A PRIMER OF PATMOREANA

TWELVE or thirteen years ago, Alice Meynell introduced me to Mr. Frederick Page in her drawing-room at Granville Place, and we talked about Patmore. He sent me Patmore's *Courage in Politics* afterwards, as a memento of that talk. In those days one met fewer devout students of this English and Catholic philosopher and poet. I, ever since, have been waiting for the book on Patmore which Mr. Page was already planning.

It has at last been published: *Patmore : a Study in Poetry.* (Oxford University Press).

The nervous and just prose in which it is written strikes one as being, in itself, homage to Mrs. Meynell, from one who, for more than three dozen years, has known her standards of accuracy and lucidity. But in the Acknowledgments there is a compliment superb, austere and delicate enough to become her. 'Through Patmore,' he writes, 'I became a pupil of Alice Meynell, and our love for him brought me her friendship. That in the following pages I mention her name almost always only to differ from her slightly, is to be ascribed to that vigilance, that care for justice, which, more than from anyone else, and almost more than anything else, I learned from her. If I have said anything to which she would not consent, then I have said what is not true.'

I should like to think, as I handle this lean and well-considered book, that it is only a first slice of the contribution Mr. Page is ready to make to Patmoreana. He has set his enthusiasm to X-ray Patmore's poetry with the finest carefulness. He has kept, with this same carefulness, to the subject of Patmore as poet, answering very fully questions which the poems raise about their writer's life and philosophy, but never yielding, in spite of many 'dangerous occasions,' to the temptation to write completely about that philosophy in a volume dedicated to the poetry.

It is, even to one who has Patmore by heart, a surprising and rebuking book. I confess to having thought that Patmore cast his thoughts into ode and sonnet because he knew they would be safer from the sticky fingers of the curious, behind the glass of poetic form. Mr. Page shows this to be so partial a truth as to be, in effect, no truth at all. Patmore was in love with Poetry; it was not a *mariage* de *convenance* to make his issue legitimate.

The student of Patmore has had, hitherto, few books, as apart from essays, on his subject. He has had, of course, the *Memoirs and Correspondence* of *Coventry Patmore,* by Basil Champneys, in two volumes. Of this, Shane Leslie says, in his own essay on Patmore in *Studies in Sublime Failure,* '. . . it seems to have been taken from the designs of a furniture repository. But even a depository becomes interesting when filled with the stuff of so curious a life as Patmore's.' Mr. Leslie's own essay puts itself on a lower shelf by reason of its superior tone, and by his acquiescence in the facile temptation to be scornful of Patmore's naiveté. Edmund Gosse, whose book came out in 1905, when Patmore was as foreign to the English Time-Spirit as a golden eagle, was obstructed by the fact that he hated Catholicism, and could not even imagine it as any man's immediate introduction to ultimate reality. Osbert Burdett's *Idea of Coventry Patmore* (1921) ventures most bravely towards the beckoning peaks of Patmore's eyrie, and is rightly valued by Patmore's lovers. Paul Claudel, nearest in stature to Patmore of all living laymen, has translated his poems into French by a miracle of appreciation. But Patmore is as essentially English as Dante was born of Italy. Patmore, I believe, showed in himself—barely recognizable because on the scale of immense genius—that the English mystic is one by nature as well as by grace, and that the words 'hearth' and 'home' which are written on his soul, have given him the passwords to mysteries, even in ages when the dispensers of those mysteries are martyred at Tyburn or questioned by Fleet Street. Patmore's complete biographer must be an Englishman,

This book, which I persist in calling Mr. Page's first instalment, is the primer for every future student of Patmore who wishes to be 'well grounded' in his subject. I should have liked the context of every quotation from the poems to have been given in a tiresome footnote; it would have helped the close study which the chapters provoke. Yet it must be said unmistakeably that this is not a mere piece of poetic technology. It is full of delight. Humour is not absent. Mr. Page has sometimes touched, but, unlike some other biographers, has never wasted time on Patmore's impatiences and outbursts of irritation, or on his unselfconscious expressions of self-knowledge.

