

## BLACKFRIARS

essay on *Religion and Life* is a permanently valuable exposition of the principles of Christian life and Catholic Action. All this variety of interests converges to support a central theme.

Mr. Dawson is one of the most helpful thinkers of our time. This book is one not only to be read, but to be kept for constant reference. Its usefulness would have been enhanced by an index.

V.W.

ERASMUS. By Christopher Hollis. (Eyre & Spottiswoode; pp. 370; 10/6.)

Mr. Hollis's pen has again been at work. His latest victim is Erasmus. We are shown, with Mr. Hollis's customary skill, most of the unpleasant sides of the Dutch humanist's character. The amount of relevant comment and historical perspective that is omitted is remarkably large—especially as Mr. Hollis is not without historical imagination. He regards Erasmus as the heir of Valla and the progenitor of Rabelais, to whom he gives a rarely accorded justice as a man with a philosophy. He might also have credited Erasmus with some religion, although to the superficial mind it is not very obvious, any more than Rabelais' philosophy. In ignoring Erasmus as a religious figure, he ignores almost everything about him. The idea of a secular-minded person having a personal religion independent of tradition or religious status and derived directly from an individual use of the New Testament, was an innovation in Christian history. Erasmus was its originator; his fault was that he did not foresee that human weakness would make his ideal the basis of a protestant schism. Erasmus seems irreligious because he was an intellectual who concealed his religious feelings from the general public. But the author of the *Praise of Folly* was also the first editor of the Fathers and almost the first exegete.

Again, Mr. Hollis mentions Erasmus' intimacy with Servatius as evidence of moral depravity. If this was the uncontrolled sentimentality of youth it was indeed a blot on his character. But it was more probably a misfortune of his birth and not his fault, by which much of Erasmus is excused: his loss of himself in literature was a creditable salvaging of his self-respect; his fussiness about his person is explicable. Such a man would naturally have become a stylist, and Erasmus was nothing if not a stylist. He was more a Latinist than a satirist. He taught Europe to write Latin well, and it happened that he taught many other things because they were the subject-matter of Latin exercises. His renown was due more to his having something to say, but his motive was due more to his ability to say things well. He loved to wield

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an able pen on the unfailing wealth of satirizable objects around him, and was too tolerant to be altogether sincere in what he condemned. No vain idealist, he took the world as he found it. Others less acute in mind and more passionately moral, saw genuine moral doctrine in Ciceronian denunciations and Lucianic irony which were cruel only to be kind. He would have reformed Christendom by education; and the Society of Jesus and the seminary system established by the Council of Trent did for the Church what he would have wished. But so mild a remedy for the social ills of Christendom was not possible in his own day. A catastrophe happened before the new era had given shape to its vast conceptions. The Renaissance is not easy to understand, and Mr. Hollis does not seem to us to have tried to make it understandable.

S.H.

**HISTORY OF THE POPES.** From the German of Ludwig, Freiherr von Pastor. Edited by Ralph Francis Kerr, of the London Oratory. Vols. xxiii and xxiv. (London: Kegan Paul, 1933; 15/- net each vol.)

It is a delight to receive from the publishers two more volumes of this great historical work, but the joy is mixed with sadness when we remember that learned author and accomplished translator have now alike passed away. The present instalment covers the pontificate of Clement VIII, 1592—1605. The subject-matter is largely new, as the Aldobrandini Pope has hitherto been rather neglected by historians, and the archives of his reign only lately opened up in their fullness. The first of the new volumes is concerned with the complicated business of the conversion of Henry IV of France, and the work of the Counter-Reformation in Germany, Austria, the Low Countries and Switzerland. The second deals with the persecutions of Catholics in Holland, Great Britain, and Ireland, and the march of events in Poland, Sweden and Russia. The interior life and discipline of the Church, the foreign missions and the beginnings of Propaganda, the great Jubilee of 1600, and the controversies on Grace are all adequately discussed. And Clement VIII's administration of the Papal States, and his patronage of learning and art receive the fullest attention. Though neither Foreword nor Colophon tell us if we may expect other volumes of this wonderful work, we believe there yet remains a goodly portion of the original to be translated, and we trust the mantle of the late Father Kerr may ere this have been passed on to a competent successor.

F. R. B.