

**EARLY ENGLISH CHRISTIAN POETRY**, translated into alliterative verse by Charles W. Kennedy; O.U.P.; 10s. 6d.

This is a worthy and handsome presentation of a superb literature. The Christian faith had taken fast hold upon the Anglo-Saxons when these poems were written in the seventh and eighth centuries and they reflect its teaching and liturgy in the distinctive glass of their own codes and conventions. Here is Christ the 'Ring-giver', 'Helm of princes', 'Warden of the wave', and men who persevere in faithful loyalty fearing to wander 'lordless and lonely, lacking all good' in a world where most respect fell to him 'Who best has bolstered his lord in battle'. The heroic epic and lyric find in Christ and 'His thanes' their central figure and theme.

Professor Kennedy's alliterative verse translation imitates the original structure with considerable success, preserving the combination of brutally factual statement rich in direct description with expansion into flowing and delicate periphrasis. This vigour and accuracy make the verse translation vastly superior to a prose rendering.

The book is well-arranged in sections covering the various types of subject matter upon which the poems are based. The story of Genesis is re-created in poetic narrative, the tale of St Helena and the True Cross springs from an unknown Vita among the Latin traditions of the Cross, while the Advent Lyrics are developments of the antiphons used in the Liturgy during that season. Similarly a homily of Gregory the Great is shaped into the 'Ascension' and the allegories of the Whale, the Phoenix and the Panther originate in Greek and Latin bestiary traditions.

The poems are accompanied by a lucid critical commentary discussing each one and placing it according to its sources. One might recommend that the poetry itself should be given a first reading before the introductions which are sometimes almost overwhelmingly explanatory, but the information is certainly useful for further study.

The book, originally published in stiff-covers in 1952, is now issued in semi-stiff covers attractively designed by Lorraine Blake. The format is clear and helpful. It is a volume which might equally well be bought for its record of the freshness and endurance of faith of the early Church with a devotional or meditative purpose, as for the tough yet subtle pleasures of its poetic forms.

CHRISTINE THIRLWAY

**BORN UNDER SATURN**, by Rudolf and Margot Wittkower; Weidenfeld and Nicholson; 48s.

The image of the artist is subject to dramatic variations. He may be seen to be essentially different to society, the prophet, the seer, the sufferer from divine frenzy: something like those prophesiers in the early church and in all 'enthusiastic' religious movements since, who were thought to give utterance to the

Holy Ghost. This readily crumbles into its parallel: the reverence turns to hatred and contempt, the artist is a long-haired and lecherous outsider, different to society and essentially at enmity with it. There is a limited analogy here with anti-clericalism.

In the other tradition he is thought of just as someone who makes things. He may make wheels for farm carts, working in a long and utterly unchanging tradition; or he may be the highly paid servant of a prince, building and beautifying palaces. In either case he is the most inside of all insiders. Society revolves around him, and he gives expression to its values. Today this sort of artist works, among other places, in advertising.

The Wittkowers' book is a documented history up to about the end of the eighteenth century. Most of the material in fact refers to the period of the Renaissance. It is a mass of quotations, and in that sense a valuable reference book. But valuable what for? Artists make things which are in some sense alive, autonomously alive: this is why they interest us. The chronicling even of artists' lives (much of the material is very extraordinary) can be curiously dead. Gossip at all levels must justify itself. One is left at the end of this book with a lingering and unsolved problem: why should so much 'fascinating' material be so joyless to read?

The central problem, the quest for the artist's 'personality', remains unchanged. A few facile psychological theories have been exploded; we know a little more about what the artist is not. But since the theories exploded have themselves been inflated in the same world of American art scholarship, they often seem already eccentric and irrelevant. 'Inflated' is perhaps the right word: too much money chasing too few ideas.

JULIAN DAVID

MADAME DE CHANTAL, *Portrait of a Saint*, by Elisabeth Stopp; Faber and Faber; 35s.

In this model biography Dr Stopp relates the story of Saint Jane Francis Frémyot de Chantal from her earliest childhood, recording how at the age of five she broke in upon an after-dinner discussion between her father and a Huguenot friend, saying that if the latter persisted in denying the Real Presence he was calling Jesus Christ a liar. Amused by her precocity he offered her some sweets which she promptly threw into the fire, adding that that was what happened to those who called our Lord a liar. This startling example of her faith was evidently an earnest of what was to be throughout her life her outstanding virtue. Such was the phrase used by her friend St Vincent de Paul in the deposition he made at the process of her canonization. It was also he declared the virtue against which she was tempted all her life, without however losing her peace and tranquillity of mind, in spite of her state of inner darkness.

The two events in her life which are probably best remembered are the death of her husband the Baron de Chantal whilst hunting, and the strange leave-