

## REVIEWS

ST JOHN OF THE CROSS, DOCTOR OF DIVINE LOVE AND CONTEMPLATION.

By Fr Gabriel, O.D.C. Translated by a Benedictine of Stanbrook (Mercier Press; 10s. 6d.)

Popular introductions to the Spanish Mystics of the character of Professor Allison Peers's *Spirit of Flame* and *Mother of Carmel* are much needed in the modern fever for mystical writings. But of more profound and lasting value are the works of those who have lived as well as studied such high and difficult spirituality. Fr Gabriel, the Spanish Carmelite, has proved himself to belong to this latter category, and his work on St John of the Cross, here revised and doubled in extent by the addition of a series of lectures on St Teresa, has been regarded widely as the best exposition in a short space of the Saint's mystical doctrine. Particularly useful is the appendix to the first part of the work in which the author arbitrates in the specialised dispute about the place of 'acquired contemplation' in the ascent and of the 'normality' of mystical states in the heights of the spiritual life. He shows that Père Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. approaches these problems too exclusively as a speculative theologian. For him, therefore, it is understandable that true contemplation does not begin until, on the quieting of meditation and the passage of the first purgation, God infuses the contemplative graces directly into the, by now, passive soul. There is, for him, no room for an 'acquired contemplation' here. But the more experimental and psychological approach reveals a period between the cessation of meditation or discursive prayer and the full gift of divine contemplation. The soul already begins to be moved by the Gifts of the Holy Ghost and is becoming progressively passive yet at the same time she needs to practise actively the presence of God and to continue to *do* many things preparatory to the reception of the divine infusion. Evidently this activity is moved by supernatural virtues, but it is this period of deepening purification and growing passivity, linked to a faithful activity, that other theologians have called 'acquired' contemplation. Fr Gabriel thus shows that there need be no ultimate conflict of views.

Similarly he modifies Père Garrigou's thesis that the mystic ascent of Mount Carmel is the normal way to sanctity and heaven; describing 'normal' as 'not-extraordinary or co-natural'. In this manner he leaves room for the many holy people who seem to have been leagues distant from divine espousals and mystical marriages, and whom experience has taught us to recognise as reaching up to the very heights of sanctity. Otherwise 'the active temperament' might be regarded as unlikely to reach perfection.

To all this very valuable mediation in the modern disputes Fr Gabriel now adds a very useful discussion on the *No pensar nada* of some of the Spanish mystical writers. This phrase might well be

taken—as indeed it has been—to inculcate the suppression of all intellectual activity and so to induce a kind of Quietist *nirvana*. 'To think of Nothing' may be an aspect of the Prayer of Quiet when the soul quietens the discursive reasoning of the mind, but according to St Teresa the soul may never *suppress* an intellectual activity. Fr Gabriel shows how St John of the Cross insisted that to practise contemplation the soul must go out to meet God, until the time comes when she seems to be doing nothing, thinking nothing except for some uncontrollable meanderings of the imagination, but remaining simply and quietly in the presence of God. Finally he returns to his point in justifying St John of the Cross as the 'Doctor of Active Contemplation'.

This is indeed a book of practical guidance in the life of prayer and in the reading of the mystics, invaluable to director and penitent alike.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

THE PRIEST'S GUIDE IN HOLY WEEK. By Arthur Proudman. (Burns Oates; 1s. 6d.)

Terse, brief and complete, this synopsis of the ceremonies and sacristy work for Holy Week is the sort of thing many a parish priest has longed for, perhaps even attempted himself but left unfinished. Each day dealt with, Palm Sunday and the last three days of Holy Week, begins with a brief conspectus of the ceremony (indispensable in instructing servers), continues with an account of the preparations necessary, and concludes with a synopsis of the ceremonies from the celebrant's point of view. So far as we are able to judge, Fr Proudman has attained a high degree of accuracy and any omissions are not essential. For example, he says the celebrant should face east in the baptistry; Fortescue adds, wisely, 'if possible'. Alas, it often is not. The book, which includes all the Latin texts said by the priest when away from the Missal, is gratifyingly free from misprints ('prophesies' on p. 38 should be 'prophecies'), is clearly printed, and apart from the curling paper cover, pleasant to handle. In a second edition, which is bound to follow, one or two phrases might be re-worded, e.g., 'spread with white cloth' (p. 39) and '(incense) is imposed' (p. 13)—shades of Dale-Baldeschi!

The clergy owe a debt of gratitude to Fr Proudman for giving us the fruits of his experience in so useful a form, and it is to be hoped it will be a powerful aid in conveying to the laity something of the *mysterium tremendum* that is enshrined in our Holy Week ceremonies.

J. D. CRICHTON

EVE AND THE GRYPHON. By Gerald Vann, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 6s.)

I have read this small book twice. In between readings, I came across this description of one of the New Testament Epistles: 'a pattern is worked which for richness of meaning, harmony of design, and depth and variety of colour, has few parallels. The effect is like