

of many evils, and uses leisure to make habitual vices worse and teach new ones. For it is past master in the art of inventing new evils. Those, therefore who under pretext of perpetual prayer reject manual work do not only not pray—for the mind cannot always remain fixed on the object of its desires without relaxing—but are distracted beyond what is normal by many unseemly things. Nourishing the proud body they make it unfit for prayer by the very leisure which they thought would provide freedom from care for the soul, and thus they become involved in a labyrinth of inescapable thoughts. For how shall a man be zealous and constant in prayer if the mind that guides this prayer is distracted by passions and perpetually falls away—I do not say from perfect ecstasy, but even from attending to the words of prayer? For the highest prayer of the perfect is a certain rapture of the mind, a real ecstasy from the things of sense perception, when with unspeakable groanings the spirit draws near to God who reads the dispositions of the heart like an open book.

*Translated by H. C. Graef.*

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## REVIEWS

**THE BOOK OF PSALMS** in Latin and English with the Canticles used in the Divine Office. (Burns Oates; 12s. 6d.)

We must be grateful that publishers in this country have given us, in so handy a form, both the recent version of the Latin Psalter and the new English translation by Monsignor Ronald Knox. Of the former, no appreciation is needed here. It can best be studied as published, first in 1945, by the Pontifical Biblical Institute (not Commission, as on the fly-leaf of the present work), with its own excellent Introduction and notes. But of the English Version a great deal could well be said.

If he were giving us a wholly new translation of the Psalms and Canticles alone, Mgr Knox would have undertaken a great labour. In sheer bulk they are no small matter. And the original text is often so obscure that, even though the Biblical Institute led the way, it must often have been hard to decide on a determined sense. The very familiarity of the Psalms in more languages than one, would make difficult any freshness of approach. The fact that they present a continual variation on a few themes would make it hard to avoid monotony in the rendering. Mgr Knox has shown great courage. He has brought this particular task to an end. He has found an acceptable sense—following, though not invariably, the new Latin Version—even for hardly intelligible passages. For good measure, he has added at the foot of the page a by no means baldly literal translation

of the Vulgate, when this differs notably from his text. And he has solved the difficulties often with great brilliance: study, for example, Ps 67 (a pity the Roman figures are retained for the English Version, to puzzle the uninstructed) v. 16-17: 'Basan's hills are high, Basan's hills are rugged . . .' and the Vulgate rendering in the note. It is the rarest thing for him to fail in clarity. If he does so, it is due, not to obscurity of thought (61, 4, too long to quote, and 77, 21, 'its mounting fires Jacob had fed', are perhaps exceptions) but to the use of an ambiguous English term; for instance 68, 16: 'the well's mouth close above me'. His Version shows every sign of meticulous care and finish, is polished to the last degree, with an exact use of words, phrases, idioms and punctuation. It is true the style has the graceless of Nature than of Art: it is conscious, studied, academic; but never to the point of pedantry. And there is always a note of warm feeling, of religious sincerity, which, though native to the Psalms, is lost in the work of some translators.

The originality of approach is remarkable. There may be some small debt to Moffatt's version; there are occasional echoes, no demerit this, of the Book of Common Prayer (it is enough to quote the refrain of 45: 'The Lord of hosts is with us. . .'; there are several more). But in general Mgr Knox has an idiom of his own. One must allow that particular devices are over-worked. He inverts continually; participial, adjectival and nominative absolute phrases are too abundant; to avoid continual repetition of 'my', 'thy', he resorts to such expressions as 'these lips', 'these eyes', 'this indignation of thine', so often that it becomes a mannerism; certain less common words or senses occur too frequently: 'audience' for 'a hearing', 'breed' as a noun. But for all this, Mgr Knox can attack psalm after psalm as if it were his first, with astonishing freshness and vigour. Certain passages call for particular mention: 17 (*Diligam te*), the whole of this great Psalm; the whole of 21, 'My God, my God'; 97, especially v. 7, 'the sea astir . . .', following the Vulgate; the opening of 117, with its echoing chorus; the simplicity, too rare, of 130; 150; the 'Songs' of David, of Ezechias, and of 'the Three Young Men'. Such passages as these have added a page to English literature.

Yet here and there his skill has failed him. Ps. 22, *Dominus regit me*, is unhappily marred by feeble phraseology: 'how can I lack anything? . . . revives my drooping spirits . . . I will not be afraid of any harm'; 74, 4, 'I alone support its fabric'; 75, 11 (difficult, it is true), 'to thee the spared remnant of Emath shall keep holiday'; the opening of 90, *Qui habitat*, really intolerable. Other such passages could be cited. But these are scattered blemishes. One's main adverse criticism is more serious. Mgr Knox has made full use of his great intellectual and literary resources to express the rich meaning he has found in Psalms and Canticles. Very much of this, quite legitimate, most of us would never have discovered for ourselves. To impart it to us clearly he has adopted the boldest principles and applied them consistently. He has deliberately forgotten, with rare exceptions, the

