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Review

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### NOTICES OF BOOKS.

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MYSTICISM IN CHRISTIANITY. By the Rev. W. K. Fleming.  
B.D. (Library of Historic Theology). Robert Scott. 5s. net.

Mysticism has attracted considerable attention of late, but the tendency has been to regard it as a sporadic phenomenon and as a by-product of piety. The volume before us presents a corrective to that tendency. No one can read it without being convinced that Mysticism has been a continuous dynamic in the Church. Intellect reads itself on the page of history, and it is through the study of history that scientific Christian thought must approach this movement. On these grounds Mr. Fleming's book establishes its claim to be an introduction to the study of Christian mysticism. In less than 300 pages it gives us a survey of the whole field. It is very considerably indebted to Dean Inge's Bampton Lectures, containing, however, less philosophy and more history. The book can be read with profit by students of whatever school of thought: no specific doctrines of Mysticism are directly inculcated, and the whole subject is treated fairly and dispassionately.

Mr. Fleming begins with the New Testament. There lies the origin of Christian Mysticism. Neo-platonism gave it a new point of departure, but the life and teaching of Christ are its sources. Of His immediate followers, St. Paul and St. John are the great mystical thinkers. St. Paul's experiences are especially instructive as exemplifying the distinction between vision and ecstasy. The Montanist heresy supplies the first instance of the anarchical tendency of mystical movements. The Gnostics are not sympathetically treated by Mr. Fleming: it is hardly fair to call their thought-systems "crude and bewildered speculation": they rendered distinct service to mysticism, though not so largely as did Clement and Origen and their Alexandrian school. Plotinu was not a Christian, but much space is rightly devoted to him and his followers. Neo-Platonism gave mysticism to the West, and that by two channels. First, Victorinus translated the *Enneads*: the translation fell into the hands of St. Augustine, and was one of the means that led to the conversion of that "father of Catholic mysticism." Then the writings of "Dionysius the Areopagite" attained extraordinary influence in the West, and they were inspired by Neo-Platonism.

Erigena, the great Irish thinker of the ninth century, was not a mystic, but he rendered the cause a great service by translating

these writings of "Dionysius," and he marks the transition to early Medieval mysticism. Here much weight is attached to the "practical" mystics, St. Bernard, the Victorines, and St. Francis, and it is demonstrated that there is no real opposition between Mysticism and Scholasticism. For instance, St. Bonaventura taught the mystical doctrine that God is "*totum intra omnia et totum extra*," and yet it was he who systematized mysticism by applying to it the Scholastic method proper, the syllogism.

At this point chronological sequence is deserted in favour of grouping by nationality. Germany is very influential, with Eckhart the philosopher, Tauler the preacher and Suso the poet of mysticism; to these leaders the German and Dutch mystical societies, such as the "Friends of God" and the "Brethren of the Common Life," trace their descent. Richard Rolle is the "father of English mysticism," and with him are associated Lady Juliana of Norwich and Walter Hylton.

Among the Italians, St. Catherine of Siena, a dyer's daughter, who put an end to the "Babylonish Captivity" at Avignon, is pre-eminent. A sketch of the chief mystics of France and Spain introduces the subject of the Reformation. Its effect was to create two schools of mysticism. On the one hand Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross organized and systematized: while post-reformation English mystics abandoned the Scala Perfectionis, with its traditional stages of *Purgatio*, *Illuminatio* and *Contemplatio*. After the sixteenth century we are almost entirely in the presence of English mystics. The one exception is Böhme, who is introduced on account of his influence on Law and Blake. Mr. Fleming gives us accounts of the mystics among the Caroline Poets, the Cambridge Platonists, and the Victorian Poets. More interesting and perhaps more germane to the subject are the personal experiences of the Unseen that came to Bunyan and Fox. As to more modern times, Evangelical doctrine is here found to contain mystical elements borrowed from the Moravian and Pietistic movements in Germany, while the Keswick school minimizes the Roman Law aspects of old Evangelical thought and emphasizes aspiration after the *Unio Mystica*.

The book concludes with a general index and a bibliography. As a whole it is easy reading and sure to be useful, though advanced students would miss a more critical treatment of some of the questions raised.

The defect of the book is the lack of a clear statement of the writer's view of the essence of mysticism. On approaching the subject we are bound to ask: "Is a mystic more than a spiritually-minded man? Is mysticism merely abnormal piety?" But it must be confessed that Mr. Fleming does not help us to answer these questions. He attempts the task in his opening chapter, but his findings there do not rule consistently the rest of the

book. We miss a principle of discrimination. Why should this be included in and that be left out from the history of mysticism? The Crusaders are ranked as mystics, and so in general is the party of reform in the Church. Spiritual imaginings of poets and much that properly belongs to the history of philosophy are laid under contribution. To discriminate is not easy, and the first requisite is a definite opinion as to the differentia of mysticism.

A further defect is that there is too much biography. It is a history of mystics rather than of mysticism: if it contained less about people it might not be so readable as it is, but certainly more enquiry into their ideas would better serve the purpose of the student. Personality and scientific method do not run well together, and to give a connected account of any one line of thought, it is almost necessary to keep in the background the human interest. We desiderate a codification of doctrines specifically mystic, and an attempt to trace systematically their development in the course of history. If mysticism is not capable of such treatment, it must abandon its claim to possess universal truth, and for the seeker after truth it loses all independent value. It convicts itself of aiming at private and peculiar possession of spiritual luxuries.

A. A. L

#### A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT.

By George Buchanan Gray, D.D., D.Litt., Prof. Hebrew  
Mansfield College, Oxford. (Studies in Theology Series).  
Duckworth and Co., London. 2s. 6d.

"What need of yet another Introduction to the Old Testament?" Certainly the production of a series by one publisher is apt to lead to the addition of volumes for the sake of completeness for which no real need exists. And yet another general sketch of the growth and composition of the Hebrew Bible must justify its existence by some special excellence or convenience. The work before us has, however, points of unusual merit. Like the rest of the series the volume is admirably produced, yet remarkably cheap. Again, the mere name of a scholar so distinguished as Dr. Gray lends peculiar weight to the judgments passed. Further, there is a most valuable Bibliography, both of English and foreign works dealing with the Old Testament as a whole or particular books. Finally, the substance of the book is by no means a mere repetition of old matter. The book would be of little value to a beginner, and none at all to the large class who wish to skim over the subject, culling here an interesting bit of archæology, and there a brilliant literary appreciation, and from a third place some startling or novel theory. Dr. Gray's work is meant to be read, Bible in hand, and not to replace in any way the study of the Bible. And, realising doubtless that his space would not