

MEDIEVAL SPIRITUAL WRITERS, by Dom Gerard Sitwell; Burns and Oates, Faith and Fact Books, 8s. 6d.

Since no single age of the Church can possibly afford a complete picture of what the mystical body looks like, historical perspectives are vital for integrated Christians. Dom Sitwell has produced, in broad outline, a very good perspective of the several currents of spirituality that developed from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. I can imagine it being enormously helpful at that stage, which is sometimes passed, but which can become permanent, at which the interior life seems to begin and end in one particular aspect of the whole; it might be the Little Way, or Saint Francis of Sales, or the Carmelite reform. It is almost inevitable, and quite understandable, that everyone must have a predilection for some particular aspect or manifestation of the Christian life, but it is sad that a predilection should so often turn into an exclusive fixation. Here then is a valuably corrective book, that sets our more familiar devotions into an outline of tradition. It offers in brief compass, as the author modestly puts it, 'a few broad movements rather than . . . a catalogue of the vast number of individual writers'. The perspective that emerges is all the more interesting for containing some of the less talked-of, more representative figures in the main movements—John of Fécamp and Peter of Celles in the Benedictine current, for instance, and in the *devotio moderna* that very agreeable writer, Denis the Carthusian. From the golden age of *lectio divina* to the meditation methods devised for the less composed people of the declining middle ages, Dom Sitwell knows his material thoroughly, and the account which he gives of it is complete, well proportioned, and of exactly the right size.

GEOFFREY WEBB

ENGLISH SPIRITUAL WRITERS, ed. by Charles Davis; Burns and Oates, 21s.

This volume is a reprint of sixteen essays selected from a series of twenty-five which appeared in the *Clergy Review* between November 1959 and July 1961. It was found impossible to include more, but an excellent closing essay by Lancelot C. Sheppard on 'Spiritual reading for our Times' has been added. The first essay treats of the work of an eleventh century Benedictine, Aelfric, abbot of Eynsham, near Oxford; the final one, of the writings of Mgr Ronald Knox. The collection is certainly a representative one, including as it does Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Dame Julian of Norwich, St Thomas More and Cardinal St John Fisher. Two excellent essays are devoted to Cardinal Newman, and Bishop Beck contributes a valuable account of the writings of Cardinal Manning. Some regret may be felt at the exclusion of those two monumental spiritual writers Alban Butler and Archbishop Ullathorne, but in view of the space difficulty it would be ungracious to express it.

All the writers here chosen are included as writers in English, although the