

REVIEWS

THE LIFE OF BARON VON HÜGEL. By Michael de la Bedoyère. (J. M. Dent; 25s.)

A full-scale biography of von Hügel has been much needed and is very welcome. There have been memoirs, and a study of his thought, and his letters and addresses contain much that is personal, but here we have for the first time a complete portrait of a remarkable and very lovable man in all his relationships, spiritual, intellectual and social. The task of making it must have been difficult because von Hügel's character was a complex one, many-sided, of great depth, and exhibiting, at least superficially, certain contradictions. Moreover, he lived through that transition period in the intellectual life of the Church which generated the modernist heresy, and he was implicated to the full in the several movements from which it sprung.

His biographer has shown a special skill in disentangling his intellectual development from its particular associations, and in showing it in relation to the spiritual groundwork in which it was rooted; a groundwork differing greatly from that of some of his friends and co-workers, notably Loisy and Tyrrell. Unquestionably he is the thinker who next after Newman has most deeply influenced religious thought in England, particularly among non-Catholics, and his influence has been due not to the radical positions he adopted in biblical criticism, and perhaps to the end never greatly modified, nor primarily to his specifically philosophical thinking, but to the breadth of his sympathetic appreciation of truth, wherever and amidst whatever surroundings it was to be found—and the patient, profound and (to use his own word) costing effort in which the finding of it involved him. Professor A. E. Taylor summed up this quality in him in his review in *Mind* of von Hügel's book *Eternal Life*: 'Writing with full conviction that his own confession presents a richer and fuller type of spiritual life than others, he is constantly on the search for the element of truth, the apprehension of a universal verity, in all the beliefs by which men have found it possible to face life and death'. It was of the closing pages of this book that the late Archbishop Temple wrote in *The Guardian*: 'It may be doubted if there exists a more impressive statement and defence of the essentials of the Roman position.'

No doubt there is a sense in which von Hügel was a modernist; that word has had as many senses attached to it as fascist and has been as much abused. He early realised the necessity for Catholic scholars to face the findings of historical criticism in matters biblical, and in spite of grave difficulties and tensions he continued to hold that its assured

results could never conflict with the *de fide* teaching of the Church. No doubt he accepted much as assured which has since proved to be not so; perhaps he adopted, in hardly conscious tension between faith and intellectual formulation, positions which in ultimate analysis would have been hard to reconcile with defined dogma. It seems probable that during the terrible years he was tempted to win greater freedom for himself by abandoning his obedience to here-and-now ecclesiastical authority, and during that period he not seldom spoke and judged harshly. He was saved from disaster firstly by his profound reliance on prayer and sacramental grace to which he was notably faithful throughout his life, and secondly by his study of mysticism (his first considerable book, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, was published in 1908) which preserved his sense of God's transcendence and prevented his falling a victim to the immanentism which so conditioned the outlook of Loisy and others of his modernist friends. In later life, under the influence in particular of the German Lutheran philosopher Troeltsch, this realisation of God's transcendence deepened and became a marked element in his thought.

The sharp dualism which some have detected between von Hügel's Catholic faith and his critical thought is, in the opinion of his biographer, only apparent. His mind did not work as the majority of men's; he himself describes it as 'seeing truths, realities as *intensely luminous centres* with a semi-illuminated outer margin, then another and another till all shades off into utter darkness. Such minds are not in the least perturbed by even having to stammer and stumble.' He did stammer and stumble at times in areas of thought where the ordinary discipline of the Church, as distinct from its final voice, had demarcated truth from error more clearly than he could honestly see it, but the *luminous centre*, fed by prayer, held him true and faithful. It was the realisation of this that led his diocesan Cardinal Bourne, a man not naturally sympathetic to his intellectual outlook, to say of him: 'I have never got him into trouble and I never will'.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

THE POEMS OF ST JOHN OF THE CROSS. Translated by Roy Campbell.
(The Harvill Press; 12s. 6d.)

As the late Aubrey Bell once wrote, 'one is always inclined to tear up translations of the Ecstatic Doctor: they seem so vain and unprofitable'. He meant one's own, but it is not untrue of other people's. It is therefore a great advance if one only does not wish to tear up Roy Campbell's versions of the Poems; but one is far from merely that. The great difficulty with those poems of St John of the Cross which are the basis of the prose works (the first three stanzas of *Noche*,