

scarcely banish from his mind the author of *The Naval Heritage* or *The Age of Charles I*, still less the Apostolic Delegate with, one supposes, a weight of administrative care which alone would provide a just excuse for a lack of time for writing. But, while these considerations are strictly irrelevant to the criticism of a novel which is emphatically not a bishop's hobby (it could have been fly-fishing or chess) but the work of a writer who might seem to have had all the leisure and detachment in the world to give himself to the problems of a novelist's job, yet they do suggest the secret of its achievement. For Dr Mathew brings to his novels the immense advantage of a serenity which is the fruit of a scholar's objectivity and, even more, of a priestly understanding of the human situation.

The setting is Florence after the last war, and the characters for the most part English men and women. This has the advantage of an economy of construction—a few days in time, a small group of people, a single incident—which allows Dr Mathew to develop his special gift of tolerant observation, of making the present moment in any one of his characters' consciousness a recapitulation of so much that has gone before: persons and places and all the determinants of habit and heredity and a memory to match them. Mrs Hardesty, a rich widow, is to marry Christopher Tremayne, an ineffectual diplomat who failed. There is a best man, a naval officer of exact appreciation of career; there are the English nuns (nostalgic for Lancashire), the lawyer, the ladies who run the finishing school and the impoverished Italian prince. Nothing much happens, except the marriage and the death of Tremayne. But everything happens that matters in the final analysis of what men and women are, and are made for. Here the operations of grace are not violently imposed to solve a novelist's dilemma. They are threads that run through all the coloured pattern of ordinary experience and give it meaning and depth and destiny. Even the repetitive devices of style serve this sustained purpose, and the cool evocative prose is at every point the servant of the situation. Its notable want of verbs is in fact a symbol of its achievement, for *In Vallombrosa* is, so to say, written in verbal nouns: it is not concerned to plan or plot. It brings the steady light of a charitable wisdom and a brilliant observation to bear on a few days in a few people's lives, and that small circle is indeed concentric with the larger range of all human life. You may argue to creation from a grain of sand, and *In Vallombrosa* is about much more than fallen leaves.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE PRIEST AS MINISTER OF CONFIRMATION. By E. J. Mahoney. (Burns Oates and Washbourne; 5s.)

This is a commentary on the decree '*Spiritus Sancti*', September 14th, 1946, of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments. The full text of

the Decree is given in Latin and English, with applications made in two more recent decrees by the Sacred Congregations of *Propaganda* and for the Eastern Church. The ritual to be observed will be found here. The excellent and most helpful commentary is conceived on the same lines as that written by the same author on marriage preliminaries. The nature of the priest's delegated power of confirming is touched on, and its determining character seen in the grant of jurisdiction. As is pointed out, it is therefore subject to the rule of canon 209 on supplied jurisdiction. Which does not mean that all errors in administration evade responsibility for invalidity. The power of confirming is restricted in the decree to those named and under the conditions envisaged, and it cannot validly be sub-delegated. It extends to exempt religious houses within the area of the priest's jurisdiction. The same faculty is enjoyed by missionaries who may be granted wider additional powers from their own Ordinaries. The recipient must be actually within the territory of the confirming priest, which Canon Mahoney takes as an added reason for making a clear definition of parochial boundaries. As with extreme unction, danger of death by sickness is a condition for valid administration.

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

ST THOMAS AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: Three Interpretations. By William Bryar. (Henry Regnery Co., Chicago; \$5.)

The main body of this book, entitled 'Systematic Interpretative Study', is an attempt to present an explicitly logically patterned account of some part of thomist metaphysics. Since many of the sections are substantially word for word the same, we feel that this would have been more satisfactorily achieved in ten pages than in one hundred. No texts are adduced to support the interpretation until the first appendix is reached, when the connection is not made very clear. The other appendices contain useful material collected from various reviews, but do not amount to 'discussions' as they are sometimes called. The introductory chapters in which the author seeks to expound his intentions we find difficult to understand and out of all proportion to the eventual achievement. An attractive programme conscientiously carried out is in general obscured by verbosity.

I.T.

RUSSIAN OPERA. By Martin Cooper.

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN. By Arthur Jacobs. (World of Music; Max Parrish; 7s. 6d. each.)

The 'World of Music' series consists of short monographs of about seventy pages, profusely and well illustrated. As far as the format is concerned the only objection one could make is that the music examples are untidy: if a proper music type is not available it would be better to