

## REVIEWS

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT. By Evelyn Underhill. (Longmans; 3s. 6d.)

Miss Underhill needs no introduction, and this, her last book published posthumously, is so uniformly good that it is impossible either to find cause for criticism or to single out any one chapter or point for special praise. It is a valuable book because it shows religion, or rather the practice of religion, to have meaning for daily life: it is a great book because its attitude is emphatically theocentric, unlike the majority of modern spiritual brochures which are in varying degrees egocentric. In the words of the author, 'A selfish craving to enjoy Him for ourselves can even poison our love of God.' Miss Underhill possesses that invaluable gift of the happy phrase which makes old truths new, surely the fruit of much meditation: thus, 'God loves, not tolerates, these wayward, half-grown self-centred spirits . . .'; humility means 'knowing our own size and own place . . . the crowning grace of creatureliness.' Yet this 'popularisation' of religion is not done at the expense of either accuracy or profundity: depth of thought goes hand in hand with the most stimulating practical advice: 'the soul of religion is adoration,' and two pages away, 'a direct and important bit of "spiritual war work" is . . . to pray for Hitler and Mussolini.' As an example of profound practical thought her treatment of the virtue of chastity is outstanding. 'This [chastity] may involve a deliberate rationing of time and energy we give to absorbing personal relationships with others—unnecessary meetings, talks and letters—to special tastes and interests, or, worst of all, self-occupied day-dreams and broodings about ourselves, cravings for sympathy and interest.' To hear possessiveness and self-centredness denounced as offences against chastity is as rare as it is true.

*The Fruits of the Spirit* consists of two parts, the first made up of the conferences given at the House of Retreat, Pleshey, in 1936, and the second of letters to the Prayer Group which Miss Underhill founded in 1938 with a view to helping young women who, in the course of their study of theology, wanted instruction in their devotional life. The retreat conferences deal with the Fruits of the Holy Ghost, and the underlying theme is that the fruits spring from fidelity to the Will of God; and yet the word self-abandonment, often meaningless to modern ears, is not once used. Indeed, the author uses no single word or expression for this climax of the spiritual life—repetition so easily produces a mere ineffective slogan—but she gradually inculcates the idea by a variety of examples and proofs: 'the spiritual life consists in His action within us . . . the foolish error of supposing that we get about under our own steam

. . . more and more emphasis on God and His love; less and less on ourselves . . . peace and joy must be based not on how we are, but on what God is . . . and they are the reward of self-oblivion, dropping all consideration of holes in our stockings, the imperfection of our characters, the poverty of our prayers.' And out of all this there is something to be aimed at. 'Have you not known such moments in life, when perhaps the sudden sight of a wild cherry in blossom, the abrupt disclosure of a great mountain, or the crowning moment of a great concerto, has revealed the perfect, and flooded you with a tranquil joy, while the fact that you are a sweep simply ceased to matter at all?' Such hints, to be found on every page, produce at the end of forty-three pages a settled conviction—of the overwhelming importance of God and a realisation of one's own place—such as no watchword, however eloquently repeated, could effect. If it has been said that in a psychological age, such as the twentieth century undoubtedly is, people must be taught to be objective and extroverted, here is the teaching. It is the remedy for that self-centredness and enervating concern for one's own success and goodness which, springing as it does from the atmosphere in which we live, deceives even the elect. The aim is no longer success in the spiritual life, but the realisation of God's perfect goodness, which, paradoxically enough, is attained through the very ordinary duties of daily life.

The practical side of Miss Underhill's teaching is more clearly revealed in the second part of the book, and especially in the proposed rule of life for the Prayer Group: twenty minutes a day in prayer and Bible reading, weekly Communion, an hour's spiritual reading a week, *perpetual* self-discipline (the bogey 'mortification' is avoided): and all this for *ordinary* people, not the 'leisured classes.' Again, her suggestions for Lenten 'abstinence' centre round the small things: 'do not linger in bed, but get up at once; give up novel reading,' and so on. The profound appreciation of what submission to God's Will means is complemented by the insistence on the 'doggy' virtue of Faithfulness—'doggy love is a very good sort of love, humble, selfless and enduring.' Faithfulness means 'continuing quietly with the job we have been given . . . not yielding to the restless desire for change. Steady, unsensational driving, taking good care of the car. A lot of the road to heaven has to be taken at thirty miles per hour.'

This book leaves one thinking and thirsting for more. In the turmoil not only of modern war, but of modern life as a whole, it demands great faithfulness to rest in God and accept the work of the Spirit. But a new Christian Order can spring only from individual personal holiness, and though indeed 'the Spirit breatheth where He will,' His work is only effective if 'thou hearest His voice.'

GERARD MEATH, O.P.