

FATHER THURSTON. By Joseph Crehan, S.J. (Sheed & Ward; 12s. 6d.)

Father Herbert Thurston, of the Society of Jesus, died at the age of eighty-three on November 3rd, 1939, when, as Father Crehan says, 'the world was in twilight'; and it is only now, when there is enough light to see the twilight, that we are beginning to realise what that death meant, not simply in terms of our loss but in terms of what Father Thurston was and did. It would seem there is room and material for a full-length study of him and his work: but it is too soon for that yet; and in the meantime Father Crehan's memoir—discreet but not 'stuffy', summary but not jejune—is extremely welcome.

There is in it much that will be new to most people about Father Thurston's earlier years: his relations with George Tyrrell, his work on the historical side of the liturgical revival. As a counsellor of souls I suppose he was virtually unknown except among those who personally profited, and Father Crehan's pertinent chapter is enlightening. Some of his controversies, historical and other, are not forgotten, nor the urbanity and erudition with which he conducted them. But I suppose that to most the name Thurston is principally associated with the critical examination of certain popular beliefs and practices, with the 'trying of spirits' and with the physical phenomena of mysticism. I understand that certain of his papers on these last are shortly to be republished, which is good news. Father Thurston's rigorously scientific approach should have a most desirable influence on current interest in these matters, which is certainly sometimes excessive and seemingly not always free from morbidity and sensationalism.

A most valuable feature of this memoir is a bibliography of Father Thurston's writings, 761 items (which the individual contributions to encyclopedias, etc., would bring up to about 1,000), mostly contributions to periodicals, especially *The Month*. A particular example of its value is in relation to the revised edition of Butler's *Lives of the Saints*. Father Crehan is not quite right when he says that, 'By a self-denying ordinance he did not quote in his extensive notes on sources and studies for the saints' lives any of his own writings'. There is in fact a number of references to them in the Butler bibliographies; but almost always Father Thurston refrained from mentioning his own name. With the help of Father Crehan's bibliography (to which there is also an index) these can now be identified at once. Some of the items listed will send readers running to the library out of sheer curiosity: e.g., *Cats in Catholic Ritual*, *King Alfred the Idolater*, *Was St Charles Borromeo a Murderer?*, *A Medieval Mrs Proudie* (this surely was the wife of St Volusian, Bishop of Tours from 488 to 496), *The Beginnings of Spectacular Cricket*, *John Galsworthy as a Dog-Lover*. And in *The Month* for 1920 are five articles on *Limpas* and the *Problem of Collective*

Hallucination. That makes one think. Who remembers *Limpias* now?  
DONALD ATTWATER

THE MAN ON A DONKEY. By H. F. M. Prescott. (Eyre & Spottiswoode; 25s.)

Miss Prescott's *The Man on a Donkey* should meet with strong approval from those who look for facts in their historical novels. Her story of the rise and fall of the Pilgrimage of Grace told through the lives of five characters, three historical and two fictional, is a masterpiece of the intelligent accumulation of historical detail. We can be sure that no dish of food, no garment, no casual reference to this or that custom will be out of place, not only because the author is a professional historian, but because she has so obviously lived with her period, and reproduced it with such loving care, that it would hurt her more than us if she had been in the least inaccurate. The dialogue is an achievement. The author has set her face against all attempts to make an impact of reality by bringing it 'up to date', and instead has blended in numberless phrases and expressions of the time with a severely disciplined prose, and produced a living and believable speech.

Miss Prescott has spiked the guns of any criticism of her two lengthy volumes as a novel by calling her tale, and indeed writing it as, a 'chronicle'. As a narrative, interweaving the lives of her characters over twenty years, it is most skilful. But just because it is a chronicle there may be found something dissatisfying about it. The author cannot be free to leap from one time to another, to pick and choose for the sake of unity or dramatic effect. Nor is the style altogether an advantage. It is descriptive, lucid, beautiful in places, always perfectly controlled, but without variety.

Miss Prescott allows us no relief. The story is weighted from the beginning; and such goodness as does exist pales beside the evil or, at least, worthlessness of the majority of the characters. And it is here that the reader who looks for something more than correct detail may quarrel with Miss Prescott. How does she manage to make even May Day revels a dreary affair? After all, at the beginning of the period she is dealing with a letter from England and remarks on the feeling in the country: 'Heaven laughs and the earth rejoices'. Miss Prescott's book might have been even more effective than it is if she had presented to us more clearly this contrast between the early and later years of Henry VIII's reign and her period; and also, if, once or twice, in the course of a long narrative which purports to deal with men and women as they are (or were), we too should laugh.

RACHEL ATTWATER