

## SYMBOLISM IN THE MYSTICS

ONE is bound to be impressed by the frequency with which the great mystics apologize for and discount their own use of symbols and metaphors to describe their experiences. St Teresa will write of our Lord as the Bridegroom, of her union with God as a marriage; but then she will go on to say: 'But this is not so: it was not at all like this; but these are the best words I can find for it'. The mystics here are in much the same position as the symbolist poets: what they have to convey is greater than rational language can contain, because what they have known is beyond reason and beyond words. Often one may think that in the symbolist poets this failure to communicate lucidly what they have felt is providential; when such a poet as Rilke has a doctrine of despair, of the renunciation of life and the worship of death to teach, it is well, as he himself recognized, that communion in his thought and experience should be limited to those, relatively few, to whom his symbols are intelligible because they have trodden the same way as he. So it may also be with the mysteries of the Faith, and the symbols through which they are presented to us in the Scriptures and the liturgy. Though it is our duty as rational creatures to strive to comprehend them, we should never forget that reason will never be able to grasp or relate the *sensuum defectus*.

ERIC COLLEDGE

## AN ANGLICAN VIEW

I HAVE had Roman Catholic friends in this country and on the Continent, and have been a fairly regular reader of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* for several years, yet I find myself surprised that the atmosphere and substance of this conference should have been so congenial to me. It ought not to have been; but actually hearing Catholic priests and professors talking among themselves with a freedom of judgment that is popularly supposed not to exist in the Roman Church is far more impressive than the reading of many review articles can ever be. It is so easy to forget who else is reading them, so impossible to guess their reactions. And if I, who bear a considerable affection to the Roman Church,