

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE. By C. F. Kelley. (Longmans; 21s.)

St Francis de Sales, in whom his contemporaries saw Christ once more walking on earth, is the great guide on the path to holiness. The Church calls him, for this reason, the Doctor of Devotion. His way, as Mr Kelly sets out to show, was the way of love. Love was his definition of perfection; and not only its definition, but the way leading to it. Between the extremes of lax sentimentalism and severe asceticism, he steered a middle course. 'Gentleness, always gentleness', he cries to the ascetics. 'Be moderate in all things except in the love of God', he warns the laxists. This *via media* of love harmonises the various aspects of life both natural and supernatural into an ordered whole. Basing his teaching on the sure principles of philosophy and theology, St Francis shows us that God is love; that through and for that love we were made; and that to that love we must make some return from our human hearts and wills. This demands some knowledge of theology—the study of God. It demands an appreciation of our place in the scheme of things. It requires a clear idea of how to establish contact with God by prayer and to grow in the likeness of God in our daily lives by the practice of the virtues—especially the little ones suitable to our state.

St Francis was not a man of extremes; that is why gentleness is his keynote. In all that concerns God and the soul and the relationship between the two he is never off-centre. His path is the *via media*—'the gentle, unassuming and patient way'. This does not mean that he would accept or condone a mediocre standard or a minimum of effort. On the contrary, there should be no limit to our love and what it may produce. 'God is greater than our heart', he said; 'shame on us if we are content to love Him by rule or measure.' Rendering his teaching no less exacting than any of the other great spiritual masters, by his balanced approach, by insisting that sanctity is synonymous with sanity, St Francis succeeded in making it more attractive.

The need for a scholarly yet popular exposition of the salesian doctrine of love has been wonderfully met by the American author of this book. His splendid treatment of the subject ranks with Professor Muller's excellent study of St Francis de Sales—the only other comprehensive analysis of the spirit of St Francis available in English. The doctrine is not divorced from its master; and so it lives and seems to acquire a new influence. St Francis is allowed to speak for himself on almost every page, and various details of his life are brought in when relevant, giving clarity and vitality to what might otherwise so easily be simply dry bones. Full and helpful notes together with the useful bibliography and index complete this very satisfying addition to salesian writing.

VINCENT KERNS, M.S.F.S.