In the first chapter, *The Poet and the Disciple,* we are given the measurement of our subject, which Francis Thompson describes, in speaking of Patmore, as 'an oceanic vast of intellect.' The scope of his poetic ability is pointed out, and his temper of thought—'a mind,' in Milton's phrase, 'fully possessed with a fervent desire to know good things.' This is followed by the necessary terse, and excellently efficient chapter of *Biography.* Then his first poems are considered in *Poems 1844*. (I was given a first edition of these in the British Museum the other day, and found them corrected in one or two places in what appeared to me to be Patmore's hand-writing. He was Assistant Librarian at the British Museum about that time. The book was in bad condition. I suggested to an official that it should be sent up for rebinding with a note pointing out to the authorities that it was a copy of special interest.)

The next chapter is called *The Young Husband;* after which comes *The Novel in Verse,* dealing with *The Angel in the House* and *The Victories of Love,* and attributing the origins and sources of these two poems with great care. I judge these three chapters to be the most interesting of all.

The Poem of the Age is the heading of the chapter which covers the transitional period between *The Angel in the House* and the *Odes.* Already Patmore dreamed of proclaiming that which, alas, he had only expounded before he died.

The next chapter has to explain his contemporaries and his circumstances before another can deal with ***The Unknown Eros***—that collection of fragments and cartoons for the superhuman task towards which he sighed, and which remain greater than fragments of Greek marbles, great as the 'Fragment' of St. Bernard on the Canticle of Canticles which Emily Patmore began to translate, and left, broken anew by her death, for her husband to finish. I like this chapter least, unthankful as I have ever been for the best words about the theme which are not Patmore's. But I commend it to the student.

The following one on Patmore's projected poem ***The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin*** is informative regarding the plan for, and the abandonment of, this ideal work; and the samite is safe in Mr. Page's fingers.

The Metrist takes its stand on Mrs. Meynell's witness that: 'When Patmore talked of his poems, it was of their metres.' Common sense agrees, with platitude, that a contemplative such at Patmore could not 'talk' of his vision, but only of its shell. Nevertheless, the reader parts company with Patmore if he refuses to take an interest in the structure of this shell. The final chapter of the book compares him with his fellow-poets.

Convinced that Mr. Page is right in his deliberate choice of approach to the study of Patmore's mind, I have added my silence to his; and leave the review of this book, as he left its pages, without the intrusion of any meditation on the beckoning distances of eternal realities which Patmore declared and studied to adore.

CECILY HALLACK.

REVIEWS.

LE THOMISME ET LA CRITIQUE DE LA CONNAISSANCE. By Régis Jolivet. (Desclée De Brouwer; 10 fr.)

This book contains two *Etudes.* The first, on the Nature and Form of the Critical Problem was to some extent occasioned by a contribution to Geyser's Birthday Book in which M. Gikon insisted on the danger of the ***Cogito*** as a starting point for a critique of knowledge, and maintained that such a critique in the modern sense was unjustifiable within the confines of Thomism.

The second study, on the Problem of Critical Doubt, is complementary in character and treated separately for reasons of literary convenience.

M. Jolivet holds that the unshakeable evidence of an independent reality immediately present to the mind alone makes a critique of knowledge conceivable, and contends that only the fact that not all our knowledge is immediate makes criticism necessary. Criticism must begin from a *Cogito;* but if I understand him his *Cogito* is the *reflexio intellectus supra actum suum* described by St. Thomas, *de Verit* q. I. The Critical Problem for him is not the *existence as such of* reality independent of our thought but the existence of independent reality *such as we judge it to be.* In other words Critical Doubt must be directed upon the alleged adequation of our thought to reality in order to examine and report upon the value of our knowledge, but never upon the existence of the real. This last and the knowledge that it is the nature of Intelligence to be conformed to objective Being are so immediately evident to M. Jolivet that he sees no question of proof; reflexion, psychological analysis, can but exhibit them. Doubt regarding them is presupposed to the Cartesian attempt to deduce the real from Thought, and this road can only lead to Idealism unless their evidence is surreptitiously re-introduced ; recourse to Causality leads no more illicitly to Berkeleianism than to Realism. To attempt such a deduction is to consent to a sham problem.

