

THE BASILICA OF ST PETER. By Paul Letarouilly. (Tiranti; 25s.)

The measured drawings of Paul Letarouilly are at once a standard item in the cultural baggage of the later nineteenth century and a monument, in the strict sense of the word, of Renaissance beliefs and perceptions. Original copies of 'La Basilique de Saint Pierre'—their pages suspiciously fresh and clean and their spines revealingly rotten—are certainly to be found in the bottom shelves of most older Catholic libraries. As visual records of architectural performance, measured drawings have one great drawback in that the contour of the smallest feature must be given approximately equal weight with that of the largest. The result therefore is a lace-like *tour-de-force* which has a compelling charm of its own but which grossly belies the *effect* of the building delineated.

But in order to appreciate measured drawing—and indeed in order to appreciate the architectural system which called it into being—it is important to remember that a building was conceived as a thing of the mind, as a complete whole which had been devised down to its smallest details and which was in some measure independent of the materials it was made of and the uses to which it was put. It will be seen that a measured drawing does capture more of the essence of this kind of thing than appearances might suggest.

This well produced and defiant little book gives a copious record of the present basilica, but also ventures daring reconstructions of the buildings which have occupied the site before and records the many projects for the Renaissance basilica which were never carried out. These last are encouraging to the devout Catholic: for they show him Providence at work preventing the completion of the new church until such time as technique could rise adequately to the occasion.

LANCE WRIGHT

THE WINGED LIFE. A Portrait of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. By Richard Rumbold and Lady Margaret Stewart. (Weidenfeld and Nicholson; 16s.)

Confined, as most of us are, to lives that are deadened by the monotony of safety, the career and personality of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry makes an obvious appeal. He played with life. The fantasies which most people, sufficiently alive to invent them, are forced to renounce at sixteen, he was able to retain almost until the day of his mysterious disappearance on a flight in the summer of 1944. His myths about the world, which he made in his own engaging if not impeccable image, were always spared the criticism of the prolonged experience of mere land-lubbers through his engagement in a life of action which led him miles above the trees and houses into the unexplored dimension of the

air. His own writing occupies a prominent and distinguished place in the literature of the new age of flight, and has communicated to people living in the lonely agglomerations of large cities a sense of the possibilities both of solitude and community in the older and more religious meaning of those terms.

The authors of this biography have let the story move at the exhilarating pace which Saint-Exupéry himself set, and with great tact have avoided a chapter either on the significance of Saint-Exupéry or his philosophy. They manage to make what comment seems called for briefly and pertinently as the narrative proceeds. Saint-Exupéry kept to the last that gift of insight which is characteristic of sensitive and intelligent children, but his inability to carry it over into a genuine spiritual maturity was clearly imposing its strain during his last years when, for purely physical reasons, the escape of astounding feats was gradually denied him, and he was forced to live more with himself and with his fellow men, not just at their best, but also at their worst. He had idealized those moments of communion between men in common hardship or difficulty which come like a purification to the spirit and, with T. E. Lawrence whom he so frequently recalls, had declared that he had chosen his barrack-room existence as the nearest modern alternative to entering a monastery. Yet he could write too: 'A camp. Three to a room (this gregarious life is the heaviest sacrifice in the world for me).' The element of egotism in *The Little Prince* (for it was undoubtedly a self-portrait) could never quite be persuaded to yield to the concrete situation. 'All his writings are shot through with a spirit of worship and veneration particularly for man and the divinity within him; on the other hand they turn a blind eye to the problem of evil and the doctrine of the Fall. It may be that he could never accept original sin. . . .' This is the crucial observation. Christianity would scarcely have altered the condition of sacrifice in his human relations but would have given it a point of which Saint-Exupéry was well aware, but could never quite find. As the authors of this book suggest, this failure to find the point gave both to his life and to his last writing 'a sense of pathos rather than tragedy, of discomfort and anti-climax rather than heroism'. Yet let it not be thought that this is a patronizing study. It is simply that it combines a warm and complete sympathy with level-headed disinterestedness of a kind whose rarity explains why a true friend is said to be one in a thousand.

ÆLRED SQUIRE, O.P.

WHAT LAW AND LETTER KILL. *The Spiritual Teaching of Fr Francis Devas, S.J.* Edited by Fr Philip Caraman, S.J. (Burns Oates; 10s. 6d.)
It must be a matter for gratitude that in our time the Society of