

## REVIEWS

CHURCHES, THEIR PLAN AND FURNISHING. By Peter F. Anson. With illustrations by the Author. (Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, U.S.A.; \$6.50.)

To build a church even remotely 'correct' one has to observe dozens of rubrics and innumerable decisions of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Which is just another indication that we live in a rather complicated age, even ecclesiastically speaking. If we add the terrifying technicalities of construction and the bewildering possibilities of furnishing, it will be seen that no one may—though far too many do—begin the building of a church light-heartedly. Mr Anson has taken pity on the woebegone post-war parish priest who has nothing but his ignorance and an empty purse with which to begin his church, and although he (the author) can do nothing to fill the one, he has competently, wittily, entertainingly, brought relief to the other. Ploughing through the undergrowth of rubrical law with the expert guidance of Mgr Croft-Fraser, surveying the whole amazing field of ecclesiastical art from the Roman basilica to the latest ferro-concrete school, this time with Fr Reinhold supplying an occasionally atonal obbligato in the footnotes, and adding (if you don't mind the mixing of the metaphors) a top dressing of history, not to mention the lavish illustration of it all by the author's brush, Mr Anson presents, in all the panoply of American format, this fascinating guide to the planning and building of churches.

The title is a little ambitious and I am not sure but that the practical architect (if there is such a person) would not derive less than he bargained for when laying out six and a half Marshall-Aid dollars for the book. Oh, there are plans, beautiful ones, but there is nothing here about strains and thrusts and the unpredictable effects of ferro-concrete and acoustics. Still, no doubt all that forms part of the kindergarten course in architects' institutes. And of course Mr Anson can be, and is, practical about details in the construction of altars, or where to put the organ and in making hopeless pleas to church furnishers to make sensible candlesticks (how we agree!). Yet I feel the approach to church-building in this book is a shade aesthetical, and of a particular period. Mr Anson has a nostalgic weakness for Rood Screens and the Spikes that went with them. And that is where Fr Reinhold comes in. Although he is not as carefree as when he romps through the pages of *Orate Fratres*, for footnotes, by definition, I suppose, cannot provide elbow-room, yet he supplies the astringent at just the right moment and stifles Mr Anson's longings for the flesh-pots of Old Mother Damnable.

The whole book is really a remarkable feat, a summary of the history, art and rubrics of the Christian Church, accurate, on the

whole balanced, easily and attractively written. We are afraid we do not agree with Mr Anson on this 'mysticity' business concerning the Christian altar. Real evidence for the curtaining of altars all round is hard to come by and the Roman tradition, at any rate, is all in favour of publicity. The arrangement of the pictures and the letterpress is very often confusing. Sometimes one has to leap over a barrage of full-page illustrations to find the continuation of the story. The grouping of all the pictures at the end of each chapter would have been preferable. The system of references to notes at the end of the chapters is not always easy to understand; one looks to the note for evidence to support a statement in the text that needs supporting and one gets only a general sort of reference. The whole book is a little over-complicated in its arrangement. The drawing of that noble church, the Birmingham Oratory, is quite misleading, and the one of St Monica's, Bootle, fails to suggest the delicate textures of the altar and its surroundings. In the caption underneath the picture of St Mary's, Derby, there is a curious omission of Cardinal Wiseman's name.

It would be ungracious, too, to suggest that the author has attempted too much, though there is undoubtedly an *embarras de richesses* here, and if he has matter enough for three books, it is not to be suggested that people will normally buy three books on the subject. In any case, Mr Anson has laid down the essentials of the business and has asked and answered the right questions: What is a church? What is an altar? What are vestments? In the midst of the multitudinous details, ranging from the shape of a church to the length of an amice (not forgetting such minor questions as to whether it is lawful to use a piano in church) he has kept a single mind. The nature and dignity of Christian worship control all his treatment of details. While showing some leaning to certain forms, he has stamped on the miserable myth that a church must be built in one or other of the historical styles. His tenderness for period pieces which he views with a detached humour and his wise sentiments about the 'modernisation' of such churches are entirely right.

The whole book is a joy and it is an experience to have read it. Curt captions season the quite civilised drawings—under a horrible modern French altar we read, 'An outstanding example of disregard of rubrics'—and the witty juxtaposition of the Beauty and the Beast, without comment, forms a piquant contrast to the serene flow of the text. One thing is certain, if the rubrics of the Church were observed and such books as Mr Anson's read, our churches would be, if not irreproachable Things of Beauty, then certainly not the Chambers of Horrors they so often are.

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