

ter, are short, helpful and informative. Here and there, sections of a letter are omitted, but, this omission is always noted on the spot, and a resume of its thought is provided in parentheses. To translate Catherine of Siena intelligibly is no mean feat! She uses much vivid imagery, but often almost as if her words and images cannot keep up with her desire to make God known and loved, one image is abandoned in mid-course in favour of another. Also, she sometimes sets out with a definite concept which she proceeds to develop philosophically, but before coming to a logical conclusion, the philosophical process is abandoned and a theological truth (the one which she had in mind from the beginning!) is arrived at. To handle all this in translation is not easy: that the two translators have done it so well speaks both of their expert knowledge of the Italian language and of their sympathetic understanding of Catherine's spiritual thought.

*I, Catherine* is a book which both those who know little about Catherine of Siena and her spirituality, and those who are better acquainted with her, will appreciate. For those, however, who would like to use it as a study resource, there are some difficulties. These concern the enumeration of the letters: to date, we have three sets of numbering – that of Gigli;

that of Tommaseo; and (for 88 letters) that of Dupré Theseider. Now we have a fourth set, that of Foster-Ronayne. This complicates reference to the letters, in English. Also, in connection with the enumeration, a table of cross-references (indicating the number of the relevant letter in the various systems of enumeration) would be helpful. As it is, a student who knows the Gigli or Tommaseo or Dupré Theseider number of a given letter has no way of verifying whether it is included in the present selection except by paging through the book and consulting the information given at the beginning of each letter. These few difficulties, however, concern only the person who wishes to use *I, Catherine* as a reference work; in other respects, it is a pleasing and relevant presentation offering a refreshing message of hope to the men and women of today. Its value is enhanced by the fact that it is the only collection of its kind in English.

The collaboration of two people belonging to the Dominican Order in this work – Kenelm Foster, a preaching friar, and Sister Mary John, a cloistered nun – is a reflection of Catherine's ability to bring together in her 'family', persons from different spheres of life; and also, a happy testimony to the reality of the 'Dominican family' today.

MARY O'DISCROLL O P

**THE WORLD OF MEDIAEVAL LEARNING** by Anders Piltz, trans by David Jones.  
*Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981. £15.00*

Dr Piltz has written a general introduction to 'the world of mediaeval learning' for 'anyone who takes pleasure in confronting his own intellectual habits, his ways of thinking and his attitudes, with those of cultures which are remote from his own in time and space'. He addresses himself to the non-specialist, in a book illustrated with late mediaeval woodcuts, with 'place-finders' in the margins like those devised in the late twelfth century for dictionaries of theological terms. The woodcuts are accompanied by explanatory glosses, but although they illustrate many

aspects of the study of the *artes* their uniformly late date is unfortunate in a book which begins with Roman times. No use has been made of the abundance of illustrative material available for the earlier Middle Ages.

In a popular treatment such as this some simplification is unavoidable; but there is no excuse for perpetuating outdated views. Dr Piltz has been guilty of putting forward without comment a number of statements which are now untenable, or highly controversial. He speaks of

the 'platonism' and the 'humanism' of the schools of St Victor and Chartres in the twelfth century, of St Bernard as an 'anti-dialectician', of the University of Oxford arising suddenly in 1167 at the whim of Henry II.

His brief summaries of the lives and achievements of individuals also involve some naiveties and errors. Boethius cannot be presented tout court as 'the greatest of encyclopaedists'; nor can it be said without qualification that logic had to wait for the arrival of Abelard before it found 'a fertile place to grow'.

The book as a whole is divided into brief sections, of a page or two each, under the headings of 'The Background', 'The New Learning', 'The University: Form and Contents', 'Scholasticism: the Masters and their Schools'. There are some disjunctions. On p 37, at the end of a section on 'The Literature of the Monasteries', we arrive at St Bernard, and are promised a contrast with Abelard, but Abelard does not reappear for nearly twenty pages. The level of technical difficulty increases abruptly on p 64, as we move into the period of Aquinas for a moment. A disproportionate amount of space is devoted to Aquinas himself, as the author acknowledges in his preface.

The translation is on the whole clear, although there are occasional banalities, and it is difficult to see why 'Pierre Abélard' was preferred to the English form. The book is visually attractive. A map and a chronological table, and a series of Latin texts on pp 265-86 as examples of the work of the schools, form a series of useful appendices.

**GEORGE GISSING: CRITICAL ESSAYS** Edited by J. P. Michaux. *Vision & Barnes & Noble*. £11.95

There are several reasons why we find Gissing more enigmatic than our other novelists of similar calibre. He had, as clever, bookish adolescents often have, an intense thirst for beauty and an unusually strong sense of a sacred natural heritage

Dr Piltz's intention is to provide a simple introduction to his subject so as to attract rather than to deter the reader to whom 'mediaeval intellectual concepts' are 'remote'. Where he deals in detail with such topics as 'Porphyry and the universals' or Aristotle's *Ethics*, he is often successful. But he begins from what is arguably a false premiss: that mediaeval philosophers shared a 'uniform terminology', so that 'anyone taking part in a discussion or an argument knew the exact meaning of the terms he used, and so did his adversaries'. He therefore leaves out of account for the crucial period of the eleventh and twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in particular (though not for later centuries), much of what is surely the most significant achievement of mediaeval thinkers: the slow development of philosophical Latin as an instrument of thought and expression, and the work on the nature of language which has been an increasing focus of scholarly interest in recent decades.

His approach is a little apologetic. He has selected those authors he believes to have been most influential, in the hope of showing their relevance to the modern reader's interests. Had he set out to present his material in the confidence that it is of interest today in its own right, his book might have made a useful contribution to the literature. As it is, it has little to add to Gordon Leff's *Mediaeval Thought* or Dom David Knowles's *The Evolution of Mediaeval Thought*.

GILLIAN R. EVANS

stretching back to ancient Greece. Near the end of his life, he was still writing in this vein:

Among the many reasons which make me glad to have been born in England, one of the first is that I read Shake-