

with cytogenetics, a study made possible by the rediscovery of Mendel's work on heredity in 1901. This part is more technical, for it goes into sufficient detail to make clear the relationship between genetics and modern causal theories of evolution. So the book puts the whole question into its historical context and also deals with the fundamentals of the subject sufficiently fully to provide information on which to base a balanced judgment. And indeed Dr Fothergill offers his work to intelligent laymen, teachers and professional biologists, for just that purpose.

Among other things, he relates the idea of evolution to the idea of change; he explains how the idea itself has evolved and is evolving and indicates probable future developments; he makes clear what is based on speculation, what on observation and what on experiment; and he shows how, as a working hypothesis, it has been invaluable to the biologist, giving order and unity to his work and stimulating further activity.

The book is sober, clear and well-documented, with a good index and a comprehensive bibliography. The author's personal attitude is stated in the introduction and enlarged on in a valuable epilogue; the body of the book deals objectively and fairly with all serious views as they developed. If any serious doubt obtains among Catholics, as Dr Fothergill thinks it may, whether a person holding any religious views is able to expound a scientific theory on a phenomenal and evidential level, this book, given a fair hearing, should remove it. Dr Fothergill apologises for any defects a reader may discover; he undertook a formidable task and any defects are insignificant compared with so much work done so well.

MARY BEAUMONT

THE SPIRITUAL ESPOUSALS. By Blessed Jan Van Ruysbroek. Translated from the Dutch with an introduction by Eric Colledge. (Faber and Faber; 18s.).

Abbot Cuthbert Butler wrote in *Western Mysticism*: 'It may with all probability be said that than him [Ruysbroek] there has been no greater contemplative; and certainly there has been no greater mystical writer'. A reading of Mr Colledge's translation of *The Spiritual Espousals* is on the whole calculated to confirm that judgment. But let it be said at once that *The Spiritual Espousals* (this seems to be the correct title, though the book has previously appeared in English under the title of *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*) is not easy reading. Ruysbroek moves in a very rarefied atmosphere, and this work is a study of the highest union between God and man that may be reached on earth. It is a very carefully, even schematically, constructed work in

three books, of which the first is concerned with the active life, but even this is considered on a very high level. The book does not deal with active good works, but with the sort of self-training and discipline which the contemplative must have as a basis of his higher activity and also as a concomitant of it. Ruysbroek's whole conception of man's union with God is that of the supernatural indwelling of God in the soul and the soul's response, and it is significant that this is conceived in terms that are fully Christian. The divine action is described in terms of Christ's action on the soul.

The translator of a work such as this is necessarily faced with the problem of how to translate words which the author uses as more or less technical terms, and Mr Colledge has done the only possible thing in explaining in his Introduction the interpretation he has chosen. The Introduction provides much valuable commentary and makes good use of Ruysbroek's other works, but perhaps in so closely articulated a book it would have been helpful to supply a detailed plan of the sections and chapters into which it falls.

GERARD SITWELL, O.S.B.

THREE MYSTICS. Edited by Père Bruno, O.D.C. (Sheed and Ward; 25s.)

This splendidly produced album has some highly original features, not the least of which is the inclusion of El Greco as the third mystic. The other two, of course, are St Teresa and St John of the Cross. In the main, the book consists of extracts from the writings of the last two and reproductions of some of the pictures of the first. The mystical writers are anthologised with a pronounced and entirely legitimate bias: to exhibit them as supreme examples (as they were) of nobility and love. For both the Carmelite saints, the contemplative is a royal soul, the life of prayer the way out of the meanness of human living left to itself. For both, the love of God must overflow into the love of friends and of things. "The detachment that his soul demanded", says Père Bruno, speaking of St John, 'brought no diminution of friendship, but the very reverse. Friendship is itself only if virtue preserves it from a self-seeking sensuality and from animal passions.' (*Three Mystics*, p. 8.) He continues:

'Saint Teresa emphasises that it is an error to think that those who have set their foot upon the way of renunciation neither love nor can love anyone but God. "They love, and they love more than others, with a more genuine love and more passion and their love is much more profitable. In fact it is love".' (*loc. cit.*: the quotation from St Teresa is taken from *The Way of Perfection*, chapter VII.)

But when one comes to El Greco, one wonders whether Père Bruno has not made a mistake. The nobility and the love that make their