

MEDIAEVAL MYSTICAL TRADITION AND ST JOHN OF THE CROSS. By a Benedictine of Stanbrook. (Burns Oates; 12s. 6d.)

It is a common criticism that the emphasis placed by the Church on positive law in her moral discipline, and on the sacraments in her system of worship is incompatible with the mystical or contemplative life of the spirit; in which it is maintained that the essence of religion consists. Without discussing whether such a view is compatible with orthodoxy (which I think is doubtful), it cannot be denied that there is about it more than a suggestion of spiritual snobbishness! One answer to such a critic would be to put into his hands this excellent essay, which shows the Doctor 'Mysticus' St John of the Cross as a true lineal descendant of the medieval tradition. This tradition he may be said to have completed, and to have surpassed by his genius as a practical psychologist and theologian. It is precisely because he is both psychologist and theologian that he is the most realistic and orderly of all writers on the spiritual life, but this order and realism represent a definite advance in man's moral and spiritual knowledge. It may be of interest to note one or two points which illustrate this. Up to the time of Hugh of St Victor the spiritual trials so common in the transition from discursive to contemplative prayer were regarded as punitive, and not as constructive in the soul's development. The progress initiated by Hugh of St Victor is taken up, and becomes decisive only when it is incorporated in the systematic doctrine of St John. In recent years much has been written on the subject of 'Acquired Contemplation', and of course St John's teaching on the Night of the Senses is classical, but the question had been raised as long ago as the time of Richard of St Victor, and here again we may see the unerring genius of the saint in discerning what is essential and fundamental in the traditions which he inherited. A final indication of the traditional roots of St John's teaching is the fact of which we are here reminded, that the three well-known tests for discerning if the time has come to pass from meditation to this prayer of 'simple regard' or 'loving attention' were taken from the Institutions of Tauler.

This book may be commended for the number and excellence of its quotations; they are the fruit of a genuine erudition.

R. VELARDE

THE BOOK OF PSALMS. Volume Two. LXXIII-CL. By Monsignor Edward Kissane, D.D., D.LITT. (Browne and Nolan; 30s.)

The lover of the psalms will find the second volume of Mgr Kissane's work no less a rich pasturage for every kind of information than the first volume. The translations are into a fine English, and the comments provide dates and other circumstances that go to draw a psalm from a