

NOTES ON LATE MEDIEVAL GERMAN TALES IN PRAISE OF *DOCTA IGNORANTIA*.¹

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I.

IN this article I have endeavoured to characterise a 'type' of story which appears to have been extremely popular in Germany at the close of the Middle Ages. Some of the texts discussed have been published; two others, which seem to raise special problems, I have printed below. I wish to emphasise that I have not conducted the thorough investigations which would permit me to say anything final about the 'type'

¹ [I am grateful to the editor of the BULLETIN for his kindness in publishing these notes. They are a translation of an article with the title, 'Zu den Gesprächen zwischen Beichtvater und Beichttochter in der erbaulichen Literatur des ausgehenden deutschen Mittelalters', which I wrote, and which was accepted for publication by the editor of the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, in the Spring of 1937. The editor promised that the article would finally appear in the fourth number of the 1938 volume of his journal; it never appeared, and now I have withdrawn it, to avoid further delay. To this article I have already referred in my account 'A German Mystic Miscellany, etc.' (cited below as *Miscellany*) in the BULLETIN of October, 1938, p. 476, note 2. In § 9 of *Miscellany* I summarised and supplemented the findings of the article, which is here presented in translation. I could wish now that the summary (which was written on the assumption that readers of the BULLETIN would not wish to be troubled by cross-references to an article appearing in another, foreign, journal) had been less comprehensive; certain of the following paragraphs will now seem to be repetition of what appeared a year ago, but this is, in the circumstances, unavoidable. I would like to point out (1) that the contents of *Miscellany*, p. 476, note 2, were, in the German version, embodied in a Addendum which is not here reproduced. (2) The erroneous view which, at one time, I held on the origin of the *Priamel* (see below)—the nature of which is indicated, *Miscellany*, p. 480, note 2, was later amended in the German text and does, of course, not occur here. (3) Notes in square brackets are recent additions to my text. For all these complications, my sincere apologies.]

of story, and that my observations even on the special problems raised by the texts which I have myself published are not necessarily accurate. Here, a word of explanation is called for. The texts considered belong, one and all, to popular, even sub-literary, genres ; they are : exempla, various redactions of a mosaic tract, a doggerel didactic poem and a religious ballad ; they are all of unknown authorship, and of roughly the same date—the latter half of the fifteenth century. The methods proper to the examination of such material are those of the folklorist, who will, or should, make no pronouncement even on the contents of a given tale, until he has ascertained and compared all its possible versions ; such methods could not be employed ; yet I have not hesitated to speak of the relative chronology of my texts and occasionally to suggest that one may be derived from the other. My conclusions must, therefore, be considered tentative. In defence I may add that I believe I have consulted a reasonable number of sources, and that I feel that the special problems which I have indicated and attempted to clarify are truly relevant.

The ' type ' of story which I wish to examine has the following basic outline : a Confessor (alternatives are, a hermit, a monk, two monks, a Mother Superior) questions a woman (almost invariably a woman) concerning the nature of her devotions ; the tone of the enquiry is frequently challenging. The devotions described by the person thus questioned are in some cases rather ' works ' but more frequently mystic ' contemplations '—they are usually called ' Übungen ' and, as described, reflect natural piety rather than strict orthodox practice. At the end of the interview the Confessor concludes in the following style : ' Go pray for me, a poor sinner ; your life is more godly than mine ' or, ' With all my learning, I have never reached such perfection '. This type of tale must be familiar to anyone acquainted with the popular mystic literature of the later Middle Ages in Germany. But it is naturally to be found in other contexts : it may well be an evergreen theme in religious writings that a simple layman may, in respect of true piety, excel one in holy orders. Essentially the same story, though the setting may be different, is that of Macarius and the two pious women.¹ Tales of this type are,

¹ Cf. *Miscellany*, p. 478, note 1, and *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters*, xxii, p. 194.

however, so numerous in writings of the fifteenth century in Germany that one is tempted to see in them evidence of widespread anti-clerical views, of the success of the principle of *docta ignorantia*—hardly, however, to point excitedly to *Karsthans* and Hans Sachs' *Disputation zwischen einem Chorherren und Schuchmacher* for there is, after all, nothing of the unrest and polemic of the Reformation pamphlet in these simple stories: they were written by nuns in convents.

2.

Turning now to specific German versions, we find a close parallel to 'Macarius' in the story of the two Dominicans and the miller's wife, *Die fromme Müllerin*.¹ More or less of the same type are those in which a hermit, or monk, prays God to show him the person whose life is most pleasing to him, and whom he should emulate—here emphasis is laid on the fact that the enquirer is well versed in theological matters.² The prayer is answered; God guides the monk to such a person, who is discovered to be a beggar or a naked child; or perhaps a nun whose way of life and devotions have been so unostentatious that she has passed unnoticed amongst her fellows (this latter variant occurs under the title *St. Bernhards Tochter*).³ The person is interrogated and the questioner concludes with an admission of

¹ Bartsch, *Die altd. Hss. der Univ.-Bibl. in Heidelberg*, i, pp. 232, 350; Degering, *Kurzes Verzeichnis der germ. Hss. der preuß. Staatsbibl.*, iii, p. 77; Borchling, *Reisebericht*, iii, p. 102; *Germanistische Abhandlungen*, xviii, p. 92; *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters*, xiv, p. 118. A close variant, 'Von einem heiligen schiffer', *ibid.*, xxii, p. 362.

