

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

TRANSLATIONS OF EARLY DOCUMENTS.

THE SIBYLLINE ORACLES. Books III-V. By Rev. H. N. Bate, M.A. (3s. 6d. net.) **THE APOCALYPSE OF ABRAHAM.** By Canon G. H. Box, M.A. **THE ASCENSION OF ISAIAH.** By Canon R. H. Charles, D.Litt., D.D. (4s. 6d. net.) **THE THIRD AND THE FOURTH BOOKS OF MACCABEES.** By Rev. C. W. Emmet, B.D. (3s. 6d. net.) **JOSEPH AND ASENATH.** By E. W. Brooks. (2s. 6d. net.) **THE UNCANONICAL JEWISH BOOKS.** By Rev. W. J. Ferrar, M.A. Edited by the Rev. W. O. E. Oesterley, D.D., and the Rev. Canon G. H. Box, M.A., and published by the S.P.C.K.

The Editors are to be congratulated for the steady way they have been able to issue this series of valuable texts.

In **THE SIBYLLINE ORACLES**, Mr. Bate follows Dr. Postgate in deriving the word "sibyl" (Greek *sibylla*) from a root "sib" meaning "wise," and the diminutive termination "ulla." "Sibyl" thus means "the wise little woman." In the Græco-Roman world the "sibyls" were generally believed to be inspired by Apollo and were consulted on every occasion. Their oracular utterances were later collected and canonized. Any prophecy ascribed to the sibyls was sure to meet with widespread acceptance. In the third and second centuries B.C. the Jews of Dispersion found themselves in close contact with Hellenism and shared with them their intellectual life. In order to commend their religion and practice to the Greeks, the Jews published a number of books in which the names of Greek authors were freely used. Some of their propaganda tracts were written under the assumed title of the sibylline oracles. The sibylline oracles that have come down to us "are a compilation of old and new oracles worked up by Jewish and Christian authors who lived at various times between 160 B.C. and the fifth century, or even later A.D." (Lanchester in Charles's *Apoc. and Pseudepigr.*, ii. 368). Mr. Bate has given us here a translation of Books III, IV and V, which are mainly the Jewish portions.

THE APOCALYPSE OF ABRAHAM has been preserved in old Slavonic and contains the legend about Abraham's conversion from idolatry and his temporal ascension to heaven, where he receives a revelation concerning the future of his race. The book is intensely Jewish and must have been composed in Palestine in Hebrew or in Aramaic between the close of the first and the early decade of the second century of our era. It ascribes the origin of sin to the Fall (ch. xxiii.), and says nothing of an intermediate state; the righteous dead go straight to the heavenly Paradise ("the Garden of Eden"), while the wicked dead go to the underworld and Azazel.

THE ASCENSION OF ISAIAH is made up of three originally distinct works, one of which is of Jewish the others of Christian origin, all of which go back to the first century. We are told in this book that Isaiah was sawn asunder (cf. Hebrews ii. 37); the Messiah is designated "the Beloved" (cf. Ephes. i. 6), and the Holy Spirit is referred to as an angel. The volume throws much light on the current Jewish belief in demons.

THE THIRD BOOK OF THE MACCABEES is dated about 100 B.C., and one of its aims seems to have been to give warning to the Gentiles "that in spite of the apparent defencelessness of the Jews it was dangerous to interfere

with them, since they had a supernatural ally who was ready to avenge their oppressors."

THE FOURTH BOOK OF THE MACCABEES is an account of "the heroic martyrdom of Eliazar, an aged priest, and an unnamed mother with her seven sons; who were put to death with horrible tortures by Antiochus Epiphanes." An interesting point in this book is the idea of *vicarious suffering*. The death of the martyrs is definitely propitiatory, and becomes a substitute for the death of others; see especially vi. 28 f., xvii. 22.

JOSEPH AND ASENATH is a Jewish legend written somewhere between the second and fourth century of our era to explain away the objectionable fact that Joseph should have married a heathen wife. This has been slightly revised by some Christian hands.

THE UNCANONICAL JEWISH BOOKS is a short and reliable Introduction to the Apocrypha and the Jewish writings of 200 B.C. to 100 A.D.

All these volumes are scholarly, handy and give just the information that a student requires. May we suggest to the Editors to issue also a *Concordance* to the whole series? It will greatly enhance the value of these volumes.

K. E. K.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD. By the Rev. L. Prestige, M.A., Fellow, Lecturer and Dean of Divinity, New College, Oxford. London: *Robert Scott*. 3s. 6d. net.

To a believer in the stupendous miracle of the Incarnation, faith in the Virgin Birth of our Lord should occasion no serious difficulty. Nevertheless, there are some who, though accepting the doctrine of the Divinity of our Lord, entertain grave misgivings as to the mode of His Birth. To such people this book is likely to prove reassuring. Mr. Prestige is a scholar and does not shirk difficulties. He shows in the first instance that the account of the Birth of our Lord in St. Luke is from the same pen as the rest of the Gospel. In the preface to his Gospel, St. Luke claims to be what we may call a scientific historian, verifying his authorities and tracing the origin of his information to a creditable source before inserting it in his biography. This claim is borne out by the researches of sound scholars. For instance, Prof. Ramsay says: "St. Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness" (p. 13). Prof. Harnack is equally positive that the evangelist did not himself invent any feature of the Birth story. Now St. Luke assents without qualification to the belief that Christ was born of a Virgin. Whence did he derive his information? Mr. Prestige argues that from the nature of the case such information must have been derived ultimately from St. Mary herself.

