

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