M. Jolivet protests in advance against the accusation of naïveté. Can he imagine that Idealists have no spontaneous certainty of an ' external world?' Does he mean that they deny the existence of the world of experience, and not merely of a secocd noumenal world behind it? This is the impression given **by** his reiteration of the enormity of doubting about existence. Can we not conceive realities possessing no actuality, *possibles,* or those mathematical reals, independent of our thought, which never can possess an actuality beyond the tenuous one we confer on them in thinking them? **If we** can, suspension of judgment regarding *existence* will leave us not with **a** nothing **(as**

M. Jolivet thinks, p. 137) but with a ***real given,*** irrational at first perhaps, but which we need not despair of rationalising. And however we may subsequently solve the problem of the senses' (not the intellect's) perception of the existent, the objective validity and value of our intellectual knowledge of realities whose content is unchanged by existence or non-existence will in no way be endangered or altered.

Q.J.

INDIVIDUUM UND GEMEINSCHAFT BEIM HL. THOMAS VON AQUIN. By Edelbert Kurz, O.F.M. (Munich : Kbsel & Pustet, RM. 3.80.)

One of the reasons for the disunity among Catholic sociologists and social workers, especially in English-speaking countries which have become sadly isolated from the general trend of Catholic thought, is the widespread misunderstanding of the social philosophy of St. Thomas. All are naturally anxious to claim him as their patron. Distributism, in particular, has brought about the association of his name among the Catholic rank and file with an extreme and naïve individualism which in fact is very far removed from the subtlety and profundity of authentic Thomism.

But reputable scholars have also been among the propagators of the myth of 'Thomist individualism,' especially in the days before liberalism fell into disrepute. Among them was the Louvain historian, Professor Maurice de Wulf, who propounded as 'Thomist' the thesis that 'Society exists for the individual and not the individual for Society.' Whereupon the eminent authority on mediaeval philosophy, Geheimrat Clemens Baeumker, remarked: 'I don't believe it, and I should never have thought *that* of De Wulf.'

Baeumker set his pupil, Fr. Kurz, the task of looking into the matter. Here we have the results of his ten-year research. He has ransacked St. Thomas for anything which could throw any light on the subject and arranged the material in orderly fashion with comments which, if not always displaying very great insight, are generally to the point. Regarded purely as a catena of quotations his work is invaluable, indeed indispensable to anyone who would get to grips with St. Thomas's own thought on social philosophy.

And in spite of a crudeness of expression, a childish lavishness with exclamation marks, and an undisguised partisanship, all of which render him suspect of charlatanism, Fr. Kurz has some very wise things to say and throws light on many dark corners of St. Thomas's thought. But he has not that profound and synthetic view of its implications which we meet with, for example, in Mlle. Suzanne Michel's ***La notion thomiste du bien***

commun. In particular he has not seen, as have Maritain and the French 'personalists' (not to mention his compatriot, Professor v. Hildebrand) that the key to the whole problem is to be found in the Thomist idea of ***personality.*** Of course he stresses the Aristotelian-Thomist idea of man as a 'social animal,' but he has not seen that the fundamental fact that the human individual essentially transcends its own individuality makes the antithesis of Society to the Individual ultimately meaningless. One outcome of this initial short-sightedness is that he flounders badly when he has to reconcile the 'individualism' of Thomist metaphysic with the primacy of the *bonum commune* in Thomist ethic. A deeper understanding of metaphysical finality would have further helped him in establishing the 'reality' of the social organism.

As an adequate exposition of Thomist social philosophy the book cannot therefore be altogether recommended. **As** an antidote to some current misconceptions it will be found extremely useful. **As** an orderly collection of the *ipsissima verba* of St. Thomas it will be found invaluable.

Lest it be thought that the work is a mere sop to Hitler, we may remark that it was published before the Nazi revolution.

