

least one participant was impressed with the fitting climax this discussion made to the conference, for one of the chief themes throughout had been the moral import of a Catholic's philosophy, both for himself and for those he has to teach.

It was unanimously agreed by those present that the conference had begun something that must not be let die, and a committee was elected (consisting of Dom Illtyd Trethowan, O.S.B., Fr Columba Ryan, O.P., Mr Dickie, Mr Dummett and Mr Geach) to arrange for a similar conference next year.

REVIEWS

OF LEARNED IGNORANCE. By Nicolas Cusanus. Translated by Fr Germain Heron, O.F.M., PH.D., with an introduction by Dr D. J. B. Hawkins, D.D., PH.D. (Rare Masterpieces of Philosophy and Science: Routledge and Kegan Paul; 23s.)

Nicholas of Cusa has for some time been closely studied and taken seriously as a philosopher in Germany, but in this country he has not yet attracted the attention he deserves. He is one of the greatest figures of that intensely attractive false dawn of Christian humanism in the early Renaissance, so full of possibilities which Catholic Europe perhaps now can never realize. He is an amateur philosopher, rather in the sense in which the Fathers of the Church were amateur theologians; his philosophical speculations are the by-product of a life spent in work for Church reform and Church unity, which he ended as Cardinal and Bishop of Brixen. Like the Fathers, too, and the great medieval Doctors, he does not separate philosophy and theology; and he goes further than they do, and sometimes altogether too far, in attempting to philosophize the mysteries of the Faith, the Trinity and the Incarnation, rather in the manner of Solovyov, whose mind, though not his system, in many ways resembled that of Nicholas. The Neo-Pythagorean tendency in Nicholas, his habit of appealing to transcendental significances in numbers and geometrical figures to establish his points, which is characteristic of the Platonic tradition (though by no means essential to Platonism) is not likely to be attractive either to contemporary mathematicians or the un-mathematically minded. But those who have the patience to get beyond the oddity of his language and the unsatisfactoriness of some of his arguments will find some very profound theological and philosophical insights to reward

them, and above all a statement which has hardly been surpassed in force of the great traditional doctrines of the incomprehensibility of God and the total dependence on him of all creation; his concluding chapters, too, on the universe (in the second book) suggests that he had a mind which could have made better philosophical and religious sense of the achievements of modern scientific cosmology than we have so far managed to do.

The translation seems excellent, clear, and rising where necessary to nobility; and Dr Hawkins's illuminating and sympathetically critical Introduction could hardly be bettered, and will be a great help to any reader who finds that Nicholas's way of putting things at first completely defeats him.

A. H. ARMSTRONG

THE BOOK OF BEASTS. By T. H. White. (Cape; 32s. 6d.)

This is not a bad child's book of admonitory prose, but a translation—at times a paraphrase—of a twelfth-century English bestiary which was edited in facsimile some twenty-five years ago by M. R. James. It is a handsomely produced volume, with end-papers, illustrations, and some capitals from the manuscript, with the addition of a few relevant line-drawings of strange animals from ancient and eastern sources. The text itself is enlivened with footnotes of out-of-the-way prose and verse, a high proportion of it from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers, and with here and there an observation or a reflection of the translator. An appendix discusses the manuscript and the background and context of bestiaries.

That it is a charming and entertaining book no one will deny. Through it some medieval characterizations of animals, of their habits and mating and procreation will doubtless gain a wide currency, and unusual information, such as the exorcism against bees (p. 156, note 1), will probably be added to many a commonplace-book. But the reader will inevitably want to know how seriously this is to be taken as an edition of a bestiary. Certainly the appendix, which has some interesting ideas, is a good deal less cautious than Dr James was in its comments on the manuscript. By page 240 we find the slight possibility that it may have come from the Cistercian abbey of Revesby being spoken of almost as a fact, and theories being built upon it. The suggestion that several scribes in a scriptorium would be likely to take down a bestiary to dictation (p. 231) is the purest fancy, nor does the punctuation in a manuscript indicate pauses in the dictation (p. 243) but rather points the pauses to assist reading aloud. These, it may be said, are small matters. The translator may at least claim to have insisted to some purpose that a bestiary deserves to be treated as