² [I believe I interpret Professor Spamer (*Beiträge zur Gesch. d. deutschen Sprache und Lit.*, xxiv, pp. 403 sqq.) correctly, in stating that he considers this group of tales grew up around the real or the legendary Meister Eckehart. In the examples, Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker*, ii, pp. 623 sqq., the enquirer is *Meister Eckehart* or *ein höher lesemeister*; it is possible that the *meister der göttlichen geschrift* in our texts (below) is also Eckehart. See also *Miscellany*, p. 477. It is expected that Professor Spamer will deal with all stories of the type under discussion under the heading, *Die geistliche Hausmagd*, an example of which tale is to be found in MS. Harley 2430, f. 1a, Priebisch, *Deutsche Handschriften in England*, ii, 12.]

³ E.g. Borchling, *Reisebericht*, iii, pp. 30, 52, 158 ('Das Stück findet sich in den Wolfenbüttler Hss. ungemein häufig'—*ibid.*, p. 30); Priebisch, *Heilige Regel*, exemplum No. 28 (*Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters*, xvi).

his own inferiority. The idea embodied in such stories was evidently so familiar that it could take the form of a simple aside: *Ein hoher wiser lesmeister der sach ein vil guotes armes swesterlin vor im gan Do sprach er sol mir nit we tuon das ich so recht gros wisheit und erkantnisse han. Und ob dis arme mensche mer minne hat zegot denn ich han das es denne got indem himelrich me wirt erkennende denn ich mit aller miner wisheit.*¹

The aim of this essay is not, however, to record all the possible variations on the basic theme. I wish rather to single out two, for more detailed consideration, which I propose to call 'The Young Woman of Two-and-twenty' and 'The pious Beguine'.²

3.

'The Young Woman of Two-and-twenty' has not previously been published. It occurs in numerous miscellanies of popular mystic writings, in High and Low German regions, until the seventeenth century. My observations on the story are based on the examination of five such manuscript versions; ³ others, which could not be consulted, are noted below. The character whom, in the general account, we have called the interrogator is here again a Doctor of Divinity (*meister van der gotheit, maister göttlicher geschrift*). To him there comes a young married woman—whose age is variously given as 21, 22, 51—seeking advice in spiritual matters; she wishes to know the way to the highest degree of spiritual perfection to which a (mere) woman can attain. The Doctor of Divinity, who is 'wont to be questioned

¹ Wackernagel, *Altdeutsche Predigten und Gebete*, Basel, 1876, p. 603. [This is, of course, in reality, a summary of the typical Eckehart legend, as Spamer sees it.]

² [From p. 123, note 2, it will be clear that Spamer will possibly not consider these as representative as 'Die geistliche Hausmagd' and the Eckehart legends; only from a reference to the Berlin MS. oct. 328 (*loc. cit.*, p. 406, end of footnote), do I gather that (one text of) the 'Young Woman of Two-and-twenty' is known to him; I find no reference to my exemplum, 'The pious Beguine'. The material under consideration is so extensive that perhaps more than one focal point should be recognised.]

³ For permission to have photographs made of the four texts in Berlin MSS. I have to thank the Director of the Preußische Staatsbibliothek. For permission to consult the Rylands German MS. 11, and for constant helpfulness, I again wish to thank the Librarian of the John Rylands Library, and Dr. F. Taylor.

rather by learned theologians and students than by worldly women', enters reluctantly into conversation with her, and questions her concerning her state, and her devotions (Übungen). She replies that she fulfils her duties as parent and mistress of her household; she has three 'inward' (inwendige) and three 'outward' (auswendige) devotions which, here, are not orthodox 'works' or practices or habits, but mystic 'contemplations'. In the end the theologian concludes, 'For fifty years I have worn the cloth and am called a Doctor of Divinity, but myself never reached such perfection; praise be to God who thus bounteously bestows his grace'. A comparison of the five texts which I was able to consult shows that one must recognise two versions, which I have called A and B, and printed separately.

THE YOUNG WOMAN OF TWO-AND-TWENTY.

A.¹

Eyn meister van der gotheit quam yn eyn stat. Dar quam eyn Junffrauwe van xxii iaren Vnd begerde, den meister an zu sprechen. Do der meister die Junffrowe gesach, Er nam is in vnwerdicheit, dat yme die Junffrauwe zo sprechen

¹ The text of Version A is based on *MS. germ oct 328*, f. 221^r-223^r (Degering iii, p. 106; 16th cent., Middle Franconian dialect). *Relevant* variants from the following are given below: *MS. germ oct 120*, f. 27^v-29^v (*ibid.*, p. 50; the MS. contains 16th and 17th cent. Dutch writings; Rubric to the exemplum: *Dit is een deuote leere*); *MS. germ quart 1584*, f. 60^r-62^r, (Degering, ii, p. 293; 16th cent. Alsatian dialect). The key letters for these three MSS. (of the Preußische Staatsbibliothek) are **a**, **b**, and **c**. (Versions of the story which could not be consulted are referred to in Borchling, *Reisebericht*, i, p. 106, and iii, p. 111; Priebisch, *Deutsche Hss.*, etc., ii, p. 49.) Abbreviations are, in the text above, expanded; *inwendig*, *vßwendig*, *ingetzogen* and *tzuverlais* are written, against the MS., each as one word. The young woman is called *vroukē* (**b**), *frewlin* (**c**) and addressed as *vroukē* (**b**), *Jungfrow*, *frouw* (**c**).

