

JESUS-CHRIST. By H.-D. Lacordaire; Editions du Cerf, 7.20 NF.

VIE DE SAINT DOMINIQUE. By H.-D. Lacordaire; Editions du Cerf, 8.70NF.

It is very fitting that, with the centenary of Père Lacordaire's death very much in their hearts and minds this year, the French Dominicans should have brought out these two books with the purpose of reviving both public interest in the person of their 'restorer' and the desire to meditate upon his life and teaching.

This has been particularly well achieved in *Jesus-Christ*, a selection from Lacordaire's correspondence, his conferences at Notre-Dame de Paris and in Toulouse, and his essays on Mary Magdalene. These texts, especially the extracts from his letters and conferences, must have been chosen partly for the perfection of Lacordaire's style, which in other works seems so often marked by the century in which he lived, but more so for the way they point to the thesis of P. Carré's introduction: 'La rencontre avec Jesus-Christ'. Would not this meeting with Christ, he asks, have provided the remedy to Lacordaire's earlier years of instability? The way Lacordaire has himself talked and written of this meeting has led P. Carré to wonder whether it had not in fact and almost physically taken place. And the answer he gives to this question led him to draw the great lines of Lacordaire's spiritual itinerary, from a vague religious philosophy to his return to God, bringing simultaneously rather than gradually, a call to the priesthood. It was not however, until much later, after 'years of troubles, changes, errors and doubts', marked only by the 'immovable assurance of his vocation' that Lacordaire could say: 'one meets Jesus-Christ here on earth as one would meet any other man. One day, turning a street corner or in a solitary lane, one stops and listens and a voice in one's conscience says: this is Jesus-Christ' . . . and write to some young friends of his: 'since I have known Christ, nothing has ever seemed to me beautiful enough to be desired'.

This introduction, far-reaching in the psychological insight it reveals, would be well worth reading on its own, but the selected extracts that follow make the book a most appetizing preparation for any further reading. It is, by the way, quite fascinating to compare the beautifully poetical and rhetorical styles of these two great Dominican writers and orators and not surprising to know that they have, each in turn, drawn crowds to Notre-Dame with the might of their preaching.

As one who had known and loved Lacordaire well, Montalembert was able to write of him: 'when all the secrets of this generous life are known, the orator will fade away before the religious . . .' It is, I think, in this context that we should approach Lacordaire's *Life of St Dominic* and realise that his Dominican vocation had undoubtedly been the cause—as it still is the light—of this work. Lacordaire was neither by nature nor by profession a historian, but his extraordinary vocation enabled him to understand and discern through the problems of the nineteenth century, the permanent confrontation of the Church and the world, and the Dominican vision as it stood six centuries before his time.

P. Chenu O.P., who wrote the preface to this book, asserts the value of the

work of both the historian and the artist. While recognising that Lacordaire was not fully equipped to carry out the former and that present methods of research and new data have brought to light a better interpretation of the moral background of the thirteenth century, it would nevertheless be wrong to support the literary romanticism of the biography by adding meticulous erudition. Although strict investigation of the past is undoubtedly the scientific basis of history, there must be from the start a deep perception of mind to grasp the human meaning behind the facts and events. It seems then that, as it stands, with Lacordaire's own limitations and those of his time, his *Life of St Dominic* partakes of authentic history. His own illuminating preface to the first edition has very appropriately been reprinted here too.

SIMONE WYN GRIFFITH

MARY WARD 1585-1645. By Mary Oliver, I.B.V.M.; Sheed and Ward, 18s.

To know Mary Ward is to love her and to find in her, after the lapse of three centuries, one who exemplified those qualities most needed in our own time—a recollected spirit hand in hand with almost ceaseless apostolic work, far-seeing initiative combined with prudence and common sense, and, above all, that gaiety, vitality, and courage which present sanctity in its most attractive light. This astounding Englishwoman is still comparatively little known in English-speaking countries and this is partly because no full length popular biography has been available. Mother Oliver has now put us greatly in her debt by providing such a biography.

She has handled with dexterity the complex unwieldy mass of material that concerns Mary Ward's life-work, and contrived to produce a complete narrative with pace and liveliness that holds one's interest throughout. The sordid tale of ecclesiastical and secular intrigue which formed the background of Mary's labours and the major stumbling block to their success is touched on without bitterness and treated with the discretion and charity typical of Mary's own attitude to her enemies. Considerable care, too, has been taken to give a vivid and accurate picture of the practical details of the education for girls offered by Mary's Institute in her own day.

Imaginative reconstruction is a legitimate medium in this kind of biography, especially, as with Mary's childhood, where few facts are available; but it has pitfalls which Mother Oliver has not managed wholly to avoid. She has, it is true, been careful to put only words which we know to be her own into Mary's mouth, but she has not hesitated to reconstruct Mary's thoughts in a manner which some readers may find rather jarring. A disturbing note of sentimentality creeps into the more fictionalized passages and even a suggestion of that melodrama which the somewhat misleading publisher's blurb will have led the reader to expect. Yet both sentimentality and sensationalism were utterly alien to Mary Ward.