

in Julian's vision, 'in Adam's kirtle', It was Christ in the kirtle of the flesh, ragged and torn. But the important thing was that it was Christ. Having been blessed with this insight, it is no wonder that Julian's understanding and compassion should bring people flocking to her, and make her a precious part of their lives, an experience unlikely to be forgotten. This was the pattern of salvation, so simple that our Lord told her that he had nothing to add to it. By thinking on it, she would understand always more in the same. The example of the Lord and the Servant, she says, was sufficient food for thought for twenty years. Into this perfect pattern it was easy for her to fit everyone, and give each one the confidence that however heavily the 'scathe of Adam's falling' seemed in him, it was infinitely overcome by the 'glory of Christ uprisen'. Thus the exhortation to Margery to trust and to love; to be constant, and to have no fear.

## The English Mystics and their Critics

ERIC COLLEDGE

Professor David Knowles, when still a young Downside monk, published in 1927 a short survey, *The English Mystics*, which workers in this field have used and quoted and respected as one of the first appraisals to be both popular and scholarly, free alike from prejudice and enthusiasm, of the reputations of some spiritual writers of later mediæval England. In that same year, Hope Allen produced her vast study, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle*, and since then much else has been accomplished. She assisted in the sensational discovery and the publication of the *Book of Margery Kempe*; and although most of us have come to deplore her methods, her ebullience and many of her contentions, we who have followed her have all learned and profited much from Hope Allen's tireless devotion to her subject. Professor Arnould's text of Rolle's *Melos*, Professor Hodgson's critical editions of *The*

*Cloud of Unknowing* and the allied treatises, Dr Helen Gardner's studies in the text of the *Cloud* and *The Scale of Perfection*, and the edition of *The Chastising of God's Children* in which Miss Joyce Bazire and the present writer collaborated, are all works which could not have begun where they did, had it not been for the pioneering of Miss Allen. And we may hope that these next years will add further to our store of reliable texts and studies. Fr James Walsh and Sr Anna Maria Reynolds are at work on a definitive edition of Julian of Norwich, a part at least of an adequate text of the *Scale* may soon be published by Mr S. S. Hussey, and Miss Joy Russell-Smith has already given us valuable indications of what her work on Walter Hilton's shorter English and Latin treatises will offer.

As Professor Knowles in his new book<sup>1</sup> frequently remarks, much remains to be done, and one of the greatest defects hitherto of studies in the English mystics has been that we who have written them have often lacked the theological training to interpret their teachings aright. The book by Fr Paul Molinari on Julian which was published in 1958 has set a new standard, and may be called the first really professional exegesis of the doctrine of a mediaeval English contemplative. For long, Richard Rolle and his school enjoyed the vogue which Horstmann and Benson stimulated and Hope Allen encouraged; writers remained content with commentaries upon such relatively trivial topics as his devotions to the Holy Name and his *canor, calor, dulcor*, and with researches into matters largely antiquarian and little if at all concerned with the essence of mediaeval spirituality. Such studies are now in decline, and in recent years attention has been diverted from Rolle to the author of the *Cloud*. Here too, however, fashion and preconceived ideas have produced many partial or distorted judgements, in particular concerning its author's dependence upon pseudo-Dionysius and his Greek treatises dealing with mystical prayer. Before anything further can be done upon the vexed question of the inter-relations of the *Cloud* and Hilton's writings, we must have accurate and scholarly Hilton texts; before we can speak with certainty about their Dionysian elements, we need a clearer view of the Western mediaeval traditions which interpreted, glossed, and it may be, distorted or exaggerated what the writer of the *Mystical Theology* had in truth said. It is much to be hoped that Fr Walsh's unpublished dissertation, *Sapientia Christianorum*, which examines this matter, and which only a privileged few, including Professor Knowles, have seen, will in time appear in print.

<sup>1</sup>*The English Mystical Tradition*, Burns & Oates, 25s.

