

best when most detailed. He is however too chary of dates. In biography precise dates are a need and the 'brief chronology' at the end of this book is not good enough. There ought to be a bibliography of Stapleton's published writings. There ought to be a tabulation of the strains and varieties of grasses bred at the Aberystwyth station during his directorship. But the interpretation of Stapleton's work and of its scientific and practical value is well done and the book has the merit of being the work of a scientist in the Stapleton mould.

As a story of the man the book fails. The author preaches, moralizes, even preaches at Stapleton. When in the story Stapleton falls ill or has a nervous breakdown, the author prescribes philosophical remedies. One wonders just how well did he know Stapleton. But, to quote again, 'he communicates Stapleton's point of view' and there is wise, sound conservative statement of social principles in the final sections of the work.

SAUNDERS LEWIS

AN OLD WOMAN'S REFLECTIONS, by Peig Sayers, translated from the Irish by Seamus Ennis and introduced by W. R. Rogers; Oxford University Press, 16s.

It is nearly twenty years since Robin Flower introduced Peig Sayers to English readers in his 'Western Island', with her unforgettable greeting of 'The devil eat you between earth and sky! Get out!' It was to him that she told the tale of how her mother was made to appear to her father by means of tinker's magic before Peig was ever thought of, and to him that she prophesied 'I shall be alone in the end of my life, but it is God's will and the way of the world, and we must not complain'. Now Peig is dead, or as she would say 'on the way of truth', and her stories and reminiscences come, now that the old island life is gone, to make a Blasket trilogy along with 'Twenty Years A-Growing' and 'The Islandman'. One was so very conscious of all the matriarchal figures in the lives of Maurice O'Sullivan and Tomas O'Crohan, that it always seemed highly desirable that one of them should one day speak in the first person, and tell us about the Blasket from her angle. Maurice O'Sullivan saw it all through the eyes of a boy and a youth, and the careless, timeless enjoyment of his early days, and the freshness and simplicity of his speech came through in the most perfect of translations. O'Crohan was a bit of an oddity (perhaps it had something to do with not being weaned until he was four), delighting to bring out the grotesque in every situation, but again, his was a purely narrative gift. Peig, however, was always given to reflection, and particularly so in her old age. As one might expect, the book which has been compiled from her story tellings and conversations has a depth and a wisdom that one could not expect to find in her companion authors of the Blasket.

'I was often standing here studying the works of the creator', she says at the end, 'and tasting his royal sweetness in my heart. Everything he created was a

consolation to me, even unto the grief itself, it would make me think deeper'. W. R. Rogers recalls in his introduction how her son Tom was killed, falling on to the rocks from a cliff, and how she, in order to make the corpse presentable to the public, 'with breaking heart, had gathered her courage together and . . . stroked and coaxed the damaged skull into shape. "It was difficult", she would say; and then, with a flick of the shawl she wore, she would invoke the name of the Blessed Virgin, saying "Let everyone carry his cross".' No Mother Macree here, no Schmalz, just the unassuming fortitude of a deeply convinced Christian. Peig reveals in almost everything she says that special gift that will always belong to the simple and unspoiled in Ireland, which one feels quite justified in describing, when one has met with it over and over again, as a unique perception of reality, both in the world of nature and the life of faith.

GEOFFREY WEBB

THE VOICE OF LOURDES: A pilgrimage in vision and sound. Text by Illtud Evans, O.P., with an introduction by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster; Hutchinson; 22s. 6d.

Soundprint, or Three Dimensional Reading, is an entirely new concept in book production, and the theme of this book lends itself with singular felicity to the new technique. The text, by Father Illtud Evans, O.P., is a comprehensive yet condensed account of the history of Lourdes and of its saint. The author several times underlines the fact that the primary message of Lourdes is not bodily healing, that the suffering of the sick is there related to that of Christ, and that penance is at the heart of Lourdes. The text is lavishly illustrated with varied and well-chosen photographs; the covers of the book have two pockets containing unbreakable feather-weight records. The reader can look at the pictures while listening to the recordings of the bells, the sound of thousands of voices praying, the processions, and finally the voice of Pope John XXIII when, as Cardinal Roncalli, he consecrated the underground basilica.

This book would surely make an unusual present for the many blind people who now listen to talking books, and who could find a friend to read the text aloud to them before playing the records. It would also be an admirable book to lend to those who have hitherto been repelled by a tawdry or sentimental presentation. The author's style combines sobriety and wonder.

MARGARET WILEMAN