

exercised.

It is hardly too much to say that taking all in all Voltaire divided and divides people into two classes, those who are with Christ and His Church and those who are not. Taking all in all, for a Renan had little use for him, and he has had Catholic partisans. He bears witness to the absence of Christ in a life. As P. Brou, quoted in the Preface, says, he did nothing but injury to what we hold most sacred. When we have given every consideration to literary excellence, to human inconsistency, to the special difficulties of a time, we must take our stand, to quote some fine words of Karl Pflieger, on the "conviction and the acknowledgment that Christ is not only our best, our most delightful, our highest and our deepest, but, rightly understood, our sole possession here on earth".

MARY RYAN.

AVRIL. By Hilaire Belloc. (Sheed and Ward; 7s. 6d.).

This is not a new book, but its reappearance is both welcome and timely. It is welcome because Mr. Belloc presents some of the finest French poetry, and in words that have a share of the freshness and vigour of the period of which he writes, conveys to the English public the charm of the period that preceded the great classical age of French literature. It is timely, because now, more than ever, we are conscious of the need of that "re-establishment of comprehension", which Mr. Belloc had in mind when he first wrote this book. Its particular content, however, makes it even more timely, for black as the war years have been for France, they have seen an outburst of lyric poetry—the poetry of Aragon—which has something of the spirit of this book.

On other points, however, there is room for criticism. Mr. Belloc's picture of the "primal and catastrophic" nature of the French Renaissance, of Charles d'Orleans and Villon, as the writers in whom "the first note of the French Renaissance is heard" makes us wonder how closely he is acquainted with earlier French literature. He is more at ease when he deals with individual poets, and skilfully and clearly he shows the gentle melancholy of Charles d'Orleans, the profound self-revelation of Villon, the 'esprit' of Marat, the pomp and circumstance of Ronsard, the poignancy of du Bellay. Yet it is with a shock—despite Mr. Belloc's plea—that we arrive at the formal Malherbe, but perhaps he serves his purpose, for undoubtedly, he is the end. It may have been Malherbe's orthodoxy that tempted Mr. Belloc, for he suffers from an over-anxiety to Christianise his 16th century poets. To stress Ronsard and du Bellay as 'Churchmen' is surely a mistake. Villon, with all his rascality, was more fundamentally Christian.

There is one final serious criticism to make. Surely, after so many years, blatant inaccuracies could have been corrected. Villon's "whole surviving work" is not in the "form of two rhymed wills".

Mr. Belloc gets away with much, however, because of his obvious joy in his task, a joy in which his reader cannot but participate.

J. McNAMARA.

MISCELLANEOUS

ESSAYS IN THE CONCILIAR EPOCH. By E. F. Jacob. (Manchester University Press; 10s. 6d.).

Dr. Jacob has long been recognized as the primary authority on early 15th century England and his essays on the conciliar period are marked by the relatively uncommon combination of a meticulously expert scholarship with an interest in abstract thought. Throughout he writes with a sympathetic understanding of medieval speculation. His chapters on the political thought of William of Ockham and on the theology of Nicholas of Cusa possess a crucial importance for the study of the shifting trends of medieval theory. His essay on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is the best available summary of the work of modern continental scholars on the meaning of those two terms. While no future church historian, when dealing with this period, can afford to ignore the composite result of his analysis of the quiet constitutionalism of Jean Gerson and Pierre D'Ailly, of the forthright reactions of Dietrich of Niem and of the profoundly attractive character of Bishop Hallam. The essay on the authorship of the Imitation has an especial interest. The conclusion is indeed the expected one. Dr. Jacob summarises all the contradictory and inconclusive evidence and holds that the authorship remains unproven, but that the treatise was much the most, probably the work of "A Kempis"—Thomas Hemerken, sub-prior of the Brother-house at Agnetenberg, near Zwolle. But the fundamental importance of the essay lies in the very perceptive study of the spirituality of the Imitation and of that associated with Gerard Groote as expressions of the "*nova devotio*" of the 15th century. For "Essays in the Conciliar Epoch" will provide a perfect and rare example of the fashion in which purely objective history can be at once sympathetic and un-biassed.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

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