

REVIEWS

WATERS OF SILENCE. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis & Carter; 15s.)

Waters of Silence follows as a welcome sequel to *Elected Silence* and shows considerable advance in style and depth. It is a true sequel, for, although it is impersonal, whereas *Elected Silence* was of its very nature personal from cover to cover, *Waters of Silence* introduces the reader to the great monastic tradition that Thomas Merton inherited when he crossed the threshold of Gethsemani. It tells us what he found within the Abbey walls.

It would be misleading to classify this work strictly as monastic history. It is more than that. Certainly, by far the greater number of its pages are historical, telling of the Cistercians, particularly those of America, but the most valuable passages in the book are those that describe and explain the monk's life in itself. To convince himself of this, let the reader turn to the second and the thirteenth chapters.

The book opens with a very brief introduction to the monastic life before and after St Benedict. From that it passes to a far more detailed description of the early Cistercians and their way of life. We are then hurried from that golden age through sadder times, to the first American foundations. These are treated in great detail. Indeed, but for the free, unaffected style that makes the whole such pleasant reading, there might have been a danger that too much detail would have been a burden to this part of the book, robbing it of its interest for the general, non-American reader. That danger has happily been avoided.

The ninth chapter, with its story of the reunion of the Cistercian congregations in 1892, gives an answer to the question one so often hears: 'Who are Trappists? How do they differ from Cistercians?' A following chapter tells of the troubles of the Order through the two world wars, while the persecution of the monks in Spain and China is given the full treatment so glorious a page of the Cistercian annals deserves.

The concluding chapter of the book stands out as its finest section. It is more than a treatise on the monastic ideal as Cistercians try to realise it; it is a justification and a challenge. Let one quotation suffice:

'To view the monastic life merely as a school of individual perfection would be a serious diminution of the Cistercian ideal. The monastery does not exist just to form individual saints and contemplatives, but to form one Saint, one Contemplative, who is the Mystical Body of the monastery itself. Each monk contributes to

the spiritual perfection of the whole by the purity of his contemplation and by the sanctity of his life: if God has made him a contemplative and a saint, it is, ultimately, that he might so contribute. Needless to say, the monastery is only a member in the great Mystical Body of the Church. Therefore in the long run, the purity of heart produced in each monk by the monastic rule, by obedience, humility, labour, charity, solitude, recollection and prayer adds to the sanctity of the whole Church.'

That is a justification because it reminds us how the contemplative monastic life draws its power, indeed, the very reason for its existence, from the most profound principle of the Gospel revelation, our sanctification through the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a challenge, because it calls back every Cistercian, every monk, to a more generous co-operation with his strictly contemplative vocation.

This whole chapter is enriched with quotations from St Bernard. The doctrine here may not be new, but it is presented in a way that makes it live for us as only great spiritual truths can live. Perhaps the most important teaching in this valuable book is the exposition of the Common Will, the *voluntas communis*, that is the secret and strength of community life. Surely, for the monk, life lived in common with his brethren becomes sacramental.

To conclude, Thomas Merton has succeeded in this book of monastic history because he has gone far deeper than the mere narration of historical facts. He has entered into a full understanding of what monasticism really is. So he has qualified in the one way necessary for his difficult task.

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RUMI. By R. A. Nicholson. (Allen & Unwin; 8s. 6d.)

In a posthumous publication the learned world and the general public are now offered the last work of England's finest Persian scholar, Professor R. A. Nicholson; in proportion to its scope and size, it may well prove his most effective. It consists of 119 translations, in verse and free-verse, of representative passages from the writings of Persia's greatest mystical poet, Jalâl al-Din Rûmî, all but a handful of them being from his *opus magnum*, the *Mathnawî* or *Couplet-Poem*, as it is commonly called without any necessity for closer identification; it was to the preparation of an edition, a translation and a commentary on this work that Nicholson devoted the greater part of his working life, and the result of his labours is universally conceded to be one of the most perfect achievements of English Orientalist scholarship. The passages selected here, all more or less substantially refashioned as against his renderings in the translation of the complete work, are in most cases provided, though