

me, O my God' (p. 205), shows how perfectly she fulfilled that aspect of her vocation.

Marie René-Bazin's loving portrait of her spiritual mother is worthy of its subject and the Mercier Press have produced it in a manner that does justice to both. May this book help to make better known the Society which is so admirably designed to practise charity towards God and man, to aid the dead by succouring the living. And may the example of Mary of Providence encourage others to surrender themselves with equal generosity to the designs of their Heavenly Father, who can do such great things in and through a soul that is wholly his.

S.O.P.

THE CURE D'ARS. By Francis Trochu. (Burns Oates 18s.)

SAINT FRANCOIS DE SALES, DOCTEUR DE LA PERFECTION. By Jacques Leclercq. (Casterman, Paris.)

There are two kinds of hagiography, the one that tries to reconstruct a detailed historical account of the life of the saint and the other which tries to assess his relative importance in regard to the spirit of his times and the history of asceticism and mysticism. For the one every little incident has its own particular value, for the other incidents are of value only in so far as they may serve to interpret 'the spirit' of the life. Both have their dangers: the historical approach may become uncritical and by too much concentration on detail distort the true picture, the critical, on the other hand, may become unhistorical and by too much theorising reconstruct a life that was never lived. In Abbé Trochu's life of the Curé d'Ars one has reason to regret the historical approach: canonisation does not canonise the details of a saint's life but only its general tendency. Has the Church pronounced on the morality of dancing because she has canonised Jean-Marie Vianney, who denied absolution to those who did not promise never to dance again? Can an *a fortiori* case be made against dancing in a modern dance-hall because the Abbé Vianney made a case against the lesser danger of dancing in the bistro at Ars which had none of the alluring accoutrements of the modern hall and dress? Abbé Trochu does not touch on these questions—his is an historical account and he does not give reasons to support (still less arguments against) the Curé's strictures. The result is that at the end of the Life we have a quite fantastic picture of the saint who is certainly not a person we would ever think we were capable of imitating—nights spent in prayer, days devoted to the confessional, house-to-house visitation, ceaseless preaching, hardly anything to eat except boiled potatoes, Office read kneeling upright on bare stones, the institution and administration of orphanages, nocturnal struggles with the devil . . . it is all rather beyond us and yet surely the purpose of the canonisation of a simple country priest was to stimulate every priest engaged on the pastoral ministry. All these details defeat

this purpose—these works may flower from a priest's life once he is a saint, but to hold them up as an example for any priest just beginning to climb towards sanctity is to underestimate his humility. This *Life* would be useful for research students (if the subject interested them) but its style is not best suited to a popular *Life*.

The contrary may be said of M. le chanoine Leclercq's *Saint François de Sales*. This is a delightful study that gives no real details of the life of the saint but sets him in place in relation to other saints before and since and with the ordinary people of his day and our own. Sanctity is shown as almost an 'ordinary' attainment and in one very inspiring passage the author maintains that it is difficult to distinguish between the supernatural courtesy of the saint and the 'noblesse oblige' of his times. In fact, there seems very little of the extraordinary in this life: his principles are quite normal and entirely inspiring, his ascetical doctrine quite unheroic. One feels that one could very easily imitate him and one would be well on the way to sanctity before one began to realise the cost and then one would be too far advanced on the road to turn back. Only two men have been made Doctors of the Church because of their ascetical teaching, Saint John of the Cross and Saint Francis de Sales and Saint John is the master of the extraordinary (and cloistered?) sanctity and Saint Francis the master of ordinary perfection. Here is the picture of a man one wants instinctively to imitate—it is a pleasant, easy book to read, full of the most interesting incidental information about many things, and after reading it, one will know very little of what the Saint did but one will know the man and like him. Curiously enough, the Abbé Trochu tells us in his *life of the Curé d'Ars*, while Saint Francis disagreed on principle with dancing, he would never force his opinions on others.

TERENCE TANNER

MYSTIQUE DE SAINTE CATHERINE DE SIENNE. Extraits de ses lettres présentés par le Père Bézine, O.P. (Editions de Sapience, 1947; 150frs.)

A return to the sources of the spiritual life is one of the healthiest signs of the modern spiritual revival and few writers will provide a sounder foundation than St Catherine of Siena. Père Bézine has condensed the pith of her letters into a single volume, prefaced by a practical and valuable introduction and so arranged as to form a coherent guide to the way of perfection. Religious and laity alike will read it with profit and it could serve as an excellent companion and antidote to some naturalistic studies of the saint.

One would wish that it could also serve as an antidote to so much loose and wishful thinking about mysticism and the spiritual life. St Catherine's doctrine is profoundly theological, 'c'est la théologie thomiste pensée et expérimentée par une mystique' (p. 15), yet as simple as the Gospels themselves. It provides milk for babes, yet meat strong enough for those who like herself may have reached