

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

review is divided into the three classic books called: I The Active Life, II The Life of Yearning for God, and III The Life of Contemplation of God; though the last one, as would be expected since the author's object is primarily practical, is extremely short compared with the other two. The translation reads well, and the introduction is scholarly: probably the best short account in English of Ruysbroek's doctrine, though readers who hitherto have only known Ruysbroek through the carefully annotated French edition of his works prepared by the monks of Oosterhout may be surprised that no mention is made of these volumes in the bibliography. Bl. Jan van Ruysbroek was beatified by Bl. Pius X in 1908.

DESMOND SCHLEGEL, O.S.B.

**THE GOAD OF LOVE:** an unpublished translation by Walter Hilton of *Stimulus Amoris* formerly attributed to St Bonaventura, now edited from MSS by Clare Kirchberger. (London: Faber and Faber; 18s.)

This edition of Walter Hilton's version of *Stimulus Amoris* is greatly to be welcomed. It is a beautiful piece of work and it contains some important implication for readers of today. There is a good introduction explaining the sources used by Hilton, and there are some interesting comments on the changes which he introduced showing his own original contribution. The most significant of these is the constant translation of such words as *Deus* and *Creator* by 'Christ' and 'Our Lord'. This Christocentric character, with its emphasis on the Incarnation, was the immediate result of the need to counteract the heresies of the day and the false mysticism which disregarded the Humanity of Christ, and also the practice of the virtues. It was the expression, too of the traditional English devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, to the Passion and to our Lady. But the fundamental reason, as the introduction shows, lies in the Faith itself—in the 'law' of the Incarnation whereby we can only reach God through the Person of Christ.

Several very striking impressions are left by this book: one of them is the almost complete absence of any detailed analysis of the states of prayer. This shows us, we are told, a poetical affective side of Hilton's nature which is much more evident here than in the more schematised work of *The Scale of Perfection*. We are here brought into touch with that simple, direct approach to God, without any 'spiritual gymnastics'. We are reminded that this approach was shown, in *Brother Petroc's Return*<sup>1</sup>, to be the mark distinguishing medieval from post-Reformation spirituality. A further impression—closely linked with this simplicity—is Hilton's insistence on self-forgetfulness.

<sup>1</sup> *Brother Petroc's Return: A Story* by S.M.C. Chatto and Windus.