

## REVIEWS

and trivial. It is a work that has to be ground down, to get at its valuable contents.

4. In its argumentative purpose this book does not altogether succeed. The handling of the historical questions involved is too facile to maintain the thesis. The contention is principally this: that the biblical history of Abraham does not merely harmonize with what archæology has to tell of life in Ur at the period of about 2000 B.C., but that certain parts, elements, of it are unintelligible away from this background; and that it would have been impossible at any appreciably later time for popular or literary imagination to fabricate this perfect correspondence.—But it is in the central chapters of the book, forming the bulk of it, that its true value lies. There the data of the Ur excavations are used to reconstruct the religious, social, physical conditions of life in that great Sumerian city at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. It is made possible for us to visit the home of Abraham with a great deal of information in mind as definite and pretty well as reliable as a Baedeker would give us. New knowledge of a vast potential importance and of the greatest actual interest.

RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

## MEDIÆVAL STUDIES

Although scholars are well acquainted with the original language of this book yet we heartily welcome the English translation of *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*,<sup>1</sup> so that it may reach even a wider public and its usefulness be still further increased. It contains the Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Aberdeen by Professor E. Gilson, of the Sorbonne, in 1931 and 1932. The name of Prof. Gilson is a familiar one to all students of mediæval philosophy, and is a guarantee of sound doctrine and thorough scholarship.

Mediæval philosophy has been belittled, despized, misunderstood. Yet it demands but one thing: not to be dismissed and condemned unheard, *Hoc unum gestit interdum, ne ignorata damnetur*. This book is not a piece of apologetic, in the sense that it is set up to prove a thesis, whether true or false. Nevertheless, it offers a help in the light of history to an exhaustive and impartial examination of the case. It calls for deep meditation. With acute powers of reasoning, with precision of statement, with vigour and vivacity, and above all with clearness of exposition, Prof. Gilson propounds the difficult problems of

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<sup>1</sup> ETIENNE GILSON: *The Spirit of Mediæval Philosophy*. Translated by H. C. Downes. (Sheed & Ward; 15/-).

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mediæval philosophy, without ever failing from the resolute determination to be fair and objective.

In search for a definition, Prof. Gilson characterizes the spirit of mediæval philosophy as the Christian Philosophy *par excellence*, and he proves his thesis by showing, with the aid of history, its realization in the mediæval thinkers. "As understood here, the spirit of mediæval philosophy is the spirit of Christianity penetrating the Greek tradition, working within it, drawing out of it a certain view of the world, a *Weltanschauung*, specifically Christian. There had to be Greek temples and Roman basilicas before there could be cathedrals; but no matter how much the mediæval architects owed to their predecessors, their work is nevertheless distinctive, and the new spirit that was creative in them was doubtless the same spirit that inspired the philosophers of the time." Great discussions have been raised lately—and the controversy is still going on—about the problem of Christian philosophy: its very name has been contested, and even the possibility of its existence denied. Without entering here into the merit of the question, we venture to say that if the problem is looked at from the right angle and is well understood, many a difficulty against it could easily be dissolved.

I do not attempt to give even an impression of the richness this book contains. It must be read and seriously pondered from cover to cover. The chapters on being, analogy, causality, finality, the intellect and its object, *potentia obedientialis*, and other metaphysical topics are most illuminating and show the originality and creative power of mediæval philosophy. "The debt of the Middle Ages to the Greeks was immense, and fully recognized, but the debt of Hellenism to the Middle Ages is as great, and nothing is less appreciated; for even from mediæval religion Greek philosophy had something to learn. Christianity communicated to it some share in its own vitality and enabled it to enter on a new career" (p. 424). If the last three chapters on the Middle Ages and Nature, history and philosophy were well pondered they could afford much help to dispel misunderstandings and reproaches.

DANIEL CALLUS, O.P.

## NOTICES

NIGHT OVER THE EAST. Translated from the German by Edwin and Willa Muir. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6.)

The adventures of a Hungarian aristocrat, who is disillusioned after the reverses of the Great War and its aftermath, first start in Finnish Lapland which has afforded him a sure, if somewhat selfish, cure for his ills. Nostalgia draws him back to Budapest. More adventures. A Macedonian Revolutionary organization. Finally, back in Finland with a wife he does not love. Recurrent