But enough has already been accomplished to make our knowledge of the mystics thirty-five years ago seem today fragmentary and often erroneous, to make the writings of such early popularizers of English mysticism as Evelyn Underhill appear amateurish and in places tendentious and misleading. Yet now to compare Professor Knowles's first and second books is to be impressed, very often, by the soundness of his early opinions, although, it must be said, we shall sometimes be surprised that 'the fruit of a lifetime's continuous study and meditation' (his publisher's encomium, not his) has not been a modification of some of his first pronouncements and a widening of his vision. Some changes have been made. The chapter in the 1927 book on the *Ancrene Riwele*, very much to the taste of those times, has gone. The legends circulated by Hope Allen that Rolle studied at the Sorbonne and had been in conflict with his diocesan bishop, which Professor Arnould has discredited, are not here repeated. And when we come to the final chapter, on Augustine Baker, though we may ask whether it has a proper place in this present work, we shall find that the years have not diminished Professor Knowles's distaste for Baker's character, but have markedly tempered his enthusiasm for his theology. Whereas formerly he could write of Baker's 'sane and lucid instruction in the first stage of contemplative prayer', and call the *Secretum* 'the best and surest guide to prayer for all who seriously seek after God', he now finds shortcomings and sad confusion in his thought. So far as Baker the man and monk is concerned, many will think that he has received a more generous and objective treatment from Abbot McCann.

Many, however, will be inclined to rate Professor Knowles's present judgements upon Richard Rolle over-generous. It is strange that, if he thinks Augustine Baker too crabbed and undisciplined a soul, he should now still find Rolle's writings fruitful, despite the many shortcomings—egocentricity, shallowness of perception and juvenility of doctrine—to which he draws attention. We shall still do well to look at Richard Rolle through the eyes of Walter Hilton and the *Cloud's* author; and, especially today when we have, thanks to Professor Arnould's labours, the monstrous, freakish, outlandish performance of the *Melos* before us, we must surely conclude that the esteem which Rolle has enjoyed was possible only to those who lacked historical knowledge and judgement.

Professor Knowles is quite right, of course, to praise Rolle's achievements as a popularizer of devotions, aimed at and reaching a very wide audience and displaying a rare gift for the composition of vernacular verse and prose; but even in this respect he is very far from being the

innovator that he is often called. This present work is not a literary history, and Rolle's merits as a writer must be a secondary consideration; but by ignoring the background to the English and Latin treatises we court the danger of hailing Rolle as yet another of those 'fathers of English poetry' who seem themselves always to have been fatherless. Any scholarly appraisal of Richard Rolle and of his successors in the school of the fourteenth century must take into account the many writers who preceded them, who wrote, in Latin, French and English, prose and verse, of the soul's longing and love for her true spouse, and who showed the way to the hermit of Hampole and to those who came after him. 'Had Rolle himself heard the nightingale?', Professor Knowles asks. He probably had, in Peckham's lovely verses.

With *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Professor Knowles advances on to firmer ground. He is surely right in deciding, along with most modern scholars, against the idea that Walter Hilton could have been the author, and in drawing attention to fundamental differences of outlook, method and doctrine which distinguish the *Scale* from the *Cloud*. Yet their common authorship cannot, at least at present, be disproved by chronology alone; it is not so certain, for instance, as is here suggested that the *Cloud's* author did not know some of Hilton's earlier works. The present writer is bound to say that he considers that discussions of the possible identity of that author have always been fruitless. We are in much the same position here as in considering who may have written those contemporary secular classics, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Piers Plowman*. Since those who are sure that *Piers Plowman* was written by someone called 'Langland' (and Professor Knowles is evidently of their number) cannot tell us anything about 'Langland', except that he wrote *Piers Plowman*, we may be allowed to think that, even if they could prove their contention, it would be of no help towards our deeper understanding of 'Langland's' work. So too with the present speculations upon the authorship of the *Cloud*. Some readers may be attracted by the hypothesis that he was 'a solitary, perhaps an ex-religious, and if so, preferably a Dominican', but they should be very careful not to take as proved what Professor Knowles is scrupulously careful to show is only conjecture. Even as a conjecture, others may consider it not well advised. It is in the first instance based on the suggestion, arresting when it was first put forward by the author in an essay some fifteen years ago, that some of the teachings to be found in Hilton, Julian and the *Cloud*, notably upon grace, are derived directly from the writings of the 'Rhineland school of mysticism', Eckhart,