3f. *nam — sprechen wolde*] da n. hy dat in groter onwaerdē d. hem dat vroukē sp. w. **b**, das was jm vnmer mit jm zū reden **c**. 4 *meisten*] aller grōsten **c**; om hē *vraechdē* **b**, süchten an zū sprechen **c**. 5 *seer onwaerdelikē* **b**, vnwerthsamlich **c**. 7 *volk.*] clairheit **a**. 7f. *vnd tzu — warheit* ÷ **a**. 8 *gerne werre* ÷ **c**; *als verre* ÷ **a**; *ffrauwen*] menschen **c**; *vercr.*] *vercr.* eñ tote comen **b**, komen **c**. 9 *gode te hebbē* **b**. 10 *weltlich ere* **c**. 13 *mich — gevoget*] mi g. dat toe heeft geuoegēt **b**, mir das g. hat zū gef. **c**; *halden*] hadde . . . gescicket **b**, het **c**. 18 *Die — oeffenunge* ÷ **b**. 20 *ander* ÷ **bc**. 21 *ich beste*] verre als ic alre diepste **b**, ich aller tieffest **c** (cf. l. 39). 21 *recht vngl.* **bc**. 22 *vader ind' godheit* **b**. 23 *ewiger a*; *geberte*] bereit heeft **bc**; *metdel.* ÷ **b**, jungfrewwlichen **c**. 23f. *Vnd in hatte — gehindert*] Vnd en hette in dās m. etc. **a**, vnd wer do von ouch des m. s. nit geh. worden, *after gewant* **c**. 26 *in loutere rejnē hartē* **b**, einem *r. h.* **c**.

5 wolde, Want er was is bas gewaen, dat yn die meisten studenten frageden dan sulch frauwe. Do sprach der meister vnwerdendlichen : , Frauwe, wat wiltu ?' Sy antwort oitmodelichen : , O meister ! wat hoert eyne tzu oeffnen, der (221^v) tzu der aller hoester volkomenheit vnd tzu der aller hoester vnd clairster warheit gerne werre ?—als verre als is ffrauwen moeglich ist, tzu vercrigen tzu eyner sicher frunschaff myt gode.' Do sprach der meister : , Ffrauwe, was ist uwer staet ? Syt ir in der ee, Vnd hait ir geut vnd ere der werelt ? ' , Ja here,' 10 sprach sye, , ich byn in der ee gebunden, Aber in were ich neit dar, Jch en queme neit dar in vmb eyn gulden werelt. Want ich nu dar in byn, so han ich gantzen gelouben, dat mich got dar tzo gevoget vor dat aller beste ; Want ich halden myne guet gerne tzu allen goeden dingen, Vnd ich leren myne kynder dogent, Wa ich 15 kan vnd mach.'

Do Sprach der meister : , Wat ist dyn oeffenunge ? ' Sye antwort oetmoden-
 clichen : , Here, Jch han drȳ v̄wendiger oeffnungen vnd drȳ inwendiger oeffnen-
 (222^r) ungen. Die erste v̄wendige oeffenunge, die ich alle dage doen, Dat ist,
 dat ich mych alle dage spiegele in dat werdige leuen vn̄ßers lieuen heren Jhesus
 20 *Xristus*. Ich sye an syne oetmoedicheit vnd sanfftmoedicheit, Vnd syne ander
 doegeden als ich beste mach. Dan gesyen ich vff mich selber, wie vngelich ich
 yme byn. Dan gaen ich tzo der ander oeffnungen, vnd syen, wie der vader
 syn ewiges woert geberte in der reynen metdelichen licham *Marien*. Vnd in
 hatte die gehorsamheit syns hemelschen vader neit gewest, Vnd in hette er des
 25 menschen selicheit neit mede gehindert, Er hette dar gerne dusent iare ynne
 gewant. Noch lieber wānt er in den reynen hertzen geistlichen dan in syner
 moder liebe lifflichen. (222^v) Die drȳte oeffenunge ist, dat ich mych alle dage
 baden in den rosenfarwen bloidigen wonden myns lieuen heren Jhesus *Xristi*.
 Jch hain tzu yme eyn gantze tzuverlais alles, dat an myr gebricht, dat er dat myt
 30 synem liden in myr erfullen sal.'

Do sprach der meister : , O guede frauwe, synt das vre v̄wendige oeffenunge,
 So sagen vns auch vmb got die inwendige oeffennunge, die ir alle dage doet.
 Do sprach sye : , Die eirste inwendige oeffennunge, die ich alle dage doen, Dat
 ist, Dat ich mych alle dage scheiden van allen creaturen, Also dat ich myt keyner
 35 creaturen tzu doen in hain tzu der tz̄yt, tzu dat der dyenste godes ober alle gedaen
 ist. Dat ander ist : ich ledigen myn hertze van allen vnnutzen ingetzogen hyn-
 derlichen dynge, (223^r) So dat neit hynderlichs enblyue in tuschen gode vnd
 myner selen. Die drȳte oeffenunge ist : So warmer ich in die kyrche komen,
 Vnd tzwen fuße rumes kryegen kan, so vereynigen ich mich myt gode, Dat mych
 40 duncket, dat dar nyeman en ist dan Got vnd ich alleyne.'

27 After *oeffenunge*, wtwendelic **b**, usserlich **c**. 28 roetuerwigē **b**, ÷ **a**. 29 toeuer-
 laet **b**, zūuersicht **c**; gebristet **c**. 30 in *myr* ÷ **bc**. 31 *oeffeningē* die ghi alle dage
 doet **bc**. 32 *alle d. doet*] hebt, habent **bc**. 33 *alle dage* ÷ **c**. 35 *tzu dat*] also
 lang bis **c**. 36 *ingetz.*] vmbtziehenden **c**. 39 *Vnd — kan* ÷ **c**; so *vereynigen —*
gode] soe sincke ic m̄ so diepe in gode **bc**. 42f. in *d. gotheit*] vand' **g. b**, von der
 götlichen kunst **c**. 43 nyenan **a**; *Vort*] fürbasser **c**. 44 gebeneditet **a**; *can*
 allē menschē **b**.

