

**OLD GERMAN THEOLOGY, A
HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE THE
REFORMATION. WITH A PREFACE
BY MARTIN LUTHER.
TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN**

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Old German Theology, a Hundred Years before the Reformation. With a Preface by Martin Luther. Translated from the German by Georgiana Harcourt

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GEORGIANA HARCOURT

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OLD
German Theology,
A HUNDRED YEARS
BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

WITH
A PREFACE BY MARTIN LUTHER.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN,
BY MRS. MALCOLM,
DAUGHTER OF THE LATE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.



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1854.

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TO
GUIDO VON USEDOM,
PRUSSIAN ENVOY AT THE COURT OF ROME.

MY DEAR BARON USEDOM,

As you first brought to my notice this "noble little book," and as, aided and encouraged by you, I have ventured upon giving my translation of it to the public, I feel anxious, by dedicating it to you, to show my appreciation of your valuable assistance. I have to the best of my ability followed your advice in making it almost a literal translation, and trust that I have not impaired its simple force, or changed the meaning of a single word in the original. I am well aware that some may

think it too abstruse, and others may even accuse it of not being quite orthodox ; but I think all will consider it a very remarkable specimen of the pure and spiritual religion that was to be found in the Mystic School of Germany at a period when so much corruption and formalism had crept into the Church ; and the beautiful lessons it teaches of humility and self-surrender may be useful in an age like ours, in which self-seeking and intellectual pride are so fearfully prevalent.

Believe me,

Your affectionate Sister-in-Law,

GEORGIANA MALCOLM.

67, SLOANE STREET,
JAN. 31, 1854.

P R E F A C E.

VERY little is known of the Author of this remarkable work.

In the short Preface found in the old editions, and in a lately discovered manuscript, he is called the Frankfort author (*der Franckforter*), and is said to have been a knight of the Teutonic order, priest and warden (or *custos*) in the chapter-house of that order at Frankfort. This building still bears the name of the Teutonic House (*Deutsche Haus*), and may be found at the entrance of *Sachsenhausen*, the suburb of Frankfort after passing the bridge of the *Maine*.

The Teutonic order was of the same character as the Hospitallers of *St. John* and the *Knights Templars*, and its laws were in conformity with theirs. Like them, it was originally founded for the support of the struggles in the *Holy Land*, and became after-

wards the mightiest instrument in the hands of the Pope and the Emperor for subduing, and, so to say, converting with the sword Prussia proper.

We learn further that he was a member of the Union of Mystic "*Gottesfreunde*," a secret religious society, composed of ecclesiastics and laymen of all conditions, the object of which was to oppose the pernicious errors propagated by an heretical sect denominated the brothers of the "*Freyer Geistes*," and the work itself gives internal evidence that such was the case.

The Author evidently belonged to that great school of ascetic theologians of which Tauler, Thomas à Kempis, Suso and others are the principal representatives. The scholastic school of the middle ages, and its endless and dry speculations, united with the fantastic and visionary tendency of monastic life, had brought on a reaction in the development of the German mind. The power and simplicity of Christian ascetic life, the flight of the soul from itself and from the world into the inward kingdom of God through Christ, has never perhaps found a stronger and livelier expression than in this

book. Perhaps never either in the writings of the Fathers, or in the solitude of the Thebais, or even in all those powerful minds that from the first centuries were regenerated by the Gospel, and fought and promoted its cause, has the essence of Christianity been more purely and deeply understood than in the circle of these men, whose souls sought a *direct* communion with God.

As there are no traces of the "*Gottesfreunde*" after the conclusion of the fourteenth century, it is evident that this work must have been written before that period; but it was not printed as a whole until 1518, when Luther published it with a preface by himself. He gave it the title under which it has since been known in German literature, "*Eyn Deutsch Theologia*," *i.e.* a German Theology; probably not only meaning, that it was written in the German language, but also that in opposition to Roman Theology it might be particularly appropriated for the great movement which the "German Theologians" had just commenced, and which brought about the Reformation of the sixteenth century.