

REVIEWS

SCRIPTURAL BULLETIN

No intelligent reader would mistake Dr. Peter Ketter's *Christ and Womankind*¹ for the work of a doctrinaire; still it is pleasant to have the author's account of its mettlesome origin: the director of Catholic women's bible classes, social guilds, etc., met on all sides with the demand, sometimes timid, sometimes "fierce," "Sir, we would see Jesus!"; forced to come out from behind his books and declare openly to this world of women what status they are assigned by the *Ecclesia Docens*. As a theologian, a historian, a sociologist, a Scripture scholar, he was splendidly equipped for this interpreter's part.

Part III of the work is entirely Scriptural—a fine study of the significance of the parts played by women in the Life of Our Lord and in the history of the early Church. Part I is historical, concerned with background. It provides a very impressive, pointillistic picture of the degradation suffered by women in the thought and economy of pre-Christian and continuing non-Christian societies—among the Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians, the European barbarians, for example. Among the Jews, of course, the author is able to find strands of a nobler tradition and usage; yet they also fit into the cruel picture. At their best they were still wont to regard woman in her *totum esse* as being tributary to man, and this was the philosophy they pegged down by their marriage laws, haram institutions, etc. "Praised be God that He has not created me a heathen; praised be God that He has not created me a woman; praised be God that He has not created me an ignorant man" was one of the prayers recommended for daily use by their *Ecclesia Docens* of the rabbinic period.

Part II, then: "Christ's gifts to and requirements of Woman-kind." The gift lies in Christ's giving of Himself, which means for mankind the offer of communion with the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. The Christian revolution turns on that. No longer can woman be thought to find her end in man, or in the children of men; her womanhood is not the crown of her being, she is a *person* having a divine assignation for her essential glory. Virginity appears like a new star in the heavens. The author has his most difficult task when it comes to defining the relations of a woman's womanly, transient vocation to her immortal, personal vocation, and similarly in defining the relations between man and woman that belong to Christian marriage. He is then faced with the Feminist question properly so called, or with what

¹ Burns Oates and Washbourne; 8s.

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is rather bluntly termed by the English translator, the *Woman Question*. Bristling with difficulties created by sentimentality, insincerity and misunderstanding of Christian doctrine. It is not often that one hears the Christian "solution" expounded—it so exalts mere creatures that anyone but a pope might well be embarrassed to state it. But Dr. Ketter was forced to speak out. One thanks those German lady barrackers.

It was natural to hope that Dr. William's *Life of the Blessed Virgin*² might be recommendable here as providing ideal counterpoint to Dr. Ketter's theme. It is a good book: that is to say, the author has collected a great deal of trustworthy information which those who already enthusiastic will seize upon and make good use of. Rather as a lover of cricket will devour his *Wisden's*. As the book it set out to be, as a life of the Blessed Virgin, artistically considered it is not successful. The action, the central interest is overwhelmed by the supporting facts. The author has failed to master what certainly was an extremely difficult artistic problem. He would have done better to hold up the action from time to time, insert his historical and archaeological information in excursions, and so resume—instead of palming off on the action itself matter that has no immediate dramatic relevance. Perhaps the only solution was to drop the purpose of writing a life and to conduct the whole affair in the key of expositional writing. Another of those works really valuable to good Catholics which cannot stand the test of being lendable to good pagans.

On the other hand Dr. Holzner in his *Life of St. Paul*³ has dealt so masterfully with similar technical difficulties that his work could be lent without misgiving to a militant atheist. Here too information abounds, but every ounce of it is *telling*. You learn, for example, a great deal about the city of Tarsus—about the river, the docks, about the trade of the place and its geography, about the culture and religion of the people, about the status of the Jews there. Yet not a word of this that has not an immediate bearing upon the life of St. Paul. (*Life. Paul*. One cannot expatiate. Too often with Dr. Willam it is the manner-of-existence of any Palestinian maiden upon which hypothetical light is being thrown.) This is a finished book, an achieved biography. It makes an ideal introduction to St. Paul. Much fuller than anything we have in English. A brilliant piece of work, equipped at all points.

To turn to Pauline literature of a different kind, artistically less

² *La Vie de Marie, Mère de Jésus*, traduit de l'Allemand. Dr. F. M. Willam (Editions Salvator. Mulhouse (Haut-Rhin) 35 fr.).

³ *Paulus*, von D. Dr. Josef Holzner. Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau. Geheftet RM. 5.60; in Leinen RM. 7.40.

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problematic, there is a new volume aggregated to Herder's *Bibelkommentar* which demands recognition.⁴ It deals with the Captivity Epistles; with Galatians and Thessalonians I and II; and with the Pastoral Epistles. It reproduces all the virtues characteristic of this series; needless then to recount them again in BLACKFRIARS. The Epistles dealt with may be brief, yet they comprise some of the most important doctrine of the New Testament: Ephesians and Colossians, doctrine which—as the commentator remarks (we are sitting again at the feet of Dr. Ketter)—is desperately needed at this moment of history to secure and strengthen Christian faith. (Even outside Germany.) Colossians, our most triumphant manifesto of the Mediatorial rôle of Christ, in whom the Fulness of the Godhead is embodied; Ephesians, St. Paul's most finished (most contemplative, Johannine!) expression of the mystery of the Church, in which the fulness of Christ is mystically embodied . . . One comes across this pleasant fantasy of Adolf Deissmann: "Whenever I open the Epistle to the Colossians, it is like opening a chapel door to enter and find Johann Sebastian performing at the organ."

But the book one would crown—given the license—as a book-of-the-month comes, not from Germany, but from Australia via the U.S.A. It is hard to make very much of the Psalter as it is rendered in our present "Douay" version, mangled edition that it is of an archaic translation of a corrupt text of a reconditioned Latin translation of a deficient Greek translation of a Hebrew original. Yet until the Westminster Version shall have supplied the need, we are without any other approved English text. Or rather, such was the state of affairs until the recent arrival from the other side of the world of Fr. George O'Neill's (S.J.) *The Psalms and the Canticles of the Divine Office*,⁵ which provides an excellently rendered eclectic text of the Psalter, fashioned according to the findings of some of our best Catholic scholars. And in addition, a critical translation of the whole group of the Canticles that are in use in the liturgy. The author has also supplied a general introduction to the Psalter, and brief particular introductions and footnotes throughout the work; all of which is very useful, although it may be thought that a conservatism sometimes shows itself here which is more partisan than Catholic in spirit.

RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

⁴ *Die Heilige Schrift für das Leben erklärt*. Band XV. *Die Kleinen Paulusbriefe*, von Dr. Peter und Dr. Heinrich Molitor. (Herder RM. 8.40, 11.20, 13.40.)

⁵ Geo. E. J. Coldwell Ltd., for Bruce Publishing Co.; 12s. 6d.