

## REVIEWS

**EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION; ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT. Vol. II:**  
Rome and Christendom. (Oxford University Press; 15/-.)

This second volume marks a considerable advance in the technique of the series. There is no luxuriant digression or incoherent theorizing and all the articles attain an adequate standard of scholarship. Indeed two of the contributions may possess a lasting value. Dr. Brown (pp. 523-599) has provided an essay on early Catholic history which is characterized by a clear perspective and a clear prose, by a sense of period and a sense of the unchanging Church. Dr. Wheeler (pp. 159-279) has given an authoritative summary of the results of modern research in Celtic pre-history.

In contrast, "The Roman Republic" of A. W. Gomme stimulates rather than satisfies. The condemnation of Etruscan art (pp. 24-25), the contrast between the p-celts and the q-celts (p. 9), the passages on the growth of Roman capitalism and the social exclusiveness of the Roman oligarchy are almost as open to argument as the ideal Sertorius (p. 124) and the wantonly ineffective Sulla (p. 142). But even the assumptions illustrate a close familiarity with recent scholarship and their number is additional evidence of a rare power of compression. Something of the same qualities may be traced in two essays on the Empire by S. N. Miller (pp. 279-253, 599-673). The extent of Romanization in the West and the defects of Roman culture are both perhaps overestimated. A Latin-speaking peasantry seems early posited without sufficient cause. In view of the drastic developments of three centuries it is hardly tenable that "the capacity for initiative had disappeared" (p. 507). In view of the Antonine revival in letters, of the vigour of African Latin and of the new psychology of third century sculpture, it seems strange to read that "Literature had lost all spontaneity and that there was progressive decline of creative power in the arts," while "moral mediocrity" (p. 503) inadequately expresses the flurried plungings in excess, the desire for the cleansing of an Initiation, the strength of Stoicism, the christianization of the Empire. But though the theories upon culture may be questioned they are balanced by a lucid analysis of the means of imperial administration and by a chapter on economic conditions which is admirable in its clarity and convincing in its detail. And it is the clearest achievement of the contributors that their essays blend into a whole.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

**A SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION and other Treatises.** By St. John Fisher. (Burns Oates; 2/6).

**THE FOUR LAST THINGS.** By St. Thomas More. (Burns Oates; 2/6.)

These two publications of the works of our martyr saints are a

pleasing contribution which should bring us into a more personal and spiritual contact with those whom we venerate. The first book includes three short treatises written by St. John Fisher. The *Spiritual Consolation* and the *Ways to Perfect Religion* were written during his imprisonment for the benefit of his sister Elizabeth, a Dominican nun at Dartford in Kent. At the close is a sermon on the Passion, doubtless a reflection of those frequent meditations which infused into the author the spirit of fortitude which in the day of victory overcame the world.

*The Four Last Things* is an unfinished treatise written by St. Thomas More in the year 1522. It is almost startling that when at the height of his power he should have chosen to reflect on death, doom, pain and joy. But in the midst of the worldly affairs of Henry's court he was not unmindful of the great realities and throughout life he looked upon death "not as a stranger, but as a nigh neighbour. For as the flame is next the smoke, so is death next an incurable sickness, and such is all our life."

A kindly providence has conserved for us these treasured gleanings which are the key to the inner sanctuary of the souls of our English Saints.

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

AU FIL DE L'ANNEE LITURGIQUE. Méditations et prières. By Abbé Jacques Leclercq. (Bruxelles: Editions de la Cité Chrétienne; 20 Belgian frs.)

It would be an injustice to the Abbé Leclercq if we supposed that he had written this book from motives, even the purest, of spiritual propaganda. These meditations are of an intimate kind: thoughts jotted down at the whim of the moment, over a period of years, and given for publication only with the greatest reluctance. Yet on reading them we are not affected by that feeling of discomfort so often the result of the disclosure of something sacred. Vital spirituality and common sense run through all these thoughts, which themselves are expressed with simplicity and restraint.

The Abbé Leclercq's genius and detachment lend originality to all he writes. This same freshness in presenting his thoughts is all the more apparent in these meditations: "j'ai écrit selon l'attrait du jour, tantôt sur une fête et tantôt sur une autre, et il y a beaucoup de jours où je n'ai rien écrit du tout." Everyone gives of his best when he works under no restraint but at the dictate of his own inclination.

The reader may at first be a little disappointed by the Abbé's point of view. After speaking of the duty and the need of contemplation, he pictures the contemplative looking out on the world. "La terre vue du ciel, c'est comme le ciel ou de la terre pendant la nuit: étendue noir piquée de points qui brillent." Yet