

Book Reviews

SHIP WITHOUT SAILS. By Barbara Barclay Carter. Pp. 423. (Constable; 7s. 6d. net.)

The author of this fine historical novel—taking Dante's own words in the *Convivio* for a text, 'truly I have been a ship without sails and without rudder, carried to divers ports and gulfs and shores by the dry wind that blows from dolorous poverty'—gives us a presentation of Dante in the later years of exile and of the *Divina Commedia*. Thirteen years in all, crowded with incident and the loves and hates of man. Dante, Lord Acton insisted, was 'first of all a sincere Catholic; secondly a patriotic Florentine, much less patriotic Italian; and only in the lowest degree what is generally represented as an imperialist.' But then 'Guelf and Ghibelline are names which changed their meanings as much as Whig and Tory.' Miss Barclay Carter is no writer of 'tushery,' no exploiter of medieval romance. Her book is the flower and fruit of long study and research; a work of sound scholarship, good to read, and serviceable. Learning illuminates the period and style brings the characters to life in this great fourteenth century play. Dante himself, in labour with his mighty poem, chiefly fills the stage. Then we have Giotto with his painting; soldiers, poets, famous women, Fra Accorso, the Franciscan inquisitor, and vivid descriptions of courts and cities, of Dante's wanderings and of turbulent Florence and its citizens. What a time! Dante and Giotto and the splendours of craftsmanship side by side with murder most foul and the ravages of plague and the papacy of John XXII at Avignon. The talk of Dante, especially with Fra Accorso, is excellent. And Miss Carter's translations from Dante, that crop up plentifully, are graceful and spirited.

Ship Without Sails, for all its wealth of learning, is no novel for the exclusive enjoyment of Italian scholars. The many who enjoy good fiction may read it and will be vastly entertained. It is a novel that will amply repay a second reading; a book to be retained, for its interest is vital.

J.C.

MEDITATIONS ON THE GOSPELS. By the Right Reverend Ottokar Prohászka, Bishop of Székesfehérvár; translated by Margaret de Pál, revised by Ada Lane. Foreword by Fr. C. C. Martindale, S.J. (Sheed & Ward; 6/-.)

The name of Bishop Ottokar Prohászka will be new to very many English readers. Fr. Martindale, in his all too short Foreword to this book, gives a vivid sketch of the remarkable