

BLACKFRIARS

TEXTS AND PRETEXTS. An Anthology with Commentaries
by Aldous Huxley. (Chatto & Windus; 7/6.)

A shameless journalist has denounced Mr. Huxley to the mob as *the man who hates God*. One recalls Hardy's bitter resentment of

. . . . the charge that blessed things
I'd liefer not have be.

Mr. Huxley shows no such resentment; yet if there is any one thing for which these very miscellaneous texts afford a pretext, it is the expression of an intense religious need and yearning.

Paradoxically, it is the very intensity of his religious instincts, and his profound consciousness of the needs which religion supplies, which make it impossible for him to embrace religion. He has a profound distrust of 'wish-fulfilment'; and he conceives religion to be nothing but the projection and rationalisation of desire. Theology is but a thought fathered by a wish. That, he holds, has been man's sole inducement in accepting it. It appears to be Mr. Huxley's sole motive for rejecting it. Kant's relegation of God to the practical reason is reduced *ad absurdum*. We may marvel at this reasoning which assumes the invalidity of an aspiration on the strength of its existence, at a metaphysic which transforms the *desiderium inane* from an impossibility into an axiom, but we must respect the intellectual integrity which refuses to bend the knee solely at its behest.

True, on the very last page Mr. Huxley shows signs of wavering. 'Religion, it seems to me, can survive only as a consciously accepted system of make-believe.' But Mr. Huxley himself would, we think, be too intelligent and too honest ever to accept so unworthy a compromise; so acutely sensed a void cannot be filled by a God who is a mere working hypothesis. So the rest of the book is devoted to reflections on life and living, adjusted by one of the keenest minds of our time to the Godless scene. Mr. Huxley may be trusted to make the very best of this very bad job. But Catholic readers, stimulated and often enlightened though they will be, cannot fail often to mark the insecurity and inadequacy, not to say the hopelessness, of the attempt.

REVIEWS

It is, nevertheless, a precious anthology which occasions these reflections. With its ideological classification of unfamiliar verse, much of which is of exquisite beauty, it may well prove to the ordinary rational animal a more illuminating guide to Parnassus than more conventional collections selected by more strictly poetic standards. Mr. Huxley reveals himself throughout as a competent, sometimes as a profound and wise, exegete. Though we are constrained often enough to reject his guidance on the 'art of living,' we are forced to acknowledge that, besides a 'modern paganism' which is crude and degrading, there is one which is noble and which compels our attention and admiration.

V.W.

THE MODERN DILEMMA. By Christopher Dawson. (Essays in Order, 8. Sheed & Ward; pp. 113; 2/6.)

Can the civilization of modern Europe remain faithful to its traditions, or must we scrap them as worn-out and valueless and start a new era of materialist civilization on purely economic principles? Mr. Dawson examines the modern dilemma with his wonted address in this short essay, and argues cogently that the solution of the problem in all its aspects, moral, scientific, political, lies neither in a revolutionary discarding of the past nor in a reactionary return to the past, but in the re-establishment of religious unity; the re-assertion of the principles of the spiritual order, in a religion not individualistic but social, 'embodied in a real society, not an imaginary or invisible one . . . an independent and universal society, not a national or local one,' the society of the Catholic Church, which, because it 'transcends political and economic categories and is indifferent to material results . . . has the power of satisfying the need of the world.' Mr. Dawson will not be a pessimist, and the conclusion of his essay is exhilarating reading.

L.S.G.V.

L'ETAT: CONCEPTION PAIENNE ET CONCEPTION CHRETIENNE.
By E. Magnin. (Paris: Bloud et Gay; pp. 163.)

State Absolutism is more than a danger. But affairs in England are not yet at the worst and vigorous minority