

is simple and direct, and should be most useful to all classes of readers. By the publication of both these books the Dominicans of Canada have made a good beginning in their collection of spiritual texts, and one hopes that equally successful efforts will be made to continue the good work. H.T.

THE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH RECLUSE. By Francis D. S. Darwin, F.R.Hist.S. (S.P.C.K.; 6s.).

Whether this book be read as an attempt to explain the medieval English recluse to the Englishman of the twentieth century or as an historical record it is unsatisfactory. For the author has not grasped the underlying principle of the contemplative vocation, of which life as a recluse is a form. The trouble indeed goes deeper than that as two quotations from his appraisal of the *Ancren Riwele* show: "With lips repeating prayers and devotional ejaculations from the moment of rising and from the time of 'putting on shoes and clothes', the three Anchoresses found themselves reduced to a position resembling rather too closely that of praying automata mechanically performing certain ritualistic acts . . . None of the prayers recommended for private devotion can be described as particularly edifying . . ." (Page 25). Some twelve pages further on we are treated to the same ideas in other words, with the Anglican Book of Common Prayer dragged in. One may wonder what the medieval recluse would have made of this book for his Devotions. "Yet the strange fact emerges that it never seems to have dawned on medieval ecclesiastics that the extremes of physical asceticism which they themselves deprecated flowed largely from their own devotional systems with their vain repetitions, the ecstatic and ejaculatory tone of the prayers and the acts of adoration, and in general the lack of that *sobriety* so characteristic of the Anglican Prayer Book—aggravated all of it by insistence on recital of the Hours (including the Night Office) even by Recluses."

A careful reading of the *Ancren Riwele* or St. Ailred's *De Vita Eremitica* gives an entirely different impression. It appears that the author has approached his subject with certain preconceived notions. That, consequently, he sums up the function of the recluse on the one hand as superficially analogous to the Buddhist praying wheel, and on the other as a sort of oracle need not surprise us.

There is a wealth of references to printed sources; no manuscript ones seem to have been consulted. The publishers have adopted the objectionable habit of producing on the jacket an interesting illustration (taken from a French manuscript) which does not appear in the book, which is unillustrated. L.C.S.