

SOME RECENT GERMAN BOOKS

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'In Catholicism there is no possibility of question-putting' was the parting shot once fired at me by a young German theologian. One must confess that the same reproach could not be levelled against German Protestants, though one may regret the occasional unwillingness to accept the obvious answer. The obvious answer to Barth's early question (expecting the answer 'No') as to the possibility of knowing God outside the Christian revelation has now been given by Max Lackmann in *Vom Geheimnis der Schöpfung* (Evangelisches Verlagswerk, Stuttgart). It is a remarkable book, a vast commentary on Romans I, 18-23 and II, 14-16, with selected passages on the subject from all the leading Christian theologians, the Catholic view and Protestant view being set one beside the other. Lackmann is not the first to have his eyebrows raised by certain of Barth's exegetical efforts, nor the first to suspect that Barth put on the mind of Kant rather than of Paul when reading Romans (pp. 211-2). But no one else has dealt with the issue so painstakingly. Lackmann, unfortunately, neglects the subtleties of the Thomist 'gratia non tollit. . . .' (p. 280). A Catholic contribution to the debate about 'de-mythologising' the Gospels has been made, tactfully, and with admirable clarity, by Oskar Simmel in *Mythos und Evangelium* (*Stimmen der Zeit*, April); it may help our Protestant brethren to deal with this fundamental issue. A further issue, that of Niemöller's political Christianity, has had the unfortunate result of driving Asmussen out of his work with the 'World Council of Churches'; Asmussen believes that Niemöller's political activity is prejudicing ecumenical hopes (cf. *Wort und Wahrheit*, July).

In expiation for crimes against the Jews, Germans have been asked to contribute money for planting thousands of olive-trees in Israel; this excellent intention towards peace with Israel is discussed in *Rundbrief*, which is full of the latest developments in the relations between Jews and Christians. It was at an appeal for these olive-trees that Romano Guardini gave a lecture on *Responsibility*, (*Hochland*, August); he provides a neat illustration of how Germans are not free from responsibility even when they show that 'collective guilt' is a nonsensical notion: when one of our family is guilty of a crime we may plead our own innocence—we cannot say 'it has nothing to do with us'. The treatment of Jews is also one of Américo Castro's concerns in his brilliant chapter on the Order of Knights which is printed in *Hochland* (June); this translation into German of one chapter

from *España en su historia* leaves one hoping that the English translation is in preparation. 'The Mystery of Israel', especially in St Paul's writings, is the title of an article by Heinrich Schlier, the Biblical scholar (*Wort und Wahrheit*. August).

One of the most interesting features of *Stimmen der Zeit* is the series of articles on the U.S.S.R. by a man of penetrating observation, Nikolaus Gurjew. His account of the intellectuals there refers to one victim of the system, Nina Staude; 'a dancer in her early life, she secretly became an Orthodox nun in the years of persecution, and had made a name for herself as a geophysicist and mathematician' before the blow fell.

The fate of many, amidst our modern craze for work and speed, is to die suddenly of thrombosis. So many German politicians have been dying this way of late that the Protestant Bishop of Württemberg, Dr Haug, was moved to address an open letter to public men, asking them to find some peace and rest in their lives before they all go the same way (*Herder Korrespondenz*. May). Dr Haug might have done worse than to refer them to Georg Siegmund's book *Schlaf und Schlafstörung* (Laumannsche Verlags Buchhandlung) which may be described as a phenomenology of sleep; Siegmund shows how often sleeplessness arises from a disordered life and how a change of mind can help those who believe—sometimes wrongly!—that they do not sleep.

The basic rhythm of life is what Resenstock-Huessy is searching for in *Heilkraft und Wahrheit* (Evangelisches Verlagswerk), which he subtitles 'a synchronisation of political and cosmic time'. The subject is certainly ripe for investigation; Jung's fumblings after 'synchronicity' and Toynbee's 'rhythms' are straws in the wind. Unfortunately Resenstock-Huessy's own effort, for all its brilliant asides and alluring chapters on Paracelsus, is scarcely more substantial. To anyone who is trying to discover the meaning of the music of the spheres and the harmony of those singular events which traditional philosophy is painfully ill-equipped to deal with I recommend the book; I do not recommend it to theologians and professors unless they are prepared for some hard blows at themselves and their colleagues; it would be a salutary present to give to any undergraduate believing in professorial infallibility.

Two books calculated to dampen Resenstock-Huessy's inflammatory remarks about professors are *Die Abstammung des Menschen* by Theodor Steinbüchel (Verlag Josef Knecht) and *Geschichte der Philosophie* by Johannes Hirschberger (Herder Verlag). The late Professor Steinbüchel's study of theological problems raised by evolutionary theories can scarcely be described as an original contribution to this well-worn subject, but it is a most sane and peaceful book, breathing that serene faith so characteristic of all his writing. The book's value is greatly enhanced by an epilogue from the pen of Hans André in which he

reviews recent developments in evolutionary theory; if Professor André could find the appropriate expression for his deep vision of the natural world one feels that he could lead us far into the wonder and poetry of nature. Of Professor Hirschberger's book one needs to say no more than that it is now available; his first volume on the history of ancient and medieval philosophy was received with enthusiasm on all sides. This second volume, on Renaissance-to-contemporary philosophy, is sure to receive a similar welcome. To read his book is a joy, an education—and an occasion of humility!



REVIEWS

MONASTIC SITES FROM THE AIR. By David Knowles and J. K. S. St Joseph. (Cambridge University Press; 55s.)

The close bond between methods and plans of building and habits of life is seldom shown more clearly than in the ground-plan of medieval religious houses. Although custom and rule directed the general scheme of construction, construction—varying as it does with the lie of the ground and local circumstance—must to some extent modify customs of life, much in the same way as St Osmund modified Norman liturgical customs in the light of the structure of the Cathedral of Old Salisbury when compiling the Salisbury liturgical use. Indeed, the whole course of human history on its material side is marked by the impact of person upon place and environment; but human life is short while locality remains almost unmodified, and it is therefore with long-lived corporations such as monasteries that history can best be traced in that dust of which men are made. Ground-plans have, therefore, despite a superficial uniformity, a significance awaiting sympathetic interpretation.

This volume of illustrations from the air of well over a hundred monastic sites in England and Wales is thus a work of serious historical importance. The photographs of Dr St Joseph, as interpreted by Professor Knowles, form an illuminating companion to the latter's histories of the English monastic movement. There is a careful introduction which outlines the genesis, development and modifications of the customary monastic plan, built around a four-square cloister. It is a pity that the recent excavations at Glastonbury were not undertaken until after the publication of this book, for they show that not only was the Glastonbury of St Dunstan's time the first English monastery to be built on this continental plan, but also that the structure was of a size and importance equal to those of Cluny, Fleury and St Gall.