

defend the 'Genius and Mystic'. She sets Margery comfortably in her medieval surroundings and without difficulty shows her value for those who would have a reliable and wholesome witness to the state of religion at that time. Margery was undoubtedly a genius to have painted such a picture. But the task of setting Margery comfortably among the mystics is far more difficult. It is easy to describe 'The Penitent' with her great stress on sexuality, easy too to see 'The Pilgrim' with an insatiable desire to go to holy places. But we may perhaps suspect some truth in Miss Cholmely's description of the other pilgrims' judgment:

'They remembered only too well the extravagant and haughty young woman who had flaunted through their town. Now it might seem to them that vanity had but taken another form; she was itching for notoriety, and affecting to be better than other folk' (p. 56).

And when we come to the heights of the love of God in poor Margery we may be justified in harbouring doubts. The author of this sketch suggests that the strong passions of the young married woman were purified and transposed to a supernatural plane, where she could pour out all her energies upon Jesus Christ. Fr McNabb considered Margery's account of her mystical marriage to be authentic. But the reader will not be easily convinced, for the whole incident is bound up with very sensible emotions of smell and sound, and only a few lines before occurs this extraordinary experience:

'She had so much affection for the manhood of Christ, that when she saw women in Rome bearing children in their arms, if she could ascertain that any were men children, she would then cry, roar and weep, as if she had seen Christ in his childhood' (Butler-Bowden, p. 352).

We will not however judge Margery. She was tried and acquitted in her own life time, but it was for Lollardy rather than a false mysticism. We hope that Miss Cholmeley is correct in her judgment, but we hope also that she or someone inspired by her wide sympathy will study the case in greater detail, analysing the nature of the experiences and comparing Margery's doctrines with the ascetical and mystical teaching of the Church. In welcoming this book we look forward to that further study.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

VINGT ET UNE LETTRES DE SAINT CATHERINE DE SIENNE: Traduction de Louis-Paul Guigues. (Editions du Cerf; Blackfriars Publications; 4s.)

A French translation of St Catherine's letters should be welcome in France, where the two volume collection translated by Père Cartier, O.P. is now probably a rare work. It should be welcome also in England where Vida Scudder's *Saint Catherine of Siena as seen in her Letters*, published in 1905, is the last English collection of any size, and among its sixty-three letters contains only three of those given in the *Vingt et une Lettres*. The present volume is the

sixteenth of the series *L'Eau Vive*, and is a sequel to *La Croix, le Sang, la Vérité*, thirteen letters of St Catherine by the same translator, published by Gallimard.

These twenty-one have been chosen as examples of *les principaux symboles cathériniens*, the lamp, the sword, the table and others, and form a selection both comprehensive and characteristic, the correspondents ranging from blessed Raymond of Capua, the saint's revered but much scolded spiritual director, to the truly villainous Barnabo Visconti and his infamous wife Beatrice de la Scala. In her answer to each the passage that would have given the clue has been cut out. Probably the messages concerned events still recent when the letters were collected, and prudence required the excision. These are two of the longest letters in the book and are typical of Catherine's dealings with souls. To say, typical of her methods, would be wide of the mark. A saint acting habitually under the inspiration of God has always a divine *savoir faire* but it is as spontaneous and instinctive as genius on the natural plane, and of this too Catherine had more than a little. The usual way to keep on the right side of tyrants is by flattering them, but we might expect a saint to lash them with words of holy wrath. Catherine does neither. She is always courteous. Barnabo is her *réverend père*, though also, a few lines after the opening of her letter, an *esclave racheté* (by the Precious Blood), and in the next paragraph *très cher Père dans le doux Christ Jésus*. Beatrice is likewise her *révérende mère* and, as the saint's heart warms towards a soul in so great need, her *douce mère et soeur dans le Christ Jésus*. So evident indeed in her pleading is her passionate love and solicitude for the souls of Visconti and his wife that even they cannot take offence when she censures unsparingly the sins they know to be theirs. No one but she would credit them with even a measure of good will, or expect their brutalised intellects to be penetrated by even a glimmer of the high spiritual ideal she sets before them. Yet perhaps the cruel heart of Barnabo, whom she bids, *Blottissez-vous dans les plaies du Christ crucifié*, was stirred by some memory of her letter when, in his last hour—as we learn in a footnote—he murmured unceasingly, *Cor meum contritum et humiliatum, Deus meus, ne despicias*.

As a translation the book compares unfavourably with the French renderings, by Père Bernadot, O.P., of the saint's letters to Blessed Raymond. The French construction is often faulty and sometimes ungrammatical.

AN INFINITY OF QUESTIONS. A study of the religion of art, and the art of religion in the lives of five women. By C. J. Eustace. (Denis Dobson; 8s. 6d.)

This book is not intended as literary criticism. It is a study of the relationship between poetry and mysticism, illustrated by the lives of five women of literary and artistic talents and their attitude towards their art.