

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL. By Mgr Jean Calvet. Translated by Lancelot C. Sheppard. (Burns Oates; 21s.)

Materials for the life of St Vincent de Paul are very ample: the *Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents* published by Father P. Coste in 1924 fill fourteen volumes, and the definitive life by the same writer runs to another three. Biographies are correspondingly numerous, from the first, by Louis Abelly in 1664, down to our own day. But there was room for a single-volume up-to-date work in English, and a translation of Mgr Calvet's *vie*, first published in 1948, was a good choice.

Mgr Calvet's account of the saint is full without being wearisome, and throughout he presents Vincent as a man, a man who achieved holiness. The distinction between the man and the saint in the same person, though it may have didactic uses, is an unreal one: 'mixed characters' are not unknown; a man may attain heroic virtue only in his last years, or last moments, but he is the same person all the way through; St Augustine of Hippo was still the Aurelius Augustinus who was living before 386. In the case of St Vincent there are certain questions about his earlier years: Mgr Calvet supports what may be called the conservative view; but whatever be the exact truth he remains Vincent de Paul. There is nothing in this book equivalent to 'The humility . . . charity . . . devotion of our saint'. The section called 'His Spirituality' is related to the whole man and his work. 'Vincent de Paul was not a "Bérullian" mystic. All those terms which in Bérulle are the premises of speculation and contemplation in Vincent become the springboard for action. . . . Bérulle loves God in God; Vincent loved God in man.' That should be sufficient answer to some critics of the film *Monsieur Vincent*.

Vincent de Paul is one of those saints the relevance of whose life to our own times stands out clearly. A perhaps lesser known example is his attitude towards Protestants: 'he looked on these "separated brethren" as brothers, and he treated them as brothers, with respect and love', and, it may be added, without patronage or condescension towards their uprightness and achievements. His missionaries were sent out to Catholics, and he 'therefore forbade his subjects to deal contentiously with controversial questions in the pulpit, or to issue challenges to Protestant ministers in any place or for any reason at all. In addition, he required them to avoid anything in the exterior manifestation of worship which bordered on display lest it should upset the Protestants.' His remarks on Catholics and Huguenots before the law (pp. 88-89) are a masterpiece of charity and justice. No doubt we may here see the influence of St Francis de Sales, one of the chief sources of Vincent's inspiration.

Mr Lancelot Sheppard should by now be sufficiently well known as a translator to make it needless to say that his English version reads easily and convincingly.

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