

COMMENTARY

THE BIBLE IN FRANCE—AND ENGLAND.¹ When P. Marie-Joseph Lagrange founded the Ecole Biblique some sixty years ago, the revival of Bible-reading which is such a feature of present-day Catholicism was something, we may be sure, that exceeded his wildest dreams. No doubt the personal religious life of this Dominican friar was one peculiarly tempered and moulded by a constant *lecture savoureuse* of the sacred text. But his immediate purpose in founding the School at Jerusalem was not to popularize Bible-reading. It was rather to save the Bible from the apparent ravages of rationalist criticism through the establishment of a tradition of sound scholarship which should be at once Catholic and equal in technical competence to that which seemed to be sapping the biblical foundations of the Faith.

The immediate mainsprings of the popular biblical movement must in fact be sought elsewhere than in the brilliant and now universally recognized scholarship of Lagrange and those whom he inspired. We might single out the liturgical revival as one of these sources: since the text of the liturgy is largely drawn from the Bible, it is only natural that the revival of interest in the one should lead directly to a revival of interest in the other. Or, more generally, it might be said that in an age whose problems and needs demand of at least the educated Catholic a deep sense of sincerity and of personal commitment in his religious life, the Bible is once more being seen as one of the more important of those ultimate sources where such a sense may be born and nourished.

Yet if the original impulse back to the Bible in the Church at large did not come from the scholars, it was certainly their work which made the growth and perseverance of the popular movement possible. They may not have been responsible for attracting us to the fountain of Holy Writ; but at least it was due to them that when we got there the waters were flowing clear and unclouded once more. It is indeed difficult to exaggerate the part played by Lagrange and his School in preserving the Bible for the present generation of Catholics. In the feverish days of the modernist crisis the Church, humanly speaking and in some of

¹ *La Sainte Bible* (Editions du Cerf; 1800 fr.). *Holy Bible* (C.T.S.; 6s.).

its all-too-human representatives, seemed like losing its grip in things biblical; and it is now possible, viewing that unhappy period in retrospect, to see that it was Lagrange and his pupils who were true to the tradition of a St Jerome and a St Augustine in retaining both common sense and Catholic sense in their attitude to the Scriptures. It was undoubtedly due to the pioneer work at Jerusalem issuing in the prolific exegetical work of Lagrange himself and others, and in the *Revue Biblique*, as indeed to the continuance of that tradition in the Ecole Biblique of the present day, that Catholic biblical studies flourish in so many independent centres today and thereby give direction and guidance to the popular urge to know the Bible better. It is as a monument to that inspiration and influence, no less than as a signal contribution to the informed and Catholic understanding of the Scriptures on the part of the layman, that BLACKFRIARS welcomes the definitive edition in a single elegant volume of the *Bible de Jérusalem*, a fitting crown to a remarkable work of co-operation by scholars at Jerusalem and elsewhere carried out over the last ten years. And at a time when any piece of news to the discomfiture of the French Dominicans is liable to hit the headlines—usually in a grossly-exaggerated form—it may also serve to remind us how much we owe to what they have done and still are doing in this field as in so many others equally outside the gaze and interest of the popular journalist.

It might be thought invidious to turn from this magnificent new French Bible to the edition of the Douay Bible which the Catholic Truth Society have brought out at six shillings. But here in England our needs are humbler, and it is a sober realization of this which bids us welcome this new venture. Despite a slightly bulky appearance this Bible is easy and pleasant to handle, and remarkably legible. No doubt it is regrettable that we in England should have lagged so much behind our fellow-Catholics abroad in our devotion to God's Word written that we have had to wait till the present moment for a popularly-priced edition of the Douay Version. But at least its appearance now is surely a sign that at long last we are moving out of that defensive state of mind which may not perhaps have been guilty of regarding the Bible as a Protestant book, but which certainly tended to regard reading it as a Protestant act.