

Romans xiv, 8, which few of the readers for whom the book is intended will recognize. The contents are practical advice on the way a Christian should face serious illness and death, and on the duties of his family and friends; simple and fairly obvious, but still, on the whole, commendable. It is unrealistic to recommend the Office of the Dead as a suitable prayer, immoderate to advise a visit to St Séverin in Paris to see how they do Offertory processions: if there is space for that, why deprive the *De Profundis* of its first two verses? On page 70 a line is interchanged with the one which should follow it. But only one sentence calls for serious comment, where it is said that the dying patient should never be drugged to the point of unconsciousness. This should indeed not happen merely to provide a passage to tranquil death, but it would be permissible if the patient were well prepared for death and his pain intense, even if the anaesthetic incidentally hastened his death to some degree: which is a summary of relevant teaching given by Pope Pius XII in February 1957.

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ST FRANCIS DE SALES: SELECTED LETTERS. Translated with an Introduction by Elisabeth Stopp. (Faber and Faber; 25s.)

THE HOLINESS OF VINCENT DE PAUL. By Jacques Delarue. Translated by Suzanne Chapman. (Geoffrey Chapman; 12s. 6d.)

'So sweet was his goodness that people who were favoured with his conversation experienced an intense joy. . . .' Thus St Vincent on St Francis, and a strong impression of this comes down the centuries and through the translation. Dr Stopp has done the work excellently. Although the correspondents of St Francis were people of birth and influence, there were among them many different types and temperaments, from the statesman to the obscure widow, the high-spirited to the timid, and to them all, once he was sure of their resolution, St Francis wrote in the words best suited to move them. We are shown the brief note from a halting place, formal epistles to dignitaries of Church and State, but the selection is made up for the most part of those more conversational letters he wrote to those whom he had undertaken to lead to God. Dr Stopp provides an Index which gives brief biographies of all those who are not anonymous. With this and a longish Introduction, very well written and crisply informative, the letters come even more vividly alive. (Perhaps, though, rather more could have been said about the Visitation and its originality, as a background for the later letters to Visitandines.) The saint comes across clearly, visiting in Alpine valleys, bothered at home by suitors, sometimes ill, always deeply affectionate, writing a brief note to Mère de Chantal to let her know that her son has arrived, watching the

pigeons being fed in the snow-covered courtyard of the castle and explaining why it made him so happy. And all the time working out his God-given synthesis of Christian perfection and common sense. Treatises are less popular than they were; nowadays we prefer to learn in ways which are perhaps fragmented, but which, including as they do—or rather included as they are in—the adventure of flesh and blood, have a greater power to move us. It is difficult to imagine anyone reading this selection without learning to love God better, or at least being moved to try, and not least by the grace-saturated personality of the bishop himself. 'I remember thinking again and again', St Vincent went on, 'How good you must be, my dear God, since Monsieur de Genève who is but your creature is so wonderfully good and kind.'

St Francis returned this esteem, making St Vincent his successor in the direction of St Jane Frances and the Visitation. But St Vincent had also his own foundations and spiritual children to direct. He continues the same inspired common sense (as can be seen in his letters to a mother who was over-influencing her son towards the priesthood), but exercises it among people on the whole less exalted than St Francis. M. Delarue has selected a number of texts from letters and conferences to give an outline of his spirituality. This has a more simply evangelical feel to it than St Francis, a stronger and rougher personality behind it, but often it strikes off fine sparks and always expresses the basic truths of the Gospel as they have to be lived out. 'It is necessary to be firm but not harsh in ruling and to avoid an insipid gentleness which achieves nothing.' If only the writers of the lives of saints in the past had followed a similar rule they would have achieved as much as Dr Stopp and M. Delarue.

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