St. Matthew's Gospel was addressed to a Palestinian audience probably before A.D. 66. "The Church of Palestine was the only Church in which there can have been diffused a strong and general tradition about the facts of Christ's earthly life" (p. 24). It "included from the first a number of Jewish converts of high social and intellectual standing, which was in itself a sufficient guarantee against the acceptance of strange doctrines unsupported by adequate authority." Further, "the successor of Saint James was like himself a man in a peculiarly favourable position for knowing family details of the life of Jesus Christ" (p. 24). As neither St. James nor his successor stopped the circulation of St. Matthew's Gospel, we must infer that they assented to the contents of its first two chapters.

In an interesting chapter on the silence of St. Paul, St. Mark and St. John,

Mr. Prestige shows that their literary silence on the subject is no proof of their ignorance. St. Paul, for instance, takes as axiomatic the pre-existence of Christ and His sinlessness, "two problems for which the Virgin Birth is peculiarly important" (p. 65). "When, therefore, we find no explicit reference to the Virgin Birth we are neither more nor less astonished than we are at the discovery that the Galilean ministry is not mentioned, and that such names as Nazareth, Bethlehem, Capernaum and Bethsaida do not occur in any of St. Paul's epistles. It cannot justly be said in either case that silence is a proof of ignorance" (p. 65).

This small volume is altogether a clear, scholarly and orthodox contribution on the subject of the Virgin Birth.

THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE.

THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE. By R. W. McKenna, London: John Murray. 6s. net.

We need optimists who can face the facts of life and hold their faith in the presence of perplexing problems. Life is not easily defined, and the question "Is life worth living?" is more frequently asked than is believed to be the case by most of us. Despair overtakes, failure depresses and the horizon is darkened by losses we cannot replace. It is not easy to say, "All is well—God's in His heaven," but the Christian must hold that good will be the end of life entrusted to the keeping of the Son of God. Dr. McKenna, who wrote "The Adventure of Death" with fine literary charm now gives us "The Adventure of Life," which deals with a wider range of subjects and cheers the reader from the first to the last page.

Dr. McKenna wrote the book disjointedly while on duty in France. It bears signs of the way in which it was composed and it also is more profitable to the reader on this account. If we may hazard a guess, it was not penned in the order it appears and this accounts for some of the chapters having a better perspective than others. Dr. McKenna is no obscurantist. He is familiar with the latest results of modern scientific discovery. He has the rare gift of seeing behind phenomena and making his vision intelligible to others and as we read his speculation that life may have appeared on earth through a life ray striking protoplasm in a favourable environment, we recalled the late Dr. Dallinger's remark that if we had been able to see the beginnings of life on our planet we should have observed the operation of the Laws of Nature in their ordinary manner. Those who are disturbed—and some still are—by the doctrine of Evolution and its bearing on Theism should read our Author's discussion. There is no real explanation on materialistic grounds of the Universe which is permeated by thought, and as we look on it we say, "We once thought God made all things—lo! He is much greater; He made all things make themselves."

The weakest chapter is that on the mystery of pain and suffering. We have many proofs of the helpfulness of pain and of the boon it is to suffering humanity under modern conditions, but as we look back before Science had reached its present position, we cannot use the anodynes to perplexing thought that are placed within our reach to-day. We have to leave the mystery where we found it and trust God to make all plain, when we see the Crucified Lord face to face. We warmly commend this volume as a helpful, useful and sympathetic gift to young men and women, and we believe those of more mature years will read it with equal interest, for it is one of the best books of its class that has come under our notice.

OTHER VOLUMES.

IN THE KING'S SERVICE. By the Rev. G. R. Oakley, M.A., B.D. London : S.P.C.K. 2s. net.

The sub-title of this little book, "An Octave of Addresses to Boys and Girls," indicates its scope. These eight addresses were given during a Mission week, and they deal with such subjects as the Mission, Sin, Jesus our Saviour, Jesus our Example, Talking to Jesus, In Jesus' Company, Helping Jesus and For Jesus' Sake. Some of these addresses have much which appeals to us ; others have statements which do not please us. Thus an otherwise excellent address on "Jesus our Saviour" is spoiled by this extraordinary reference to Confession :—"Remember, dear children, you are always at liberty to ask God's priests to listen to your confession of sin, and God through His Church has given authority to the priest to help you, to declare forgiveness to you, and at the same time a command always to keep the matter quite private to himself and you and God." The address "In Jesus' Company" is also unsatisfactory, as the following extract will show : "It is in Holy Communion, dear children, we can get more closely than anywhere on earth into the company of our Lord, and although most of you are not yet confirmed, and are still looking forward to your first communion as a future event, there is no reason why you should not attend and join in that holy service as far as you may." Clearly this is not a book that Evangelical Churchpeople will find helpful.

