

OBITER

THE QUINCENTENARY OF FRA ANGELICO. In a letter addressed to the whole Order, the Vicar General of the Friars Preachers draws attention to the fifth centenary of the death of Brother John Petri, better known as Fra Angelico.

'The Order formed Brother John in that piety which he gave expression to with his brush, so that on the one hand his pictures did much to make the Order and its special characteristics better known, and on the other hand the Order did a signal service to sacred art by fostering through him the faith and piety of artists. For the men of our day especially, his pictures provide an antidote against unrest and materialism, with their presentation of eternal life in which peace and order reign supreme, and to which all of us are called. Such are the means Fra Angelico used to convey to others what he had contemplated; not words which are soon forgotten, nor writings which so often leave men's mind practically unmoved, but a mirror as it were placed before our very eyes and ingeniously reflecting the mysteries of faith.

'Guy Petri was born in 1387 in Tuscany, at the village of Vicchio di Mugello near Florence. At the age of twenty he joined the Order at the priory of Fiesole, and since the Friars were expelled from that town soon after, he did his novitiate and studies at Cortona. He was called in the Order Brother John of Fiesole, since he belonged to that convent and spent most of his life there, after the brethren were allowed to return in 1418. He was Prior of Fiesole from 1449-53, an office his own brother Benedict, a distinguished painter of miniatures, had held shortly before.

'However, Brother John spent considerable periods in other places, at work on the pictures he was commissioned to paint. From 1437-45 he was at the priory of St Mark in Florence. Then he was at Rome and Orvieto, and again at Rome when he died, aged sixty-eight, on 18th February, 1455. He is buried there in our church of Sta Maria sopra Minerva. He was held in great esteem, not only by his brethren but by the Popes and most eminent prelates of the Church. Eugenius IV and Nicholas V employed him to adorn the buildings of the Vatican with sacred scenes.

'Inseparable from Fra Angelico's technical mastery is his constant aim of withdrawing the mind from the material world of sense; in fact this is the outstanding feature of his style, so that his pictures seem to proceed from his heart sooner than his brush, expressing the beautiful and the holy, as befits the Christian artist, and conveying a sense of it as far as possible to others. He never painted anything except subjects con-

ducive to the faith; he was, in fact, incapable of portraying evil, as being something quite foreign to his gentle and contemplative turn of mind. And yet our painter combines vigour and spirit with the graceful elegance of his style.

'A glance at Fra Angelico's pictures and their almost incorporeal sense of line is enough to reveal the holiness and open nobility of character of their painter. This impression is confirmed by the testimony of his own times. "A man of perfect modesty and religious", one old chronicler called him. Above all there is the name "Angelico" he was popularly known by, a testimonial both to his art and his sanctity. And in the sixteenth century he is represented in pictures with a halo. So then the greatness of his art flowed from the integrity of his life.

'The memory of his great qualities, his enthusiasm for painting and his otherworldliness have been sedulously cherished in the Order, which has every right to call Fra Angelico one of its most distinguished scions.'

THE REVISED PLAN FOR LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL. The published sketch plans and elevational drawings show that Mr Adrian Gilbert Scott has held faithfully to his instructions 'to prepare a simpler and reduced version of Sir Edwin Lutyens' design'. Though reducing considerably the floor area of the church, he has nevertheless contrived to double the number of people who can sit within sight and reasonable distance of the main altar. The crypt, already almost completed to the original design, is to be covered by a vast forecourt where, when weather and occasion combine, ten thousand people can take part in outdoor ceremonies.

The principal feature of the design is a great central dome, bigger than those of the Pantheon, St Peter's and St Paul's; and such is the importance attached to this dimensional superiority that there is a note on the published plan of the comparative diameters of the four domes. Whether or not modern structural techniques are to be employed in the construction of this monster, it will certainly look very much like an amalgam of the other three, with a dash of Delhi thrown in lest we forget the author of the original design. The church is to cost four million pounds, at the present value of money, and is to take some sixty years to complete. It is, of course, impossible to foresee over so long a period what the final cost will be; but it is perhaps salutary to reflect that the present estimated cost represents £800 for every person seated within view of the main altar. If this is compared with the range of perhaps £25 to £75 per person for which parish churches are being built all over the country, the difference may seem a high price to pay for 'splendour and dignity'.

It is unlikely that any more cathedrals will be needed in England

during this century, and this serves to sharpen the regret that so great an opportunity is being lost of creating a cathedral which would look forward instead of backward. Lutyens' original conception, always a very long-term dream, has passed into the realm of fantasy. It is no compliment to him to produce a laundry-shrunk version of it, the eternal English compromise. It seems that it is to be left to our Anglican friends at Coventry to build the one great church of our age which, because its design is as essentially inventive and original as were all the great medieval churches, can claim to be in the true tradition of English cathedral building.

DONOVAN PURCELL

REVIEWS

I PETER; A PASCHAL LITURGY. By F. L. Cross. (A. R. Mowbray & Co.; 3s. 6d.)

The lecture here printed as a booklet of some forty-five pages is a good example of how one field of study can benefit from the interest of a man who is learned in the cultivation of another. Dr Cross, as he says himself, has been chiefly occupied in patristic and liturgical studies; and it is precisely this close but not exclusive concern which gives him a clue to I Peter that the *ex professo* exegetes have missed. In some of the earliest liturgical texts that have come to light, namely the paschal homily of Melito of Sardis and one of Hippolytus of Rome (the reference of this in Migne, by the way, not given in Dr Cross's notes, is PG 59, 735 among the spuria of Chrysostom), he notices that great play is made with the likeness of *Pascha*, the Hebrew for 'Passover' transliterated into Greek, and the Greek word *paschein*, to 'suffer'. The Pasch is the occasion of the redemptive sufferings of Christ, and according to Melito at least is prophetically, if not etymologically, named from them.

Then Dr Cross happens to observe that the word *paschein* and its derivatives occur unusually often in I Peter. The author of the epistle habitually refers to the sufferings of Christ, where St Paul would have talked about his death. At times he strains the use of language a little to bring in the word *paschein*. Dr Cross makes the shrewd guess that the author's preoccupation with suffering is really a preoccupation with the Christian significance of the Pasch, that he is using the word 'suffer' almost as a code-word, a key-word for 'celebrate', or 'share in', or 'undergo' the true Pasch, which is the death and resurrection of Christ.

I say that the *ex professo* exegetes have missed the clue, because in fact both the most substantial commentaries of recent times, Dr Selwyn's and Dr Beare's, while differing in almost everything else, seem to be at