

chapters 56-66 after the rebuilding of the Temple and the coming of Nehemiah (516-444). This view of the three distinct works included in the Book of Isaiah is, though not completely proven, generally held by non-Catholics, and it will be remembered that the Catholic scholar Mgr Kissane in his commentary (1941-3) presents the second part of the Book as an exilic 'write-up' of material belonging to the original Isaiah, thus still maintaining the traditional unity of the Book, while also explaining very obvious differences. Professor North accepts, and expounds very clearly, the threefold theory. But he also reminds us (p. 13) that the Book of Isaiah was already accepted as a whole as early as the second century B.C., a fact which has had striking corroboration in the discovery in 1947 of a single scroll of Isaiah among the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' which probably go back to that period.

Professor North's commentary is brief and to the point, it is mainly textual and historical (on the background of Babylon).

The essay on interpretation (pp. 26-36) is valuable, as explaining the 'mythological interpretation': 'if there is anything more in the prophecy than pure vapourings, such an interpretation seems absolutely necessary. . . . A myth is not just any fanciful or untrue story. Myths are related in all seriousness. They may relate to the past, or they may relate to the future. . . . A myth may be told about something that happened before the dawn of history, in order to explain a situation with which we are confronted and which must have come about somehow. Such a myth is the story of the Fall. . . . A myth may also refer to the future. It is then a description of something which lies beyond the horizons of any future that we can envisage. . . . When we say of Christ that "he sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead", we are speaking the language of mythology. . . . The Second Isaiah lived at a crisis in the history of his people. Something was about to happen. What he depicted was . . . transcended by what did happen six centuries later. . . .' (pp. 26-27.) This is really helpful, and it leads on to the question of the interpretation of the 'Servant' passages. Professor North summarises very concisely the various methods of interpretation, concluding with the Christian Messianic interpretation, in which the vocation of Israel symbolised in the Servant comes to a head in Christ, and through Christ is inherited by the Church.

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ST BERNARD 'ON THE SONG OF SONGS'. Translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (Mowbrays; 12s. 6d.)

If one could, in itself a foolish wish, have chosen to live in some other place and period, the opportunity of being present in

Chapter when St Bernard poured out the *Sermones in Cantica* would have a serious claim to selection. Reading them over again, even in short extracts, one finds no better proof of their universal character than the number of ideas, lightly accepted as part of our spiritual heritage, which one runs to earth there. Just as in our daily speech the tags of Shakespeare are often on the lips of those who seldom if ever turn to the plays, so a devout reflection is frequently a dim reminder of Bernard's genuine honey. Less metaphysically-minded, less withdrawn, usually less penetrating than his friend and admirer William of St Thierry, not so intimate as Aelred, one understands afresh why he was the natural leader of that monastic revival which spread through Europe with such astounding rapidity. For he had some indefinable attribute, the mark of the man of genius, which makes him appear among his contemporaries always a little larger than life. The incandescent quality of his thought transforms what it touches. Gifted, as every page bears witness, with a rare sense of language which would have made outstanding whatever he turned to, he will not be content with the making of a book. He creates a world.

One unmistakable theme gives unity to all the diverse matter with which the eighty-six sermons of this unfinished commentary on the *Canticle* are crowded. It is the call not merely to know God by faith, but to become one spirit with him by charity, to 'taste and see how gracious the Lord is'. It would, however, be possible to exaggerate the amount of time which St Bernard devotes to the exposition of his properly mystical doctrine. There is a great deal of moral and ascetical instruction adapted to the needs of a community whose members are at every stage of development. St Bernard has a marked fondness for the image of our Lord as Shepherd, and fully in accordance with St Benedict's picture of the abbot, he never forgets his duty to the little ones of the flock. If what he says on some occasions must have been beyond them, he can never have been anything other than an encouraging master from whom to learn. Again and again he loves to repeat St John's words, 'He first loved us'. It is always Christ who is looking for us before we are looking for him, who is as it were compassionately prejudiced in our favour, more ready to give than we to receive.

It seems almost an impertinence to praise the translation of parts of these sermons which one of the Wantage Sisters has here given us. Her work is a little masterpiece and communicates something of the joy she has obviously felt in doing it. It is completely free from mannerisms, dignified, yet never bookish, and constantly refreshed by the bold choice of a firm, strong noun, where the temptation would have been to select a vague, 'poetic' one. Consequently, in a seemingly effortless way the English often succeeds in recalling the musical effect of the original. Take for instance a few sentences from one of the most

familiar of all passages: 'O little while, and little while, O lengthy little while! Good Lord, dost thou call that a little while in which we do not see Thee? With all good respect to thy word, my Lord, I must confess that it is long to me—yes, much too long. Yet it is right to call that time both short and long, for it is short compared with our deserts, and very long indeed to our desires.'

The selection of extracts is always skilful, and one gets from it a very balanced impression of the whole. There are of course many sacrifices, some of which it would have been outside the Sister's immediate purpose to include—the moving lament for Gerard, or, by contrast, the witty passage in Sermon XXX on the kind of monk who is over-finicky in his diet, both of which she would doubtless have rendered excellently. Indeed, if we had one complaint it would be that she has underestimated our powers of endurance. Making her excuses for not translating the whole, she alludes to two translations already in existence, and also to the fact that 'few people nowadays would read such a long book'. We think they would, if only she would consent to translate it.

A.S.

BLESSED JAN VAN RUYSBROECK: THE SPIRITUAL ESPOUSALS.

Translated from the Dutch, with an Introduction, by Eric Colledge. (Faber; 18s.)

The waning of the middle ages saw the beginning of a new spiritual movement which was to have the most far-reaching consequences in the life of the Church. Scholars have of late been turning their attention towards discovering the origins and describing the course of this movement to which they have given the name of *Devotio Moderna*. It is certain that the philosophers and saints of the Low Countries played no small part in its development: from there came that little book called *The Imitation of Christ* which probably more than any other book before or since has guided souls along the paths of prayer and the devout life. But the work of Thomas à Kempis, if he was indeed the author of *The Imitation*, was the result of his training at the school which Geert Groote had founded at Deventer in 1387. The Augustinian mystic, Jan van Ruysbroek, whose principal treatise on the contemplative life has here been translated by Mr Colledge from the fourteenth-century Dutch, is in truth the father of this movement in the Netherlands. It may be said that his mysticism is more of a practical than a speculative cast, and in this he approximates more nearly to the English school—he is contemporary to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*—than to the Spanish precursors of St John of the Cross. He is concerned with the means whereby mystical union is to be attained rather than with its metaphysical implications. The work under