

A TREASURY OF RUSSIAN SPIRITUALITY. Edited by G. P. Fedotov. (Sheed & Ward; 25s.)

To assemble representative extracts from a literature of whatever sort of language must always be a hazardous business. And if the literature itself be unfamiliar, the reader is necessarily at the mercy of the anthologist. For most Western Christians the Russian spiritual tradition is a deep mystery. Echoes there have been, and occasionally—as in the case of *The Way of a Pilgrim*—a whole work has become known and loved. But few have been able to judge such a work against the background which alone can give it full meaning.

Dr Fedotov's *Treasury* is welcome, therefore, as a serious and obviously authoritative introduction to a whole literature, beginning with the eleventh-century *Life of St Theodosius* (the first monastic saint canonised by the Russian Church) and extending to within reach of our own times with the *Fragments of a Diary* by Alexander Yelchaninov. The five hundred pages of the collection are not dissipated by short and unrelated extracts. Instead we are for the most part given whole works: lives of saints, spiritual autobiographies (such as that of the Archpriest Avvaum, the seventeenth-century reformer who was burned at the stake), a monastic rule (that of St Nilus), the systematic ascetical writings of John of Cronstadt. And the extracts are linked up by an informed commentary by the compiler, revealing the continuity of Russian spirituality—however modified it may seem to be, as, in different ages and under different hands, it shifts its emphasis, from a severe asceticism to a profoundly mystical contemplation, from a naïve simplicity in prayer to an elaborate technique of self-examination.

For spirituality reflects the world in which a spiritual experience of a world beyond it is in fact enjoyed. The idiosyncrasies of narrative and style, these are often enough a fashion, and beneath our amusement or our amazement there lies a rich continent where God is constantly known and loved, and where that knowledge and love are, however haltingly, declared to men. The unity of mystical life transcends language, race or age, and while there is much, for instance, in the kenotic emphasis of many Russian saints (with their immolatory sense of the literal meaning of Christian suffering) which seems harsh and strange to Western ears, there is never wanting that awareness of incorporation in Christ which is the living principle of Christian life in every place and age.

The *Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, admirably presented and edited as it is, should be of the utmost value to Catholics who wish to respect a tradition that may superficially seem unlike their own. It should, besides, encourage our prayers for the Russian people

whose true literature this is, and who, please God, may soon be brought back again to these healing waters. I.E.

ACTUAL GRACE AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. By John V. Matthews, S.J. (Mercier Press; 7s. 6d.)

A considerable number of devotional books consist so entirely of pietistic ejaculations that it is difficult to see a long future for them. Father Matthews' study of grace is to be welcomed for having eschewed that tedium, though a reviewer might be misled into fearing the worst when he reads on the dust-cover that it belongs to the 'Recall to the Spiritual Life Series'. It is high time this phrase 'spiritual life' were either given its precise meaning or decently put to death. Living a holy Catholic life is not an exclusively spiritual affair, and Catholics in England, and Ireland, too, are now sufficiently tolerated for us to admit that living a Catholic life embraces politics and business, and everyday routine, and is more than an 'affair of the "spirit"'. More important still today, holy men are needed who not only cultivate their 'spirit', whatever that might mean, but holy men who find their religion driving their lives in office and factory and committee-room. Father Matthews himself, however, is rarely guilty of disembowelling the language of religion, though he does occasionally speak of 'souls' when he means persons or people, but in general his writing is marked by clarity, simplicity and deliberation. The simplicity is almost excessive, but it is useful. He has written a book of instruction presupposing nothing except willing readers. He does not attempt to move our emotions but to enlighten our minds. He succeeds. Only twice do we have to pause. In the ticklish question of the relation of grace and nature it would have been helpful to hear a little, though by the nature of the book only a little, of how nature can be predisposed—or not—to grace, and how grace builds on nature. In Chapter XVIII he sets out to show that actual grace does not take away human freedom: but as the question has hardly been raised the answer only creates difficulties; and there is one surprising remark: 'It is generally felt that actual grace took away St Paul's freedom of will for the time being when the saint was struck down on the road to Damascus'. How general? Information about the relationship of grace and nature would again have helped.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

A CHAQUE JOUR SUFFIT SA JOIE. By Isabelle Rivère. (Emile-Paul; 450 fr.)

At a time when men all too frequently utter in despair the cry, 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof', it is refreshing to find a