

Sacraments, and finally abandoning her when a hoped-for miracle did not take place. Margaret, now seventeen, for a time shared the garbage and the gutters with the beggars of Castello. Then the poor, recognising her holiness, took it in turns to support her. A community of Nuns received her, only to eject and calumniate her when her fervent observance of the Rule put their relaxations to shame. She remained patient and serene through it all, weeping only at the goodness of God in allowing her to be so conformed to the sufferings of his Son. Finally she became a 'Mantellate', i.e. a Secular Tertiary living in the home of one of the Sisters where she died at thirty-three. During this last phase, miracles, prophecies, ecstasies, and other preternatural gifts drew attention to her obvious nearness to God; yet we are told—consoling fact!—that virtue never 'came natural' to her but was an uphill struggle right to the end. When she died the clamour of the mob, reinforced by the cure of a mute cripple at her bier, secured for her the burial of a saint within the walls of the Dominican church.

A spate of miracles followed, and about forty years later a Canon of the Cathedral of Castello set out to refute the 'fantastic legends' about her which were current in the city. Instead he found that they were true and well authenticated, and in reparation for his incredulity he wrote her life. Subsequent biographers, by withholding the more unpleasant facts (perhaps from discretion in the first place), diminished both the pathos and the heroism of Margaret's story. Fr Bonniwell, by re-telling it in all its stark tragedy, helps us to understand the fascination which the saintly little dwarf exercised both in life and after death, especially since both he and the artist have caught something of that child-like simplicity and freshness which so often characterises the blind.

Despite the popular cultus, political disturbances delayed Margaret's beatification until 1609. Her body was found incorrupt and so it remains to this day. The townspeople still turn to her for help and comfort and among her most fervent clients are the children of the city's blind asylum founded in her honour. But there are so many things in her life to appeal to modern sympathies that it may well prove that, by popularising it, Fr Bonniwell has given the impetus to a movement for her Canonisation.

S. M. ALBERT, O.P.

SAINT BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE. By Agnes de la Gorce. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

Anyone who has ever thought there is a 'sameness' in the 'Lives of the Saints' should read the life of St Benedict Joseph Labre by Agnes de la Gorce; entrancingly written, and beautifully translated by Rosemary Sheed, who has succeeded, not only in telling the story of an unusual life, but in conveying the atmosphere so well brought out in the original French.

Benedict Labre was born at Amettes, a village in the plain of Artois. Whoever has seen that great plain in the early summer will not easily forget those vast stretches of grass and of corn land reaching away to a misty distance, nor the impression of solitude and silence. The village of Amettes is not seen at first in its hidden valley. Outside the village is a farmhouse where Benedict Labre was born in 1748, the eldest child of a large family. This book tells briefly of the childhood of this pious, dreamy boy who attended the village school until his parents, having decided that he was more likely to become a priest than a farmer, sent him to a priest uncle to carry on his education. But Benedict did not know what God wanted of him. Neither when he was with his uncle, nor, later, when he lived with another priest, nor, for years afterwards, did Benedict know with any certainty the nature of his vocation. For a time he was drawn to the Contemplative Orders. He tried more than once to enter the Cistercian Order (referred to throughout this book as the 'Trappists'), and he also offered himself to the Carthusians. But in each case the particular life was not for him. He did not return home. He wandered into Italy, taking food if it was offered to him on his way, or going without. He never begged, and the book tells the story most graphically of the pilgrim-saint tramping from shrine to shrine in Europe praying God to show him his vocation.

Benedict Labre died in Rome. We are told that his death was first proclaimed by the little children of the poor, who came out in hordes and ran through the streets, calling as they ran, 'The saint is dead, the saint is dead'.

His was a life unlike that of any other saint in the Calendar, and the book is well worth reading.

FLORENS ROCH

INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH FOLKLORE. By Violet Alford. (Bell; 12s. 6d.)

If we are to reintegrate our Christian religion into the general life of today we have to take into account the 'irrational religion' which remains even in an age which thinks it has rationalised most human activity. The traditional customs of the people which have come to be classified under the heading of 'Folklore' represent a body of instinctive religion that has continued without a 'Testament' or a Code of Rubrics or Law for thousands of years. The Christian religion has not despised or thrown out this 'natural' worship although it has had to struggle to prevent the irrational element from occupying the direction of religious worship and so turning the people towards superstition and magic. The advantage of this 'Introduction' is that the reader is given a glimpse of a great number of these customs that are actually observed today in England. What we still require, however, is a *Christian* introduction to give the reader a key to the connection between Christianity and folklore. Miss