

phenomenon embodying a certain 'vision of reality'. It arises at certain crises in human history, such as fifth-century Athens and Shakespearean England, when new forces come to disrupt a traditional order of life; it belongs to an age of transition, 'it comes up like a flame from the fires that consume an epoch'. But the 'original vision' of the great tragic poet, like Sophocles or Shakespeare, gives an insight into the essential condition of human existence; it reveals the radical insufficiency of human life as far as the world of sense and time is concerned. It has thus a permanent value, and yet in itself it is 'not enough'; it has to find its place within the whole of a philosophy which looks beyond the temporal to what Jaspers calls 'the Encompassing'. It is a peculiarity of his theory that he denies to Christianity any sense of 'tragic knowledge'. For the Christian, he says, 'the darkness of terror is pierced by the radiance of blessedness and grace'. In a sense, no doubt, this is true. A Christian can never rest in tragic knowledge; he will always see beyond it. But in another sense we feel that his view rests on a real misunderstanding. The tragic experience lies at the very heart of Christianity; it is the experience of Gethsemane and the Cross, which every Christian has to undergo. But may it not be that too often we allow the 'consolations of religion' to blind us to the real tragedy of existence and so give ground for the view that Christianity has no real answer to it? The final significance alike of tragedy and of that 'eclipse of God', of which Buber speaks, is to be found where neither Jaspers nor Buber is prepared to look for it, in the last words from the Cross, which are repeated through history: 'Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabacthani!'

BEDE GRIFFITHS, O.S.B.

SIMONE WEIL AS WE KNEW HER. By J. M. Perrin and G. Thibon. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 16s.)

We shall probably never know more of the inner life of Simone Weil, of the conflicting forces which shaped her mind and character, than can be learned from this book. It is the work of the two men who knew her most intimately (though only for a short period) at the most creative period of her life, and who moreover both loved and understood her as no one else had done. It is of the utmost significance that it was to these two men, both Catholics, the one a priest, the other a layman, that Simone Weil entrusted all her writings and gave her complete confidence. Nothing can show more clearly the extent to which she felt herself to be drawn towards the Catholic Church. On the other hand both Father Perrin and Gustave Thibon from their different points of view make it clear how immense was the gulf which actually separated her from the Church. Father Perrin writes perhaps with a more intimate understanding of her mind, and it becomes clear from his analysis how deep was the conflict between the profound intuition, which grace had given her of the mystery of Faith, and the habits of her mind which had been formed by her early education.

She was an intuitive genius with marvellous insights both in the natural and the supernatural order, but there were at the same time grave defects in her understanding, particularly of history, which often made her judgments childish and absurd. Yet Father Perrin continually emphasises the incompleteness of Simone Weil's experience. She was a soul torn by the deep conflict between her personal feelings and opinions and the tremendous demands which divine love was making upon her. The conflict was never resolved, and perhaps it is part of her significance for our age that it was not; but there can be no doubt that her conflict could only have been resolved by her becoming a saint, and it is to a 'new saintliness' that the work of Simone Weil is calling the world today.

Gustave Thibon gives us more of the personal side of Simone Weil, her awkwardness and physical unattractiveness, 'prematurely bent and old-looking', and the astonishing beauty of the soul which showed in her eyes. For him it may be said the same conflict between exterior and interior is reflected in Simone Weil's view of the Church. He emphasises the attraction which Simone Weil felt for the 'soul' of the Church and her repulsion from the 'body' so marred by human imperfection. This is a conflict which again only grace could have resolved, but Gustave Thibon, while insisting that the 'body' is necessary to a religion which is incarnate, yet points to the need of purification which is no less necessary in every generation in the Church, if souls are not to be driven away from it on account of our imperfections. Simone Weil is thus a portent challenging us to try to make the outside of the Church more worthy of the truth which it enshrines and which she sought with such an ardour of self-purification.

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SAINTS AND OURSELVES. Edited by Philip Caraman, S.J. (Hollis and Carter; 10s. 6d.)

It may appear unmannerly to complain that the authors' names appear on the dust-cover and that one has to look inside the book to discover the saints dealt with. There is a fashion at present for these collections of studies of the saints; it is to be wondered, though, whether the interest is in the saints or, as may be suspected, in the well-known authors' reaction to them. Such a pitfall is hard to avoid in a book of this sort, but having pointed it out I must add immediately that these twelve studies, which originally appeared in *The Month*, are excellent. And very largely they are so precisely because they show us personal reactions, so that although the saint is the important person in each essay it is the reaction of saint upon author that is to be sought.

Two essays stand out in particular: Robert Speaight's on St Augustine and Rosalind Murray's on St John of the Cross. The former not only paints a portrait but comes to grips with Augustine's thought. 'A nature so violent as Augustine's might easily have twisted to fanaticism, and even