

**THE FLAMING DOOR.** Study of the Mission of the Celtic Folk-Soul by means of Legends and Myths. By Eleanor C. Merry. (Rider & Co.; 12/6.)

Pantheistic over-identification leads to depersonalized vacuity. That is a psychological principle empirically verifiable. The "life-line" of an individual is the resultant of the "individual" and "collective" tendencies of the psychic process at any given moment. It is the intertwined action of the two tendencies, perfectly differentiated and balanced, which gives richness and harmony to the human being; whilst "individuation" is precisely through prudent differentiation from the "collective psyche." And that differentiation is the precious thing about any individual soul. Through it is made possible his unique contribution to history, to life. (Such is a summary of Jung's researches into the relation of the "individual" to the "collective unconscious.")

Hence we get the double rhythm of the spiritual life—the flowing outwards to the multiplicity of creatures and the thrusting inwards to the threshold of the supernatural where the unity of divine light plays in the soul: "Variety up to the verge of dissipation: Recollection up to the verge of emptiness" (Von Hügel). But only up to the verge. And there must be both verges. Otherwise balance goes, and you get that quaint paradox, the neurotic religious—the automatic visionary, whose individuality is swallowed up by a world of imagery and pretentious dogmatism, where the emptiness of the abstract truth proposed seems hardly worth the loss of the human individuality sacrificed.

The Church has always recognized this principle and the dangers of ignoring it. Her prayer-life is the supreme example. For side by side with the collective action of the Liturgy she insists on the importance of spontaneous devotion in its most individual forms. She has a delicate respect for the unique spiritual *attrait* of each soul. For she knows that there is, in a positive way, no more precious thing for God than the individual contribution.

But the principle is usually glossed over by esoteric systems. Not that the criticism of lack of psychic equilibrium bears in its naked brutality on this book. But it does apply—obliquely. For true religion is basically dim. And we mistrust religion with too much light, "too much clearness," as a great Catholic writer has put it. And in this book there is much too much light. Not, again, that its fundamental theses are untrue. They are not. When precipitated from their solvent of seemingly pointless superstition, they represent ultimate values. Thus: "Logical thinking . . . tends to tear one away from dreaminess or instinctive action and impulse; it works separatively, separating us from our surroundings so that we can observe them. . . It creates the

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possibility of selfless devotion to something other than ourselves." Or: "It was (the Bards') function to be 'psychologists'. . . . They had to suffer and endure and overcome all that belongs to the tragedy of the impurity of the human soul in the face of the Divine Soul. . . . Every poet knows this suffering. Theirs was a Dionysian, a Kabirian, cult." Passages such as these are vital. This is true light. But the light diffused here is not the same light that radiates in pretentious dazzle from the cabbalistic calculations in Chapter I or the zodiac-diagram from Paracelsus. This latter is too definite, too clear, to be true. Indeed such analyses are so "coherent" logically as to be ethically and religiously valueless. (For what is too "coherent"—too intelligible-for-us—is purely natural.)

In short, if the veritable *Walpurgis Night* of phantasies, to which the disciples of Rudolf Steiner treat us, were purged of its tinkling Magus-symbols, and if a quiet discussion of the personal character of the God who gives validity to those phantasies were substituted for much of the enthusiastic "light"-eulogizing, it would gain resonance and genuineness. And we should no longer fear the dissolution of our human individualities by the super-abundant radiance.

Yet these are but qualifications of our admiration for an inspiring book, delightfully written. And even these criticisms are perhaps anticipated by the author, when she says, in her closing section: "A jumble, you may say; a fantastic mixture of legend and superstition and pseudo-history. But perhaps, here and there, the innocent beauty of some old tale may have stirred your heart so that you had to say 'it is true.' The world magician has woven a beautiful tapestry and leaves the threads of it in our hands so that we may complete it; and in the centre a space is left for us in which to weave the Figure whose Face and Form elude us still, though we have held the threads to fashion them with for two thousand years."

All of which we concede—so long as we are not asked to dissolve our human individualities, *Homunculus*-like, in the face of infinite light. For grace does not destroy nature. If it did, no one would want it.

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## SOCIAL STUDIES

SOCIAL ORIGINS. By Eva Ross. (Sheed & Ward; 3/6.)

This little book is the outcome of a course of lectures given by the author at the Catholic Social Guild Summer School in 1935. They were of an apologetical nature and meant to disprove the false assumptions of the evolutionists which have for so long held the field regarding the origins of the family, the State, property