

BLACKFRIARS

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

JOHN FISHER AND THOMAS MORE: TWO ENGLISH SAINTS. By Richard Lawrence Smith. (Sheed & Ward; 6/- net.)

SAINT JOHN FISHER. By Vincent McNabb, O.P. (Sheed & Ward; 2/-.)

Monsignor Smith's book is provided with a foreword by the Archbishop of Westminster and was approved by the Congregation of Rites for distribution to high officials of Church and State at the time of the Canonization. The author has added a foreword which is delightfully candid and sincere and prepares the reader for the really refreshing quality of the book. It is entirely fair, balanced and unpretending. The narrative flows easily and is suited to a present-day public and it has a particular value in showing to non-Catholics how enlightened and scholarly is the approach made to historical problems by the Roman Congregations. The chapter on Caesaro-papism is particularly well done and the whole detail of St. Thomas' life is carefully worked out. At times, as on p. 24, there is rather a strained effort after the picturesque in the actual writing. Monsignor Smith's judgment is balanced and his brief comment on Elizabeth Barton is encouraging after the curious panegyric to which she has sometimes been subjected. The whole quality of the book is very high.

Fr. McNabb's little volume is very different. "Dear Reader!" the opening passage begins, "you are about to take part in perhaps the greatest tragedy of an age that wrote *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*." He refers with justice to St. John Fisher's "humble self-distrusting quest of the best." And when he is dealing with this subject the book will appeal to all readers. On his historical judgments there will generally be two opinions. But the present reviewer finds the style of the book and the line of approach difficult. The book ends with these words: ". . . even on the morn they died Mr. More was merry and My Lord satisfied." It seems doubtful whether the line of approach to historical questions employed will appeal to non-Catholics or to most Catholics who have been brought up in the present century. The cost of both books is low. Monsignor Smith provides a most convenient volume which contains the lives of both saints; but it hardly seems fair to discuss the question of biographies produced in connection with this centenary without alluding to Professor Chambers' admirable work, the fruit of twenty years of study. Students of St. Thomas More, who are unable to purchase more than one volume, will undoubtedly save their shillings until they have enough to purchase this.

DAVID MATHEW.