

cessions of Candlemas, Palm Sunday and Ascension. The rest of the text shows admirably the manner in which a mystical writer can build on a liturgical function and reach to the heights of the spiritual life thereby. The processions are each one of them conducted in company with our Lord, since they have their origin in our Lord's own movements in the Gospels. The procession of candles in honour of the Purification of our Lady is particularly fruitful. 'We light our candles when we have need to look for something in the more hidden and obscure places in our rooms. We have to ask for the light of deep and thorough investigation in order that things hidden in darkness and the designs of the heart may be made manifest, cleansed, purified.' So we carry lights to shine in the dark recesses of our hearts and to accompany our Lady and her Son to make their offering in the Temple. The treatment of the symbolism of the Scriptures and liturgical functions is somewhat tortuous to the modern way of considering the spiritual sense, but the method unearths some very pleasing and illuminating aspects of interpretation.

JOHN CORSON

L'OBÉISSANCE ET LA RELIGIEUSE D'AUJOUR'HUI (Editions du Cerf; and Blackfriars) is the latest volume in the series which began with *Directoire des Supérieures*, now translated as *Religious Sisters*. Each volume is the fruit of a conference of a group of French clergy under the direction of *La Vie Spirituelle* designed to help the cause of the vocations of religious women. On the occasion whence sprang this book they had chosen a subject which is the corner stone of religious life and the one which needs to take all the strain of the change in modern conditions. The clergy on this occasion were joined by some nuns, and between them they faced the questions of 'the nature and exigencies of the virtue and vow of obedience both in its immovable roots and what is common in all forms of the religious state as well as from the point of view of its "adaptations" to feminine psychology and to contemporary circumstances'. (Introduction.) It would be impossible here to give any adequate idea of the contents of the volume. The design is on a wider scale than in any of the previous volumes, the question being discussed from the historical, theological, psychological and empirical stand-points—each of these aspects forms one of the four parts of the book. The history begins with the fathers of the desert and traces the varying ideas and practices of obedience up to the sixteenth century. The doctrine considers, besides the more obvious topics, that of 'Le mystère de la femme et l'obéissance religieuse' by Père Henry, O.P. Père Plé, O.P., treats psychologically the point of supreme importance regarding obedience and freedom, judgment and maturity of character. The

latter essay is of the utmost importance, for, as the author says, if obedience is not assisting the subject in the virtue of prudence and therefore in a certain freedom of judgment (for prudence is the *recta ratio agibilium*), it will not be a means of perfection. Such is the urgency of the proper understanding of obedience in religious life that it is to be hoped that this volume will quickly follow in the wake of *Religious Sisters* into the English tongue.

JOHN CORSON

STIMULI. By R. A. Knox. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

Chesterton used to say that he had not the time to read a short book. Would he have added: nor listen to a short sermon? Short sermons, which are as good as these 'Stimuli', do indeed demand much concentration and subsequent reflection if their message is not to pass us by. As Mgr Knox himself wrote of a book by Father Gerald Vann, they need 'to be read slowly, sipped not gulped'. Readers of *The Sunday Times* will find here paragraphs which they had carefully cut out on Sunday evening—and afterwards lost—as well as those others which they would have cut out on Monday morning—had not the Sunday papers been by then already consigned to their last resting place. It is a good thing too that not only readers of *The Sunday Times* should feel the sting of these sharp goads. Altogether it was an excellent idea to reprint these sermons in book form—though a pity we could not have been assured beforehand that it was going to happen.

DESMOND SCHLEGEL

SOEUR CATHERINE. By G. Gaetano di Sales. (Editori E. L. M., Roma; n.p.)

The nature of S. di Sales's book is difficult to discern. It is certainly an interpretation of facts, both those of St Catherine Labouré's visions and silence and those of the author's conversion, the one set the effect of the other and at the same time the lens through which the other is seen. Aesthetically the book fails to unify its divided intention—to examine analytically and to express synthetically the truths of the manifestation which it justly sums up in its essence as that of 'la Vierge Immaculée, Médiatrice Universelle'. The principle that 'la cause est Supérieure à l'effet' is sometimes betrayed in the book itself, and one has to remember the warning of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and read it in its entirety lest it should be misunderstood. It is then obvious that the two theological jolts are verbal imprecisions, and that if the author indulges often in an exclamatory style himself, he admires sheerness and repose in others. As a whole this Italian study in French is interesting but below the standard of its 'intermezzo', a sonnet purer in achievement than the quasi-commentary which surrounds it.

M.H.P.