Do sprach der meister : , O goede frauwe, ir sýt in dem rechten wege. Jch han die kappe gedragen wail ffunfftzich iare lanck, Vnd heissen eyn meister in der gotheit, aber ich in quam noch nye tzo dieser volkomenheit.' Vort sprach er : , Gebenediet sy der here, der syne genade sus myldeclichen geben kan.'

B.¹

Ain maister göttlicher geschrift kam in ain stat. Da kam ain frow von .xxj. jaren vnd fraget nach dem maister. Do der maister die frowen sach, da waß im die frow etwas vnwerd, wan er waß nit gewunlich, dz die frowen nach im fragten. Er wz vil baß gewun, dz die höchsten studenten oder maister nach im fragten, die in der schül warend. Doch sprach der maister vnwürdigklich : 5
, Frow, waß wend ir mein ? ' Do sprach (103^v) die frow gar demütigklichen : , Here, da wer ich gern der aller höchsten lütresten volkumesten warhait nächer, als verre es den frölin müglich ist, dz alle jre werck nemend ain zügnus vß den freunden Gotes.'

Do sprach der maýster der göttlichen geschrift : , Frow, was seind eüwer 10
üebung ? Hand ir ainen burgere oder ainen ritter ? ' Do sprach die frow gar demütigklich : , Here, ich honn zwon vßwendig üebungen.' Do sprach der maister : , Frow, honnd ir kain inwendig üebung ? ' Do sprach (104^r) dz fröwlin : , Ia ich here, dreý inwendig üebung hon ich.' Do sprach der maýster : , Frow, sagend mir durch Got, was seind eüwer vßwendig üebung.' Do sprach 15
die frow gar demütigklich : , Here, die erst vßwendig üebung ist, dz ich mich

¹ Version B is based on *MS. germ oct 571*, f. 103^r-107^v (Degering, iii, p. 206, 16th cent.). Relevant variants are given from the text in *German MS. 11* of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, f. 199^v-203^r (latter half of the 15th cent., Bavarian dialect). To these the key-letters *đ* and *R* are given. Abbreviation signs are expanded only where they have independent value, e.g. *not* the *n*-stroke over *n*; the *er*-hook over *r* is given as *e. ú, ü* and the *y*-like symbol for *ü* are given uniformly as *ü*.

1 junge *frow* R; li *đ*. 3 *vnmär* R; *gewent* R. 4 *oder maister* ÷ R. 5 *schül*] stat R; *vnweltliche* R. 8 *als verre es den*] wer es *dē đ*, als es *ainē R*; müglicher *đ*; *ainer* R. 9 *frēndē đ*, *frewāten* R. 10 *der g. geschr.* ÷ R. 12f. *Do spr. d. maister — Ia ich here*] vnd R. 14 *hon ich* ÷ R. 16, 40 *gar dem.* ÷ R. 17 *ainest*] oft R; *schaid* ÷ *đ*; before *zu tond*, numtz (a form of *niht* ?) *đ*. 18 *aller* ÷ R; *vff*] *v̄b*⁷ alles R; *verpracht* ist R. 20 *peleibt* R. 24 *dan*] das R; *lib*] maidlichē leichnā R. 25 *Maria* meiner *frawē* R; *het es* ÷ *đ*. 27 *gew.*] gelegen R. 28 *ainem*] *ains*, *aines đR*; *rainen* ÷ R. 30, 31 *jn sin* R; after *barmh.* vnd in sein senfftmutikait R; *kan vnd*] *chomen* R. 33 *des ain*] *dā* (corr. from *dz*) *đ*; *zu verloß* R. 34 *das*] des R; *dz — gebrist* ÷ R. 35 *leyden* ÷ *đ*. 36 *ward*] *pegundt* R. 38 von *der* R. 41 *meinen kīnden*] den *meinē* R. 44 *sij*] wār seý (sic) R; *nit* ÷ *đ*; *leb — allen* ÷ R; *schwester u. prūd*⁷ R. 46 *mein zwen füß* auf die *erd* R. 47 *der*] *dißer đ*; *Chr. u. ich*] *christus đ*, *ich* R. 48 *maister* göttlicher *kunst* R. 49 s. *kor kappen*] seiner *körper* (!) R.; *finfftzig jar* ÷ R. 50 *chan* (sic *đ*)] bin (P. Part. missing) R. 51 *in — kappen*] mit der *grobē fech* (!) R. 53 *in, der stat* ÷ R. 53f. *schöwent — end*] *schamē* sich die *jungen frawen* die *nit anders schmeckent dān flaischlich ding* etc.

alltag ainest schaid von allen creaturen, dz ain ougenblick zu tond hat mit keiner creatur also lang biß aller gotz Dienst vff erdrtrich volbracht würt. So gon ich zü der andern üebung, Vnd (104^v) entledig mein hertz von allen ingezognen bilden
 20 vnd von allen vnützen gedencken, dz der kainer belib zwiscent mir vnd Got.
 Do sprach der maister : , Frow, seint dz eüwer vßwendig üebungen, so sagent mir durch Got, was sind eüwer inwendig üebungen ? ' Do sprach dz fröwlin gar demütiglichen : , Here, die erst inwendig üebung ist, dz ich alle (105^r) tag siche, wie dan Got der vatter sein ewig wort erhöcht hat in dem künschen lib siner lieben
 25 müter *Maria*, da er inn ist gelegen .viiiij. monat. Het es die gehorsami seines himelschen vatter nit geton vnd het es des menschen säligkait nit gehindert, er wer lieber darin gewesen tausent jar dan .viiiij. monat. Noch hundert malen lieber wonet er in ainem rainen hertzen gaistlich dan in siner lieben müter leiplich. Die ander üebung (105^v) ist, dz ich mich besich in dem spiegel vnd in dem
 30 gebenedicten namen meins süssen Heren Jhesu vnd sich sin gerechtigkeit vnd sin barmherzigkait, also tieff alß ich imer kan vnd mag. So gon ich dan zü der dritten üebung vnd bad vnd wäsch mich in den blütigen roßen farben wunden meines süßen herren, vnd hab des ain gantze züversicht vnd ain gantzen volkümnen globen : alles das, dz noch mir (106^r) gebrist, dz Got der here an mir mit sinen
 35 hailigen leyden erfüllen will.'

