

## REVIEWS

across the Channel. Nothing could be less true: in opinion, in style and in the tang of the work, with its blend of individualism and tradition, this is Englishry at its best. Let any man who doubts this re-read Frederick Harrison's review of *Lothair*.

The best parts of the book are those in which the author discusses the Englishman's power of visual imagination and his aptitude and appetite for oligarchy. The least satisfactory is that devoted to the Englishman's religion. The first reading of the essay is like listening to good conversation: the second reading is to find oneself engaged in good argument. Both are pleasures which are seldom to be obtained.

T. CHARLES-EDWARDS.

### GREEK PHILOSOPHY

This book of essays dealing with Greek philosophy before Socrates by Professor A. Covotti of the University of Naples<sup>1</sup> is a work of great value. A pupil of H. Diels, the well-known editor of the Fragments of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, Prof. Covotti has collected with utmost care and *con amore* all the scattered sources of information, and from the *disiecta membra* he succeeded to reconstruct with rare skill the proper features of those early thinkers. It is hardly to be expected that we should find original views on a subject handled already by experienced masters; yet, two main characteristics recommend most particularly the present work: we have here a comprehensive survey of Greek philosophy before Socrates as a whole, and, what is more valuable, the most arduous problems are presented with remarkable clearness, convincing solidity joined with that care of details which is the mark of scholarship.

The first two chapters are introductory. The first history of early philosophy was written by that outstanding genius, who was called the Philosopher *par excellence*. In that Aristotelian historical treatment of philosophy Dr. Covotti distinguishes a twofold edition, the former of his earlier years, and the latter, left incomplete by his death, at the end of his writing. The central question is whether Aristotle's presentation of his predecessor's teaching is to be taken as strictly historical, or merely as theoretical, viz. according to Aristotle's own plan of philosophy. Siding with Paul Tannery and Ingram Bywater, and against Zeller, Gomperz and Burnet, the author sees in Aristotle's statements, not an objective expression, but rather an interpretation of their doctrines considered from his own point of view.

The next chapter, a bird's-eye view of the development of philosophy from the very beginnings to Socrates, is particularly illuminating. The conclusion reached is that there was a perfect

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<sup>1</sup> A. COVOTTI: *I Presocratici*. (Collezione di Studi Filosofici. Serie storica. Monografie, 3.) Napoli (A. Rondinella), 1934, pp. 325. Lire 30.

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continuity of Greek thought in the process of research for truth. This is expounded in the remaining chapters wherein we watch this long and slow growth, from the time when the school of Miletus replaced mythology by elements of scientific knowledge: Thales of Miletus, the Astronomer, Anaximander and Anaximenes, cosmogonists and astronomers. Then came Heraclitus of Ephesus, the aristocratic despiser of mankind, with his doctrine of continual flux and the coexistence of contraries; the Pythagorean school; Philolaus and his system of astronomy on the movement of the firmament of fixed stars; Xenophanes and his scepticism; Parmenides of Elea, his teaching and his controversies with Heraclitus; Epicharmes; Empedocles of Acragas and his Legend; the metaphysician Melissus of Samos; Anaxagoras. Then the Atomists, the Physicists, until we arrive at the time of Socrates. Two appendices close the volume: in the first is discussed the historical question of Democritus. He must not be reckoned among the Pre-Socratic philosophers, but rather as a contemporary of Socrates. In the other, Prof. Covotti gives an accurate edition of the fragments of Melissus of Samos. An alphabetical index and a helpful summary of the chapters add value to a very valuable book.

A work on Plato by L. Robin of the Sorbonne is always welcome.<sup>2</sup> This book, he says, rests on a twofold postulate: that Plato is a philosopher, and that he has, or tries to have, a doctrine. What differentiates Plato from others is that, instead of propounding his teaching dogmatically, he proposes it by way of enquiry and under the form of criticism. The aim of his research and of his criticism in the Dialogues is to present a doctrine which, though somewhat involved and obscure, is nevertheless rigorously definite, and even, perhaps, rather rigid. From this standpoint Prof. Robin endeavours to present, on the one hand, a systematic view of Plato's thought, and, on the other, its historical evolution.

An interpreter of the Dialogues, however, before attempting any reconstruction—if it is to be historically faithful—has to face the difficult problem whether the views put by Plato into the mouth of his interlocutors represent his own ideas or theirs. The question is particularly important for the Socratic Dialogues; its solution commands the exactness of the whole synthesis. J. Burnet's and A. E. Taylor's theories on the subject are well known. The author, on the contrary, holds that it is Plato's own ideas that are mainly reflected, and, even in those Dialogues where Socrates plays the leading part, Plato is less a skilful artist describing what took place in Socrates' time than the exponent of

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<sup>2</sup> LEON ROBIN: *Platon (Les grands Philosophes)*. Paris (Alcan), 1935. pp. viii-364. Frs. 35.

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his own personal mind. In accordance with this interpretation Prof. Robin in five chapters condenses Plato's teaching in a remarkable synthesis dealing with the problem and the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge is neither sensation nor opinion, but is based on being and depends on being, and if relations are the constituents of being, then knowledge must be the faithful image of these relations. And then we follow Plato step by step in his aspiration towards the full intelligibility, his incessant *inquiétude*, his perpetual search for truth, his cosmological, psychological, theological teaching, the physical world, the soul, God, and finally his ethical, sociological and political ideas.

In A. E. Taylor's *Plato, the Man and his Work* which gave us an analysis of the Dialogues a systematization of their contents under subject-headings was avoided, for Plato himself hated nothing more than system-making. L. Robin approached his subject from a different angle. With a thorough knowledge of Plato's thought, derived from a minute analysis of his works (which we have learnt to admire in his former books), he has now attempted a synthetic view. We do not think that Plato has lost anything by this attempt. On the contrary, it seems to us that a great deal may be gained in clearness and exactness by co-ordinating—not quite systematizing—the same ideas scattered in the many Dialogues. Apart from certain interpretations, with which one may perhaps not agree, the book is a very great success.

DANIEL A. CALLUS, O.P.

## NOTICES

UN PROGRAMME RECONCILIATEUR PROPOSE PAR JACQUES MARITAIN: MEMOIRE POUR PRONER SA MISE EN PRATIQUE. By Dr. Henri Minot. (Labergeirie; pp. 33; n.p.)

The author urges that Maritain's programme of Christian humanism, suggested in his *Lettre sur l'Indépendance* and elaborated in *Humanisme Intégral*, should not be left on paper, but should be translated at once into action. The formation of a *Mouvement Fraternel pour l'Humanisme intégral* is suggested in order to discuss ways and means. They would be many: Christian humanism, because it is Christian, looks first to the establishment of the conditions necessary for human perfection not for an *élite* but for the masses, and all the current problems, political, economic, cultural, religious, immediately present themselves. The pamphlet is a *fervorino*; but the author has anticipated criticism of lyricism of style (*les cités s'édifient au son de la lyre*) as he has anticipated the more substantial and perhaps more irrelevant objection that Catholic action should be initiated by the hierarchy, not the laity; and a *fervorino* in favour of something at once so urgent and so well defined as Maritain's programme is not to be despised in these days of apathy. May the *Mouvement Fraternel* flourish. And why not an English equivalent?

G. V.