

brothers—to St Louise de Marillac and her Daughters and to the Ladies of Charity. To these he has added some letters of St Louise and St Vincent's disciples, all of which go to show, as the author remarks, 'the extent to which the saint has penetrated the soul of his followers with his own spirit'. The extracts vary in length from a few lines to three or four pages and enables us to decide in what respect M. Menebrea looks upon the saint as a savant. He does not, of course, regard him as 'a distinguished scientist', but as 'a man of learning deeply versed in the knowledge of the human heart and endowed with the gift of persuading his correspondents and hearers to advance in the love of God and of their neighbour. 'The secret of St Vincent's style', he remarks, 'which is so simple, so vibrant, and which imitates that of no other writer, is that he never treats of any other subject than the problems of life. He studies them in their entire extent, in all their mysterious complexities, he does not isolate or separate the soul from the body, and he passes on without any transition from those most lowly and most humiliating necessities which are of such a nature that he was the first to devote attention to them, to the most sublime thoughts and ideas, in accordance with the desire of our human nature.' Is there a more learned style of writing, one that embraces the totality of Truth, one more certain to ensue than that which follows the drama of human existence? And if eloquence is the gift that renders us master of the mind and heart of those who hear us, who was more eloquent than he?

This book, then, should serve as a useful introduction to those who know little of the life and doctrine of St Vincent and of his spirit in which he entered upon and carried to a successful conclusion those great corporeal and spiritual works of mercy that have earned him the glorious title of 'Apostle of Charity'.

JOSEPH LEONARD, C.M.

SHE WHO LIVED HER NAME. By Marie René-Bazin. (Mercier Press; 12s. 6d.)

'The realisation of a thought of love from the Heart of Jesus' was how the Curé d'Ars described the Society of the Helpers of the Holy Souls (p. 76), founded in 1856 to 'labour through works of mercy for the deliverance of the Holy Souls' (p. 78); and since the Foundress urged her daughters to 'share in all manner of good' (p. 166) it is not surprising that the Saint's prophecy that it would spread rapidly through the Church was quickly fulfilled.

God's instrument in the work was Eugénie Smet, born at Loos near Lille on 25th March 1825. From her youth, longing to do something great for God, she prayed: 'Take me, O God, for I do not know how to give myself' (p. 25). At the age of 12 the two great passions of her life, Providence and Purgatory, had already become inseparably united in her thoughts; 'O Providence, You have given me everything! I ask one thing only: to be your Provi-

dence for the Souls in Purgatory.' (p. 67). Yet it was not until she was 33 that the Society she had long envisaged came into being. The interval was filled with pious works of every kind among which the successful organisation of raffles for charitable purposes played a leading part.

To compare her with Fr Largentier who shared her ideals and was used by Providence to lead her to Paris, the pre-ordained scene of her labours, is to study the contrast between one who is led by the Spirit and another who is guided by natural reason. Hers was from the first the 'passivity' of the handmaid whose eyes are always upon the Lord and who would never act until his Will had been made manifest. But once this was clearly signified—and her requests for signs seem always to have been granted—she went ahead in the strength of 'a powerful grace working in a powerful nature' (p. 108).

The Curé d'Ars encouraged her during the anxious times before and after the foundation and help came from various sources, including the saintly Dominican Père Aussant, but it was in the Jesuit rule and direction that the Foundress and her daughters eventually discovered their predestined way of life and holiness. (Her second Director, Père Olivaint, died as a martyr under the Commune and his Cause has been introduced in Rome.)

Suffering speedily perfected her generous, virile nature, as it bore fruit in new foundations in France, Belgium and China. This last Mission was successful beyond all expectations and its most striking results were the Congregation for native Sisters, started in 1869, and the reception of the first Chinese Novices of the Society in 1870.

The malady which tormented her with the 'radiance of Purgatory' (p. 122) and ended in her death remained so long undiagnosed that her Director could say: 'God is your Pain' (p. 96). For ten years she endured the anguish of the Dark Night and to her despairing cry: 'When will Jesus come back?' the only answer she received was: 'When you have gone out of yourself' (p. 95). And although the Society flourished and was visibly blessed by Providence, it had been conceived and born in her pain and at the moment of her death during the siege of Paris in 1870, its future may have seemed as precarious as its beginnings had been.

Yet her complete abandonment and trust and her spirit of joy never wavered; hers was the way of the radiant and serene self-surrender of spiritual childhood, serene because so simple. She was 'Mary of Providence', not only the child but the instrument, 'the thing' of God (p. 194). Her work was his so that she could leave everything securely in his hands; 'God has done everything and he is always with us' (p. 208). Above all, perhaps, she was his victim for the suffering souls and the prayer of her last days: 'If I am not to be mad with pain I must be mad with love. Consume

me, O my God' (p. 205), shows how perfectly she fulfilled that aspect of her vocation.

Marie René-Bazin's loving portrait of her spiritual mother is worthy of its subject and the Mercier Press have produced it in a manner that does justice to both. May this book help to make better known the Society which is so admirably designed to practise charity towards God and man, to aid the dead by succouring the living. And may the example of Mary of Providence encourage others to surrender themselves with equal generosity to the designs of their Heavenly Father, who can do such great things in and through a soul that is wholly his.

S.O.P.

THE CURE D'ARS. By Francis Trochu. (Burns Oates 18s.)

SAINT FRANCOIS DE SALES, DOCTEUR DE LA PERFECTION. By Jacques Leclercq. (Casterman, Paris.)

There are two kinds of hagiography, the one that tries to reconstruct a detailed historical account of the life of the saint and the other which tries to assess his relative importance in regard to the spirit of his times and the history of asceticism and mysticism. For the one every little incident has its own particular value, for the other incidents are of value only in so far as they may serve to interpret 'the spirit' of the life. Both have their dangers: the historical approach may become uncritical and by too much concentration on detail distort the true picture, the critical, on the other hand, may become unhistorical and by too much theorising reconstruct a life that was never lived. In Abbé Trochu's life of the Curé d'Ars one has reason to regret the historical approach: canonisation does not canonise the details of a saint's life but only its general tendency. Has the Church pronounced on the morality of dancing because she has canonised Jean-Marie Vianney, who denied absolution to those who did not promise never to dance again? Can an *a fortiori* case be made against dancing in a modern dance-hall because the Abbé Vianney made a case against the lesser danger of dancing in the bistro at Ars which had none of the alluring accoutrements of the modern hall and dress? Abbé Trochu does not touch on these questions—his is an historical account and he does not give reasons to support (still less arguments against) the Curé's strictures. The result is that at the end of the Life we have a quite fantastic picture of the saint who is certainly not a person we would ever think we were capable of imitating—nights spent in prayer, days devoted to the confessional, house-to-house visitation, ceaseless preaching, hardly anything to eat except boiled potatoes, Office read kneeling upright on bare stones, the institution and administration of orphanages, nocturnal struggles with the devil . . . it is all rather beyond us and yet surely the purpose of the canonisation of a simple country priest was to stimulate every priest engaged on the pastoral ministry. All these details defeat