

REVIEWS

PHILOSOPHY

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS AND HIS WORK. By A. D. Sertillanges, O.P. Translated by Godfrey Anstruther, O.P. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.; pp. 150; 5/-.)

The one privilege which Aquinas craved from his contemporaries was that of being allowed to tell them the truth. The way in which he fulfilled his very honest purpose is brilliantly re-told by Père Sertillanges, with an understanding and an economy which it would be difficult to surpass. St. Thomas's allegiance was primarily to the truth. Consequently, and despite the disapproval of the reactionaries—'mere brutes,' as Albertus Magnus so appositely called them—his work is that of 'a pagan as well as a Christian' to change, slightly, the challenging phrase of Péguy. Père Sertillanges is in his element when writing—in the last two chapters—of Thomism and the modern world. Thomism is, essentially, metaphysics: therefore, complete and unchangeable. What we need is a metamorphosis; a philosophy in substance St. Thomas in its expression; Santayana. And this will be a real advance, since 'poetry is philosophy, but something more.' It will be a difficult task, for we too have our 'mere brutes,' imprisoned behind the walls of their system and muttering to themselves in a strange tongue. Sertillanges thinks that it will not require the intervention of a Divine Person. No! But it will require another man with the native capacity, fearlessness and originality and, not least, the sanctity of Aquinas. Everybody interested in the re-statement of philosophy ought to read this book.

Fr. Anstruther deserves great praise. His work is as excellent as it must have been extraordinarily difficult.

I.C.

S. AUGUSTIN ET LE NÉO-PLATONISME CHRÉTIEN. By Régis Jolivet. (Denoël et Steele; 15 fr.)

Recent literature on St. Augustine has tended to become either picturesque and romantic (Louis Bertrand and Papini) or strictly technical. This work of M. Jolivet is to be welcomed as a balanced account of Augustine's life written calmly but in a lucid and attractive style, by one who is himself an accredited philosopher and historian of philosophy. The advantage of the latter fact is that the philosophical problems with which Augustine was engaged obtain a realist and not merely acade-

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mic treatment. In particular, the account of Neo-Platonism is remarkably well done. M. Jolivet puts St. Augustine's conversion in the early days of his stay at Milan, attributing to him then *fides informata*, which was prevented from becoming *fides formata* by two difficulties; an intellectual difficulty—materialism; and the difficulty of his carnal passions. His materialism was removed by Neo-Platonism, and he was delivered from the dominance of carnality after the *tolle lege* incident in the garden.

Two minor criticisms might be made. Surely Plotinus's conception of evil as a privation of due being in some way necessarily inherent in the order of the universe is more than an 'aesthetic' solution of the problem—though admittedly inadequate. Secondly, we think that M. Jolivet takes the *Contra Academicos* too seriously—and consequently Augustine's crisis of scepticism also. Doubtless Augustine thought the arguments of the Neo-Academicians were a trap for the unwary—and the dialogue is meant to enlighten his disciples. But there is no trace in it of any difficulties personal to him. Finally, we offer a criticism of greater import. Augustine was primarily a Christian theologian. As a Christian thinker (this book is in a series 'Les Maîtres de la Pensée Religieuse') it is by his presentation of Christian doctrine that he should be known. And therefore we are inclined to think that there is a radical mistake in producing a book which treats of his entire life and yet gives three-quarters of its space to philosophical issues which concerned his pre-Christian period. There are, indeed, chapters on 'Le problème du mal,' 'La psychologie de la foi,' 'La spiritualité Augustinienne'—all of which are good. But they are not enough. It is a matter of orientation. Within its limits, however, and for its own special problems, the book certainly deserves to be read.

A.M.

ALBERTO MAGNO. *Atti della Settimana Albertina*. (Rome: F. Pustet; pp. 282; lire 10.)

It was a happy thought on the part of P. M. Cordovani, O.P., to publish the papers read and discussed during a 'study week' on St. Albert the Great, held in Rome, organized by the Dominican University of the Angelico and the Institute of Historical Research of Santa Sabina.

The various and most important aspects of St. Albert's life and intellectual achievements are here reviewed by competent specialists, in their departments. Mgr. Ruffini, the Secretary of the Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, opened the debates by giving an outline of the manifold activity of Albert