

BLACKFRIARS

From where did Père de Grandmaison get the passage from St. Thomas—quoted in Latin—given on p. 156? The reference is certainly wrong (it is wrong in the French edition too), but we doubt whether the passage is to be found anywhere in the *Summa* precisely as it is given here. Was he quoting at first hand? We venture to doubt it, for in quoting other passages from the *Summa* (p. 297 f.) he gives a translation by Portalié, which, had he taken the trouble to compare it with the original, he would have seen to be more a travesty than a translation.

L.W.

JESUS RACONTE PAR LE JUIF ERRANT. By Edmond Fleg. (Librairie Gallimard ; 15 fr.)

We have grown only too accustomed to books in which sacred Personages are travestied in solemn language, with outward show, and sometimes genuine intention, of what the publishers call 'the deepest reverence.' Here, in this Jewish fantasy round the life of Our Lord, we have the precise opposite. The expression is colloquial, ironical, with a characteristic element of grotesque, but the substance is something very near adoration.

Edmond Fleg is still as he revealed himself in 'The Boy Prophet'—in the story of the little Jewish agnostic, who cries to the priest in the confessional that he cannot live unless he become a Christian, but he cannot believe that Jesus is God ; who in his spiritual hunger is torn between the beauty of Catholicism, the grandeur of suddenly realized Judaism, and . . . the universal comradeship of the Boy Scouts ; and who, finally, as an attempt at synthesis of all three, feels himself called to be the prophet of a new Messianism, summoning all Israel to make the world fit for a Messiah of Peace and Justice for all mankind.

And yet, in each of his books, the three-fold conflict is renewed, finding always the same unstable solution. What he sees as the crucifixion of Israel throughout the ages (a theme to which he constantly returns) comes between him and the Crucified, yet, *anima naturaliter christiana* if ever there was one, he is still tormented by the perennial problem. 'I remembered the wonder and despair of my childhood when I first read the Gospels, the questionings, more urgent year by year, that have since framed themselves before my mind.' It is out of such questionings, which led him to Holy Land, 'to seek the Master in the land of His tribulations,' that the present book was born, and the author has yet to find the final answer.

In the meantime, he has produced a book of extraordinary interest—the life of Christ, which he imagines told to him by a mysterious figure, who reveals himself as the Wandering Jew,

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and who is at once a symbol of Israel, and the image of Fleg's own searching soul. A Wandering Jew who is wholly the author's creation; identified with the paralytic let down from the house-top and healed, one of the Disciples, eager and loving, yet puzzled, because the promised Kingdom does not come (it is strange how a man of Fleg's discernment fails to perceive what was meant by the Kingdom within), alternately aflame with enthusiasm and chilled by doubt, stumbling at the 'hard sayings,' constant only in anguished devotion towards the human personality of the Master. But when, on the way to Calvary, the beloved voice bids him 'Bear my Cross,' he turns away, because, in the two thieves who follow he recognizes his own kinsfolk (we have here again the obsessing theme of the 'crucifixion of Israel'), and the tie of blood holds his first allegiance. It is the tragedy of the Jewish people throughout the ages; it is that of Fleg himself, whom many Jews look upon as an heir to the prophets.

At the same time, the book is one of the most enthralling lives of Our Lord that have ever been written outside the Gospel; seen from the outside, as He must have appeared to many Jews of His time, on the background of custom and tradition; in no way rationalized, with no trespassing into holy places, and with full acceptance of the supernatural and miraculous, though, inevitably, it lacks that supernatural fulness that could only come with the gift of faith. It is not without blemishes; there are certain passages unacceptable to Catholic readers (notably the references to Our Lady), but even these have nothing that could give offence, and the wonder is that they are so few. It is very nearly a really great book.

B. B. C.

AFTER STRANGE GODS. By T. S. Eliot. (Faber and Faber; 3/6.)

Mr. Eliot's Epistle to the Virginians. 'I ascended the platform of these lectures only in the role of moralist.' What, then, are we to think of Mr. Eliot as moralist? In the first place let us recognize the morality in our time of a distinguished poet and critic frankly judging works of literature from moral standards. Every fussy little Puritan, of course, imagines that he is endowed with moral standards, and we are wearied with the petulant raillery of nincompoops against modern art. But it is a new thing for a genuine artist to take up the cudgels for Christian morals. What is the loss, not to the artist as a man, but to his products, from the absence of orthodoxy? That is the enquiry. Mr. Eliot first emphasizes the departure of tradition, 'all those habitual actions, habits arid customs,' from modern life, and then of its concomitant 'orthodoxy,' the more conscious and