

Blackfriars

THE FRANCISCANS. By Alexandre Masseron. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 5/-)

Yet another book on the Franciscans! But this, without prejudice to its immediate forerunners, is a very charming one, despite some drawbacks. Let us say at once that it is very easy and pleasant reading throughout, enlivened by much shrewd and humorous comment, and excellently translated. Part I is a Historical Sketch. Once more we travel the familiar ground, meeting on the way not a few of the familiar errors. Did Elias really persecute Brother Leo? Surely that is now a discredited piece of discreditable fiction. Was John of Parma forced to resign? And if so, by whom? *Penitus nolebant absolvere eum*, writes Salimbene. Did the *Recollects* originate in France? Europe would be safer, and Spain probably truer than France. But all may be pardoned in view of the author's wise handling of St. Bonaventure, and his yet wiser *Note on the Crises of the Order*. 'If the gaunt plant of Rivortorto,' he writes, 'amid all the squalls that might have uprooted it, has become an immense three-branched tree, this is because a vigorous sap has risen tirelessly from the secular trunk, and because the spirit of Francis . . . has always animated his work' (p. 88). Part II, *Franciscan Life*, is very mixed fare, ranging from a chapter on Franciscan Hospitality to one on the requisite qualities of the Novice-Master and on his duties. One wonders for whom it has all been compiled. The author has evidently gathered much of his detailed information on life in a Franciscan friary from the friars in Switzerland and in France; but the Order is very much wider; and little of what he tells us is of value to an enquirer in other lands. The best chapter in Part II is the last, on *The Franciscan Spirit*. Its value lies not in the usual sentimental allusions to a vague and imaginary Franciscan *ethos*, of which we have had so much lately, and of which nearly all might be said with equal truth of any other Order, but in his excellent handling of the question of Franciscan poverty. Much here, as elsewhere in the book, is drawn from the writings of that sound Franciscan scholar, Père Gratien, O.M. Cap., but his own contribution is wise and true. 'Francis,' he writes, 'conceived poverty in such a form that it could only be put in practice by a very small number of men, living in a country where Nature is particularly clement, and at a period when the ideal of chivalry, which had so much power over men's minds, still made the beggar a sacred person.' Exactly so: Francis, the *saint*, with a companion or two, might travel penniless to the

East and back ; but even in his lifetime, his brethren could not establish themselves and *work* in Morocco, without changing their dress and using money. So it has ever been : every reform movement in the Order foundered on this rock ; once numbers grew, manners of life had to change. The *Observants* felt the inevitable pressure, and developed beneath it. When the Capuchins came, a century later, escape was equally impossible. They had the warning history of the Order behind them ; and full of pathos is the sad but sterile cry of their early *Chronicles* : ' We are for the *very few* : with numbers we shall lose our distinctive characteristics, and become as the others ' : but numbers they could not and would not stem. Thus, as the author of this book points out, despite *legal* divisions, the Franciscan Order is really one, and the layman who sees no difference between Minors and Capuchins is very nearly right.

O.F.M.

THE HOGARTH LETTERS. NO. 1 : A LETTER TO MADAN BLANCHARD. By E. M. Forster. NO. 2 : A LETTER TO A SISTER. By Rosamond Lehmann. (The Hogarth Press ; 1/-.)

It was announced that the Hogarth Letters were to be pamphlets ' in the easy style of familiar correspondence.' The first of the series, however, Mr. Forster's *Letter to Madan Blanchard*, ' an able-bodied seaman of the eighteenth century,' affords fresh evidence of the influence of Mr. Garnett on English prose, indeed it might well be a prelude to a ' Sailor's Return.' Still Prince Lee Boo's adventures in Rotherhithe are delightful, and the style, always elaborately ingenuous, is often pleasing.

Miss Lehman on the other hand tells us that in her *Letters to a Sister* she has ' lingered over luscious pen pictures.' This is very true.

G.M.

LA RAISON REGLE DE LA MORALITE, D'APRES SAINT-THOMAS. Par le R. P. Léonard Lehu, des Frères Prêcheurs. (Paris : Gabalda. Pp. 264 ; 15 francs.)

It is time indeed that the intimate and necessary relation of Reason and Morality should be set before the modern world clearly and apodictically, for the collapse of morality and the debasement of reason, characteristic of modern civilization, are due almost entirely to their separation. The moral law, far