

Hers was no blind, weak-willed obedience; it was as clear-sighted as it was wholehearted and closely patterned on that of the Mother of God. The most telling lesson that Mary of Ágrede's life offers to our age is this—perfect submission in all that is not sin. She herself tells us that obedience was the North Star that guided her safely over the deep waters of extraordinary supernatural experience and her unflinching consolation in times of darkness and distress.

Probably no woman ever entered the field of literature more unwillingly than did this Franciscan Abbess of seventeenth-century Spain; few have succeeded in causing so great a stir. It is a pity that some compilers of works of reference have not gone beyond the controversy of the late eighteenth century for their information. Much water has flowed under the bridges since those days and we now know that many misunderstandings were due to a faulty translation, as well as to the misrepresentations of those with a Jansenistic bias. In recent times there has been a revival of interest in the correspondence between Philip IV and Mary of Ágrede and both Spanish and French editions of the letters have appeared.⁴ Perhaps someone will be found to make these documents accessible in a reliable English translation. We may also hope for a life of the valiant woman whose body lies incorrupt in her native town of Ágrede, while her spirit still lives on in the daughters of St Francis who follow their great Abbess in her Marian way.

4. In Spanish by Torrente Ballester, 1942; in French by R. Bouvier, 1939.



REVIEWS

THE FAILING WINE. By Father M. Oliver, o.c.s.o. (Gill; 12s. 6d.)

For discriminating spiritual-readers a book about our Lady by Father Oliver is something of an event. He always has something to say, and one feels a safe theology under one's feet. In *Fair as the Moon* he gave us the result of his meditations upon our Lady 'not in the clouds but living her life among ordinary men and women'. It was a sublime book because a reverent reflective mind, on such a theme, could not make a picture of Mary as an ordinary person, no matter how ordinary her surroundings.

This time Father Oliver has meditated upon the hidden life, the thirty years before our Lord began his public ministry. That ministry begins with a startling miracle. Our Lady's prayer at Cana ushers it in. In those few words, 'They have no wine', are contained the faith and confidence of Mary as developed, intensified, by thirty years of divine motherhood. All that they contain cannot be sketched without a long

meditation upon what goes before them in the history of the soul of Mary. This is therefore the main theme, a series of contemplations of the soul of Mary.

His way of taking principles straight out of the theology (even the metaphysical) books and showing how their light shines through the ordinary truths, that we are used to, is customary on the continent but rare in England. He is one of the few, the very few, who do it well.

There are forty-seven chapters in 164 pages; forty-seven reflective devotional essays, progressive, connected, carefully and surely bringing us to a better understanding of the mind and heart of our Mother. He condemns, *en passant*, the very strange idea that has got about lately that our Lady's knowledge of the divinity of Jesus was at first not only imperfect but non-existent. This whim of one or two writers (who are not by any means authorities in Marian theology) should, I think, be left to die of inanition. It has no support among serious students of the theology of our Lady.

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CHRISTIANITY IS REVOLUTIONARY. By Maurice Fraigneux, with a preface by Gonzague de Reynold, translated by Emma Craufurd. (Cassell; 12s. 6d.)

M. Fraigneux is concerned with the problems that face Christians today, but, rather than highlight those problems and examine our approach to them in isolation, he prefers to paint a gigantic backpiece that shows our modern problems in perspective; and he does so by indicating how the Church of Christ has met similar problems in the past.

It is not just with the Christian era that the author is concerned because with a real sense of history his backpiece begins with the Jews and with God's message to them: 'I am the Lord thy God.' Using the prophets as pegs for his theme, he traces the religious revolution maintained by the prophets throughout Israel's history.

The element that M. Fraigneux finds in the Jewish prophets—as he later does in the Church's prophets—is love, love of God and our neighbour. Conscious as he is all the time of the modern social problem and seeing the need for tremendous charity to solve it, we need not be surprised that the social part of the message of the prophets is brought out. The stand that the author of Ecclesiastes made against social oppression is clearly shown and the same is done for the other prophets described.

There was a great hope that never ceased to breathe through the history of literature of the Israelites and this was fulfilled and crowned by Christ. Again the message offered was a spiritual one based on love, a message which raised humanity to hitherto undreamed of heights.