

REVIEWS

WRITINGS FROM THE 'PHILOKALIA' ON PRAYER OF THE HEART. Translated from the Russian text by E. Kadlubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer. (Faber and Faber; 30s.)

The *Philokalia* is a collection of the writings of the Eastern spiritual fathers, edited by Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus the Hagiorite (*i.e.*, Athonite) during the eighteenth century and published at Venice in 1782. A translation of this into Church Slavonic by the famous Paissey Velichkovsky, published in 1793, had a deep and lasting influence in Russia; and Bishop Theophan the Recluse, who died in 1894, made a version of the *Philokalia* in Russian. From this last E. Kadlubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer have made a one-volume selection in English. It consists of writings of eleven Greek-speaking Christians, from the fifth to the fourteenth century, including St Simeon the New Theologian. (Thanks to Combefis, this important figure was excluded from the Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum*. Father I. Hausherr translated his life by Nicetas Stethatos into French in *Orientalia christiana*, vol. xii, no. 45; *cf.* also vol. ix, no. 36 and vol. xx, no. 66), and St Barsanuphius and St John of Gaza, whose letters were long ago brought to our notice by Father Simeon Vailhe in *Echos d'orient* (1904 and 1905).

It is not quite clear why this welcome English selection should be made from the derivative Russian and not from the Greek original; the statement of the anonymous Athonite monk who prefaces it does not really enlighten on this point: 'Although the original "Philokalia" consists of Greek texts, the Russian text has a value of its own, justifying translation into English, owing to the spiritual understanding of Theophan and of the period in which he lived'. The selection has been made with the desire to illustrate 'constant prayer in the heart through practice of the prayer of Jesus . . . the book describes the hesychast method in the true and original meaning of the term', which in fact is what the *Philokalia* did on a larger scale.

This is enough by itself to make the book of interest and importance. But it also raises for some readers difficulties that they meet in many other religious writings of both East and West. So much of them is so obviously excellent and unexceptionable. But many books of spirituality (awkward word—and to some a repelling word) seem to confront us with a sort of *gnosis*. The *Philokalia* 'contains an interpretation of the secret life in our Lord Jesus Christ', says Bishop Theophan. That can have an innocent enough meaning, but . . . It is no answer that these teachings and writings are intended for a minority of monks, nuns, hermits, *startsy* and the like (I do not find Bishop Theophan clear on

this matter: p. 13); they are handed out and commended to 'ordinary' Christians, with the inference, and sometimes the direct statement, that this *is* Christianity, in its pure state. Yet it is obviously not so. There are, for example, two opposite ways in which a Christian may be contaminated by materialism—and the second way leads to Manicheism. In several places in this very book, the teacher inordinately bothers himself and his reader about food and drink—not, of course, how much, but how little—tithing ounces and quarter-pints. What *has* this to do with the Man on the donkey? Barsanuphius, who was seen of men only once in fifty years, writes a lot about eating, and very sensibly (as about other things)—but all he says in nine paragraphs is covered by the first. However, it is not simply a matter of emphasis and proportion. It is difficult to envisage the impact of the *Philokalia*—and of other works much nearer home—on the man at the garage and his wife at the sink; it is no less difficult to admit a dualism in Christian life ('spirituality'). This book presents a most beautiful (*Philokalia*) interpretation of Christianity: but so much of it, and the way it is expressed, is conditioned by a way of living entirely different from that to which God calls the overwhelming majority of his children.

It is interesting to learn that Messrs Faber and Faber are now going to give us the *Spiritual Combat* of Lawrence Scupoli as edited by Nicholas the Hagiorite and revised by Bishop Theophan, thus still further enabling Catholics to carry out the wish of the Holy See that they should familiarise themselves with religion in the Christian East. It may be recalled here that Nicholas in 1800 published a book of 'Spiritual Exercises', based on those of St Ignatius Loyola and including thirty-four three-point meditations. He and his friend Bishop Macarius were criticised by many of their Orthodox contemporaries as 'latinizers' (cf. *La Prière de Jésus*, anon., noticed herein last August).

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A THEOLOGICAL WORD BOOK OF THE BIBLE. Edited by Alan Richardson. (S.C.M. Press; 25s.)

This book is a kind of dictionary, although that word is deliberately avoided, because this book restricts itself to words of theological import in the Bible, the entries therefore being relatively few, and because the articles on each word are in the form of fairly elaborate essays. There are thirty-one contributors, and although the editor is a Canon of Durham, about half the contributors are members of various Free Churches, the other half being Anglicans. There are well-known names among them, such as the Anglicans Canon Carpenter, Professor Ramsey and Fr Hebert, and the Free Churchmen Professor Henton Davies, Professor North and Mr Schofield, the O.T. articles being for the most part the work of the Free Churchmen, which corresponds to the situation of