

the spiritual perfection of the whole by the purity of his contemplation and by the sanctity of his life: if God has made him a contemplative and a saint, it is, ultimately, that he might so contribute. Needless to say, the monastery is only a member in the great Mystical Body of the Church. Therefore in the long run, the purity of heart produced in each monk by the monastic rule, by obedience, humility, labour, charity, solitude, recollection and prayer adds to the sanctity of the whole Church.'

That is a justification because it reminds us how the contemplative monastic life draws its power, indeed, the very reason for its existence, from the most profound principle of the Gospel revelation, our sanctification through the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a challenge, because it calls back every Cistercian, every monk, to a more generous co-operation with his strictly contemplative vocation.

This whole chapter is enriched with quotations from St Bernard. The doctrine here may not be new, but it is presented in a way that makes it live for us as only great spiritual truths can live. Perhaps the most important teaching in this valuable book is the exposition of the Common Will, the *voluntas communis*, that is the secret and strength of community life. Surely, for the monk, life lived in common with his brethren becomes sacramental.

To conclude, Thomas Merton has succeeded in this book of monastic history because he has gone far deeper than the mere narration of historical facts. He has entered into a full understanding of what monasticism really is. So he has qualified in the one way necessary for his difficult task.

BRUNO WALKER, O.C.R.

RUMI. By R. A. Nicholson. (Allen & Unwin; 8s. 6d.)

In a posthumous publication the learned world and the general public are now offered the last work of England's finest Persian scholar, Professor R. A. Nicholson; in proportion to its scope and size, it may well prove his most effective. It consists of 119 translations, in verse and free-verse, of representative passages from the writings of Persia's greatest mystical poet, Jalâl al-Din Rûmî, all but a handful of them being from his *opus magnum*, the *Mathnawî* or *Couplet-Poem*, as it is commonly called without any necessity for closer identification; it was to the preparation of an edition, a translation and a commentary on this work that Nicholson devoted the greater part of his working life, and the result of his labours is universally conceded to be one of the most perfect achievements of English Orientalist scholarship. The passages selected here, all more or less substantially refashioned as against his renderings in the translation of the complete work, are in most cases provided, though

never overladen, with penetrating annotation, which point, amplify and integrate the particular aspect of Sûfi doctrine or imagery involved. There is a short and lucid introduction, based on Nicholson's notes as found by his literary executor, an old pupil and friend, Professor Arberry, who has also added two paragraphs of his own.

Of the consummate scholarship of the translations I am emboldened to give emphatic testimony: the quality and style of the renderings, too, while doubtless they will strike many as (like their author) somewhat too gentle and unassuming, are in fact the perfect lens to focus the poet's meaning, without distortion or false colour. It is a rare good fortune which brings forth a work of this kind, didactically selective as it is, as the maturest fruit of the master's long and patient cultivation; too often such productions are the hasty potboilers of a scholar's callower years.

In the long run, the book only gains in value from its author's scrupulous avoidance of all comparisons between Eastern and Western mystics and his policy of allowing one of the greatest of the former to give evidence in his own behalf. With this valid document on which to work, the Christian and Catholic will have no difficulty in drawing his own comparisons and contrasts and discovering what for him must be the essential blind-spots of Sûfism: the inability to distinguish God from his creation and the failure to recognise mystical experience as utterly and sheerly of grace. From my own experience of Professor Nicholson and his work, I doubt that he ever clearly saw the awful gulf which (but for God's grace) gapes between the Islamic and the Christian mystic, or that, if he had, he would have seen it as of the Muslim's own unwitting making. His application to the *Mathnawî* itself of some words used by Dante (Introduction, p. 25), do nothing to dispel my doubts: Rûmî's 'state of felicity' was fully attainable in this world; Dante's is secure in the walls of the *Civitas Dei*, and death is the portal of entry there.

The book is the first of the new 'Oxford' series of *Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West*, and no series could wish a better inauguration. Catholics may well be justified in feeling an unusual optimism over the future publications of this series, too, for the General Introduction to the whole project contains a sentiment unusual enough in ventures of this kind: 'Those whose own religion is dogmatic have often been as ready to learn from other teachings as those who are liberals in religion'.

G. M. WICKENS.