

and how varied and voluminous it was—strikes one as a sustained, if sometimes despairing, attempt to unravel himself, not only for his own personal satisfaction, but for the enlightenment of the world at large. And Murry had certainly quite enough to analyse, if the diversity of epithet and invective that came his way is any criterion. Even if he was never to approach it, he could be rapt into ecstasy by the idea of an ultimate harmony in the soul of man: 'somehow within that are all philosophies comprehended, all beauties, all desires'. But not everybody took him seriously, some even made fun of him. Mr Lea, who has had every available source to work on, manages to reach a balanced appraisal, but his task must have been a daunting one.

The trouble with Murry was that, besides having to contend with a character of a dozen different and often conflicting facets, he would always insist on having too many irons in the fire at once—he had to be evangelist, moralist, prophet and philosopher all in one. And that meant he had to become a man of countless contacts, throwing open the door of his ever 'public private life' for all and sundry to enter in. The result of this was, in many an instance, disastrous. Quarrels, betrayals, every sort of vicissitude came upon him; and half of them, the impression is, need never have happened. If only Murry could have lived within himself and, as he put it to a friend, 'let the waves—welcome joy, welcome sorrow—go over him'. He had all the equipment, and enough mental and physical industry for two.

Mr Lea's objective presentation of his subject makes first-class reading, especially for those who are old enough to look back at the time *entre deux guerres*. And dozens of charming photographs illustrate a book which amply deserves the title of an 'official biography'.

EDWIN ESSEX, O.P.

THE HISTORY OF BELMONT ABBEY. By Dom Basil Whelan. (Bloomsbury Publishing Co.; 25s.)

This very readable book, written for the centenary of Belmont Abbey, is intended no doubt primarily for those who are in some way connected with the house, but it will be found interesting by anyone who enjoys odd legal situations.

Three chief factors contributed to the foundation of the monastery. Bishop Browne, a monk of Downside, was authorized by a decree from Rome in 1852 to set up a Benedictine monastic chapter in his diocese of Newport and Menevia. And the English Benedictines, on their side, wanted to open a common noviciate and house of studies for the congregation. That Belmont, not far from Hereford, and rather on the outskirts of the diocese, became the site of the foundation, was due to the great generosity of a recent convert, Mr Wegg-Prosser,

who lived close by. He is the founder of Belmont. The church he built in thanksgiving for his conversion became the pro-cathedral, and the monastery the residence of the canons.

How from these beginnings Belmont became an independent house is a complicated story, and interestingly told by the author. The first difficulty was that no one could have said exactly what sort of an entity Belmont was. It was clearly a monastery in the sense that a number of monks lived a strict and common life there. But each of the monks was the subject of his own superior. To whom then would any newly professed be aggregated? And when the house was founded, it had been decreed by general chapter that it was not to receive novices. Apart from this, there was the question of ownership. It had been started as a common house, and must have belonged either to the congregation or to the several houses composing it.

However, towards the turn of the century, when those several houses were made abbeys, and government ceased to be centralized in the congregation, it seemed likely that each abbey would want to have its own noviciate and see to its own studies. Belmont would then become, as Dom Ildefonsus Cummins put it, an institution in which all the abbeys had a common share and diminishing interest. He was the Ampleforth delegate at the general chapter of 1901, and mainly instrumental in getting a decision which authorized the Newport chapter to profess monks for Belmont. He himself was appointed Prior that year, and very shortly received the first novice.

But the independence of Belmont was still far from being achieved. There were many who still wanted a common house of studies and were reluctant to abandon their rights in the buildings. And they doubted whether a young community could support itself if it were not allowed to have a school for lay students—and that was a condition on which they held the land. Further, was the new *conventus* to consist of the Newport canons and those professed for the house? That would have been a very difficult situation, at least until such time as all the canons were members of the Belmont community.

Before the matter was settled the diocese of Newport and Menevia was divided up, the episcopal seat was transferred from Newport to Cardiff, and a secular chapter was to be set up there. But by the same Bull it was decreed that the monastic chapter of Belmont was also to be maintained in its existing state. It is probable that Cardinal Gasquet and his very able secretary Dom Philip Langdon were responsible for this anomalous arrangement of two chapters in one diocese. But Rome's gracious gesture was not altogether welcomed by the English Benedictines, who had not been consulted on the matter. Abbot Cuthbert Butler and Dom Aelred Kindersly, the Prior of Belmont,

and both monks of Downside, were of opinion that it was essential to sever all connections with any diocesan chapter. As long as it continued Belmont could only be a cathedral priory, while *canon* would be no more than an honorary title. That Belmont is today an independent house and abbey is due to their sustained interest in the matter.

Dom Basil Whelan has told his story well. In the hands of a less able writer it might have been a dull record of events, but he sustains our interest by bringing to life the characters who played a part in it. And it is not an unedifying story of ecclesiastical squabbles, for those who worked to bring Belmont abbey into existence did so for the good of religion, while others believed strongly in maintaining a common house of studies, and they probably still do so; and if one senses an indifference on the part of yet others, it was the indifference of men, fully occupied, who saw both sides of the question, and an indifference about the future of what, at the time, did not yet exist, or did not fully exist.

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