

REVIEWS

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

LA VRAIE VIE CHRETIENNE. By A. Gardeil. (Desclée de Brouwer; 20 frs.)

These are fragments that would have gone towards the composition of a comprehensive and synthetic work on Christian spirituality which the late Père Gardeil, O.P., had projected but never accomplished. A great part of the matter has already appeared in articles in the *Revue Thomiste* and *Vie Spirituelle*. And yet we can be doubly grateful to his nephew, Père H.-D. Gardeil, for the production of this book: first, because more of Père Gardeil's invaluable work is made accessible, and secondly because he himself has sketched in outline a plan and reconstruction of the whole work as originally intended. And this last is of particular value inasmuch as it exemplifies that which all thomists should have at heart—a whole, synthetic, structural view of Christian ascetical teaching and practice (*structure* was a favourite notion with Père Gardeil). An all-embracing vision, cohesion and sequence of thought, and other kindred elements, go towards forming that "architectural" habit of mind whose great achievement is to be seen in the plan of the *Summa. Sapientis est ordinare*. Spiritual readings and ascetical literature in general often treat of profound, excellent matter: but too often it may be uncorrelated, departmentalized. The need is not so much for various *Meditations for Every Day in the Year* but rather for an ascetical doctrine that presents Christian life as a unity. There can be no doubt that Père Gardeil, had he lived, would have shown us *la vraie vie chrétienne* in its fulness as a synthetic whole.

The present work, such as we have it, will be relished by those who seek strong meat rather than sweetmeats in ascetical teaching. Page after page is quarried straight from St. Thomas and hewn into its French form; and time and again we can note points of profound psychological analysis and a masterly knowledge of souls. Noteworthy too is the happy use of etymology in explanations and definitions. Occasionally an apologetic preoccupation—e.g. as regards "la moral laïque"—will interest French rather than English readers.

The publication of this work of ascetic theology in the *Bibliothèque Française de Philosophie* is not without a certain piquancy: perhaps enough to kindle a debate on the nature of Christian philosophy. Yet we have no doubt that the editors have acted rightly.

ROLAND D. POTTER, O.P.

THE TEACHING OF ST. AUGUSTINE ON PRAYER AND THE CONTEMPORATIVE LIFE. By Fr. Hugh Pope, O.P. (Burns Oates; 6/-.)

The teaching of St. Augustine on prayer is a subject on which there are not many books in any language, and certainly very

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few in English; almost the only one is Abbot Butler's *Western Mysticism*. This is strange considering what a master of the subject he was, and that "the task of teaching his flock how to pray occupied St. Augustine during the whole of his Episcopate, or from A.D. 395—430." Some have said that "he was not strictly a mystic." They could hardly deny that he was, properly speaking, a contemplative after reading this book (or the *Confessions*). What, then, is this distinction between mysticism and contemplation?

He is indeed so great a teacher on contemplation that "in his well-nigh innumerable references to 'contemplation' it is generally most difficult to decide whether he is speaking of contemplation here or in its fulness—in heaven; he passes from one to the other almost as though there were no difference between them." This we learn from Fr. Pope's admirable introduction. But however high may be St. Augustine's teaching, it is also extremely practical and a help to all who desire to learn to pray well, especially couched in the vivid and readable English of this translation, which must have been no easy task considering the difficulty of translating St. Augustine's Latin. The Editor has joyfully given us pure St. Augustine, has allowed him to speak for himself, and has added little of his own besides the Preface. The book is a compilation of extracts from a great number of the works of St. Augustine, particularly the sermons, arranged arbitrarily under various headings, *How and why we should pray*, *The Lord's Prayer*, *The Things we should pray for*, *Contemplation*, etc., ending with the famous letter to Proba. It has, of course, the defect consequent upon such an arrangement, that it is rather "snippety" and disjointed, but the extracts presumably are not meant for continuous reading but for the constant return of the meditative mind, and each one is so pithy that it provides abundant food for thought. It is compact and handy so that it may be easily carried in pocket or bag. It should become the constant companion of many.

It is to be hoped that this volume is only a preliminary to a much larger book in which the editor will use his great knowledge of St. Augustine's writings to give us a complete treatise on his teaching on prayer and the contemplative life, linking together the extracts and throwing light on them from the other writings and putting each in its true light and perspective.

FRANCIS MONCRIEFF, O.P.

SOCIAL QUESTIONS

THE CATHOLIC TRADITION OF THE LAW OF NATIONS. By John Eppstein. (Burns Oates; 15/-.)

Mr. Eppstein writes: "The national bias of many Catholic