

## REVIEWS

HADewijch d'ANVERS: POÈMES DES BÉGUINES TRADUITS DU MOYEN-NÉERLANDAIS PAR FR. J.B.P. (Paris, Éditions du Seuil.)

This short work deserves to be known and studied by everyone who is concerned with any aspect of medieval spirituality. Its lucid and modest French versions of some of Hadewijch's splendid poems of divine love are in themselves excellent, for the author wisely began his task in the full realization of the impossibility of translating more of them than their mere sense, and he has furnished them with ample, recondite notes showing where the difficulties lie and where, sometimes, even the sense itself, delicately dependent upon nuances and ambiguities of language, is lost in any process of translation. To know Hadewijch for what she is, a singer of the love of God whose songs are not unworthy of comparison with those of Jacopone da Todi and Mechtild of Magdeburg, we must listen to her own words: and the pains which that may cost us she will repay again and again.

But the author of this work has added to its value by an introduction, written with the utmost clarity and simplicity, which none the less is informed by his wide and deep learning, and which points, sometimes in most disturbing fashion, to the conclusions which recent scholarship has indicated concerning Hadewijch and her age.

He is convinced that both 'Hadewijch I' and 'Hadewijch II'—for he separates the works which the late Middle Ages attributed all to one writer—were Béguines: and he starts with a summary of the modern literature upon the origins and growth of the Béguine movement, pointing out the many similarities, in development and in their literary products, between the Béguines and contemporary movements elsewhere, notably the Spiritual Franciscans and others in Italy. Deliberately using an ambiguous, dubious phrase, he writes of 'Liberty of the Spirit' as their outstanding characteristic: and he suggests that this liberty came to the early Béguines, uncloistered and vowed only to poverty, prayer and good works, as an unwanted gift which they would have exchanged for the strict discipline of the convents, had the religious orders been able or willing to contain them. From this he proceeds to show how it was the contemporary development of the vernacular as a serious literary medium which helped them to play their part in the spiritual revival of the thirteenth century, a revival which above all, he thinks, was marked by 'une conscience nouvelle de la solitude de l'âme avec Dieu, de sa noblesse divine, de sa liberté intangible'.

Plainly we are moving in the direction of Eckhart and Ruysbroek: but the author skilfully guides us off the comfortable, well-trodden paths, and across ground where we are liable to receive a few severe jolts. Reminding us briefly of Margaret Porete's condemnation and burning in Paris in 1310, and cursorily indicating his own opinion of these proceedings, he then summarizes the sensational findings which Signorina Guarnieri published in 1946 in the *Osservatore Romano*, that Margaret Porete's two 'heretical' propositions, which cost her her life (briefly and roughly, that the soul lost to itself in union with the Godhead need no longer be concerned with virtues, and that such a soul would find his consolations and gifts to be a hindrance to union with him), are to be found, word for word, in *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. The French original of this text, hitherto only known in medieval Latin and English translations, has recently been identified in MS. 986 of the Musée Condé at Chantilly: and the author, who has Fr Stephanus Axters's support for his views, believes that in *The Mirror*, in the verses of Hadewijch II, which doctrinally resemble *The Mirror* closely, and in the earlier writings of Hadewijch I we have the most important texts which have survived to us from the early days of the Béguine movement.

There is next a most valuable short analysis of critical writings concerning *Brautmystik* and *Wesenmystic*, where the author reminds us of Rudolf Otto's demonstration of how impossible it is, in the works of Eckhart and Suso, to separate the one mode of thought from the other: and he then goes on to examine this in the light of the thesis, so generally neglected, of Professor Herbert Grundmann that the Eckhartian doctrine is not, as Fr Théry has suggested, merely theory run riot in the brains of theologians seduced by the allurements of dialectic, but rather an effort to synthesize and proclaim in forms acceptable to theologians the spiritual experience and practice of groups of devotees, notably women. However much Suso, Tauler and Ruysbroek may have learned from Eckhart, he had first learned much from the orthodox Swabian Béguines: and all who wish to judge Eckhart should ponder the author's well-argued contention that in the Hadewijch poems and in *The Mirror* (he does well to point out that this text was passed by three contemporary censors, copied and read by the English Carthusians in the fifteenth century, and given a *Nihil obstat* in 1927) we have pre-Eckhartian documents which should be considered as typical of the devotions and speculations which helped to form his thought. Not the least of the merits of this present work is the indications which it gives that in Eckhart's case there are today many scholars no longer satisfied to take the findings of his enemies on trust.