

patiently. What would it profit you to be poor if all the while you were burning with greed? What would it profit you to be stripped of wealth and yet have a heart that was full of cravings? Blessed are the poor, but the poor in spirit, the poor detached from every affection towards earthly riches. Such is the poverty canonised by Christ in his Gospel, a poverty which is compatible with any condition of life. Thus, and thus alone, can we be poor in this world and merit the everlasting riches of the next, to which I pray God's grace may bring you.

LOUIS BOURDALOUE (1632-1704)

*Translated by* WALTER SHEWRING.

## OBITER

ST BENEDICT-JOSEPH LABRE was born in 1748, and his bicentenary may encourage devotion to one who is surely a saint for our times. He is the patron of providential failure. He failed as a Cistercian, he failed as a Carthusian. His short life was one of no public importance; a displaced person, he wandered through Europe, from shrine to shrine, and he died in Rome as he had lived, in poverty and obscurity. But the memory of that hidden figure, lost in prayer for hours together in the churches of Rome, broke at once into a chorus of acknowledgment from children, from old women, from the destitute whose world he had made his own. Never was there a more immediate awareness of the fact of sanctity, and the solemnity of canonisation only sealed the sure knowledge of the people of God.

St Benedict-Joseph was a reproach to his generation, to the century of the Enlightenment. He showed forth in its most piercing light the vocation of penance and humility. He broke across the frontiers of pride and prosperity as surely as he invaded the frontiers of nations. From Normandy to Burgundy, from Loretto to Compostella, from Einsiedeln to Rome, he made his way. And his mission was folly to the wise, but its meaning remains and grows with the years that have come after. The need for penance, that radical truth at the centre of the Christian life so easily acknowledged, so hardly achieved: that is his teaching, more eloquent than words.

One remembers, before the last war, a lecture given by Père Garrigou-Lagrange in London on 'Mysticism'. The great theologian might, one thought, find it hard to condense so vast a subject into an hour's address. It was St Benedict-Joseph Labre he chose to speak of: a saint who was ignorant of theology, who probably had never heard of the distinctions between infused and acquired contemplation. Summed up in the life of a silent wanderer, ragged, flea-ridden, was the sublimity of the Christian soul's vocation of prayer and unity with God.

And unity with God demands a unity among men, no less. St Benedict-Joseph made a mockery of the senseless divisions of class and race. He transcended them in his own life, and, at a time when even secular statesmen are crying out for unity as the essential means for the survival of civilisation, he still shows the way. It would surprise St Benedict-Joseph Labre to be declared the patron of European recovery, but that most deeply he surely is.

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THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE PARISH was the subject of a recent Congress held at Lille. If, to English habits of thought, French Catholics seem excessively given to large-scale speculation on the problems of the apostolate in the modern world, it cannot be denied that the numerous congresses held in various parts of France since the end of the war have revealed a realistic understanding of the task that awaits the Church in a post-Christian world. And there are encouraging signs that the ample phrases of unanimous resolutions are beginning to be implemented in the local setting, the parish, where the real work remains to be done.

*Evangeliser* (May) gives a report of the Congress and a summary of its conclusions. Professor Gabriel Le Bras spoke on 'The influence of the social structure on the religious life of France'. Père Lebret, founder of *Economie et Humanisme*, emphasised the need to develop a 'sociology of the parish'. The apostolate demands a knowledge of the real life of the people of the parish and of the world to which they belong. The impact of the Church is often blunted through ignorance, on the part of priests, of the social setting of the parish. Père Lebret urges the use of technical methods of enquiry: a diagnosis of the malady must precede the hope of cure. Père Congar spoke of 'The mission of the Parish'. Too narrow a view of the parish can destroy its purpose. It is the Christian Family, with a fundamental unity joined to a variety of function that is implicit in any human group. Modern circumstances may seem to demand modification, but the specialised work of Catholic Action relates to the diocese rather than to the parish. The unity of the parish

remains, transcending differences of class and occupation, though its priests may well have to devote themselves to the needs of special groups within it. But the parish is primarily the setting in which the Christian is born and grows to maturity. So it is the place of baptism, the school in which knowledge of the Faith is imparted, the house of God where, through the life of the sacraments, the Christian grows in strength and heals his wounds.

