

THE WAY OF MYSTICISM. By Joseph James. (Cape; 12s. 6d.)

In the spiritual hunger now besetting the Western world and spreading rapidly over the Orient, we are probably destined to witness the production of many works of this kind. When their shortcomings, both in conception and execution, are as manifest as those of the present book, however, it is difficult not to regard them as symptoms of that very hunger and of its resultant blurring of vision, rather than as likely nourishment for the spiritually weak.

This is an anthology of 'snippets'—ranging from one line to several pages—culled from every clime and age, and grouped in eleven chapters, each bearing a significant title; four of these chapters comprise Part One, under the broad heading 'God Turns Towards Man', and seven form Part Two, 'Man Turns Towards God'. The proportions of this division alone might suggest a certain confusion in the compiler's mind about the proper connotation of the term 'mysticism': such a suspicion is unfortunately only borne out by the extracts themselves and by the short Introduction, with its irritating note of sweet simplicity and goody-goody didacticism.

The compiler himself acknowledges that he has been led to include 'much that, strictly speaking, is not mystical at all', and justifies himself on the usual lines that all ethics 'are grounded in the same eternal verities of love and truth'. Even if this axiomatic assumption be allowed, it can scarcely be held to justify the title of the work as a whole: perhaps even Mr James's consciously displayed lack of sophistication was not equal to calling the book *A Garland of Noble Thoughts*? As it is, we are treated in the name of mysticism to such items as that at the head of Chapter V: 'How much less hard are pious reveries than upright actions?' (Lessing.) No great knowledge of German eighteenth-century rationalism is needed to supply the commentary that among 'pious reveries' that excellent man was almost certainly placing mysticism itself. While John Stuart Mill's advice on the following page, even in its detached presentation, is more redolent of Samuel Smiles than Francis de Sales. These are, of course, extreme examples of the *reductio ad absurdum* in which Mr James's sentimental benevolence has involved him, but much of the other less objectionable material seems to me to have as little intrinsic flavour of mystical experience as have the sincere daily prayers of millions of ordinary Catholics.

But the fundamental error of a work of this kind goes even deeper. Even had all these extracts been, as it were, genuinely mystical, the compiler's heavily emphasised thesis, that all the personalities concerned are really saying and meaning the same thing, would still have nothing more than his emphasis to justify it. In fact, in my

own professional concern with *Súfism*, I never cease to be appalled at the distance which, but for God's grace, lies between Eastern and Western mysticism. Islamic mysticism grew up wholly outside orthodoxy and was only with difficulty ever made to appear as integrated in it (hence, incidentally, its appeal for many modern European 'seekers'), but the great Western mystics knew no such tension: the Muslim mystic undoubtedly did come to regard the Qur'án, the daily prayers and the Pilgrimage as mere forms, unnecessary to the 'enlightened', but can one see St Teresa viewing the Blessed Sacrament in this light? In a word, Islamic mysticism was never wholly free from the influence of the magical cult, with its grades of initiation, its pseudo-scientific certainty of cause and effect, and its pantheistic goal of assimilation, which, it may be thought, comes closer to annihilation than to the Christian conception of Union.

The compiler surely did right, albeit for the wrong reasons, in refusing to accede to a suggestion that he should include 'a résumé of the methods adopted by the various mystics'; any uninstructed attempt to work through, say, the Loyolan Exercises as summed up by Mr James, the whole being topped off with a reading of these extracts, must surely have resulted in a first-class neurosis. As it is, a certain class of readers can splash about more or less harmlessly in a spiritual lukewarm bath.

There are one or two barbarous transliterations of Oriental names, the most offensive being *Al-Hillaj* for *Al-Halláj*: this is no mere question of taste or pedantic accuracy: *Halláj* is a nickname with a meaning, *Hillaj* means nothing whatsoever, and has never been adopted as a spelling by any Orientalist.

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HUMAN PERSONALITY. Its Historical Emergence in India, China, and Israel. By H. C. E. Zacharias, Ph.D. (Herder Book Co.; \$4.00.)

As Dr Zacharias has studied much in India and was until lately professor at the Catholic University of Peking, he was well qualified to write this interesting and useful book. World history, in its earlier stages, is tribal and anonymous; if individuals seem to stand out, it is as representatives of their society. The records deal with individuals for their own sake only when tribalism begins to be outgrown. Finally, exceptional individuals start to explore their own inner life, to analyse, educate and appraise themselves. They become aware of their personality and develop their spiritual talents. Philosophy and mysticism begin. With these beginnings the present book is concerned.