

## BLACKFRIARS

PEIRESC : Un amateur, 1580-1637. By Pierre Humbert. (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer; pp. 324; 20 frs.)

Messrs. Desclée de Brouwer have added a life of Peiresc, 'the French Pico della Mirandola,' as his biographer calls him, to their excellent series, *Temps et Visages*. Though M. Humbert's work is not of the same importance as Dumesnil's *Flaubert* or Garreau's *St. Albert le Grand* in the same series, it is a competent biography of a distinguished seventeenth century scholar. It also throws light upon an important phase of intellectual development in Europe. The amateur was the product of the movement that gave Europe Leonardo da Vinci and Pico della Mirandola. But though amateurs like Peiresc in France and Burton and Sir Thomas Browne in England were not of the same stature as the 'men of the Renaissance,' they did possess in a smaller way something of the universality of the Renaissance mind that enabled them to apply themselves to any and every form of intellectual work. Peiresc was a scholar, a traveller and a collector. He was a great astronomer who made some discoveries of lasting importance. He was also at one time Abbot of Guîtres, he designed the gardens at Belgentier, and was a great letter-writer. In describing him as an amateur, his biographer makes it clear that criticism as well as praise is intended. 'He passed ceaselessly from one subject to another,' he writes, 'sketching and planning, yet never finishing anything.' He had the *libido sciendi*, that undisciplined thirst for knowledge, which led inevitably to waste of energy and lack of concentration. 'There are no more amateurs,' says M. Humbert regretfully. And it is true that the discoveries which were the special contribution of the Renaissance to human knowledge ended by making this kind of intelligence impossible. For man has become the slave of knowledge instead of its master, and to-day a high degree of specialisation is one of the necessary conditions of intellectual progress. Still, in an age like our own when excessive specialisation is a definite menace to European culture, we cannot but share M. Humbert's regret at the disappearance of the remarkable qualities of versatility and adaptability with which the amateur was endowed.

G.M.T.

THE LIFE OF FR. AUGUSTINE BAKER, O.S.B. By Peter Salvin and Serenus Cressy. Edited by Dom Justin McCann. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; pp. 208; 5/-.)

The publication of this volume is an important contribution to the study of the seventeenth century contemplatives. The lives that it contains are printed for the first time; strangely enough,