

The story of his life reveals a character that never changed. He loved poverty and he loved the poor and the distressed. As a boy he would walk barefoot to school to save leather, only putting on his shoes when near to the village. As a country priest he would give all away. As a Cardinal he would himself try to dye his sash the right colour to save money! As Pope he continued a life of poverty and simplicity and had no interest in any other way of life. He hated display and would have liked to have arrived at Venice on his appointment there 'locked in a suitcase'.

It is to be hoped that this absorbing life of the newly beatified Pope may in turn help to hasten his canonisation.

C. M. DAVIDSON

THE YORK CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS. A Shorter Version of the Ancient Cycle. Edited by J. S. Purvis. (S.P.C.K.; 7s. 6d.)

This summer, in connection with the Festival of Britain, and under the able direction of Mr Martin Browne, the York Mysteries have had their first performance since 1569. It has not been possible to revive the original form of production, in which the craft guilds exhibited the scenes allotted to them on wooden 'pageants' or wagons, at twelve successive stations throughout the town; Mr Browne has fallen back on the medieval French method, by which all the localities are represented by different points on a single stage, and for his stage he has the ground in front of the ruined St Mary's Abbey. This book is the modernised and reduced text employed for his production. Twenty-nine plays only out of forty-eight have been included; however, by concentrating on those central portions of the cycle dealing with the Incarnation and the Passion, the editor has preserved unity of dramatic effect. His task has been made easier for him by one of the peculiar characteristics of the York Cycle: the simple dignity of theological exposition with which it handled the sweep of cosmic history from Creation to Judgment.

In modernising the language Dr Purvis has acted with judicious restraint, adhering as closely as possible to the forms and syntax of his original; he is not afraid of leaving unpolished the clichés and tortuosities of Middle English alliterative verse; likewise, he rejoices when he can preserve some vigorous Northern idiom which rings down the centuries with a note of contemporaneousness:

Attolite portas, principes!

Open up, ye infernal potentates.

His version is thus a faithful mirror of the original. Modern criticism has tended to dwell upon the sharp contrasts in medieval religious drama between the crude realism of some scenes (e.g. the Scourging, the farcical scene between Herod and his wife and butler, or parts of the

Harrowing of Hell) and the devotional intensity of others. This compendious view of the whole cycle impresses one more with the astonishing unity of feeling which can embrace the mean and the trivial because of its awareness of possible dignity in all created things. Also an interesting comparison suggests itself with some modern attempts at religious verse drama: the modern writers are often poetically weakest in their theological passages, while the anonymous master of the earliest version of the York Cycle handles doctrine with an impressive assurance.

One fascinating feature of this version is the support it gives to Dr W. W. Greg's views about the other two individuals whose hands stand out in the composite work: 'the metrist' and 'the realist'. Their two styles stand out like variegated strands of silk; we can inspect the complicated tail-rhyme stanzas of the former (some of them, as in the Locksmiths' Play, recalling Burns), and the torrential colloquialism of the other, rising to great power in the character of Pilate.

THE TWICKENHAM EDITION OF THE POEMS OF POPE:

Vol. III, i. AN ESSAY ON MAN. Edited by Maynard Mack.

Vol. III, ii. EPISTLES TO SEVERAL PERSONS. Edited by F. W. Bateson. (Methuen; 30s. and 25s.)

These new volumes of the Twickenham Edition fully maintain the high standards of the previous ones. The text of Pope has had to wait two centuries for such a critical treatment, and it is a remarkable testimony to the revival of interest in the poetry of the neo-classical age that Professor John Butt and his colleagues have attempted it both with editorial acumen and with such a fund of sympathetic understanding. The general reader may raise his eye-brows at the erudite apparatus expended on minute historical and literary points: often a few lines of Pope head a page of explanatory notes; but this is a sign of poetic justice done at last to an English classic, which is no longer relegated to the outer darkness of being 'a classic of our poetry'.

These two volumes comprise what Pope originally intended as a single work on man and his place in nature and society. The *Essay on Man* was to provide the introduction, and the *Moral Essays* (Mr Bateson has now restored their original title) were to take their place in the body of the work. Mr Bateson has had a more difficult textual problem to contend with than Professor Mack, that of reaching behind the revising and transposing activities of Warburton to Pope's original intentions. He has managed this task by a ruthless dismissal of those changes in the original editions of the *Epistles* which can safely be attributed to Warburton. Sometimes he compromises, as in his inclusion of the passage on Cloe in *Epistle II*. The crux of the problem is