

FIRST STEPS IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. By Bernard Kelly, C.S.Sp. (Mercier Press; 8s.6d.)

This book comprises a number of conferences on the Religious Life, and is primarily intended for novices. Of course, it is the author's hope that religious other than novices will read it, and with profit. What Fr Bernard Kelly says (he deliberately maintains not a literary but an oral form of expression) is clear and to the point. Indeed, the chapters have already been tested by being actually preached, at least in part. There are a number of advantages that accrue when an author keeps to the style of the spoken word in his work; e.g. there is a directness of approach and appeal, the theme or argument under consideration is expounded with patient clearness. But for the reader there is also one distinct disadvantage, viz. over-much repetition. This may not be so noticeable when matter is being preached, when the congregation depend on hearing and understanding the word as it is uttered. In a book, however, the call for repetition is not so great: the reader can always refer back and retrace what has previously been expounded.

Fr Kelly's treatment of Religious Life is not directly concerned with elucidating and developing the principles that underlie and inspire it. Rather has he set himself the task of dealing with Religious Life from a practical angle, to set forth in elementary form the practice of that life. Principles are taken for granted, or implied. In the counsel he proffers there is much that is worthy of attention.

TERENCE NETHERWAY, O.P.

WHERE IS THY GOD? By Father James, O.F.M.Cap. (Mercier Press; 10s.6d.)

The quest in life is the quest for Life, for him who is Way, Life and Truth, who alone can satisfy the longings of man's heart. Christ came to give men life that was superabounding, and in his book Fr James gives a series of prayerful meditations on the Incarnation and its significance for mankind. Incorporated are chapters on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, our Lady and St Francis. We welcome this, the third edition of the work, a reprint that is timely and opportune.

T.N.

MARGARET OF CORTONA. By Francois Mauriac, tr. by Barbara Wall. (Burns Oates; 9s. 6d.)

This is the unusual biography of an unusual Saint. As the author tells us in his Preface, it was written during the enforced leisure of the years of the occupation of France, and some of the strain of that period has passed into the book—not to its disadvantage, for the 13th century Saint Margaret of Cortona was pre-eminently a Penitent Saint, and as such her character, even in her later years, lacked that serenity and peacefulness which we normally associate

with sanctity. While reading her life as Mauriac presents it, we can sympathise with the author's feelings, who could not prevent himself from being 'swayed, alternately, by the attraction or the irritation' which she inspires.

Margaret of Cortona was extraordinarily beautiful, a fact which probably contributed to the hatred of a jealous stepmother, and so it does not seem surprising that she should have fallen an easy prey to the flatteries of a young nobleman, whose mistress she was for nine years. At the end of this time her lover was murdered—and at once there arose before the eyes of her soul another Lover. It was one of those instantaneous conversions which know of no waverings. Henceforth her life became a wondrous pattern of super-human penance and heavenly contemplation, in which human relationships—for example that to her son—were sacrificed in a way that would not be lawful but for a unique vocation, as was the case, too, with Angela de Foligno. Mauriac, while being justifiably repelled by this and other aspects of her penitential life, yet does full justice to its essentially supernatural inspiration.

With the same understanding he treats her almost exclusive devotion to the Passion, that refuses to look beyond the Cross to the Resurrection and the glorious life of the Holy Trinity. It goes without saying that Mauriac, who is sometimes wholesomely provocative, holds the reader's interest from beginning to end. His work is another welcome addition to the modern French hagiographical books that make the Saints living people. The translation runs smoothly; the frontispiece is the reproduction of an interesting work by Gino Severini.

H. C. GRAEF

THE STORY OF MATT TALBOT. By Malachy Gerard Carroll. (The Mercier Press; 8s.6d.)

Matt's sanctity was definitely pre-ACTU; not that he would have been against it. Although he did not attend his fellow-workmen's strike meetings, he spent his savings helping their families. But Matt was of an eremitical nature. After his 'conversion' and abandonment of Guinness he lived by himself and spent all his time on works of charity and in prayer. He became foreman in a timber yard and used the old bills for noting down prayers etc. On one side: 'J. L. Green. To timber purchased—42/6', on the other, 'Jesus, says Origen, is the Sun of Justice arising with the Spring of Grace upon our hearts'. He was a good workman and respected by his fellows, who often consulted him. 'Matt's different', they said, trying to express their intuition of his holiness. Yet it was a difference rooted in ordinariness. He did not marry, but this was no part of a plan of his own. He was proposed to by a pious cook and replied that he would make a novena to see what God wished. He replied later that our Lady had told him not to marry.