

THE GRACES OF INTERIOR PRAYER. By A. Poulain, s.j. (Routledge; 30s.)

About the time that William James was preparing his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, at the turn of the century, Père Poulain was engaged in a similar occupation with a massive work on *Les Graces d'Oraison*. And though the results of their work are very different, these two men were interested largely in the same thing, the phenomena of religious experience. Poulain of course wrote not only as a trained Catholic theologian but also with the wide scope of Catholic mystical writing under review, while James was concerned with more or less contemporary reports of men and women of no particular creed who experienced conversion, union with the cosmos or with the divine and such-like strange awarenesses. Von Hugel says of *Varieties* that the author almost wholly overlooks the traditional, intellectual framework in which the experiences find their lodgment. The same could not be said of Poulain's work, and yet he too is so concerned with phenomena of the spiritual life that one feels that he has instinctively adopted the modern scientific habit of providing an hypothetical rather than a traditional framework into which he can fit the various facts as reported by those who have ascended the scale of perfection. His work is not therefore traditional, partly because of his modern experimental methods and partly because the traditional theology has remained almost exclusively *a priori* in its approach. Thus for example the traditional theology of progress towards union with God took into account only three 'ways' or main stages to the ultimate one of transforming union. Poulain distinguishes two approaches towards God—one is that of ordinary grace which concludes in the prayer of 'simple regard', the other of extraordinary graces which begin with the prayer of quiet and conclude in transforming union. These divisions can hardly be called traditional, but they are perfectly legitimate on the modern scientific method of finding an hypothetical formula into which as many phenomena as possible may be fitted. If his formula does not prove a completely accurate explanation, that is no reason for condemning the method. He had to produce a formula in order to display the facts, and the display of facts is very impressive and useful.

It is only a pity that this re-impression of the English translation should have retained the original introductory matter written in the early 'twenties by Père Bainvel when the war between Père Poulain's successor and Père Garrigou Lagrange was at its height. The long introduction could therefore have been omitted.

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