

THE IMMACULATE HEART. Litany and Meditations. By Mgr. Johannes Messner. (Mercier Press; 3s.)

Is it fair to base a book of meditations on theological opinions? Mariologists may ask themselves the question when reading Mgr Messner's book. It is a series of most useful meditations on the Litany of the Immaculate Heart. The underlying theology is that of M. J. Scheeben. The faithful who ponder these paragraphs or points (and they take some pondering) will feel that they are penetrating into the world of spiritual wonders which we call Mariology, under the guidance of an expert. And so they are. But few will realise that the Mariology of Scheeben is very far from being the last word on all subjects. His key-theme ('the key to all Mariology' ,p. 14), which is that of Mary as 'God's bride as well as God's Mother', has not by any means received general acceptance as the first principle of Mariology, though it is no doubt a beautiful and inspiring idea. So small a book packed with so many lovely thoughts deserves general commendation, but for the student of Mariology the presentation may appear somewhat unbalanced. There is a slip in the footnote on p. 22. For 'July 12th' read 'February 12th'. G.M.C.

## EXTRACTS

HOLY SCRIPTURE must ever be the main nourishment, with the Eucharist, of the Christian life. Too often men turn to cut-and-dried textbooks for guidance in the spiritual life when they would find all they need in the Word of God. Perhaps they are too easily discouraged by the literal sense, and it is of interest to find Dom Ralph Russell showing (in *The Downside Review*, winter number) the importance of the 'spiritual sense' and how it is safeguarded by the late Encyclical *Humani Generis*. The 'literal' sense, which is what the author meant when he wrote, contains other, deeper significances, and the words of the Scriptures are always revealing new and deeper vistas, leaving the earthly images and turning towards God himself and his Providence.

Are we not opening the door wide to fanciful interpretations?

The answer lies chiefly in the unity of God's providential plan, shown in the Old and New Testaments, and in the fact that events acquire a new and spiritual meaning from God's own revelation of his design.

It is the coming of our Lord that finally 'opens up' the meaning of the Old Testament and gives us a key to untold mysteries in the Bible. For this reason the spiritually minded man must keep his eye constantly on the Word of God.

Fr Sustar gives a practical application of this in *Verbum Domini* (Biblical Institute, Rome), where he has been publishing his studies on the idea of charity in St John. In the current issue he deals with brotherly love in which of course the beloved disciple excelled.

LAY SPIRITUALITY is the subject of the November *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle*, and it does perhaps elucidate some of the problems raised in the last issue of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT on the question of lay or religious sanctity. The weakness of this symposium lies in the absence of any lay man or woman among its contributors. It sets out, however, to pose the very real question as to the difference (if any) between the various types of Christians. It is often said that Catholic schools run by religious, for instance, unconsciously try to impose a religious type of spirituality on the future adult lay men and women. But the layman is not a mere tool in the hands of an ecclesiastical church; and he has to be established as a full and active member of Christ's Body. Père Serrand makes some suggestions as to the lines upon which this spirituality should be developed:

He should be allowed to be at ease in his faith, not to take his ease with it. He should learn in the Traditions of the Church to know his Bible and its principal sources, to gather its epic sense. In the liturgical community he should not be a paying and passive spectator of a foreign film without sub-titles. He should be prepared in joy and freedom to take on himself truly apostolic responsibilities. . . . In short, rather than treat him as a child in the Church, or as a servant of the Church in the world, he must first be treated in the Church as a brother (according to St Paul), as a friend (according to St John), and the lay spirituality will come of itself.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION the layman needs—up to a point, and *Revista di Vita Spirituale* dedicated its last number of 1950 entirely to the subject. It must always be remembered that the direction given must be aimed at leading the individual to an independence of the director and an immediate dependence on the Supreme Director—the Holy Spirit. For this reason the distinction drawn between 'obedience' and 'docility' in the first article, and emphasised by an editorial note, is of particular importance. The person directed exercises the virtue of docility rather than strict obedience. The only difficulty is that docility seems to apply rather to the mind and obedience to the will. The purpose of direction is to train the will to recognise and follow the divine will; it may be, however, that the humility of mind which is demanded by direction will thus prepare the soul for the more perfect docility which belongs to the Gifts of the Spirit—*docibiles Dei*.

VIRGINAL LOVE is the title of an article by Père Heris in the January *Vie Spirituelle*—and anything from this author is of course a first-class piece of theology. He discusses St Paul's somewhat pessimistic view of the superior excellence of virginity in relation to wedlock and sets it in relief with St Augustine's and St Thomas's view that virginity's true value comes from the vow by which it dedicates one to the direct service of God, preparing the way for the contemplative life. Thence Père Heris goes on to compare it with the different types of love; some it excludes, others it purifies and perfects. In this way he shows how true spiritual friendships are possible and how they differ from what are often known as 'particular friendships'. The dedicated virginal love does not shun all mankind, but it protects and purifies the love of man in the love of God.

LA VIE SPIRITUELLE for January also gives the full text in French of the Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi* which deals with the modifications and adaptations for orders of religious women. LIFE OF THE SPIRIT will be considering this important document later in the year together with the reports of the important congress dealing with the modern needs of religious held in Rome last December. *Esprit et Vie*, which has ceased to be the international literary journal it has been during the last few years and has turned to more specifically religious subjects, has an interesting article on Protestant religious communities with special reference to the now celebrated community at Taizé near Cluny, concluding with the text of their profession ceremony and their horary. The vows are somewhat elaborate as the subject has to attest his vows in six promises. Indeed, with the blessing and giving of the ring the whole ceremony bears close resemblance to the profession of a nun. The horary is admirably balanced between prayer and work.

THE CHURCH AND PEOPLE, which has been struggling for so long, has finally given up the battle. This is a great loss to English popular periodicals as there is nothing to supply the liturgical needs of the people in a way to deepen their understanding of and participation in the worship of the Church. It is to be hoped that it will be soon revived in a more successful form.

DIEU VIVANT (Editions du Seuil; Paris) in its seventeenth number presents a wealth of interest to the 'religious' reader, in particular Simon Franck on the Kingdom of God and the 'World' and Marcel Moré on the religious ideas of Simone Weil.