Ruysbroek and Tauler, in the previous half-century. But these intervening fifteen years have seen no proofs of this suggestion forthcoming; and, meanwhile, such new evidence as has been produced strongly suggests the opposite to what Professor Knowles believes. We cannot point to any one work of Eckhart's having been known in England in the fourteenth, fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, and the circumstances of his condemnation for heresy make it very unlikely that any of his writings would, knowingly, have been imported or published here. With regard to Tauler, the suggestion, made in several places by Professor Knowles, that he could have influenced the English mystics, is an impossibility; because he preached in German, his sermons were recorded in that language by amanuenses or devout listeners, and we know of no Latin translations earlier than the sixteenth century which could have conveyed his teachings to English readers. That leaves us with only Suso and Ruysbroek. Suso, certainly, was well-known in England in the later fourteenth century through vernacular translations of his Latin *Horologium*, but their contents, as, indeed, the whole of Suso's writings, are of no use for Professor Knowles's thesis; and as to Ruysbroek, we have merely one short tract, *The Treatise of Perfection*, which is a commentary upon certain very restricted aspects of his teaching, and the excerpts from *The Spiritual Espousals* which appear in *The Chastising of God's Children*, where, as the present writer has shown, they have been so heavily edited—censored is not too strong a word—by the author of the *Chastising* that they convey none of Ruysbroek's doctrine upon the matters which concern Professor Knowles. That Ruysbroek's mystical writings were used in the *Chastising* for purposes which were inimical at least to religious enthusiasm, if not to mystical prayer itself, has been vehemently denied by Fr Albin Ampe, the distinguished Belgian authority upon Ruysbroek; but since exactly the same editorial principles can be shown to be applied in the *Chastising's* selection from Suso and from Alphonse of Pecha's commendations of St Bridget of Sweden as an ecstatic contemplative, Fr Ampe's judgements appear to be partial and prejudiced.

Professor Knowles has made for himself a great reputation as a historian of monastic life and institutions, but when he writes here of those who have turned aside from the high roads which Benedict and Augustine built, to scale heights to which most of the pilgrims travelling home to God do not aspire, he is on territory which he knows less well and to which he is a less sure guide. This book will bring pleasure and instruction to many, whom it may for the first time draw to the

mediaeval English mystics, but it cannot be said to have greatly extended or deepened our knowledge of this complex and in many respects obscure subject.

## A Pattern in the Mass

SISTER MARY JULIAN, O.P.

Not much of a Red Sea, a mere smudge of holy-water dabbed at in the porch, but in the moment that it takes we have left Egypt, the door has closed behind us like the pillar of cloud and we set out on our journey up the aisle into the domain of the holy, to the mountain of God. The Sinaitic fire burns in sanctuary lamp and candle-flame; the limit of approach is fixed. 'Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy'. To say that is to accept the responsibility of being God's holy people. Far from being merely a self-righteous expression of religious apartheid, it is an appeal to God to implement his choice, to give us the grace to fulfil the priestly purpose of the making of the nation. 'Send forth thy light and thy truth . . . And I will go unto the altar of God'. To be 'distinguished' in this way by God's choice of us in baptism is to enter into the creative pattern, the *opus divisionis*; land emerging from the abyss; light separated from darkness; a separation not destructive but creative. Yet it is not enough to be brought out of the land of Egypt, to have left the sphere of the profane for that of the holy; there is still need for decisive separation from the chaos within oneself, the sin which is the denial of creative relationship with God and one's neighbour. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' There must be confession of sin and absolution to mend the broken relationship and restore us to life. 'O God, turn to us and give us life'. Fear of the holy and confidence in God who gives life achieve a balance between 'Take heed you go not up into the mount and that ye touch not the borders thereof. Everyone that toucheth the mount, dying he shall die', and 'Take away from us our iniquities we entreat thee, O Lord, that with pure minds we may be enabled to enter into the holy of holies'. This balance is stabilised, confident in the three-fold prayer for mercy which acts as preface to the *Gloria*, the three-fold thanksgiving for the glory of