

sight of him was in the library at Palace Court which we had to ourselves while the young couple were getting ready to catch their boat-train. He got out some proofs of *The Dublin Review*, passed by Alice and initialled by her. They were old articles of my own and the 'A.M.' in her beautiful handwriting was on their margins. 'Do you know what that stands for?' said Wilfrid. 'A marriage.'

FRA ANGELICO

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

MR JOHN POPE HENNESSY'S recent study on Fra Angelico¹ has already been widely and appreciatively reviewed. Yet it is curious how few of its reviewers seem to have noted the profound originality of his treatment and conclusion.

The volume is in itself an admirable specimen of the Phaidon productions at their best. It would be possible to criticise some of the colour reproductions but we are still at the stage when the majority of colour reproductions are liable to criticism. The photographing is excellent, the selection of details ideal for its purpose. The reproductions are predominant over the text as is so often the case in English Art History publications, yet here this is counter-balanced by Mr Pope-Hennessy's rare capacity for conciseness. In ninety pages of introduction and of catalogue he describes definitively three previously unknown yet major Italian painters of the Quattrocento.

One of these may still be described as Fra Angelico, but there is little in common between this Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, 'Fr Ioannes Petri de Magello iuxta Vichium Optimus Pictor', and the Angelico popularised by Rio in *De l'Art Chrétien*. He is a consummately accomplished and professional painter, employed by many patrons, working from carefully considered and balanced schemes, and consistently influenced by the ideals in the *Lucula Noctis* of his Dominican master Giovanni Dominici. The author of the *Lucula Noctis* was familiar with the technique of his contemporary Italian humanists and could write as well as they of 'Myrrha, Phaedra or Ganymede', but he rejected so many of their standards of value. To him the art of rhetoric seems over-prized. 'The beautiful form of the poem is like clothing. The body is worth more than the clothes which cover it. The soul is worth more than both.' He looked backwards to a half-imagined more simple past. So too Angelico, though as technically accomplished as any painter of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, rejects the fashionable forms of rhetoric in art, the 'Gothic'

¹ *Fra Angelico*. By John Pope-Hennessy. (Phaidon Press; £3 13s. 6d.)

rhetoric of Lorenzo Monaco, the lyrical rhetoric of Stefano da Verona. He looks back towards the Giottesque and it was as the successor of Giotto that his admirers prized him; the Dominican Domenico da Corella wrote of him, '*Iohannes nomine non Jotto non Cimaboue minor*'. The Giottesque quality of much of his work has frequently been obscured by restoration; it is admirably illustrated by the reproduction in this volume of the 'Massacre of the Innocents' as it was before it was restored.

The *Lucula Noctis* had been opposed not only to the contemporary cult of rhetoric but to the cult of private revelation which was to play so vital a part in the spirituality of late Renaissance Italy. This was to be true also of the paintings of Angelico with their emphasis on the common essentials of Gospel Catholicism. In this again he belongs very clearly to the first period of the Florentine Dominican Observance. As Mr Pope-Hennessy writes, 'Savonarola with his belief in the validity of individual visions inculcated a personal religious energy in the artists he inspired; the painting produced under the aegis of Dominici was the expression of collective and not of individual mystical experience'. A whole grouping of paintings attributed to Angelico and for the most part associated with the priory of San Marco are inspired by the same ideals, reflect the same school of spirituality, preach an identical moral lesson, and are clearly by different hands.

It is part of Mr Pope-Hennessy's achievement that he has developed canons of criticism by which the work of Giovanni da Fiesole can be distinguished from those of his school and those of his school from each other.

Two of these now stand out from the rest with sudden distinction: the Master of Cell 2 in San Marco and Zanobi Strozzi. It becomes apparent as soon as they are studied closely together that the Pietá in Cell 2 at San Marco, the Nativity in Cell 5, the empty Sepulchre in Cell 8 and the Baptism in Cell 42, are all by the same painter and that he was not Angelico. Of these the Baptism is the most original and most accomplished, but none are below a considerable standard. All are characterised by the tight folds of the constricted draperies, the long thin pointed noses in the sharp oval of the face, the furrows that mark the cheek bones, the shallowness of the perspective, the rhythm of the recurrent rock motif, the tall thin bodies, the acute sense of the form of the material portrayed—whether cloth, rock or straw. It was the same master who would seem to have painted the frescoes in Cell 4, 11, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, a number of scenes from the life of St Dominic in the Museo del Gesù in Cortona and twelve of the Scenes of the Life of Christ in the Museo di San Marco.

