

THREE MYSTICS: EL GRECO, ST JOHN OF THE CROSS, ST TERESA OF AVILA.

Edited by Fr Bruno de J. M., O.D.C. (Sheed and Ward; 25s.)

It is a bit disconcerting to be told on the title-page that El Greco is a mystic, considering how little we know of his life. I know nothing about the life of Morales, but from the pictures reproduced in this book, one might have included a fourth, since his head of Christ and another of 'Mater Dolorosa' rank higher in depth of understanding than any of El Greco's.

We are given a series of dishes in a feast. Fr Bruno provides the first with a little essay on the two saints. In its way it is admirable. Then there is a short excursus on the handwriting of the two saints. The sample of St Teresa's is St Teresa on her best behaviour, because several examples that I have seen of her handwriting would scarcely be recognised as being by the same person—for instance, the book exhibited in a case in the Escorial. Nevertheless, the meditation on their characters, as seen in the writing, is of great interest, especially the remarks on St John of the Cross. Another little chapter is devoted to a strange and striking drawing or painting by St John, the one of the Christ hanging forward from the Cross. Again the remarks are illuminating.

The body of the book is taken up with a life of St Teresa, mostly in her own words interspersed with graphic little details from contemporary evidence; and with a life of St John of the Cross, though in his case the chief space is given to a summary, and a very good one, of his teaching on asceticism and prayer.

The book is interspersed with numerous illustrations, almost on every page. They are chiefly drawn from the four hundred and more surviving pictures by El Greco, but there are several carved groups of Juan de Juni which the traveller will see at Valladolid, others by Luis Tristán, Morales el divino—already mentioned—Berruguete and others.

Undoubtedly a feature of the book is this wealth of illustrations. Something therefore should be said about them. El Greco, more than any other painter, needs to be seen in colour, since the emotional quality of the particular subject he paints is often striven for by the use or almost abuse of colours. This is specially true in those scenes of the Passion so beloved either by El Greco or his patrons. In this book there are no colour reproductions. And one can overdo one's adulation of El Greco, and I think one has to distinguish. There are those portraits of Christ with the weak and insipid face; there are others of almost inconceivable beauty.

So the interest in these three great Spanish geniuses, of sanctity and of artistry, continues without diminution. St Teresa would have taken it all in her stride; would St John have approved? Does he approve? He

might be thinking that we are all getting entangled in the unessentials. Yet for every hundred that open such a book as this from idle curiosity surely one at least is moved to get nearer to God, and that should satisfy even the 'santico'.

COLUMBA CARY-ELWES, O.S.B.

UNSEEN WARFARE, being the *Spiritual Combat* and *Path to Paradise* of Lorenzo Scupoli as edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse, translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, with an introduction by H. A. Hodges, M.A., D.PHIL. (Faber and Faber; 25s.)

Readers of this periodical are familiar with the name, if not with the text, of the work called in English *The Spiritual Combat*, written by the Theatine clerk regular Lorenzo Scupoli and first published in 1589. It is a spiritual classic of the so-called Counter-Reformation, widely read and treasured in many languages even to our own day. But the adventures and metamorphoses that the *Spiritual Combat* underwent in eastern Europe—as summed up in the words of the title-page above—are news to most of us.

*The Spiritual Combat* as it eventually left the hands of its author was an essentially practical work, centred on the passion of Christ, concerned with the daily discipline of mind and will of the Christian *miles*, with a concern for prayer for the most part limited to the practice of formal meditation. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century copies of the *Spiritual Combat* and of Scupoli's *Path to Paradise* came into the hands of a distinguished writer of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Nicodemus, who was a *megaloskhemos* (highest degree of monk) upon Mount Athos, and is therefore known as 'the Hagiorite'. Nicodemus ran the two works together, translated them into Greek, with some unimportant omissions, added in footnotes biblical and patristic passages as *pièces justificatives*, and made some textual alterations and additions. The most important of these are a carrying of Scupoli's *askesis* of the senses a stage further, raising the mind above the sensory and imaginative level; and an expansion of Scupoli's short chapter on mental prayer, making it into, as Professor Hodges says, 'a statement of basic hesychast doctrine'.

This Greek version of Scupoli was published at Venice in 1796 under the title of *Unseen Warfare* ('Aorates Polemos'). Nicodemus claimed no more than to have 'adorned and corrected' the original: its real author, he said, was 'a certain wise man'—but he did not name Scupoli. To offer to the eighteenth-century Orthodox a religious work by a 'Latin' author would have been something like offering to English Catholics a book by Jeremy Taylor or William Law.