Do der maister dz erhört, do ward er bitterlich wainen vnd sprach : , Frow, habend jr ainen man ? seind jr in der e ? habend jr kind, hand ir güit, hand jr er der welt ? ' Da sprach sÿ : , Ja ich here, die ding hon ich alle.' Da sprach der maister : , Sagent mir güte frow, wie mügent jr dz alles thün ? ' Da sprach
 40 die frow gar demütiglichen : , Gütter here, was schadend mir die ding ? Jr sollend (106^v) wißen, ich gib meinen kinden ir notturfft vnd züchs vff kainen vbermüt ; ich thon inen alles, dz inn zü gehört, Got zu ainem lob. Ich thün auch nit mit meinen knechten noch mit meinen megten alß ob ich frow in dem hauß sÿ : nit anders leb ich mit inen allen den werent wir alle geschwistergit.
 45 Wen ich dz alles gethon hon vnd in die kirchen kum vnd ain stätlin gehalten mag, dz als weit ist, dz ich baid füß gesetzen mag, so senck ich mich (107^r) also tieff in Gott, dz ich main, dz nymand leb in der zit dan Christus vnd ich allain.'

Da sprach der maister : , Frow, jr sind in ainem rechten weg. Bittend Gott für mich armen brüder, der sin kor kappen hat getragen finfftzig jar vnd haist ain
 50 maister götlicher kunst, vnd chan noch nie zü der volkumenhait. Ich hab ouch grosse sorg vnd angst, das manger sj geganen in ainer fächinen kor kappen finfftzig jar nach dem brött, der auch nimer me zü der volkumen- (107^v) hait kumpt., Nun Sehent ! dz was nun ain fröwlin in der .e. der stat. Nu schöwent auch jr junckfröwlin, die jr hertz in der welt er vnd güit kerent. Nit mer ist mir wissen-
 55 lich von dem edlen .e. fröwlin zü schriben, den : ain iegeliche .e. frow besser sich dar ab nach irem höchsten vermügen ; dz ist mein rat mit gantzen vertruwen.

This story, like the works in whose midst it is to be found, is a typical instance of late fifteenth-century popular mystical literature in Germany ; it is a product of the period in which

'der Tauler' and 'der Süß' had become generic terms for collections of pious storyettes, sentimental tracts and *Büchlein* dealing with the infinite love of God; it represents mysticism on the decline.¹ We shall therefore not be surprised to discover that, according to the evidence of the textual variants, it appears to be a matter of indifference whether a given devotion is described as being 'inward' or 'outward': of the three 'outward' devotions of text A two appear in B as 'inward' and the third has no rubric; the three 'inward' devotions of A come under the heading 'outward' in B. The devout souls who read such literature would not be versed in the technicalities of speculative mysticism; none of the devotions listed—with the possible exception of church-going—would to them appear to be 'outward', so that the classification of the six in two groups of three must be considered a popular, formal, rather than a logical arrangement.² I believe that I can show that the rubrics 'outward' and 'inward devotions' were, in fact, borrowed from a related story in which entirely different 'Übungen' were described. One would like to know what those same pious readers understood by such phrases as, 'bathe oneself in the rose-red wounds of Christ',³ 'mirror oneself in the blessed name of Christ'. Could even the writer of such lines at this period have explained their meaning? More important than the original sense of such inherited formulations were their sound and associations, the imagery, and the voluptuous thrill which they were still able to provoke. 'The Young Woman of Two-and-twenty' we may label the popular mystical variant of the story-type under discussion; more particularly it reflects the post-Suso sentimental mysticism of the convents.

With this simple tale I propose now to compare a considerably longer work, which has been published and which is quite well known; this is the tract *Swester Katrei, Meister Ekehartes tohter von Strâzburc*,⁴ which was long considered to be a work of

¹ [An attempt to assess the literature of 'Mysticism on the decline' positively, see *Miscellany*, §§ 1, 3 and *passim*.]

² It is purposeless to speculate on the relative merits of the arrangements in versions A and B, but it would appear that A is the older—B is evidently drawn from some letter or *Büchlein* and has a garbled text.

³ Cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 604.

⁴ Pfeiffer, ii, pp. 448 *sqq.*

Meister Eckehart himself. To anyone who has not recently read *Schwester Katrei*, and who has only its main outline in mind, the 'Young Woman of Two-and-twenty' will have sounded familiar; he will, intuitively, have recognised the essential affinity of the two works.

3.

