

The Germans are masters of some departments of hymnology, but weak in literal translation. Of the versions of the Reformed Churches, I know only one which in many Psalms equals, and in a few excels, our own. And the fact that this is the version of the Church which was long most closely united in sympathy and history with our own seems a significant fact. Dutch is not a poetical language, and Holland has not been rich in great poets. But in Holland and in Scotland the religious history and theology of the nation were specially calculated to foster a love for the Psalms,

as a spiritual appreciation of their meaning, which goes much further than any mere æsthetic quality. As a whole, indeed, the Dutch version is exceedingly unequal. But some of the Psalms, especially one or two of Ghysen's are most masterly. This writer's rendering of Ps 130 is probably the finest literal translation of a Psalm that was ever written, and shows in the most convincing manner what loving and sympathetic labour can do in reproducing those peculiarities of the Hebrew Psalms, which might at first sight seem inimitable.

## The Mythological Acts of the Apostles.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. J. G. TASKER, HANDSWORTH COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM.

PARTS iii. and iv. of *Horæ Semiticæ* consist respectively of an Arabic version<sup>1</sup> of 'The Mythological Acts of the Apostles,' and of an English translation of the same by Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, who also writes full and scholarly editorial notes. Appendices contain the text and the translation of Syriac palimpsest fragments of the Acts of Judas Thomas from Cod. Sin. Syr. 30. A great gain is the substitution of 'mythological' for 'apocryphal'; for, unlike the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, which bear 'some sort of relation to the Hebrew canonical books and to historic fact,' these legends represent the Apostles as 'degraded to the level of the heathen wizards for whom we are told that they were mistaken.'

A family likeness in the tales is recognized, but they vary both in value and interest. *The Preaching of Matthew* most nearly approaches the Lucan 'Acts of the Apostles' in its 'convincing simplicity and congruity with the conditions of actual human life, in this narrative, which Mrs. Lewis has good grounds for regarding more highly than the rest, on account of its moral teaching and literary beauty, Matthew thus answers a question of Armis the priest, who desires to know something more of the country in which dwells Matthew's God:—

'He is in a clean country; whose streets are justice, and its roads righteousness. My country is a country of righteousness, and its inhabitants die not. There is no darkness in my country, but it is all light. And my God is He who giveth light to all who are in it. And death hath no power over my

countrymen. My country is all furnished with seats; the sweet scent in the midst of it is great; the trees never wither; not one of the inhabitants of my country hath a wish to sin, but they are all just men. There is no slave, but all of them are freemen. My God is merciful and pitiful; a giver to the poor until he maketh them rich. There is no anger in my country, but they are all in harmony; there is no hatred in my country, but they are all united. There is no rebellion in my country, but they are all of one mind. There is no deceit in it, but they are all humble. There is no sound of wailing in it, but joy and delight.'

When Armis the priest would fain go out with Matthew to his country, Matthew says: 'Thou shalt enter my country, and thou shalt see my God, partaking with me in the faith of my Father, and in His Holy Mysteries.'

At the other extreme is *The Story of Peter and Paul*, in regard to which Mrs. Lewis confesses that she had scruples as to the propriety of printing it along with the other stories. 'It seems to belong to the series of the Thousand and One Nights.' Satan is represented as taking the form of a Hindoo man and putting on the garments of a king; thus disguised he approaches the palace of the Roman emperor and says to the door-keepers: 'Go ye in and say unto Bar'amus the emperor, that "thy brother the king of India standeth at the door."' The king of India complains that Peter and Paul came down upon his country from a cloud, that they led astray his viziers and friends, who ultimately rejected him and said, 'We have found a heavenly God better than thee, and He is the King of Peter and Paul, the Ruler of the whole world.'

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Mythologica Apostolorum*. 12s. 6d. net; Translation, 6s. net. Cambridge University Press.

A twofold interest attaches to *The Travels of John the Son of Zebedee*. In the first place, it contains a Liturgy of the Lord's Supper which, in Zahn's judgment, is one of the oldest prayers of the Church. After John had taken bread and given thanks, he spake thus—

'What blessing, or what acknowledgment, or what word of exaltation, or what thanks, or what name shall we speak over the breaking of this bread, save Thy name? Thou who alone art Jesus the Christ, the Saving Name. Thou art the Life-giving Bread which came down from heaven for the salvation of the world. We bless Thee, who hast made us meet for the path of life. We thank Thee. Thou art the Creative Word; Thou art the Guide and the Door into grace; the abundant Salt; the Rich in Jewels; the Ear of Corn; the Life, Righteousness, Strength, Wisdom, the Refuge, the Repose, the Rest, the Vinestock, the Root, the Fountain of Life; who permitteth Himself to be called by that name because of man, that he might be saved and renewed from the former open wickedness of his deeds into which he had fallen through sin. For to Thee belongeth glory for ever and ever.'

In the second place, this story contains 'incidental allusions to heathen customs' which are of value. A bath-house is described in which Satanic power dwelt, because 'when the makers laid the foundation, they dug in the middle of it and placed a living girl there, and heaped up [the earth] over her; and laid the foundation stone.' The researches of scholars and missionaries enable Mrs. Lewis to give abundant proof of the wide prevalence of this horrible custom amongst heathen nations. Dr. Rendel Harris supplies a very curious illustration from Asia Minor: 'After the laying of the founda-

tion stone of a new Protestant church near Harpoot by the American missionaries, the native workers sacrificed a lamb in the trench, and placed its head in the foundation stone. We have there the first stage of the abandonment of the human sacrifice by the substitution of an animal; a later stage will be the placing of ransom money in the stone, a custom which prevails at the present time.' Needless to say, if this conjecture suggests the true origin of the custom, it has now lost all trace of this significance. Coins, like newspapers, are buried beneath foundation stones to give information as to date, etc.

The extracts given from 'The Mythological Acts of the Apostles' will prove that the editor and the publishers have once more earned the gratitude of all students of early Church history. To say that these stories are all below the level of the Lucan narrative is not to say that they are worthless. In some there is probably evidence of a recrudescence of paganism, and in others of incipient gnosticism; in some witness is borne to heathen superstitions, and in others to the ecclesiastical usages of the early Christians. When the chaff of legend has been winnowed away, it is probable that few golden grains of historical fact will be left. Nevertheless, these narratives deserve to be carefully read, for they furnish 'specimens of the kind of history that might have appeared in the New Testament, if that priceless little library of books had come to us from a purely human source.'

## Recent Foreign Theology.

A SURVEY.

BY THE REV. J. A. SELBIE, D.D., MARYCULTER.

### Old Testament.

THE Leo-Gesellschaft (Roman Catholic) commenced two years ago to issue a series of 'Theologische Studien,' edited by Professors A. Ehrhard of Strassburg and F. M. Schindler of Vienna. These are intended to cover the whole domain of scientific theology. Before us lies the ninth issue of the series, entitled *Geographische und ethnographische Studien zum III. and IV. Buche der Könige* (Vienna: Mayer & Co.; price M.8.40). Its author, Dr. Johannes Döllner, gained with it

the Lackenbacher prize offered for the best response to the invitation: 'Res geographicae et ethnographicae III. et IV. libri Regum illustrentur e monumentis historicis.' The author goes over the Books of Kings, picking out, after the fashion of Schrader, passages that seem to stand in need of elucidation from the points of view of geography and ethnography. If he contributes nothing very strikingly fresh, he has at all events consulted all the best authorities, and given his readers the benefit of their views. Dr. Döllner's work is a real contribution to this department of biblical study.