

BYZANTINE PAINTING with an Introduction and Notes. By Gervase Mathew, O.P. (Faber Gallery of Oriental Art; 8s. 6d.)

Until some twenty years ago most 'Westerners' regarded Byzantine art as universally stylised and to such an extent as to leave no room for life or variety. Father Gervase Mathew with a few other scholars has laboured since then to reveal the intense vitality of this art up to the comparatively late period of the seventeenth century. These historians of Byzantine art and music have put into our hands the key to appreciation; hitherto we did not know what to look for, and the similarities of the ikons of the Madonna or the Pantocrator led us to regard them as a white man might look for the first time at a tribe of African natives—all seeming identical until the criterion of black beauty has been discovered.

In this book Father Mathew not only initiates the reader into the nature of Byzantine art, revealing its time setting in the life and history of Constantinople and its relation to Western art, but shows his understanding of these paintings by the accuracy with which he dates them. The ten paintings reproduced in the book are well chosen for their variety and for their being unknown and they are among the finest reproductions of their kind in this country—great care has been given in particular to the gold, which in such books is often overpoweringly heavy and dead.

C.P.

REGINALD POLE, CARDINAL OF ENGLAND. By W. Schenk. (Longmans; 15s.)

'... to unite Europe and England in a renewed Christendom' was the task which faced Pole from the year 1536 when he was made Cardinal, until his death, twelve hours after that of Mary Tudor. Perhaps it was the especial fascination that such a taste has for today which impelled the late Dr Schenk to examine the first half of the sixteenth century not through the life of one of those who, by a more vigorous personality, had influenced decisively the immediate issues of the day, but through the study of a man who failed to solve a task which yet awaits solution.

The resultant biography is one of great merit. The picture of Pole which emerges is sympathetic, faithful to the facts, and entirely convincing. Neither must one be misled by the comparative briefness of this study. The connection between the man and his age is constantly apparent, and his obvious limitations underline Dr Schenk's perspicacity in seeing through him the civilisation which Pole so faithfully desired and which friend and foe seemed always ready, in strange collusion, to deny him.