

St Thierry has been taken as the basis of Père Bouyer's chapters on a thinker, by comparison with whom, as he justly says, 'we may even be tempted to say that Bernard did not exist'. But here again, where the Greek sources can be established on a much more certain basis, it is probable that the vital, though temporarily less interesting, influence of Augustine needs eventually to be brought more to the fore. Perhaps the least satisfactory chapters in this book are those on Bernard. Gilson's study of Bernard's mystical theology, which still remains the best book on this school of writers, is not easy to summarize in a few pages, and it is difficult to know what the general reader will make of the extremely compressed account of the argument of the *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* on page 54 of the present volume. The chapters on Isaac of Stella and Gueric of Igny have at least the merit of fairly generous quotation. The translator's most amusing lapse is in making it appear that Aelred's infirmarian had him 'rocked on his bed in the fireplace' (page 130), whereas *basculer* here means to tip. In spite of its defects, which the author would probably be ready to admit, it is to be hoped that the appearance of the *Cistercian Heritage* will stimulate a renewed interest in a school of spirituality which flourished before the final schism between East and West and owed something to the inspiration of both parts of Christendom.

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THE CHALLENGE OF BERNADETTE. By Hugh Ross Williamson. (Burns & Oates; 10s. 6d.)

This is not just another book about Bernadette, timed to appear in the centenary year. Far from being content with a rehash of a tale that is already more than twice-told, Hugh Ross Williamson approaches the whole subject afresh with an inquiring sympathetic mind. The result is a very interesting book and its clear layout makes for easy reading.

After the simplest factual outline by way of preface, the author divides his work into seven chapters. In the first three he examines the implications of the particular circumstances, the place and the time of the apparitions; in the fourth he looks at Bernadette herself; and in the last three he discusses her relationship with the parish priest, with the novice-mistress and with our Lady. Not everyone will be prepared to endorse his conclusions, but, whether the reader agrees with him or not, what he says commands attention and is an incentive to think again.

Thus he shows that the Pyrenean foothills boasted a long history of visits from our Lady—some well authenticated, others doubtful—so that, by her apparitions to Bernadette, our Lady was graciously

re-establishing herself in a place that remained dear to her, despite the desecration of her shrines during the Revolution. In fact the author goes further. He regards Lourdes as dedicated to our Lady since the eighth century when Mirat, the Mohammedan commander of the castle of Mirambel, was converted and baptized under the name of Lorus (which is the derivation of 'Lourdes'). In token of his submission to our Lady, this soldier plucked from the banks of the Gave a handful of grass which he placed in her great sanctuary at Puy. To the author, this feoffment with livery of seisin was plainly recalled when Bernadette ate the grass at the command of our Lady, though he sees the grass-eating as primarily part of the exorcism of a grotto infamous for its pagan and diabolic associations.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter is that on Bernadette and her novice-mistress. The author is very charitable towards Mother Vauzou and he always gives her the benefit of the doubt—which is a refreshing change. However, for one reader at last, he is unsuccessful in his attempted rehabilitation. The thought of Mother Vauzou 'belabouring the soul', 'using the shears', 'pulverizing hearts' (her own words)—all in the name of love, leaves one uneasy. Moreover, whilst the author dismisses the conventional explanation, as he calls it, of the rift between Bernadette and Mother Vauzou, it is not clear how he himself accounts for it. On this and other points there may be room for argument, but that is tribute to the interest which Mr Ross Williamson stimulates.

One final matter. When the reader comes to the end of the book he feels that he has been in close touch with the true character of Bernadette and he is able to see her as the wonderful servant of our Lady that she was. This book, then, *adds* something to the mass of Lourdes literature and that alone is its justification.

N.B.