

Book Reviews

THE MAKING OF THE CHRISTIAN MIND. By Gaius Glenn Atkins, D.D., L.H.D. (William Heinemann; 8/6 net.)

'For the Christian mind is strangely hard to write about. It is a mind of central unities with marginal variations so opposed as sometimes to hide its unity. It is the creation of manifold forces working through almost three thousand years, and it is the creation of a lonely teacher whose brief ministry began and ended in the highlands of Palestine. . . . There are sub-levels of temperament which lie beneath the Christian mind to give it its dominant qualities. I would not say that all its defences of polity and its interpretation of liturgies and symbols have been word patterns embroidered upon forms and attitudes created by the persistent and elemental, but to a degree that is true.' This quotation is from Dr. Atkins' preface. It reveals something of his style and something of his thought. Often the latter shows penetration, but more often still a lack of grip and depth that is disheartening. Professor of Homiletics at Auburn Theological Seminary, the author deserves nothing but thanks for the sympathetic attempt he makes to understand, and describe, theological positions very different from his own. He has tried to do justice to the Catholic Church; he emphasises the dominant part it has played in European history, but frequently he fails in spite of an honest effort to grasp and understand. The chapter entitled 'The Christian Mind becomes Sacramentarian' contains the following passage descriptive of the Catholic position. 'One has only to accept the sacraments in a proper spirit, after proper preparation from the proper hands, dismiss the responsibility for his soul's salvation to those divinely commissioned to attend to it, and devote himself with a quiet mind to the affairs of this world.' Here Dr. Atkins does not seem to have thought out what he wanted to say. The implication is clear. Those who believe in Sacraments 'dismiss the responsibility for their soul's salvation'—*i.e.*, are saved mechanically through the action of another. But in fact this, the obvious interpretation, is nullified by the words 'accept the Sacraments in a proper spirit, after proper preparation.' Either Dr. Atkins is ignorant of what the proper preparation involves, or he is bewildered and swayed unconsciously by prejudice. Other instances could be given of confused writing resulting from confused thought. Dr. Atkins disclaims original work. He aims at synthesising the work of others. But the quoted authorities are not always the best, and that, at least, we should expect. It is useless to multiply instances of superficial judgment, or what have all the

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appearances of such. Dr. Atkins speaks in more than one place as if mystics replaced Catholic doctrine by individual experience and obscures the fact that the greatest mystics have been those most faithful to Catholic doctrine and practice. The free approach to God, which he repeatedly assumes to be denied to Catholics, is uniquely theirs. Scientific knowledge can only be obtained by those who know and observe its implicit principles: the freest approach to God is open to those who accept and follow what revelation teaches. It is curious to find cropping up repeatedly in the minds of devout non-Catholics the *naïve* belief that a licence they would be the first to condemn in any other branch of knowledge or practice will be a paramount aid where religion is concerned.

F.B.

MEMORIES AND MUSINGS. By the Right Rev. Sir D. O. Hunter-Blair, Bart., O.S.B. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd. ; 7/6. i-vii ; 284 pp.)

Although Abbot Sir David Hunter-Blair does not himself care to read autobiography he wisely realises that not everyone shares this dislike. 'Memories and Musings' is so full of interesting facts and fancies that one cannot but marvel at the retentiveness of the writer's memory. Few have the opportunity of meeting so many famous people and even fewer have a pen so quick to record. To the 'Memories' belong facts and information about almost everyone of note in the last fifty years. Into the 'Musings,' whether on umbrellas or angels, there ultimately creeps the fact. The monk chroniclers have not entirely disappeared. Whether it be in correcting a false impression of Trollope or in adding 'more than a touch of romance' to the prosaic newspaper notice that the King of Spain has arrived at Dunrobin Castle on a visit to the Duke of Sutherland, the book always holds our attention.

Those who did not read these essays when they appeared over the *nom de guerre* Nestor in the 'Catholic Times' and come upon them in book form with their authorship revealed, will realise that Abbot Hunter-Blair is certainly not among those writers of memoirs of whom it has been said that they have either entirely lost their memories, or done nothing worth remembering.

G.