

REVIEWS

MISCELLANEOUS

ST. PATRICK. By Eoin Macneill. (Sheed & Ward ; 3/6.)

Scholars to whom legend is not history, yet enshrines history, are patiently recovering the *vera effigies* of the man who might almost be said to have rediscovered the apostolic life. It is not generally realized how narrowly the early Christian Church was confined, for good or evil, within the Roman Empire. National institutions shut the door of the Eastern peoples to the Gospel. Outside the Roman Empire Persia alone gave any vital tolerance to the Church of the Crucified. Yet Persia rivalled imperial Rome in its fierce outbursts of persecution, until the day when Jesus was treated as an undesirable alien.

In view of the fact that the Catholic Church was almost literally the Roman Catholic Church, the conversion of a free, intelligent, warlike, civilized people outside the *Pax Romana* was almost an unparalleled phenomenon. That this conversion was designed and accomplished by a Roman nobleman, once a slave in Ireland, is itself an event of first magnitude; that it was accomplished without bloodshed, amongst a notably warlike people, gives it the character, not of mere human, but of divine direction.

When history is finally making up its mind about St. Patrick's importance not only to the fifth century, but to all succeeding centuries, studies like this unobtrusive book of Professor Macneill will be of necessity. The writer of this latest study on the runaway slave was born and reared too near to the hill of Sleamish not to forget the sublime self-effacing of the slave who came back with gifts to his old slave-master.

There is not a line in this little book that does not proclaim the scholar who prizes scholarship and loves his hero by fitly praising him with the artlessness of truth.

To this fine scholarship we venture to add a slender contribution. On page 14 we find a quotation from St. Patrick's *Confession*, ' . . . I have not studied as have others who most fittingly have drunk in *both Law and Holy Scripture alike*.' It seems to the present writer that in this phrase we have one of the earliest—if not the earliest—references to what may be called the curriculum of priestly studies. If our view of the passage is correct, historians of educational methods will find the *Confession* of St. Patrick a document of prime importance. There would seem no doubt that by *Law* St. Patrick meant the body of moral and ecclesiastical precepts which later on grew into the vast subject of *Moral Theology*.

By the word *Holy Scripture* St. Patrick meant what we now call *Dogmatic Theology*. Students of the history of priestly

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education need no reminding that even down to the close of the thirteenth century 'Holy Scripture' and 'Theology' were synonymous.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

I. JAMES WHITTAKER. (Rich & Cowan; 7/6.)

This book is of great interest in several ways. It is the story, by a young man of 28, born in the slums of Edinburgh, and now a greaser in Rochdale, of his desperate efforts to lead an intelligent human life within the framework of our civilization. This grim narrative of admirable courage, told without ostentation, is well worth reading for its own sake; in the fewness of his years James Whittaker has had more experience of 'reality' than members of the comfortable classes manage to obtain by the time they die.

The author draws no conclusions; he has no thesis; he does not 'indict' modern society. He simply tells his story. But his restraint does not exempt us from reflection. The book compels us to think; particularly compels Catholics to think. We cannot bluff ourselves by assuming that this is an exceptional case; of course it is exceptional in the sense that of the millions who suffer, only very few are able to express their suffering; the masses are inarticulate; but any serious investigation would show that the conditions here revealed, far from being exceptional, represent the common distress of our proletariat. The general fact that emerges is that in this country there are still two nations, that equality in any real sense is a miserable myth, that social justice is intolerably lacking. It is a fact to which Catholics must awaken. If we desire to bring in the social reign of Jesus Christ, we must remember that He is a Ruler whose subjects have an equal *right* to the means not only for a decent natural human life, but also for a life befitting those who are called to be the sons of God. If we fail to follow the Holy Father and refuse to put social justice in the forefront of our programme, we are betraying the people to whom we offer the Gospel and justify the accusation that religion is a dope for their evils.

There are two incidental problems brought out by this story. The first is that of education. In England education is still governed by class privilege. For wage-earners of the working-class, access to a first-rate education is almost always an impossibility. The amiable theory that any boy of ability can climb the intellectual and social ladder is perniciously untrue. Once now and then such a boy has luck; that is all that can be said. There are countless others of equal ability whom economic circumstances crush down and keep down. James Whit-