

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discursive meditation came to be looked on as the only safe way of praying, but in recent years the true sources of the theology of prayer have happily been rediscovered, and the act of contemplation restored to its proper place as the normal goal of prayer. These recent studies have incidentally made possible the writing of an article so greatly instructive and refreshing as the one we have described. All those that succeed it should be read against its background. They show St Paul, the Desert Fathers, St Francis of Sales, and Charles de Foucauld at prayer, enquire into the prayer of layfolk in our own times, give valuable instruction in the practice of meditation and the prayerful exercise of the theological virtues, and stress the value of Holy Scripture for feeding the spirit and fostering its ardour in prayer and life. A widespread and general shrinking from the least suggestion of method is revealed as characteristic of prayerful souls today, but while the contributors are not slow to condemn exaggerated complications of the past, there is an undercurrent of suggestion that some degree of regularity and discipline is a normal requirement for progress. The not infrequent generous desire to lead a life that draws its strength from prayer may prove an idle reverie and cover a dangerous self-deception if it is not persistently expressed in the ascetic discipline of regular practice.

IVO THOMAS, O.P.

OUR BLESSED MOTHER. By the late Fr Edward Leen and Fr John Kearney, C.S.Sp., edited by Fr Bernard Fennelly, C.S.Sp. (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds; 10s. 6d.)

Those who during the past years have refreshed themselves with the spiritual writings of Fr Leen and Fr Kearney must have felt a pang of regret when they learned that these two gifted pens had ceased. There were still vast fields of God's supernatural world to be worked over: great themes on which to bring their *sapida sapientia* to bear. To both the fitting theme would have been Our Lady. 'If I could write a book on our Blessed Lady', said Fr Leen, 'I should feel that my work as a spiritual writer would be complete'. God ordained otherwise. What Fr Fennelly has done for us is, with the help of the Sisters of St Mary's Convent, Arklow, to give us fifteen talks of Fr Leen and four conferences of Fr Kearney's. We can therefore gather what was uppermost in their minds on the subject of Our Lady and have an inkling of a greater banquet, which Providence withheld.

It might be well on the appearance of this posthumous work of Fr Leen to try to discover what we might be permitted to call his 'Secret'. We are all conscious of the difference between the *Summa* of St Thomas and the ordinary theological manuals. The *Summa* somehow feels warm and the manual cold. It is not a question of brevity and precision, but a *Respondeo dicendum* seems to live whereas a thesis with its *Status Questionis* and its ordered array of

proofs from Scripture, the Fathers and Reason is dead. Is it not that the references to Holy Writ and the Fathers come in St Thomas, not so much as proof-texts as loving reminiscences from an abundant and affectionate memory and are blended from a living thing? We perhaps find the key in the words used by the Holy Father in the *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, when he says of the Fathers and commentators of the past: 'By reason of the office in the Church with which God entrusted them, they excel in a delicate perception of heavenly things and in a wonderful keenness of understanding, which enable them to penetrate far into the depths of the word of God and to bring to light all that can contribute to explaining the teaching of Christ and to promoting sanctity of life'. (C.T.S. trans. n. 34.)

I should like to apply this to the discovery of Fr Leen's 'Secret'. We are always conscious when reading him that the *Summa* lies just immediately behind, even when it is not directly quoted. When he says in the present work: 'Mary is the Mother of Fear—not of servile fear, but of a fear of delight, of a fear shot through and through with trembling reverence and love. She is the Mother of that fear which is a delicate shrinking from anything that could pain or wound the object of its love'—do we not recognise a very beautiful summing up of II-II q. 19 on the Gift of Fear?

It might be said that the hope expressed by the Holy Father for the work of modern interpreters of the Sacred Scriptures: 'Thus will come about that happy and fruitful combination of the learning and spiritual unction of the ancients with the greater erudition and maturer skill of the moderns' was realised in his own sphere by Fr Leen. He knew how to found himself on St Thomas as the transmitter of the past and at the same time to gather up the rich spiritual teaching of the moderns and thus to 'bring forth new fruit'. And thus we get the teaching of St Francis de Sales and the two Teresas and withal that unconscious Irish Thing—a steady strength that has come purified through the fire of persecution, together with the innate kindness and graciousness of the Irish soul.

P. J. FLOOD.

THE COMFORTING OF CHRIST—being a Peace-time Edition, revised and enlarged, of *This War is the Passion*. By Caryl Houselander. (Sheed & Ward; 8s. 6d.)

Miss Houselander is always feminine in her writing. That is her great merit. When we hear her it is as if we are at a mother's knee being told the things we need to know, simply, soothingly. She writes for adults, so that the things she says are no children's things; but the telling of them has that quality. And it is a quality we so badly need. Too many of us have had no Catholic mother; we are converts, or children of broken families, or our mother has been more worldly than Catholic; and anyway all of us are somehow orphaned by the strain and cruelty and unsympathy of a war-racked world.

Not that there is anything condescending in Miss Houselander's