

Chenu in particular has demonstrated; and that this fine scholar's name gets no place in Curtius's Index suggests that the latter has still something to learn about his subject; while a couple of supercilious pages on 'Thomism and poetry' suggest that here he is unaware of his limitations. One may add that on Dante, the single figure who bulks largest in his pages, Curtius, though enthusiastic and well-informed ('Petrarch and Boccaccio . . . are both interesting, but Dante is great'), is not, on the whole, a very safe guide.

However, the great merits of this work far outweigh its faults. Within its limits—and they are not narrow—it has authority. It will be widely and respectfully consulted as a sort of dictionary of medieval culture, to the understanding of which (so far as this was a *literary* culture with inherited mental patterns and images and habits of reading and writing) it provides a magnificent introduction. But it should be criticized as well as used.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

MEDIEVAL ESSAYS. By Christopher Dawson. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

All except four of these essays have been published before, but brought together with the new matter in this volume they form a most suggestive outline of what 'the study of Christian culture', the subject of the first, hitherto unpublished essay, ought to involve. Christianity may underlie many cultural patterns, and will provide a background colour for them all, but in these essays Mr Dawson is concerned with the development of medieval Europe under the impact of Christianity, because it is there that we find the most fully developed Christian culture, in as much as the highest culture of the Middle Ages was also an expression of the Christian religion.

The range of Mr Dawson's essays is very wide and the learning displayed immense, but there is no difficulty in seeing the underlying unity, for in the political organization of Western Europe in the Middle Ages, in its sociology, its science, and its literature, the Catholic Faith exercised a profound influence. On all these subjects Mr Dawson has illuminating and arresting things to say, but perhaps one of the most valuable contributions to our understanding of the period is the light he throws on the culture of Western Islam and its effect in the Christian world in science and literature. In the essay on 'The Romantic Tradition' he argues that the courtly love poetry of Provence derived its origin from Moslem Spain. The thesis must be accepted, I think, but it is still too little known in this country, and it is good that the essay should be reprinted. This alien element in medieval life came to have an influence far beyond the limited sphere into which it was originally introduced. It infused that quality which we imply by the

word civilized into European society. In Mr Dawson's words, 'it transformed the knight from a mere fighting man into a gentleman and a man of the world', but in doing so it became itself christianized. It is true that an unresolved element remained specifically in literature, a mingling of idealism and sensuality, and it is this which has given spice to the poetry of romantic love right down to the nineteenth century.

We are the heirs of this Christian culture and, in spite of much that is inimical to it, its influence may still be potent. Catholics at least should welcome, and study, Mr Dawson's exposition of it.

GERARD SITWELL, O.S.B.

HÉLOÏSE AND ABELARD. By Etienne Gilson, translated by L. K. Shook. (Hollis and Carter; 16s.)

In his Introduction M. Gilson notes that whereas the story of Héloïse and Abelard has provided more literary inspiration in England, from Pope to Miss Helen Waddell, 'France has done better in the field of pure history'. His own work has certainly filled a gap on the French side; and now, with the appearance of this English translation, surely even more so on the English side. For this book is, first and foremost, a work of meticulous scholarship. Thus M. Gilson explains to us why 'this little book is full of notes', and noting the disfavour with which certain literary opinion eyes books burdened with notes, goes out of his way to refuse an apology for their presence. (Notwithstanding this, the publishers have seen fit to conceal them at the end of the volume.)

To those accustomed to the historical sympathy which pervades M. Gilson's scholarship, the quality which invariably enables him to revive the past which he studies, this book will reveal an added dimension of his insight: that of a profound, imaginative understanding of a personal drama. He reconstructs the story on the basis of the available evidence; an Appendix is devoted to vindicating the authenticity of the Correspondence. The outward events are too well known, their inwardness revealed by M. Gilson's careful analysis and dramatic tact at once too subtle and too solid, to be summarized here. In his hands the documents are made to speak of the encounter and struggle of two great souls great even in their faults: 'we cannot measure the real depth of their fall save from the height of the ideal to which they refer', M. Gilson writes. The coherence and unity of the drama as it is allowed to develop under its own momentum in this account, surprises us only by the strictness of its dependence on the evidence we have—even to its very silences.

The final chapter of the book is a challenge to the various arbitrary ways which used to be fashionable among historians (and are, perhaps,