The Master of Cell 2 will most probably always remain anonymous, yet it is possible to hazard a few tentative guesses as to his life. The wealth of his Dominican iconography and the fact that he continued to

work in San Marco during Angelico's absence in Rome, and perhaps after his death, suggests the possibility that he was also a Dominican and of the Observance. He was Angelico's assistant. The Mocking of Christ in Cell 7 seems clearly a joint composition of them both. They were together at Cortona since his hand is apparent in the Cortona polytych; there is no sign that they were together in Rome. His composition suggests the probability that he was first trained as a miniaturist. His style seems curiously reminiscent of two groups of wall paintings in the monastery of Dionysiou on Mount Athos. This may be a coincidence or may suggest that his background was Siennese, not Florentine.

In contrast to the Master of Cell 2, Zanobi Strozzi already possessed a recognised position in the history of Quattrocento painting. Only now his position is radically altered. Very little is left of the Zanobi Strozzi discussed by Collobi-Ragghianti in *La Critica D'Arte* of 1950 and he has a far wider reach of talent than could be gathered from D'Ancona. Mr Pope-Hennessy has queried a number of the paintings ascribed to him and has gathered together a body of work clearly by one hand which he has established to be his: the 'Madonna della Stella' and the 'Virgin with Nine Angels' in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, the 'Coronation of the Virgin' in the Museo di San Marco, the Assumption scenes in the Gardner Museum, the King David drawing in the British Museum, the Virgin and St John at Princeton, the Annunciation and Epiphany on a single panel. All these have at times been ascribed to Angelico, all could still be described as 'Angelico' if that term was used collectively for something that was a movement as much as it was a school, all are by a single painter of very inferior genius to Fra Giovanni da Fiesole; of very inferior genius but of very considerable talent. If we follow D'Ancona in *La Miniatura Italiana* and ascribe the four volumes of 'Angelico' Miniatures in San Marco to Zanobi Strozzi and if we consider as a strong possibility, discussed by Van Marle, that Strozzi is the Master of Cell 31—and therefore responsible for the 'Christ in Limbo', the 'Sermon on the Mount', the 'Agony in the Garden' and the 'Institution of the Eucharist'—he becomes one of the most accomplished painters of the Quattrocento.

The Fra Angelico of the Rio legend was distinguished from all other painters by his individual religious experience and his individual religious approach. The Fra Angelico of Mr Pope-Hennessy's study was united to a group of painters by identical religious experience and identity in religious approach. Some of that group were quite undistinguished, like the Master of Cell 36. But the identity in approach and in religious emphases was so complete that their works passed naturally under his name. He was distinguished from them not apparently by any separate mystical experience but by technique. His greatness as opposed to their talent or their mediocrity lay in the union of extreme sensibility with

consummate technical mastery. He did not originate a movement in early fifteenth-century Dominican spirituality; he reflected one. Mr Pope-Hennessy's volume has opened a new chapter in Angelico studies; it could also be the opening of a new chapter in the study of the School of Blessed Giovanni Dominici.

REVIEWS

DIVINE HORSEMEN: THE LIVING GODS OF HAITI. By Maya Deren. (Thames and Hudson; 25s.)

DJANGAWUL: AN ABORIGINAL RELIGIOUS CULT OF NORTH-EASTERN ARNHEM LAND. By Ronald M. Berndt. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; £2 2s.)

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION. By Jaroslav Cerny. (Hutchinson; 8s. 6d.)

BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN RELIGION. By S. H. Hooke. (Hutchinson; 8s. 6d.)

MAGIC BOOKS FROM MEXICO with an Introduction and Notes on the Plates. By C. A. Burland. (Penguin Books; 4s. 6d.)

ENGLISH MYTHS AND TRADITIONS. By Henry Bett. LITT.D. (Batsford; 12s. 6d.)

'Myth is the twilight speech of an old man to a boy. . . . Myth is the facts of the mind made manifest in a fiction of matter. The speech of an elder in the twilight of his life is not his history but a legacy; he speaks not to describe matter but to demonstrate meaning. . . . Out of physical processes he creates a metaphysical processional. . . . The fictions of the old men are their final fecundity. As their flesh once labored to bring forth flesh, so the minds of the elders labor, with a like passion, to bring forth a mind. By rites of initiation they would accomplish the metamorphosis of matter into man. . . . The rites of this second birth, into the metaphysical cosmos, everywhere mime the conditions of the first physical birth. . . . To enter a new myth is a moment of initiation. . . . It is to enter, in one's mind, the room which is both womb and tomb, to become innocent of everything except the motivation for myth, the natural passion of the mind for meaning. It is to meditate upon the common human experience which is the origin of the human effort to comprehend the human condition. . . . It is the doer who is changed by the ritual, and for him, therefore, the world changes accordingly.'

These quotations indicate the interest, importance and value of the subject-matter of all the books we have listed. But they must also serve to illustrate something of Miss Deren's perceptiveness and of her power and economy as a writer. One wonders if any of the professional theorists of myth and ritual have succeeded in saying half as much or with a quarter of such lucidity. All we are told of her (and a biographical note would be a welcome substitute for the pomposities and spleen of Mr Joseph Camp-