Schwester Katrei (SK) is not now accepted as a work of Eckehart; it was composed by a zealous emulator and is, moreover, almost certainly a mosaic tract made up of gleanings from speculative mystic writings. Simon¹ has already shown that certain long digressions—an interpretation of the two loaves and five fishes and a disquisition on faith—were added latest: they do not occur in the earlier MSS. of SK. The rest of the tract comprises (four or) five dialogues between a confessor and his spiritual child (Pfeiffer, ii, p. 452, 11-33; 455 (below)-458, 35; 460, 35-462, 18 and 463, 15 f., whereby a long and more recent digression, 465, 19-467, 27, splits the fourth into two). It is particularly, but not exclusively, the section 467, 27 *sqq.*, which is recalled by the exemplum. With ll. 6-9 of Text A, above, compare:

Si sprichet, herre, wisent mich den nêhsten wec zuo mîner êwigen sêlikeit' (Pfeiffer, ii, p. 456, 1). Er sprach, niht ennim dich des an, ez ist vrouwen niht gegeben' (*ibid.*, l. 18).

In SK the young woman has already followed the advice of her confessor and had communion with God before he asks her what have been her devotions ('Übungen'), and to what causes she attributes her state of grace. She then describes (467, 27 *sqq.*) ten 'outward' 'Übungen' (*ûzzerr übungen*)—which, indeed, deserve the names 'outward', and 'Übung', for they describe her mode of life and her dealings with her fellows. He continues, 'Nû hâstû mir geseit von ûzzerr üebunge: nû sage mir von inrer üebunge' (468, 16 *sqq.*). She describes *one* which she calls 'inward': whilst in the state of grace she dwelt in heaven and moved about amongst heavenly beings. The rubrics which we

¹ Otto Simon, *Überlieferung und Handschriftenverhältnis des Traktates S. K.*, Diss. Halle, 1906. (This work was consulted before the present article was prepared and has not since been available.)

know from the *exemplum* are here used with some meaning. Commenting on his own unworthiness, the confessor uses the following expressions which resemble those of his counterpart in the simpler tale :

, ach mich armen man, wie mac ich mich sô wol schamen vor den ougen gotes, daz ich sô lange geistlichen schîn hân gehabt und ich sô wênic bevunden hân götlicher heimlichkeit ' (463, 37-40) ; , wizzet, diz (her state of grace) ist allen menschen fremde, unde wêre ich niht ein solich pffaffe, daz ich ez selber gelesen hête von götlicher kunst, sô wêre ez mir ouch fremde ' (464, 32-34).

We have, in the *exemplum* and SK, two almost contemporary versions of the same story of the penitent whose life is more godly than that of her confessor—the naïve and the sophisticated variants. In the latter the basic theme is made the framework for a mass of theological argument. Beside the simple housewife of the *exemplum* we have the blue-stocking who ousts her confessor in subtle debate, turns the tables on him and becomes his instructor—incidentally ruining the point of the story, which is that a simple woman shall triumph over a competent theologian.

The elaborate trappings of SK were, however, not an adequate disguise ; a number of collectors recognised that it was, fundamentally, of the same stock as such stories as *Die fromme Müllerin* and *St. Bernhards Tochter*, and proceeded to reduce it again to its simple basic formula. One such revised version of SK, based in fact on one of the longer texts which Simon has called *Fassung II*, is to be found in the John Rylands German MS. 11, where it immediately precedes 'The Young Woman of Two-and-twenty'. It is thus composed :

(f. 191^v-199^v) Pfeiffer, ii, p. 467, 27—468, 1 + 468, 5-11, 13-35 + 468, 36—469, 10 + 473, 28-39 + 474, 1-26 + 458, 11-19 + Got ist ain gaist vnd die Jn/an peten musen vnd stülen/an peten jm geist vnd jn der/warheit (*Rubric*) + 449, 35-39 + 461, 10-23 + 462, 12-14 + 465, 29-35 (*lebens*) + 460, 39—461, 9.

Within the excerpted passages the idiom is simplified and certain mystic metaphors (e.g. 'he came to her in a foreign land') are given a literal sense. The new version begins with the (fourth or) fifth of the SK dialogues, in which the young woman's 'Übungen' are discussed. Certain passages from other dialogues are included, in which purification through suffering and the importance of avoiding contact with one's fellows—themes

dealt with in every mystic sermon and tract—are discussed. By main force the five dialogues have here been reduced to one, and the contents popularised and simplified.

The adapter responsible for this version of SK must have recognised the tract's ancestry; that he or she failed to discover a passage which could easily have been modified to supply the customary conclusion in stories of the same stock ('Go and pray for me, a poor sinner')—see *Miscellany*, p. 478, note 2. However unsatisfactory the adaptation may be, one cannot but be impressed by the trouble which the writer responsible has taken to recover the simple tale. Other adapters of SK proceeded more rigorously. Spamer, listing MSS. of SK, notes certain versions which transmit only the one dialogue in which 'Übungen' are discussed. In the Melk MS. 371 in 2°, f. 319^{rb}, for instance, the text of Pfeiffer 467, 30—468, 15 is preceded by the simple introductory phrase, *Ein andächtige Junchfraw ward in hahe volchömenhait tzogen. dý fragt ir peichtuater, was sý am meisten zw irer sölchen sállichait tzogen hiet.*¹ One cannot know more about the SK texts—whether *Fassung I* or *Fassung II*—which were used in these cases. It is clear that several writers felt that SK called for simplification, and for the removal of accretions.

In an earlier cast of this article I adduced, as evidence to prove that SK had been known in a form considerably shorter than that published by Pfeiffer, a late Middle High German *Priamel* (a doggerel didactic genre, consisting, normally, of a series of precepts) to be found in a Wolfenbüttel MS. (published in *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters* xiv, as Nr. 609). After a rubric, *Ein peicht vater fragt eyn sel, was sein peicht kint, warumb si wer selig worden auf erden*, and the introductory couplet, *Ein beichtvater ain nachtz sas / und fragt ein sel die sein peicht kint was*, we find a rhymed version of that same dialogue from SK which deals with the ten 'outward' and the one 'inward' 'Übungen'. It seemed to me inconceivable that the *Priamel* should be an adaptation of the tract as I knew it from Pfeiffer. It would now appear that it is merely a rhymed version of the one dialogue,

¹ *Beiträge*, xxxiv, p. 367 (with further references).

and that its immediate source was an excerpt ¹ of the type referred to above.

