

had the privilege of *seeing* a Goon Show. This fantastic performance took place in surroundings of the utmost theatrical propriety, in the old Camden Theatre which the B.B.C. have redecorated with the height of conventionality, so that it is all awash with gilt and red plush and gleaming white paint, and Ellen Terry's incomparable profile dreams away on a plaque in the foyer. An immensely long, immensely happy queue waited for the doors to open, and the moment we found our seats a feeling of high euphoria spread over us all. Already from the wings came maniacal cries that could only be Seagoon's; we laughed each time in spite of the admirable jazz purveyed to keep us quiet. From the very beginning of the show the deceptive casualness and the obvious relaxation of the performers was a delight, and when they strolled forward to throw away or bellow their lines, so complete was their mastery that half an eye was still left free to savour our enjoyment we could hardly believe that these were the characters involved in that lethal free-for-all which we could—and indeed did—hear the following Tuesday evening. There they were, Spike Milligan as long as a lamp-post in a shapeless jersey and a deerstalker hat, Peter Sellers with a hundred voices coming from the same dead-pan countenance in its owlish spectacles, Secombe a figure out of a nightmare whose every movement was comic, whose very fingers were significant, and yet whose impact remained obstinately radiogenic: to see all this, to receive those cracks nearly as fast as they were poured out before us was indeed a feast considerably better than enough.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

REVIEWS

THE BOOK OF THE POOR IN SPIRIT, BY A FRIEND OF GOD. Translated and with an Introduction by C. F. Kelley. (Longmans: library edition, 21s.; pocket edition, 8s. 6d.)

This work bears the marks of having been written in a hurry, the most obvious of which are the many uncorrected mistakes wherever foreign names or titles are cited. On page 278, for one example, *Geistleben, Abhandlung, Dufourq, Geschichte des deutschen Sprache, Revue belge de philosophie* and *Bussuet* should read *Geistesleben, Abhandlungen, Dufourcq, Geschichte der deutschen Sprache, Revue belge de philologie* and *Bossuet*. Having observed these errors, one proceeds to read the critical introduction and the text with something less than perfect confidence, and to check the author's references wherever possible; and the results of such a scrutiny are far from gratifying.

The Book of the Poor in Spirit was until the nineteenth century gener-

ally believed to be by Tauler; but in 1877 Denifle produced a new edition, in the introduction to which he vigorously attacked this belief, and stated his reasons for holding that the views on poverty put forward in the *Book* would not have been taught, not merely by Tauler but by any German Dominican of the fourteenth century. But Denifle's thesis, and his whole approach to such problems, were denounced with equal vigour by Père Noël, O.P., in his translation and commentary of the year 1914; and Mr Kelley identifies himself completely with Noël's sentiments.

Those who have not access to Denifle's edition, which is very rare in the British Isles, will find a summary of it by A. Chiquot, in the article *Buch von Geistlicher Armut*, which appeared in 1937 in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Mr Kelley cites this article on page 48 of his Introduction, where he writes: 'A contemporary opinion should perhaps side with Denifle and say that Tauler did not personally write this book. It should not, however, argue that it is necessarily not Dominican in spirit and doctrine, rather that the author was far more influenced by Tauler than Denifle will admit. It would be far nearer the truth to regard this treatise not only as having been written by a mid-fourteenth century Dominican but, as Professor A. Chiquot says: "even by a close disciple or perhaps some friend of Tauler".' Now this is a distinctly disingenuous quotation. It suppresses the truth, because what Chiquot wrote is: 'On sera davantage dans le vrai en estimant que ce traité aura été de quelque disciple ou ami peut-être de Tauler, mais qui en aura mal compris l'esprit et la doctrine sur ce point précis de la pauvreté . . .'; and it suggests the false, that Chiquot agrees with Noël, whereas, it will be seen, he supports Denifle's main contentions, which he summarizes as (1) Tauler never taught that all men were called to 'external poverty' or that he who has not external poverty 'is neither a disciple or Christ nor a true friend of God'; (2) the *Book* teaches that 'external poverty' is an essential condition for contemplation, whereas Tauler teaches that a man may possess a kingdom and still be truly poor in spirit; (3) the *Book* comes near to quietism in its teaching that a man must become 'poor in virtues', whereas Tauler never excludes a contemplative-active life; (4) the *Book* would make external poverty a condition of communion, whereas Tauler in his exhortations to frequent communion makes no such condition.

