

REVIEWS

has been widely acknowledged, and itself occupied an important place in the conventual schools which were characteristic of Dominican priories in the thirteenth century. Owing to the fact that the Friars took up their abode in populated centres it was especially incumbent on them to make themselves acquainted with the new problems arising out of the changed social conditions of the time.

In some respects the second work we have under review is less critical. The Saint's life is sketched in its different aspects, in the University and as a Dominican, and some account will be found of his public, literary and missionary labours. There is an able introduction by the Most Reverend Amleto Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, and a preface by Father Anselm M. Townsend, O.P. Miss C. M. Antony, at whose request the book was written, has efficiently performed the task of revision. As has already been well said in the introduction, "the appearance of the first English life of St. Raymond of Pennafort cannot but be hailed with great joy. Saint Raymond well deserves to be known also to-day, not only because he was a saint and a great one, but because of the importance of his labours to the life of the Church in his day and in ours. AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

A COURTESAN OF PARADISE. Louise, duchesse de la Vallière, or Sister Louise of the Order of Mount Carmel. By Margaret Trouncer. (Faber & Faber; 15/-.)

Re-creation of spiritual atmosphere is essential to the art of biography. Mrs. Trouncer has utilized not merely the studies of scholars like Lair, but the original sources, from whose mass of detail she has been able to establish a sense of setting, of atmosphere, which, apart from occasional intrusions of an alien ethos, fills her narrative with life. The setting was, more than that of any period perhaps, paradoxical. Taine regretted that history concerned itself with drawing-rooms and neglected kitchens; but at Versailles the state apartments themselves were a mixture of grace and squalor. Buildings, furnishings, functions—the height of elegant splendour; but passages and tapestries turned into latrines, the vast rooms icy, choking with sooty smoke (and the *appareil capnéballique* invented to remedy this, Lenotre remarks, made when put on trial *des grincements si lugubres et de si sonores et incessants miaulements* that no one got a wink of sleep at night and it had to be abandoned). As with the setting, so with the people: Montespan, cruel, superstitious, splendid, sordid; Maintenon, mixture of unctuous piety and hard-headed scheming; Bossuet of the gentle heart as well as the voice

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of thunder; Louis himself, hardworking and pleasure-seeking, loving beauty and grace but washing little and allowing his bed like everyone else's to be verminous. The simplicity of Louise stands out almost alone, her character and actions having one key, one driving force. Mrs. Trouncer, in doing justice to contemporary complexity, does justice also to this oneness in Louise, thereby succeeding as hagiographer as well as historian. For a saint's life is understandable, and helpful, in so far as the new way, where there has been a break, is shown to be in one sense a continuation and a building upon what went before; natural impetus is not lost for being re-directed; and the motive-force of all Louise's earlier life and sufferings continues to be in sublimation that of her seclusion and sufferings in Carmel, so that these latter become for us not an unintelligible stumbling-block but a sermon.

There are points of historical detail which one would question: Fouquet, for example, fell in 1661, surely, and was imprisoned in Pignerol; Henriette's death was due, not as she and her contemporaries thought to poison, but to an ulcer of the stomach. (St. Mary of Egypt, incidentally, did certainly pay her passage on a pilgrimage by selling her virtue, but she was not then St. Mary, nor was she exactly making the pilgrimage.) Accuracy in such points as these, little though it affects the value of the study of Louise as such, is worth while in so far as the book is intended by the author to be of use for reference. (Perhaps also this purpose would suggest constant references to sources.) Again, there are passages alien to the general spirit of the book and liable to be misunderstood: St. Teresa's "inability to renounce human friendships" consoling Louise for her lack of detachment; Louise herself "aghast to find herself still human"—contrast with what is said of the influence of the excellent Liselotte in keeping her "human and balanced in the midst of her sudden re-awakening to spiritual realities." One feels, in the latter part of the book especially, these inconsistencies, as though two diverse points of view were being alternately expressed. But the great virtue of the book remains: the only grave sin, and the many great actions, of Louise sprang from one single motive; it is love that unifies her life, and the demonstration of this that unifies and vivifies the book. There is another virtue. Mdlle. de Scudéry, after the Bishop's attack on the Court at Louise's clothing ceremony, dried her eyes and murmured, "Never have I heard so beautiful a sermon," and forthwith forgot about it. The history of Louise as here presented is incentive on the contrary to action, for it upholds the Christian belief that through suffering joy is born: it was not only by force of contrast to the tortures of Versailles that the courtesan found paradise in Carmel. GERALD VANN, O.P.