

## BLACKFRIARS

promulgated a year too late, and punctuation to be supplied here and there by closer proof-reading.

Yet the style of circumspection and candour, sympathy and detachment, makes a book for the hammock and fireside as well as for the library. A quiet, unforced humour flows from such objective consideration of persons and causes. To adapt the epitaph on Sir Thomas Gage: enthusiasm and delicacy are blended in a manner as happy as unusual . . . tact tremblingly alive to the beauties of art and the charms of creation. However, there is no suspicion of the vapours so punctilious and clear. Despite the compression, Dr. Mathew usually manages to give us a glimpse of the personalities behind the names. He must write a commentary, not for elucidation, but to give us the joy of having more. "The intrepid Bishop Wilkinson of Hexham and Newcastle, profoundly apostolic, deeply interested in shorthorns, a North-Country Tory. . . ." Such touches abound.

This sketch begins with the sixteenth century, when Catholicism diverges from the general life of the country, a steadily narrowing but deepening tradition, intensely English, stubborn and devoted, having little to do with the growing Empire, the Universities and Services, yet not inconspicuous in letters, music, and the stage; living mainly round the country houses and the gentry until the Industrial Revolution and the Irish Immigration shifted the preponderance to the slums and the proletariat, and then later and inevitably, to the suburbs and the bourgeoisie, though of itself cutting vertically down through all the social layers. Always the tough, resilient core of English Catholics is seen to absorb the successive influences from outside, and always, except perhaps in the time of Manning, the absence of leadership is marked.

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ASCETICISM. By Johannes Lindworsky, S.J. Translated by Emil A. Heiring. (H. W. Edwards; 5/-.)

The scope of this little book may be best stated in the words of the author himself, namely "to give some hints and suggestions culled from the domain of modern psychological knowledge, by way of contribution to the problem of ascetical training. The school of ascetics is the training ground of the *mites Christi*, but it is possible that ill-directed training may result in the production of the lay-figure type of ascetic, who thinks he has fulfilled all justice if he can find some more or less seemly garment wherewith to cover himself as he sets out on life's journey. The psychologist believes that he can prevent such misdirection."

Asceticism is a field for psychological study which may however be prejudiced by a superficial conception thereof, such as is put forward for instance by Prof. E. Kretschmer, to the effect

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that it implies a reversal or perversion of man's natural instincts and appetites combined with pleasure in such perversion (*Psychology of Men of Genius*). It is true that the psychiatrist is more likely to meet with pathological forms of asceticism, and thus to pass too lightly over or even ignore its higher forms as found in the Christian ideal. But even here asceticism is subject to danger and illusions. Certain rather revolting practices are sometimes held in admiration, the author says, and no longer secure our approval.

Such reversal of natural instinct may however occur and here the author agrees with Kretschmer in tracing such deviations to a temperamental basis, some types having, as it were, an instinctive inclination towards asceticism, whilst others have no taste for it.

The Christian ideal, expressed by the Apostle in the words "This is the will of God, your sanctification" is the key to true Christian asceticism. It implies the assumption of a life-ideal or goal which, when regarded psychologically, "falls within the large group of will-dispositions," and is therefore in this place studied mainly from the standpoint of the will-psychologists.

The accent falls mainly on the training of the ascetic, pointing out different faults, and offering suggestions based on psychology as to which may produce better results. Asceticism is a vocation, or rather is implied in the Christian vocation generally, but more particularly when it assumes the form of a religious vocation or form. Two kinds of asceticism may be distinguished, the one tending in a *piece-meal* fashion to the acquisition of particular virtues, the other "striving towards a whole, towards a religious form." It is towards the latter that the author inclines.

Again, there are two kinds of people—those who aim at self-culture or personality and those whose aim is some achievement for the Kingdom of Christ, "*men of personality and men of work*." Here again the author, while not pronouncing on the value of either ideal, appears to favour the *men of work*, "for the properly completed work is itself formative of personality."

The difficulties arising in the ascetic life are discussed—illusions, scruples, anxiety-states, defective attitudes and tendencies of will, etc. Many valuable hints are offered in regard for instance to mortification and humility, based on the author's wide psychological experience. He even ventures to suggest that more attention should be paid in ecclesiastical institutions to the hygiene of diet, noting that many directors of such institutions "do not seem fully to understand what the concept of a hygienic diet really involves."

Though the book is well translated its German source makes it at times a little difficult to follow. It will however repay close reading, being not too technical psychologically, as might be inferred from the title.

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