

from the others: all . . . are related, . . . and form one organic whole'. But this quotation will show the synthetic, theological attitude that Fr Frenay adopts. Priests will derive much assistance from the book.

THE GOOD CONFESSOR, by Gerald Kelly, S.J. (Clonmore and Reynolds; 5s.), shows again that the priest today is not being neglected. The book is also written by an American, but its publication in Ireland makes it readier of access to the shelves of the clergy on this side of the Atlantic. The treatment is very practical as the author discusses such things as 'consultation' and how far one can use experience gained in the confessional for preaching and direction. The book will be bought by many confessors.

THE VEN. PETER DONDEERS was a Dutch priest who went out to Suramin and Batavia in search of missionary work, lived heroically among the lepers, and at the age of fifty-seven became a Redemptorist. He died after a life of great energy and holiness at the age of seventy-eight in January, 1887. His life is told with spirit and attractively by John Carr, C.S.S.R., in *A Fisher of Men* (Clonmore and Reynolds; 9s. 6d.).

EXTRACTS

THE BLESSED SOLITUDE may well appeal to the greatly active and ever energetic French Catholics; so we are not surprised to find the October issue of *La Vie Spirituelle* devoted to the modern hermit. Is the call to a solitary life an evil sign—weakness, escapism, despair? Or is it perfection? Do we desire to fly to the desert under the impulse of the Spirit? Elias is the great figure of the solitary:

He is alone. The immense solitude of the desert which surrounds him is but an image of his isolation in his faith. His intense zeal has proved impotent. He knows that deep sense of frustration which so often pervades the heart of man. The most resounding triumphs come to nothing. Perhaps it is just here that we experience the most acute understanding of our interior wretchedness. . . . Miracles are not and cannot be holiness. If it please God to make use of us for his exterior works—without dragging in miracles, but limiting ourselves to the apostolate or to preaching—we rediscover ourselves in the dead weight that we are, acutely conscious of the vast disproportion between what God is and what we are.

But in that despair an angel appears and nourishes Elias with heavenly bread. Even so he must remain another forty days in the aridity of the desert on his way to the Holy Mount.

A footnote to another article recalls a past discussion in the pages of the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT:

Now that the constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* has recognised

canonically the ideal of the state of perfection lived in the very heart of worldly life now so profane, we may well hope to see the recognition *a fortiori* of this same ideal in the eremitical state, by an extension in the opposite direction . . . which seems to be needed to keep the supernatural balance. . . .

No suggestion here makes the possibility any nearer realisation. Last year, however, in two instructive articles on Secular Institutes, Fr Gumbinger, O.F.M.CAP., in the *Father Mathew Record* (Dublin; June and July, 1951) made it clear that the spirit of the solitary ought to be very close to the ideal of these groups:

Some members of these Institutes must live at times in common life; . . . This fact of common life, however, does not make such Institutes religious Congregations.

The negative problems of these consecrated souls find their solution not merely in prayer and detachment, but in that *spiritual autonomy* to which they must be trained. . . . The individual will also be helped to solve his problems by that *interior wealth* which he gradually accumulates. . . . Generally they (the Institutes) do not wish to be known as a society. Most of them publish nothing under the name of the Institute; they form no group activity in public; they forbid their members, as a rule, to speak to others about the Institute, its rules, houses, members and work. Even when the members live a community life they still manage to work in a hidden way . . . when they go about in the world, they are lost in the world.

All this has a delightful touch of the *ordinary* Christian life which of course every Institute and Order must live, and which always demands the spirit of the desert and solitude without its 'exclusivity'.

RELIGIOUS LIFE has been receiving much attention in America. *Cross and Crown* for September went to press too early to give much impression of the results of the first-year course of their Institute of Spiritual Theology except to quote the words of Cardinal Stritch who opened the Institute by celebrating Mass and preaching. Forty-five students began the three year course, coming from twelve religious institutes and many seminaries. *Review of Religious* for September gives the first hasty account of the National Congress of Religious held at the University of Notre Dame from August 9th to 12th.

The Congress was summoned by the Sacred Congregation of Religious, as a means of intensifying and strengthening the religious life in the United States, of giving religious of all institutes an opportunity to exchange ideas and particularly to discuss the problems pertaining to the adjustment of the religious life to conditions prevailing in our land without compromising the principles on which the religious life is based.

As so often happens in these Congresses, there were too many papers and little time for discussion, which latter is of the utmost importance. But a good start was made and we may look forward to similar gatherings in other English-speaking countries.

Meanwhile the same Congregation summoned a Congress of Superiors of Religious Sisters in Rome in the middle of September. At its conclusion the Holy Father spoke to them all:

As you know, the Orders of women are going through a serious crisis. We refer to the drop in the number of vocations. The crisis has not yet in fact affected every country; and even where it is felt it is not felt with equal intensity everywhere. But now in several European countries it is already disquieting. . . . We wish today only to speak to those—priests or laity, preachers, lecturers or writers—who no longer have a word of approval or praise for virginity vowed to Christ, who for some years, in spite of the Church's warning and contrary to her mind, give preference on principle to marriage over virginity, who present marriage as the only means capable of granting natural development and perfection to human personality.

The Holy Father regarded this reaction from religious to married life as the principal cause of the lack of vocations and the consequent abandonment of many great works of long standing in the matter of hospitals and schools. But he went on to speak of the necessity of adapting the life of sisters to modern standards in such matters as the religious habit, and of perfecting a more motherly spirit towards the sisters, who must also be properly trained for the work they are to undertake.

'Sad saints are no saints at all.'—Fr McAuliffe, S.J., in *Sponsa Regis* (August).

'The one natural life of man is supernaturalised, not by an external veneer, as it were, of grace but by an inward strengthening. The change may be regarded as a consecration, in so far as everything in man's nature is made sacred, as every part of the iron is made to glow with the fire in which it is plunged, or every part of the air is suffused with light.'

—Fr McNicholl, O.P., in *Doctrine and Life* (October).

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