

## BOOK REVIEWS

LA CLARTE D'OXFORD. Par F. Ducaud-Bourget. (Librairie de la Revue Française; 12 frs.)

It is a very dangerous experiment to adopt a foreign setting in the writing of a tale; the book may come into the critical hands of a native. In so far as it is French *La Clarté d'Oxford* is thoughtful and literary; where it is English it is always unreal and often ludicrous. For the English reader the ludicrous will inevitably prevail, to produce either amusement or indignation.

M. Ducaud-Bourget could write a passable guide book to Oxford—has done so, indeed. But there seems to be no other reason why that ancient place of student-rags, or any place in England, should have been chosen for this spiritual aeneid. There are, however, many reasons against it. Here are some of them.

'Grisel Swordson' (the amiable daughter of 'Sir Swordson'), 'Alkmund,' the hero, with 'Athold' and 'Othoniel,' are scarcely more English than their names. The hero is a good cricketer. 'Athold avait bien joué. Mais lui, Alkmund, n'avait pas été run out une seule fois. Il avait presque achevé un "century."' No wonder he smiled at the remembrance! 'Alk' favoured a unique stance: 'jambes raidies, buste en avance, la batte pointée en terre.' The onlookers show a keen appreciation of the play. 'Parfois un sifflement ou une exclamation "Well!" ou bien: "Blow it!" marquait leur joie d'un coup "splendide" ou leur dédain.' There is an aristocratic flavour throughout. The "Counts of Deadman" are first introduced appropriately enough through the medium of the family vault. Lord Peter, scion of the house, breaks silence in the grand manner of English lords, greeting his friend 'Alk' thus: 'Halloo! you devil!' It is not clear whether 'Sir Swordson' (occasional variation 'Swardson') is of the nobility; his wife, at any rate, is merely 'Mrs.' or more often 'Ms.'

English words and phrases are sprinkled lavishly throughout, often without accuracy. 'Les gowns écourtés des undergraduates' would scarcely be illuminating to a French reader. Yet, even so, 'Attention, vieil homme' (for 'Be careful, old chap') must sound strange to French ears.

The Chapel of 'Black-friars' and a Dominican 'moine,' P. Dwyers, figure largely in the tale. Mr. Doran-Webb, the architect, will not be pleased to hear that he built the chapel 'dans le

style du XVe siècle.' But possibly the author is here drawing on his imagination, just as he does in the poetic but wholly fantastic description of the reception of a convert in that chapel. Fr. Dwyers, O.P., is an attractive man, in spite of being 'à peine plus haut que large.' That 'Capstan' should be 'le tabac préféré du moine' is interesting, but one wonders why Grisel bought him the odd amount of 'cinq onces.'

In general the pseudo-English atmosphere has spoilt a fine piece of apologetic.

H.C.

**SAINTS FOR SINNERS.** In Nine Studies. By Archbishop Goodier, S.J. (London: Sheed & Ward; 7/6 net.)

The literary worth of this book, with the originality of its aim and treatment of its subject, suffice to make it noteworthy; but it has also a more vital value, 'We would take the word "Sinners" in a broad sense,' says the author in his preface, and on the paper wrapper we read that the book is 'for anyone conscious of weakness, failure or ineffectualness of any sort.' It is, then, a book for everybody. Most hagiographers have rightly aimed at showing especially the sanctity of the saints, and have therefore rather cursorily passed over the years of sinful or merely ordinary life that led up to sainthood. But since it matters more, for practical purposes, to know how a thing is begun, than what it is like when made, it was surely an inspiration to write these studies on the unpromising raw material from which some of the saints have been made, and the obstacles contended with in the making.

In dwelling more on the natural than the supernatural, Archbishop Goodier has not sought, like certain modern hagiographers, to explain away the second by the first. Indeed, the natural temperaments of some of his saints, and the circumstances of their lives, leave nothing but the supernatural to account for them having become saints at all. Even the most convinced and painstaking of modern psychologists will find it difficult to make them fit in with the principles of his science.

And surely none of us, after reading this book, can despair of sanctity on the ground that we are 'not made that way.' Here is St. Camillus of Lellis, failing again and again in his efforts to give up the wild habits of his life as a free-lance, seeming to have no will-power left, and as though his vices had become so deep-rooted that they had passed out of his control. St. John of God—a standing comfort for the middle-aged—had led the same sort of life for nearly twenty years, was converted at forty-two,