

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