

REVIEWS

THE LORD WE SERVE. By Ferdinand Valentine, o.p. (Blackfriars; 7s. 6d.)

If our welcome to this little book is rather belated—it was published last year—it is none the less hearty. *The Lord We Serve* forms the fifth and last of the now well-known series of Theophila Correspondence, the various numbers of which have been so well received. This book is a commentary for the most part chiefly on those sections of the third Gospel which are peculiar to St Luke. But for some mysterious reason the author warns Theophila from the start that it is 'in no sense a commentary'. I can only think that the remark is prompted by his diffidence and humility, because if there is any meaning in words his book is a commentary and no bad commentary either. Readers who are familiar with the monumental works of Lagrange (as the author clearly is), or who had the good fortune to follow the lectures of Fr Luke Walker at Hawkesyard thirty years ago (as the author had), will easily recognise the sources of much that Fr Valentine has to say. But he has, too, much of his own to add—acute and penetrating observations on the Gospel and the lessons one may draw from it. Most Scripture scholars know how hard it is to write a commentary which strikes the happy medium between a coldly literal study of the text and a book of spiritual interpretation which uses the text as a pretext for what one wishes to say; but Fr Valentine seems to me to come near that happy medium. No doubt learned scholars of the Bible will find much to criticise in what he says: fanciful and unjustifiable interpretations; an occasional undue forcing of the text to fit the lessons he wishes to draw; an eclecticism which selects from one of his authorities what would be rejected by another; the stringing together of a remarkable collection of quotations ranging from the works of St Thomas to those of Teresa Higginson. But he writes not for the learned student of the Scriptures who is already well provided for, but for the large number of people represented by Theophila for whom the Gospels are almost a closed book. None of the faults criticised will do them much harm. I will make only one exception. In his fine treatment of the Visitation of Our Lady to Elizabeth he estimates Mary's motives in a fashion that contradicts the text of St Luke and is hardly reconcilable with the conclusions he later draws concerning Our Lady (Part IV). To present her as bursting with eagerness to tell someone what she had learned at the Annunciation certainly does not fit into St Luke's picture of Our Lady 'rising up with haste' to visit Elizabeth.

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