

BOOK REVIEWS

L'EVANGILE DE JESUS-CHRIST., Par le P. M.-J. Lagrange des Frères Prêcheurs. (Paris : J. Gabalda et Fils; 50 francs.)

To speak of Père Lagrange's latest work as his 'Life of Christ' would be misleading without further explanation. His own name for it is 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ,' and he expressly disclaims any intention of writing a 'Life of Christ,' as the phrase is generally understood. We might say that the writer of the ordinary 'Life of Christ' uses the Gospels as a kind of quarry; he draws his material from them, as indeed he must, but he transforms it to such an extent that the finished product may be rightly called *his* 'Life of Christ.'

Père Lagrange has no intention of giving us a Life of Christ in this sense; for him the Gospels make such a thought impossible. 'They would not,' he says (p. vi), 'be adequate as historical documents for writing a history of Jesus Christ in the way a modern author might write the history of Caesar Augustus or of Cardinal Richelieu, yet such is their worth as a reflection of Jesus' life and teaching, such their sincerity and beauty, that in the presence of their inspired word one abandons any other attempt to reproduce the life of Christ. The Gospels are the only Life of Jesus Christ that can be written. Nothing remains but to understand them as well as we can.' That is the purpose of his book, to take the Gospels as *the* 'Life of Christ,' and to help the reader to a better understanding of the narrative.

This presupposes that an initial difficulty has already been overcome. The Gospels are four, and though on many points they either agree with one another, or supplement each other in such a way that they can easily be fitted together to form one narrative, on one point each goes its own separate way, namely, on the point of the historical order in which events happened. It is the fact that the Gospels often do not follow the same order in narrating the same events. It may be that some of the evangelists lacked information on the point, or did not attach much importance to it. But we who have all four Gospels before us must, if we are to read them as a 'Life of Christ,' bring them into some kind of unity on the point. And, besides this, there is the keen desire every student of Our Lord's life naturally feels, not only to learn as much as possible about the facts of His life, but also to follow, as far as

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possible, the course it took day by day, month by month, and year by year.

Père Lagrange had already given his solution of the difficulty in his *Synopsis of the Gospels*, which was published, first in Greek and later in French. By 'synopsis' here, of course, is meant, not a summary of the Gospels, but an edition giving the complete text of the Gospels, but distributing it in such a way that the parallel or corresponding passages are printed together in parallel columns. As a rule, in this distribution, it is St. Mark's order which determines the order in which the passages are given. But in Père Lagrange's *Synopsis* it is St. Luke and St. John who decide. For it was Père Lagrange's aim, if possible, to make his *Synopsis* reflect the chronological order of events, and years of study had convinced him that in ascertaining that order we must rely on the order followed by St. Luke, and especially on the chronological indications contained in St. John. The order thus reached is far from certain in all particulars, but it is hard to see how a more satisfying one could be found. As Père Lebreton, S.J., said, in reviewing the *Synopsis* on its first appearance, it confirms the historical character of the Fourth Gospel, and proves that we can gather from the Gospels the information necessary for determining the general course of Our Lord's life.

We despair of giving anything like an adequate idea of the riches the present work contains. All Père Lagrange's previous works here give abundantly of their wealth. He himself modestly says (p. x) that it is hardly more than a rapid commentary of the *Synopsis* with the addition of a little historical information. It is true that it may be called a commentary on the *Synopsis*. From the explanation we have given the reader will know what that means. It means, at any rate, that we are not given another 'Life of Christ,' but are brought into the presence of the Gospel 'Life of Christ.' And, in reading it, we have placed at our disposal all the help that the greatest Biblical scholar of our time can afford us. The commentary is rapid in this sense, that it dispenses with everything that does not promote its aim, which is to make Our Lord live again. No parade of erudition, but everywhere that extraordinary power of seeing things, and of enabling others to see them, too, sometimes merely by the use of a simple phrase. One example will suffice, the simple notes Père Lagrange gives on the incident of the Samaritan woman at the well (pp. 103-108). It is as if we had been looking through a stereoscope,

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but unable to find the focus. A slight adjustment, and the scene takes on an astonishing solidity. And so it is throughout a book which, as a help towards acquiring 'the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ,' is priceless, and unique in that it does enable the reader to hear again, and in the Gospel narrative itself, what Père Lagrange has elsewhere called 'la note que donnait ce mystère au moment où il se déroulait en Galilée et à Jérusalem.'

We should add that an excellent map of Palestine and an excellent plan of Jerusalem help the reader to trace out Our Lord's steps, and fifty excellent photographs of Gospel sites show him the scenes His eyes rested on.

L.W.

THE JESUITS. By the Most Rev. Alban Goodier, S.J. Pp. 92. (Sheed & Ward; 2/6 net.)

The editor of this new series of books concerning 'the spirit and the ideal of the chief Religious Orders in the Church' has made an excellent beginning. Archbishop Goodier, whose writing, marked by grace and distinction, illuminates the subject, makes plain—in a few short pages—what Catholics and non-Catholics alike often miss in the character of St. Ignatius Loyola and the high purpose of the Society he founded. Vividly, yet with great economy of words, is Spain depicted in that 'age of transition and adventure' of the boyhood of the youngest son of a Castilian noble. Popular notions of the Jesuits are amended, mistaken opinions of the life and ideals of their founder corrected. The simplicity of St. Ignatius Loyola is insisted upon; the 'astonishing simplicity, the simplicity, very often, of a very little child.' We are reminded that 'so simple in mind was St. Ignatius Loyola that many have assumed that he could not be sincere, and have accused him of cunning or duplicity.' Assumption and accusation are equally wrong. With Ignatius the one idea 'greater glory of God' became an obsession. 'It had taken hold of him and possessed him, almost blinding him to every other light. To that single end all else was bent, work, word, prayer, life, even sanctity itself; by its single standard everything in life was measured, and rigidly allotted its value and place. For it, and for it alone, this world and man in it were fashioned; so long as it was promoted, it mattered little what else was done or how man fared.'

In this simplicity, characteristic of saints, and all who are great of heart, Archbishop Goodier finds Ignatius Loyola 'close