

useful to 'students who desire to revise rapidly, in the vernacular, the tracts which they are presenting for examination'; whether in the long run such treatment of revelation and tradition does the Church good service is more doubtful. The further suggestion that an educated layman could find it useful is, I think, patently untrue.

The standard of book-production is in each case well below anything normally acceptable in this country. The second book especially has a fantastic number of misprints; the usual conventions for the use of capital letters and italic fount appear to be unknown. It is to be hoped that these books do not come into the hands of those cultivated pagans whose mockery St Thomas was at pains to avoid.

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THE ANCRENE RIWLE. Modern English translation by M. B. Salu, with Introduction and Appendix by Dom Gerard Sitwell. (Orchard Books, Burns & Oates; 15s.)

The Orchard Books have now added another work to their series, which will be of great value to students of medieval English religious literature, and upon which its authors are greatly to be congratulated. For the general reader a few words of explanation of the names used to describe this text may be useful. Although Miss Salu has called her book the *Riwle*, she has in fact translated the text found in MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402; and although this may be the oldest extant manuscript, it contains a number of additions, as well as other variants, which show that it is not so faithful to the author's original manuscript, now lost, as is MS British Museum Cotton Nero A.XIV, and it is to the group of texts which are best represented by the Nero MS that the title *Riwle* usually is reserved. Miss Salu in her Preface lists the manuscripts which have survived, both of the original English in its several versions (one of them, she forgets to mention, interpolated with Lollard teaching) and of medieval French and Latin translations. These many manuscripts alone show the popularity and influence of the *Riwle* in medieval England: and Miss Salu's admirable translation, cast in an easy, living English retaining no trace of the innumerable difficulties, textual, linguistic and historical, which she has overcome, shows us clearly why the *Riwle* has become so well-known. To call it a work of genius is not too much. The circumstances of its composition might today seem archaic and 'Gothick' to the point where all resemblance to modern religious life, all correspondence to our own spiritual needs disappear: for it is a code of conduct, spiritual, liturgical, moral and social, for three sisters enclosed in an anchorage and vowed to a life of strictest seclusion. Yet as we read, and this is the chief merit of Miss Salu's work, we are drawn into that seemingly impossibly remote

world, and we hear with growing attention the author's precepts, shrewd, witty, pungent, tolerant and kind, and we find that the wilderness haunted by the seven ravening monsters, and the knight who jousts for a lady's love, and all the other figures of this landscape are not the faint, derivative decorations of some pre-Raphaelite dream of the medieval world, but live and move with the heart's blood and the Spirit of God.

Dom Sitwell in his Introduction does something less than justice to the greatness of this work. Writing as a practical theologian and spiritual director, he has many pertinent things to say about the defects of some of the greatest medieval religious classics (his remarks on *The Cloud of Unknowing* deserve our especial attention), but when he disparages the excessive attention which the *Riwle*, a work written for contemplatives, devotes to sin and its remedies, he betrays a certain want of sympathy for the age in which it was written. It is one of the paradoxes of history that it is probably easier for a man or woman with a contemplative vocation to pursue and fulfil it today, in our demented, lunatic, godless age, than it was in medieval Catholic England. If we read the counsels of the *Riwle* with attention and without too much subtlety—'don't let men put their hands in through the grille to try to touch you', for instance, or 'be sure that there is someone else within call when your confessor comes to shrive you, if only to avoid gossip'—we can recall St Francis's words to Clare as they left the inn at Spello, 'Sister, didst thou hear what the people were saying about us?', and we may marvel at the saints and the sanctity which that lewd and carnal world produced as the roses bloomed on the gorse bushes for Clare.

St Francis and St Dominic must be much in our minds as we study the *Riwle*, for in the history of the foundation of their orders must surely be the answers to some of the many still unsolved questions about the origins of this work. This is not the place to canvass these questions, but one or two points may justifiably be made. It is a pity, to begin with, that this present book was presumably already at press when Miss Clare Kirchberger published, in the 1954 volume of *Dominican Studies*, her article, *Some Notes on the 'Ancrene Riwle'*. She and Dom Sitwell arrive independently at several similar conclusions, notably when they agree that the work as it has survived is probably a composite, made by the author himself from originally separate treatises, and that this probability, together with the impetus given at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 to the proper organization of a preaching syllabus to give moral instruction to the people, accounts for the prominence of such material in the *Riwle*. But Miss Kirchberger has made some other valuable points, and her conclusion is that Dominican influence (as distinct from Dominican authorship) is to be discerned:

nor can we reproach her, as Vincent McNabb was justly blamed, for failing to distinguish between common practices of the thirteenth century and peculiarly Dominican usages. What is now needed is for English scholars to turn their attention to Europe, and to read the *Riwle* again in the light of the events which created the needs which the Dominicans and Franciscans so astonishingly satisfied. If we read Herbert Grundmann's account of how the friars came to Germany, and of the great company of pious women whose enthusiasm they directed and controlled, and then study particularly the *Ancrene Wisse*, we may well ask ourselves whether in its famous addition to the original, the passage beginning 'Of all the anchoresses in England' and ending 'into the cloisters of heaven' on pages 112-3 of Miss Salu's translation, we have got a 'missing link', whether the company of anchoresses, 'twenty or more', addressed there, whose community is beginning 'to spread through England', may not have congregated under the influence of events comparable with those which led in Germany and elsewhere to the phenomenal growth both of Dominican nunneries and of Beguinages.

One of the chief objections to such a view of the *Ancrene Wisse*, an objection which Miss Salu, Miss Kirchberger and Dom Sitwell all concede, is the early date assigned to the Corpus MS by Professor Tolkien, doyen of linguistic studies concerning this text, under whose aegis this present edition is produced. Miss Salu says that the manuscript 'belongs to the second quarter of the (thirteenth) century' (p. xxiii), but several of Dom Sitwell's arguments depend upon the dating of the *Wisse* before 1225, and, consequently, of the *Riwle* before 1221, the year of the first Dominican mission to England. But one must point out that when Professor Tolkien published his article, '*Ancrene Wisse*' and '*Hali Meithhad*', in 1929, he began by calling it 'a line of argument that is based on assertions of which the proper proof—or retraction—must wait for a later occasion', an occasion which still has not presented itself. Professor Tolkien was only concerned with a selection of certain linguistic phenomena, at all times only to be dated tentatively; and what he said of them was that they could not, in the Western region in which he claimed that the *Wisse* was written, 'be put back much before 1225, if as far'. Since then other authorities have ventured to disagree with him: but even those who accept his suggestions are wrong in treating his *a quo* as an *ante quem*.

Clearly, there is still much work to be done on the *Ancrene Riwe*: but even if we treat this present edition only as an interim report, it has brought us further on our way towards a clearer sight of one of the most remarkable religious teachers of medieval England.

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