

SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE. By A. Penna. (St Paul Publications; 30s.)

MEDITATIONS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT—THE PSALMS. By Gaston Brillet, C. Or. (Desclée; \$3.50.)

An informed 'life' of the apostle to the gentiles, such as the first book attempts to give us, should afford many readers a clearer penetration of the text of his epistles. The original Italian version of this book, published in 1947, has now been translated in condensed form. The best feature, of the English condensation at least, is the treatment of the historical, geographical and cultural environment against which St Paul's life-story is presented to us. Clearly the author draws on a wide knowledge of the mythological and historical worlds of Greece and Rome; and he applies this knowledge effectively at each change of scene throughout the book. Moreover, he has used imagination intelligently to clothe many of the naked facts which are presented unadorned in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Much less happy is what the blurb calls the book's 'sensitive understanding of the emotional, intellectual and spiritual life and development of the great apostle'. The author appears to belong to the (surely dwindling) school who regard Paul's theological thought as having been fully developed from the moment of his conversion, or at any rate from the beginning of his ministry at Antioch. When, in each of his various epistles, Paul deals with the particular topics called for by the *ad hoc* situation, he does so, it seems, by drawing on his already complete understanding of the mysteries revealed to him by the risen Lord. There is no hint of progressive and continuous theological advance during his missionary life, no sign of the apostle's wrestling with problems leading to the evolution of new and yet profounder doctrine. And it is the same with Paul's struggles with himself, of which there is no mention here. There are just two brief references to his 'weaknesses, if they may be called such' (p. 233, cf. 125), at which we almost hear the author's embarrassed cough as he hastens on to explain how they really sprang from zeal for the gospel! Readers in search of up-to-the-minute scholarship should be warned that very few references are made to works later than 1930.

The book of short meditations offers us evocative texts from the psalms, redolent of the psalmists' rich experience of life in the presence of God. But how is this standard, inherent in the original text, to be sustained in a rationalized meditation? As is inevitable, P. Brillet conceptualizes some of the imagery of semitic religious poetry, with the result, *ipso facto*, that much of the impact of the pristine immediacy and colourful vigour of the psalms is drained away. Faced with this perennial difficulty of 'explaining' scripture in the ethos of western civilization, this book does creditably.

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