

seemed to me that, could I but see him, I should fall down at his feet, embrace them and kiss them a thousand times, and that I would thank him, weeping, for having given me the grace of such a consolation—to me, his unworthy and sinful creature. Then I felt in my heart and my breast a life-giving warmth.'

But, warned by his *staretz*, he knew the dangers awaiting the contemplative, and to test his experience he had recourse to that guide of Eastern mystics—the *Philokalia*, or *Love of Virtue* containing mystical writings by twenty-five Fathers.

Prayer gave him a new conception of the world. The following words exhale a sweet fragrance :

'When I prayed in the deep recollection of my spirit, everything about me seemed to be delightful and marvellous: the trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air and the light all seemed to say that they had been created for man, that all showed God's love for man, that all prayed to God and gave him honour and praise and adoration. It was then that I understood the words of the *Love of Virtue*: "the comprehension of the language of creation," and I realised that I could talk with all creatures and make myself understood.'

Again and again he warns against pitfalls awaiting the mystic—vanity and pride, distraction during prayer though it may be due even to edifying thoughts, apparitions . . . Do we not detect in this an echo of the teaching of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross? Yet in his foreword the Benedictine translator rightly points out how the Russian mystic comes at times dangerously near the false doctrine of the 'Uncreated Light' which preoccupied Greek theologians of the decadent era.

Despite its artless simplicity the writer manifests a talent for keen observation: the characters though drawn in a few words are vivid and true to life. The pilgrim's religion is one of true Christian tolerance and charity.

We feel deeply indebted to Dom Theodore Baily for this little book which gives a glimpse into the Russia that deserved the name of 'Holy Russia,' and can only hope it will find many readers. Though a translation of a translation (French) it is excellent, and only here and there would a Russian find a word to change. The *vignettes* and frontispiece add to the book's attractiveness.

G.B.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS TO OUR BLESSED LADY. By Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P. (Sheed & Ward; 3/6).

There is much that is excellent in the seventy or eighty pages of this little book. This is only what the name of the

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author would lead us to expect, and there is no need for us to insist on it. It will serve a more useful purpose to indicate one or two of the points on which the book seems to us open to criticism.

In the first place, we are not clear what class of readers Fr. McNabb had in view in writing the book. At the outset he tells us that he will feel obliged to use again and again what he calls 'the ultra-literal sense' of Holy Scripture. 'Ultra-literal' here, of course, does not mean 'excessively literal' as the current use of the prefix might lead one to suppose; Fr. McNabb has in mind the sense which has sometimes been called the supra-literal. 'There is then,' he writes (p. 12), 'a least, literal sense which it is the duty of the literary critic to determine and, perhaps, not to transcend. Yet there is a highest, ultra-literal, sense which it is the duty of the theologian to discover and defend. And whereas the literary critic will admit that the text of an inspired saying must at least mean the least, the theologian will add that it may mean the most.' Now we are not going to deny that there is in Scripture a sense which may be called supra-literal or ultra-literal; Leo XIII in the *Providentissimus Deus* seems to say that there is, and its existence seems to follow from the dogma of Inspiration. We are not going to deny, either, that—to use Leo XIII's words—'the labours of individuals may, in the kindly providence of God, prepare for and bring to maturity the judgment of the Church.' But it is equally certain that this supra-literal sense can be said to be *known* only after the judgment of the Church. Some words written by Père Lagrange thirty years ago are relevant here: 'Il peut arriver que cette interprétation dépasse de beaucoup le sens obvie tel qu'il résulterait des règles de l'herméneutique . . . Rien ne découle plus clairement du dogme de l'Inspiration que cette méthode; rien n'ouvre un champ plus large au caprice et à l'arbitraire des interprétations privées . . . Pour le dire en un mot, une pareille exégèse ne peut émaner que de l'autorité de l'Eglise . . . Elle seule—après le Christ et les Apôtres—peut donner à un texte ce sens supra-littéral' (*Revue Biblique*, 1900, p. 142). Fr. McNabb himself writes (p. 11): 'This principle [*i.e.* the existence of an ultra-literal sense] will allow the Church of God, guided by the Holy Ghost, to see more in the words of an inspired person than was seen by that person under the light of inspiration.' The Church of God, yes; but the theologian can only say of those same words that (the phrase is Fr. McNabb's) 'they *may* mean the most.'

Our complaint, then, is this: The words 'New Testament Witness' suggest that we are to be given evidence attainable by the ordinary reasonable methods of exegesis, and, certainly at times, Fr. McNabb seems to have in mind readers who find it difficult to accept Catholic teaching about Our Blessed Lady, yet would be open to *argument* from Scripture. What useful purpose is served by offering them this ultra-literal sense? As Père Lagrange points out, this sense has to be determined, not by ordinary means, but by the authority of the Church, and that authority such readers do not admit. And even the Catholic reader, though he may find it interesting, will not find it very helpful to learn what a passage *may* mean. As for the faults of capriciousness and arbitrariness into which Père Lagrange says that the searcher after the supra-literal sense is particularly liable to fall, we fear that many readers, whether Catholic or not, will find not a few examples here.

'Fanciful' is, we think, not an unjust qualification of such a passage as this: 'In the hastily written letter to the Galatians St. Paul had so identified himself with the Gentiles and had so accentuated the imperfections of the Jewish dispensation that he had spoken of the CURSE OF THE LAW—the capitals are Fr. McNabb's—(*Gal.* iii, 13) This presentation [*i.e.*, in the Temple, *Lk.* ii, 22] was in fulfilment of that law which St. Paul had spoken of as the Curse of the Law Whatever else is doubtful in the gospel of St. Luke, it is certain that this gospel, published in Rome by the faithful secretary of St. Paul, is unsaying the phrase *Curse of the Law*' (pp. 47, 49). It is true that St. Paul speaks of the curse of the Law. It is quite untrue to say that he speaks—as Fr. McNabb goes on to make him speak—of the Law as the Curse of the Law. If I use the phrase 'the curse of drink,' I may mean 'the curse (*i.e.*, the evil) that drink is.' But when St. Paul speaks of 'the curse of the Law,' he does not mean 'the curse that the Law is,' but 'the curse uttered in the Law against those who break it,' which is quite another thing.

We venture to think that when Fr. McNabb writes (p. 58): 'Of course the divine maternity implicitly taught by St. Mark is explicitly taught by St. Matthew,' he is misusing the term 'divine maternity.' The same misuse seems to occur on p. 33. At times, indeed, there are arguments and expressions which, taken as they stand, would suggest that the Virgin Birth is a sufficient reason for calling Jesus God's Son, which, of course, no theologian would admit.

L.W.