

Bossuet's methods are far from blameless. He uses her confidential letters in public controversy without her permission, and always to her detriment. But it cannot be denied that he was as sincere as she was, and genuinely felt that her brand of mysticism was dangerous, and that its effects on others would prove pernicious in the extreme. For she was not content with the hidden life of a mystic, but was determined to form a spiritual *élite*, especially in Court circles.

But the main interest for readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* is the vivid picture of the spiritual climate of seventeenth-century France—the France in which so many Orders of nuns have their origin. Here we see the flight from the liturgy, the reckless production of ready-made and highly emotional mystical formulas, imposed on communities as a substitute for the Divine Office. These personal and extravagant effusions, that few could recite with conviction, were obstinately clung to by successive generations of nuns as though they were the very oracle of God, and acquired by constant repetition a quite fictitious sacredness. Even Fenelon could write that 'it was a strange thing that those who wanted to follow a way which meant being attached to nothing should be so attached to the way itself and those who counselled it'. (p. 97.) Perhaps Bossuet, whose stomach was turned whenever he read her book (p. 107), saw further into the future than did Fenelon, and was less concerned with the fate of one innocent woman than with the health and sanity of the many who followed her.

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.

CONFIRMATION STORIES. By a Sister of Notre Dame. (Sands & Co. Ltd; 5s.)

This collection of good, varied stories should prove very useful to those who have to instruct children for the sacrament of Confirmation. Their value is increased because practical issues are not far in the background; and the making of good resolutions, etc., is made to seem nothing but normal. No doubt it is as a result of practical experience that the authoress gives most of her attention to the gift of fortitude, referring to the other gifts (with the exception of the gift of wisdom in the story about Saint Stephen) only by implication.

E.B.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD and SELECTIONS FROM THE LITTLE FLOWERS OF ST FRANCIS. Edited by Hugh Martin, C.H., D.D. (S.C.M. Press; 8s. 6d.)

The S.C.M. Press has given us a well-printed edition of these two well-known works: an anonymous translation of Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*, and selections from Roger Hudleston's translation of the *Fioretti*. Brother Lawrence was a seventeenth-century

French Carmelite lay-brother whose now well-known spiritual way was of simple abandonment to God's will, the continual seeking of God in everything, the doing of little things out of great love for God. However there is behind it a great depth, as may be seen from the balance of elements in his piety: . . . 'the whole substance of religion was faith, hope and charity'. . . (4th Conversation); 'We must know before we can love' (9th Letter), yet 'the acts of the understanding were comparatively of little value, and the acts of the will all' (2nd Conversation). In his life we find this same kind of balance. He was absolutely sure of his spiritual path and said he needed no director (2nd Conversation), yet he humbly begs the opinion of a correspondent as to whether he is being deluded (2nd Letter). He acknowledges his feelings of sensible devotion, yet knows it is wrong to be taken up with them (4th Letter).

Where Brother Lawrence was, we feel, deliberately withdrawn, Saint Francis was filled with a burning apostolic love. He did great things out of great love for God, and there is a fierce intensity about most of the *Fioretti* which is brought out by its being adjoined to the more restrained *Practice*. One wishes that the editor in his brief introduction had not left us with the impression that Saint Francis died as a disillusioned crusader: 'Dissensions . . . provoked by the desire of many for a relaxation of the stern rule made Francis retire from the active direction (of his Order), heart-broken, blind, ill. He died in 1226.' This is just a fraction of the story. Sabatier's remarks about the *Fioretti* depicting 'the soul and the heart' (and not the words and deeds) of the early Franciscans need much explanation.

Grateful as we must be for non-Catholic interest in Saint Francis, a great disservice would be done to him if this were to lead an incautious reader into thinking that some undogmatic spiritual doctrine is to be found in its pages (and, for that matter, in the pages of Brother Lawrence) and that all the rest is superfluous.

E.B.

THEY SPEAK BY SILENCES. By a Carthusian. Translated from the French by a Monk of Parkminster. (Longmans, Green; 7s. 6d.)

'What enchants me in these pages and constitutes their perfection is that they . . . awaken those deeper regions of the soul where God dwells, by which the soul can be united to him. But they contact them in the only way in which they can do (so): by touches. . . . These are what one may call "distant scenes": the overtones of a picture; and we need them. We intuitively know that reality is greater than ourselves, and that no words of ours can ever adequately express that reality. . . . Anyone who thinks he understands it fully is lessening both it and us. Anyone, on the other hand, who has caught some glimpse of