

CATCH US THOSE LITTLE FOXES. By A Carmelite Nun. (Herder; 5s.)

Human common sense suffused by the gracious wisdom of holiness is the special quality of this Carmelite nun who has delighted a large public for many years. Her reflections on life in general and on modern holiness in particular have been presented in *Each Hour Remains, Our Eternal Vocation, Heartbreak Earth*. This time she gives us ninety-five pages of rich reflections, so arranged and divided up that the reader accompanies her through a typical day in a Carmelite life, each period of the day being a chapter. In this way it is a 'vocations' book, portraying Carmel for anyone who is interested and thinking of entering. Its general interest lies in this, that the picture of Carmelite life is generously filled in with thoughts about holiness in general: a typical Carmelite thinking aloud about her own life as a human life. It is extraordinary how often she says things which apply not only to Carmelites but to people in the world who are trying to live holily, to create what Dr John Wu calls an interior Carmel.

Sometimes the little Carmelite vignette seems merely an excuse for talking about something else. This is an advantage because whichever way she roams—history, liturgy, even philosophy—this writer has something helpful to say. Work, unselfishness, temptation, perplexity about God's will, all come up for mention.

In the chapter on vocation it is difficult to follow her all the way; there is perhaps a tendency to humanize the inscrutable ways of God in the calling, and holding, of souls.

The chapter on 'Prayer and the Way of it' is a gem of its kind. It will help everyone but especially those who are apt to get confused by degrees of prayer, theories of prayer or what Caryll Houselander used to call 'expertness in prayer'.

The best book yet from this gifted pen, it will console many, enlighten many, and help to spread commonsense holiness among lay people as well as religious.

G.M.C.

THE WESTERN FATHERS: *being the Lives of SS. Martin of Tours, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Honoratus of Arles, and Germanus of Auxerre.* Translated and edited by F. R. Hoare. (Sheed and Ward; 18s.)

THE ANGLO-SAXON MISSIONARIES IN GERMANY: *being the Lives of SS. Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba and Lebuin, together with the Hodoeporicon of St Willibald and a Selection from the Correspondence of St Boniface.* Translated and edited by C. H. Talbot. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

These are the first two volumes in Sheed and Ward's 'Makers of Christendom' series, of which the General Editor is Mr Christopher

Dawson. The series will eventually comprise a collection of Christian biographical documents coming right down to the present day. It will be a great monument to its originator; for the cultural importance of historical Christianity, which has been the theme of Mr Dawson's major works, most recently in his Gifford Lectures on Religion and Culture in 1948-9, will be demonstrated at last in a series of original documents far too long neglected by modern scholars and their students.

Mr Hoare's volume on the Western Fathers covers the fourth century (the period of S. L. Greenslade's *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius*, reviewed in these pages in December). It is the period when the constitutional distinctions between priests and bishops are becoming stereotyped; when the two forms of monasticism—the Antonian eremite type and the Pachomian conventual type—are both flourishing; when baptism is something deferred till near death, from a misguided notion that post-baptismal sins cannot be forgiven; and—grand delight as one reads the racy narratives—when bishops were sometimes consecrated at the defiant insistence of popular acclaim, and against all comers. Mr Talbot's volume covers the eighth century, that of the evangelizing of the Frisian and German lands by St Boniface and others from the British Islands.

Both books are a delight to read, save for one or two turgid or prolix sections in which not even the lively resource of the translator can redeem the shortcomings of the Latin. It is the aim throughout to 'preserve the feeling and manner of the original' and let the Lives speak for themselves. Where there is obscurity, we have footnotes to clarify or argue it, along with the footnote-biographies and footnote-cross-references. The translations abound with graphically 'modern' passages: for example, almost at random, the following, from Possidius's life of Augustine:

'So a day and place were fixed and they met in the presence of a large and interested audience and a crowd drawn by curiosity. The shorthand reporters opened their notebooks and the debate was opened on one day and concluded on the next. In the course of it, as the record of the proceedings shows, the exponent of Manicheism could neither refute the Catholic case nor succeed in proving that the sect of the Manichee was founded on truth. When he broke down in his final reply, he undertook to consult his superiors. . . .'

Some of these Lives—Sulpicius Severus on St Martin, Constantius of Lyons on St Germanus, Alcuin on St Willibrord—are better known than others. The most fascinating of the narratives are those of St Boniface, of 'Exanchester', going *via* 'Londenwich' and the North Sea on his German missionary enterprise; and of Willibald, monk of

Bishops Waltham Abbey, whose account of his years-long pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the middle of the eighth century was taken down from his own words upon his return to Germany, by a Heidenheim nun so caught up in what she was recording that at times the narrative says 'we'.

They were two great centuries. Mr Hoare has some tart things to say about the style and the credulity of some of the pious biographers; for miracles abound, devils are cast out wholesale, and these Ages of Saints are in general spectacular. But the truly historic influence of the Saints can never be gathered from standard monographs and secondary sources to anything like the extent possible for these first-hand, and sometimes day-to-day, accounts. For that reason, while the complete series will become in due time an authority for students, and for reference, each volume as it appears is for the general reader as well; for each is complete in its period, representative in its selection, and absorbing in its narrative interest and the meditations it prompts.

A. C. F. BEALES

THE LAST OF THE FATHERS. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter; 10s. 6d.)

This is a title frequently given to St Bernard of Clairvaux, who, writing in the twelfth century just before the age of the scholastics, was the last exponent of the patristic scriptural tradition. A good deal was written about St Bernard in 1953 on the occasion of his eighth centenary, but much of it was for specialists. A notable exception, however, was the Encyclical letter of Pius XII. In this the Holy Father, deploring the way in which the mystical life is so often neglected or forgotten, exhorts all the faithful, not only the clergy and religious, to read and meditate on St Bernard's writings on the subject. The Saint teaches that every soul, no matter how ensnared in vice, may aspire to marriage with the Word by reason of the image of God which it sees within itself. Some of the best passages from the Song of Songs, including the one just mentioned, are quoted in the Encyclical and these will surely serve to whet the appetite for more from the same source. Happily this appetite can be easily gratified, as an excellent selection of these sermons translated into English and edited by a religious of C.S.M.V. was published by Mowbray's in 1952.

Father Merton has preceded his translation of the Encyclical by a succinct sketch of St Bernard, a brief account of his writings, which again whets one's appetite, and by some notes commenting on the text.

The book is a pleasure to handle as it is so attractively printed and bound.

A. J. MEIKLE