

## BLACKFRIARS

PEIRESC : Un amateur, 1580-1637. By Pierre Humbert. (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer; pp. 324; 20 frs.)

Messrs. Desclée de Brouwer have added a life of Peiresc, 'the French Pico della Mirandola,' as his biographer calls him, to their excellent series, *Temps et Visages*. Though M. Humbert's work is not of the same importance as Dumesnil's *Flaubert* or Garreau's *St. Albert le Grand* in the same series, it is a competent biography of a distinguished seventeenth century scholar. It also throws light upon an important phase of intellectual development in Europe. The amateur was the product of the movement that gave Europe Leonardo da Vinci and Pico della Mirandola. But though amateurs like Peiresc in France and Burton and Sir Thomas Browne in England were not of the same stature as the 'men of the Renaissance,' they did possess in a smaller way something of the universality of the Renaissance mind that enabled them to apply themselves to any and every form of intellectual work. Peiresc was a scholar, a traveller and a collector. He was a great astronomer who made some discoveries of lasting importance. He was also at one time Abbot of Guîtres, he designed the gardens at Belgentier, and was a great letter-writer. In describing him as an amateur, his biographer makes it clear that criticism as well as praise is intended. 'He passed ceaselessly from one subject to another,' he writes, 'sketching and planning, yet never finishing anything.' He had the *libido sciendi*, that undisciplined thirst for knowledge, which led inevitably to waste of energy and lack of concentration. 'There are no more amateurs,' says M. Humbert regretfully. And it is true that the discoveries which were the special contribution of the Renaissance to human knowledge ended by making this kind of intelligence impossible. For man has become the slave of knowledge instead of its master, and to-day a high degree of specialisation is one of the necessary conditions of intellectual progress. Still, in an age like our own when excessive specialisation is a definite menace to European culture, we cannot but share M. Humbert's regret at the disappearance of the remarkable qualities of versatility and adaptability with which the amateur was endowed.

G.M.T.

THE LIFE OF FR. AUGUSTINE BAKER, O.S.B. By Peter Salvin and Serenus Cressy. Edited by Dom Justin McCann. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; pp. 208; 5/-.)

The publication of this volume is an important contribution to the study of the seventeenth century contemplatives. The lives that it contains are printed for the first time; strangely enough,

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for they are two of the five primary sources of our knowledge of Augustine Baker. They gain a particular interest from the unconscious self-portrayal of their authors; Dom Peter Salvin, the Catholic squire's son from the north, with his candid piety, ingenuous, rather slow; and Dom Seremus Cressy, the convert Caroline divine, one with the metaphysical poets in his intricate thought. Yet the chief value of this book is derived from Dom Justin's scholarship and contained in the appendices, not the text.

G.M.

MARIE ANTOINETTE. By Stefan Zweig. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. (New York: The Viking Press, 1933; \$3.50.)

This book of four hundred and fifty closely-packed large-octavo pages has been hailed as a masterpiece of biographical literature and a triumph of historical research. It is being read on two continents and in fifteen different languages. Full of dramatic force, and steeped in the spirit of the eighteenth century, it reminds us of *Jew Süß*—documented and scholarly history written like a novel. It claims to be a psychological study of Marie Antoinette, viewed neither as the wanton Massalina of the revolutionist, nor as the martyred Queen of the royalist, but as a mediocrity and an average woman. Most certainly it is a powerful work, powerfully written and admirably translated. But it cannot be recommended without reservations. Its coarseness and frankness are beyond belief. One chapter in particular is almost an outrage, and parts of others are equally unpleasant. The author does not seem to know what reticence is.

F.R.B.

FREDERICK OZANAM. By H. L. Hughes, B.A., D.Litt. (London: Alexander Ouseley; pp. 191; 3/6.)

*Allons aux pauvres.* 'It would be better,' said Ozanam to his friends, 'if we Catholic young men, instead of wasting breath on these vapid discussions, were to form a society of our own and concentrate our energies on relieving the troubles of the poor.' This was a hundred years ago, but the Society exists, and many admire, but many more have cause to be grateful for, its efficient and undemonstrative work. Practice is better than precept. An article in the present number of *BLACKFRIARS* on the centenary of the S.V.P. may serve as an introduction to a biography of its founder by Fr. Hughes—a welcome book, which sets Ozanam in the nineteenth century scene, and points the urgent need of the extension of his work at the present time.

N.W.T.G.