

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 There are some amusing extracts from the superseded doctrinaires.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'.

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