offset by the generous alms distributed to the poor of a very wide area twice a week.

Such men as Abbot Whiting, living in a new age of hedonism, yet saw Christ in the common man. And many a common man found Christ in a monastic hostelry. The guesthouse dispensed not food and drink merely. It gave out love, hope and charity—and peace.

Tradition has it that Dante knocked one evening upon the door of a remote convent in the Apennines. On being asked what he wished, he replied simply, *Pax*.

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor, LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.

Dear Sir,

A few months ago one of your readers, Mr G. Sexton, called the writer's attention to a remarkable book published in New York just before the outbreak of the last war. This book, *The Following of Christ*, carries the *imprimatur* of Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop of New York; but owing probably to the unsettled condition of world affairs during recent years, it seems to have been overlooked on this side of the Atlantic. It professes to give conclusive proof that *The Imitation* was originally written in low German by Gerard Groote, the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life; and that Thomas à Kempis—a member of the same Order—was given the task some years later of translating and copying the low German MS into Latin. It is stated that this manuscript was discovered in 1921 at Lubeck by the city librarian, and was edited by Dr James Van Ginneken, S.J., of Nymegen. After the Introduction, which amplifies these points, the remainder of the book is given up to a translation from the Lubeck manuscript into English, by a Joseph Malaise, S.J.

Assuming for a moment (perhaps a wide assumption) that all the facts in the Introduction can be verified, there is a very good case indeed for attributing the authorship to Gerard Groote. And when comparing the translation with the Latin of Thomas à Kempis, the case becomes even stronger.

This is the briefest hint of the book's purport, and there are many ramifications, such as alleged alterations and additions made by à Kempis. Many questions also remain to be asked, such as—was the Lubeck MS lost in the terrible air bombardment of that city, and what is known of the translator Joseph Malaise?

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This old controversy concerning the authorship of *The Imitation* is, of course, one for the scholar-specialist and the master of minutiae; but there are a few broader considerations which may interest the general reader. In the first place it is interesting to recall the well known literary connection between Gerard Groote and Thomas à Kempis.. Thomas wrote the life of Gerard, *Vita Gerardi Magni*, and also translated into Latin some of Gerard's shorter pieces, for example, *De sacris Libris studendis*. Again, the subscription of the celebrated Antwerp Codex has always been accepted as clear evidence that Thomas was the author. It runs: *Finitus et completus anno domini MCCCCXLI per manus fratris Thomae Kempensis in Monte Agnetis prope Zwolles*. But a little thought leads to the conclusion that these words are more likely to have been written by a translator and copyist than by the author. A copyist would naturally stress his hand-work, *per manus*. *Finitus et completus* seems to convey a feeling of relief at the end of a laborious task, and the composer and author would not have chosen these two words—at least so it appears to this writer. Another point: Thomas à Kempis was a most prolific writer. In a seven-volume modern edition we find long sermons, short homilies, biographies, hymns and verses, stories of the saints, prayers, meditations—all these in addition to *The Imitation* which forms a very small part of his works. How is it that this one fragment has won world-wide appreciation, whilst all the rest is only dipped into by the scholar or by an occasional inquisitive general reader? What are the implications of this fact?

A comparison between the two men may also throw some light on the controversy. Thomas à Kempis's long life was spent in a monastery. His Latin sermons were given to small communities of monks and novices. He knew little of the outside world. But Gerard Groote was a popular preacher who addressed crowded congregations in their mother tongue. Before his radical change, when at the age of 33 he turned from all earthly consolations, he had led the life of a wealthy and worldly churchman. He possessed ample means, held two lucrative prebends, had travelled widely, mixing with every section of society, and had acquired a deep and extensive knowledge of the human heart. Assuming once more that he was the writer of *The Imitation*, might not these facts account for the wonderful book's universal appeal. But this argument, based on a comparison between the two men, cuts both ways, as the following will show. Gerard was a great lover and collector of MSS, both sacred and secular; and in order that he might be able to refute any possible opponents, on his preaching tours he carried with him a chest filled

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with manuscripts of the Fathers and other writers. This is quite contrary to the spirit of *The Imitation*, for we all know how lightly Thomas à Kempis esteemed human wisdom and learning.

But, as I said before, here is a problem for the scholar-specialist. It may be he already knows this book with its claim for Gerard Groote, and in that case he must pardon this writer's presumption.

If, on the other hand, the book has been overlooked, you might, Sir, consider bringing it before your readers; and no doubt within your Oxford or Paris circle you could find someone competent to make a comparison between the two men and, at the same time, deal with this latest claimant to the authorship of *The Imitation*.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN SEARLE.

REVIEWS

PARDON AND PEACE. By Alfred Wilson, C.P. (Sheed & Ward; 10s. 6d.)

A practical study of the sacrament of Penance, breezily written. Some points emphasised are the distinction of necessary and unnecessary matter; the primary importance of contrition; the danger of 'piety' falsifying one's judgment on self; the unhealthiness of a 'safety first' attitude in the matter of doubtful sins. The belief—inculcated in Catholic schools?—that conscience is a still, small voice, is attacked roundly as leading ultimately to moral judgment which is subjective in a bad sense. 'Disastrous misconceptions of conscience have arisen because it is often confused with fuss, feeling, fuddle and fif. . . . Fuddle about conscience leaves the door wide open to obstinacy, intuition, scruples and fif (by fif is meant a tendency to substitute emotional intuition for reason) (p. 105). . . . Beware of the voice, special faculty theory of conscience' (p. 117), quotations which give a sample of the style. In fact all the bad misconceptions of untutored devotion are opposed by a moral sanity based on theological conceptions of God, sin and the sacrament. But Fr Wilson is limited by the need he feels to attack an unhealthy mentality. When he speaks of the 'centre of gravity', of God in whom thought and desire should converge, he admits that the problem is not one of correcting isolated errors of moral judgment but of a total religious education in which, so far as moral judgment in particular is concerned, an adequate doctrine of the virtue of prudence and of natural and supernatural human action must play a leading part.

DAMIAN MAGRATH, O.P.

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