

A similar revision of education seems to be necessary 'in some educational establishments in which formation in purity holds (such) a prominent place in their system (that) the very word love is banned'. (p. 48.) Or perhaps it is rather our language which needs revision, for it can only be a horrid fear of ambiguity which leads Canon Leclercq to say: 'Man needs love. The Church is not so simple as to believe that men can be induced to deprive themselves of love, apart from the small numbers of those who deliberately renounce it in order to consecrate themselves to God'. (p. 41.) This sounds rather like carrying coals to Newcastle!

Another question of presentation: why does the author not favour us with a few stories and anecdotes (of which he must have a vast store, since no one could talk so much sense as he does on this subject without a wealth of experience to draw upon)? This is not a minor matter if the young people for whom the book is intended are going to read it, because they soon become bored with a philosophical treatise. Our spiritual guides need to acquire the habit of telling stories; we remember stories at moments when principles seem to belong to an unreal world of remote abstractions.

Finally, at the very end of his book Canon Leclercq makes a suggestion which we should like him to expand. He says that the opposition between Christians and the world has nowadays become so acute as to make it almost necessary for Christian households to form themselves into groups so as to make a social *milieu* inspired by the Christian ideal (p. 171). It is a sad comment on the human condition, and its division even from the natural law, if the vocation of marriage has become the vocation to solitude.

DONALD NICHOLL

A TREATISE ON INTERIOR PRAYER: FOLLOWED BY A FEW COUNSELS ON THE SAME MATTER. By Dom Innocent Le Masson. Translated from the French by the Prior of Parkminster. (The Paternoster Series, No. 8: London, Burns Oates; 1s.)

It is not easy to review this booklet in a satisfactory manner. The title, *A Treatise on Interior Prayer*, and the fact that the author was a Carthusian monk arouses a sympathy and expectation which are not altogether fulfilled. In itself, the treatise is full of excellent and useful matter; it sets forth the true nature of interior prayer (in the wide sense) and insists on its simplicity—in order, says the author, to remove the fears of those who 'believe that it [interior prayer] is only possible for those who have retired into solitude'. (p. 7.) But he declares that 'there is nothing so easy as prayer, nothing so possible for all kinds of

people, whoever they may be; nothing so far removed from all artifice'.

But in spite of these reassuring statements, the treatise seems to be chiefly concerned with the very beginnings of mental prayer and meditation, and it must be remembered that meditation is not strictly speaking itself prayer, but rather the *preparation* for prayer. Is it then too much to say that more than this might be expected from a Carthusian? Is it again too much to say that the teaching of Dom Le Masson cannot be considered as typical of Carthusian spirituality—deeply spiritual and, indeed, holy man as he himself undoubtedly was?

Apart from the fact (which Carthusians themselves would admit) that Le Masson lived at a period which was not the best as regards teaching about contemplative prayer, nor for the—at least outward—development of Carthusian life itself, we should also consider the fact that the Treatise was written for certain special persons and for a special reason. It was written for the use of Carthusian nuns, in order to counteract the dangers of Quietism. This heresy of the interior life had, it appears, invaded the convents of these good nuns, and Madame Guyon had herself paid visits to them all and introduced a number of her books on the subject. Dom Le Masson obtained permission from his Superiors to visit each of these convents (a most unusual proceeding), and he collected all the Quietistic literature, took it back to the Grande Chartreuse and made a bonfire of it all in the fireplace of his own cell. Incidentally, he also made a bonfire of the whole of the Grande Chartreuse monastery, as the fire spread from his fireplace to other parts of the place, finally causing a complete conflagration. Dom Le Masson made up for his incendiarism by re-building the whole monastery—unfortunately without architectural improvement.

No doubt, during the seventeenth century, the attitude towards contemplative prayer as being the normal perfection of the Christian life and possible for all who truly seek it (God's complete freedom in his gift remaining always untouched) was in no way widespread. The uprise of Quietism, too, had started a scare which took a long time to die down. Today, however, the whole tendency of teaching on prayer is to go back to the simplicity and directness of the early Church, the age of the early Fathers with their insistence upon the sacramental, liturgical and scriptural nature of the interior life.

Any 'philosophising' about one's state of prayer, such as Dom Le Masson so strongly deprecates, is very unlikely—indeed impossible—when the soul's desire to advance in prayer even to the highest stage, is founded deliberately and continually upon God's will alone, and directed by his 'divine direction' through the liturgy and sacraments

of his Church (and his own immediate dealings with some fortunate souls).

The author's concluding words, however, are of lasting importance: he tells us that any danger of self-seeking in the way of interior prayer can be met and overcome by pouring out the whole of the will and all desires into God—a continual act of union with him, and so practising the 'prayer of abandonment' which desires nothing save the consummation of his love. This prayer of abandonment, says Dom Le Masson, 'is the best of all and the most sure'. (p. 36.)

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ENTHUSIASM. A Chapter in the History of Religion. By R. A. Knox. (Cumberlege; Oxford University Press; 30s.)

FROM PURITANISM TO THE AGE OF REASON. By G. R. Cragg. (Cambridge University Press; 12s. 6d.)

*Enthusiasm*, when it appeared some months ago, was a surprise to many who thought they knew the work of Mgr Knox. They had not suspected that for the past thirty years he had been working on the book of his life, 'the unique child of his thought' as he himself describes it. It took time for reviewers to adjust themselves to this sudden revelation, but in the ensuing months after publication they have begun to realise what this study of the puritanical movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has achieved in placing them in the perspective of the whole history of what might be called 'exaggerated Christianity'. It is, however, the subject-matter of the book that is of special interest to readers of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*. Mgr Knox sets out to trace the pattern of what he calls 'ultra-supernaturalism' as it ploughs its way through the history of Christian religious thought and life. It is in fact an ever-present danger to the devout who take the Gospels seriously and wish to ensure themselves a place in heaven. As the author tells us, such exaggerations arise from a laudable desire to make grace the norm of life, to achieve a direct and personal access to God, to make the supernatural a substitute for the natural. And, as he shows us, this tendency has ended in the most extraordinary and esoteric sects and societies. Under such a wide label, of course, he has bottled a very diverse group, some sincere, others licentious, some noble groups of Christian men and others despicable. Many reviewers have quarrelled, for example, with the presence of the Quietists and the Jansenists as classified in the same category. But all this is a lesson to those who are too prone to ignore or despise nature and to rely on grace as separated from that in which grace exists. Quietism, illuminism and even the -ism of the Shakers are the destiny of those who ignore or despise the natural order of things.