

Book Chronicle

SOME RECENT COMMENTARIES ON THE BIBLE

THE present age is an age of a wide-spread revival of interest in the Bible among Catholics. The need of making the Bible easily accessible to the average reader is being strongly felt everywhere. The result is an ever-increasing output of biblical publications, especially translations and commentaries, adapted for the educated layman and the non-specialized clergyman. To a certain extent this revival is the response to the appeal of H.H. Pope Pius XII who, in his Encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu*, urges biblical scholars to communicate to the faithful the divine treasures hidden in the Scriptures which God has given to men not to satisfy their curiosity, or to provide them with an object of study and research, but in order that they might "instruct to salvation by the faith which is in Christ Jesus," and "that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work."

The general character of these publications is an easy readable exposition of the best established results of biblical exegesis, shorn of all the shackles of tedious philological and critical discussions.

To this class of publications belongs *The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures*, a new translation from the original Greek and Hebrew texts undertaken with the approval of the Cardinal Archbishop and the Catholic Hierarchy. Though the publication started 20 years ago, the work is still very far from complete. The New Testament is complete, but of the Old Testament only a small part has so far been published, that is *Malachy* (1934), *Ruth* (1935), *Nahum and Habakkuk* (1937), *Jona* (1938), *Psalms 1-40* (1939). Another important publication is *The New Testament newly translated into English* by Mgr. R. Knox (1945) which has been officially recognized by the English Hierarchy.

In America Ch. J. Callan O.P. and J. A. McHugh O.P. have published in 1937 a translation of the New Testament made by their confrere F. A. Spencer O.P. in 1894-1913 and left in a manuscript form. The title is *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, translated into English from the original Greek, N.Y. 1937.

In France the commentary *La Sainte Bible, texte Latin et traduction Francaise d'après les textes originaux avec un commentaire exégétique et théologique*, which was started in 1935 under the general editorship of the late L. Pirot, is now proceeding apace after the interruption caused by the war. Seven out of twelve volumes have already been published, and the Psalms have been through a second edition. Another French translation is being prepared by a group of well-known French scholars under the direction of the Dominican Biblical School of Jerusalem.

The Italian-speaking Catholics have *La Sacra Bibbia commentata*, a commentary on the whole Bible commenced by M. Sales O.P. in 1911 and continued by his confrere G. Girotti O.P. A complete translation is being published under the direction of A. Vaccari S.J. of the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome. The Pentateuch was first published in 1923 and in a 2nd edition in 1942; the poetical books in 1925; the historical books, part 1, in 1946; part 2 will follow shortly.

The Germans have many translations and commentaries which are generally called after the editor's name or that of the place of publication, such as the Bonn Bible which is nearly completed; the Echter Bible which started in 1947 with the book of the Psalms; Herders Bibelkommentar (1935ff); the Regensburger Neues Testament (1938ff); the translations by K. Rosch (N.T., 1921), P. Riessler (O. and N.T., 1924), R. Storr (N.T., 1926), E. Henne (O.T., 4th edit. 1934) and others.

A Dutch translation of the whole Bible has been undertaken by the "Petrus Canisius Association" in 1936. The Old Testament in 4 parts has been completed in 1939.

A translation of the New Testament in Russian is being published by the "Libreria Vaticana", 1945ff.

Out of this plentiful crop of biblical publications I wish to select only two, the two which are more likely to interest Maltese readers.

The first is an English commentary on the whole Bible with the title *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*. The work, though included in the title of this note *Recent Commentaries*, is not yet published, but it is hoped that it will be out before the end of this year. It will be a one-volume commentary, in two columns, covering such introductory matters as: The Place of the

Bible in the Church; Texts, Versions and Languages; Inspiration, Inerrancy and Interpretation of Holy Scripture; the Person and Teaching of Christ in the N.T.; Life of St. Paul; etc.; special introductions to the several books and the commentary which will be based on the Douay version with references to the original texts where necessary.

In order to give an idea of the scope and standard of this commentary I give here some extracts from circulars distributed among contributors: "The Commentary is meant to be an up-to-date handbook for the reader of our Catholic Bible, priest or layman... The chief object of our Commentary is to reveal to the reader the true sense, the doctrinal import and, as far as may be, the marvellous beauty of the Word of God." "The Commentary is designed to sum up the results of Catholic Biblical scholarship during the past forty years and put them at the disposal not only of priests and clerical students but also of Catholic teachers and educated laymen... The commentary should become a standard work of reference for Catholics." No further details can be given before the publication of the work, but it is earnestly hoped that the commentary will not come short of the general expectation. An obvious advantage of this commentary over other commentaries is that, being published in one volume, the reader will not have to wait indefinitely until the publication is complete, nor is there any risk that the whole work will remain unfinished.

The other is an Italian commentary published under the general direction of Mgr. Salvatore Garofalo with the co-operation of many distinguished biblical scholars. The title is: *La Sacra Bibbia. Volgata Latina e traduzione Italiana dai testi originali illustrata con note critiche e commentate*. So far two parts have been published: *Daniele* by G. Rinaldi C.R.S. (1947) and *Le Epistole Cattoliche di Giacomo, Pietro, Giovanni e Giuda* by Sac. P. de Ambroggi (1947).

The whole work consisting of 32 parts in 17 volumes will be followed by 5 supplementary volumes dealing with these subjects: *Repertorio Pastorale della Bibbia; Archeologia, Geografia, Cronologia Biblica; Storia Letteraria della Bibbia; Le fonti profane archeologiche e letterarie della Bibbia* (2 vols.). Like the English commentary it is meant to be a standard work of reference for Catholics in all their scriptural difficulties.

The Italian commentary, which is carried out on the same lines as the Bonn Bible, is considerably ampler than the English and even than the German commentary. The number of words of the book of Daniel in the three commentaries stands approximately in this proportion: English commentary 30,000 words, Bonn's commentary 40,000 words, Rinaldi's commentary 74,000 words. This, however, does not mean that the Italian commentary contains twice as much the matter of either the English or the German commentary. The excess of the Italian commentary lies rather in a more detailed discussion of controversial points and in the more copious bibliographical references. But apart from these numerical differences the scientific standard and exegetical value of the commentary is admittedly very high, though at times one would like a more defined attitude towards certain problems.

The English and Italian commentary are entirely independent of each other. The Italian commentary has the advantage of being more informative and of having already offered to its readers the first parts of a vast work. The English commentary, though apparently less pretentious, will certainly come out complete before its rival has advanced far.
