

It follows from this that as all the changes and movements of this world depend on the movement of the first heaven, so in the spiritual world all good and holy actions depend on the grace and merits of this sacred Humanity. For we can have no good resolution, nor any desire, nor longing, or perform any religious action or speak in a way pleasing to God that does not come to us from the grace and merits of our Lord. This is to teach us that all which is good comes from Him and that we must thank Him for it, pray that by Him and for Him we may receive it, and may resort to Him in all our needs, placing in Him our whole confidence, our love, our happiness and all our cares and thoughts, and hold for lost the time we do not spend with Him or for Him
(*To be Continued*)

REVIEWS

THE SEVEN STEPS OF THE LADDER OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. By Jan van Ruysbroeck. Translated by F. Sherwood Taylor. (Dacre Press; 3s. 6d.)

Jan van Ruysbroeck, one of the greatest of the medieval mystics, is undeservedly little known in this country, and the fine translation of this small, but exquisite, work of his is a most welcome achievement. The more is it to be regretted that the introduction by Fr. Joseph Bolland, S.J., does little to familiarize the reader with Ruysbroeck's thought, and is, in fact, apt rather to repel than to attract him to the great Flemish monk. For it consists entirely of warnings against possible misunderstandings, which, though useful, might have been given in a very much shorter form instead of taking so much space, and leaving the reader with a negative impression, which a few condescending words on Ruysbroeck's piety and unction can hardly correct.

Yet the treatise is one of the gems of mystical literature, and it is to be feared, or should we rather say hoped, that once we have set our foot on the first rung of the ladder of spiritual love, we forget the warnings of our cautious guide and delightedly follow the saintly author, "always ascending and descending the steps of our heavenly ladder, in interior virtues, outward good works, the commandments of God and the precepts of Holy Church," convinced that no ill can befall us on steps so solidly built. Ascending from the conformity with God's will to voluntary poverty and thence to purity of soul and body, he leads us on to the great fountainhead of holiness, humility, this "lowliness of spirit, wherein God lives in true peace with us, and we with God," and from which flow like streams the virtues of Christ Himself, obedience and meekness, patience and self-denial. But he seems unable to linger there long, and hurrying past the first four steps, he presses

on to the fifth, to hymn and glorify the queen of virtues, for "when we carry love, it carries us above all the heavens to Him whom we love"; then "all the faculties of the soul rejoice, the veins swell and the blood grows hot with the desire of fulfilling the glory of God." But in his exultation he by no means forgets the foundation on which the love of God is built: "For patient suffering is the wedding-garment which Christ put on when He took His Church as bride at the altar of the Cross, and with the same garment He has clothed all His family. . . . If you would be exalted, you must needs suffer." For sanctity is not to be had save after the model of Christ, and it is one of the glories of the book that our Lord is held up to us for imitation from first to last, He the "Example and Singer of God's praise here and hereafter." And in His traces we reach at last the final steps, the contemplative life of union with the Trinity and of "annihilation" in God's essence. But here he touches on the sublimest things which can be understood only by those who have attained to the highest stages of sanctity. It is here, too, that the obscure passages occur which are discussed in the Introduction—but who could blame the mystic when words fail him and theology deserts him before the ineffable union, before which even a St. Thomas confessed that all he had written was straw?

Though small in size, the "Seven Steps" are big with Christian wisdom, a very authentic ring in the chain that connects Dionysius the Areopagite with St. John of the Cross. More, it is one of those rare books of transparent humility which makes us entirely forget their author and imperceptibly leads us to prayer, surely the greatest thing a work of the human mind can do.

(H. C. GRAEF.

"JUST FOR TODAY." By a Benedictine of Stanbrook. (Burns Oates, 6s.)

This is an extremely valuable little book, for it not only introduces us to two great spiritual writers, St. Thomas à Kempis and St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, but it does so in a way at once practical and effective. The Imitation must be read and read again if it is to give up its secret, and it is the same with the writings of St. Theresa; especially is this true of *L'histoire d'une Ame* (her autobiography), from which most of the quotations in this book are taken. Both St. Thomas à Kempis and St. Theresa present us with the same difficulty, their writings are in each case so full of spiritual treasures, so closely knit together and so concisely expressed, that it is most difficult to concentrate upon one simple passage and not to be distracted by the wealth of spiritual teaching contained in the passages surrounding it. We are apt to suffer from spiritual indigestion, to feel it is more than we can manage,