

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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