

author seems to be unaware that problems and criteria of this nature exist; and, after reading his Introduction, in which he describes, with relative brevity, what he believes the Middle Ages to have been like, one is hardly sorry that his often-declared intention of exposing the texts of his plays as illustrative of medieval religious and social life is never carried out. Narrow specialists, if they are wise, will not attempt wide surveys; and if their studies compensate for narrowness with depth, they do not result in such very shallow works as this.

ERIC COLLEDGE

THE SLAVE OF LIFE. By M. D. H. Parker. (Chatto and Windus; 18s.)

Did Shakespeare have a philosophy of life? How many times has that question been asked and with what sketchy results very often! Miss Parker, however, gives us a very substantial answer. In this book she considers Shakespeare's views on justice but that takes us very far afield to think about nature and grace, corruption and salvation. Perhaps the most important thing she says is that theology was significant to Shakespeare: this is something we are not always allowed to appreciate. We are encouraged to think of Shakespeare as first and last a craftsman who was so busy churning out his plays for the theatre that he couldn't be bothered with the things which we should nowadays call 'abstract matters'—faith and morals. That of course ignores the intellectual and spiritual tempo of his age and in any case will not stand in the face of the very texts of the plays. *Hamlet* bristles with moral problems; *Antony and Cleopatra* is very largely written in Catholic theological language; even such 'trivialities' as *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* depend for their growth on moral and theological roots. It would have been quite impossible for Shakespeare to write 'belles lettres'. Moreover, he takes his stand firmly on the traditional Catholic platform. He could never, for instance, have created a figure like Milton's Satan: pride for him was always a sin, and he was so aware of this and of the ultimate dreariness of sin that this pride never became a magnificent sin. There is no figure anywhere in Shakespeare even like the Duchess of Malfi. This awareness of sin is a thing that sometimes even surprises us, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* when it is contrasted with the transmuting power of sincere love. Together with a sense of sin there goes pity for suffering and even for the sinner, and the even more typically Christian attitude of charity for the failure and the blackguard. Falstaff will always be something of an enigma; true enough, Shakespeare found him good box-office and therefore developed the character, but the original attitude to him remained, and we cannot imagine the Puritans, if they had dared to set foot in a theatre, taking a kindly view of the audience cheering the lovely bully; nor can we imagine business-like politicians approving

Shakespeare's tenderness towards Henry IV. Yet it was all part of a creed which, though it insisted on the triumph of justice, nevertheless believed that justice was not so much to be tempered with mercy and charity as to be perfected by them. To be less than charitable to Falstaff would be less than just. But above all Shakespeare's view is what it is now fashionable to call 'incarnational', that is, a belief which is inspired by the knowledge that Christ has redeemed and made holy the things of his own creation, and that if we will only be faithful to them as God has ordained them fruitfulness will be the result. It was perhaps a pity that Miss Parker did not make greater use of this theme as displayed in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where in a quite startling manner we find good being drawn out of evil and when Cleopatra puts on her crown and robes for the immortal longings that are on her she is in fact preparing to meet her lover in eternity. A daring and yet perfectly logical conclusion. One feels also scarcely convinced by the unravelling of the character of Ophelia, but then she always was a difficult child. Miss Parker has made a very considerable contribution to the study of Shakespeare's thought and her use both of the text of the plays and of theological texts, chiefly St Thomas Aquinas, provide not only an admirable piece of reading but a valuable book of reference.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI. A Pictorial Biography. By Leonard von Matt and Walter Hauser. Translated from the German by Sebastian Bullough, O.P. (Longmans; 30s.)

St Francis of Assisi is the most picturesque of the saints, in the literal sense that his life, as we think of it, falls inevitably into a series of pictures; and these are mostly landscapes. His Order had the luck to begin in central Italy, which is not only one of the loveliest regions of Europe but is also the one that produced Europe's most brilliant painters during the two centuries that followed the birth of St Francis. The Umbrian saint, so native in his poverty to that roughly delicate and airy, glittering landscape, was a godsend to Italian art. The great popular movement he started was and still is an amazingly Italian thing, without being the less universal for that. But the saint is a godsend to the modern photographer, too, as the beautiful plates that adorn this book so clearly show.

It is sufficient praise of these photographers to say that they bring Italy before the imagination. It is almost a shock to see stone, water and trees, hills and buildings so plainly, with such a pure directness. Against this background the Franciscan story is unfolded in a suitably unpretentious way; though it might have been better, surely, if the narrator had sometimes been a bit more careful to distinguish legend from ascertained fact. In at least two places an episode that begins to be told