

REVIEWS

THE LIFE OF MOTHER MARY POTTER. Foundress of the Congregation of the Little Company of Mary. By Eve Healy. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6.)

One of the things we like most about this book is the quiet restraint with which it is written. Mrs. Healy could have told us much more. She wisely refrained from doing so. In a comparatively short space (174 pages) she tells us the story of Mary Potter's beautiful life (1847-1913) and tells it beautifully.

Two chapters in particular are models of condensation and claim special attention. In Chap. IV, *The Evolution of Nursing*, we get a remarkable *résumé* of the history of nursing from remote times down to the present day; while Chap. XII deals with the attitude of the Church towards the science of healing. These pages bring us to the very centre of Mary Potter's life-work. Through all the trials, misunderstandings and opposition that marked her early years one great idea took definite shape in her mind: the foundation of a Congregation of Nursing Sisters. In the mysterious designs of God's Providence this was her special vocation. In its fulfilment she experienced the invariable law of God's dealings with chosen souls. Trials and crosses of all kinds beset her path. But in her sorrow she endured and kept patience. She cheerfully took all that came upon her. She believed God and trusted in Him. And He, almost visibly, directed her ways and blessed the Little Company of Mary from its humble beginnings in Hyson Green (Leicestershire) to the marvellous expansion we witness to-day.

The care of the sick and dying was the great object of Mary Potter's life and work. In itself there was nothing new in this. What was new, however, and quite distinctive was the *spirit* which animated the foundress and which she left as a precious heirloom to her children. They are "Mary's own," imbued with the virtues and sentiments of the maternal heart of the Mother of Sorrows. The sorrowful scene on Calvary seems to have burned itself into the very soul of Mother Mary. As Our Lady of Pity watched beside the Cross, so the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary were to keep vigil at the bed-side of the sick and dying. With deep insight into the things of God she realized that the sick and dying not merely recall that scene on Calvary but, in a sense, they repeat it; mystically, it is true, but none the less really. There is nothing far-fetched about this idea. It is simply the application of that profound teaching about the Mystical Body of Christ: "*Now you are the body of Christ and members of member,*" wrote St. Paul (I Cor. xii, 27), faithful echo of Our Lord's own teaching: "*Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me*" (Matt. xxv, 40). Mother Mary deeply loved this great mystery. Hence it is not

BLACKFRIARS

without significance that she called the Mother House in Rome "Calvary Hospital"—a fitting name for a home of suffering erected upon a hill overlooking the Eternal City.

In the accomplishment of this sublime ideal the saintly foundress insisted on the spiritual life as the foundation of all activity: "Be good nuns first," she used to say, "and then you'll be good nurses." But not for that did she neglect their training in the art of healing. Quite the contrary; it was her wish that the Sisters should be thoroughly trained. She had no use for half-baked nurses. *La piété ne dispense jamais de la technique*, we read somewhere recently. The principle applies to all professions, but it needs to be specially borne in mind in all that concerns the care of the sick. There was and is still a real danger of people imagining that piety will supply the lack of technical training. Mother Mary Potter would have none of this. She insisted on her Sisters being thoroughly skilled and efficient in every way. But where she was quite up-to-date and indeed ahead of her time was in her views regarding maternity nursing. With what joy would she not have welcomed the recent *Instruction* published by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide on this most important matter (February 11th, 1936).

There is one point about which, we think, much more might be said, and that is the *inner* life of Mother Potter. Mrs. Healy did not write this book with the purpose of proving that the Foundress of the Little Company of Mary was remarkable for her holiness of life. There is no trace of special pleading in this respect. The glimpses we get here and there of her interior life are all the more forceful for that and make us long for more.

T. E. GARDE, O.P.

MEDIÆVAL STUDIES

The third volume of *European Civilization*¹ will be welcomed by all those who cherish serious and well-informed reading. It is a matter for satisfaction that this part of the work dealing with such an arduous subject as the *Middle Ages* has been entrusted to such highly qualified contributors as D. C. Douglas of the University of Glasgow, Professor Jean Guiraud and Professor A. E. Taylor.

To trace the development of mediæval civilization in Europe and to explain the causes of that unique growth is the purpose of Mr. Douglas's contribution (pp. 5-350). And he has succeeded exceedingly well in driving home his argument with clearness,

¹ *European Civilization. Its Origin and Development.* By various Contributors under the direction of E. EYRE. Vol. III: The Middle Ages. (Oxford University Press, 1935; 18/-.)