

REVIEWS

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE. By Abbé Roger Poelman. (Kenedy, New York; \$1.50.)

This little book (113 pages) is really useful. It is not an *Introductio Generalis*, nor a History of Israel, nor a study of biblical problems, critical questions, authorships, authenticity, etc. It is simply a little handbook for anyone who wants to find out what the Bible is about and to learn that it is simply about God and the history of his loving relation to mankind. 'The reading of Holy Scripture in the spirit of faith is a discovery—an eager and reverent discovery of God; it is a contemplation of God. It is also a dialogue in which he takes the lead and summons us. We answer, as did all the men of God, "Here am I"—and prayer begins to take shape. As we turn from reading to prayer and from prayer to reading, our souls receive light. They are kindled with love, generosity, faith, hope and joy, and transformed from glory to glory into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ' (p. 108).

With the present-day interest in the spiritual sense of Scripture, and the continuity of its mysteries, the method here used is specially valuable. The theme is followed from Creation through the patriarchs to the kingdom of Israel, always watching God's care of his people. Every few paragraphs a few chapters (or only verses) are suggested for reading in the main current, with accompanying passages also indicated both backward and forward in the revelation. For instance, after reading Osee, the theme of God as the bridegroom is followed through passages in Isaias, Jeremias and Ezechiel, the Canticle and Psalm 44, to John the Baptist as 'the friend of the Bridegroom' (John 3, 27) and our Lord's wedding-parables, St Paul in Ephesians (5, 25) and finally to the marriage of the Lamb in the Apocalypse (p. 50). Again, when discussing Solomon's work for promulgating God's law, we are invited to look back to Leviticus and forward to Hebrews (p. 42).

The argument is always very briefly stated, and is unencumbered with critical preoccupations, though in matters like the historical order of the prophets the usual conclusions are tacitly followed, with, for instance, Isaias 40-66 appearing about the exile. From the kingdom of Israel the theme is traced through the exile and the restoration through Machabees and Daniel to the New Testament. At the end comes the fulfilment in St John and the Apocalypse.

The author is a Belgian secular priest, chiefly engaged in preaching and writing, who wrote the original in French in 1950. The translation was made by a Benedictine nun of Bethlehem, Conn. (U.S.A.). Recent American idioms such as 'to cater to' (p. 41), 'to round out our study' (p. 76), 'in behalf of' (p. 12), and 'chapters 7 through 11' (passim), and

the common carelessness of the American printer in dividing words at line-ends, are a little trying to the English reader, but the translation fully shares Fr Poelman's invigorating enthusiasm and sound piety. The many people who are now interested in the great 'types' and themes of the Bible as a whole will find every page suggesting profound ideas and throwing new light on many passages, both well-known and little-known, in the Scriptures.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

GUIDE TO THE BIBLE. By the Monks of Maredsous. (Sands; paper cover, 3s. 6d.)

This is an extremely good three-and-sixpenceworth. It should be of considerable service to almost anyone. It is an extremely brief statement of most of the salient facts in what in the schools is called an *Introductio Generalis* and *Introductio Specialis* to the Bible.

It opens with two pages on the Catholic attitude to the Bible according to the great Encyclicals. A three-page History from Abraham to A.D. 70 follows, with a useful table of 'Great Dates', giving thirty-five key dates. Six pages describe the general lay-out of the whole Bible. The rest of the book then works through the Bible, giving very brief and concise notes on the authorship and date of composition, and the content and general theme of each book. In each section, of particular value to the beginner (especially in the Old Testament), is a short list of items for selected readings which should not be missed. This selection is extremely well done. Tobias, Judith and Esther are included as 'episodic narratives' among the historical books, and are followed by Machabees. The rest of the notes follow the order of the Catholic Bible, except in the notes on the Epistles of St Paul.

The statements on authorship and date are generally reliable, and that dealing with the Pentateuch is wisely non-committal ('. . . the original old Mosaic part underwent a series of changes and enrichments . . .'). Similarly for the Gospels (p. 80), a solution of the Synoptic Problem is merely hinted at on the lines of Greek Matthew making use of Mark. Isaias presents a 'still unsolved question', and the traditional view of the unity of the book is given, together with the opinion that the later chapters were written by 'one or two unknown prophets'. No mention is made of a *via media* according to which these rewrote older Isaian material. With regard to dates of composition the reader is sometimes preemptorily ordered to accept a date that can only be hypothetical: thus, Samuel 'must have been written after 622', or, Abdias 'must be assigned to the period of the Exile', or, Aggeus 'must have been written by a disciple', but these things, together with the phrases 'the Book of the Judges' and 'Matthew, whose real name was Levi', may be due to an imperfect knowledge of either English or French usage on the part of the