

Thomas a Kempis, and a comparative unlikeness in those of the pairs *Imitation-Gerson* and *Thomas a Kempis-Gerson*.

The work was originally undertaken as a contribution to the controversy on the authorship of the *Imitation*, and the results obtained show that whoever he may have been, it was not Gerson. The limitations of the method are shown by the fact that no more positive conclusion can be reached by its use. The general reader who takes the trouble to work through the book will get a useful insight into statistical method and will learn a large number of interesting facts concerning the vocabularies of Macaulay and Bunyan, and even of Basic English. In spite of the austerity of the subject-matter the style is fresh and the manner often amusing. Those with any taste for questions of authenticity or of the details of literary style, if they are willing to exercise a little perseverance, will find this a most interesting book.

ANTONINUS FINILI, O.P.

THE OLIVE AND THE SWORD. By G. Wilson Knight. (Humphrey Milford: 6s.)

With 'The Olive and the Sword' Mr. Wilson Knight has added to his work of Shakespearian analysis a volume on Shakespeare's conception of England at war. It is a straightforward example of the author's familiar method showing the predominant symbolism disengaged from surrounding distractions, but by no means isolated from the relevances of plot and context. We thus have something from the field of Mr. Knight's greatest achievement combined with one of his chief enthusiasms. The book is in a sense an essay in anthropology, an examination of one of the principal English myths, the myth of St. George and the Dragon.

In the chapter 'Roses at War' on the three parts of Henry VI, we are shown 'the patriotic Henry VI, himself a weakling,' watching a battle and expressing his pity for mankind at odds with itself, in the words:

'Wither one rose and let the other flourish;  
If you contend a thousand lives must wither.'

Nevertheless war is seen to be a natural feature of all the visible creation, and the paradox of this sequence of plays is acknowledged and summed up in the words: 'The blood of the slain is felt by relative or supporter, as a rich, sweet, potent yet piteous thing. Neither side has any monopoly of these images: the terrible Margaret can be as pathetic as anyone.' Chosen as the central comment is the king's speech comparing the shepherd's life and that of royalty. That paradox taken in connection with that comment show that at this stage the poet's vision turns to a solution of contentment with personalities and societies in which the opposing forces are but little differentiated. As Mr. Knight puts it, 'in Henry VI . . . the victims' supporters . . . though violent, are, in a deeper sense, all

strangely passive : they are at the mercy of circumstances and their uncontrolled selves.'

*King John, Richard III., Richard II., 1 and 2 Henry IV. and Henry V.* are grouped under the title *St. George for England*, and in them we find a renewed acceptance of the necessity of struggle, and a corresponding increase in the moral stature of the characters. A certain contempt for the first solution is in evidence : *Richard II.* sees that

God omnipotent  
Is mustering in his clouds on our behalf  
Armies of pestilence

against his rival Bolingbroke. But *Richard* himself is accused by *Margaret* of unmanly weakness. In *Mr. Knight's* words 'he has too little of the beast in him.' Yet along with this reinstatement of conflict as something to be valued we are given a new goal of advance instead of one of retirement into pastoral simplicity : in *King John* it is the Papal Legate who brings about the fulfilment of *Salisbury's* wish that

. . . . these two Christian armies might combine  
The blood of malice in a vein of league ;

*Henry IV.* purposes to atone for his bloodstained usurpation by a Crusade ; *Henry V.* who calls on the name of God before *Agincourt*, and gives thanks to him after the victory, is an attempt to portray the nobility of the Christian warrior. We may sum up the author's findings by saying that without the dragon *St. George* is a meaningless figure, while if *George* is not a saint the dragon will win. This theme the second half of the book works over again in terms of the later plays.

As a Shakespearian study this book is in no way unworthy of the author's previous ones : it is by far the most successful of his manifestos on England's destiny.

IVO THOMAS, O.P.

THE BEAR OF BRITAIN. By Edward P. Frankland. (Macdonald ; 9s. 6d.)

The figure of *Arthur* is hard to disentangle from the elaborate frieze of Arthurian legend, whether it be the rich tapestried version of *Malory* or the Tennysonian water-colour. Any attempt at re-establishing the *Arthur* of history must be ruthless. The muddled sources of sixth-century British history are scarcely promising for a plain story. But when so much fantastic speculation has passed for serious history, a novelist may be allowed the fullest liberty. He can at least make a fresh start.

This is what *Mr. Frankland* has done in his novel, *The Bear of Britain*. He has, in the words of *Mr. Lloyd George's* introduction, 'cleared away the lumber of incredible mediaeval fantasies' and has