M. Dagalier's theme was 'The indispensable function of the laity in the spiritualisation of the parish'. 'You priests', concluded M. Dagalier, 'help us to be Christians. Put us face to face with the real problems. Show up our excuses when we claim to have done all that is reasonable by taking part in a procession or attending a committee meeting. Deepen our sense of the supernatural. Give us the realisation of our vocation as missionaries. Send us forth.'

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TEMOIGNAGE CHRETIEN, the weekly review which reflects perhaps better than any other the amazing vitality of French Catholic life, has reached its 200th number. Along with many other Catholic publications it is experiencing a desperate struggle for existence, and one may hope that it will long continue its fearless career. In the issue of May 7, two unpublished letters of Léon Bloy are printed. In the second of them, written from Bourg-la-Reine in May 1913, we have an extraordinarily apt summary of the character—and the vocation—of the 'Pilgrim of the Absolute':

All of us alike have one thing to do in this world: to become saints, and that means much suffering, as we know. But it can't be too often repeated that there is really only one way of suffering and that is to reject in advance any consolation.

It is a superhuman sacrifice, and yet it is demanded of us. If it isn't achieved, the hope of sanctity is only a dream and a mockery. Such is our task, and I agree that it is a very hard one. We must pray to the Holy Ghost to free us from the illusions of the times whose victims we are. In sadness and in joy we think time is something, but it is nothing since for God it has no existence. And so it should not exist for us either. It is time that separates us from God. If we should obtain the grace of not knowing what time it is, we should already be in the blessedness of Eternity, and suffering would be for us as it were a swift boat on the river of Paradise.

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CATHOLICISM AND PURITANISM is the subject of a lecture given by Mason Wade in Boston 'under the auspices of the Gallery of Living Catholic Authors' and printed in *Commonweal*.

In recent years there have been certain signs that we Catholics,

who once hailed the American tradition of tolerance and freedom because they enabled us to exist as a tiny minority in an overwhelmingly Protestant U.S.A., are becoming bumptious, now that our unified strength outweighs the disordered ranks of a dying Protestantism. We seem to be adopting the Puritan attitude of 'I will not. Thou shalt not'.

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SOVIET WRITERS REPLY to questions put by English writers in a booklet published by the Society for Cultural Relations with the U.S.S.R. (2s. 0d.). Nothing could be more revealing. In answer to Elizabeth Myers's question as to whether any modern Soviet writer approximates to Dostoevsky's 'message' as exemplified in Father Zossima and Prince Myshkin, David Zaslavsky replies:

Dostoevsky believed that the Russian people was called upon to play a special role in history, precisely by virtue of its adherence to the teaching of Christian love. In this idea of Dostoevsky's we see the erroneous, weak side of his work and his teaching. In reality, as we all know, the Russian people, who have established the Soviet socialist state and who have saved world civilisation from fascism, could play such an outstanding role in world history precisely because of the fact that they . . . were armed not with the teaching of Christian love but with the philosophy, policy and morality of Communism.

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LINACRE (No. 2) contains a wise article by Dr Newsholme on 'Health and Habit'. The principle he commends to medical students is to study man 'as a whole, in health or in ill-health, and of refusing to deal with him in watertight compartments. For man is not a mere box of mechanical or chemical tricks. He is a creature whose state of health is intimately affected by his relationship to God, his fellow-men and his outward circumstances.'

TWENTIETH CENTURY (Melbourne) includes Fr Martindale's meditations on *Brideshead Revisited*. 'Mr Waugh begins by exhibiting what we know to be sin as what it seems like to an unbelieving generation—and this includes their periodical sense of sorrow and shame—and innumerable young men and women will be grateful that someone, especially a Catholic, understands them: and forthwith he makes it clear that nothing but disorder and disaster follow from sin.'

MAMANS is the title of the latest *Fêtes et Saisons* album (Blackfriars Publications, 1s. 1½d.), and in it Christian mothers are worthily commemorated, with the customary wealth of excellent photography and readable text.