

A BOOK OF SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION. By Ludovicus Blosius, translated from the Latin by Bertrand Wilberforce, O.P. (Burns & Oates; 10s. 6d.)

Blosius has always been a great favourite in monastic circles, though perhaps he is not as much read today as formerly, and so it is good to see a reprint of his *Spiritual Instruction* which is of more general import than his more famous *Mirror for Monks*. The book under review is a reprint from the translation of his works made by Fr Wilberforce, O.P., and published in 1900 by Burns & Oates. There is a new preface giving an account of Blosius and his spiritual background.

Blosius is a fascinating character and Pope Pius XI had some thoughts of canonizing him. Louis of Blois, to give him his proper name, was a sixteenth-century Abbot of Liessies in Belgium who at the incredibly early age of twenty-four or twenty-five began a reform of his monastery for which he wrote his *Mirror for Monks*. His *Book of Spiritual Instruction* was written twenty years later and for a wider public. His teaching, especially on the higher stages of prayer, follows the traditional line that runs from Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite (to whom he devotes a special chapter), to Tauler who was his favourite author. In some ways his teaching is as austere as St John of the Cross, though tempered by the discretion of his Benedictine outlook. Thus he stresses the importance of self-denial and rejection of self-will as the primary mortification and discourages self-chosen physical austerities, an emphasis he draws from the Rule. And yet this book does not reveal the extraordinary discretion which made his reform so successful. He made a highly spiritual body out of a group of slack, easy-going monks. While insisting on silence, the common life, the cloister and poverty, he yet allowed a full and varied table, beer and wine, two and a half hours recreation and talk in the afternoon and a whole day of recreation once a month. His monks had also eight or nine hours of unbroken sleep. It is hard to square this practical moderation with his theoretic admiration of Denis the Aeropagite and his neoplatonic flight from all created things—an admiration revealed in his teaching. But Blosius will always remain good spiritual reading and of great value in his easy and clear exposition, especially for those who might be frightened by the more formidable classic of the spiritual life.

BRUNO DONOVAN, O.S.B.