

tinually drawing conclusions about it to which the facts he himself provides are as continually giving the lie. Space does not permit us to meet his misstatements with the retort courteous; we can only give the more outstanding of them the somewhat ruder treatment of contradiction flat and denial categorical.

1. That the Vulgate is the authentic version of the Latin Church does *not* mean that it replaces the original in every respect; or that all Catholic translations of the Bible must be based on the Vulgate; or that the Catholic exegete must be concerned with the Vulgate rather than with the original Greek and Hebrew texts.

2. No theologian could possibly maintain that the Vulgate is divinely inspired in the sense in which the original, and in St Augustine's opinion the Septuagint, was inspired; nor that it is a translation wholly free from mistakes. All that its authenticity means is that even where it mistranslates, it does not contain anything contrary to faith or morals.

3. The Church has not, does not, and indeed cannot fear that the progress of studies on the Greek and Hebrew text of the Bible is dangerous to its traditional teaching.

4. There is nothing therefore really odd about the fact that the early humanists were good Churchmen, or that Reuchlin died a member of the Roman Catholic Church, or that Erasmus never dreamt of leaving it.

5. The Church is not opposed to exegesis based on personal thought. For its authority is there to guide and stimulate thought, not to provide the intellectually hide-bound with a substitute for it.

EDMUND HILL, O.P.

GOD'S IRON. A Life of the Prophet Jeremiah. By George A. Birmingham. (Geoffrey Bles; 16s.)

Those who in the days of their youth, like the present writer, enjoyed *Spanish Gold* and the other hilarious Irish tales of George A. Birmingham, probably learnt with some surprise that the author was a reverend clergyman; though they need not have been so surprised for the clergy are by no means the least merry of men. There must have been good reason why people used to speak of the jolly old monks. The book under review proves that the late author (who was known in Dublin as Canon Hannay of St Patrick's Cathedral) was equally successful in writing a very different kind of book, one in fact in which there is not a suspicion of humour from the first page to the last. But the subject hardly lends itself to humour. Indeed it might be called a depressing book; but then Jeremiah was a depressing sort of person, as the popular use of his name shows. Nevertheless, he was a man whom Canon Hannay evidently held in great reverence, and the study of

his life and writings must have occupied years of the Canon's time and care. He begins his book very modestly, too modestly, by disclaiming any title to the name of scholar; but any scholar who wishes to understand the life and work of the prophet in their historical and literary setting would do well to read this book. As a rule scholars do well to avoid those writers who try to dramatize the Scriptures and improve on the sacred text by the use of their imagination. And at first sight it might seem that in this book there was rather too much of such phrases as 'it is reasonable to suppose', 'it is not impossible to suppose', 'it may be', 'perhaps', etc. But on consideration we may say that the author's suppositions are on the whole well grounded historically. The book makes a story that is enjoyable as well as informative.

REGINALD GINNS, O.P.

THE OPEN BOOK. Edited by Pamela Whitlock. (Collins; 12s. 6d.)

'You may hardly think of things like holly and mincepies as having any religious significance. Yet they have.'

These, the opening sentences of a chapter on the traditions associated with the great feasts of the Church, might be taken as a key to this whole book, for it is essentially a religious book, in the fullest sense: an attempt to show that the good news of the gospel touches every facet of life; a book into which every member of the family can dip, and find something for profit and pleasure.

The first of the five sections deals with the gospels: the evangelists, and the people they write of, are described in an everyday idiom, with enough of social and historical background to make them real. Some of the parables, dealt with in a similar manner, give a fresh significance to our Lord's words and methods of teaching, and should send the reader back to the New Testament for further exploration.

The second section, called 'God and our neighbour', is concerned with the commandments of love, and here are modern parables, short instructions, some lively and pertinent puzzles, and a charming collection of prayers and praises from such varied sources as Richard Rolle and Dr Johnson.

The third part gives an account of the feasts of the Church's year, of which Christmas is treated most fully. The retelling of this story in the setting of the Welsh and English countryside is a bold attempt to underline the realism of the Holy Family's suffering, by relating it to familiar scenes. Yet, beautifully as this is done, some may feel that it defeats its own end. Children are very literal-minded, and great sticklers for tradition, and this may cause a protest. The remainder of this section is a mine of information about feast-day customs—not forgetting seasonable recipes.