

THE WAY TO CHRIST. (Watkins; 18s. 6d.)

John Joseph Stoult, an American scholar, has published a new English version of the work by the German Protestant mystic of the seventeenth century, Jacob Boehme, whose writings so greatly influenced William Law. Although this work was first issued in Boehme's own lifetime, it is not so much a systematic theological treatise as a disconnected series of short tracts: like so many other mystics, Boehme was short-winded, and seems only to have been able to write and expound as far as single accesses of inspiration would take him, lacking the intellectual power and training to enable him to synthesize his moments of perception. There are many most appealing qualities in the man and his writing: his perfect submission and resignation to the will of God, his love of God's creatures in him, and his essentially medieval perception of the divine harmony existing between Nature and her Creator. His roots, indeed, are deep in the Middle Ages. His worship of the *logos*, of Divine Wisdom, reminds us of his countryman, Blessed Henry Suso, and often he writes of the Passion and of the fire of love in words which are the very utterances of Suso and his contemporaries. But he is a mystic who has lost the way. Suso and St Nicholas of Flue could both tremble and cry aloud for dread of the terrible anger which they saw in the face of God; but they knew that man could seek for and gain God's pardon, even in his last moment of time. To Julian of Norwich and Mechthild of Magdeburg might have come too the words revealed to St Catherine of Siena, 'Thou art she who is nothing', but both hoped and prayed for mercy in the end for all God's creatures. *Doctor Faustus* is a Protestant tragedy and a German one: to Faustus as to Boehme, God's wrath is 'an abominable chain' that will drag the wretched sinner down into a ravening hell, and Faustus' pupils can find no words with which to comfort his agony. Boehme had explored for himself the way of purgation and of self-abandonment: but at the end of that way he found himself in uncharted lands. The life of the Church upon earth was denied to him, the life of the sacraments and of the communion of saints; and so we see him falling back, as Kierkegaard and so many others fell, in fruitless, idle self-accusation and condemnation, into a darkness out of which his strange and false doctrines of Heaven and Hell grew. But none the less he is a thinker of great intuitive power, a Christian whose every word reveals a Christ-like soul, a Jacob who did not cease to wrestle.

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