

me: 'The poor have only respect to offer to one another: but human nature having its weaknesses, *respect* requires *forms* in order to maintain itself'. How an English taxi-driver would have put that, I am not too sure!) Fr Valentine, gently leading Theophila away from misuse of imagination and 'reasoning', yet does not over-stress the difference between 'meditation as such' and prayer—that 'as such' on which the abbé Bremond, good French logician, always insisted! Do we ever make a meditation-as-such? Is not the most discursive meditation 'shot through' by prayer, or at least desire for prayer, which is already a union with God? Thus Benedictine *laborare*, being 'prayer-ful', is already *orare*. W. G. Ward, enthralled by an opera, making 'never so many' acts of pure love! The saint, ecstasied by a flower, forgetting neither it nor God! The prophet, seeing the whole world and its ending in a city and its sack! While thinking, to be aware of and to be rendering homage to That which is beyond all thought, let alone imagination. Happily this book is not controversial, but leads Theophila sweetly, firmly and gaily to the happy point where prayer, 'the lifting of mind and heart to God', is due rather to *God* lifting it, than to herself pushing from underneath, and to the 'Carmelite' love for the Trinity, evidently present and active in the soul. The lucky young lady is to receive two more books of letters.

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IS LIFE WORTH LIVING? By Father James, O.F.M.Cap. (The Mercier Press; 7s. 6d.)

Father James answers yes, and adds explanations to convince the still sceptical 'no-men' and to encourage the still faint-hearted 'yes-men'. Not everyone, probably, will find the explanations entirely satisfying; philosophers who are 'specialists' might protest that too much is assumed and too little analysed; and from their specialised point of view they would be right. They would be wrong however to disparage Father James's book for not laying all their doubts about existence; for it does not pretend to that, but only 'to suggest the broad outlines of a Christian philosophy of life' and so to give 'the plain man' what he so badly needs, namely intelligible principles to serve him in the task of making his life more intelligible and intelligent. Even this is no easy thing to do; if Father James has not failed he owes it quite as much to his enthusiasm and to his gentle generosity of spirit as to any power of thought or expression.

Two points touching his general approach may be noted. First, Father James insists on the continuity of wisdom: beginning with an implicit philosophy, an 'instinctive faith' in the order and meaning of reality as a whole, it ends with the vision of God. He deplores the *separation in practice* of philosophy from theology, while admitting the *distinction* of their domains. Here, surely, he is, in the main, right; and these words are well worth attention: 'No amount of analysis or discussion can get rid of the fact that there is, and has been, a Christian philosophy of life. That the Thomistic *distinction* of reason and faith . . . useful when it was a question of meeting adversaries

who said our philosophy was . . . indistinguishable from faith should have grown into a *separation* of the two disciplines of a Christian mind is . . . deplorable'.

And this leads to the second point. If I may interpret Father James's purpose, I think he is trying to bridge the gap between the minds of ordinary men and those of professionally trained priests—and is not the priest's own mind 'ordinary' as well as professional? For Father James is well aware that the problem stated by the title of his book comes into actual and critical existence as a struggle in the soul of the ordinary man for whom he writes; which mere statements of dogma or appeals to blind faith do not suffice to calm. Aware as a priest of his responsibility for feeding the poor in spirit with doctrine, he knows that doctrinal food must be, in some degree, intelligible food. Hence his priestly undertaking in this book to build a bridge (*pontifex*) between the first stirrings or confused glimpses of the natural mind and the Creed. He wants to communicate an assurance of the immensities implied in the former and effectively realised and confirmed by the divine initiative expressed in the latter. So he dwells especially on the Incarnation, the 'descent of God in love' which answers the demand of Martineau: 'You say, he is everywhere; then show me *anywhere* that you have met him . . .'

Father James has no turn for epigram, but his words are often deeper than they seem at first. The God of the consistent cheat, he says, is 'the supreme Quack' because a man's actions are 'somehow an appeal to the inner essence of his universe'. I like too the notion that sound philosophy 'somersaults' the world of unreflecting common sense, putting spirit in the place of matter as the major part of reality. That is philosophy's way of exalting the humble; and what a relief it brings to the mind! The whole context (ch. 3) deserves attentive reading.

The printer or proof-reader has nodded several times; and *Hamlet* is misquoted on p. 22.

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THE SECRET OF ST MARTIN. By Henry Ghéon, translated by F. J. Sheed (Sheed & Ward; 7s. 6d.)

November 11th was a day that marked an armistice. It was a day that was already dedicated to peace, for St Martin, the ex-soldier who became a monk and a bishop, exemplifies the serenity of mind and fellowship of charity which, St Augustine reminds us, are the marks of a virtue that is so much more than an armistice. It is good, then, that M. Ghéon should have turned his gift—which he shared with our own Fr Martindale—of bringing the saints to life again, to Martin of Tours: of all patrons perhaps the most apposite for our generation.

His was a life of miracles: not merely the manifest showing forth of God's power through a human instrument made wholly responsive to his demands, but, too, the countless fruits of the life of grace—of penance and apostolic preaching, of acts of mercy and of the most human understanding. The very land of France is a litany of dedica-