

NOTICES

Quite the best short account of the background and life of BLESSED MARTIN OF PORRES is told by Fr Columba Ryan, O.P., in a pamphlet recently put out by the C.T.S. (4d.). It is based at every point upon the established facts; thus Fr Ryan shows that Bl. Martin's mother was an African Negress, not a Peruvian Indian, that he became a Dominican *donatus* or tertiary, not a laybrother. But the account of the Dominican's simple desire to serve and to love others stands out far more clearly and movingly than in high-sounding phrases that have become so hackneyed in hagiography, far more authentically than in the stories of hundreds of miracles and wonders. Bl. Martin has become deservedly popular throughout the English-speaking countries in the past thirty years. This pamphlet will tell you why. The lesson of his life is that of the Word made flesh—uniting so many divergent bloods and races and classes in his flesh. The secret of his holiness is obedience, prayer, penance and devotion to our Lady. And today more than ever before we need a Christian idea of service of others—we find it most vividly in Bl. Martin.

Thomas Merton is at his best when treating of the *fact* of Cistercian life. His *Waters of Silence* was a simple and straightforward account of the history of his Order and it brought with it the breath of those simple cloisters. His life of the Cistercian nun, St Lutgarde, shared this attractive directness, so that we are not surprised to find Desclée de Brouwer publishing a French translation of the book under the title *Quelles sont ces plaies?* (78 Belgian francs).

LIVING IN GOD (Clonmore and Reynolds; 5s.) is one of those rare modern spiritual books which bears the mark of authenticity because written by one who had experienced even more than he had studied the nature of Union with God. The author was a French priest whose notes and papers were published under a pseudonym 'Robert de Langeac', but shortly before this English version was published he died and so released his name—Père Delage, a priest of St Sulpice. The first forty pages are concerned with 'the Soul's Effort', the ascetic aspect of the Christian's reaching out towards God; the rest of the book with God's action in this union and its effect in the apostolate. Some of the notes and remarks on humility and meekness in the first part are extraordinarily valuable; and the whole book is written with an insistence upon silence and quiet that is equally rare. The only criticism that could be made of the book is the author's acceptance of the analytical approach in which 'the soul' is referred to always rather than the person; the imagination, for example, is treated almost as though it were not an integral part of the man. Nevertheless the book can be wholeheartedly recommended; and the translation by Father Moloney, C.S.SP., makes the reading of it comfortable and unselfconscious.

FREDERIC OZANAM died a hundred years ago and to commemorate the event Professor Charles K. Murphy, author of 'The Spirit of the Society of St Vincent de Paul', has written a short account of the 'spirituality' of that Society based on the writings of Ozanam and of Emmanuel Joseph Bailly, the second president of the Society. HUMBLE OF HEART (Mercier; 3s. 6d.), the title suggests the main spirit of an organisation of which, according to Ozanam, no one has the right to be called Founder; and everyone knows that its wonderfully preserved anonymity is one of its special glories. From the beginning Bailly set out to sketch that 'collective self-love' which is the deadly cancer which kills so many Catholic groups and organisations; Professor Murphy's scathing remarks about 'holy rivalry' would be well pondered by many societies.

FRAGMENTS D'UNE CONFESSION (Desclée; 39 fr. b.) are the two introductory chapters which Alphonse de Châteaubriant had intended as a preface to his *Itinerarium ad lumen divinum*, a work interrupted by his death in 1951. Among other things he advocates the practice of 'a fast of thought'—*jeûne de la pensée*—abstaining from every useless activity of the spirit. This is surely a form of that creative silence so necessary at all times, but especially for the writers of today if not for their readers. In these pages the author shows the illumination that succeeds such purification; it is in fact the account of his conversion to the full light of faith in Christ.

ST MARIE MADELEINE POSTEL, an account of whose life has already appeared in this journal, introduced the methods of the Brothers of the Cistercian Schools to the education of girls in her France of the early nineteenth century. But she did more than that; she lived as a single-minded and heroic young woman through the turmoils of the Revolution, she lived in many ways the real life of Christ on earth. It was not so much her ideas about education as the intensity of her love that has brought her down to us as a real, live saint. Sister Calista of her Congregation sets her before us in her reality in LOVE ENDURETH ALL THINGS (Mercier; 7s. 6d.); and as we read it we are compelled to admit that it is not just one more good Frenchwoman who had a desire to teach the poor and to found a new Congregation. Her plan was a contemplative one which took education into its embrace rather as the first Benedictines taught because they praised God rather than praised God because they taught. The author of this biography brings out these and other points in an unassuming and attractive way that will win many admirers for her foundress.

BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY appeared in earlier times in the art of the monastic manuscripts and so it is good news that Nicolette Gray, author of *Jacob's Ladder* which set out to teach the children the Bible with the help of Anglo-Saxon pictures, has now produced a series of film strips with the same end in view. The prospectus says:

This series is designed primarily to provide visual aids for the teaching of the Christian faith in schools; it is also fascinating material as art and as history. The pictures have been chosen partly for their subjects and vividness of presentation, but above all for their sense of the reality of the spiritual.

Jacob's Ladder Filmstrips should be applied for either from Kay Carlton Hill Film Studios, 72a Carlton Hill, London, W.8., or from the Editor, 9 Essex Villas, London, W.8.

EXTRACTS

The Passion narrative in the late Middle Ages

All students of late medieval spiritual writings are already much in the debt of Professor F. P. Pickering, particularly for the account which he published in 1938 in the John Rylands Bulletin of a Middle High German version of the tale, *The Pious Beguine*, one of the most charming and illuminating examples we possess of the literature of *docta ignorantia*, and, more recently, for his new edition of *Christi Leiden in einer Vision geschaut* (Manchester University Press, 1952). Now, as an appendix to this edition and as a preliminary sketch for the critical work on the history of such Passion narratives as *Christi Leiden* which he promises us, he has published in volume 7 of *Euphorion* (Heidelberg 1953, pp. 16-37) a long article, *Das gotische Christusbild: Zu den Quellen mittelalterlicher Passionsdarstellungen*.

He begins with a passage in *Christi Leiden* which describes in painful detail the ferocity with which our Lord was taken prisoner in the garden, '... with heavy blows from hands and fists grasping weapons, aimed at his nape and between his shoulders, upon his back, at his head, against his cheeks, towards his throat and breast. . . . They tore the hair from his head so that locks of it lay strewn upon the ground: one dragged him along by the hair of the head, another pulled him back by the beard . . .' and he contrasts this with the reticence and austerity of the Gospel narratives. The title of the article perfectly describes its content: here we have, not the awful, remote, hieratic figure of the East, reigning in triumph from the tree, wearing the Precious Blood as a Royal robe, but a late and Western Christ, tormented, lacerated, dying a death horrible in itself and most horrible in its sufferer's Divinity: and the author seeks to discover where the painters and sculptors, the visionaries and preachers of late Western Christendom found the lineaments of the 'Gothic Christ'.

As we should today expect, he turns first to medieval Old Testament exegesis, and suggests that in the fuller work which he has in hand he will examine the contributions of the prophetic writers to the evolution of the various scenes of the Passion: here he confines himself to consideration of