

III.—RICHARD ROLLE, THE HAMPOLE HERMIT.

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NOTHING more is needed to justify us in calling the attention of the readers of the HOMILETIC REVIEW to the life and work of this Old English author than the striking language of Ten Brink as he says, "All in all, Hampole is the most notable English religious writer of the first half of the fourteenth century, and he had a corresponding influence upon later religious literature, especially that of the fifteenth century."

This high eulogium is elicited partly because of what Hampole was and did, and partly by reason of the fact that he appeared just at the time when such a man was needed to conserve and perpetuate what was best in the life and teaching that preceded him. Born at Thornton, in Yorkshire, about 1290 A.D., he is known to us now as Richard of Hampole, a province in the southern part of Yorkshire, near Doncaster, where he died in 1349, right at the middle of the century—looking backward and looking forward as he did to what was praiseworthy in Old England and to what might yet be done for the cause of good learning and Christian character.

Little as we know from the Cistercian records and other sources as to his personality and mission, enough is known to stimulate us to seek for more and to give to this old Northumbrian monk a far higher place in Middle English history than has been hastily assigned him. Early inclined to educational life, we find him at Oxford deeply absorbed in scriptural and theological studies, and in secular study on the ethical side. So strong did this desire become to devote himself to such a line of inquiry, that, leaving Oxford, he entered at once upon the more secluded life of a hermit, and went about with crook in hand teaching, preaching, and working in a truly apostolic manner. Belonging, formally, to no ecclesiastical sect or order, he was a self-appointed herald of the truth and comforter of the people, amenable, as he held, to no other voice than the voice of God as heard in the Scriptures, and often heard, even more impressively, within the most interior recesses of his soul. Partly a monk of the cell and the cloister, he was also an evangelist out among the people, if so be he might win them to the religious life. He was enough of a Romanist to hold in traditional veneration the Pope, the Church, the sacraments, and established doctrines of the Holy See, and also enough of a Protestant to note the necessity of spiritual life behind all dogma and ritual, and incline the Lollards themselves to examine his writings in search of anti-papal teachings. It would not be unhistorical to speak of him as a devout Romanist with evangelical and Protestant tendencies. No one can read his treatise on Divine Love (*De Amore Dei*), to the spiritual perception of which he came through the medium of holy meditation, and not discern repeated evidences of the Reformed theology, while yet the English Reformation was three centuries distant. Feeling his indebtedness to the faithful anchoress of Anderby in the line of his literary work as an English author, it is most