

## BLACKFRIARS

### BIBLICAL STUDIES

The compiler's own introduction to *THE HOLY BIBLE, AN ABRIDGEMENT AND REARRANGEMENT*, by Ronald A. Knox, M.A. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6), asserts too modestly that "his commission was one that demanded neither originality nor scholarship." For this work is not a mere anthology, but a concatenation of passages and verses which *does* achieve the purpose of giving the heart of the meaning of the Bible in about a third of its own canonical compass; and the forging of that is enough to convict a man of scholarship, however carefully he may ignore the affair of D and P or leave it to the reader to suppose if he pleases that "On the waters of Babylon" was once strummed on David's lyre. It is not unchivalrous, then, to point out this defect in the work: that in particular sections, for want of dots or dashes or some such indications of the use of overleaping and foreshortening, a positive misunderstanding of the immediate sense of a passage is sometimes encouraged. For example, in *Isaias*, ch. vii, the omission of v. 3 makes it impossible to tell who is speaking in v. 13; and then, more important, the omission of v. 9 and of the hostile passage that follows soon after the Immanuel announcement makes it impossible for the simple reader to interpret the passage as it is understood by the best Catholic exegetes. But the difficulties of this work were very great, and in face of them the compiler has indeed "done well, and as it becometh the history." He has given the impeded multitude of us the opportunity of reading that history, from *Genesis* to *Apocalypse*, far more easily "as a single book with a single message."

More often on our lips than any other part of the Old Testament the *Psalms* yet remain for many of us as obscure as the more algebraical part of *Daniel*. This is not altogether disastrous: these songs have not been sung for some two thousand years like sea-shanties in the Church without working a great deal of their religious spirit into the communal mind, etc. Still they are not magic incantations that a literal interpretation would dissolve; on the contrary, their literal sense is the sacramental key to their genuine divine meaning. It is that literal sense that is sought after in two recent Catholic works here to be recommended. In L. Desnoyers' *LES PSAUMES, TRADUCTION RYTHMEE D'APRES L'HEBREU* (Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, Paris) we have the posthumous publication of the last work of a man who held the position of a sort of *Henri Bremond* of French Old Testament scholarship. In point of style his translation was perhaps doomed to over-civilize the original; at the same time it is of the keenest, steeliest, exegetical value. His preface recalls the virtues of his masterpiece, the *Histoire du peuple hébreu*; it is beautifully instructive and discerning, clear of the slightest admixture of

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ignorance or prejudice. Then there are his useful brief introductions and notes to each individual psalm. Stout and burgher-like rather is the publication of the noble Bonn syndicate: *DAS BUCH DER PSALMEN*, übersetzt und erklärt von Dr. Heinrich Herkenne (Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, Bonn; RM. 14.50). Yet with all its learning and dogged textual analysis and criticism it is genially written. Undoubtedly the book to cling to now if one were reduced to a single volume of Catholic commentary on the Psalms. For foreigners it is irksome that a good part of the introduction should be devoted to difficulties that any Catholic unspoiled by Nazi propaganda can solve satisfactorily for himself. However, there are more than 400 pages of pure commentary. The serious weakness of the book is that it takes hardly any account *explicitly* of the conclusions of other scholars.

The lectures that form the booklet called *THE CASE FOR MIRACLE*, by Clement F. Rogers, M.A. (S.P.C.K.; 2/-) were declaimed eight times under the trees in Hyde Park. They are appropriately lucid, manly and honest. First for the *a priori* possibility of miracles, then for the historic credibility of the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth, a case is made out that many a loungeer must have heard for the first time and accepted gladly. If there were any of the better informed who drifted up in time to catch, let us say, this remark: "Perhaps as good a definition [of a miracle] as we can get is 'an event in physical nature which makes unmistakably plain the presence and direct action of God working for a moral end,'" and so stalked off in disgust—then they were very unlucky. It is wise to master the science of biblical archaeology as the separate subject that it is. The ground is then cleared for exegetical manoeuvres. A very alive and expert introduction to the subject is to be found in a recent publication belonging to the *Bibliothèque Catholique des Sciences Religieuses* series of manuals: *PRECIS D'ARCHAEOLOGIE BIBLIQUE*, by A. G. Barrois, O.P. (Bloud et Gay). The purpose of this study is very neatly defined by a reviewer in the *Revue Biblique* as being to "recréer, à l'aide du monument étudié en lui-même et mis en relations avec les institutions auxquelles il se réfère, le milieu où vécurent les Anciens." RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

## MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

The fourteenth century thinkers are still very little known. Their formalism, their multiplication of distinctions and sub-distinctions which involve and obscure their thought, the bitter controversies which give the impression that they indulge in criticism rather for argument's sake than because they have something worth saying, and even their abstruse and decadent