



Encounters with Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard

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Encounters with Kierkegaard is a collection of every known eyewitness account of the great Danish thinker. Through many sharp observations of family members, friends and acquaintances, supporters and opponents, the life story of this elusive and remarkable figure comes into focus, offering a rare portrait of Kierkegaard the man.

Often viewed by his contemporaries as a person who deliberately cultivated an air of mystery and eccentricity, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) has been, then and now, a subject of great speculation. His startling attack on the established church, his broken engagement with a young woman from a respected family, and his searing criticisms of literary figures--from the editors of *The Corsair* to Hans Christian Andersen--are among the acts that brought him much notoriety during his short lifetime. Yet arriving at a sense of the philosopher's personality and motives behind his behavior has been a difficult task. He left no memoirs of autobiography, but in the enormous cannon of his published writings, the author and the person Søren Kierkegaard is problematically present in a welter of disguises. An indispensable path to understanding what he was like as a person, maintains Bruce Kirmmse, is through the observations of his contemporaries.

These accounts, ranging from the writings of Meir Aron Goldschmidt, editor of *The Corsair*, to the recollections of Kierkegaard's fiancée, are organized around the major episodes of the philosopher's life. They enable us to glimpse, among many things, his spiritual and intellectual development, to get a sense of what it was like to be the object of his friendship or his wrath, and to examine various persons' opinions about his relationship with his young fiancée. The memories of this woman, Regine Olsen, who later married Fritz Schlegel, are among the most moving passages: they reveal her profound suffering, her personal understanding of Kierkegaard, and the satisfaction she ultimately felt, knowing that "he took her with him into history." This collection of first-hand accounts invites the reader to compare and interpret a wealth of fascinating stories, and in the end forms an intriguing "do-it-yourself" biography for both the scholar and general reader.

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