

SIR KENELM DIGBY. By R. T. Petersson. (Jonathan Cape; 25s.)

This study is typical of many emanating from American universities, where so much interest is taken in seventeenth-century England. It has first to 'satisfy the examiner' by the industry and curious research of the student, and this it certainly does by a formidable array of notes—more than five hundred of them—in which books good bad and indifferent jostle each other in type that is needlessly unkind on the eyes. It is better written than many, though one is constantly reminded how sharply American is diverging from current English. Digby was a man of very wide interests, and a critical biographer needs to be something of an authority *de omni re scibili*. One should not expect any very profound or original criticism in a book such as this. But one does expect the facts to be stated accurately and fairly, and one is all too often disappointed. There is a great deal of criticism that seeks to impress rather than to enlighten, and much of it is shallow and callow, and will not bear analysis. There is the usual dabbling in psychology, and having triumphantly labelled Digby as 'extrovert', the author doubtless feels satisfied that he has added to our knowledge. There is also a sprinkling of sentences that may mean something to the author, but which mean precious little to the reader. 'Of the many times Sir Kenelm crossed to France, none was more decisive than his crossing in 1635. To go over to France was to go over to Romanism. To take up French life was to break off more or less conclusively with English life.' It also meant getting further away from Scotland. But why more decisively so in 1635?

Digby came of a distinguished Catholic family, and religion played a prominent part in his life and in his thought. This the author recognizes, and much space is devoted to religious topics. It is unfortunately the weakest aspect of the book. Even the terminology betrays a lack of acquaintance with the literature of the period. Digby is converted from 'Romanism' and becomes an 'Anglican'. In a book bristling with notes one might expect one or two for the more sensational discoveries. Of the Powder Plot conspirators we are informed, for instance, that 'nearly all were Yorkshiremen newly converted to Rome' (p. 19) and that 'in the five years following the Gunpowder Plot at least fifty priests and lay Catholics were put to death' (p. 25). These are not incidental slips, but statements made to prove or illustrate some point, and presumably the author has some sort of reference to offer. After statements of this kind one wonders whether he is really in a position to stigmatize Hugh Ross Williamson's book on the Plot as 'an exciting and biased report' (p. 328). Again, in the crude account of Innocent X, if Mr Petersson has evidence that Donna Olimpia moved into the Vatican (p. 217), it would be worth giving.

Mr Petersson has 'attempted to date everything according to the Gregorian Calendar' (p. 11). This was once the practice in England, but it led to such chaos that it was given up a century ago. The trouble is that it is so difficult to be consistent. Mr Petersson does not, for the Gunpowder Plot, 'Remember, remember' *the twenty-sixth of October*. The only satisfactory, and now almost universal, practice is to print the actual date on the manuscript, and leave it to the intelligence of the reader. But the author seems loth to leave anything to the intelligence of the reader.

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.

CHARLEMAGNE. By Richard Winston. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 25s.)

The author of this new biography rejects the idea that Charlemagne was merely a rude and unlettered barbarian. He insists that he was not only a great political figure but also a profound theologian and one of the foremost intellectuals of his age. These are high claims: that the reader is left convinced that they are justified is perhaps the fairest measure of Mr Winston's success.

His interpretation of the problem of Charlemagne's coronation as *Imperator Romanorum* is certainly original. In his view it was primarily an attempt by Leo III and the King to reconcile the citizens of Rome to Frankish rule and to their pro-Frankish pope whom they had already tried to depose. For Charlemagne it also represented, of course, the culmination of his ambitions.

Some readers may question Mr Winston's rendering of the title *rector ecclesiae*. He suggests that Charlemagne saw himself as 'the true head of the church'. If this is so little room is left for the more common view that the coronation of A.D. 800 was intended to establish a dual system with Pope and Emperor ruling together, the one governing the spiritual, the other the temporal domain.

A theocratic institution, the new Empire embodied the conception of Christianity as the ultimate social unity with the temporal ruler holding a sacred character as the divinely appointed leader of the Christian people. Within this unitary conception of the Christian community the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual powers may indeed have become blurred, but it is surely unwise to press too far the idea of the two powers as no more than two aspects of the one society. The deposition of Childeric III should warn us against this assumption. By the death of Charlemagne the three powers of Papacy, Roman Empire and Frankish Kingdom, to use Alcuin's trichotomy, had of course become confused beyond unraveling, and the fall of the Empire may in large measure be explained by just this confusion.

ADRIAN JOHNSON