The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

Possidius' Life of St. Augustine *Sancti Augustini Vita Scripta a Possidio Episcopo*. Edited, with revised Text, Introduction, Notes, and an English Version, by H. T. Weiskotten. (Dissertation for Doctorate.) 5½ x 8". Pp. 176. Paper. Princeton: University Press (and Clarendon Press).

C. H. Evelyn-White

The Classical Review / Volume 34 / Issue 3-4 / May 1920, pp 71 - 72

DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00013561, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00013561

How to cite this article:

C. H. Evelyn-White (1920). The Classical Review, 34, pp 71-72 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00013561

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

- (1) *Biennium Latinum*, a translation and composition book for beginners (pp. 146; 2s. 6d. net), which is intended to be used with a Card of First Rules (8d. net); and (2) *Further Rules for Latin Prose* (pp. 108; 2s. net), to be used with a volume of *Exercises* (pp. 192; 2s. 6d. net).

The last-named volume includes 173 exercises of detached sentences, a number of exercises on *oratio obliqua* and 'periods,' and 51 historical passages a little more difficult than those generally set in Responsions. The writer is an experienced schoolmaster, and has evidently for a long time been interested in the teaching of Latin. He tells us that he has come to the conclusion that 'what with full Vocabularies and Notes, and the Accidence printed in the same volume,' the beginner has had things made too easy for him. Accordingly, in *Biennium* the words are introduced gradually in separate lists, which are intended to be learnt by heart, and no general vocabulary is given to help those who have failed to learn them. In the second book a Vocabulary is given, but it does not include the commonest words. The Rules, too, are bound in separate volumes, presumably in order that the pupil may be required at times to show that he has mastered them.

The Exercises are well constructed, but some of the Rules seem to us unsatisfactory. E.g. 'Verbs governing a Dative in the Active must be used only impersonally in the Passive.' According

to this we must not write *Epistula mihi reddita est* for *reddo* governs a Dative. The Rule is of course meant to apply only to Intransitive Verbs, but this does not stand out clearly, for as the second part of the Rule runs, 'Intransitive Verbs must, in the Passive, be used impersonally only,' the pupil may well think that the first part applies to Transitive Verbs. (2) In the Rules for *Oratio obliqua* we read, 'N.B.—Be careful to remember that in the Latin Infinitive, the Present stands also for the Imperfect.' This means, 'we suppose, that *Dixit se scribere* may represent *Scribebam*.' We should very much like to see an example, for the doctrine is not confirmed by our own experience of Latin, nor is it supported by the better grammars (cp. Gildersleeve, § 653). But we have seen similar statements in some other elementary books, and we often find that boys have been taught to speak of the Present and Imperfect Infinitive. (3) As is often the case in elementary composition books a good many uncommon types of sentence are introduced. For instance, is there sufficient evidence for such a sentence as *Incertum est num futurum sit ut urbs capiatur*? Is it really idiomatic Latin? The fact seems to be that the Roman never took to this form of expression, because he found the present or imperfect subjunctive conveyed the meaning clearly enough (e.g. Cicero, *Pis.* 79); if it did not he could help it out with an adverb or turn the sentence into the active.

Σ.

POSSIDIUS' LIFE OF ST. AUGUSTINE.

Sancti Augustini Vita Scripta a Possidio Episcopo. Edited, with revised Text, Introduction, Notes, and an English Version, by H. T. WEISKOTTEN. (Dissertation for Doctorate.) 5½" × 8". Pp. 176. Paper. Princeton: University Press (and Clarendon Press).

THIS carefully edited rendering of the work of Possidius is based on a collation of ten of the earlier known MSS., close attention being paid to various

readings in other copies. The printed texts of the *Vita* were ordinarily included in St. Augustine's works, and no separate edition earlier than that of Salinas, printed at Rome in 1731, is known. The *textus receptus* dates back to the Louvain edition of 1564.

Written about A.D. 432 in a plain and somewhat commonplace style, corresponding to the Latinity of the period, and with no great pretension to literary merit, it yet occasionally rises to a high

level. Discarding numerous text alterations made by previous editors without authority, the present editor's purpose has been to reproduce, as nearly as possible, what Possidius wrote, rather than what some assumed he should have written. This in itself is a laudable endeavour, and serves to enhance the value of a work for which many have long waited.

The life of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, up to the time of his conversion to the Christian faith, contained in his *Confessiones*, is continued to the time of his decease in the *Vita* bequeathed to us by his faithful and intimate friend, Possidius, a native of Proconsular Africa, who became Bishop of Calama in Numidia about A.D. 400. It would appear that Possidius is only known in connection with St. Augustine and the graceful biography derived for the most part from St. Augustine himself. Both men had painful experience of the trials incidental to the troublous times through which the North African Church of the fifth century was called to pass. Upon the Vandals invading Africa in 428, Calama was taken, never again to rise. Possidius took refuge in the city of Hippo with Augustine, who died there during its siege in the arms of his devoted colleague. The influence of St. Augustine and his association with Possidius is discernible throughout the *Vita*, not only in the precise views enunciated but in the actual use of words and forms of expression. Among other features of interest which render the work serviceable are the numerous sidelights upon ecclesiastical usages and the conditions under which the early Church laboured.

Some singular points are observable in the text—e.g. the balanced antithesis employed, wherein every word in the first member of a passage is made to correspond with a word in the second member having a like construction with the same final syllable. The use by Possidius of the word *Romaniae* as applied to distinguish the world of Roman

civilisation, viewed apart from the Roman Empire, and *impraetermis* = incessantly, are among the earliest instances of their use in Latin literature. There are several uncommon and post-classical words scattered throughout the text.

The quaint allusion to the habit of tale-bearing at the table is well illustrated in St. Augustine's domestic ordering. We are told that he set himself *contra pestilentiam humanae consuetudinis*, and had this inscription on his table:

Quisquis amat dictis absentum rodere vitam,
Hac mensa indignam noverit esse suam.
(cap. xxii.).

Possidius quotes an unidentified elegiac couplet by a secular poet desirous of remaining a living voice after death, who directed that the following inscription should appear on his monument:

Vivere post obitum vates vis nosse viator?
Quod legis ecce loquor, vox tua nempe mea
est.
(cap. xxxi.).

It would be interesting to learn its authorship.

Mr. Weiskotten has given a body of various readings as footnotes; those of a general character are supplied in some twenty pages at the end of the volume. The bibliography is brief and far from satisfactory. No mention is made of any English translation, but it must not be forgotten that Abraham Woodhead (1608-1678), in an English version of the *Confessiones*, carried the life of Augustine to its close out of Possidius. The *Indiculus*, the earliest detailed list of St. Augustine's writings, added by Possidius to the *Vita* is also omitted. A small and poorly executed map of Provincial Africa, based upon that in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, appears at the end of the volume. The work is altogether worthy of a better 'setting' than that in which it appears.

C. H. EVELYN-WHITE.