

mathematics. For Ficino and Pico, it was a science only in the sense that it was an hermeneutic, the ancillary tool of the *magi*. Numerology as such owed much to the re-translation of the Hermetic texts and the revived interests in the Cabala during the sixteenth century. From this initial interest in the relation of numbers came the eventual interest in the relation of numerical quantity and the representation quality of mathematics (much in the same vein as the late scholastic debates on language produced the first genuine interest in vernacular grammar as representational schema). The move from magic (the control over matter) to scientific method (manipulation of matter) was easy when the change in *episteme* became apparent. Unfortunately, devising a world picture of the transition from the hermeneutical to the

descriptive methodology was not included in this study.

The discussion of Kepler as both a transitional figure (he was a magus and a scientist) is enlightening and entertaining, as is the work on Bacon. But both suffer from the chronic problem of the book: too superficial an account in the details, and too much detail in the mechanics of the theories, which are hard to understand without a detailed background. The style, too, makes it difficult to read. We do receive some good information about trends and movements, but too few carefully argued conclusions that would open us to a vista of the history of scientific development that would allow us to take its intellectual temperature during this critical period.

MICHAEL WEST OBORNE

**TERTULLIAN: A HISTORICAL AND LITERARY STUDY**, by Timothy David Barnes. *Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press*, pp. 285, £6.

Even if there had been no acknowledgements it would be patent from intrinsic evidence that the author of this study belongs to the school of Sir Ronald Syme. The English style is felicitously similar and the genre is that of Sir Ronald's 'Tacitus'. Yet at least there are enough facts known about the life of Tacitus to place him in his social milieu. Dr Barnes' approach to the traditional lives of Tertullian is perhaps rightly destructive. He discards the twenty lines on Tertullian composed by Jerome, the suggested identification with Tertullian the Jurist and even the hypothesis that the Bishop attacked in the 'De Pudicitia' was Callistus of Rome.

It is an old Oxford adage that a negative result is the best evidence of positive scholarship. This is an admirable doctorate thesis. Its

most valuable section analyses the evidence for Tertullian's wide reading. It places him rather too squarely in his Carthaginian milieu; it is hard to believe that he wrote his Greek treatises for a Carthaginian audience. But it provides new material on the development of Christianity in North Africa and illuminating parallels with Apuleius. There is much more to be said on Tertullian as a theologian, but as the subtitle suggests the emphasis is on his secular setting.

This study has so many merits, lucid style, a healthy cynicism and much detailed research. But there is one fact that it does not convey about Tertullian—the central truth that he was a genius if possibly a slightly mad one.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

**ONE MAN AGAINST THE DRYLANDS**, by Peggie Benton, *Collins*, £2.50.

This book is about Brazil—a nation caught up in the socio-political evolution that is stirring the whole of Latin America today. But *One man against the Drylands* does not treat this theme on the broad canvas of national movements of initiative and protest. Rather, it belongs to that literary genre of biography that concerns itself with individuals who have unobtrusively identified themselves with a particular group within the larger community.

It is understandable that those preoccupied with the greater issues are simply not aware of

the more limited human plight. Where a choice of priorities must be made one tends to be committed to what is thought to be central and to shelve the supposedly marginal. Often it is more clamorous that tends to be heeded and muted voice is largely ignored. Consequently, the 'hero' of this kind of book is something of a prophet, doggedly articulating a human need in the fact of ignorance and massive indifference. He is a solitary figure caught in the circle of having to achieve something before he can

gain support; requiring that support before he can achieve anything.

Padre Manuel Lira Parente is such a man, with a pastoral concern for a people scattered over a vast area of north-east Brazil—where the land is so barren that it is aptly compared to 'a dry mutton bone without a scrap of meat'. Here life is interpreted and conditioned by seasonal droughts. A people that values the freedom and independence of possessing one's own piece of land—even if it is little better than a desert—has no desire to move to the city.

Padre Lire shows an immense respect for these sentiments. Scrupulously he avoids paternalistic hand-outs and promotes a movement towards self-sufficiency and responsibility towards the community. Thus the girl who has learnt embroidery at school is encouraged to use the profits from the sale of her work to buy her own sewing machine; the family that has received a number of goats pledges itself to make payment in kind when the animals have borne young. One reads of the communal effort to build roads, reservoirs, a shoe factory and even an air-strip. In fact, one can say that

Padre Lira's objective is to establish communities in which celebration—both social and liturgical—plays an important part.

If he deserves our sympathy it is surely over the constant need to raise funds. Often he is the victim of the broken promise, procrastination and the obtuseness of bureaucracy.

However, in Muriel Heading Mitchell, a widow living in England and the sister-in-law of the author, he found an ally who by her persistence recruited the support of agencies such as Oxfam and Cafod, and herself sent over clothing and other gifts. It is from this correspondence with his 'English Mother' that he emerges as more than a faceless hero. To her he revealed his profound trust in God, his love for the people he served, his hopes and fears, successes and disappointments.

Peggie Benton has identified herself with her subject. Years spent in Brazil, her friendship with Padre Lira, her having visited the scene of his work, her interest in people rather than projects, make her book authentic—an unpretentious tribute to an essentially unpretentious man.

PETER CLARKE, O.F.

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