

member, to advise the Pope on measures of reform. This recommended the gradual abolition of all existing monasteries on the grounds that to reform them back to their original zeal was considered impossible.

The most Catholic way possible of looking at the Reformation would be to see it as St Thomas More saw it. He was under no illusions as to the static condition into which contemporary theology had fallen, yet, unlike some of his friends, he revered St Thomas Aquinas. He himself saw clearly the true implications of the rejection of Papal authority, yet he was fully alive to the force of the genuine doubts about it which made others hesitate or temporise. He could hardly have been blind to the partial decay of the religious orders, yet he seems to have considered trying his own vocation with the Carthusians and at one time thought of becoming a Franciscan. The final merit of this small book is the admirable insight it gives us into the mind and outlook of this great saint and martyr.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

THE LIMITS AND DIVISIONS OF EUROPEAN HISTORY. By Oscar Halecki. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

A short review can hardly do more than add one witness to the importance of this little book. It has a Preface by Mr Christopher Dawson, whose high praise of it is the best guarantee of its interest. It has rather the air and manner of a provisional sketch, but its author is so evidently well-informed, wide-minded and serious, that it is sure to be regarded, for some time to come, as a standard survey of its subject. It will be read wherever men are trying to understand the modern age historically. For it is very much concerned with the modern age. If one may divide history-books into those which appear to be written simply to account for the past, and those which are written with an eye on the present and the future, this is one of the latter. And Professor Halecki's eye is both alert and long-sighted.

Any summary must be tentative; the book is curiously provocative of second readings. It is so, partly because its provisional, or, better perhaps, its meditative, air stimulates further thought; and partly because the author has conveyed, possibly more than he realised, his own sense of the urgency of his theme. From a quick—alas too quick—reading one can however retain three major emphases. First, there is the stress on the importance and the European character of Eastern states now engulfed by the Soviet. Secondly, there is a clear, if prevalently rather political, view of the historically *original* character of this mid-twentieth century—the view, spreading everywhere now, that, in a historically valid sense of the phrase, a *new age* is beginning. Thirdly, there is an attempt, focussing on the concept of freedom

(itself left, perhaps inevitably, somewhat hazy) to define the specific nature of 'Europeanism' and the special problems, past and present, for nations and individuals, set for being or trying to be European. The 'basic problem' is set by the antithesis: freedom and authority. As to freedom, one notes with interest Halecki's agreement with Christopher Dawson in stressing the profound positive effect of Christianity. As to authority, one notes with relief the author's strong certainty of the historical short-windedness, so to say, of despotism; for today an exiled Pole might be excused for any despondency. Further, it is good to note that the Holy See is not left out of account. Let us hope that Catholics will buy this book; it deserves to be read and re-read; and kept handy for discussion.

K.F.

HISTORY, ITS PURPOSE AND MEANING. By G. J. Renier. (Allen and Unwin; 16s.)

People who like history naturally are bored with talk about history, for their interests are necessarily concrete and particular, whereas talk about history, its theory and so-called philosophy, is bound to be abstract and general. It is this which makes Professor Renier's volume tedious to the present reviewer as a student of history, though what the author has to say is usually sensible and occasionally valuable.

The most useful section of the book is that concerned with the frame of mind in which one should approach the task of writing history. Professor Renier quite rightly points out that no one can set out to write on a historical subject altogether free from prejudices and he proclaims the value of writing history with some general pattern, or philosophy, in mind. The mere recital of facts would be tedious and is, in fact, impossible. What he says by way of caution is pure common sense, that is, that the writer should always be ready to abandon his theory when facts turn up that will not fit into it. It is a pity that Professor Renier's knowledge of the Catholic Church is so incomplete that he has not yet found reason to discard some of his more fantastic comments upon it.

Books about history and its so-called philosophy are numerous nowadays for the good reason that the events of our time are so disastrous that we are all curious to know the causes from which they spring. The pattern which produced Hitler and Stalin is obviously of enormous importance and Professor Renier's book is useful in indicating how complex that pattern is likely to be when disengaged, and how very much pragmatism and anti-supernaturalism have contributed towards it.

P.F.