

BLACKFRIARS

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

SIR THOMAS MORE. By Christopher Hollis. (Sheed and Ward; 7/6.)

'Con impazienza ardente.' Let the passage be given in full: 'I promotori della Petizione, umigliandola ai piedi della Santità di Nostro Signore cum tutta devozione filiale e cum piena fiducia nella sua compiacenza benevola e paterna, formuleno il voto che la Causa del Beato sia portata al buon esito che il culto di tutto un populo—e diffalto, per quanto è diffusa la lingua materno del Martire—aspetta con impazienza ardente.'

So wrote the late Professor Bullough in a short memorandum which he was invited to prepare for the private reading of the Holy Father the day before the mighty Petition for the Canonisation of Blessed Thomas More was formally presented to His Holiness last Easter.

Now that burning impatience has given way to ardent hope and even to expectation of the early canonization of Blessed John Fisher and Blessed Thomas More popular interest in the life and writings of the martyrs will naturally increase. And this increase of interest will certainly ensure a wide and warm welcome for this new book that Mr. Hollis has given us on Sir Thomas More.

Here in attractive form is a record of the life and writings of one whom Professor Holdsworth salutes as the noblest character in the history of English Law, and to whom many Englishmen will be prepared (in the company of Mr. Hollis) to concede the title of 'the greatest of our countrymen.'

Though it is in every respect a true biography, the main concern of the volume is with the quality of the mind and of the works of Thomas More. And in making his estimate of these matters the author has many shrewd and pungent things to say about the assessments that others have attempted. In discussing *Utopia*, for instance, he maintains an independent view against the earlier estimates of Seebohm and Father Bridgett and the Abbé Bremond and Mr. W. E. Campbell. It may, in fact, be justly said that Mr. Hollis has put *Utopia* in its place: it is 'the picture of the state of society to which man can attain without revelation.'

There are many other passages of capital interest and importance: on the place of Greek studies in the Oxford and England of those days, on the friendship between characters so different as More and Erasmus, on the philosophical position of More as a disciple of Aristotle and St. Thomas, of the significance of his debate with St. German and the conflict of their philosophies: More on the side of Aristotle and St. Thomas and the Canonists, St. German (who was to exercise much in-

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fluence in Post-Reformation England) on the side of Ockham and Marsilio and the Common Lawyers.

In fine, a penetrating and in many ways an illuminating study of the life and mind of one whom we hope soon to honour as a Saint.

RICHARD O'SULLIVAN.

CARDINAL XIMENES AND THE MAKING OF SPAIN. By Reginald Merton. (Kegan Paul; 12/6.)

This life of the great Cardinal Ximenes de Cisneros is written, we are told, from a non-sectarian point of view. This in itself is an excellent ideal for the writing of history when it means that one tries to discard prejudices and judge facts objectively. Unfortunately that is just what Mr. Merton does not do. He makes no attempt to judge events in the light of the motives inspiring the people who enacted them, he does not trouble to explain these motives either in themselves or as part of a wider policy concerned with the 'making of Spain'; instead he rejects them because they do not conform to his own standards.

This defective approach to his subject is more evident in Mr. Merton's treatment of Queen Isabella than in his account of Ximenes himself. But his picture of the Cardinal is marred by his arbitrary selection of those characteristics which he himself thinks most important. Within his own limitation of his theme Mr. Merton writes competently and attractively, but the result is not really a life of Ximenes. We may not know much about the Cardinal's religious life, but at least we do know what the spiritual life means to a man as deeply religious and ascetic as he was; and we do know that such a man gains more from a 'long period of almost unbroken solitude and self-communing' than just a 'greater knowledge of himself, of his likes and dislikes, of his weakness and strength.' The spiritual life does not enter into Mr. Merton's scale of values, therefore he does not associate with it those magnificent qualities of character which he most admires in Ximenes, despite the fact that for Ximenes himself the spiritual life was obviously of more value than anything else.

Mr. Merton does not go outside the usual sources and authorities, and tells us therefore nothing new (his correction of the traditional view of Charles V's final treatment of Ximenes seems to me unconvincing). A little additional research outside the ordinary sources would have been most valuable. This picture of Ximenes would have been more complete had it contained a fuller account of the important disciplinary measures he im-