

BLACKFRIARS

CANONS OF GIANT ART. Twenty Torsos in Heroic Landscapes.
By Sacheverell Sitwell. (Faber & Faber; 7/6.)

The sub-title is the really relevant one. Mr. Sitwell has planned his poems as landscapes, dominated by such themes as the Farnese Hercules or the Hermes of Praxiteles. He turns his muse into a landscape painter, and she responds with the authentic Mediterranean. One is tempted to consider these poems as products of visual art. As such they are sensitive pictorial studies, glamorous, with intimate appeal to the senses and those feelings which lie closest underneath the skin. They leave many vivid recollections, but it is the sensuous impression which is recalled rather than the words which conveyed it. Mr. Sitwell is not likely to be accused of any great austerity, for an indifference to bathos mars many of his most sonorous passages :

It was one long siesta all the live-long day,
And they ate not, nor drank, but kept the shady shore,
Where trees were tall as masts, where all full-rigged,
The green galleons lay becalmed, without a wind :

then, with complete impenitence for those last three words :

This was peace, this was plenitude, away from men,
.

But now was the interlude, the lull of quiet,
Provisioning of strength,
This was their idleness.

all in the next five lines. The same slackening of poetic discipline is in his choice of metre. It is interesting to compare Mr. Sitwell with a poet like Gerard Hopkins, whose metrical innovations arose from the desire of a discipline more flexible, but more tense and vital than common iambics will give. Mr. Sitwell has sought freer expression in a metre more flexible but less exacting than the iambic. He has access to rhythms which render admirably the thunder-storm scene inspired by Berlioz; which may halt or quicken to the requirements of his theme; but too often his lines stop simply because it is time for another to begin. He has freed himself not only from the restraint of a stricter discipline, but also from the vital movement which it fostered. The law most strictly observed is that of the pictorial whole—of the landscape; but the requirements implied are not strong enough to exalt the tenor of his verse.

This is not to deny to the twenty torsos a great measure of success. In justice, the nature of these poems did not demand much more than Mr. Sitwell has given them; a sensitive but perhaps not altogether profound sympathy for Greek legend,

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a rare knowledge of circumstantial detail, a genuine enthusiasm for the Southern landscapes which provide the setting for most of the book. He is to be excused that his enthusiasm leads him to what seems in more English ears an undue repetition of exotic and not particularly poetic words — the Mediterranean names of Mediterranean things. The too exquisite metaphor may also without much difficulty be forgiven him, for it is the excess of a sensibility which has given much that is delightful.

B.K.

REBUILDING THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; pp. xii, 174; 10/6.)

The new Liverpool Cathedral has been called by the newspapers 'the three-million-pound Cathedral.' This is unworthy of a building whose spiritual significance will far outstrip its material proportions. Here is a book to correct this misconception. It rebuilds the Church in England, and with it Liverpool Cathedral, not with bricks and mortar, but with fundamental notions.

The Archbishop of Liverpool meets the difficulties of the timid and the money-minded in an excellent apologia for his great work. A cathedral finds its religious meaning in Christ and the Church founded by Him. Fr. Manson shows with great skill how Christ effected this in reforming the mistaken Jewish notion of the Kingdom. Fr. W. E. Brown sketches the main features of the first building of the Church in England. The catastrophe that ruined this fine structure nevertheless gave firm foundations for its restoration, and the boldness of the martyrs of the Liverpool district in giving their lives for this rebuilding is recounted by Dom Bede Camm. The reconstruction has proceeded rapidly since Emancipation as the facts and figures of Fr. Stebbing and the lives of the first three Cardinal Archbishops of Westminster given by Mr. Denis Gwynn clearly indicate. Abbot Hunter-Blair describes the main buttresses of the Church under reconstruction—the old Catholic homes scattered over England and Scotland. Sir John Gilbert gives ample proof of the advanced reconstruction in the sphere of education. But the Church has its difficulties, which Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith in a charming essay points out in the Church's gradual growth in an outlying Sussex district far from a Catholic centre. Mr. Belloc with acute analysis discloses the new type of opposition to the Church of England, no longer one of open irrational dislike, but a pretence that the Church does not exist or is as national as any other body of Englishmen. As a conclusion, Mr. Chesterton shows how all outside the Church have returned