

## *Blackfriars*

DICKENS. By Osbert Sitwell. (Chatto & Windus; 2/-.)

Lytton Strachey in one of his essays discusses the best conditions and places in which different authors may be most appropriately read. Pope is at his best in a formal garden, Herrick in an orchard, Shelley in a boat at sea, Sir Thomas Browne floating down the Euphrates or along the shores of Arabia. And where would you go to read your Dickens? Go where you will: he needs no setting or atmosphere, as Osbert Sitwell proved by reading him amid the stupendous towers and flashing lights of New York. Read him in no matter what remote city or distant foreign field: he is for ever England. He is as English as Chaucer or Shakespeare, not only in the way he reflects the English character, but in this that he is massive and great with the special kind of greatness which only England could produce. Dickens, as Mr. Sitwell reminds us, has a hold upon a large public not usually given to reading. He attracts for different reasons; first he is thrilling and sensational (blended with melodrama and large doses of sentiment); secondly he went in for practical social reform, 'humanitarian achievement,' as they call it (but better described as charity, joy, etc., the Beatitudes, the Good Samaritan, and in fact the whole catalogue of the supernatural and Christian virtues); and thirdly there is his humour—the nearest thing in human nature to the grace of God. There will always be, it is to be hoped, English readers enough to feel the force of one or other or all of these appeals; otherwise we may despair of England.

Be it said that this reviewer opened this book with misgivings, unallayed by the superlative praise on the book's jacket. But reassurance soon came. Mr. Sitwell is not a Dickens idolator, nor is he the type of modern who would decry Dickens as a mere vulgar demagogue or a stale Victorian comedian. Indeed, it is the 'modernity' of Dickens that Mr. Sitwell goes out of his way to extol: he shows him to have been the source of inspiration for Proust, and declares he was a writer a hundred years ahead of his time. Mr. Sitwell provides one more testimony from an unexpected quarter to Dickens's universality and perennial humanity, a further confirmation of the belief that Dickens is above fad and fashion, not the cult or craze of an hour, but permanently among the immortals.

B.

WHAT WE LIVE BY. By Ernest Dimnet. (Jonathan Cape; 6/-.)

Canon Dimnet has an engaging manner. Come, my dear friend, he seems to say, come and sit down and let us talk