

It is therefore a little disappointing that when he does speak of the early Fathers of the Order, one gets the impression that Thomas Merton is harassed by an unconscious desire to measure them by the standards of a later and alien spirituality. Why is it, for instance, that when one turns to his account of St Aelred's sure and clear teaching on spiritual friendship one reads by way of introduction that: 'Theorising upon this point may be rather confusing, it is too abstract to be clearly grasped.'? Certainly there is nothing 'confusing' in St Aelred's carefully developed thought—unless, of course, one wished to accommodate his conception of friendship as a genuine asceticism and school of perfection, which like all schools takes in beginners with their lopsidedness and their defects, to a rather different ideal of disembodied relationships which he scarcely envisaged. It would have seemed incongruous to St Aelred—as indeed it would have done to St Thomas—that God's servants should ignore what we here find referred to as the 'merely' natural and human qualities of their friends when God himself does not ignore them. Is it not precisely nature and particular individuals that grace comes to restore and sanctify? It is wholesome occasionally to remind ourselves that we can become so concerned to avoid anything that might injure the supernatural life that we also succeed in preventing it ever producing the smallest effect on our wounded nature, or drawing into its orbit the entire personality. Yet this is the goal of all prayer and all mysticism. The early Cistercians had a particularly sound and certain grasp of the effect of the whole of Christ on the whole man, and it seems a pity to make them appear at less than their true stature. AELRED SQUIRE, O.P.

THE FATHERS OF THE WESTERN CHURCH. By Robert Payne. (Heinemann; 21s.)

ST BERNARD: ON THE SONG OF SONGS. Translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (Mowbray; 12s. 6d.)

Mr Payne uses the technique of the poster—bright colours, simple outlines and a dash of modernity. In some ways it is a pleasant change from the conventions of hagiography, but it does not inspire confidence in the accuracy of the pictures drawn: it succeeds best perhaps in the chapters on Ambrose and Augustine; in particular scenes—Ambrose's grief at the death of Valentinian II, Augustine's winter in retirement before his baptism; and it fails worst in attempting to present something of the mind and thought of the Fathers in so brief a compass. Since, surprisingly for a novelist, Mr Payne seems to have little sense of period, this treatment becomes ludicrous in the case of St Thomas, for the author's idea of a Father of the Church is elastic enough to include him and St Francis, but not St Bede or St Anselm. One can only hope that, like a poster, this book will attract the hitherto uninformed to the Fathers themselves.

It is with relief and pleasure that one turns to the selection and translation from St Bernard's Homilies on the Canticle of Canticles made by a member of the Anglican community at Wantage. The selection comprises about a third of the total volume, the extracts vary considerably in length, enabling the reader to appreciate St Bernard's power to sustain his exposition, and the translation is fresh and original, sometimes even colloquial, but never in such a way as to offend.

B.W.

WOMAN TODAY. By John Fitzsimons. (Sheed and Ward; 8s. 6d.)

If you have lived to see the home as the centre of life in process of destruction, and women deprived of the only place in which they were the indispensable partners of man, you will welcome the retracing of many false steps urged and implied in Fr Fitzsimon's book. This is a critical and sympathetic study of the winter of discontent that has succeeded the suffragette heyday. It shows how industrialism robbed women of the richly creative life they led when everything possible was made at home. Industrialism left the bored mistress of equally bored maids to play golf or bridge. The girl in the factory learnt no home skills and could not pass on to her daughters what she had not learnt herself. A generation that had largely forgotten to be women aspired to be men. The idea goes back to the French Revolution. It is ironical to reflect that Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin—of all unsatisfactory mothers of unsatisfactory daughters—was its English pioneer.

'Education' was called in to redress the balance. How perverse this education was (and is) is emphasised nowadays by psychologists, biologists and educationalists. Many of these are quoted by Father Fitzsimons and listed in a useful bibliography. There are some amusing extracts from the superseded doctrinaires. The Spens Report, for instance, would confine handicrafts to 'the less gifted girls'. One can imagine the gifted ones getting on with their Algebra while their half-witted sisters were allowed to do something creative which would be a joy to themselves and their families. A woman who knows more and more about less and less is a sadder spectacle than a man in the same case.

It is realised that every woman may not marry or become a nun. But the spinster has, as Pope Pius XII maintained, a vocation of her own, and its reality and enrichment are well handled here.

The theology of women is not the most attractive chapter in the book. Perhaps it would be best to let bygones be bygones. In any case it is a pity to represent St Jerome by one of his sillier diatribes instead of the magnificent dedication to Paula and Eustochium; and it would have been only fair to remember that St Theresa liked her nuns 'manly'.

HELEN PARRY EDEN