

not only deliberately set out to make himself a fully equipped Magus on Trismegistian lines, but really hoped and worked for a restoration of something like that pristine 'Egyptian' religion. And it is here, I think, as a statement of this double ambition in Bruno—to become a great magician and to reform Western religion—that Miss Yates's book, for all its learning and incidental brilliance, may be found not completely convincing—very plausible, but going, in its conclusions, slightly beyond the evidence adduced. But it will, of course, be thoroughly discussed by Renaissance scholars. Speaking as a mere amateur, or less, in this field, I hope that Italian *brunisti* will be absolutely fair to it. There is, I fancy, some lingering prejudice in those quarters against such a view of Bruno as we are given here; of a philosopher whose thinking was pervaded by religion and his religion pervaded by magic. And myself, I wish that Miss Yates had defined more precisely what she means by magic and Bruno's magic in particular, and especially the 'demonic' side of it. 'Bruno's magic', we are told, 'is quite frankly demonic. He . . . entirely abandons Ficino's reservations. Bruno *wants* to reach the demons; it is essential for his magic to do so; nor are there any Christian angels within call in his scheme to keep them in check'. Possibly; but it seems clear that he wasn't consciously a *Satanist*, so that 'demon' here is a term that needs more defining. And no doubt Miss Yates herself will define it more, at any rate implicitly, as well as illuminating many other aspects of the subject, in the book on Bruno's 'art of memory' which she hopes to bring out as a sequel to this one. Meanwhile I hope it is not improper for a Dominican to thank her for so instructive and sympathetic a work on the greatest of ex-Dominicans. It is pleasant to read that Bruno remained 'very proud of his Order', was 'deeply read in Albertus Magnus', and a lifelong admirer of St Thomas. These two, of course, he counted as Magi—along with Christ himself.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

BYZANTINE AESTHETICS, by Gervase Mathew; John Murray; 35s.

A belated review of so notable a work as Father Gervase Mathew's survey of the art of Byzantium has at least the value of a reminder. For the enthusiastic welcome it received from scholars on its appearance may have suggested to the reader of unspecialized taste and training that it is a monograph of limited appeal. It is indeed a book of consummate scholarship, enriched on every page by an evident familiarity with the works of art themselves as well as with the whole complex history—of events and ideas—which they illuminate. But it is a book in its own right, lucidly organized and beautifully written, with twenty-five illustrations to hold the attention if it should ever falter. No one who cares for the articulation of an unfamiliar thesis in a clear and living language can afford to neglect this quite remarkable book.

'Byzantine' has so often become a loose epithet for a hierarchic and stylised art, an image of Eastern mystery as contrasted with the rationalized understand-

ing we associate with Rome, that an introductory chapter that defines the term is very necessary. Father Mathew's detailed treatment of twelve centuries of Byzantine art, beginning with the transition from classical art-forms in the third century to the 'creation of a Christian art that conveyed a hidden sacred meaning', is in effect a commentary on the four factors he outlines in the beginning, namely a taste for classical reminiscence, a mathematical approach to beauty, an interest in optics and thus a preoccupation with the function of Light, and, finally, a conviction that the material world is only a shadow of an invisible world that altogether transcends it. The continuity of these standards provides a consistent basis for understanding objects in themselves so diverse as a fourth-century silver disk of the Dance of the Seasons, the mosaic Virgin of Torcello, the church of San Vitale in Ravenna and the fifteenth-century mural painting of the Raising of Lazarus at Mistra.

It is this harmony of interpretative criticism that gives unity to Father Mathew's study, fortified as it constantly is by the wealth of his patristic learning and his first-hand experience as an archaeologist. And his very language has an astonishingly evocative power, as when he writes of the décor of the Byzantine court: 'the blue silk robes tight-girdled, the scented tapering beards, the harsh cosmetic and the great officials holding in their hands the red enamelled apples of their rank'. So, too, his commentary is always deepened by the range of his sympathy as well as by the extent of his learning. Nowhere can the symbolism of the Fish (usually dismissed in simple terms of Greek initial letters) have been so profoundly analysed. And the sudden phrase, the happy analogy, enlightens a whole argument, as when we are reminded that 'an appreciation of Russian ballet is still perhaps the best introduction to Byzantine aesthetics'.

But it is perhaps where Father Mathew draws on his acquaintance with the Greek Fathers that his book takes on dimensions altogether more significant than those of a conventional study in aesthetics. He sees very clearly the unity of the world he describes, so that St Gregory of Nyssa's conception of man as the bridge that links the two worlds in which all Being is divided is a profound commentary on the works of art themselves, evoking as it does the hidden, lasting mystery they so wonderfully image.

PEREGRINE WALKER

HUMAN ACTS, an essay in their moral evaluation, by Eric D'Arcy; Oxford University Press; 25s.

THE CONCEPT OF A PERSON and other essays, by A. J. Ayer; Macmillan; 30s.

The concept of human action is central to the whole field of moral discourse, but very little work has been done on it from the point of view of ethics, since Bentham, whose utilitarianism demanded an enquiry into the distinction between an act and its consequences, and also into what constitutes the circum-