It must be realized here that when Chiquot writes of 'la pauvreté extérieure', he is supplying his own gloss; for the author of the *Book* generally writes simply 'Armuth': but it is given a different gloss by Mr Kelley, who writes on page 47: 'the term "poverty" has a sacramental significance for Catholics which is not accepted by members of other faiths, and this was especially true in the Middle Ages, when it

had mainly a spiritual rather than a material meaning', and, in a continuing note to this on page 279, 'Wisely realising this, Surius, in making his Latin translation, carefully translated "Armuth" as "spiritual poverty" or poverty of spirit'. Following Noël, who followed Surius, he also does this throughout his translation. One need not here discuss the validity of his judgment on non-Catholic views of poverty; but one is bound to point out that it can in no way be applied to the Middle Ages. The author of the *Book*, in his teaching on 'poverty in grace' and 'poverty in virtue', comes very close indeed to the tenets for which the unhappy Margaret Porette had been burned (one is bound to admire the neatness of the *Book's* somersault, where the author explains (page 55) that 'poverty in virtue' consists in losing the mere image of virtue and retaining virtue in essence). It is exceedingly difficult to know how to resolve this conflict. It is because of the heterodox interpretations to which the *Book* exposes itself that Denifle was at such pains to show that Tauler could not have written it; and he may well have displayed prejudice in his narrowly literal interpretation of what is meant in the *Book* by 'poverty'. But this new version certainly errs as much on the other side. When, in I vii, the author is translated as writing 'True spiritual poverty is full of grace, and so Holy Scripture is understood by a truly poor spirit. Of this Christ says "The poor have the Gospel preached to them"', for only they comprehend it correctly' (page 84), we must remember that 'spiritual poverty' is the Surius-Noël-Kelley gloss, that the author wrote 'true poverty', and that in its context—the end of I vi has just been deploring the pursuit of knowledge for material ends—the author means the passage to have a breadth and an ambiguity which a close insistence upon 'spiritual poverty' takes away. The *Book* is in this respect closer to Suso, with his bitter contempt for the schools, than to the genial and tolerant Tauler. Indeed, we often see that German proneness to hyperbole, from which Tauler was so happily free but which was the ruin of Eckhart and Suso, emerging in the *Book*. For instance, no one today could suppose that such a comment as 'Men like this are truly spiritual, and their eating is dearer to God than the fasting of others, and those who so eat actually consume God Himself' (page 79) could refer to anything except the Holy Communion; but no, this is the way in which it seemed appropriate to the author to say that it is lawful for men to take adequate sustenance, and that in so doing they are obeying and pleasing God.

It was something less than reasonable for Noël to complain that Denifle was not over-anxious to claim so brash an enthusiast as one of their brethren; and Mr Kelly shows a complete lack of understanding of Denifle, of his point of view, and of the historical facts which formed

it. Although he does support one minor point of his thesis, the introduction of the teaching of scholastic philosophy into German nunneries, by a reference to Professor Herbert Grundmann's *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (a reference in which the author is called 'J. Grundmann', the title is given merely as *Religiöse Bewegungen*, and the page-number is wrong) it seems that the reference is taken from another work which Mr Kelley several times mentions and praises, Professor J. M. Clark's *The Great German Mystics*, where the same point is made on page 4 and Grundmann's work referred to with the same abbreviated title in the footnote. But if Mr Kelley really had consulted this masterly book, with its arresting sub-title, 'Investigations of the historical connexions between heresy, the mendicant orders and the religious women's movement in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and of the historical basis of German mysticism', he would have known that precisely those merits which he commends in Professor Clark's book are derived from Professor Grundmann's study; and he would, one hopes, have been able to achieve a more liberal judgment of Denifle. The Theological Faculty of Fribourg University, if no others, will read with some surprise Mr Kelley's statement that 'The method of criticism used by Denifle, an old-guard Neo-Scholastic, is now regarded as unprofitable by contemporary Thomists' (page 276), and they would strongly recommend him to study Pater Otwin Spiess's recent edition of the notes for the work unfinished when Denifle died, *Die deutschen Mystiker des 14. Jahrhundert*: for in these notes, without ever departing from his convictions about the authorship of the *Book*, Denifle provides us with his mature reflections upon the essential purity of its doctrine, not so much on the minor question of poverty as on the nature of mystical union.

In several places Mr Kelley returns to the same point, the crux of Noël's criticisms and his own, which is, as he with a regrettable lack of modesty and charity formulates it, 'that Denifle not only misinterpreted the views of poverty held by our author, but . . . also failed to grasp the meaning of that subtle yet essential approach which dominated the teachings of these great mystics' (page 44). He then goes on, it is true, to demonstrate that in two sermons Tauler praises outward poverty as the highest kind; but the quotations which follow from Nicholas of Strasbourg and from St Thomas are commonplace, and that from Eckhart can only be made to apply if we insist that 'poverty' in it means outward poverty, precisely the offence for which Mr Kelley condemns Denifle. In a note to I v Mr Kelley remarks on 'the apostolic significance which the Rhineland School gave to spiritual poverty' (citing no evidence this time) and then continues: 'Moreover, do we not see in (Dominican) writings a concern for a return to the traditional notion

