

REVIEWS

CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY

THE MOTHER. By Cardinal Mindszenty. Translated from the German. (Clonmore & Reynolds; 9s. 6d.)

This is a book by a pastor, and by a son; it irradiates the joy of a happy childhood. It is in part a book of practical advice simple and wise, but though he touches on modern problems and failings, the author's object is above all to set before his readers a positive picture of holy motherhood and family life. At first glance to us some of what he says may seem sentimental—we are used to a good deal of sentimental lip-service to the family. But as one reads this book one is aware that here it is real; it is written from an experience of very many ordinary women who as mothers have succeeded in exemplifying an ideal which awakens continual reverence and wonder. It is a touching feature of his book that Cardinal Mindszenty continually resorts to quotations from the poets as if his own words were inadequate to express this wonder, as if too, to emphasise the universality of his concept. He draws on an extraordinarily wide range of humanity to illustrate his points in precept and example, but all are used in the service of a picture that is most touchingly simple; the love and wonder of the child for his mother is never far behind the surface.

One is aware, however, of a background which I suppose hardly exists in England today. 'The bread we eat at home is the best bread in the village because mother has baked all her goodness and love into it'; mother, the great teller of fairy stories—a teller and inventor, not reader. There is a deeper sense than we know of the value of the continuity of life—reading backwards and forwards. In the home, 'every flower, every bush, every tree has been planted by the family. The trace of its hands and of its tireless labour is everywhere. There are no soulless things in this house' (quotation from a grandmother). And in the family: 'a knowledge of our ancestors is a necessity of life . . . humble folk know the history of their family for ten generations back.' 'It was customary still in my childhood for the bride and bridegroom to carry a brand of the tree of life (*arbor vitae*) from their parental homes to the church and from there to their new home.'

And of course the book is full of the sanctification of the home in a sense of the symbolism of common things, bread, cradles, kisses, and in customs. Of these, one for the return home of the newly baptised child is very beautiful. The mother and midwife are waiting. The god-mother comes to the door of the bedroom, holding the child. From

within comes the question, 'What have you brought?' From outside the answer: 'A baptised lamb, a lamb pure as an angel, a sacrificed lamb! The lamb of God has redeemed also the beloved new-born lamb of the mother! *Agnus redemit oves.*'

NICOLETTE GRAY

SUMMARIUM DE CULTU CORDIS IMMACULATI BEATAE MARIAE VIRGINIS.

By T. M. Sparks, O.P. (Marietti & Libri Liturgici, S. Sabina; Rome.)

Father Sparks has done a service to all priests by indicating in this little treatise the theological foundations of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He puts the question firmly into its proper place as a special section of a special section in Theology—in other words, a particular question in Mariology, which is itself one part of Theology. Incidentally, he does not believe that Mariology is a *scientia* in its own right. He also asserts without discussion that the Divine Maternity is the single fundamental principle in Mariology (in which one agrees with him wholeheartedly, but with respect for other opinions). Tracing the cultus from its faint beginnings in the Fathers (building on Lk 2; 19, 35, 51) to St John Eudes, with a milestone in the thirteenth century under the name of St Mechtilde, he calls the last three centuries—from St John Eudes to the present time—the period of public liturgical cultus. His second part, 'De Natura hujus cultus', consists of a theses, of which the gist is that in this devotion we pay honour and veneration to the Heart itself, literally, but as a symbol, and that this honour and veneration is directed mainly to the holiness of Mary and her love of God, of Jesus, and of mankind redeemed by him. This leads him naturally to the conclusion that the most perfect of all devotions to Mary is devotion to her Immaculate Heart.

It seems, just slightly, a case of special pleading, but if one considers carefully the comprehensive meaning Fr Sparks gives to this devotion one wonders less about his enthusiasm and more about his use of terms. By 'devotio' does he mean a 'devotion'? In that case we must ask ourselves whether it is a 'modality' (as Pope Pius XII would call it), and, if it is, we must be careful of calling it 'the most perfect of all'. If it is not, then it must be simply another way of saying 'devotion to Mary', in the most general sense: and then another confusion arises with St Grignon de Montfort's phrase '*la vraie dévotion*'—'true devotion' as against '*the true devotion*'. It is a point worth considering.

The bibliography is good, but it does not include *The Immaculate Heart* (Mgr Messner, Mercier Press, 1950), nor *The Heart of Mary* (H. Keller, S.J., Clonmore and Reynolds, 1950).

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