlook.

But Mr. Gregory has written a book which in the main is so good, so learned and so thoughtful that to find fault with it at all seems churlish. He packs into a sentence as much thought as most writers spread over a page, and if his language is sometimes dim he rarely fails to make his meaning clear. As an observer of modern cant he is acute. "A man who sincerely desires to be rid of the slums does not cultivate the sincerity of his desire but sets about getting rid of the slums. A cult of absolute honesty is *prima facie* evidence that its initiates are dishonest."

This is a really important book.

LAURENCE OLIVER.

A PHILOSOPHY OF FORM. By E. I. Watkin. (Sheed & Ward, 16/-.)

No thesis more urgently cries for advocates in the world of to-day than the thesis of this book. The disorder of politics, economics, art, religion, has a single root cause, the lack of contemplation. This is not the same as lack of religion in the everyday sense of piety: it is often the most pious people who think least. The root cause can be traced in philosophy to the abolition of metaphysic which began with the decadent scholastics and passed from them through Descartes to the later centuries. Disorder means lack of synthesis, but lack of synthesis in turn must be due to lack of thought, for synthesis, unity, is the object of thought. Such a book as this, then, cannot be, from that point of view, too strongly recommended.

Comprising as it does the main delineaments of a philosophy, it is only to be expected that one cannot find oneself in complete agreement with every detail of the author's argument. He professes his allegiance to the *philosophia perennis*, but he will not follow exclusively any one philosopher—originality and freedom from echoing of authorities are one of the greatneses of this book.

In treating of hylomorphism, Mr. Watkin follows Scotus in

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attributing spiritual matter to spiritual substances, arguing that its exclusion has been often the result of a latent confusion with matter in the colloquial sense; St. Thomas at least, it might be urged, used a different (and a strong) argument for holding that "in spiritual substances that *materia prima* which of itself lacks all species could not be a part." Again, against the argument for the intuitive character of discursive reasoning, and in particular of the proofs of the existence of God, one would maintain that what puts such ratiocination altogether outside the field of intuition is the necessity the thinker is under of collating different propositions; in syllogistic terms, of uniting major and minor before the conclusion can be reached; and this character is not altered by the fact that the process may begin and end with an intuition.

Such differences as these do not however affect one's agreement with the main issue. Incidentally it may be questioned whether the author is not far nearer St. Thomas than he would seem himself to think: particularly welcome to the Thomist must be his brilliant inclusion of a Hegelian dialect in his argument, for the Thomist scheme, in terms of its own basic principle, is in potency to continuous enrichment, and its greatest extrinsic claim to truth is precisely its capacity to take from every philosophy.

The statement of the doctrine of forms should be read by any who still regard those much maligned principles of being as evidence of a system static and dead. The chapter on aesthetic contemplation provides a most welcome antidote to the ultimate stark fatuity of the presidential address at the recent Academy banquet; "the artist is essentially a contemplative, and all genuine criticism of art a product of contemplation," and nowhere perhaps is the world's lack of contemplation more dolefully apparent. Unless perhaps it be in the sphere of religion. It is not sufficiently recognized that "no positive system of revealed religion can affect our social salvation immediately and *by itself*." There must be metaphysic, the formulation of what is implied in revelation as explanatory and directive of life. And dogma cannot be translated into action without contemplation. This is the first necessity. "We are too apt to think of religion as otherworldly, as though it were concerned with a life to begin only at bodily death . . . it is a fatal misconception. If the other world were in this sense a next world it could have no meaning for us." Without contemplation in all its forms, ethical, aesthetic, sociological, metaphysical, religious, disorder will continue. Contemplation "since it is the discoverer and ground of unity, is the sole path to man's theoretical and practical salvation." In urging so convincingly that lesson this book is doing the world an inestimable service.

GERALD VANN, O.P.