

REVIEWS

INTRODUCTION TO HOLINESS. By Henri Petitot, O.P. (Mercier Press; 8s.6d.)

SAINT BERNARDETTE. By Henri Petitot, O.P. (Mercier Press; 8s.6d.)

It was in 1927 that Père Petitot's study of St Teresa first made its appearance in English, and quickly ran into several editions. Although a writer of established reputation, Père Petitot until now lacked a translator of these two other important works. In the *Introduction to Holiness* we find three sections—the Ascetic, the Active and the Unitive Life, which trace in outline the foundations of the spiritual life. Herein we are given teaching which underlies spiritual progress, which prepares and disposes the soul for the divine work of sanctification. The author emphasises that holiness is a gift of God; even so, man has a part to play, a part that is indispensable and necessary, albeit not the principal part. That man is the instrumental and God the chief cause in the matter of sanctification is ably stated in the chapters on 'Humility', 'Love of God' and 'Love of our Neighbour'. The points made are familiar to every Christian, but such in no wise precludes a re-statement and re-consideration of these primary truths. Indeed, spiritual progress is too often handicapped by man being but ill-grounded in these fundamental beliefs.

In this connection we may mention the chapter on the Study of Christian Doctrine, which effectively disproves the fallacy that only those engaged as professors in seminaries need study theology. Knowledge of divine revelation is essential to all, a knowledge that is not confined to what was acquired in childhood, but knowledge that grows and deepens with the passing years. Such a book as this could only have been written by one well-versed in the spiritual classics; further evidence of which is shown by apt quotations from Scripture, St Thomas, St John of the Cross, St Francis of Sales, and St Teresa.

In future reprints one or two corrections would not be amiss. Thus Mgr (or even better, Bishop) Hedley for Mgr Hidley, p. 17; a modification of the phrase, 'likens to leaning on red iron', p. 29; part of the following sentence would profit by being re-cast: 'Care must be taken, however, not to confuse a trial relating to individual passive purification, with redemptory sufferings permitted for the salvation of the collectivity', p. 124; beginning for 'beginner', p. 131; 'The first to lead me astray on certain points was a very learned Religious of the Order of St Dominic', p. 159—there is no reference to this (alleged) quotation from St Teresa, and although we could trace what precedes it, we would venture to submit that 'astray' hardly seems to conform with St Teresa's opinion of Dominicans

given elsewhere in her works, cf. E. Allison Peers' trans., vol. I, pp. 111, 322-323, to give but two references.

In *Saint Bernardette*, Père Petitot offers us a skilful analysis of the life and character of her who was chosen to witness the Lourdes visions. Not infrequently one hears the sophistry, 'saints are born, not made'. No creature (save our Blessed Lady) is born holy. The greatest of saints, and Bernardette is truly to be numbered among them, found the way to God difficult and toilsome. When the Church designates any of her children Saints, she first requires stringent proof of virtue that is no less than heroic.

Bernadette was a creature subject to faults and frailty, as are all human beings. That she was granted visions of our Blessed Lady is not an infallible sign of perfection. No one was more conscious of this than Bernardette herself. In being the recipient of such outstanding heavenly favours she recognised the source of temptation to pride, a temptation to which one of less moral stature might well have yielded. Then, too, her proneness to pride was marked in her natural tendency to be headstrong, impulsive, gruff. So relentless was her attack on all that savoured of selfishness that one of the witnesses at the process of canonisation testified: 'Humility was the dominating virtue of Sr Marie Bernard'. Such truly heroic humility was manifest on the day of her profession, when before the Bishop the Mother General affirmed: Bernardette 'is a stupid girl and good for nothing', and if she were kept on in the Institute it would be solely out of charity. Père Petitot summarises this aspect of her sanctity: 'With her fiery, delicate and nervous temperament, she needed heroic virtue to subdue her secret temptations arising from what she called "the human me", and stirred up by the devil'.

Coupled with humility went deep love of our Blessed Lord, especially as Crucified Saviour. Bernardette had an affectionate and sensitive nature, frequently wounded by those who misjudged her. In the Passion she found the true expression of her longings. To foster this devotion she had recourse to the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, the beads of which she never tired of telling. This predilection for the Passion found its fulfilment in her martyrdom of heart. Of the trials and mortifications she endured at the hands of her novice mistress, the unwitting (but not wholly excusable) instrument of Bernardette's sanctification, the author writes soberly and factually. In various versions of the Saint's life, the tendency seems to gloss over or romanticise this all-important feature, to the detriment of truth.

The translator has given us a readable version, and the Mercier Press are to be commended for undertaking the work.

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