

REMINISCENCES OF SISTER ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY. Translated by a Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey. (Mercier Press; 27s. 6d.)

I believe this is the second translation into English of the *Souvenirs*, and my recollection is that it is an enormous improvement on the one made years ago. In fact, it is very readable indeed, and brings home to a much lesser degree than the other the inescapable fact that in all biographies, however well-intentioned, of saints and holy persons, one is almost always conscious of a sigh of relief when the subject is allowed to speak for him or herself. Sister Elizabeth is allowed to do so frequently and extensively, and this book is something to be thankful for. It is a pity the price has to be so high.

It is more or less inevitable that Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity should have to be compared, as in this book, with St Thérèse, nearly her contemporary in Carmel. They died at about the same age, they showed the same disconcertingly unhesitating directness, from childhood up, in their path to God, the lives of both closed in long periods of terrible suffering, and they both offer us a doctrine or 'way'. And they are both extremely attractive and lovable to encounter. It seems almost as if it were felt that the similarities were so strong that Sister Elizabeth might be eclipsed as a mere replica of St Thérèse, and that some striking distinction must be established between them. But in fact the utter individuality of sanctity seems to take care of this, and it would appear unfortunate to establish the contrast by suggesting that whereas St Thérèse's 'way of spiritual childhood' is for the many, Sister Elizabeth's doctrine of the divine indwelling is for a privileged few. As she herself constantly pointed out, it is a privilege bestowed on all the baptised—only they are so seldom told about it. There is something pathetic in one of the letters quoted in this book, received, after the first appearance of the *Souvenirs*, from a humble and simple person in the world: 'I did not know that the good God loved us so much, and that he was so close to us. No one had taught me that as has this little nun; and yet it is what preachers ought to teach. What we most need to know amid the troubles of this life, is that the good God loves us, and that he is with us, in us.' Is there, after all, so much difference, fundamentally, in the two doctrines? To which of them is St Paul referring when he says 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father!':

It is rather striking that two young Carmelite nuns, who, it might be supposed, if they ever did come to public notice as examples of sanctity would be just that and nothing else, should have in fact both insisted on presenting a doctrine. Not, of course, in either case a new doctrine, but something perhaps half-forgotten in the ordinary life of the Church. There is sometimes discussion of whether something has not gone awry in recent centuries, separating 'spiritual life' from the sheer fact of

revelation taught by the Church: dry-as-dust theology on one side, undoctinal 'devotion' on the other. It might have been expected that a life following the sequence: exceptionally pious little girl—unusually devout young lady—extraordinarily edifying nun—early death, would belong definitely in the undoctinal devotion category. Instead of which, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity seems to stand as an object-lesson in the healing of this breach. She was theological. For her there was no division between prayer and dogma. Revealed truth—her awareness of the revealed fact that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and is present in us by the grace of baptism—*was* her prayer. Hence she has the capacity to make that astounding fact come alive for others: 'I felt a void that I could not fill', wrote a missionary in Africa. 'I felt the need not of *something* but of *somebody* to make tangible to me, so to speak, him who was there in the Unity of his nature and Trinity of his persons. I sought rest in studying everything that concerned the Holy Trinity, but how could I deduce the practical consequences of this study, interesting and profound as it was? One day, I opened the *Reminiscences* and night gave place to sunrise, chill to warmth, void to fullness. I was in possession of my treasure hitherto hidden, although there.'

The division—the sense that a doctrinal truth of this sort is one thing, and prayer is something else—was sufficiently strong round her to make her feel almost guilty on one occasion at continuing to pray simply by remembering the indwelling of God. Other members of the Community were all vying with each other in saying what each was going to do by way of prayer at Quarant'ore. It seemed that she for her part was doing nothing: but she was given a divine assurance that her 'I will be silent and let him flow into me' was in fact what was required of her. Perhaps the significance of this incident is not as evidence on which to assess how much more she was advanced in prayer than her sisters; it is rather that her whole position was theological—her prayer consisted in simply living that which has been revealed to us as the situation of the Christian: 'The Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings'.

Comment was frequently made after the *Souvenirs* were published on her lack of theological training. She learnt from the Holy Spirit, experimentally, it is pointed out in this book. That, of course, is true: but it is equally obvious that she owed much to the fact that the doctrine of the divine indwelling was providentially explained to her by a Dominican priest, Père Vallée, before she entered Carmel. With that key in her hands she learnt her theology straight from St Paul. It is interesting that one of the consequences of the total unity in her of doctrine and prayer—the prayer of praise—is that predestination, ²

frequent point of departure for her Pauline meditations, is seen as something entirely luminous and joyful—it is more apt to be a problem to be solved and a difficulty to be surmounted! In fact it might be said that it was within that ‘uncomfortable’ mystery, set within the mystery of the Trinity, that she found her final and simple vocation to be *Laudem Gloriam*: ‘God chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity. We being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will: that we should be unto the praise of his glory.’

C. HASTINGS

TREATISE ON PREACHING. By Humbert of Romans, translated by the Dominican Students, Province of St Joseph. (Newman Press, Maryland; \$2.50.)

THE ART OF PREACHING: A Practical Guide. By Ferdinand Valentine, O.P. (Burns Oates; 18s.)

These two books, by a contemporary Dominican and by the thirteenth-century friar who was Master General of the Order forty years after St Dominic's death, complement each other usefully. In Blessed Humbert (who is fortunate in his translators) much common sense combines with plain supernatural spirituality to draw the picture of what a preacher, particularly a Dominican preacher, should be—namely who dispels ignorance by the Word of God made his own in life and speech, his speech (which is to be orderly, not prolix, without irrelevant learning, practical) drawn ‘from the Old and New Testaments as from an inexhaustible quarry’, his life ‘without blemish in the midst of a depraved and perverse generation . . . holding forth the word of life’ (Phil. 2, 15-16). Fr Valentine on the other hand (the title of his book is too general) writes almost exclusively for the younger *parochial* clergy, and says as much about their general relationship to their parishioners as about their actual preaching. The parish is his emphatic interest. He treats of conduct in the confessional, in the schools, at study groups, with especial regard to women and children. At times one wonders whether he thinks there is no room for preachers other than parish priests and their helpers.

It is the first part of his book that has more immediately to do with preaching, and here he is concerned much with the technique of the spoken word, the technics of making it heard, and the psychological mechanics of winning the sympathy of its hearers. The difference of emphasis from Blessed Humbert is due no doubt to the needs of our world, artificial world in which technique replaces spontaneity, materialistic world where minds come of age alienated from God, rest-