traditional method of Scriptural translation. The original sentences have been turned by him inside out. He has made use of paraphrase, periphrasis, every device, to make us see clearly what he sees, hear what he hears. But he has gone too far. Sometimes, expressions have been introduced of which the associations would indeed have been strange to the Psalmist; what are we to say, for instance, of 15, 5: 'deep flowed the tide of wrong', except that there sound there overtones unknown to David's harp? And while he has wrung from the text all, and sometimes more than all, the meaning it contains, again and again he has distorted or destroyed its structure. If we are to have the Psalms in English, and not a mere interpretation of the Psalms, their native rhythm should not so lightly have been neglected. In this respect, the new English Version has lost touch with the original. It is true the original structure, whether of accent, line, group of parallel lines, or strophe, is not always certain; but often it is clear enough, and to ignore it is to denature the poem. One example among very many: What could be clearer and more characteristic than the structure of 23, 7-10, with its repeated 'rex gloriae' (representing but two Hebrew words)? Yet here we are given three different phrases. The original simplicity has disappeared; we have lost contact with the poetry of Israel.

A personal recollection may illustrate the point. It is a monastic custom that during the Triduum of Holy Week, reading in the refectory should be without a title. On Maundy Thursday 1947 the reader began: 'In old days, God spoke to our fathers in many ways and by many means, through the prophets; now at last in these times he has spoken to us, with a Son to speak for him ...' One's thought was, 'A Commentary on Hebrews'. Then a little later, 'This man keeps close to his text!' Finally light broke: it was no Commentary, but the new Version of the text itself. Now such a rendering may have great value for the Epistles, full as they are of shades of meaning needing paraphrase to bring them out, with no metrical structure to lose. But is it legitimate for the poetical books? We hardly know them in such disguise. Can a Version of this kind represent them authoritatively to English readers? If recited publicly, or used as a key to Breviary or Rituale, it would, one gravely fears, mislead or at least confuse the faithful. And as a text for serious study it is useless.

Yet there is indeed a place for this translation. We hope to see it multiplied inexpensively for private use. What better material could be had for prayer or *lectio divina* than such an interpretation of the Psalms? To read it through attentively is to rekindle devotion, to recover old treasure and to be enriched with new.

A few matters of less importance. Though Mgr Knox has as a rule treated the structure of the Psalms so freely, yet, rather perversely, in most of the alphabetical Psalms, he imitates their acrostic arrangement. Often he has forced the sense to find a suitable opening word. The peaceful, monotonous sway of 118, for example, has become a

prolonged gymnastic. To aggravate this, the initial letters are printed an irritating red. The abundant red ink also of the notes and titles, if it is cheerful in these dark days, has no other value. Whether the ingenious translation of isolated verses from the Vulgate, without the Vulgate text, is useful, may be doubted. But here and there are excellent notes explanatory of the Psalms themselves; these notes should be generously increased. The number of the Psalm should be shown on every page. A few slips and misprints should be corrected: 14, 4, nothing corresponds to *Timentes . . . honorat*; 22, 5 (Engl.), misprint; 33, 12 (Lat.) misprint; 34, 15, misprint for *laetati sunt*; 37, 13 (Lat.), misprint; 47, 3, nothing corresponds to *Mons Sion*; 49, 10, mistake in note, which should refer to v. 11b; 52, note on 1-7: X, VIII, should read XIII; 76, 17-19 (Engl.), verse numbers apparently misplaced; 88, 11, is not 'his' a misprint for 'this'? 88, 20 (Engl.), misprint for 'didst'; 105, 4, is not 'Remember us' a slip for 'Remember me'?

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THE NEW TESTAMENT, in the Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures (Small Edition), by Rev. Cuthbert Lattey, S.J. (Sands; 10s. 6d.)

The Westminster Version of the New Testament appeared in parts between 1913 and 1935 and now occupies four volumes in the normal edition. After the publication of a 'small edition' of the Psalter in 1945, we now have the New Testament in this edition, complete in one volume, at a price which should make the version widely known. 'We ought to welcome all new translations', says Mr C. S. Lewis in his introduction to a recently published translation of the Epistles (*Letters to Young Churches*, translated by J. B. Phillips, Bles), and this is particularly true in the case of the first publication in this country (for the ordinary pocket) of a translation by Catholics from the Greek text. The Holy Father has again emphasised the importance of such translations in his *Motu Proprio In Cotidianis Precibus*, prefixed to the new Latin Psalter. The promoters' ambition from the first was to produce a one-volume edition of the New Testament, without all the scholarly notes and references, 'for the devotional reading of the faithful'; they are to be congratulated on the realisation of their aim. Some improvements in the text have been incorporated since the version first appeared. The main aim of the translation is clarity, dignity, and accuracy, both in the Greek text used and in the translation. Thus it preserves 'Bible English', and is even more literal, sometimes awkwardly so, for the devout Greekless reader, than the Anglican Revised Version. In St John 14, 22, we have: 'Lord, what hath befallen, that thou art about to manifest thyself to us, and not to the world?' (Westminster, where R.V. has: 'Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?'), and the American Catholic (Spencer) version reads: 'Lord, what has happened that thou wilt manifest thyself