

## REVIEWS

REPETITION. An Essay in Experimental Psychology. By S. Kierkegaard, Translated with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie. (Milford; Oxford University Press; 14s.)

Of 'repetition' Dr. Lowrie wrote in his *Kierkegaard* that 'no term in S.K.'s vocabulary is more important, and none so baffling.' And of the book *Repetition* he forewarned us that therein S.K. 'cunningly contrived to make it difficult for the reader to understand what he meant.' It is true that the reader will search in vain in this book for any cut and dried definition or even for any direct description of this 'category'; all he will find are recurrent and seeming irrelevant allusions to it which break the flow of the narrative, and some playful parodies which make it superfluously clear what repetition is *not* and which mock the earnest seeker of formulated enlightenment. It is true also that S.K. invokes the precedent of the *disciplina arcani* of the Alexandrine Gnosis to justify his elusive allusiveness. But 'cunningly contrived to make it difficult' suggests a wanton muddying of clear waters, and seems to miss the whole point of the book. The point is surely that the meaning of 'repetition' is to be learned only in 'contemporaneous discipleship' to the 'Divine Teacher' (see *Philosophical Fragments* passim). The 'indirect communication' of the human teacher can only be 'maieutic'; he can only render the disciple 'open' to 'God as Teacher' by revealing to him the nihilistic impotence of the 'closed' human system. It is surely the whole point of *Repetition* that repetition is no immanent human category which can be defined, docketed and explained in books; and its whole purpose is to disabuse us of such preconceptions and to unstop our ears to the Voice of the Divine Thunder. It is that governing purpose which gives the unity of great art to what must otherwise appear (and is meant to appear) as a chaotic hotchpotch of the ridiculous and the sublime; in the achievement of this purpose every element in the book has its part to play—the whimsy, the triviality, the leg-pulling, the very shallowness of the brilliance of its small-talk, no less than the penetration of its psychological diagnosis whose relative superficiality is itself revealed in the soliloquy on Job, whose own ultimate foolishness is in its turn to be unmasked in the indescribable thunderings of Jehovah himself. That is why, if the book is to work upon us as S.K. meant it to work upon us (and to read it otherwise is to pervert both it and our understanding of it), it must be read as he intended it to be read. That is to say that the publisher's misleading title-page (with its irrelevant 'By S. Kierkegaard') and the editor's 'Introduction'

must be sedulously skipped, and reading must be begun with the original title-page (with its 'By Constantine Constantius')—which is here reproduced before the text and after the 'Introduction.' It is not only that the element of surprise is essential to the book, both to its artistry and to its maieutic efficacy; it is essential that we doff irrelevant curiosity and foreign 'interest' (or rather, allow the book itself to strip us of these), and surrender ourselves to its cathartic influence. 'Read as literature'—or as illustration to history or biography—Kierkegaard is doubtless 'interesting,' as is also the Bible; but such 'interest' inoculates us against the healing virtues of both, and both will correspondingly be misunderstood. Doubtless, without Regina Olsen there could have been no *Repetition*; but we shall read Kierkegaard *à rebours*—we shall commit the solecism of re-transmuting the cosmic Divine catastrophe back into the 'bagatelle'—if we read *Repetition* as a source for the biography of Regina Olsen, or even of Kierkegaard. After the text has done its work, the reader should most certainly turn to Dr. Lowrie's 'Introduction,' for it contains S.K.'s own *subsequent* elucidations as well as much apposite comment of his own.

The translation is done with the excellence we have learned to expect, and the production of the book (for which there is a heavy price to pay) is fully uniform with that of the pre-war volumes in the series.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

NIETZSCHE, PHILOSOPHER OF CULTURE. By Frederick Copleston, S.J. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne; 8s. 6d.).

That the philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche should suggest itself to many as the intellectual basis of National-Socialism is no less surprising than that his invective against the Germany of his day should lead others to see in him an opponent of all that National-Socialism represents. The opposition is, however, purely imaginary. National-Socialism has no real connection with antecedent German thought, and its founders would find Nietzsche's writings almost harder going than the dutiful reading of *Mein Kampf*. It is unfortunate that Fr. Copleston should open his preface to this latest addition to the Bellarmine series with a statement of this 'conflict of attitudes towards Nietzsche,' advancing it as 'an excuse ready-made for a further book on his philosophy.' The implied promise of a resolution of the supposed problem is not fulfilled. Indeed, except in the next to last chapter it is hardly even attempted; but the book is none the less valuable for the omission, and one can disregard the opening paragraph as no more than a concession to the conventions of scriptorial modesty. Nietzsche's style is aphoristic in the extreme, and the attempt to construct a synthesis from the violent patchwork of his writings is one which might deter any author. Fr. Copleston