

action. But one cannot help wondering how much help was given out of a genuine spirit of compassion and a humble acknowledgement of responsibility, and how much as a sop to the conscience both of the individual and of the nation. People today have little notion of the theological significance of almsgiving. At worst it is seen as an unavoidable duty; at best it is often a form of sentimental humanitarianism. In either case the motive for giving is far removed from true Christian charity which reverences and respects other people and ministers to them as to Christ himself.

The tragedy of the little child and the other miseries which it brought to light are not of course merely a French national problem. Six months ago we in England read of an old man who pleaded not to be sent to the workhouse and who within two weeks of being sent there died, according to the official medical report, of grief and shame. And it is not irrelevant to notice that for the current year contributions to the R.S.P.C.A. were well in advance of donations to the R.S.P.C.C.

The appeal of this book is not that of the romantic war-time resistance leader who 'has become a legend in France with his beret, black beard and benign smile'. It is the appeal of a man of God living the Gospels unself-consciously, without for a moment thinking that he is either doing or becoming anything extraordinary. The life of the Abbé Pierre proves that true Christian charity is both practical and acceptable; that so far from robbing some unfortunate man of the last shreds of his self-esteem and dignity, service to one's neighbour done out of a love of God heals wounded pride and restores self-esteem. Abbé Pierre tells us in a Foreword that 'one saves oneself in saving others'. How different is this expression of true compassion from what we so often find: one saves others in order to save oneself. The latter is the 'charity' which any self-respecting man abominates. And yet we learn from this absorbing and well-written story of a modern St Vincent de Paul how true love can transform the baser counterfeit with which we so often, perhaps unconsciously, trade; 'the kingdom of heaven is like to leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened'.

MURDOCH SCOTT, O.P.

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND. By Thomas Merton (Hollis & Carter; 16s.)

The Author tells us in his preface that 'these meditations are musings upon questions that are, to me, relatively or absolutely important'. That they are musings, and thus not always directed to a defined audience, may explain the somewhat remote and impersonal style of the writing, which though it demands close attention, is none the less of a high order. The Essays are full of trenchant, revealing phrases, shedding

new light on old truths. 'A love that is selfless that honestly seeks truth does not make unlimited concessions to the beloved'—a thought which should dispel the widespread confusion of charity with mere amiability. 'Sanctity does not consist in doing the will of God. It consists in willing the will of God'—a thing which once said is clear but which is not always said. The meditation on Pure Intention explains Tauler's distinction between a right and a simple intention; the latter does all things not only for God but in God; the former brings it about 'that we work with enough detachment to keep ourselves above the work to be done'. 'A right intention aims only at right action. A simple intention keeps our life hidden in Christ with God.'

In the essay on Sincerity Fr Merton writes: 'In the end the problem of sincerity is a problem of love', and he goes on to say without naming the sin that the practice of birth control implies a failure of sincerity in love between husband and wife. 'A love', he writes, 'that fears to have children for any motive whatever is a love that fears love. It is divided against itself. It is a lie and a contradiction.' Speaking, as Fr Merton does, of natural human love the last half-dozen words need further qualification. There are Catholics involved in this sin who are not formally guilty of it. Is their love insincere? If sincerity is equated with perfection, then since nothing human is perfect nothing human can ever be wholly sincere. This however is to deal in absolutes, and to ignore the fact that the relative is the practical norm of human life. A human love may well be sincere though imperfect, perhaps because it sincerely recognizes its own imperfection. Surely that much may be conceded to a modern predicament, and surely to concede less is to withhold that small but necessary amount of encouragement, without which perseverance in the ways of the spirit is for ordinary people impossible. Of such is a good portion of Fr Merton's public.

R. VELARDE

FAITH, REASON AND MODERN PSYCHIATRY. Edited by Francis J. Braceland, M.D. (Kenedy, New York; \$6.00)

This is a serious and important symposium of five psychiatrists, two Dominicans (and a Jesuit foreword writer), an historian of Medicine, a philosopher and an anthropologist, all American or Canadian apart from two Spaniards, and linked with one another by the Faith and their interest in its synthesis with psychology and psychiatry, the general aim of the book.

The British psychiatrist will rapidly smell the ghost of Freud as pungent in this work as, one hears, in all New World psychiatry. It hovers even around the editor who, in his initial, general survey, tends to reject the 'somatic' approach with that of nineteenth-century