Dependent on SK are therefore the Rylands redaction, the excerpted single passages and, consequently, the *Priamel*—the latter two need not go back to the full-length text edited by Pfeiffer. My reasons for believing that at least the rubrics 'inwendige übungen', 'auswendige übungen',² in the actual dialogue of 'The Young Woman of Two-and-twenty' are derived from the tract I have summarised in *Miscellany*, pp. 479 *sqq.* The text of SK used by the author of the exemplum may have been an early, simple, or late, simplified form of the tract: the naïve version is dependent on, and later than, the sophisticated one.

4.

I wish now to examine one special variation on the theme common to all the stories under consideration; I find it in one exemplum, which I have printed below, and in the stanzas 56-91 of a medieval Dutch religious ballad known as the *Beghinchen von Paris*.³ The person interrogated is, in both cases, a Beguine; the interrogator is in the one case a village priest (setting: a village church, confession), in the other a Mother Superior (scene: a Beguines' convent). The latter challenges the Beguine and demands to know why she 'goes to church only on the

¹ [I am still convinced that an expert student of the literature of the German Mystics would be able to prove that SK is a mosaic-tract, and that it is, moreover, none too skilfully composed. As it stands, it will not bear close analysis. See, further, *Miscellany*, p. 479, and p. 480, note 2.]

² A possible source of the actual formulations given under the rubrics may be such a gnomic compilation of devotions as the following entry seems to indicate: Hildesheim MS. 724b, f. 123a, Dusse worde sprac broder Hinrick van Loeven. De mensche de godes wil syn, deme behoven to holden ses stucken, der syn dri van buten vnd dri van bynnen, Strauch, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, xli, p. 21.

³ The most convenient text of this poem is in Schade, *Geistliche Gedichte vom Niederrhein*, Hanover, 1854, p. 333 f. Through the good offices of the University Librarian in Copenhagen I was able to consult, in the summer of 1936, R. Segebrecht, *Von dem Beghinchen zu Paris. Vergleichung der überlieferten Fassungen und Herstellung eines kritischen Textes*, Diss. in typescript, Hamburg, 1921. The only emendation in the critical text which is relevant to the present study is noted below.

Sabbath' / 'never goes to church'. She explains that on Monday she cannot, on Tuesday she cannot—on no day but the Sabbath / not even on the Sabbath—can she go to church, for she is 'busy'; the 'business' of each day is described, and is the contemplation of some phase of Christ's Passion. The interrogator admits that the Beguine's piety is adequate and that her way of life is more pleasing in the eyes of God than that of her critic.

Von ainer sälligen pegeinen.¹

ES was ains mals ain salige pegein, Vnd die kam jn ain dorff Vnd peichtet ainem priester. Vnd jn andacht sy furtt ain hailig leben, Aber sy gieng jn der gantzen wochen nit zw kirchen den an dem suntag. Da fragt sy der
5 priester, was sy da mit mainte, Das sy nit zw kirchen gieng In der wochen.

Do sprach Sy: , Da han ich (255^v) an dem montag mein gärttlein gegeten.' Do sprach er: , Wie hast du das gärttlein gegeten?' Do sprach sy: , Do han ich betrachtet alle meine
10 verlorne zeÿtt, Die ich ye verloren han, Das ich mein sele rainige von allen sunden Vnd von allen masen. Dar vm pin ich so vnmussig gewesen, Das ich nit zu der kirchen kumen pin.'

Do sprach der herre: , Was hettest Du an dem erctag² tan, das du nit zw der kirchen kumen pist?' Do sprach sy: , Ich
15 pin zeratt gangen, Vnd han (256^r) wetrachtet, wie die Juden vnseren Herren habent verraten.'³

Do sprach er: , Was hast du dan an der mitwochen getan?' Do sprach sy: , Do han ich flaisch gekaufft.' Do sprach er: , Wie hast dw flaisch kafft?' Do sprach sy: , Do han ich
20 betrachtett, wie vnser Herre Jhesus Xristus, das vnschuldig plutt Vnd lämplein, verkafft ist worden von seinem jungeren Judas, das ich nit kunde kumen zw der kirchen.'

Do sprach er: , Was hast dw dan an dem pfindstag getan, das dw nit zw der kirchen kumen pist?' (256^v). Do sprach sy:

¹ I have not succeeded in discovering a second text of this exemplum; it is reproduced here from the John Rylands Germ. MS. 11, f. 225^r-258^r.

² MS.: *erstn*. See *Miscellany*, p. 480, note 4.

³ What answer preceded the allegorical interpretation? Perhaps, *Do bin ich in dem markt gewesen*.

, Do pin ich jn dem pad gewesen.' Do sprach er : , Wie pist 25
 dw jn dem pad gewesen ? ' Do sprach sy : , Do han ich be-
 trachtet Den pluttigen schwaiß, den vnser Herre an dem Ölperg
 geschwitzet hatt, Vnd pin so vnmussig gewesen mit dem be-
 trachten des leydens vnsers lieben Herren, das ich jm gedanckt
 han der grossen liebe, die er zw mir gehabt hatt, Das er mich 30
 so willigleich erlost hatt von dem ewigen tod. Vnd do han ich
 geschwitzett jn der betrachtung, Als war ich (257^r) im pad gewe-
 sen. Vnd dar vm pin ich so vnmussig gewesen in der wetrach-
 tung, Das ich nicht zw der kirchen komen mocht.'