V.W.

DE SACRA LITURGIA UNIVERSIM. By C. Callewaert, J.C.D. (Beyaert, Bruges, 1933; 25 francs.)

This is intended as an introductory volume to the whole study of the liturgy. As such the book achieves perfection. In a comparatively small space the author discusses the definition and nature of liturgical cult, the whole history of the liturgy, the ***Fontes*** of the Roman liturgy, and finally the nature and method of liturgical science. An introduction demands such a complete conspectus. But the treatment is in no way sketchy. The author, who is a bishop and a canonist, brings all his deep knowledge and experience to bear on each point. Disputed questions are stated dispassionately, and the whole work is marked by a sound common sense. Every statement is backed by a wealth of references to liturgical works and writers from the first century to the present day, to the Code of Canon Law, and, perhaps most valuable of all, to examples from the Missal and the Breviary. Such treatment of the subject makes further study easy and attractive. But the book deserves a wide circulation not only for its great value as an introduction, but also because it will help the reader to understand the spirit of the liturgy.

Perhaps there appears towards the end, in dealing with the ***Fontes*** **of** the Roman Liturgv, **a** tendency for details and re-

condite points unnecessary in an introduction. But though this may limit the range of the book's appeal, it increases its value for the clergy, since here are discussed many practical details not found in other liturgical works. In the final chapter some may quarrel with the author for relating liturgical science to Canon Law rather than to Theology, for as a result the method of study advised appears to lay over-emphasis on rubrics; a method which differs from that implied and encouraged throughout the rest of the book. This third edition has been thoroughly revised so as to include reference to the most recent liturgical books.

C.P.

THE LITURGICAL ALTAR. By Geoffrey Webb. (Washbourne & Bogan; 5/-.)

DIRECTIONS FOR THE USE OF ALTAR SOCIETIES AND ARCHITECTS. New edition (Fourth) revised and enlarged. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 2/6.)

Mr. Geoffrey Webb's book on the Liturgical Altar, though in many ways an admirable and artistic production, cannot be unreservedly recommended. Its main purpose is, I take it, to give in a simple form a reliable statement of the liturgical laws relating to the construction and adornment of the altar. But this it fails to do. The book contains many inaccuracies. The author lays great stress on canons 1197 and 1198 which deal with the structure of the altar. On page 38 canon 1197 is wrongly translated (though in justice one must say that later on page 43, he gives a more accurate version). The interpretation of this canon is misleading. In passing one might suggest that the title of the book is not altogether satisfactory, since every construction which is an altar must of necessity be liturical, *i.e.,* it must have the essential properties laid down by liturgical law. I wonder if Mr. Webb is clear about what is essential and what is non-essential to an altar? One has the impression that he would make a matter of law what is really a question of taste. Perhaps his dogmatism gives one that impression. But on purely artistic grounds I agree entirely with him. Again, the translation of canon 1198, page 38, is quite wrong. The author translates ' Both in the fixed altar and also in the consecrated stone there should be a sepulchre . . . containing the relics of saints, enclosed in the stone. This should read ' . . . sealed with a stone.' The *lapide* in the text is not the same as the *sacra petra*. Further, I cannot agree with what Mr. Webb says about the decrees of the Congregation of Rites. The obvious inference from his remarks on page 36 is that *all* these decrees deal with local abuses which have grown up at different times and are therefore ' corrective rather than

creative.' Surely a decree may be an approval of a custom which if contrary to the law cannot possibly be 'read in the light of the original rubric to which it refers!' Yet Mr. Webb makes that the general norm of interpretation of these decrees. On this question he is far too dogmatic. If rubrics may sometimes be changed or moderated, so, too, decrees may lose their binding force by non-observance. Let me take an example, one which is actually referred to in the book. Candles placed on the altar for Mass may, says Mr. Webb, be of equal height. Now the *original* rubric in the *Ceremoniale Episcoporum* laid down that candles should be of unequal height. A question was sent to the congregation whether, since in Brittany the candles were all of the same height, the rule of the *Ceremoniale* ought to be observed. The reply was that 'the reason given excuses from the precept given by the ceremonial.' This answer is illuminating, for the reason which excuses from the law is that *de facto* they are not all equal. In view of Mr. Webb's insistence on reading all decrees 'in the light of original rubrics' one is tempted to ask him how it is that he can allow the candles to be of equal height? The Congregation has the right to modify any liturgical law which is of ecclesiastical origin and when it does so it is not for the private individual to go back to the original rubric. I think it would be truer to say that the rubrics must be read in the light of the authentic decrees, just as the Codex must be read in the light of an authentic interpretation.

