

Reviews.

Birmingham Baptists, Past and Present. Prepared for the West Midland Baptist Association, by Arthur S. Langley, F.R.Hist.S. (Kingsgate Press, 3s. 6d.)

Midland Baptists have always been strong, and well deserve to have their story told afresh. Stokes led the way, Gwynne Owen wrote again at the 250th anniversary; now Birmingham has grown so vast that it alone can commemorate its bicentenary. Standards of accuracy have been improved; our own Society has shown new sources to be tapped, and the result has been good wine that really did not need the bush Dr. Charles Brown has hung out.

Four dozen churches have their stories told, with a wealth of detail that speaks volumes for the industry of the compiler. We should have welcomed more of his work on the Baptist life in the city as a whole, so as to see the forest as well as the separate trees; the outsider does not understand easily why growth was at certain periods and in certain directions. For instance, who knows how the inventiveness of our minister at Dartmouth, Newcomen, and the improvements in his steam-engine by our Humphrey Potter of Bromsgrove, led to his pumps at Dudley and in the Black Country and aided the spread of Baptist principles till the days of Boulton and Watt? On the other hand, while we knew that the orthodox General Baptists of Coventry, dating from 1626 at least, had opened a branch at Birmingham by 1738, Mr. Langley now shows that the minister was C. Marston, and that they had registered their building on Freeman Street in 1729. By the way, no "licence" was needed to have a meeting-house, any more than to have a baby; it is only required that you certify the fact after it is accomplished. That Marston moved to Worcester about 1752, and his people joined Cannon Street, shows how the orthodox General Baptists would rather become Calvinist than Unitarian; this may explain why John Marston, born in 1722, figures at Broseley in 1770 as receiving a grant from the Particular Baptist Fund.

Cannon Street, daughter of Bromsgrove and grand-daughter of Bewdley, receives due attention. Its declaration of faith and practice, its covenant as to mutual duties, deserve study as to their origin and influence: do churches still drill their recruits in these matters of faith and order?

What Birmingham has done for foreign missions has been told separately, so is only glanced at here. References to other subjects are tantalising; would that Mr. Langley would develop what Baptists have done for education, as at Shireland Hall. Contribution to life in Australia and New Zealand is well summarised in a resolution sent last year to the centenary meetings under the Southern Cross.

It is to be hoped that after this fine contribution to the story of Baptist life in the industrial Midlands, the author will work up his researches in Lincolnshire and give us a companion picture of rural life by the sea.

W. T. WHITLEY.

Israel's Mission to the World, by H. H. Rowley, M.A., D.D.
Student Christian Movement Press, 3s. 6d.)

In view of the flagrant injustice now being meted out to Jewry in various centres of civilisation (!) it is but fitting that a book of this order—a concentrated study of Post-Exilic Judaism—be accessible to lay and ministerial readers.

As often expressed, Post-Exilic Judaism is not easily handled, and might be badly mishandled, but Dr. Rowley's slender book in form and spirit reveals how much he is at home in his theme. The only criticism one cares to make is that the book is too brief for its theme, but the lengthened treatment it needs must wait until the author has more time than is now at his disposal.

In the first two chapters the wider and narrower visions of Judaism are set over against each other, together with the invaluable contribution each was able to make. The third chapter has the arresting title "Aggression through Christianity," the gist of which can be glimpsed through a phrase which Dr. Rowley has treasured for years: "Old Testament prophecies run to Christ, as tidal rivers to the sea, only to feel His reflex influence upon them." In closing, he sketches Israel's enduring contribution to the world, in which chapter one feels that the term to be stressed is that of duration, for the author shows how Israel compelled the thinking mind within the spirit of man to acknowledge once and for all that worship *must* be ethical through and through, since history and experience stand out as the vehicle of a revelation inherently holy, calling forth a worship which is fundamentally spiritual. (Those of us who have had some close acquaintance with worship as practised in other countries can hardly fail to underscore this varied emphasis.)

The position taken up throughout is that of modern scholarship, though Dr. Rowley, with engaging freedom and frankness,

in not a few places suggests that some critical positions were taken up years ago all too readily, with greater loss on deep issues than need have been incurred—a return, perhaps, to less vulnerable positions. Is it too much to say that the Old Testament is being handled with more reverence to-day than has been the case in other years?—reverence, in the sense of a more spiritual handling of great themes than that of the purely academic.

