

BLACKFRIARS

spite of smaller publications on the nuns of the Order (notably *Dominican Contemplatives* by a Dominican of Carisbrooke). Yet even a casual reader of Chapter XI, on Dominican spiritual life, is likely to remark its singular appeal to the English character by its "compelling desire for Truth," its consequent simplicity, inward—"methods, examens, practices are developed but little . . . she is occupied with God"—and outward—"no affectation, no special solicitude to edify others," its "respect for individuality . . . it will never be said of Dominican souls, that to see one is to see them all," and "another consequence of Dominican mysticism: joy"—"One breathes in it an air of liberty and security which gladden the heart exceedingly"—"the Dominican soul . . . will always prefer the attitude of the wise virgin who, lamp in hand, watches for the coming of the Bridegroom, to that of the anxious woman who upsets her whole house to find her lost penny."

The first eight chapters relate the history of the Dominican nuns, three more describe their existence, rule, customs, liturgical and mystical life. The translators have added another three on the foundations in America, with their Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It is a pity that no mention is made of the nuns of the English or Irish provinces.

The translation reads awkwardly at times. Proper names seem a special stumbling-block. We have "Compostello," "Paleologue," "San Sixtus," while the acute accent has an odd way of straying from French words and turning up in those of other languages.

The book is illustrated by delightful sketches reproduced from the French edition.

S. M. B., O.P.

AN ESSAY ON CONTEMPORARY ENGLAND. By Hilaire Belloc. (Constable; 2/6.)

Here is Mr. Belloc at his best in a fine piece of closely reasoned analysis. His purpose is to show his readers in England what their nation and its institutions look like from the standpoint of the dispassionate observer. "Modern England is Aristocratic, Protestant and Commercial": that is his thesis. As is to be expected of Mr. Belloc, for it is a capital virtue of his writing, he defines his terms with exactitude and thereon builds up his argument.

The interest and actuality of the book can be gauged by the reviews and articles which it has stimulated or, perhaps, in some instances provoked; and it has, for example, been highly entertaining to watch the clash in the minds of his reviewers between their conventional view of their nation as one of which freedom and democracy are essentially characteristic and Mr. Belloc's blunt statement: "Equality is odious to an Englishman." Several of the critics have chosen to consider the essay as a missile from

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across the Channel. Nothing could be less true: in opinion, in style and in the tang of the work, with its blend of individualism and tradition, this is Englishry at its best. Let any man who doubts this re-read Frederick Harrison's review of *Lothair*.

The best parts of the book are those in which the author discusses the Englishman's power of visual imagination and his aptitude and appetite for oligarchy. The least satisfactory is that devoted to the Englishman's religion. The first reading of the essay is like listening to good conversation: the second reading is to find oneself engaged in good argument. Both are pleasures which are seldom to be obtained.

T. CHARLES-EDWARDS.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY

This book of essays dealing with Greek philosophy before Socrates by Professor A. Covotti of the University of Naples¹ is a work of great value. A pupil of H. Diels, the well-known editor of the Fragments of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, Prof. Covotti has collected with utmost care and *con amore* all the scattered sources of information, and from the *disiecta membra* he succeeded to reconstruct with rare skill the proper features of those early thinkers. It is hardly to be expected that we should find original views on a subject handled already by experienced masters; yet, two main characteristics recommend most particularly the present work: we have here a comprehensive survey of Greek philosophy before Socrates as a whole, and, what is more valuable, the most arduous problems are presented with remarkable clearness, convincing solidity joined with that care of details which is the mark of scholarship.

The first two chapters are introductory. The first history of early philosophy was written by that outstanding genius, who was called the Philosopher *par excellence*. In that Aristotelian historical treatment of philosophy Dr. Covotti distinguishes a twofold edition, the former of his earlier years, and the latter, left incomplete by his death, at the end of his writing. The central question is whether Aristotle's presentation of his predecessor's teaching is to be taken as strictly historical, or merely as theoretical, viz. according to Aristotle's own plan of philosophy. Siding with Paul Tannery and Ingram Bywater, and against Zeller, Gomperz and Burnet, the author sees in Aristotle's statements, not an objective expression, but rather an interpretation of their doctrines considered from his own point of view.

The next chapter, a bird's-eye view of the development of philosophy from the very beginnings to Socrates, is particularly illuminating. The conclusion reached is that there was a perfect

¹ A. COVOTTI: *I Presocratici*. (Collezione di Studi Filosofici. Serie storica. Monografie, 3.) Napoli (A. Rondinella), 1934, pp. 325. Lire 30.