

be discovered, had no contact with the religious life either Catholic or Anglican, gradually reached the point of being able to write: 'some of us will have to enter upon a vow of dedication which is as complete and irrevocable as was the vow of the monks in the middle ages. Little groups of utterly dedicated lives knowing each other in fellowship with the Divine; to live in the world, but not wholly of the world.' Her long experience of work with the Church Missionary society in Uganda and as warden of one of its training colleges in England convinced her finally that 'the renewal of society cannot be brought about by large-scale measures devised and put into operation by those at the top. It is only as individuals and small groups acquire a new outlook and attitude, and as these spread silently and imperceptibly from one to another, that forces are set in motion that can bring about a real renewal.' So in 1941 she established what became known as St Julian's Community. It is improbable that she was aware that this venture of faith bears a strong likeness to some of the Lay Institutes which have sprung up in the Catholic Church in recent years. '*Ex tenebris lux*'—perhaps if Florence Allshorn had not died in 1950 she might have found the light? The story of her life as recorded by Dr Oldham with such sympathy and understanding is inspiring reading.

P.F.A.

INSTRUCTIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. By Richard Meux Benson.
(Mowbray; 10s. 6d.)

We are presented in this book with a series of twelve instructions on the religious life which formed part of a long retreat delivered in 1874. Though the book is small (it has less than 150 pages), it is important as it allows us to feel the pulse of the religious life in the Church of England. To judge these conferences one must remember the circumstances and the period. Religious life was not a part of the tradition of the Church of England. Fr Benson therefore had no tradition behind him; he was a pioneer, an explorer with very little backing and a good deal of opposition. These pages are a monument to his zeal and sincerity, for nobody who is not blinded by prejudice could deny him these two qualities. The Society he founded has always been known for its austerities, and these were never practised, certainly by the founder, for self-glorification, as every page of this book proclaims. Yet this lack of tradition and the stiffening discipline of centuries of Catholic philosophy and theology which had been largely thrown out at the Reformation is all too obvious as one reads on. At the very roots of Christianity are to be found the nature of the relationship of God to man, the nature of the soul (and the body), the subjection of the moral virtues to the supernatural in Christian tradition and thought. And here alas Fr

Benson shows an all too fundamental failing. There is a flavour of Manichaeism that keeps on asserting itself and which confuses the issue all the more when there is a lack of clarity over the nature of the body and soul, or worse still, over the ultimate and the means to that ultimate. The nature and purpose of Grace is confused, and it would seem that the author assumes that most if not all grace is a *gratia gratis data* when he says: 'All those riches (of God) are not merely for itself (my individual soul); for *it receives nothing for itself*'. (p. 28.) (The parentheses are mine.) There are two errors apparent here, on the nature of grace, and the primary purpose of every soul in this world which is his OWN INDIVIDUAL SALVATION. 'The body at the last day will rise again because it has the body of Christ within it' may be a nice idea, but is it true? (p. 37.) Supernatural grace, that is supernatural life, resides in the soul; and yet we read: 'The indulgence of all the natural life of the body is the destruction of the supernatural life of the body'. (p. 37.) This might be true had the author said that an over-indulgence of the natural life of the body is the death of the supernatural life of the soul, since the body should be in subjection to the soul. Mortification is never an end in itself. A religious rule (which always implies mortification) is a means to an ultimate end—God. Yet Fr Benson says: 'We must understand that our rule is intended to be an inconvenience. It is intended to hinder us.' (p. 49.) It is impossible to allow this negative attitude to pass unchallenged; it is not the true authentic christian tradition at all.

When we come to the old bone of contention—obedience—we find Fr Benson saying outright: 'It is in the surrender of the judgment that the chief point of obedience is found'. (p. 50.) There is so much that is very good in these pages that it is a pity they have been influenced by an undercurrent of basic misconceptions or confusions. Fr Benson's sincerity is writ large on every page and so is his zeal; his personal austerity is advertised—albeit unconsciously—by every instruction. No doubt he never even thought his talks would one day be published, and therefore self-glorification is as foreign to him in these words of his as God is to the devil. Please God, he now sees all he has here written in its true perspective. Much of the advice given in these pages should be taken to heart by all who sincerely seek God in the religious life.

DOMINIC J. SIRE, O.P.

In EIGHT DECISIVE BOOKS OF ANTIQUITY (Sheed and Ward, 1952; 16s.), the late F. R. Hoare very usefully summarises the part played by certain books in laying the foundations of civilisation. The eight books are: *The Laws of Hammurabi*, *The Book of the Dead*, *The Torah*, *The Epics of Homer*, *The Laws of Manu*, *Sayings of Confucius*, *Plato's Republic* and *Aristotle's Politics*.
D.N.