

EARLY CHURCH PORTRAIT GALLERY. By Maisie Ward. (Sheed and Ward; 25s.)

One sometimes wonders whether, if St Thomas Aquinas had been able to obtain Chrysostom on Matthew, which he would have given Paris to possess, he might not have found it rather a disappointment. Is that work not most remarkable for the glimpse it gives of the skill of a great preacher rather than for any hint of deep theological insight, remarkable above all for its occasional brilliant characterizations of contemporary life, which make one feel that it might be more exciting to read *about* Chrysostom than to read him? It seems, however, that we shall still have to wait that for deft recreation of Chrysostom in his setting which ought some day to be possible. Dom Baur's painstaking and monumental study, of which the first volume now appears in an English translation that avoids few of the idioms of German grammar, may well require of the reader something of the ascetic arduour appropriate to the gymnasium in which, according to the translator, the author received his earlier education. The student will be better able to find his way about in a book which will never make easy reading, when the second volume, which will contain an index, becomes available. Meanwhile Mr Attwater's more modest book, which is continuously aware of Baur's work, will be of better service to the general reader. For, although it does not give us the portrait that would bring Antioch in Chrysostom's day to life, it is likely to leave one with a taste to know more about him.

This is presumably the service that an elementary patrology ought also to do, but it can scarcely do so without a more vital and personal contact with the materials than that which Fr Dirksen, with disarming frankness, claims for himself in the preface to his *Elementary Patrology*. It is, he tells us, 'meant to be a relatively inexpensive tool. For these reasons there are no footnotes, there is no bibliography, and quotations from foreign languages have been reduced to a minimum.' It is difficult to appreciate the reasoning that connects these two sentences and anyone who is really beginning to take an interest in the Fathers will be likely to turn with relief and a good deal more profit to Maisie Ward's *Early Church Portrait Gallery*, which may not be a student's tool, but is a workmanlike demonstration of how to use one's reading well, and a generous, personal, appreciative introduction to many great saints and Fathers from St Ignatius of Antioch to St Benedict. The student will even find a bibliography at the end which he will probably reach in a mood to follow up.

ÆLFRED SQUIRE, O.P.

J. G. HAMANN. *A Study in Christian Existence. With Selections from His Writings.* By Ronald Gregor Smith. (Collins; 21s.)

The Wizard of the North is certainly not everyone's cup of tea. Nobody would describe him as a systematic thinker. Nor did he ever claim to be one. On the contrary, he declared that he had no aptitude for 'truths, principles, systems', but only for 'crumbs, fragments, fancies, sudden inspirations'. But his style is so allusive that even these fragments and sudden inspirations tend

to baffle the reader. Yet Hamann possesses some historical importance both for his relation to the *Sturm and Stress* movement in German literature and as, in some respects, a forerunner of Kierkegaard. And he is interesting as a man and as a Christian thinker. Hence we can be grateful to Professor Gregor Smith for providing us with this study of Hamann's life and thought, accompanied by some selections from his writings. There is indeed a fine recent German edition of the Wizard's *Works*; but the ordinary reader is not at all likely to consult it. Further, life and writings go together. As Professor Gregor Smith remarks, Hamann's 'writings must be read as a reflection of this life, or as a witness to it'.

Hamann has a special interest for English readers owing to the fact that he underwent a religious conversion when in London in 1758. Moreover, he took a lively interest in English thought. He had a weak spot for Hume. 'Hume is always my man, because he at least honours the principle of belief and has taken it up into his system.' Whether Hamann always clearly understood what Hume was about is open to question. In fact, Hamann questions it himself. But the Wizard of the North, in spite of the title which he traditionally bears, had his feet very much on the ground. 'Not *cogito, ergo sum*, but the other way round.' When relating how he had postponed reading an instalment of Kant's first *Critique* in order to do his stint of Voltaire for the day, he adds that when he came to turn his attention to Kant he prepared himself beforehand by taking a dose of Glauber's salts. And he remarks about Kant, not without some perspicacity, that 'without knowing it, his enthusiasm for the intellectual world beyond space and time is worse than Plato's'. Not that Hamann lacked concern with supersensible reality; far from it. But he insists that the approach to God is through the world and history. Or, to put matters the other way round, he insists that man hears the word of God, if he has the faith to hear it, in the world, in life, in history. In a sense faith is less of a leap with Hamann than with Kierkegaard.

In Hamann's writings one comes across remarks which have an astonishingly familiar ring. 'I am inclined to think that our whole philosophy consists more of language than of reason, and the misunderstandings of countless words . . . have produced a whole world of questions which have as little reason to be raised as to be answered.' And he alludes to the 'hereditary defect and leprosy of ambiguity' which clings to metaphysics. But if he expresses scepticism about metaphysics and the scope of reason, he obviously does not do so with a view to encouraging religious disbelief. Reason shows us our ignorance and sin; the saving truth is 'historically revealed'.

Hamann was a Lutheran. But it is interesting to read in Professor Gregor Smith's account of his life of the spiritual help which the Catholic Princess Gallitzin received from her conversation with him.

FREDERICK C. COPLESTON, S.J.

SOME PROBLEMS OF THE CONSTITUTION. By G. Marshall and G. C. Moodie. (Hutchinson; 21s.)

THE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS. By D. V. Verney. (Routledge; 28s.)  
Recent events, at home and abroad, have made Englishmen more aware