

Shakespeare's tenderness towards Henry IV. Yet it was all part of a creed which, though it insisted on the triumph of justice, nevertheless believed that justice was not so much to be tempered with mercy and charity as to be perfected by them. To be less than charitable to Falstaff would be less than just. But above all Shakespeare's view is what it is now fashionable to call 'incarnational', that is, a belief which is inspired by the knowledge that Christ has redeemed and made holy the things of his own creation, and that if we will only be faithful to them as God has ordained them fruitfulness will be the result. It was perhaps a pity that Miss Parker did not make greater use of this theme as displayed in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where in a quite startling manner we find good being drawn out of evil and when Cleopatra puts on her crown and robes for the immortal longings that are on her she is in fact preparing to meet her lover in eternity. A daring and yet perfectly logical conclusion. One feels also scarcely convinced by the unravelling of the character of Ophelia, but then she always was a difficult child. Miss Parker has made a very considerable contribution to the study of Shakespeare's thought and her use both of the text of the plays and of theological texts, chiefly St Thomas Aquinas, provide not only an admirable piece of reading but a valuable book of reference.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI. A Pictorial Biography. By Leonard von Matt and Walter Hauser. Translated from the German by Sebastian Bullough, O.P. (Longmans; 30s.)

St Francis of Assisi is the most picturesque of the saints, in the literal sense that his life, as we think of it, falls inevitably into a series of pictures; and these are mostly landscapes. His Order had the luck to begin in central Italy, which is not only one of the loveliest regions of Europe but is also the one that produced Europe's most brilliant painters during the two centuries that followed the birth of St Francis. The Umbrian saint, so native in his poverty to that roughly delicate and airy, glittering landscape, was a godsend to Italian art. The great popular movement he started was and still is an amazingly Italian thing, without being the less universal for that. But the saint is a godsend to the modern photographer, too, as the beautiful plates that adorn this book so clearly show.

It is sufficient praise of these photographers to say that they bring Italy before the imagination. It is almost a shock to see stone, water and trees, hills and buildings so plainly, with such a pure directness. Against this background the Franciscan story is unfolded in a suitably unpretentious way; though it might have been better, surely, if the narrator had sometimes been a bit more careful to distinguish legend from ascertained fact. In at least two places an episode that begins to be told

as a story ('it is believed', . . . 'it was said' . . .) ends as a statement of fact. But as Fr Hauser says, there are many biographies of St Francis, and a critical reader has only to look things up for himself. But if he does, he will have to look beyond the scanty references at the end of the volume: and while the translator was about it he might have given us a more up-to-date bibliography, with English editions, where possible, instead of German ones.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

ELGAR, O.M. By Percy Young. (Collins; 30s.)

Popular notions of the personalities of great composers are invariably simple, clearly-defined, and thus misleading. The composers themselves, like other public figures, are often at some pains to encourage legend—sometimes, perhaps, for honest publicity, but more often to shield their true and fallible selves, their essentially unromantic inconsistencies, from the vulgar stare.

Of few composers, certainly no English composer, was this more true than of Elgar. The crystalline image of the lumpy country squire with the aggressive handle-bar moustaches and bluff, insensitive manner is as misleading as any tinted deceptions of a commercial photographer. His personality was subtle, delicate in nuance and full of contrast. It is all the apparent contradictions, revealed in Dr Young's book, which gives verisimilitude: the horse-enthusiast who was immensely well-read; the almost vulgarly loyal imperialist who was intensely sensitive, the incredibly successful composer with devitalising bouts of black depression. The major part of this book, then, is plain but illuminating biography, not burdened with comment or analysis but enlivened by well-chosen quotations from letters and diaries. At one point only does it become sketchy and imperceptive: in discussing the composer's religious belief. To say that Elgar moved from 'orthodoxy' not 'because he had too little faith but because he had too much' is to place such a strain on the word 'faith' as to make the paradox meaningless. (One letter, written in 1914, certainly suggests neither orthodoxy nor an excess of faith.) There is another enigma here: we are not likely, now, to find the solution, nor would it be pellucid; but it cannot be replaced by another precisely delineated simplification.

The discussion of the music itself is rarely extended: often merely dutiful it is sometimes quickly penetrating—notably the criticism of *The Kingdom*. The eighty music examples are grouped together at the end of the book (a practice one reader at least finds maddeningly inconvenient) with the usual catalogue of works, bibliography, (no 'discography') and index. Dr Young's volume of letters and other writings by Elgar will be eagerly awaited—both for the light it will throw on the composer and because he was clearly himself no mean author.

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