

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE HINDU DOCTRINES. By René Guénon, translated by Marco Pallis (Luzac; 12s. 6d.)

MAN AND HIS BECOMING ACCORDING TO THE VEDANTA. By René Guénon, translated by Richard C. Nicholson (Luzac; 12s. 6d.)

'What fear of criticism can people feel', asks M. Guénon apropos of some Western orientalists, 'who start off by laying down the principle that, in the study concerned, no real competence is admissible except such as is to be gained in their own school?' M. Guénon himself repeatedly disarms criticism in similar fashion, and treats his subject with a cocksureness which few of the despised orientalists would care to emulate. Indeed his contempt for almost every other effort but his own to interpret the East to the West is boundless, and he reiterates his assertions of it with a frequency better calculated to arouse irritation and mistrust than to convince. Much that he says in reproof of the facile syncretism of the erudite orientalists, of the pretensions of the pseudo-science of comparative religion, of the bogus exoticism of Theosophists and Westernising Vedantists (he here makes a distinction between Ramakrishna and his disciples Vivekananda which deserves explanation) needs saying; although most readers would have profited more from his animadversions had he argued more and scolded less. But his contempt for his readers almost equals that for his adversaries and rivals in the same field.

For his estimate of Westerners and of Western tradition and culture generally, is hardly higher than his estimate of previous Western interpretations of the East. 'East' and 'West' too often stand in M. Guénon's writings for the very highest in the former as contrasted with the very lowest in the latter. Such comparisons are misleading, and regrettably obscure the radical rightness in his strictures upon modern Western civilisation. Aristotle and the Scholastics alone among Westerners are allowed any good marks at all; in them alone M. Guénon finds any glimmer of light in the darkness of the Western world. But his own understanding, especially of the Schoolmen, is very limited. He could have found in them much to dissipate his own strange illusions concerning the meaning of such terms as Theology, Religion, God, Sin, Morality. For his understanding of the East, he has gone to the sources and, still more important, to direct 'realisation'; his knowledge of the West seems mostly to have been gained at third hand.

But once he turns to his own subject, to the straightforward exposition of Eastern doctrines, our confidence is restored, and there are few readers who will not feel themselves in the presence of a master—a master not only of his subject but of the art of teaching. The third and largest section of the *Introduction* provides a lucid elementary survey. *Man and His Becoming* has been described by Ananda Coomaraswamy as 'probably the best account of the Vedanta in any European language'. The testimony is all the more valuable as coming from an authority who has succeeded in appreciating the Western

tradition in a way which M. Guénon has not, and who has brought to light the kinship and affinities between the fundamental conceptions of Sanskrit and Græco-Roman terminology and belief.

There is one important facet of Eastern wisdom which M. Guénon seems to have passed by. The *Tao Te Ching* thus expresses it:

The Sage is square, but does not cut others;

He is angled, but does not chip others;

He is straight, but does not stretch others;

He is bright, but does not dazzle others.

M. Guénon is square, angled, straight and—brilliant. But there is still more for him to learn from the East if the West is to profit from him as we could wish.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

THE FAR EAST MUST BE UNDERSTOOD. By H. Van Straelen. (Luzac; 10s. 6d.)

Here is a most charitable book: charitable in its purpose, which is to plead for the very high charity of understanding, charitable above all in the framing of a plea too often couched in terms of bitterness. The author even seems unaware of the host of bitter or even brilliant wisecracks which are the stock-in-trade of criticism of the behaviour of Westerners in the East. His indictment of the type of diplomat who never journeys outside the European club; of the foreign correspondents who have never troubled to learn the language of the peoples whose affairs they represent to the world; of the condescension, based upon ignorance, of those who choose to regard the Easterner as a sort of inscrutable savage—of all these painful and shameful things—is immensely weighty because his seriousness does not side-step the pain or the shame of them.

The chapter on the education necessary for the prospective Far Eastern diplomat should be read by all who are responsible for the appointment of young men to diplomatic posts in the East. It has been published separately by Luzac's under the title 'New Diplomacy in the Far East'.

The book contains a most valuable critical bibliography for the assistance of those who wish to build up, as far as this can be done from books, the understanding called for on its title page. B.K.

STUDIES IN THE MIDDLE WAY. By Christmas Humphreys. (Luzac; 6s.)

A second edition of a popular modern exposition of Buddhism for English readers, including three new essays on the Buddhist trilogy of *Dana*, *Sila* and *Bhavana*. The approach is what we should call an explanatory apologetic.

A certain amount of capital is made from the revulsion of the modern mind against 'authority'; the Buddhist too, 'whatever the forms in which authority has sought to fetter the mind of man . . . bows to none of them'; and from the doctrine of rebirth in the meaning we may suppose to be assigned to it by the 'masses' (but cf. Coomaraswamy: *On the One and Only Transmigrant* in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Suppl. Vol. 64, No. 2, where this