The Directions for Altar Societies and Architects is, as its name implies, a book similar to the one reviewed above. It is perhaps more lenient and conservative and certainly less absolute and dogmatic. The ruling on antipendia for example is milder than Mr. Webb's and is an indication of the complexity of the liturgical law. The book is an enlarged and completely revised edition of some instructions issued by Cardinal Vaughan. It gives a concise statement of the liturgical laws for churches that follow the Roman Rite on the construction and ornamentation of altars, chapels, the baptistry and mortuary chapel; the making of sacred vessels and vestments. The reviser in his very modest preface hopes that the book will be of use to all who have the care of the church and be a guide to architects and others engaged in the production of what is needed for divine worship. I am sure it will be.

K.W.-G.

IDA ELISABETH. By Sigrid Undset. Translated from the Norwegian by Arthur G. Chater. (Cassell; 8/6.)

The scene is Norway of the present day, but the woman might be anywhere. She is a universal, by great art embodied in an individual. Hence both the philosophy of th

novel and its delicate, quiet, observant study of human personality. Heroic without heroics, that is the formula; but if heroism is the form, the material is the ordinary run of life, its undertones and unexpected moments of intense sensation—the saloon smell of a coasting steamer, the sight of sprouting birches, the atmosphere of a little draper's shop. Rare, this union of a sense of unearthly value and of fact. The following passages may hint at the quality of this great book, so restrained and strong and jet so moving.

First, *das mitgefühl,* the mother and her dying child : 'Again the little frame was shaken by spasms, the eyes rolled and rolled under their lids which had grown so thin—there was a pause, but soon the spasms returned, more feebly, and the collapse was more marked than before. And after another while—she did not know how she knew it, she *saw* it, but it was not a thing she could see with her eyes. It was as though she had been through this before, in giving birth—the moment the child was born a wave from an invisible and infinite ocean had swept over her, and torn something asunder, but when the wave withdrew again the little twitching, puling creature lay beside her, as though the two had been washed up on a beach. The same wave from an invisible eternity now went over her again—and it was as though the fierce, tearing pain she had then felt in her body was but a crude image of that which now tore her in two. The wave drew back, but now it had taken Solvi with it—what was left on the bed was not Sölvi.'

A bedroom scene : ' " If you attempt to touch me," she said calmly and distinctly, " I shall pour paraffin over you as soon as you're asleep and set light to it." '

The thesis: 'She had come by degrees to the conclusion that after all . . . it was perhaps necessary that there should be some who had a sort of call to be mothers and sisters to all and sundry. To be young and in love and to wish one could feel and act as though we two are one thing and all the rest of the world something else—that was *happiness,* no doubt most people felt that in their hearts. But if this instinct of happiness were really such that no one could resist it—if no one could hold against this thirst within him—well, then there would be an end of mercy in this world. Then finally there could be no question of leniency for the disabled and those who can never help themselves.'

A Catholic novel with scarce a mention of the Church, a story of a vocation to sacrifice without the exterior obligations of religion.

T.G.

THE PLAY

THERE is perhaps no problem so urgent in the modern theatre as that of language, in any play that is more than a semi-photographic domestic comedy (though even here, convention plays its part), and above all in any play with an historical setting.

The most current method is to use the colloquial speech of to-day, and this, too often, means newspaper clichés, and a mode of thought and expression wholly alien to the age and characters. One jibs at hearing Richard of Bordeaux talk of 'internationalism' and 'pacifism,' and indeed, in the whole play there is not a line that gives pleasure to the ear.

