

A LIFE OF BLESSED MARIE THERESE DE SOUBIRAN. By William Lawson, S.J. (Burns Oates; 10s. 6d.)

QUARTET IN HEAVEN. By Sheila Kaye-Smith. (Cassell; 15s.)

ST BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE. By Agnes de la Gorce, translated by Rosemary Sheed. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

Miss Kaye-Smith distinguishes between the hagiographer whose aim seems to be to promote a cultus and who approaches his subject with 'more imagination than judgment', and the biographer who only seeks to record facts. All three writers here are of the second class, though in *Quartet in Heaven* the novelist's imagination sometimes replaces the hagiographer's. Fr Lawson gives a simple, unvarnished account of the woman who gave up her desire for the contemplative life to found the active Congregation of Marie Auxiliatrice, only to be deposed and driven out by a rival who later turned out to be married and separated from her husband and therefore no religious at all. Marie Thérèse died as assistant portress in another community where she was received but never really trusted. Her own Congregation seemed doomed. Yet after her death it revived and now carries on its work for the young as far afield as Japan.

Catherine of Genoa, Rose of Lima, Thérèse of Lisieux and Cornelia Connelly (the as yet un-beatified Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus) form Miss Kaye-Smith's heavenly quartet. Background and characters are painted by a master hand, and contrasts and parallels, often striking and illuminating, illustrate the nature of both saints and sanctity, though one may not agree with all the interpretations and conclusions. The approach is psychological, the aim primarily to discover 'the marks of our common humanity . . . the sacramental base' which grace, by purifying, perfects in holiness.

Benedict Joseph Labre, the dirty, evil-smelling, verminous pilgrim-tramp is a repellent figure to many people, saint though he be. But here we see below the surface to the 'proud, sensitive, reserved' soul tormented by the sense of sin becoming with Christ 'despised and the most abject of men', *joyfully* accepting the blows and spittle as his share of the redemptive Passion. It was no easy matter for him to plumb the deepest depths of human loneliness and physical degradation. 'I know how much it cost him', said one of his confessors, speaking of the fleas. But the harsh ascetic became the gentle mystic, carried out of himself by the mystery of the Trinity, famed for miracles, ecstasies, the reading of hearts. When he died Rome went mad and the cause of his beatification was opened the following day. Both the original life and the translation convey the tragic beauty of the subject as worthily as the arresting contemporary portrait which serves as frontispiece. Altogether a most moving and humble book.

S.M.A.