

CATHERINE MCAULEY, the First Sister of Mercy. By Roland Burke Savage, S.J., M.A. (Gill & Sons, Dublin; 15s.)

This is incomparably the best book on its subject that has yet appeared. In particular, it is a very great advance on the *Life* of 1886, the last biography of Mother McAuley to be written. Fr Burke Savage has brought to his task not only the author's indispensable sympathy and understanding of the remarkable and saintly woman he portrays, but the approach and style of the impersonal and completely accurate historian. He has omitted nothing, neglected nothing which serves to put into focus one whose selflessness is perhaps the most outstanding feature of her sane sanctity.

To the general reader, this book ought to be of interest. It follows the always full and exciting nineteenth century from its birth in the late eighteenth to the later years of Queen Victoria's reign. 'Twenty-one years before Karl Marx proclaimed his brotherhood of man in the Communist Manifesto of 1848', Catherine McAuley was giving her whole life to the devoted service of her fellow-citizens in Georgian Dublin. She worked with the intensity of a martyr and the generosity of every saint, so that her convincing sacrifice inspired other ladies to join her. Without act or intention on her part, she became the foundress of 'the second largest congregation of women in the Church of God'. This book traces the miracle, in all its aspects and its implications. It deals with the 'social service' required by poverty, want, plagues of cholera, and the pernicious ignorance bred of the penal laws. To all of these, according to their needs, this woman came with healing and with grace.

To the reader seeking mainly the story of spiritual values, this book may prove disappointing, unless we remember that astonishing selflessness which set such value on religious reserve. Catherine was in all things very simple and unpretentious. Her favourite prayer was the 'Psalter of Jesus'. Her manner was gay rather than severe. Her companions loved her, no less for her bright company than for her firmness of will. She was trusted and revered. Never was she sparing of affection, either to family or friends, yet they are the first to offer proofs of her holiness. With her enormous output of work, much of it thankless and all of it difficult, went her selfless simplicity of soul.

This book sets out, probably, the most we can ever know about her on this side of heaven. Perhaps its only defect (and it seems ungracious to mention it) is to leave as written those abbreviations which did not offend the recipient of Catherine's letters, but do not please the modern reader. This tiny fault apart, it is a beautiful and a very valuable book, for which the Sisters of Mercy must be grateful.

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