

REVIEWS

THE WESTMINSTER VERSION OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES: THE FIRST BOOK OF PSALMS (Pss. I-XLI). By the Rev. Cuthbert Lattey, S.J. (Longmans; 5s. 6d.)

THE PSALMS. Translated with Text-Critical and Exegetical Notes. By W. O. E. Oesterley, D.D., Litt.D. Two Volumes. (S.P.C.K.; 16s. each.)

Having finished its work on the New Testament, the *Westminster Version* is now making steady progress with the Old. In this latest addition to the series, the question of translation assumes a quite special importance, since the strength of the psalms largely depends on their very style; and it is surely a pity that in striving after literal accuracy Fr. Lattey should have made frequent use of incongruous English wording. This may be justified perhaps when it serves to convey some interesting or significant Hebrew idiom: for example, to translate, '(In the nights) *my reins admonish me*,' has its point. But nothing is gained by the use of expressions such as the following: 'In the nights (my reins admonish me) —' Jehovah, how many are my foes become?' — 'Sing to him a new song: Play skilfully with loud noise' — 'Awaiting I awaited Jehovah . . . Thyself hast done many things, Jehovah my God.' — 'Man walketh to and fro, naught but a semblance. . . —' But myself do walk in mine innocence.' — 'Plead my cause, Jehovah, against mine implacers . . . ' loses far more than it gains. However, these are no more than blemishes. The work as a whole, translation and commentary, affords a priceless opportunity to any educated Catholic to increase his spiritual resources. In the commentary a disproportionate amount of attention is given to questions of Hebrew prosody. It would have been better — one suggests — to have offered instead a somewhat fuller account of the religious significance of the psalms. There is a certain impression of jejuneness which might then have been overcome.

Dr. Oesterley's work is on a much larger scale, and its purpose is more strictly scientific. A certain amount of the Introduction and the Commentary for some twenty psalms has been contributed by Dr. Theodore Robinson. The Introduction includes a good account of the theory which would assign to a certain group of psalms the original setting of a supposed Celebration of The Enthronement of Yahweh. It is a fascinating theory and full of grand doctrinal implications, if it be acceptable. (It is to be hoped that Fr. Lattey may treat of this

question in the next volume of his work—it was barely relevant to the matter of this first volume. His judgment would be of great value). Another question lying off the beaten track with which this Introduction deals very competently is one which it entitles 'Saints and Sinners in the Psalms.' The continual denunciations in the psalms directed against the sinners in the land no longer tend to seem wearisome or disedifying if it is recognized that throughout the period of the composition of the psalter, the orthodox traditional religion was being threatened by a powerful coherent paganizing movement, of which the Hellenizing movement fought by the Maccabees was a later manifestation. (Dr. Oesterley does not accept a Maccabean date for any of the psalms).

The exegetical notes are thoroughly useful, although sometimes rather sketchy. Textual criticism is cautiously and skillfully employed. This is a work which can be resorted to with great profit by any serious student; although for a Catholic its doctrine must often seem unsatisfactory or positively unsound—for example, in its failure to recognize the working out through the literal sense of a divine typical sense.

RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

THE MATERIALISTIC CONCEPTION OF HISTORY: A Critical Analysis. By Karl Federn. (Macmillan; 10s. 6d.)

It has been said more than once that Karl Marx interpreted the whole of human history upon the pattern of the one phase of it of which he possessed massive knowledge: the period of transition from medieval society to the capitalist industrialism of the nineteenth century. Dr. Karl Federn undertakes to prove this up to the hilt, and to show both that the theory Marx based upon his economic and philosophical studies is nonsensical and that it fails completely to interpret any process of historical change in the ancient world. The second project succeeds better than the first. It is difficult to be sure that Dr. Federn has quite grasped the synthesis of the Marxist theory either in its psychology or in its social dialectic. There is misunderstanding of both in the very common argument, which he repeats: 'if socialism really were the inevitable next stage in the evolution of society, there would be no need of a Socialist theory and still less of a socialist party . . . they might spare themselves their pains.' Again the theory of the development of the productive forces in Marx is hardly countered by such a formula as this: 'Intelligent and enterprising persons are