

REVIEWS

THE SUNDAY SERMONS OF THE GREAT FATHERS. Translated and edited by M. F. Toal. 4 vols. (Longmans.)

This collection is published in four volumes, corresponding to the liturgical divisions of the year. It appears both in a large format for libraries and in a pocket edition. The pocket edition is most attractively produced; it has markers, the paper is fine, the print, though small, is extremely clear. For each Sunday the gospel, and parallel passages, are laid out and followed by extracts from the *Catena Aurea* of St Thomas; this in turn is followed by two, or usually more, sermons of the Fathers. We are told that this work contains 'what is in effect the spiritual inheritance of every Christian'—the Sunday gospels themselves together with the traditional interpretation and teaching of the Fathers, 'in authority and influence second only to the Apostles and Evangelists themselves'. It is stated that the author's purpose has been to serve the needs particularly of the busy priest, who will here find 'placed in his easiest possible reach this treasure house of sacred lore, this quintessence of the doctrine of tradition. . . . A sermon well prepared on the matter here supplied cannot fail to be learned, solid, simple and effective.' (Foreword.) Alas! any effectiveness will be due rather to the qualities of the preacher than to the material as here presented to him. The reason for this lies in the actual translation. It does indeed seem accurate, as one would expect, and also perfectly clear; it is, however, dull, lifeless and perfectly uninspiring, belonging to a *genre* which one had hoped was of the past. As such, it does not have the power to implant in the reader the strength and life which it really possesses. It is not only what the Fathers said, but the way in which they said it, the zeal and vigour with which they spoke, that gives to us the full content of their thought. It cannot be maintained then that this work contains 'the spiritual inheritance of every Christian'; there is a vital aspect missing, and what could have been a most delightful and valuable work, is instead a doubtful quantity.

G.H.

MUHAMMAD AND THE ISLAMIC TRADITION. By Emile Dermenghem. (Longmans; 6s.)

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE DESERT TRADITION. By Jean Steinmann. (Longmans; 6s.)

These two books are 6 and 5 respectively in the *Men of Wisdom Series* which Messrs Longmans are producing from the French. From the first of them the average reader unfamiliar with Islam will inevitably

carry away a rather blurred impression. The reduction in scale is too enormous. It might have been wiser to leave out altogether the section on Islamic Tradition, since few distinctive features can emerge from the compression of this subject into thirty-six pages. But the sketch of Muhammad and the selection of Islamic texts do offer vivid pictures to the imagination.

The wars and wives of Muhammad have often been held against him by Christian apologists who have compared him with our Lord. The comparison is not really fair. The Prophet is a thoroughly 'Old Testament' figure, his wars and wives reminiscent of David, and his prophetic experiences of a man like Elias. His character, like David's, seems to have deteriorated somewhat with success and old age, but his personal religion had the grand simplicity of both these Hebrew prototypes.

A quotation from the Qur'an and a reported saying of Muhammad's seem to put the essential difference between Islam and Christianity in a nutshell. The Prophet said, 'There is no new born child but belongs naturally to Islam. It is the parents who make it a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.' And the Qur'an says, 'Turn towards the natural religion in which God created men. God's creation cannot be changed. That is the unalterable religion.' Christianity claims to be a fulfilment and a supernatural religion; Islam to be the natural religion, a primitive reform.

The book on John the Baptist is scarcely in the same class. It rambles from the Essenes to Christian monasticism, the Jewish Karaites and Mandaeism, using the Baptist as a sort of symbolic peg, to which to tie these various reflections with the most tenuous of historical threads.

Both volumes are adorned with the excellent illustrations characteristic of this series. The calligraphic Arabic compositions of certain sacred texts are marvellous feats of ingenuity. It is interesting to observe that the contemporary Muslim holy picture, though not quite so hideously sentimental as its Catholic counterpart, is subject to similar debasing influences.

E.H.

ALL FOR THE KING'S DELIGHT. A Treatise on Religious Chastity, principally for Religious Sisters. By Ferdinand Valentine, O.P. (B. O. and W.; 21s.)

The title of this book is taken from the 44th Psalm: 'Thy beauty now is all for the king's delight; he is thy lord, and worship belongs to him.' And this is a fitting summary of the valuable study given us here. It cannot be too warmly recommended to the sisters for whom it is written. It will also serve all who are in any way involved in the