

REVIEWS

PHILOSOPHY

QUATRE ESSAIS SUR L'ESPRIT DANS SA CONDITION CHARNELLE.

By Jacques Maritain. (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris; 20 frs.)

Three of these four essays have been issued before either in print or as papers read to learned gatherings; the first, *Freudisme et Psychanalyse*, is new. *L'Expérience mystique naturelle et le Vide* is presented as an addition to the treatment of mystical experience in *Degrés du Savoir*, and the essay entitled *Science et Philosophie*, a development of considerations offered to the Thomist Congress in Rome (Nov. 1936), completes the second and fourth chapters of the same work.

One thing that will strike the reader is the frequent use of terms like 'régime nocturne.' Just as it takes a champion of the intelligibility of being to declare its mystery so eloquently as M. Maritain has done, so it takes one who appreciates the true nature and power of the human intellect, to appreciate the gloom, the mystery, the horror even, that may result in certain circumstances from the flesh-clothed condition of our soul. It is this that gives the essays their unity. The primacy of the light of reason is emphasised explicitly and implicitly on every page, but at the same time we are shown some of the darkness in which it gleams but fitfully in circumstances of undevelopment, morbidity or aberration. In the first essay, for instance, on Freudism, in speaking of the dangers, which may be incurred legitimately, of psychoanalysis, the author talks of passing a frontier on the other side of which there is no longer any hope to be placed in the protection of reason, where one is in a savage world. And in the essay on the role of the practical sign in primitive magic we are set face to face with the childhood of our race when the intelligence has not yet burst the wrappings of imagination, and all sensation, images and ideas are 'nocturnes' and not 'solaires.' (How excellent in that essay, is the distinction between the magic of the natural childhood of humanity, and that of those who have sunk from or rejected the full day of reason.) It is especially in *Freudisme et Psychanalyse*, and *Science et Philosophie* that the thought proceeds with a truly amazing clarity and certainty, and that the movement of concession and denial seems most thoroughly fruitful.

L'Expérience mystique naturelle appears to be the most likely of the four essays to call for controversy. In *Degrés du Savoir*

M. Maritain had asked the question, to be answered emphatically in the negative, whether an authentic mystical experience in the natural order is possible. He had also there considered an objection to this negative answer, arising from the claims of some Oriental schools of mystics. It is to these that he returns here, desirous of finding an interpretation which will respect the authenticity and truth of their experience and at the same time provide a precise delimitation of the sphere within which it is valid. For the purposes of this investigation he accepts their claim to 'contact' in some sense with the divine, and considers it as natural, not supernatural. At the same time account has to be taken of the theological principle much to the fore in the treatment of the subject in *Degrés du Savoir*, that all authentic mystical experience (which he defines as 'expérience fruitive de l'absolu') results from divine grace and infused contemplation. How can we reconcile this principle and the hypothesis of our enquiry? In the natural experience outlined in this essay the absolute that is enjoyed is not primarily God, but the substantial *esse* of the soul, in knowing which the mystic attains in one and the same act, God, not in His Deity, but as the principle of that being, and *inquantum infundens et profundens esse in rebus*. How is this knowledge to be secured? While united to the body the soul cannot actualise that radical self-knowledge which belongs to it as a spiritual substance. M. Maritain contends that a knowledge is nevertheless possible for it, not of its essence, but of its substantial existence; and that this is to be attained, not by a prolongation of metaphysical contemplation in the same line so to say,—that has been rejected in *Degrés du Savoir*,—nor by an exhaustive examination of the soul's acts, the ordinary way of self-knowledge in this life. Instead, there is to be a deliberate ascetic laying aside and stripping off of all these acts and of reflexion upon them, so as to reach 'une expérience métaphilosophique de l'esse substantiel de l'âme par connaturalité intellectuelle négative ou plutôt anéantissante.' This account seems to call for much more elucidation both in respect of the object and the act of knowledge. How can we know a particular existence in complete isolation from any manifestation of its essence? It is admitted that this is indeed impossible for conceptual abstract knowledge, or for any positive mode of experience (*e.g.*, poetic), 'mais l'expérience dont nous parlons ici étant négative et par mode de nescience, elle peut atteindre—comme inconnu—l'exister seul, sans rien savoir du reste, précisément parce qu'elle l'atteint par l'acte d'abolition de tout le reste.' And that all too brief answer itself

opens up the correlative question of the nature of the act. What, in the end, are we to say of an act which is at once intensely vital and the consummation of the voiding and spoliation of all soul-activity, when the void produced is not the mere condition of a contemplation of which the formal medium is positive as in the case of supernatural mystical experience, but is itself stated to be the formal medium of the experience in question? That these questions persist in spite of an essay which in effect is largely concerned to elucidate them, is perhaps due to the brief space which such a mode of presentation can afford to a new development of thought.

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HISTORY

THE ANGLO-SAXON TRADITION. By George Catlin. (Kegan Paul; 10s. 6d.)

It is easier to recognize Anglo-Saxony than to define it, and Professor Catlin clears many ideas in his defence of its spirit and his lively and learned account of some of its characteristics. It is not a *völkisch* philosophy of life, bounded by race, nation, or state; for it leaves close breeding to dairy cows and the like, would have frontiers no barrier to intercourse, and no longer aims at political centralization. It is held together not by blood nor by economic interest, but by a community of rational custom, a habit of mind. Dagoes begin at Calais . . . we make the joke at our own expense, and that kind of satire goes back at least as far as Defoe. Those who belong to this tradition know its faults as well as do those from outside, saying, 'there, there,' to the criticisms, like a tolerant grandmother taught how to suck eggs. And grandam she seems to the Gaydas and Göbbelses, to the boys all biceps but butterless; a selfish old lady, time that she died, but still in her mittens she holds tight to the bonds, and doles out the pocket money. She never had rickets as a child, still less a psychological birth trauma; always she knew what she wanted, and got it. Now her wild oats are porridge.

This is a book to dispose of such nursery fancies, and it is a warning as well, for it takes as a text the words of Robert Burton, 'We are of the same humours and inclinations as our predecessors were: you shall find us all alike, much at one, we and our sons.' I must confess to pausing at the word Anglo-Saxon, but considering that the substance of the book was delivered in the form of lectures in areas from the Great Lakes to the Deep South, that the values exhibited in its pages have not an exclusively, nor even mainly, English accent, and that now it