

REVIEWS

A MANUAL FOR INTERIOR SOULS. By John Nicholas Grou, S.J. (Burns and Oates; 15s.)

This work is published in the Orchard Books series with an introduction by Father Donal O'Sullivan, S.J. Father Nicholas Grou belongs to that group of French spiritual writers whose existence proves that the last days of the Ancien Régime were not quite so bereft of spiritual vitality as is sometimes believed. A young priest at the time of the suppression of his Order, Father Grou continued to work on in Paris until the Revolution, when he accepted the invitation of Thomas Weld to live at Lulworth Castle, where he died in 1803 after having been able to renew his vows in the partially restored Society. Both during his years of active apostolate in Paris and during the time of contemplative retirement at Lulworth Father Grou was a prolific writer. The Abbé Brémond decided to call him a 'Berullian Jesuit', which, whatever else it might mean, was, in the context, intended as a compliment. Others place him in the line of great seventeenth-century Jesuit mystical writers such as Lallemand or Surin whose teaching bore fruit in the lives of the heroic missionaries of New France. The *Manual for Interior Souls* is not, perhaps, the greatest of Father Grou's works, but it is by far the most popular, having been translated into several languages and having attracted the attention of non-Catholics. Father O'Sullivan contributes an interesting introduction and has added a little-known treatise on prayer by Bossuet. He has added this, he tells us, because he was afraid that certain opinions of Father Grou might seem to smack of Quietism unless it be made clear that Bossuet, the arch-enemy of the Quietists, shared those same views. This is a book for those who practise *Lectio Divina*.

RICHARD BLUNDELL, S.J.

THE CHOICE OF GOD. By Dom Hubert van Zeller. (Burns Oates; 12s. 6d.)

'Challenging', 'forthright', even 'provocative' are words that reviewers use automatically about a book like this. 'Provocative' could be used only by one who was prepared to maintain that Father van Zeller goes too far and too fast in the matter of mortification and detachment. He practically says that if we want to be holy we must give up smoking, drinking, cinemas, everything that would betray a lack of proportion, the proportion being that of, say, St John of the Cross. And he is pretty severe in the matter of natural affections. Also he seems to take for granted that even good priests will tell you to ease

up, and not to take yourself too seriously, if you really set out to become detached. Spiritual writers, he says, will let you down by explaining away the general—or very common—lack of rigorous bodily penances. We have grown soft and need to revise our ideas of what is allowable to one who loves God wholeheartedly.

It is all rather discouraging at first glance, but it is extraordinarily difficult to refute, taking it as a whole. Many readers will put the book down with a hope that 'there is another way of saying these things.' Indeed there is. St John of the Cross does not say things in exactly the same way as St Philip Neri. The present reviewer prefers the 'carriage and pair' method, but one cannot deny that a good dose of this holy charitable severity is a tonic at the least and a medicine at the best.

The subject—need one say it?—is holiness, holiness in all things, all along the line. The forty-six short chapters are on the usual retreat subjects: prayer, the cross, Mass, detachment, the theological virtues, perfection. Titles such as 'Prayer and Art' and 'Works in Particular' indicate the personal and original style in which these changeless ideals are presented.

G. M. CORR, O.S.M.

A CEDAR OF LEBANON. By Fr Paul Daher, O.L.M. (Browne and Nolan; 15s.)

This life of Father Charbel Makhlof, Lebanese Maronite monk (1828-1898), is full of miracle and presents to this 'scientific' age a challenge which must bring many converts to the Church and harden the hearts of many who will turn aside. It makes one think of our Lord's words: 'Greater things than these shall you do'.

Father Makhlof lived a simple life as a monk. In this he is very like St Thérèse of Lisieux. But it is the life almost of a Father of the Desert. The spirit of the ancient abbots of the primitive age of monasticism is clearly as much alive today in Lebanon as the spirit of St Ignatius is alive in London. But this is not the miracle. The miracle is that after nearly sixty years the holy body of Father Makhlof is as supple and fresh as if he had just died, that a mysterious liquid flows from his side, and has done so for all these years, and this in circumstances and conditions which exclude all possibility of fake or illusion. With the usual reservations about the final judgment of the Church on the matter, one may say that this phenomenon is one of the outstanding supernatural manifestations of this century. Many other wonders are narrated, and with good evidence, but this central one is so impressive and so well and vividly narrated that it sticks in the memory long after the book has been put down. Reading this book is quite an experience.

G. M. CORR, O.S.M.