

THE MOSAIC TRADITION. By F. V. Winnett. (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1949. London, Geoffrey Cumberlege; 28s.)

A book of no small interest to Catholic biblical scholars who have grown accustomed to but scarcely convinced by widely accepted views of pentateuchal (or hexateuchal) criticism: views occasionally varying in detail, but all based on the Wellhausen hypothesis. This hypothesis, in the minds of most, has ceased to be such, has hardened into fact, into a sort of academic dogma, to the point of being taught in schools and colleges and embodied in our very dictionaries.

And now, after some seventy long years, there are signs of a reaction in the world of biblical criticism. Scholars here and there have grown weary of accepted methods, have begun to see the sterility of so much merely-critical work divorced from other data and our ever-growing knowledge of the ancient Near East. New trends are specially manifest in recent continental work—straws in the wind.

Now however Professor Winnett serves to confirm us in the view that 'there is something wrong in the usual documentary approach'. For him, Exodus and Numbers constitute one primary source, the 'Mosaic Tradition'. This was supplemented and modified by the Jerusalem priesthood, viz., P, after the Exile; and P had the further difficulty of trying to reconcile the original 'Mosaic Tradition' with a Deuteronomic version put into circulation in the interval.

The last sections of the book include 'The literary history of the Mosaic Tradition', and an Appendix in which is reconstructed the original form (pre-Hezekian) of the Mosaic Tradition. The remainder of the book is a reasoned attempt at justification of a text thus reconstituted, e.g. as the 'original form' starts with Exodus III, reasons are given for Exodus I and II being from another 'Life of Moses'. Various chapters deal with the themes: The Story of the Plagues, The Traditions of the Oppression, of the Law-giving, of the Tent of Meeting, etc. Some are the substance of papers presented at meetings of the Canadian section of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis.

In the Story of the Plagues, the schematic arrangement is stressed, and the conclusion is that 'it is surely more reasonable to see in this pattern the work of a single mind striving after stylistic arrangement'. Yet we would urge also that the various phenomena and plagues described in the text of Exodus correspond to known climatic and other changes in the Nile valley, and the very sequence of phenomena described corresponds in great part to a real sequence in nature, and all the while the sacred author strives to show unearthly realities.

Historico-literary criticism is essential and insufficient; we must envisage *all* the elements at issue. There is a crying need for 'total' exegesis. Thus even when our author does touch upon topographical

data, it is less convincingly: e.g., 'there is a striking absence of "built" houses at Pera, most of the homes being hollowed out of the rock' (p. 67) will sound strange to those who have studied the rock-cut monuments of the Nabatean capital.

This is perhaps the main criticism we would offer of Professor Winnett's reasoned investigations and analyses, all of which deserve careful thought and study, and are valuable in their limits.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE. By Charles Williams. (Faber; 15s.)

It is perhaps significant that Charles Williams had first intended to entitle this book *A History of Christendom*. It remains a history of what he thought, and many will think with him, the most important thing in the Church, namely the unending struggle to reconcile the natural with the supernatural, the human and the divine. Of course in a brief survey over two thousand years many episodes and periods will be too hastily dismissed and each reader will find his own cause for complaint. But what remains throughout is the unalterable fact that the Church is the Body of Christ and the central strand in the texture of her history is the movement of the Holy Ghost in her life. So we can see, and hear, the Spirit of God which once brooded over the chaos of creation now uttering through the cries of a Christian slave-girl martyr, through the philosophy of Augustine of Hippo, through the authoritative voice of the Church's Councils, through the mystics and allegorical poets, and even in our own day through the Newman and Claudels. The whole book is in fact a commentary on *Verbum Caro Factum Est* and this second edition is more than ever welcome when the clamour of statesmen, philosophers and even poets may easily deafen us to the more subtle cadences of the Eternal Word.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

SILVER SHEAVES. Published by the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary, Killeshandra, Ireland; 7s.6d.

This is a record of twenty-five years of missionary work in Central Africa. Founded by the late Dr Shanahan, Vicar Apostolic of Southern Nigeria, directed by the late Dr Leen, C.S.Sp., and nursed by the Dominican Sisters of Cabra, this new Missionary Congregation has developed and spread rapidly. Devoted to educational, social and medical work of all kinds, it has shown the adaptability necessary for work in the African Mission fields. One of its latest ventures is to take over a large native hospital in Johannesburg. This is one more example of the Church's unending fecundity in supplying the needs of the Missions and of the apostolic zeal of the Irish. May this record help to bring the sisters the spiritual and temporal help they need in their great work!

D.M.