

CHOPIN. By Arthur Hedley. HANDEL. By Percy M. Young. The Master Musicians Series, edited by Eric Blom. (Dent; 7s. 6d. each volume.)

These two books are worthy additions to the excellent 'Master Musicians' series. Both writers have a thorough knowledge not only of their man but also of his setting in the social, political and artistic background of his time. Dr Young's wide reading as attested by the many apt quotations from contemporary sources which enliven his 'Handel' volume, and his vivid sense of period are nowhere better seen than in his insistence on the matter-of-fact, craftsmanlike nature of the musician's calling in the 18th century, as distinct from the 'prophet-priest' conception created by Romanticism. It is the more unfortunate that the author's style should be marred by preciosities. The intelligent layman, for whom the series is in the first place designed, is not necessarily erudite and it should not be taken for granted that he will recognize *hubris* in Greek characters or to know that *Dom* (not even uniformly italicised) is the German for cathedral. Nor do manufactured adjectives like 'triadic', 'virtuosic' and 'accompanimental' help to lighten a style of which the worst features are epitomised in this sentence: 'If there was one lesson taught by Handel to posterity, and to Gluck according to Burney, it was that periphrasis is anathema'.

But these blemishes are important mainly in so far as they make the book less useful to those for whom it is intended, and to criticise them seems ungenerous when the author gives so much, and so stimulatingly, not only of Handel's life and personality but also of his music. His discussion of Handel's harmonic idiom and of his treatment of the orchestra—with excellently-chosen examples—and his chapters on the operas and oratorios cannot but create a sharp realisation of how little we really know of Handel and an equally sharp desire to hear neglected masterpieces like 'Jephtha' (in the author's view Handel's crowning achievement) or the cantatas 'Semele' and 'Hercules', and at least a wider selection from the operas. Perhaps the author, reacting from the traditional picture of Handel as a 'sacred' composer, is less than fair to 'Messiah', and goes too far in speaking of the 'misconception that Handel was more interested in God than in man'; actually Handel was so superbly at home in treating of both God and man that there would be an excellent case for regarding him as music's greatest example of Christian humanism!

Mr Hedley's book on Chopin is free from eccentricities of style, and his knowledge of Polish has enabled him to make use both of contemporary documents and important later books inaccessible to the ordinary English reader. His treatment of the composer's relationship with George Sand, and their final breach, is admirable. He explodes the various legends that transform each, in turn, into the other's 'evil genius', and shows that if there was an 'evil genius',

it was George Sand's daughter Solange, the cause of the pitiful misunderstanding that brought about the rupture. The whole story leaves the reader with a lively sympathy for them both, and a poignant sense of needless waste and tragedy. In his handling of Chopin's music the author is surely right in insisting that it should be judged by its own internal laws and not by any supposed 'programme' nor by the laws of classical sonata construction. He gives due weight to the Polish element in Chopin's music—not only the intangible spirit of ardour and longing that made him, in his lifetime and for all time, the living voice of Poland's tragedy, but also to the actual traditional folk-music embodied in his work which, combined with his revolutionary piano technique, 'placed the first explosive charge against that long-revered edifice of classical diatonic harmony which now lies in utter ruin and disintegration'. As the author himself sums it up, 'Strange that a poet's reveries should forebode the end of an epoch!'

ROSEMARY HUGHES.

How to Study, being the Letter of St Thomas Aquinas to Brother John *De Modo Studendi*. Latin text with translation and exposition by Victor White, O.P. (Blackfriars; 1s.)

Brother John was one of St Thomas's younger Dominican brethren; he did not importune his brother and master in vain. A new edition of St Thomas's letter and Fr White's running commentary cannot fail to be welcome. It is true that the format is not attractive, but the grace and wisdom of St Thomas and Fr White's lively exposition triumph. Seldom, and nowhere in shorter span, is there struck so perfect a balance between exhortation to scientific method and an admonition to the devout life.

C. R.

JUDGEMENT AT CHELMSFORD. By Charles Williams. (Oxford University Press; 2s. 6d.)

This pageant play was written for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Diocese of Chelmsford, and although production, because of the war, was made vain in 1939, admirers of the late Charles Williams will be pleased to hear that it is to be presented in London at the Scala Theatre during 1947. Here admiration ceases, for it is important to distinguish between pageant plays in verse and poetic dramas. For instance, *The Rock* by Eliot is unlikely in future generations to be classed with *The Family Reunion* and, in a similar way, *Judgement at Chelmsford* is unlikely to be classed with Williams's *Thomas Cranmer*. In fact, almost in fear of such a verdict, the author in this case admits to originally ascribing the text of the former to Peter Stanhope—a name to which on various occasions he had recourse, so that the approval or disapproval which his other works had brought him might not mar the purpose of such writing as that now under scrutiny.

The pageant is presented in eight episodes together with a prologue and epilogue in which Chelmsford (personified as a woman) is discovered on her birthday coming to the gate of Heaven to talk with her