

THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH. By R. M. French. (Hutchinson's University Library; 7s. 6d.)

To provide an impartial account of the Eastern Orthodox Church for the general reader was a very desirable undertaking, and the Rev. R. M. French has done it exceedingly well. The task calls for much compression, with the accompanying dangers of too solid a concentration or too loose an outline: Mr French has avoided both, and the result is a readable book that covers the subject adequately. It was perhaps impossible to avoid a slight impression of paying attention to the Russians at the expense of other Orthodox peoples: why this should be so is easy enough to understand, but a little more about Serbian, Rumanian and Bulgarian religion would have been welcome.

To the outside observer it must seem that the Orthodox are terribly prone to what may be called 'domestic schisms'. Mr French does well then to emphasise 'the remarkable cohesive strength of the Orthodox communion', without the aid of a 'monarchical system of government'. And though to speak of a 'stress upon truth rather than upon authority' may well seem an over-simplification, and a suggestion of an opposition where no opposition need be, the preservation by the Orthodox of the *faith of the first seven oecumenical councils, through so many vicissitudes and so much oppression, is a phenomenon that certainly should engage the attention of the Western Christian.*

There are certain manifestations of Orthodox religion that we in the West may be tempted too lightly to dismiss with hard words. Here Mr French's touch seems just right. On the veneration of icons, for example:

Plainly we are here in a realm which readily lends itself to capture by popular religion. Popular religion, whatever the field in which it expresses itself, the use of the Bible, the singing of subjective and emotional hymns, the veneration of icons, or anything else, may easily use the thing it has captured, in a way which others call superstition, and which may indeed be such. But before the Westerner draws hasty general conclusions about the Orthodox practice before the icons, he should reflect that the Orthodox approaches the icon with premisses in his mind which he himself probably does not share.

On the other hand, is it quite true to say that the Greek *salos*, the Russian *yurodiv*, the "fool for Christ's sake", could only be found within the Eastern Orthodox world? Surely St Benedict Labre and others went more than a little way along that road.

Mr French provides a useful bibliography of works in English, few of which are beyond the compass of the intelligent general reader.