

Dom Chapman never expected that one day his letters would be collected and published as a supplement to his personally edited writings. However, for those who are drawn to this virile Benedictine there will be much fruit for thought and clarification of ideas.

The source of his spiritual thought would seem to spring from the Benedictine spirit of liberty plus the influence of the Spanish Mystic St John of the Cross. His attraction is tradition in every respect. He draws from the Fathers, not excluding his holy Father St Benedict, and from the modern spiritual writers such as Saudreau, Lehodey and others. Had these letters been written for general consumption and edited by him personally some points would surely have been cleared up. Letters reveal a man as he is at his best and there is something about these letters that make up for the lack of a finished product. As a young priest he was sought out for direction and even in the midst of war we find him taking time out to help those who need personal direction. The influence of the great Jesuit de Caussade is very evident and that alone enriches the doctrine he sought to give.

The contents of the book are divided into three parts: letters to lay people, to religious and finally to a young Jesuit scholastic. In addition there is an appendix with a treatment of Contemplative Prayer and another on Mysticism. This new edition concludes with two more letters not previously published and well worth inclusion.

That Dom Chapman was a great scholar there can be no doubt; that he could have been clearer and more precise on some points is not to be denied, but we must remember that letters such as these were written to fill a specific need and consequently like any letter they serve only those to whom they were addressed or whose problems were similar.

In our day, even though there is a revival of interest in spiritual direction, there remain many souls who hunger for a more personal care and who definitely need special direction. It is not only in the cloister but out in the world that help of this type is so badly needed. For these souls, books often must be substituted for the lack of direction. It is to those Religious and Seminarians that we recommend this book. The letters would not perhaps fill this need for lay people, except in some cases, but they would be of incalculable help to those whose problems in the spiritual life find treatment in the letters of this great Priest of God.

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE LOW COUNTRIES. By Stephanus Axters, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 6s. 6d.)

La spiritualité des Pays-Bas, by Fr Stephanus Axters, O.P., which was published at Louvain in 1948, has been translated by Donald Attwater

under the somewhat infelicitous title of *The Spirituality of the Old Low Countries*; although the infelicity was not altogether to be avoided, since Axters rejects, for reasons which may be thought pedantic, 'Netherlands' along with the quite reprehensible 'Flemish' as a genetic term. This French work was designed as a preliminary sketch of the massive Dutch critical history of the subject which has since appeared and which the present writer hopes shortly to review for THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. But this English translation can meanwhile be warmly recommended, both for its own merits, which are such as one looks for in any work by Attwater, and for the admirably concise account which its original gives of the chief problems which are to be considered in assessing the history of mystical devotion in the Low Countries. Even in this short sketch Fr Axters's great learning and his awareness of the sometimes bitterly controversial nature of some of his themes are not disguised: but he presents his material lucidly, and in a form so attractive that it should encourage many readers to seek for themselves in the vast treasury of medieval Dutch devotional literature. It is sad that as yet so little has been done in Britain and America to make these riches available to English readers: some of Blessed John Ruysbroek's greatest works are still not translated, and, so far as the reviewer knows, not one single letter or poem has appeared in our language by the great Hadewijch, the mystery, fascination and power of whose writings must strike any reader even of Axters's somewhat dry and terse account of her. Naturally, she has her place in his balanced and ordered account of speculative mysticism as Ruysbroek's forerunner, just as John van Leeuwen, the Groenendael cook, and Denis the Carthusian appear as his heirs in that great tradition. The question whether too much is sacrificed to balance and order, whether the author's admirable method does not compel him to take a somewhat blinkered view of spiritual history, must be postponed to the review of his major work. Meanwhile it only remains to say how grateful we must be for this modest, pleasing, scholarly little work.

ERIC COLLEDGE

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF MAN IN SOCIETY. By G. Ernest Wright.
S.C.M. Press; 7s.)

This book is the outcome of a series of conferences given in Chicago by a number of Protestant biblical scholars, and organized by the Study Department of the World Council of Churches in pursuance of its policy to deepen its broad enquiry on 'The Social and Political Message of the Bible today' (v. *Biblical Authority for Today*, published 1951), by fostering a series of monographs on particular themes.