The same jarring note sounded in Sherwood's ***Acropolis,*** which had a brief run before Christmas — briefer than it deserved, for the theme was a mighty one, with modern resonance: the defeat of Athens, and still more of the spirit of Athens, by Sparta; the one standing for beauty and the arts, and the flowering of free democracy; the other, for the all-demanding State, warlike, efficient, with its own glamour, but whose victory meant the end of a civilization. The play was, however, marred by astounding crudities; above all, by the portrayal of Pheidias as a Victorian agnostic, who goes to his death after a speech recalling Exeter Hall.

In ***The Rose Without a Thorn*** (now playing at the Vaudeville) it is a disappointment to find Clifford Bax has made a domestic episode of a subject made for tragedy on a vaster scale — Katherine Howard, gallant, generous, yet a wanton, whose moment of amorous folly supplied the rack and block with victims, brought the downfall of the great house of Norfolk, and assured the final victory of Cranmer over the Catholic party. The sense of nemesis implied by these wider issues is wanting, but throughout, the characters speak the King's English, sometimes very nobly. And yet, one has still the impression of concepts at variance with the age depicted. The fact is, that the very use of prose gives an expectation of realism; if an historical play is not to be simply an archeological reconstruction (of which the dramatic value would be doubtful), what is needed is a diction that will raise the whole piece on to an ideal plane, out of the domain of time. The dramatist must be a poet.

The older tradition maintained that all such plays should be in verse; the result was often less a poetic drama than that very different thing, a dramatic poem, and we wonder on learning that Tennyson's and Browning's tragedies were actually written for the stage. Their diction was too remote from common speech, and Shakespeare sat like a lion at the head of the

way; Clemence Dane is one of the very few who have trodden it unscathed. While on the other hand, Yeats is almost alone in having made of blank verse something personal and new, reflecting shadowy waters. For the Irish the problem is simpler, because the daily speech has still something of the quality of song, and the freshness springing from contact with the realities of the soil. It will probably be the Irish playwrights who will show the way to the new rhythm that will supersede blank verse as blank verse superseded the old rhyming couplets of the mystery plays.

In this respect the performance of Claudel's *Annonce faite a Marie* in English dress by the Catholic Stage Guild has been of peculiar interest. It is far more a Morality than any form of historical play; in spite of the definite historical allusions that would place it in the early part of the XV century, the setting, as Claudel states in his stage directions, is that of the 'purely conventional Middle Ages.' It is a play to be enjoyed in a contemplative rather than a discursive state of mind—resting in its beauty, in the almost biblical cadences, in the sense of an underlying significance to which it would be a mistake (and difficult) to give analytic precision. (One has the same impression with many of Shakespeare's plays: though in Shakespeare the action on the purely human plane is more strictly dramatic and complete). The play moves to the rhythm of the earth, who 'gives the perennial answer of bread and wine'; good is brought forth from evil, the broken is restored, the rejected one becomes the vessel of redeeming grace. All things are made new, just as the dead child of evil Mara and worldly Jacques is brought to life, or rather, reborn, new-mothered by Violaine on Christmas night, when in the Christ Child mankind is born anew—Violaine, who had become a leper through compassion and a saint through suffering, whose dowry was always Mont Saint Vierge, a supernatural heritage.

The Catholic Stage Guild deserves all praise for a most artistic production, and praise is especially due to the producer, Robert Speaight, who also gave a satisfying rendering of the part of Pierre de Craon; to Roger Furse, the designer of scenery and dresses; to Veronica Turley and Patricia Hayes, who as Violaine and Mara brought out the full beauty of conception and word, and to George Wray, who was so imbued with the spirit of the piece that the Father, Anne Vercors, in Part I where he takes his leave on pilgrimage, brought to mind the scriptural 'householder . . . who went on a journey,' and in Part II seemed to assume a sacerdotal majesty that gave the scene its full significance.

B. Barclay Carter.