

ALBERT THE GREAT. By S. M. Albert, O.P. (Blackfriars; 7s. 6d.)

There are two ways of writing the biography of a saint, the medieval one where the intention was edification and the attention was focussed on the supernatural virtues of the hero and his visions and miracles, and that of the modern historian whose aim is to give a critical survey of the period and of the influence of the saint on the life and thought of his contemporaries. In the present book both methods are combined but without much success. A medieval writer using a familiar technique and either himself a disciple of his hero, or in touch with his disciples could produce a piece of work which was at its best a living portrait and at its worst had something of the formal conventionalised charm of a stained glass window. A modern one, however judicious his use of primary and secondary sources, always tends to give a colourless photograph. The historical background also, though conscientiously and laboriously sketched is, except for the first few pages, barely adequate and no sense of drama is ever conveyed to the reader. The rediscovery of the philosophy and science of Aristotle in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries is the most significant event in the history of medieval thought and the sudden presentation of an entirely new conception of reality and a world of science undreamed of before to a mind as original and brilliant as St Albert's must have been an amazing and wonderful experience. The excitement of the struggle between seculars and mendicants at Paris during which the latter were in danger of attack whenever they ventured into the streets and Aquinas had to deliver his inaugural lecture under the protection of the royal guards is also not felt. The most vivid pages of the book are those which deal with his episcopate, and the modesty of the preface disarms criticism. The humanity and charm of the saint as well as his holiness are apparent especially when he is allowed to speak for himself. These are the qualities which make a more adequate biography desirable although it would tax the learning and skill of a Gilson or a Maritain to do full justice to the philosophical and scientific significance of the great Dominican doctor and saint whose personality and achievements have been unduly obscured by those of the beloved pupil whose gifts he so quickly realised and so generously and self-effacingly brought to the notice of his superiors.

D. L. DOUIE.

THE MASS IN SLOW MOTION. By Ronald Knox. (Sheed and Ward; 6s.)

'It's an ill wind . . .' and all that. The hazards of war were not so kind to everyone as to a certain girls' school which was moved for a few years from the bomb-infested area of Kensington to Aldenham Park in Shropshire. We suspect that Mgr Knox himself was not altogether displeased at this invasion of his solitude, and that he was glad to have an excuse to turn once a week with a

sigh of relief from the textual intricacies of Job in order to explain to this appreciative young audience 'what it felt like to say Mass'. Now that it is all over, that the girls have gone back to London and that Mgr Knox, like St Jerome in his cave, is able to concentrate solely on his biblical studies, the general public has been admitted to these Sunday afternoon conferences by their publication in book form. They have been printed as they were delivered and we are invited to take them as they stand: no attempt having been made to 'edit' them. It will be indeed our own loss if we cannot while reading them do, in spirit, the school uniform of Mary Jane and her companions, and take a humble back seat in the chapel at Aldenham. No matter how much a subject may have been written about we can be sure that when Mgr Knox writes about it the approach will be fresh and thought-provoking. This is most certainly so in the case of the Mass, and the book before us is perhaps one of the author's most personal pieces of writing.

If, in saying this, we have said enough to indicate the charm of the book, it is also true that we have pointed to its chief defect. The Mass is a corporate act of worship in which priest and people take part together as one objective entity. An ever deeper understanding of the notion of sacrifice and of how the assembly is symbolic of that greater corporation, the mystical Body of Christ, is surely more important for fruitful participation in the Christian mysteries than simply to try 'to think of a way in which we can follow the Mass devotionally' or to devise any 'system for attending Mass devoutly'. To insist at greater length would be ungracious to an author to whom we owe so much.

The pages of this book are pure of foot-notes, but despite this the reviewer feels fairly certain from the treatment given in them to some 'obscure points in the history of the Canon, for instance, that the author has somewhat more than a nodding acquaintance with 'the clever people' whom he pretends not to know much about.

G. D. SCHLEGEL, O.S.B.

THE NEW TESTAMENT of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, newly translated from the Latin Vulgate and authorised by the Archbishops and Bishops of England and Wales. (Burns Oates; 12s. 6d.)

The new demy octavo edition of Mgr Knox's English New Testament has certain advantages over its smaller predecessor. Its pages are fewer and their lay-out is improved. The heavier type is pleasanter to the eyes. There are no substantial changes in the text or notes, though in the latter a very few additions, omissions and corrections have been made. The page-headings have been partly re-written, chiefly to suit the longer page. A new system of reference to the foot-notes has been introduced, but is no improvement on the old: the verse referred to should still have been quoted in the note, as it is