

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE. By George Kane. (Methuen; 12s. 6d.)

The LIFE OF THE SPIRIT frequently carries studies and texts of earlier English spiritual writings. Some of the work is modernised to make it readable, but with the archaic often present as an incentive to return to some of the sturdier spiritual language of an earlier age. Those who would wish to taste more of the original literary charm of some of these works by such men as Richard Rolle should turn to this book, which deals specifically, not only with the Metrical Romances, but with the Religious Lyrics and *Piers Plowman* of the middle English period, and does so on purpose to reveal the peculiar beauties of these writings as well as the special characteristics of the authors. The author shows how difficult it is to recapture the full bearing of this religious writing and therefore its full beauty as skilled work, because, as he says of the medieval Englishman, 'his moral sense was close to his imagination, excited it, and was in turn sharpened or at least made more lively by the pictures . . . his state of mind was then vastly more receptive to this moral lyrics than is that of the common reader of today'. (p. 110.) This perceptive remark indicates the value of the book, whose pages are constantly refreshed with delightful excerpts from the writings in question.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORSHIP. By Gerald Ellard, S.J. (Bruce; \$4.50.)

The first edition of this classic appeared in 1933, when the liturgical movement was still the concern of a few specialists and before the breezes of worshipful enthusiasm had swept France, or any other country; before also Pius XII had thought of his two great encyclicals on the Mystical Body and on Divine Worship. Fr Ellard was then a pioneer and his book stands as a kind of prophecy of the future liturgical missions and retreats which are now having such great effect in many countries. But just as the author fitted the liturgy into the life and doctrine of the Christian, so his own work was never allowed to be a fossilised statement of fact. It has evidently been living with him for all these years, so that in this third edition, revised and enlarged, it is as fresh and modern as though it were seeing the light for the first time. Pius XII's encyclicals are quoted *in extenso*; major works of recent date, such as Gregory Dix's *Shape of the Liturgy*, have been taken into account; and there is nothing in the book that is out of date. The worship of the Church, in Mass and the Sacraments, is shown to grow from the reality of the Mystical Body, and active sharing in this worship is applied to the Christian as a *member*. And all is supported by history and texts which make an excellent introduction to the study of the

subject; each chapter concludes with 'Topics for Further Discussion' and 'Readings'. So the grass is not allowed to grow under the reader's feet either. It is only a pity that the price of the volume is so difficult in English currency and that the lay-out is so reminiscent of unattractive school text-books. Miss de Bethune has striven nobly to decorate the text with her plain black-and-white drawings, but we miss some of the photographic plates of the first edition.

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EXTRACTS

NOTES ON PRAYER, by Père G. Dirks in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* (June 1951), contains some very pertinent remarks, though the article as a whole seems to be attempting to set the usual Ignatian methods and interpretations of prayer into a more contemplative frame. It is useful, for example, to have contemplation treated in a general sense: the original ideal of the monk, for example, was 'contemplation':

This more or less continual contemplation is formal at certain periods and 'diffuse' the rest of the time. For nourishment the monks have constant recourse to spiritual reading. According to the seasons, i.e. according to the demands of their work on the land, great in summer, less in winter, they have two to four hours, sometimes more, for spiritual reading. For preference they read Holy Scripture. Père Dirks insists on the centrality of God in prayer, which in spite of appearing a platitude often needs to be repeated:

But what are the fundamental attitudes or dispositions which man must have in regard to God? . . . Everything turns on Tertullian's answer: '*Veneratio Dei; petitio hominis*'—adoration and petition. . . . God is at once our beginning and our end. Since God is the 'Being-spring', each of us at every moment depends in being upon him. We must accept God as God and ourselves as creatures. The man who does that adores God. He adopts voluntarily that attitude of a servant which he has by nature. The first and the most essential object of prayer is to adore. . . .

God is also our End: we are made for him . . . That is to say, our restless soul can find its quiet in God alone: *Fecisti nos ad te, Domine, et irrequietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*. God alone can satisfy us. . . . To wish for God, to desire God, to love God—this is prayer's object. The prayer of petition expresses our need, declares our desires and our love. . . .