

M. BERGSON, MYSTIC

THE appearance of a new book from M. Bergson's pen is always an event; and the publication, early last year, of his *Les deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion*¹ is quite an exceptional event, since it forms, in a sense, the culmination of this philosopher's thought. His conclusions are in a line with the tendencies of his earlier work—in the course of it he himself frequently refers to *l'Évolution Créatrice*—but no one could have foretold the definitely Christian and movingly devout note which is so frequently struck in it whenever M. Bergson quits his complicated and protracted disquisitions on social morality in agreement with Durckheim and his school.

There can be no room for doubt: M. Bergson, when he writes of the experiences and the ideals of mystics and saints, writes and feels as a mystic and a saint. The saints whose doctrine and example he has studied so closely have responded by winning for him a special, if occasional, gift of mystical connaturality and kinship. It is in contrast with this genuine and moving mystic note that the Durckheimian disquisitions seem such a burden on the soaring *élan* of M. Bergson's spirit.

The world, for M. Bergson, is a world of *élans* and of emotions. The whole cosmic round of life and of rhythmic gyrations and alternations originated in the primal, creative thrill or emotion of God. Received in human souls, it awakens in them an original and creative thrill like its own. This aspiration, of mysterious birth, kindles in them such pure and ecstatic emotion of love and joy as would seem to be an end in itself, transcending every notion of a definite object. Such, says M. Bergson, is the love or the joy expressed and communicated by music.

¹ Paris; Alcan. Pp. 346; 25 fr.

What happens here to our Thomist intellectualism? Let us not be deceived by an overburdened imagination. An object is not necessarily a hard, knobby thing. There is a formal object as well as a material object. The supreme Object, God Himself, has been authoritatively defined as love. *Ubi charitas et amor, Deus ibi est.*

There is a danger, we are told, lest M. Bergson's philosophy should exalt emotion at the expense of reason. But we surmise that M. Bergson's emotion has an intellectual content, that his love necessarily harbours a loved one known and experienced.

St. John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church, has reminded us that there is 'more' in love than in mere knowledge, since knowledge may exist without love, whereas love cannot exist without knowledge, and knowledge that turns to love proves itself deeper and more penetrating in the act.

For M. Bergson, we know, everything must be an *élan*. The static, the formulated, is, *ipso facto*, effete, dust subsiding after the flare. Past acquisitions have no value—all that matters is to get ahead with the vital *élan* and the thrilling experience of here and now.

But does not M. Bergson rule out the past with too inexorable and indiscriminating a rigour? I bethink me that, on this view of things, I must banish Chopin's nocturnes and Chartres Cathedral and the Parthenon. There are things, surely, whose *élan*, inherent in their very being, carries them as 'joys for ever' through the drifting ages. And if that is true of works of art, is it not also true of the products of human and divine wisdom? Of the Upanishads, of the Magnificat, of the Beatitudes? We cannot cut ourselves adrift from these peaks in the rhythmic waves of great aspirations without endangering our own spontaneity and originality. Cosmic influence covers time as well as space. We cannot all be mystics all the time. It is a relief, in times of dearth, to live over in imagination and deliberate evocation the saints' unique experiences or, in memory, our own paler glimpses of Reality.

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It has also been objected to M. Bergson that when he identifies all high mystical experience with a triumphant élan of self-devotion and heroic achievement, he contradicts Catholic teaching as to the supreme excellence of pure contemplation. Before taking sides, we should like to hear M. Bergson again on this point. At anyrate, one can admit here and now that authentic contemplation is invariably associated with an irresistible urge to expression, articulation, whether in words or deeds. 'Obras quiere el Señor' cries St. Theresa, and when Benigna Consolata would linger before the Tabernacle, her divine Lover sends her back to her pen and paper.

'Sich im Unendlichen zu finden
Musz unterscheiden und dann verbinden,'
sang Goethe.

The work of analytic and scholastic philosophy is primarily *unterscheiden*, distinguishing. M. Bergson, philosopher of life, who everywhere, like a man of his age, thinks biologically, is chiefly concerned with the work of *verbinden*, welding together, thinking together, the results of analysis, in order thus to revert to the total reality from which we started.

Tempting, if impossible, quest! The quest, however, of every mystic, who will not be content with less than the whole of reality, captured and enjoyed at its source.

CYPRIAN RICE, O.P.