

*THEOLOGICA GERMANICA*. English Translation edited by Willard Trask. Introduced by Joseph Bernhart. (Gollancz; 10s. 6d.)

This fourteenth-century mystical work has remained under a cloud since the Reformation, for it was one of the only works of its kind that appealed to the non-mystical Protestant. It is a book which needs a Catholic interpreter to reintroduce it to the readers for whom it was originally intended. Joseph Bernhart in his introduction shows how for its lack of sympathy with institutionalism Luther first took it up with great fervour, but was later constrained to turn his back on mysticism and all that it stood for. This book therefore did not for long play any vital part in the spirituality of Protestantism, which has never taken kindly to this way of perfecting the interior life. And the reader will be grateful to Bernhart for his suggestions in this field.

But the whole tone of the Introduction makes an extraordinary contrast to the work itself. Bernhart, we are told by the publishers, has made a life-long study of mysticism, and what he has to say is certainly of considerable interest as well as subtlety. But his studies would seem to have led him to despise and condemn the whole vast experience and literature of mysticism. He begins by defining the mystic in such terms that he is common to the Chinese, Indian and Persian non-Christian mystics, but has no place in the religion of the Old Testament, of our Lord in the Synoptics, or of Luther. The effect of mysticism upon the individual 'usually consists in his recognising the futility of life'—and in this Buddha and Francis of Assisi are together linked as sharing a jaundiced view of the world at their conversion. The connection between this Eastern pessimism and Christian mystical theology is not unexpectedly discovered by Bernhart in 'the weak decoction of Neo-Platonic mysticism out of stock items borrowed from the great Systems', namely, the work of the pseudo-Dionysius, also described as 'this inferior production', 'insipid brew', 'the dregs of Antiquity', 'these stale waters'. And in spite of his evident distaste for this source of Christian mysticism, Bernhart rightly goes on to say that both Meister Eckhart and the *Theologica Germanica* are essentially rooted in this pale Dionysian thought. The writer's point of view is readable and entertaining; but it seems likely that the author of the Introduction has gathered a wholly pagan conception which his Catholic spirit rightly rejects. But he should surely have taken greater care of the baby when emptying the bath—one is quite surprised to find this child of Christian thought so handsomely presented at the end of such an introduction. Perhaps a traditional Catholic exposition is still required for this classic.

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