

reader for an informed examination, in Part III, of the various groups of books of the Bible. The going sometimes gets tough in this section, not because the authors are unable to keep up their lucid style, but simply because text criticism is not a simple activity. All credit is due to Rogerson and Davies for their success in making a complicated subject not only comprehensible but also enjoyable. Part IV gives an account of the formation of the Old Testament.

There are many misprints and grammatical mistakes in the text, indicating that the proofs were not thoroughly scanned: 'humities' decisions' for humanity's decisions (p. 226); brackets that don't close (p. 278), 'Hasonean' for Hasmonean; 'advocate' for advocate (p. 304); 'king of a lustful foreign nation' for lustful king of a foreign nation (p. 226), to name but a few. The picture of Masada filling pages 186/7 is printed back to front. A confused retelling (p. 92) of the important Egyptian myth of Osiris, who is killed and whose parts are scattered over the land to be recovered and restored to life by his devoted wife, Isis, has made their son, Horus the corpse, depriving it of much of its power and beauty.

But the most serious mistake in this book which, as the dust-jacket proclaims, aims to 'build up a complete picture of the people who created the literature, and their world', is to use Byzantine and Mediaeval art as the source of many of its illustrations. Such pictures tell us about Byzantine and Mediaeval life and throw no light on the biblical period. Indeed, they reinforce many of the erroneous ideas we have of biblical scenes and characters. What can a picture of mediaeval peasants and artisans building an ornate Gothic cathedral tell us about the construction and design of the Solomonic Temple, for example? (p. 137). And did King David really look like Edward the Confessor playing a harp whose design is European C13 AD? (p. 268) Does it have anything to say about the Israelite monarchy at the time of David? This is a serious lapse of judgement in an otherwise splendidly written and illustrated volume.

However, these irritating aberrations should not dissuade anyone from reading the book, which is probably the best thing of its kind yet produced. I hope the authors are now thinking of a second volume, about the world of the New Testament.

TONY AXE OP

RICHARD ROLLE: THE ENGLISH WRITINGS trans., ed. and introduced by Rosamund S. Allen. Preface by Valerie M. Lagoria. *Classics of Western Spirituality*. SPCK, First pub. 1931, O.P., Repub. 1988 x + 232pp, £13.50.

Richard Rolle was the first of the English mystics of the fourteenth century, and therefore one of the earliest writers in vernacular English. And yet his English writings have been hard to come by for some time: in contrast to his Latin treatise, *Incendium Amoris*, which is readily available in a modern English version (from the middle English translation made by Richard Misyn). There is some sense in this, for Rolle, in contrast to his junior, Walter Hilton, seems to have been more at ease in Latin than in English. Nevertheless he did write in English, and heralded the remarkable flowering

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of English mystical writings in the fourteenth century. In this excellent volume, Rosamund S. Allen makes available in a fluent and accurate English translation the most important of Rolle's English writings. It is rather more than just a translation, for though it is based on Emily Hope Allen's classic edition of the English writings (1931; there is a reprint currently available), Dr Allen has prepared her own version of the texts, often making use of the Longleat manuscript of Rolle's English works (which have just been published: Early English Text Society, no. 293). She includes all the works that found a place in Hope Allen's edition: the three short prose treatises (the *Ego Dormio* and *The Commandment*, and *The Form of Living*), the three very brief works (*Ghostly Gladness*, the allegorical *The Bee and the Stork*, and *Desire and Delight*), the two versions of the *Meditations on the Passion*, *The Ten Commandments*, and extracts (more extensive than in Hope Allen) from *The English Psalter and Commentary* (the only authorized translation of any part of Scripture in England until the Reformation), as well as Rolle's lyrics. All this is accompanied by succinct and very helpful notes.

Although the *Classics of Western Spirituality* are intended for a wide and popular readership, this volume cannot be ignored by scholars. First, as has been said, the translation is based on a reconsideration of the text. Secondly, Dr Allen's introduction is an important essay on Richard Rolle's life and teaching. She relates what we know of Rolle's life, making it quite clear that there are large gaps and considerable uncertainties. She also reminds us of our ignorance over the question of the dating of Rolle's works: Hope Allen's conjectures (especially over an early date for the *Melos Amoris*) are no more than conjecture, though they are often repeated as fact; further, it is hazardous to attempt to date his works by tracing his spiritual growth, for his works are mostly addresses to particular people, whose needs may have conditioned their content more than anything else. Another valuable feature of her introduction is the way Dr Allen puts Rolle in the context of contemporary Middle English devotional literature, rather than seeing him too much as part of some universal 'mystical tradition', though she has valuable remarks about his debt to that tradition, especially to Anselm and Bernard.

Though the earliest of the medieval English mystics, Rolle is usually compared unfavourably with his successors, especially the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and Walter Hilton, both of whom, it is often claimed, were rightly critical of Rolle's sensuous spirituality. Dr Allen provides a fine defence of Rolle here, showing how grievously misunderstood Rolle is if it is not realized that in his sensuous, emotional language he is drawing on the long-established tradition of the spiritual senses with which the purified soul can experience God. This fine volume will enable many to learn from Richard Rolle's spirituality, at once austere and exuberantly joyful.

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