

BLACKFRIARS

REVIEWS

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST. By Jules Lebreton.
Translated by Francis Day. Vol. I. (Burns Oates; 10/6.)

The purpose of this book is to provide a commentary, for the most part historical (and in all respects scholarly), on the Gospel account of our Lord's life and teaching, such as should minister to Christian knowledge and love of Him. That it proves worthy of its author, a theologian and historian of very high standing, already indicates the importance of the book. More definitely, it is probably safe to say that it deserves to be associated with those works, *L'Évangile de Jésus Christ* by Père Lagrange and *Jésus-Christ* by Père Grandmaison, of which it makes such full and grateful use, as an asset of primary importance to able-minded Catholics. Its character would then make it fall between those major works, as preparatory to *L'Évangile* of Lagrange with Grandmaison's work serving for general introduction to both the others. A paragraph to paragraph commentary, it throws light on the Gospels partly by means of brief disquisitions—'excursus' as the Latin text-books would call them—which for all their pertinence remain external to the Gospel narrative; and in this it contrasts in character with the work of Lagrange, who has so used his material that it becomes as though wrought into the Gospel texture, and he seems to write with the Gospels or from within them rather than about them. With Lagrange we live in the world of the Gospels, all is transacted *sub specie aeternitatis*. With Lebreton we are still in the class-room; but as undergoing sound and very necessary instruction. Such at least is the impression made on the present writer by this English version of the book; but even the best of translators, he remembers, is a doomed spell-breaker.

There are certainly faults in the book, faults of omission and faults of obscurity and confusion. And there are, of course, statements with which many Catholic scholars would disagree. For example, there are many who would disagree with the view that the parables of our Lord are 'not without obscurity expressly intended by our Lord to punish the Jews for their blindness to the truth,' nor would they relent at the concession that 'For the rest, this very obscurity . . . was not without a merciful design.'

This first volume of the work ends with the close of the Galilaean ministry on the eve of the last journey to Jerusalem.

For want of the original text it is impossible here to appraise the work of translation as such. Yet it has an honest ring

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about it. But it is a great pity that carelessness should have brought about so many lapses from elegance and even from grammatical soundness, and from clearness of statement.

As inelegancies might be instanced: 'And the Master, not too pleased, replies: I am the Resurrection . . .'; '. . . the privileged three, fresh from the heavenly cloud'; 'After a turn or two in the house below he begins again' (of Eliseus working to raise the widow's son to life); '. . . some Swiss countryside, pregnant with possibilities of pleasant rest.' And who does not shiver to hear the term 'enceinte' used of the Blessed Virgin?

There being so many misprints (certainly not less than twenty-two), and these often very confusing or even seriously misinforming, the publisher would do well to take the step of providing every unsold copy with a list of corrections.

RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

THE FRANCISCAN MESSAGE TO THE WORLD. By Agostino Gemelli, O.F.M. Translated and adapted by H. L. Hughes. (Burns Oates; 7/6.)

The title of this book may sound a trifle grandiloquent; but it is not easy to find an intelligible equivalent in English for *Il Francescanesimo* under which it first appeared. The author is well known as the Rector of the Catholic University of Milan, though many, no doubt, will be grateful for Fr. Hughes' brilliant little *Foreword* introducing Fr. Gemelli himself. The purpose of the book is best shown in the author's own words in his *Preface*. 'My intention,' he writes, 'has been to outline broadly the historical development of Franciscan spirituality and explain its ever-present and universal value, without dwelling on isolated historical facts or stopping to discuss points of philosophy and theology—however important and full of interest they may be.' One result of this—we may note in passing—is that here is a book of well over three hundred pages without a breath of controversy or bitterness; and the very division of the Order, in the sixteenth century, into three branches is shown in bright colours as involving 'a distribution of labour which became a source of strength.'

Bearing his intention in mind the author divides his book into three parts. The first is on *St. Francis and the times he lived in*; and it is hardly necessary to say that Fr. Gemelli not merely throws new light on old facts, but gives us something fresh as question of *more or less* of this world's goods, but on the grave. Thus Franciscan poverty is held to depend not on any dual depression of 'the acquisitive instinct,' leading to a universal charity towards all, rich and poor alike, and to a new