

book, or for making a weary translation of a work deserving better treatment. The chapters are copiously laden with very valuable information about important men and their work on behalf of the Church which was so sorely beset by heterodox influences from within and without her ranks, but the presentation is so haggard that only the most ardent liturgical *enragé* could survive the ordeal for more than a few pages. If any potential reader is in hopes of finding a competent account of modern progress in the liturgy, we bid him carry on his quest. L.K.

Saint Benedict and His Times. By Ildephonse Cardinal Schuster, O.S.B., Archbishop of Milan. Translated by Gregory J. Roettger, O.S.B. With a preface by Rt. Rev. Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B. St. Louis, B. Herder, 1951. pp. 392. \$6.00.

The difficulty involved in writing the life of St. Benedict is pretty commonly recognized. Civilization owes to him and to his sons an enormous debt, but of the Patriarch himself we know precious little. Père Lagrange steadfastly refused all his life to write a "life" of Christ. He believed it was impossible in the face of the meager knowledge we possess of Christ's life among men. Yet the biographer of Our Saviour has vastly more to work with than the biographer of St. Benedict. Excepting the Rule itself, which indirectly testifies to the character of the man who wrote it, all we know of the life of Benedict for certain is what we read in the pious account of the miracles of St. Benedict which Pope Gregory the Great wrote for the edification of the faithful of the sixth century. His Eminence, Cardinal Schuster argues that this document is entirely worthy of our trust; that St. Gregory was a reliable chronicler. The circumstance, nevertheless, of this vacuum with regard to the chronological ordering of Benedict's life puts the biographer at an immediate disadvantage. He is forced by the nature of the case to write what is more a history of his subject than a biography; a history, moreover, which must rely on deduction and arguments *a pari* more than on objective evidence.

All this can be said of any biography of St. Benedict. Within these limits, therefore, Cardinal Schuster has done a competent job of weaving in St. Gregory's account of the miracles of Benedict with the historical, juridical and literary background of the age. The method is one of exegesis of the account of St. Gregory. Whether St. Gregory's document will suffer all that the author reads into it is open to question. The reader will probably be distressed by the frequency of

the word "perhaps" and the general tentativeness of all that is written concerning St. Benedict. There is no help for it, and no apology under the circumstances need be made for the author. The reader, by the time he is done, will have an excellent picture of the Italy of Benedict's day, both the ecclesiastical and political Italy, in that age of turmoil and brutality attending the barbarian invasions. And if it sometimes seems that this Benedict moves, a creature of make-believe, through a very factual background, it is our loss.

Over many chapters of this book the musty smell of the archives hangs heavy, too heavy. Moreover, the reader will early recognize that the author's principle of selection is a most elastic one. The only justification for much of the material is that it will in some oblique way illuminate either the saint or his work or the milieu in which he worked. In principle, this is a valid procedure; but in practice it does not stand up. That Damasus wrote inscriptions on the tombs of his sister and his mother has no relation to Benedict and Scholastica; and if Gregory also wrote a *Regula Pastoralis*, so what?

Scholarly research is evident on every page, the publisher assures us; too much so, I venture to say. St. Benedict never gets a chance to come to life, for all the Latin footnotes. The book is, therefore, better history than biography, better in its treatment of *his Times* than of *Benedict*.
P.M.G.

The Nature of Law. By Thomas E. Davitt, S.J. St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1951. pp. 274. \$4.00.

Father Davitt's work is a survey of the nature of law as it was understood by the great scholastic representatives of the voluntaristic and the intellectualistic schools. In order to prevent his book from becoming too heavy, he has written in an essay-style and yet has avoided over-simplification. This has been accomplished by incorporating pertinent texts into the exposition itself. There is an excellent index and a good bibliography.

In his presentation of the school that upholds the primacy of the will in the concept of law he has chosen Henry of Ghent, Scotus, Ockham, Biel, De Castro and Suarez. The proponents of the primacy of the intellect are St. Albert, St. Thomas, Cajetan, Soto, Medina, and St. Robert Bellarmine. Father Davitt's method with each author follows the same general outline. First, the author's psychology with special emphasis on the act of command is explained and then Father Davitt shows the consequence of this philosophy on the author's concept of law. Some knowledge of psychology is presumed in the reader,