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GOD'S BOOK OF HOPE. By B.T.B. London : *Marshall Brothers*.

This is not at all what one might expect from the title. It certainly suggested to us words of comfort addressed to mourners, whereas it is published in the interests of the "Back to the Bible Army"—the latest of the many Bible Reading Unions. It emanates from a member of the congregation at St. Matthew's, Croydon, and contains a memoir of the late Rev. A. J. Easter, together with some appreciative observations about the present Vicar, the Rev. W. E. Daniels. Interesting as some of the chapters are, there is an absence of sequence, and, it seems to us, a consequent lack of usefulness. Of the earnestness that lies behind it there can be no doubt.

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THE "CHRISTIAN SCIENCE" DELUSION. By A. C. Dixon, B.A., D.D. London : *Marshall Brothers*. 1s. net.

That strange cult—which is certainly neither "Christian" nor "Scientific," but which nevertheless seems so fascinating, especially to those who, like the Athenians of old, are ever on the look out for something new—has been frequently unveiled and refuted, but perhaps never more completely and forcibly than by the Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. This exposure ought to be sufficient to open the eyes of those who are being led captive by the cunning philosophy of what certainly seems to us a wild and incomprehensible delusion.

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PSALMS, MEDITATIVE AND MILITANT. NEW METRICAL PARAPHRASE. By W. J. Cooke. London : *Elliot Stock*. Book I. 2s. net.

A new "Tate and Brady" comes as somewhat of a surprise ! However, Mr. Cooke has done his work with considerable ingenuity (a quality which is needed for such an undertaking) and in some cases with real poetic instinct and insight, and if we fail to appreciate such metrical paraphrases and prefer our authorized or Prayer-book versions, we can at least admire Mr. Cooke's courage in undertaking such a task and express the hope that he will find many readers more appreciative than ourselves.

A HISTORY OF THE COLLECTS. By Frederick Armitage. London: *Weave & Co.* 4s. 6d. net.

This is rather more than a history of the collects for it contains succinct notes on the Book of Common Prayer with some account of its sources and of the successive revisions through which it passed. Each collect has a page to itself and in each case the Latin version is given, together with brief but useful historical notes. Mr. Armitage has done his work with judgment and ability, and the general get-up of the book leaves nothing to be desired.

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The C.M.S. "story books" are always excellent. They combine with pleasing narratives strong missionary appeals, and it is good that young people should thus early have their interest awakened in the great cause. Among the more recent of these fascinating publications are *Little Master: A Story of Ceylon* by Mrs. A. Kathleen Shorten (1s. 9d. net); *The Book of other Babies* by Mary Entwistle, (1s. net); *Missionary Pie*, (9d. net); *Red Indians I have Known*, by the Rev. J. B. McCullagh (6d. net) and *Prem's Partners* (4d. net).

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IN HIS STRENGTH. By Constance M. Wishaw. London: *Robert Scott.* 3s. 6d. net.

The authoress of *Being and Doing* has given us a choice selection of helpful thoughts and prayers from various sources, arranged for daily reading. She has accomplished her task in a truly Catholic spirit, as the index of authors testifies. Those who find such books helpful will find this one is worthy to rank with others which have enjoyed a wide circulation.

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The publications of Drummond's Tract Depot, Stirling, are always interesting and a wide distribution of them will do good. Among new issues are: *The Soldiers' Calendar*, 1919 (1s. 6d. per dozen net); *The Upward Way* (1s. 6d. per dozen); *The Heavenly Guide* (2s. per dozen net); *Have You?* Series Nos. 60 to 64 (1s. 6d. per dozen); *The Intermediate State.* (1s. 6d. per dozen).

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Those who have enjoyed Mr. Edward Shillito's papers in the Saturday evening edition of the *Westminster Gazette* will be glad they are now available in volume form, published under the title *The Christian Year in War Time* (Longmans, Green & Co., 2s. 6d. net). Packed full of thought these essays will be found wholesome and stimulating reading, even if in some cases the reasoning, no less than the conclusion, may be open to criticism.

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THE COLOURS OF THE FLAG. By Rev. H. D. S. Sweetapple, D.D. London: *Elliot Stock.* 6d. net.

The attractive cover of this booklet prepared us for the contents, a pleasing address on the red, white and blue of our National Flag, short and to the point.

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The War has stirred the poetic soul of many writers and "A Northern Celt" has written a poem of seventy-eight pages, entitled *The Darkness, the Dawn and a Vision*, descriptive of Britain's part in the great War as "a tribute and a call" (Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Ltd., 2s. 6d. net). The writer's patriotism is beyond dispute.

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A Practical Handbook on the Provision and Use of Altar Linen by the Rev. Roland Borough, M.A. (Elliot Stock, 1s. 6d. net) does not particularly interest us.

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Mr. Harold Begbie's *The Proof of God*, first issued in September, 1914, is now reissued (Constable & Co., Ltd., 1s. 3d. net).