

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY. By Jacques Maritain. Translated by E. I. Watkin. (London : Sheed & Ward ; 8/6.)

We doubt whether there exists in any language a better introduction to Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy than M. Maritain's *Introduction Générale à la Philosophie*. The work comes about as near to perfection as can reasonably be expected. Wisely it begins, unlike most manuals of Thomistic philosophy, with a brief outline of the history of ancient philosophy up to Aristotle. In beginning thus, as Maritain remarks, 'we display philosophy in its origin and construction, and thereby show how the transition was effected between the teaching of common sense and the scientific knowledge of philosophers, how the great philosophic problems arose of themselves, and how a particular conception of philosophy, which will later be put to the test of discussion, results inevitably from this historical enquiry, and naturally forces itself upon the mind.' 'How the great philosophic problems arose of themselves'—this is a point to be insisted on from the start, for it is of the utmost importance that the beginner should realise that the problems he is to deal with are not the mere otiose questionings of a few eccentric men, but questions which the human mind naturally asks and tries to answer in its effort to understand the world. Also, as Maritain well says, this historical approach is 'the actual method of Aristotle, too often neglected by books which teach his conclusions but apparently ignore his spirit.' After this historical introduction comes a discussion of the nature of philosophy. These two sections form the first half of the book. The second half is taken up with an account of the main divisions of philosophy, and a survey of its principal problems. The work is excellent throughout. But particularly valuable are the pages devoted to such notions as *essence*, *substance* and the like. We say 'particularly valuable,' because, first of all (as Maritain himself hints) the treatment of these all-important notions in the ordinary manuals is lamentable, and secondly because they are of all philosophical concepts the most crudely misunderstood—and, we may add, nowhere more so than in England.

Mr. Watkin has done a great service in translating the book into English. We cannot claim to have read the whole of his translation, but we have tested it at many points, and it seems to have been very carefully done, and, on the whole, with great accuracy. We noticed, however, a certain number of minor faults. Thus, in the sentence on p. 169 : 'Psychology as understood by the moderns does not correspond exactly to the ancients' treatment of the soul,' the last few words should read

## *Blackfriars*

' treatise on the soul.' ' Material ' in the sentence (p. 207) : ' how the intellect knows its own individual and material act,' ought to be ' immaterial.' But such faults are not of much importance, and it still remains true that the English reader owes to Mr. Watkins a reliable version of an excellent introduction to the supreme synthesis of human thought.

L.W.

A TREATISE ON THE CANON OF MEDICINE OF AVICENNA. By O. Cameron Gruner, M.D., Lond. (Luzac & Co.)

Students of St. Thomas can hardly afford to overlook a book written with the two-fold purpose ' (1) To furnish a translation of the First Book of the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna ; (2) To present a study of its mystical philosophy (tassawuf) especially showing where this and modern biological knowledge are reciprocally illuminative . . . . Furthermore, the Thomistic philosophy of human nature is especially discussed, and its applicability to the Medicine of the future definitely enunciated ' (p. v).

This is a book of wide scholarship. Our present praise must be limited to saying that Dr. Gruner's work has almost a place of honour apart in modern Thomistic writings.

V.McN.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE STUARTS. By J. Desmond Gleeson. (Cecil Palmer.)

Mr. Gleeson has explained his book in an illuminating introduction. In his own words :

' The Monarchy, national and popular in England, was pulled down and destroyed. The process of destruction lasted for a period of more than a century. It began with the raising of the new rich in Henry VIII's time, and it ended when the last Stuart king vanished over the water. At the commencement of the period the Monarch was supreme ; at the conclusion of the period the Aristocracy was supreme. And during the years that the upsetting and substituting was going on, the Stuarts were on the throne. It was their business to defend the rights of the Monarchy, their duty to preserve the prerogative, their fate to fight the losing battle. . . . The Stuart Kings of England each had his private tragedy, but the war with the new rich lords was the tragedy of the whole line.'

Mr. Gleeson, whilst giving the main emphasis to the main tragedy, has known how to blend the private tragedy with the larger dramatic doom that finally overwhelmed the line.