

Recensiones

EGIDIO DA VITERBO, *Scechina e Libellus de litteris sanctis*, ed. François Secret (Edizione Nazionale dei Classici del Pensiero Italiano, Serie II, n. 10 & 11). Roma, Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, Università di Roma, 1959. 2 vol. in-8. 239, 340 pp. Lire 10,000.

To write a comprehensive biography of Egidio da Viterbo (1469-1532) will be a formidable task. He was to an eminent degree a versatile representative of that latter period of the Italian Renaissance which is breath-taking in its display of the flights of human endeavour, and his biographer will need to appreciate, though not necessarily to master, all those branches of learning in which Egidio exercised his talents. He was at once a theologian and philosopher, a celebrated preacher, a poet in Italian vernacular, historian, orientalist, biblical scholar, papal diplomat, reformer of the Augustinian order, and a cardinal resident at Rome during a crucial period of church history. Nowadays, in the realm of scholarship the *uomo universale* of the Renaissance has been supplanted by the specialist. Consequently, the one practicable method of preparing the groundwork for a satisfactory biography of Egidio would be an arrangement whereby a number of specialists in different fields would deal separately with his religious, intellectual, and political activities. The task will then remain for an ambitious biographer to weave the findings of the specialists into an accurate and harmonious pattern.

As a result of research by various experts over the past thirty years it would now be possible to attempt an adequate survey of his life and achievements. Two aspects of his intellectual activity have until quite recently remained closed territories. These concern Egidio as orientalist and biblical scholar, and they involve in particular his study of the cabbala, that corpus of Jewish esoteric doctrines and mystic interpretations of the sacred writings of the Chosen People. A trained expert in this field, François Secret, has over the past few years engaged in research on Egidio as a cabbalist. M. Secret is a product of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes at Paris, where he had the good fortune to study under André Chastel and Georges Vajda; he is now attached to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. He has published a host of articles on various aspects of the christian cabbalists of the Renaissance, and his specific interest in Egidio first became evident in a monograph, *Le Zôhar chez les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris 1958). His 'Le

symbolisme de la kabbale chrétienne dans la « Scechina » d'Egidio da Viterbo', in *Archivio di Filosofia*, 1958, was a substantial augury of the edition which has now appeared in two volumes of two of Egidio's cabbalistic works, *Scechina* and *Libellus de litteris sanctis*.

The *Libellus* (now Vat. lat. 5808) was completed in 1517 and was dedicated to Cardinal Giulio dei Medici, later Pope Clement VII; *Scechina* (now Paris, Bibl. Nat. lat. 3363) was composed in or about 1530 at the request of Clement. It may come as a surprise to some to find that as late as 1530 the cabbala was still attracting favourable papal interest despite the condemnation of Reuchlin's *Augenspiegel* by Leo X in 1520.

The *Libellus* is a graceful little work of fifty folios, which was to serve as an introduction to the study of the cabbala. The dedication is a typical Renaissance flourish and bow, in which Egidio refers to the remarkable revival of the arts and letters which had taken place since the return of the popes to Rome from Avignon. Compliments in limpid period latin are paid to the dei Medici family and to the reigning Pope Leo in particular for the encouragement he had given to the study of the scriptures and oriental languages. Egidio then passes with hardly a conscious pause into the body of the text, beginning with the hebrew letter Aleph, and continues on with measured comment on each letter of the alphabet until he reaches Tau. Egidio's intimate knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, of Plato and Vergil, shows itself in frequent references and allusions. M. Secret remarks that the *Libellus* is of that class of literature on the hebrew alphabet to which St Jerome and Eusebius made similar contributions.

Scechina is a more ambitious work than the *Libellus*. Although Egidio declares that he undertook the work only because of an express command of the pope there is no doubt that he was quick to seize an opportunity of expounding a subject which lay close to his heart. In the cabbalist scheme of theosophy God made his existence and will known through the medium of ten *Sephiroth* or intelligences, of which *Scechina* was the tenth and represented the union of all the *Sephiroth*. Egidio uses this image to explain that christianity was then passing through the tenth cycle, that of the *Scechina*, in which the church was threatened with great dangers but in which also a new Cyrus had arisen, the Emperor Charles V, who would act as defender of the catholic faith, particularly against the Turk. Egidio diplomatically did not dwell on the fact that the army of this new Cyrus had been responsible for the disastrous Sack of Rome in 1527. However, *Scechina* is not a disguised political tract. Like so many of Egidio's works it is primarily exegetical, a discourse on symbolic theology, on the inner sense of revelation and sacred scripture. It is too early yet, as M. Secret remarks, to pronounce on the value of Egidio's cabbalist works, but one has only to glance through *Scechina* to observe how effortlessly he can

run through the whole gamut of cabbalist literature and interpret it in a christian manner. A predominant feature of this work, as of so many more of Egidio's compositions, is that it is a mosaic of scriptural quotations and allusions. In addition there is throughout *Scechina* a strong current of neo-platonic ideas, with many references to Plato, Proclus, Simplicius and Jamblichus ; inevitably Egidio illustrates from classical authors, principally from Homer and Vergil. Nor is he without contemporary references, including several to Cuba and Hispaniola in the New World. It is noticeable that he makes no comment on Luther.

One cannot but highly commend M. Secret for producing a thorough scholarly work. It is only when a representative number of Egidio's works have been published in similar critical editions that we shall be able to assess his importance. M. Secret's edition is crowned by a series of excellent indexes — indexes of biblical citations, of Egidio's corrections to the Vulgate, of hebrew words, of hebrew authors, and of proper names ; there is also a general index.

A special tribute should be paid to Professors Enrico Castelli and Giovanni Calò, the editors of the series in which these two volumes appear. Their purpose to make available the complete texts of significant works by a number of Italian authors gives us an admirable opportunity to judge the evidence on its own merits. It would be ungracious to conclude without mentioning the attractive format and printing of the two volumes.

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John Bagnell BURY, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian*. New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1958. 2 vol., xxv-471 et ix-494 pp. Prix : \$ 4.

Sous couverture plastifiée et cartonnée, les Editions Dover de New York présentent, en deux parties, la réédition intégrale de l'Histoire du Bas-Empire Romain de Bury, d'après l'original paru en 1923. La première va de 395 à 518, la seconde est consacrée aux règnes de Justin et de Justinien jusqu'à la mort de ce dernier, le 14 novembre 565.

Dans le premier tome, l'auteur, après une courte préface, commence par donner les tables généalogiques de la Maison de Théodose le Grand, de la Maison de Léon I, de la Famille d'Anastase I et de Théodoric l'Ostrogoth. Vient ensuite la liste des évêques de Rome, des Patriarches de Constantinople, Alexandrie et Antioche ainsi que celle des évêques et Patriarches de Jérusalem. En treize chapitres très denses, il nous parle successivement de la constitution de la monarchie ; de la machine administrative ; de Constantinople ; des Barbares aux confins de l'Empire ; de la suprématie de Stilicon ; des invasions germaniques sous Honorius ; de Théodose II et Mar-