

SURPRISING MYSTICS. By Herbert Thurston, S.J. (Burns and Oates; 18s.)

This latest collection of Father Thurston's essays is as interesting as its predecessors, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* and *Ghosts and Poltergeists*. The longest, and, in the opinion of the present reviewer most interesting, chapter is that on Anna Catherine Emmerich, the famous nineteenth-century German stigmatic, whose visions, published in English under the title *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, still appear with iron regularity every Lent in our Catholic bookshops. Father Thurston unerringly lays his finger on the weakest spot in the amazing story of this visionary, which alone would be enough to discredit her: 'But what appears perhaps to militate even more strongly than actual errors of fact against the idea that Sister Emmerich's visions were supernatural in origin is her own conviction of the supreme importance to mankind of the revelations thus made . . . further investigation has only deepened the impression that the good Sister insisted upon the supernatural and veridical character of these visions with a tenacity which is distinctly foreign to the spirit of such ecstasies as St Theresa, let us say. She declared that the priests and others who had been so lukewarm in making provision for the recording of her revelations incurred a serious responsibility for which they would some day have to render an account to God. She proclaimed again and again that the knowledge imparted to her was unique and was meant to be given to all the world.' (p. 82.)

I have cited the passage at such length because it provides one of the surest criteria for distinguishing between true mystic visions and their neurotic counterfeits. Unfortunately the importance certain visionaries attach to their experiences is sometimes shared by their director who 'having filled his mind with mystical theology and with the marvels recorded in the Lives of the Saints, is apt to welcome with enthusiasm the not too common experience of a soul that is exalted, but fervent and courageous. . . . If he were equally well-versed in the literature of what we may, for brevity's sake, call hysteria, all would be well. But that is a rare combination.' (p. 168.) In many of the cases treated by Father Thurston, such as those of Christina of Stommeln or Domenica dal Paradiso, their directors were themselves their greatest admirers, and so contributed to the development of the phenomena instead of aiming at their curtailment.

It is unfortunate that the book should be called 'Surprising Mystics', though this is not the fault of its editor, Father Crehan; for Father Thurston himself uses the term constantly of the persons he investigates. But is it not time, at least in theological works, to restrict this term to the people who really are mystics in the accepted sense of the term, that is to say to those who, as for example St Catherine of Siena,

St Teresa, St John of the Cross, have reached a high degree of union with God, whether this be accompanied by ecstasies and visions or not? A person who does not enjoy such a union, though he or she may be subject to trances and exhibit other unusual phenomena, surely ought not to be called a mystic. Hence very few of the subjects of the study under review could be so named; several, e.g. Marie Julie Jahenny, John Thom, 'Georges Marasco' and the false visionaries of Lourdes were no more than deluded neurotics. In fact true mystics are very rarely 'surprising'.

Apart from this misleading terminology, however, the book is a mine of information, containing much highly interesting and otherwise not easily accessible material. The comments of Father Thurston, sometimes tantalizingly sparing, should be pondered by all who are interested, whether professionally or otherwise, in mystical phenomena and their neurotic counterfeits.

HILDA C. GRAEF

A NEW WAY OF THE CROSS. Contemplated by Father Raymond, O.C.S.O., illustrated by John Andrews. (Clonmore and Reynolds; 10s. 6d.)

This is certainly a new approach to the Stations. Stark dark pictures of hands, vivid emotional descriptions of what the hands suggest to the mind and heart of a holy Cistercian with a flair for phrases that register. The hands are the hands of our Lord, bound with cord, receiving the cross, pressed to the ground when he falls, pierced with the nails. As a method of meditation it is irresistible. Our Lady's hands and Veronica's hands are also firmly depicted. The twelfth Station is just the two feet of our Lord nailed with one nail to the wood. The fourteenth is the Shroud draping his feet. On the page opposite each picture you have Father Raymond's reflections. He follows the liturgical thread, the Mass, the pervading idea of membership of the mystical body of Christ, self-immolation. The style, rather dramatic American, harmonises with the pictures. Both are very effective.

G.M.C.

WHY HAST THOU COME? By John Carr, C.S.S.R. (Clonmore and Reynolds; 10s. 6d.)

This is a humble helpful book, a useful stimulus for those who have lived the religious life for some years and have become slack. It also provides good strong meat for those, men and women, who are actively engaged in religious life in the world in Secular Institutes.