



# Contemplations on the Dread and Love of God

*Frances M M Comper, Brother Hermenegild TOSF*

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THERE can be little doubt that the writer of this treatise was a disciple of Richard Rolle, who is writing shortly after the latter's death in 1349. What he says of "other holy men of right late time, which lived a well holy life, and took their livelihood as feebleness of man asketh now in our days," exactly tallies with what we can learn of this group of wandering hermits. Moreover, in the following sentence there is an unmistakable reference to Rolle's book, "The Fire- of Love": Some of these men, as I have heard and read, were visited by the grace of God with a passing sweetness of love of Christ; which sweetness, for ensample, they showed afterward by their writings to other men following, if any would travail to have that high degree of love. "And a little further on, describing this love, he uses almost the identical words of Rolle in his prologue "This love," he says, "is so burning and so gladdening, that whoso hath that love may as well feel the fire of burning love in his soul, as another man may feel his finger burn in earthly fire." It was convenient then, as now, to assign every book printed to an author, and Wynkyn de Worde ascribes this to Rolle himself, in his edition of 1506, from which the picture of a hermit, with staff and beads, is taken. He repeats this picture in another little book, "The Remedy agenst the Troubles of Temptation," which he printed about the same time, and which he also mistakenly attributes to Rolle. I have not followed de Worde's version, but have chosen the earliest, and apparently the best, of the manuscripts in the British Museum: MS. Harl. 2409. It is a beautifully written manuscript, of the late fourteenth, or early fifteenth, century. I have modernized the spelling, and where a word is quite archaic, I have written it in the footnote below, inserting the modern word in the text; but otherwise I have transcribed it exactly. For the benefit of those to whom these books are unfamiliar, a glossary is added at the end. The references to the Fathers and "other holy men" I have copied just as they stand in the margin of the manuscripts, without attempting to trace each to its source; for their interest lies mainly in noting what writers were then mostly read. Beyond these few notes this little book needs no introduction. Its style is clear and simple, unlike the involved and latinized style of "The Fire of Love," and reminding us of Walter Hilton rather than of Richard Rolle. It is a book which, so long as life lasts, with its struggle between good and evil, the better and the best, can never be outworn. And when we in England are being forced to face the things which are eternal, "be we lord or lady, husbandman or wife," we may perhaps find these eternal questions more simply and more truly answered in these old words, written by this English writer of long ago, than in our modern and more complex authors. "And," to use his own words, "if men had such sweetness in the love of God of so late time, I suppose well that the same we may have now, by the gift of God, if we were as fervent in love as they were."

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