

THE SCHOLAR AND THE CROSS. The Life and Work of Edith Stein. By Hilda C. Graef. (Longmans; 18s.)

Miss Graef more than once speaks of 'the general type of devotional biography', examples of which are to be found among Edith Stein's writings. It is clear, then, that she has explicit standards for such biographical writing; and it is certainly true that her own biography of Edith Stein demands more critical attention than a great deal of the religious biography with which we are familiar.

If I were to attempt a brief characterization of Miss Graef's approach, I should call it *typological*. The title of the book perhaps sufficiently indicates this; but Miss Graef is also concerned with two other major themes worked out in Edith Stein's life and death: the Vocation of Woman, and the Redemption of Israel. The consequence of this typological approach is that too often the person of Edith Stein tends to be less immediately apprehended, by both reader and biographer, than the themes illustrated: Miss Graef seems only to warm to her subject when an event of the life exhibits typological significance. The Redemption of Israel theme is naturally the most successfully demonstrated; and the closing pages of Miss Graef's study most movingly integrate eye-witness accounts, sympathetic apprehension and reflective Christian insight. But the other themes don't seem so happily treated. The Prologue on Woman, and the development, in the body of the work, of the theme so stated, are a little off-key; and the discussion of the philosophical writings fails to engage the intellectual interest of at least this reader, largely, one is tempted to suppose, because the writings don't themselves fully engage the interests of the biographer. By way of representing the inadequacy here, why 'Scholar' in the title? (Except for the alliteration). Edith Stein seems to have been, on Miss Graef's own showing, highly unscholarly, though intensely a philosopher. 'Scholarship', 'philosophy', 'theology', 'spirituality' don't lead sufficiently differentiated lives in Miss Graef's text.

These criticisms are offered because they seemed to be invited by the overt intentions of the book. To have set such high standards is in itself something which requires appropriate recognition, a recognition involving, need it be said, an appreciation of the conscientious intelligence of Miss Graef's study.

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

ABBÉ PIERRE AND THE RAGPICKERS. By Boris Simon. (Harvill Press; 15s.)

It is a terrible thing that a little baby should die for want of the basic necessities of life in a large city in this atomic age which promises us the moon in twenty-five years. And it is to the credit of the French people that they were deeply shocked by the tragedy and quickly stirred to

action. But one cannot help wondering how much help was given out of a genuine spirit of compassion and a humble acknowledgement of responsibility, and how much as a sop to the conscience both of the individual and of the nation. People today have little notion of the theological significance of almsgiving. At worst it is seen as an unavoidable duty; at best it is often a form of sentimental humanitarianism. In either case the motive for giving is far removed from true Christian charity which reverences and respects other people and ministers to them as to Christ himself.

The tragedy of the little child and the other miseries which it brought to light are not of course merely a French national problem. Six months ago we in England read of an old man who pleaded not to be sent to the workhouse and who within two weeks of being sent there died, according to the official medical report, of grief and shame. And it is not irrelevant to notice that for the current year contributions to the R.S.P.C.A. were well in advance of donations to the R.S.P.C.C.

The appeal of this book is not that of the romantic war-time resistance leader who 'has become a legend in France with his beret, black beard and benign smile'. It is the appeal of a man of God living the Gospels unself-consciously, without for a moment thinking that he is either doing or becoming anything extraordinary. The life of the Abbé Pierre proves that true Christian charity is both practical and acceptable; that so far from robbing some unfortunate man of the last shreds of his self-esteem and dignity, service to one's neighbour done out of a love of God heals wounded pride and restores self-esteem. Abbé Pierre tells us in a Foreword that 'one saves oneself in saving others'. How different is this expression of true compassion from what we so often find: one saves others in order to save oneself. The latter is the 'charity' which any self-respecting man abominates. And yet we learn from this absorbing and well-written story of a modern St Vincent de Paul how true love can transform the baser counterfeit with which we so often, perhaps unconsciously, trade; 'the kingdom of heaven is like to leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened'.

MURDOCH SCOTT, O.P.

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND. By Thomas Merton (Hollis & Carter; 16s.)

The Author tells us in his preface that 'these meditations are musings upon questions that are, to me, relatively or absolutely important'. That they are musings, and thus not always directed to a defined audience, may explain the somewhat remote and impersonal style of the writing, which though it demands close attention, is none the less of a high order. The Essays are full of trenchant, revealing phrases, shedding