

takes away the context and robs the text of a lot of its force, giving it a slightly unreal quality. Religious sculpture is not what it was because, confused by history and experience, we have lost the art of image-making; it will only be restored by taking into account all the forces making up the religious-cultural-artistic pattern (or muddle) of today, and then in a way we cannot anticipate. A *simpliste* solution to such a problem is no solution at all, as the author knows, but he should have taken pains to make this point clearer. The value of the book would have been increased if some photographs of the artists cited in the text had been included, and a short bibliography added.

PATRICK REYNTIENS

MARGARET ROPER. By E. E. Reynolds. (Burns and Oates; 16s.)

No father can have devoted a keener intelligence and a more loving heart to the education of a daughter than did St Thomas More to that of Margaret. He held strongly to the opinion that man and woman 'both have the same human nature . . . both, therefore, are equally suited for those studies by which reason is cultivated'. But his first attempts at feminine education with his young wife came near to disaster due to an all-too-male absorption with abstract concepts that took no account of feminine psychology. Poor Jane wept 'day after day, and sometimes threw herself on the ground, beating her head as if she wished for death'. More did not abandon his aims but changed his methods and happiness was restored. He had learnt his lesson well and, whilst he made heavy educational demands on his children, he did not forget cakes and apples and pears and only whipped them with a birch of peacocks' feathers!

Margaret grew into a most able scholar, determined to do for her own family of two boys and three girls what her father had done for his own. When he had been executed, his household dispersed and her own husband was in the Tower, she was discovered 'not puling and lamenting but full busily teaching her children'.

Despite the paucity of the material—few of Margaret's own letters have survived—Mr Reynolds' fine scholarship and unrivalled familiarity with the More circle have wonderfully well succeeded in bringing her to life. Yet the mystery of the unbroken intimacy of father and daughter remains. More's pain: 'Sit not musing with some serpent in your breast . . . to offer father Adam the apple once again'. Margaret's recognition of his sanctity: 'The shining brightness of your soul, the pure temple of the Holy Spirit of God'. Yet she, no more than the infamous Audley, could see the rightness of his decision.

JOHN WEBB

THE FOXGLOVE SAGA. By Auberon Waugh. (Chapman and Hall; 15s.)

THE LETTER AFTER Z. By Vincent Cronin. (Collins; 18s.)

Novelists' sons have no doubt an advantage with their own first novels: publishers (and even reviewers) remember names. And Mr Waugh has much of the sharp accuracy of his father's early observation; for him, too,

the human race is usually silly when it is not sinister. His story dispenses with the discipline of a consistent plot, and the adventures of Martin Foxglove, son of a doting mother set on good works, pass from a thinly concealed Catholic public school (which will cause little pleasure at Downforth, one supposes) to the Army and hospitals, with country-house and (unconvincing) Elephant and Castle interludes. There is a cleverness in the writing which by no means compensates for an insensibility which can make fun of madness and deformity. A hateful ending makes it difficult for one to do justice even to its incidental, adolescent merits.

Mr Cronin is a much more experienced writer, but he has scarcely the right to demand our attention for 450 pages in which he traces the improbable career of Dirk Vidal, a poet who is sent down from Oxford and who wanders from Florence to Paris, from South America to the Lebanon, where he takes up gun-running and gets deeply involved in a love-hate relationship with an Italian girl who shares his own failure to conform. (She, one might almost add 'of course', had refused a religious vocation.) This picaresque, and often heroically conceived, story is thought by Mr Cronin to require a degree of sexual adventure (and hence of detail in describing it) which is unacceptable. The novel would be twice as good if it were half as long.

PEREGRINE WALKER

NOTICES

In *FOUR ABSENTS* (Barrie and Rockcliff, 13s. 6d.), Mr Rayner Heppenstall has collected his memories of four celebrated men who were once present in his life: George Orwell and Middleton Murry, Eric Gill and Dylan Thomas. These do not really make a book to themselves and Mr Heppenstall's attempts to find or make artificial links between them betray this. The glimpses of Dylan Thomas boozing add nothing new to our knowledge of him; the encounter with Eric Gill may be told honestly but is one-sided and contains certain elements wholly distasteful unless they are balanced and interpreted by a knowledge of the profounder side of his thought and practice. The accounts of his longer and more complex friendships with George Orwell and Middleton Murry are less frivolous but the divergences between his own memories and the extracts from Murry's diary which he very honestly includes undermine one's confidence in his own objectivity. The best thing in the book is an attempt to assess the motives of Dylan Thomas in the last hours of his life: as a whole, used very cautiously, the book will be of some use to literary historians of the thirties.

THE AGE OF MARTYRS, by Giuseppe Ricciotti, translated by Anthony Bull, c.r.l. (Geoffrey Chapman; 24s.), is an excellent account for the average intelligent reader of the most momentous fifty years in the history of the Church, from the persecution attributed to Diocletian, through the conversion of the Empire, to the Council of Nicaea and the death of Constantine. It is clearly written and it uses only the assessments of recent scholarship, not legend. The personalities of the emperors, the mixture of