

REVIEWS

ART IN MEDIAEVAL FRANCE (987-1498). By Joan Evans. (Oxford University Press; 63s.)

Dr Joan Evans was recognised even before the publication of this volume as the principal authority in England on the mediaeval art of France. The international recognition that she has received as a scholar emphasises the fact that her study is an essentially English contribution to French art history, perhaps the most important single contribution ever made in England to art history as a whole. It is both the strength and the weakness of English art history that it is the child of archaeology. It still lacks much of the technical equipment of the continental schools, the great photograph collections of Paris or Vienna, it has always been based on a detailed first-hand knowledge of the objects themselves and of the monuments studied on the site. It is precisely this intimately personal first-hand knowledge that gives such unique value to Dr Evans's survey of all French art from the tenth to the fifteenth century—sculpture and painting and architecture, tapestries and plate and furnishings. Her lucid analyses and descriptions are varied by passages of real beauty and emotional insight—it has long been a tradition in English art history to love what is described. Throughout her volume changes in aesthetic standard are related to the changes in social structure that they both illuminate and reflect. No medieval historian, however little interested in art forms in themselves, can afford to neglect Dr Evans's researches. They are illustrated by 280 plates admirably reproduced.

It seems cheap to criticise so great an achievement. But it may be doubted if 'Benedictine' is in fact a satisfactory classification in French art forms and queried if there were 'Rosary' chapels in the Dominican church as early as 1275. The enamelled casket illustrated on plate 156b bears the arms of the Earls of Pembroke and I know nothing that proves it to be of French provenance. The Trinity diptych in the National Gallery reproduced on plate 200 would seem stylistically to be early fifteenth century north Italian. Yet the only note on which this review can end is one of admiration and of wonder that so much has been achieved by a single scholar.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

MEDIAEVAL ENGLISH POTTERY. By Bernard Rackham. (Faber; 21s.)

This monograph consists of 29 pages of preface and 100 plates, four of which are in colour. It forms a useful introduction to a subject that still waits definitive study. Masses of broken medieval pottery are constantly being uncovered in England. If it were possible to arrange them in clearly dated series they would be of the greatest assistance in archaeology and illuminate the survival and developments of popular art forms in England. But compared to our detailed knowledge of Islamic glazed ware the scientific study of

medieval English ceramics is in its infancy, and perhaps the chief value of Mr Rackham's preface is that it indicates so many puzzles still waiting to be solved—the sudden apparently transient appearance of *sgraffiato* technique in the fourteenth century or of *repoussé* decoration, the purpose of the grotesque head from Nottingham or of the Cambridge piper, even the first provenance of glaze.

G.M.

SAINT CATHERINE IN TUSCAN PAINTING. By George Kaftal. (Blackfriars Publications; 10s.6d.)

Dr Kaftal's *St Dominic in Early Tuscan Painting*, published last year, was recognised as a notable work of scholarship and also as an altogether delightful piece of book-production—an alliance sufficiently rare to be remarkable. Using the same methods, and aided by the same collaboration by his publisher and printer, he has now provided a companion volume on Saint Catherine of Siena which should receive an especially enthusiastic welcome from the countless thousands who look to St Catherine as their patron, whether as religious sisters or as Dominican tertiaries in the world. But the interest of the book is not confined to what may be called its domestic features, any more than was St Catherine herself confined in her apostolate to her immediate world. The representations of St Catherine, from the familiar portrait by Andrea Vanni (supposed by some to be a portrait, but this Dr Kaftal thinks to be doubtful) to the scenes of her life by Giovanni di Paolo (accompanied by extracts from the charming seventeenth century English translation of the Italian life by 'the Reverend Doctor Caterinus Senensis', alias Ambrosio Politi): all alike reflect that grace and integrity which so impressed her contemporaries and have gone on drawing men and women to St Catherine ever since. The iconography of the saints is a matter of more than academic consequence, and it is absorbing to watch its development under the guidance of an expert who shares the painters' devotion for the woman they intend to honour.

Dr Kaftal provides a useful introduction and detailed notes on each of the pictures reproduced. It must remain a matter for admiration that so exquisitely produced a book (there are thirty-nine full page reproductions of quite exceptional accuracy and definition) should be sold for half-a-guinea. ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

TRADITION IN SCULPTURE. By Alec Miller. (Studio Publications; 30s.)

Art manages to keep alive today less by the efforts of modern artists than by the boundless enthusiasm of a few people whose minds really are warmed and nourished by the contemplation of things excellently made. For such as these no art book can ever be a tenth part as exciting as some common object made with skill and love. For such a beholder no craftsman ever laboured excessively or in vain. To him beauty's action is everywhere stronger than fire.