

BOOK REVIEWS

LES SAINTES ICONES. Dom Ildefonse Dirks, Hieromoine. Prieuré d'Amay s/Meuse, Belgique.

The monks of Amay deserve our gratitude for their efforts to popularize Eastern religious art. This is important not from the artistic point of view only, but also because it reveals to Westerners the *soul* of the East. And mutual understanding is the first and necessary stage in the great work for the return of the East to the fold. The little book under review is a valuable addition to the Amay publications. It is well printed, and Dom Ildefonse Dirks' short survey of Eastern iconography is excellent. Altogether the book is so good that it seems ungracious to criticize it, yet it would have gained if instead of the 'pretty' modern rendering of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, a reproduction of the original had been given. The plate with Rublev's 'Trinity,' rightly considered the highest achievement of Russian iconographic art, is probably an enlargement of a not too good print—it is somewhat blurred and fails to convey the intense spiritual beauty of the great icon. Lastly we should have much preferred the reproduction of an Eastern painting on the cover. We do not think M. Collette's drawing very successful.

The Renaissance dealt a death-blow to religious art in the West: beautiful 'pictures' have been painted since, but they are merely portraits of handsome models, and not icons. Nowadays, when the need of a great revival of religious art is so keenly felt in the West, it would be necessary to return to its first principles. Prospective iconographers would do well to meditate upon the words of the 'Stoglav' (Council convened by John the Terrible in 1551, which amongst other matters issued regulations concerning sacred art), quoted by Dom Ildefonse (p. 7). In our commercialized world it is useful to be reminded that 'earning money is not the object of painting, and the art of depicting the image of God cannot be entrusted to one who dishonours it.' A pious life was considered an essential condition for the iconographer, otherwise he must not be permitted to paint—'let him choose some other manual work.' We hear in these words an echo of Fra Angelico 'to paint the things of Christ one must live with Christ.'

A famous manual of Mount Athos gives minute instructions for the painter of icons, and how he 'must pray with tears' when his vocation has been definitely chosen. The prayer recited by the priest over him is very beautiful: 'Guide his hand

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so that he would picture faithfully Thy features, those of Our Blessed Lady and Thy saints for the peace and glory of Holy Church ' (p. 7). The East has religiously preserved many traditions of the Undivided Church of the first centuries, and in this lies our hope for the future.

O.B.

ST. HUGH OF LINCOLN. By Joseph Clayton. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 6/-.)

With great care and with delicate appreciation of his hero's character, Joseph Clayton, F.R.Hist.S., has given us a new life of St. Hugh of Lincoln. Founded inevitably on the *Magna Vita* by the Saint's friend and disciple, Adam of Evesham, this life is the first modern life written in English by a Catholic. How astonishing that this should be so! Fr. Thurston, S.J., with his admirable learning has indeed edited a biography which is a translation from the French. To this Mr. Clayton not seldom refers. But it is an astonishing fact that no Catholic of modern times has written in English the story of this Saint, whose name and influence were so considerable in his own time. Ruskin and Freeman from different points of view have praised St. Hugh; Henry II, Richard I, and John knew and revered him. Nor as you read the pages of this life of Mr. Clayton's do you wonder at the reverence or the praise. St. Hugh was typical of his race, a perfect Burgundian, humorous, tender to animals, a lover of children, indomitable, just, and in anger terrible, without fear, eloquent: from Burgundy also came St. Bernard, Bossuet, Lacordaire. Curiously, too, like St. Dominic and St. Anthony of Padua and many another great religious leader of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he was a Canon Regular before he joined the order in the habit of which he died. The description of his visit as a Canon Regular to the Chartreuse with his superior, of the impression made on him by the sons of St. Bruno, and of the dismay of his superior when he saw how he had unmeaningly led his dearest subject into the very monastery which would draw them asunder is to our mind the best part of Mr. Clayton's book. But all of it is good; it is a new adventure in biography with its happy blending of colloquialisms and piety, of the natural and supernatural, of the burlesque and the reverent. It is, in fact, the biography of a medieval bishop in England, and being a good biography is vividly true. It should be in all libraries.

B.J.