

of his Church (and his own immediate dealings with some fortunate souls).

The author's concluding words, however, are of lasting importance: he tells us that any danger of self-seeking in the way of interior prayer can be met and overcome by pouring out the whole of the will and all desires into God—a continual act of union with him, and so practising the 'prayer of abandonment' which desires nothing save the consummation of his love. This prayer of abandonment, says Dom Le Masson, 'is the best of all and the most sure'. (p. 36.)

BENEDICT STEUART, O.S.B.

ENTHUSIASM. A Chapter in the History of Religion. By R. A. Knox. (Cumberlege; Oxford University Press; 30s.)

FROM PURITANISM TO THE AGE OF REASON. By G. R. Cragg. (Cambridge University Press; 12s. 6d.)

*Enthusiasm*, when it appeared some months ago, was a surprise to many who thought they knew the work of Mgr Knox. They had not suspected that for the past thirty years he had been working on the book of his life, 'the unique child of his thought' as he himself describes it. It took time for reviewers to adjust themselves to this sudden revelation, but in the ensuing months after publication they have begun to realise what this study of the puritanical movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has achieved in placing them in the perspective of the whole history of what might be called 'exaggerated Christianity'. It is, however, the subject-matter of the book that is of special interest to readers of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*. Mgr Knox sets out to trace the pattern of what he calls 'ultra-supernaturalism' as it ploughs its way through the history of Christian religious thought and life. It is in fact an ever-present danger to the devout who take the Gospels seriously and wish to ensure themselves a place in heaven. As the author tells us, such exaggerations arise from a laudable desire to make grace the norm of life, to achieve a direct and personal access to God, to make the supernatural a substitute for the natural. And, as he shows us, this tendency has ended in the most extraordinary and esoteric sects and societies. Under such a wide label, of course, he has bottled a very diverse group, some sincere, others licentious, some noble groups of Christian men and others despicable. Many reviewers have quarrelled, for example, with the presence of the Quietists and the Jansenists as classified in the same category. But all this is a lesson to those who are too prone to ignore or despise nature and to rely on grace as separated from that in which grace exists. Quietism, illuminism and even the -ism of the Shakers are the destiny of those who ignore or despise the natural order of things.

From this point of view Mgr Knox's great work has one great weakness: it is not really theological. He traces the phenomena (and indeed his choice of data, while being too inclusive, serves up excellent fodder for his caustic wit, for which he is renowned); but he gives no fundamental explanations of that phenomena. For example, it might have been more valuable to trace the streams of thought that have sprung up into 'ultra-supernaturalism'. Surely the long tradition of neo-platonism with its puritanical and angelic tendencies might have accounted for a great deal of the phenomena. And with that criterion Mgr Knox could have excluded some of the less reputable members of his caste—and with advantage. There still remains a need to show the source or sources of 'ultra-supernaturalism' in order to classify the dangers. Once classified, they might be more readily detected and prevented.

Mr Cragg's book makes an excellent contrast to *Enthusiasm*, for he is writing of that period in England round which Mgr Knox centred his investigations. But Mr Cragg is out to show the reaction at the Restoration period from the enthusiasm of the puritans, a deliberate avoidance of the dangers of excessive supernaturalism. But such reaction provided another moral, for it led to a very un-supernatural view of divine truth and ushered in the modern era, which is here shown with skill and erudition to have its roots in a retreat from enthusiasm.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

SERMONS ET OPUSCULES SPIRITUELS INEDITS. By Richard of St Victor.

Vol. I. L'Edit d'Alexandre ou Les Trois Processions. Latin text edited with French translation, introduction, etc., by Jean Chatillon, W.-J. Tulloch, J. Barthélemy. (Desclée de Brouwer; n.p.)

The importance of Richard of St Victor in the history of spirituality can hardly be over-emphasised, though it is only of late years that this has come to be realised. It is strange that after an immense influence over the writing and mysticism of the middle ages he should have become eclipsed by subsequent writers. He was probably born in England in the twelfth century, and his writings did a great deal to inspire the English mystical writers of the fourteenth; but Hilton is known and Richard remains merely a name and a tradition. It is therefore a welcome event that his works are now being critically edited in Paris, and it is to be hoped that this example will soon be followed in England. The 'Edict of Alexander', about which there are two discourses, may have been a commentary on the first words of the Christmas Gospel about the edict of Caesar Augustus, but it is only an excuse to describe some aspects of the passage from the active to the contemplative life and to introduce the three liturgical pro-

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