

them, and above all a statement which has hardly been surpassed in force of the great traditional doctrines of the incomprehensibility of God and the total dependence on him of all creation; his concluding chapters, too, on the universe (in the second book) suggests that he had a mind which could have made better philosophical and religious sense of the achievements of modern scientific cosmology than we have so far managed to do.

The translation seems excellent, clear, and rising where necessary to nobility; and Dr Hawkins's illuminating and sympathetically critical Introduction could hardly be bettered, and will be a great help to any reader who finds that Nicholas's way of putting things at first completely defeats him.

A. H. ARMSTRONG

THE BOOK OF BEASTS. By T. H. White. (Cape; 32s. 6d.)

This is not a bad child's book of admonitory prose, but a translation—at times a paraphrase—of a twelfth-century English bestiary which was edited in facsimile some twenty-five years ago by M. R. James. It is a handsomely produced volume, with end-papers, illustrations, and some capitals from the manuscript, with the addition of a few relevant line-drawings of strange animals from ancient and eastern sources. The text itself is enlivened with footnotes of out-of-the-way prose and verse, a high proportion of it from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers, and with here and there an observation or a reflection of the translator. An appendix discusses the manuscript and the background and context of bestiaries.

That it is a charming and entertaining book no one will deny. Through it some medieval characterizations of animals, of their habits and mating and procreation will doubtless gain a wide currency, and unusual information, such as the exorcism against bees (p. 156, note 1), will probably be added to many a commonplace-book. But the reader will inevitably want to know how seriously this is to be taken as an edition of a bestiary. Certainly the appendix, which has some interesting ideas, is a good deal less cautious than Dr James was in its comments on the manuscript. By page 240 we find the slight possibility that it may have come from the Cistercian abbey of Revesby being spoken of almost as a fact, and theories being built upon it. The suggestion that several scribes in a scriptorium would be likely to take down a bestiary to dictation (p. 231) is the purest fancy, nor does the punctuation in a manuscript indicate pauses in the dictation (p. 243) but rather points the pauses to assist reading aloud. These, it may be said, are small matters. The translator may at least claim to have insisted to some purpose that a bestiary deserves to be treated as

'a serious work of natural history'. The delightful section on the swallow with its passing remark on the migratory habits of the bird, so many centuries before accurate observation, is there among many passages to bear him out. Yet it may be questioned whether even here the right note is struck. Mr White has perhaps never aspired to wear his medieval garments as one to the manner born. He is rather, in the older sense of the word, 'curious', and sees his twelfth century through the eyes of those later antiquarians who so often figure in his pages. His alert and critical faculty, which always insists on the objective, cannot quite permit him to enter a complete world the separate elements of which so fascinate him. Hence it is that he achieves less an attitude of genuine detachment than of a certain benign aloofness. We cannot altogether quieten a sneaking suspicion that there are moments when he is chucking his author under the chin. Certainly some such underlying division of sympathies makes itself felt. This is perhaps because the commentary does not find a way of coming to terms with what in the text is as conspicuous as the natural lore, namely the sense that the beasts are somehow symbols of moral forces, patterns, one might almost say, of the behaviour of spontaneous feeling. And here Mr White overlooked another seventeenth-century writer who is a true descendant from the authors of bestiaries as any careful naturalist. We meet the remora (p. 208) again in St Francis of Sales; he knows that the elephant only has one calf (p. 25) and makes it the basis of one of the most memorable examples in the *Treatise on the Love of God*. More recently, too, since dreams have come to be charted, the beasts have appeared again, for nothing makes them feel so much like breaking out as being exclusively confined to the hygienic conditions of a zoo. However, these reflections need spoil no one's pleasure at learning with Mr White's assistance just which bird to buy in order to discover if he is likely to rise again after a nasty attack of the 'flu.

AELRED SQUIRE, O.P.

CHINESE THOUGHT FROM CONFUCIUS TO MAO TSE-TUNG. By H. G. Creel. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 21s.)

It would be difficult to find a better introduction to Chinese thought than the present volume. Professor Creel made his name with his work on *Confucius: The Man and the Myth*, in which he succeeded in disentangling the true character of Confucius from the mass of tradition which has grown up round his name, and he can be relied on for exact scholarship. In the present work he has undertaken the very difficult task of giving a history of Chinese thought, based throughout on original sources and yet intended for the general reader. The effort of compression and the desire to be just to every school of thought has