Do sprach er : , Was tetzt du an dem freytag ? ' Do sprach 35
 sy : , Do han ich ainem siechen seines endes gewartt.' Do
 sprach er : , Wie hast du den ainem gewarttet ? Nu ist doch
 jn meiner pfar nyemant kranck noch siech gewesen.' Do sprach
 sy : , Do pin ich vnder dem creutz gestanden jn meiner betrach-
 tung, Vnd pin gestanden pey Maria Vnd han ir geholffen klagen 40
 ir kind, (257^v) das ich nit mocht zw der kirchen komen.

Do sprach er : , Was hettest dw am samstag tan, do du nit
 zw der kirchen komen pist ? ' Do sprach sy : , Ich pin pey der
 grebnuß gewesen, das ich zu der kirchen nicht komen mocht.'
 Do sprach er : , Pey was grebnuß pist dw gewesen ? ' Do sprach 45
 sy : , Do han ich trachtet die wegrebnuß Jhesu Xristi, das ich
 zw der kirchen nit mocht komen. Nu pin ich an dem suntag
 zw der kirchen komen.'

Do sprach der herre : , Nu gang hin ; dein leben ist säliger
 dann das mein. (258^r) Ich frag dich furpas nymer war vm du 50
 nit zw der kirchen gast xc.'

What is common to the *Beghinnen* stanzas and our exemplum was indicated in the outline given above. The resemblance is so striking that the dependence of the one text on the other seems likely. The sources of the *Beghinnen* is a problem which has not been attacked hitherto.¹ I am encouraged by the fact that the last third of the ballad seems to have its own independent source in a popular allegorical tract, *De speghel denes hertin*,²

¹ According to the article on the work in Stammeler, *Verfasserlexikon*, i, cols. 183-185, no source is known.

² Cf. Borchling, *Reisebericht*, i, p. 258 ; iii, pp. 31, 52, 158.

to advance that the middle section, with which we are now concerned, has its own source, which may well have been a version of our exemplum. The *present differences* between the story according to the exemplum and according to stanzas 56-91 of the *Beghinchen* seem to me to be explainable by reference to the Beguine's pre-history in the ballad version, i.e. to be *consequential modifications* in the latter.

It is said in the Dutch ballad that the Beguine was the daughter of a Parisian family of rank ; that, in order to become a Beguine, she had renounced family, wealth, and worldly honour (Schade, stanzas 1-38). Though she had given the oath of obedience, she now steadfastly refuses to go to Church, to sew and to spin :

*Jesus hat min herz geraicht
soe vast mit siner minnen,
dat ich zo kirchen niet gain enmach
noch neien noch wirken noch spinnen.* (Stanza 48)

The latter couplet embodies the central theme of the ballad, and occurs before the point where the adaptation of the exemplum story begins. The consequential modifications are : (1) The priest of the exemplum had *asked the pegein why she did not go to church* ; the Superior of the ballad, endeavouring to persuade the *Beghinchen* to obedience, *suggests that she should go to church*.¹ (2) The *Beghinchen* can no more go to church on the Sabbath than on any other day. (3) The 'business' which kept the *pegein* occupied was first described as being a normal worldly activity (' I had to weed my garden ', ' I attended a dying person ', etc.) and then interpreted allegorically. The allegorical statement is dropped in the ballad, because its verbal content would clash with the assertion ' ich . . . enmach noch neien noch wirken noch spinnen '. (The *pegein's* allegorical statement and interpretation would seem—but perhaps my construction is too modern—to recommend a compromise between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* ; the *Beghinchen* emulates Mary and

¹ According to Schade's text the Superior suggests for whom, or for what boon, she should pray (stanzas 66, 72, 87). This feature is not to be found in the exemplum, but the couplets in which these suggestions are made are altered in Segebrecht's critical text to *hebdi eene dach begonnen / hi brocht den andern in* (which occurs only in stanza 59 in Schade).

not Martha and the allegory is dropped, in spite of the fact that the ballad contains a good deal of allegory). (4) — is consequential on 2: the 'contemplations' assigned to each day, and which keep the *pegein* 'vnmussig' and the *Beghinchen* 'unledich', do not always correspond in the two texts. This is possibly because the exemplum did not provide a 'contemplation' for the Sabbath—the day on which the *pegein* went to church to confess. It is worth while noting that gnostic compilations of 'contemplations of the Passion, arranged for the days of the week' or 'arranged for the canonical hours' are one of the commoner recurring entries in descriptive catalogues of fifteenth-century manuscripts; the adaptor, having dropped the allegorical figure, would not feel bound to follow his source on this point.¹ The *Beghinchen* stanzas may, therefore, well be an adaptation of the exemplum story.

There my juggling with imponderables must cease. The material discussed raises numerous further questions which I could formulate but which I am not equipped to answer; there are doubtless many others whose existence I have simply not recognised. If my notes provoke others to publish the material which they consider relevant, and to reassess, if necessary, the value of what I have made known, I shall have achieved my purpose.

¹ Short gnostic compilations of 'contemplations of the Passion' are necessarily stereotyped: the sequence of the scenes 'contemplated' is that of the events of the actual Passion Week. There is not absolute uniformity in the selection of scenes and events to be contemplated, however, nor in the allocation of the scenes to given days, for the events of Thursday to Sunday had to provide the material for seven days' or seven hours' contemplations. [I note that certain connected accounts of the Passion have been provided, by copyists, with marginals to indicate what sections should be read at the different hours, e.g. the version in the Cues MS. of *Christi Leiden in einer Vision geschaut* (ed. Priebsch, Heidelberg, 1936).]