F. CAWLEY.

The Qur'ān: translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs, in two volumes, by Richard Bell, B.D., D.D. Vol. II. (Surahs xxv.-cxiv.). (T. & T. Clark, 12s. 6d.)

The first volume was noted in our issue of January, 1938, and what was then said holds true for this volume also. The special feature of this version is the dissection of the materials which have been combined in the Qur'ān. Muhammad himself was unable to read or write; he recited to others the oracles given to him as the prophet of Allah. These were written down, we are told, on all sorts of fragmentary materials, palm-leaves, leather, stones, etc., and were collected only after the Prophet's death. As any one Surah may be an agglomeration of oracles of widely different dates (though no external indication of this is given), the Qur'ān is a most difficult book to read. Dr. Bell's analysis of the material is necessarily often subjective, but even so, it affords valuable help to the student, as indicating the view of a competent authority. Thus, in Surah xc., the first eleven verses are classed as "fairly early Meccan"; vv. 12-16 are a (later) Medinan comment on a word used in the earlier portion; vv. 17-20 are "a scrap from some other context" presumably placed here because they were written on the back of the other verses. The style of the translation is not made to run smoothly, but simply aims at reproducing the Arabic as closely as possible. The brief footnotes are helpful, and indeed often necessary.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.

Evangelism Today, by F. C. White, B.D. (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 2s. 6d.)

Evangelism in all its aspects is the theme of this little book, which has much that is wise and useful to say about both the need and the methods of evangelism. Mr. White has wisely taken nothing for granted. Any book such as this, that re-directs our attention to the urgency and the possibilities of evangelism is relevant. The obligation to evangelism does not seem to grip the majority of ordinary church members in this country as it

does, for example, in some of the continental churches, or in China. Is it because evangelism has come to be identified with the particular school of thought and circle of ideas to which this book is most likely to appeal? Many of those who most need to read a book with such advice and encouragement as Mr. White gives need also a complete reinterpretation of the experience and vocabulary in which he moves with such ease and conviction.

W. TAYLOR BOWIE.

Why not abandon the Church? Four talks by Bernard Lord Manning, M.A. (Independent Press Ltd., 1s. 6d. and 2s. 6d.)

It is easy to understand the inspiration these talks gave to an Easter School of young people. They are alive, informative and challenging, begging no questions. The critics who say (1) Modern science has exploded religion; (2) Karl Marx has exploded religion, or exposed it; (3) The people in the churches make it impossible to join them; and (4) Religion gives you a narrow view of life, are faithfully, even drastically, dealt with. But the book is concerned with more than the critics. It insists that the church is the bulwark against liberty being suppressed by dictators, and it tells young people what they can do in the church.

Mr. Manning's views on baptism are interesting. *The mistake of fancying that the main thing in baptism is the faith of the person baptised leads to the so-called believers' baptism. . . . Baptism of children is not merely dedication. . . . Baptism because of faith is sloppy Nonconformist sentimentalism.* Holding these views, Mr. Manning must find the New Testament a most awkward book.

On page 63, "not" has slipped from the sentence "Signing creeds does [not] protect Anglicanism from such folk."

The Office of the Holy Communion, with eight orders of service, by Pitt Bonarjee (Independent Press Ltd., 1s. and 1s. 3d.).

In a brief foreword, Dr. J. D. Jones says, "Mr. Pitt Bonarjee has prepared this little book of eight Orders of Service for the Communion not as rigid forms to be observed, but as suggestions as to the method by which the Supper of the Lord may be celebrated with due reverence." Ministers and lay preachers will find them helpful and suggestive, but let it be remembered that forms and orders and offices are servants, not masters. The more we elaborate the communion service the

farther we depart from the simplicity of the supper prepared by our Lord.

Prayer in the Purpose of God and the Experience of Man, by John Lewis (Kingsgate Press, 3d.).

The writer makes no claim to originality of thought or expression, but he has spent fifty-six years in our ministry, and served the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association as secretary for twenty-six. Out of this rich experience he says much that is profitable concerning the prayer life.

THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY for October will include articles by Mrs. Alexander Dow, M.A., on the "Baptist World Congress," by Professor A. J. D. Farrer, B.A., on the "Particular Baptist Convention of 1689," by Rev. Gwilym O. Griffith on "Absolute Pacifism," and by Rev. W. H. Haden, M.A., on "The Church at Salem, Burton-on-Trent." That issue will complete the ninth volume, and title pages and index will therefore be added.