

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

somewhat unreal world of indefinite piety to the reality of men living, feeling and praying in hardship or delight, the enlivening of Scripture which is demanded by a current mood one cannot but be thankful for. Mgr Kissane is however here cautious, which means conservative in speculation, while in textual criticism, a subject remote from the interest of the general reader, he commands admiration for the acumen with which he finds a plausible solution for tangled passages with the minimum of change in the Hebrew text. But for fifteen psalms he makes no change at all, and for twenty-five more, very few. It would be beyond the scope of this review to enter into detail on particular psalms, or to argue that the Septuagint might have been given greater credence. This generally reserved or traditional treatment might have been extended to the question of explicit prophecy of Christ, which is treated of too negatively to be committal one way or the other. At present, when the biblical world is in suspense over what discoveries will next upset or confirm long-cherished opinion, such prudence is not without its advantages.

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L'ATTENTE DU MESSIE. Par P. Cerfaux, J. Coppens, R. de Langhe, V. de Leeuw, A. Deschamps, J. Giblet, B. Rigaux. (Desclée de Brouwer; n.p.)

If the word 'Messias' is to be defined, it is by the term *Christus Incarnandus*, 'Christ due to be Incarnate'. Such was he to those who believed in his coming when the Old Testament was in force, albeit the word literally means 'the Anointed', which expresses one among several aspects of his work. Such was he to the Jews when he came, and in the terms moulded by the mode of prediction he was both received and commemorated in tradition and the books of the New Testament. In this wide area for dispute and doubt, criticism has had much to say, and the Church has its specialized refutations to present in defence of the deposit of Faith.

The latter task is the purpose of a collection of essays appearing from a group of professors, six Belgian, one Dutch, each dealing with his own topic in brief compass, to assess the present state of opinion in the light of *Divino afflante*; but there is something not altogether satisfying about the result. The individuality of treatment makes for an unconcerted whole, and the positions taken by non-Catholic critics are analysed and refuted according to the partial view of each working in his own sphere, stress being laid on some, others passed over; while the author's own position might seem to many to be itself 'critical'. The latter qualification, however, is perhaps the only attitude to take while archaeological discovery opens up ever newer possibilities, and a