

of a mind fully used to discourse in this subject matter. Although a subsequent volume, intended for use as a work of reference, is suggested in the preface, it could surely add little valuable information to the present book, in which the universe of Vergil's imagination is vividly reconstructed in terms of previous and contemporary literature and history; in which it is shown in detail how Vergil originated to best effect when he had most tradition to draw on; in which the familiar difficulties of language, oddities of metre, and peculiarities of style are briefly debated and passed under review.

There has been a tendency in some twentieth century studies of Vergil to explain his importance and universality of appeal in metaphysical rather than historical terms, sometimes with neglect of the context of passages used. Yet the Vergil who appeals to us is essentially the Roman poet of the Augustan Age. Like all great poets he often said more than he knew, but if we pay first attention to his unconscious overtones we risk abandoning Vergil for some unrelated phantasy of our own. Mr. Knight is very well aware of the surplus of meaning which Vergil holds for later ages; but his great knowledge of Vergil's background keeps his modern references always in touch with the concrete subject in its original setting. In biblical terms he is intent on the literal meaning before all others. Yet it must be admitted that a modern enthusiasm for Vergil is coloured by the history of Vergilianism and even of the text. Here again Mr. Knight does not fail us. He tells us alike of the chief MSS. and the famous editions, and of the influence of Vergil on poets from his own times to ours. His chief aim is assuredly to cut back to the man and the poet, but he remembers, too, that Vergil is a literary entity who has grown in stature through the centuries.

Ivo. THOMAS, O.P.

ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM: THE MEDIEVAL PHASE. By J. W. H. Atkins. (Cambridge University Press 12s. 6d.)

Professor Atkins warns us at the beginning of this book that the literary criticism contained in it has a period interest and importance; we shall find in it 'a running commentary on literature, made up of a few definite studies together with a number of occasional remarks scattered throughout works of various kinds.' The book then deals mainly with the growth of literary consciousness and in doing so both draws upon and supplements the history of the period. Perhaps one can best indicate its value by pointing out that it forms a useful appendix to that re-assessment of the place of medieval habits of thought in Renaissance literature which has recently been set out in such books as Dr. Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture* and Mr. Theodore Spencer's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*. 'It is only by appreciating the range and tenacity of medieval ideas and influences,' says Professor Atkins, 'that the true position of the

neo-classical element in Elizabethan criticism can be rightly understood.' There would be little profit in attempting to summarise here the intricate account Professor Atkins gives of the development of the subject-matter of his book; a few points however call for comment. St. Bede's critical activities, for example, have in one instance much more than a merely historic interest: we are told that in the approval he gave to the accentual verse of Ambrosian hymns 'he was incidentally recognising an important literary development of his age—the establishment of a versification which was ultimately to play a great part in modern poetic expression.' Here we might recall a remark of Mr. Eliot's: 'the rudiment of criticism is the ability to select a good poem and reject a bad poem; and its most severe test is of the ability to select a good *new* poem, to respond properly to a new situation.' The space devoted to St. Bede's exposition of tropes in the Bible might have been shortened in favour of that rare exercise of critical evaluation contained in the saint's remarks on certain Ambrosian hymns which Professor Atkins is content to mention and not to illustrate. Finally, though we may agree that 'of that speculative criticism which deals with literature in the abstract, its nature and functions, but few traces are to be found' in the medieval period, we were not prepared for the conclusion that 'this, however, is not surprising, since the philosophical equipment for such treatment was lacking; and practical, rather than speculative, interests have always been characteristic of English thought.' The remark just quoted, and a further one to be found on page 64, suggest that this book is on safer ground when it deals with the literary effects of medieval Scholasticism than when it is forced into some appraisal of the speculative value of Scholasticism and its relations with Humanism.

DOM HILARY STEUERT.

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL PRIORY. A Study in Monastic Administration. By R. A. L. Smith, Ph.D. (Cambridge University Press; 15s.)

The story of England since the thirteenth century gives abundant evidence of that tendency in human history whose fruits are now becoming so apparent. As soon as men's energies cease mainly to be directed towards the interpretation of the material in reference to the eternal, the force of human aspiration, urged onward centrifugally over an ever-widening area, comes by degrees to take on a new character. Organism develops fast into organisation, function into mere utility; the balance of human life is upset and privilege grows to lack the responsibility that is the justification of its existence. As a result, reconstruction has revolution as its sole means of expression, conservatism means nothing more than a return to a previous counter-revolutionary settlement; attempts towards recovery, because necessarily baseless experiments, become foredoomed