

what may at first sight seem surprising—the amount of space he gives to the Egyptian Fathers, by showing that they were one of the most important influences on the *Rule* and consequently on Western Christianity; 'It is one of the most significant and rewarding of all sources since it contains so much of the "raw material" of history.' What are the *Verba*? From the middle of the fifth century, and probably from the late fourth, collections of the sayings of the hermits began to be gathered together, St Anthony, St Pachomius and Abbot Moses 'that great gentle negro' among them. The question is asked, how am I to find God? and in return the seeker receives a 'word', goes to his cell, meditates, puts it into practice, takes it to Church with him and exchanges sayings with his brother hermits, and in this way the sayings grew. Nor are they all moralizing and *diablerie*, but show a quite special wisdom not to be acquired by merely human knowledge. As a monk of the twentieth century Fr Merton has availed himself of the privilege enjoyed by monks of earlier days in making this selection, freely translated, so that 'those who need and enjoy such apothegms may be encouraged, by the taste of clear water, to follow the brook to its source'. A long and forceful introduction points out that the Fathers have much to teach us, having preoccupations and living in a situation not at all unlike our own. He speaks of their uncompromising personal decision to follow 'an uncharted way' in a 'life continued in compunction', 'shaped by solitude', for 'our time is in desperate need of this kind of simplicity (and) the word to emphasize is *experience*'. These men spent a good deal of their time simply awaiting the re-appearance of the risen Lord, and the *Verba* only make sense in this light, whereas our own eschatological sense has been dulled; yet it is only if we really believe that he will come again and learn to be expectant that we can practice their detachment and find purity of heart. It is a pity, therefore, that such a price for so small a book (81 pp.) will prevent many people buying it, especially when a book of the value of Professor Chadwick's is available for only 35s.

ALEXANDER NEWMAN, O.P.

THE MYSTICAL LIFE, by J. H. M. Whiteman; Faber and Faber, 30s.

Since God is utterly transcendent of his creatures and the order of pure spirit remote from the embodied spirit of man on earth, human understanding of communion with God and above all its imaginative expression is liable to distortions and illusions. Even when Catholic faith safeguards a mystic from unorthodox doctrines, in other respects the form and fashion of his experience may be defective in the extreme. This has been sufficiently shewn by Fr Thurston's studies of the by-products of Catholic mysticism. *A fortiori* when, as is Dr Whiteman's case, the seeker for God has no guide other than his personal experience and his interpretation of other evidence in the light of that experience, it is not surprising that his experience of God should be invested, one must

say adulterated, with a very considerable element of illusion and misinterpretation. Dr Whiteman, I cannot doubt, has over the years sought God with a whole-hearted devotion and in obedience to his will as he conceives it to be. Therefore he convinces us that he is a genuine mystic, has experienced the union with God he has pursued so earnestly. He is moreover a man of quite exceptional erudition well acquainted not only with the writings of the mystics, Christian and non-Christian, but also with a wide yet detailed knowledge of philosophy.

Nevertheless his book contains so much that is fantastic, so much in other respects unacceptable, that its value is solely that of a record, though this in itself is considerable, of strange psychological experiences carefully registered and sincerely credited. The Catholic cannot find in it a contribution to mystical theology or a guide to the life of prayer. At the outset of his book Dr Whiteman defines 'mysticism' as 'the study of anything non-physical'. Later, however, he restricts this unsatisfactory extension of the term and distinguishes between the psychological and the properly mystical. The latter is characterized by two unities, 'an immanent unity' which is the integration of the self and 'a Transcendent Unity which is known through a metaphysical direction of the mind to the One and the Good'. (pp. 53-4.) How much simpler to describe mysticism as experienced union with God and secondarily whatsoever is connected with that experienced union. In any case it is strange and arbitrary to maintain that St Teresa's 'Passive Recollection and Quiet seems to mark the highest point reached by psychological states and the Prayer of Union the beginning of mystical states'. (p. 56.)

However much the author has pursued, in his central intention, union with God in detachment and obedience, very many, it might even seem the majority, of the experiences related in this book are of what he terms his spiritual body: 'the human form of the spirit'. His explanation of this is none too clear. Is it spirit or matter? In one place it is described as a condensation of universal spiritual flux (p. 204). It would seem to be an energy intermediate between spirit and matter—but in this I may be mistaken—in any case a counterpart of the physical body, experienced however as more, not less, objective and real. Moreover, however spiritual Dr Whiteman may conceive it he evidently experiences it as thoroughly physical, a fleshly body complete with all its parts, organs and many functions. His evidence for its existence is the personal experiences, many of which are here reported, together with others cited from books. Since these experiences are extremely vivid and realistic Dr Whiteman will not regard them as dreams, and is convinced that his consciousness has passed over into the spiritual body. However, not only are experiences which may be products, hallucinations, of the imagination wholly insufficient evidence for this alleged spiritual body: in most cases they present the character of exceptionally vivid dreams. The parallel experience, quoted from the Proceedings of the Society of Psychological Research, of 'Miss C.A.' whose still living father led her from her bed to the site of his future grave is clearly a dream, and her belief that she was awake an illusion. (The prophetic factor is from this point of

view irrelevant.) There is little sustained consistency in Dr Whiteman's experiences. Figures appear and vanish. One object may even change into another—e.g. animals into flowers. 'A dog like a setter' is 'seen' but when the subject 'approached to fondle it, a return to the physical state quickly ensued' (p. 72). Surely the dreamer woke. Moreover, as in the case of Miss C.A., many, I believe most, of the experiences occurred when the subject was in bed, and in my belief had just fallen asleep.

The most fantastic and disconcerting feature of Dr Whiteman's experiences of his spiritual body is their reversal of sex. It is the body of a beautiful young girl—on one occasion a young mother also gives birth to twins—or a mother nursing her baby. The emotions of a woman are vividly felt and described. One might believe the writer a woman. Dr Whiteman sees in this womanhood the expression of the feminine factor in his masculine psychology and of the fact that the human psyche is feminine in relation to God. An expression of these things it may well be, but a subjective creation, a dream fantasy. And although mystics regard the soul as in a sense feminine towards God and some, St John of the Cross, for example, have employed the imaginative symbolism of a woman's love, they do not experience an imaginative change of sex. A compulsive and somewhat unhealthy quality of the author's imagination has pushed him across the frontier of legitimate symbolism into a positive hallucination.

In conclusion, the book is an interesting and valuable record of extraordinary psychical experiences, investing a genuine mystical aspiration and union, but as a contribution to mystical literature of very little if any worth.

E. I. WATKIN

THE PASSION ACCORDING TO JOHN, by J. C. Fenton; S.P.C.K., 7s. 6d.

There are many excellent points to this small book. First, it is an example of *lectio divina* as it should be today, a preparation of scripture, taking every advantage of modern exegesis, but leading the reader beyond mere scholarship into a deeper faith and prayer; it follows a really sound method, presenting the scripture, then a brief clear commentary, which is textual, literary and theological, then some meditations or themes for meditation, though these latter, an attractive modesty in the author, are given in an appendix; thirdly, its setting, which is liturgical, here Anglican. The exegesis is sound except for one or two small points, but one minor and one major criticism must be made. The minor one—which does not affect the commentary—is that it is implied that this Passion is a re-writing of Mark's, and it is never allowed, at least explicitly, that the author may be the beloved disciple himself, drawing on memories more exact than the synoptics' at the same time as he sees a profounder significance in them. The major criticism is that the author is not bold enough; he seems so anxious to avoid any theology of sacrifice that he skimps the significance of the frequent passover references; if, in tracing the setting of the