of the apostolic man?' (page 280). Now, this 'traditional notion of the apostolic man', we are told, is as defined by Rupert von Deutz in *De vita vera apostolica*: but why is this work so called, what is the 'false apostolic life' with which it is contrasted, why does it begin with a 'defence' of the Church? The answers to this we shall find in Grundmann's careful demonstration of the constant appeals to 'apostolic poverty' as their authority by so many heretical sects, and of the deep suspicion in which such professions of an 'apostolic life' were held. In the age of Tauler and Suso and Ruysbroek there was hardly one of the many sects which did not defend its aberrant beliefs and practices (some of them unspeakably vile) by a claim that they were returning to the ways of the primitive Church. We should also remember that there were interested parties who stood to profit by any impoverishment, self-imposed or forced, of the Church: Grundmann reminds us that 'Bernard of Clairvaux maintained . . . that the upper classes and especially the nobility encouraged and protected heretics who preached evangelical poverty, not out of religious motives, but for worldly, economic and political reasons, for avarice and a lust after money and land' (*op. cit.*, page 38). These considerations were all in Denifle's mind when he wrote of the 'false ideas' of poverty in the *Book*; and we shall be able to sympathize more fully with his reserve if we try to see it against its contemporary background, which Denifle knew better than any other student of German spirituality of our time.

In spite of Mr Kelley's lucid and readable translation, the *Book* remains an exceptionally difficult text to understand. Constantly its author uses language which suggests to us the very opposite of what he means: and this is so because his thought also is often altogether alien from us. Read, for instance, the section of I iii entitled: 'Why one must perform external works of mercy', and come upon the statement: 'It should here be added that a poor spirit *ought* to abandon himself and perform acts of charity to his brother'. To us this seems self-evident; but not to the fourteenth century, which knew particularly the quietism of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, to which indeed the author refers in I v. One must also search diligently to discover that he does not mean by 'self-abandonment' at all what we should expect, but rather a loss of the contemplative's recollection and detachment.

The author, it is plain, was himself a first-class spiritual director: this is shown, for instance, by the exposition of his theme that sin, so far from being 'natural', is an unnatural act and an offence against nature, or by his counsel on the 'true earnest avoidance of sin' which can be a true possession of virtue. It is clear, too, that he knew religious life from the inside, and had seen not only the desolations which come from God and are a part, not to be avoided, of the way of perfection, but

also much of the *cafard* which enthusiasts seem to woo, 'excessive fastings, night-vigils and other severe exercises, by which a man becomes unbalanced and his senses perverted' (page 67). Much of his teaching reminds one of Ruysbroek's, and he may indeed have known the German translation of *The Spiritual Espousals* which was made in its author's lifetime: the end of II ii 3, the passage beginning 'Should the soul empty herself of all intermediate things . . .' (page 135), has a distinct echo of the concluding sentences of the *Espousals*. And throughout the *Book* shows that it was written by a connoisseur of mystical literature, for readers with similar tastes. Though it is claimed in this present edition that the Friends of God aimed 'at affective contemplation, not mystical brain-work' (page 16), the *Book* is still a very advanced and sophisticated performance, an interesting and important memorial of that strange borderland between sanctity and error in which so many of the Rhineland mystics wandered. As Mr Kelley reminds us, it was Tauler who said in one of his sermons: 'A well-loved master has written and preached to you concerning this mystic union with God, and you did not understand him. He spoke in terms of eternity and you understood in terms of time.' This quotation does certainly illustrate Tauler's awareness of the dangers of undue popularization of mystical union; but it also illustrates Tauler's abiding reverence for Eckhart's memory. He and Suso—and Ruysbroek too—never ceased to honour Eckhart as the master from whom they had learned divine wisdom: and in assessing the good and the harm which Eckhart did, scholars will do well to take account also of *The Book of the Poor in Spirit*.

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AQUINAS. By F. C. Copleston. (Penguin Books; 3s. 6d.)

Fr Copleston set himself a difficult but most important task when he attempted, in a book of this size, a precise account of the major aspects of Aquinas' philosophical thought; I do not know that it has been tried before in English, and certainly it has never been done so well. Part of the difficulty in putting over the philosophy of Aquinas is that it is mixed in with a much greater quantity of theology, and even when separated out, as in Fr Gilby's *Philosophical Texts*, it needs careful explanation if the modern reader is not to misunderstand statements so deceptively simple, and a method of presentation so alien to anything he knows. There are enough books about thomism, but these contain developments and interpretations of the original thought; Fr Copleston sets out to tell us just what Aquinas himself has said.

An important introductory chapter successfully justifies this whole manner of philosophizing, against a variety of modern criticisms. It is