

Blackfriars

LIFE OF PERE ETIENNE PERNET, Founder of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. Taken from the French by Alice Lady Lovat. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd. ; 6/-.)

Père Pernet was no socialist, he never held forth in public on the question of the amelioration of the states of the poor nor gave his sympathy to the 'modern machinery' which the world has substituted for Christian charity; his solution of the problem and the secret of his success are both to be found in words he himself addressed to his daughters: 'We shall get to Heaven only if we have worked to make a heaven on earth.' He was one of the most hidden of men, shy and retiring almost to excess—one would almost say even to pusillanimity, for he twice ran away from the seminary terrified at the mere thought of a priest's responsibilities—yet he did more for the relief of the poor and suffering than the most renowned of social reformers. Himself a child of the working class, Père Pernet spent most of his priestly career in their service and it was this daily contact with the poor which made him realise that illness with all its direful consequences in the home was one of the chief causes of what he himself called '*le mal de l'ouvrier.*' It was obvious that a woman and a nun was required to meet the case; Père Pernet prayed and waited in patience and Almighty God gave him the solution to the problem by inspiring him with the beautiful and delicate idea of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. The Little Sister goes to the home of the poor and takes therein the humble place of a servant; she nurses the sick, tends the children, cooks the dinner—all this without accepting as much as a drink of water in return. Moreover religion is not mentioned until questions are asked, but the results of this humble apostolate are too great to be put into words. Statistics, however enlightening, can never tell the hidden romances of charity nor the value of these lives of self-sacrifice.

France possesses the greater number of houses of the Congregation, but there are also at present seven in England, three in Ireland and five in America.

Père Pernet died after a few days' illness, worn out by his zeal and labours for the poor and leaving to his daughters the precious inheritance of his love of the hidden life, his supernatural love for souls and his spirit of sacrifice. More details about the work of the Congregation and less moralising on the part of the writer would certainly have added to the interest of the book.

S.M.T.F.