

REVIEWS

SOME VICTORIAN AND GEORGIAN CATHOLICS. By Patrick Braybrooke. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd.; 7/6.)

In the six essays included in this book, Mr. Braybrooke discusses the 'art and outlook' of six Catholic writers who 'combine a keen Catholicism with genius.' (In spite of Mr. Braybrooke's enthusiasm 'keen Catholicism' scarcely seems a feature of Conrad's novels.) It is perhaps unfortunate that his emphasis of their Catholic outlook suggests that Catholicism in a writer is synonymous with genius. Nor is the literary position of a Victorian or a Georgian more firmly established by a critic's disparagement of modern poetry which he does not understand, and of modern civilisation which he regards as insanity. His assertion that we 'exist,' not 'live,' is somewhat gratuitous.

However, he possesses the virtue of enthusiasm, which, indeed, together with the frequent quotations from the authors, is the chief merit of the book. On the other hand, his loose colloquialisms and the vapid rhetoric into which his enthusiasm sometimes betrays him, his irrelevant generalisations, his paraphrases and explanations of obvious passages, his occasional intolerably arch asides, his lack of economy of speech and style, are hardly to be excused either by his enthusiasm or by the admitted excellence of the subjects of his essays.

J.R.H.

THE MONASTIC CRAFTSMAN. By R. E. Swartwout. (Heffer; 1932.)

The legacy of the Romantic movement is still with us, but it is receiving destructive blows. It is with one of its legends that this book is concerned. Did the medieval monks build their own churches? Romantic opinion emphatically asserts that they did and many picturesque accounts of their activities have been drawn. Commonsense might have suggested that if monks were constantly engaged in considerable numbers with the work of building they would have made very little progress with the regular life. This view is supported by Mr. Swartwout's book—a meticulous examination of the evidence with a well-balanced conclusion. 'Some monks did undoubtedly practice art, but where they did so we usually find them to

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have been goldsmiths, painters, illuminators, or practitioners of some similar branch of art, which would afford quiet sedentary work. The monk who was a sculptor on a large scale, or a skilled carpenter, builder or architect, is a rarity If an artist turns up, well and good; he may exercise his craft provided that he behaves with proper humility. But the person who is expected to do, as a general thing, whatever building, carving or painting may be required is the ordinary, hired lay craftsman Not very frequently do we find monks taking part in building operations, even when only simple tasks, calling for no special skill, are required. In a new and poor community, or in one fired by unusual enthusiasm in some wave of reformatory zeal, we do sometimes find monks acting as builders, either alone, or, more frequently as the unskilled voluntary helpers of professional masons. . . . When a community is financially prosperous, and when the reformatory zeal has died away, we hear no more of these amateur builders.' Financial prosperity, however, is no index to the spiritual standard of a community and some may regret the passing of such reformatory zeal. But no one can mourn the passing of the amateur builders—at least no one who pretends to admire medieval architecture. That great achievement was principally the work of laymen and it is as well that its praise should be directed to the right source.

A.M.

ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE. By F. Eygun. (Sands & Co.; 3/6.)

This volume forms part of Messrs. Sands' series of translations of works by French Catholic writers. M. Eygun's wide knowledge of his subject renders this introduction to Romanesque architecture more comprehensive than its price suggests. His treatment is commendably sane and thorough and the translation excellent.

J.P.-H.

Recent Art Exhibitions.

MR. Leon Underwood, in an introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition, arranged during November by Mr. Sydney Burney at his St. James's Place premises, of sculp-