

BLACKFRIARS

The attitude to religion expressed throughout the volume is definitely post-Lateran. The idea of God is spoken of with respect and organised Catholicism with benevolence.

D.M.

A HISTORY OF EUROPE. By Bede Jarrett, O.P. (Sheed & Ward; pp. 549; 5/-)

HOW THE REFORMATION HAPPENED. By Hilaire Belloc. (Cape; pp. 293; 4/6.)

Fr. Jarrett's history of Europe was characterised by concise prose, an objective standpoint and a talent for selection. It remains among the best anthologies of historic fact. The assurance with which Mr. Belloc judges human motive has made his analysis of the Reformation the most provocative of his lesser studies; but the European perspective of his surveys gives his work a permanent value. Fortunately it was inevitable that both books should be reprinted.—(G.M.)

RECENT ART EXHIBITIONS

AS during April I have been unable to visit any modern exhibitions, I propose to discuss generally two important loan exhibitions, both of which closed last month—the Elizabethan Exhibition, held in Grosvenor Place, and the Three French Reigns Exhibition organised by Sir Philip Sassoon. Now that the former is over, there can be no harm in saying that it was not really very good of its kind. The majority of the exhibits had little interest over and above their historical associations, and impressed on one for the most part the peculiar contrast between the refinement of the English literary renaissance and the vulgarity of its decorative counterpart, while the paintings, imitative all of them and good only when approximating most closely to their Holbein-Clouet-Moro prototypes, showed that in its failure to inspire a distinctively national school Holbein's influence was as sterile as Van Dyck's. Frescoes apart, there is no English painting before Hogarth and artistically therefore little is to be gained by localising an English historical period in this way. The exhibition had no such *raison d'être* as Sir Philip Sassoon's, which formed an essential complement to the French Exhibition held in 1931 at Burlington House.

'Sans naïveté,' writes Diderot in the *Penseés Detachées sur les Arts*, 'pas de vraie beauté,' and explaining what he means, he goes on to say: 'Pour dire ce que je sais, il faut que je fasse un mot ou du moins que j'étende l'acception d'un mot déjà fait, c'est naïf. Outre la simplicité qu'il exprimait, il faut y joindre l'innocence, la vérité et l'originalité d'une enfance

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heureuse qui n'a point été contrainte, et alors le naïf sera essentiel à toute production des beaux arts.' This naiveté exhaled by the art of an age which we consider usually as the pinnacle of sophistication is as much of a paradox as the severely moral aesthetic of the most confirmed of sceptics. The characteristic of the exhibition was the childish charm of work unanimously directed to a decorative end, of furniture, china, painting that is so integral a part of a decorative scheme as to lose half its purpose in the sort of isolation it endured at Burlington House. It is only the first-rate painter who can survive transference to a gallery; here one could understand the reason for the narrow limitations of an art like Hubert Robert's, the value of elaborately stylised portraiture like Drouais.

Watteau and Fragonard were both magnificently represented, though the Watteaus were collectively as usual a little disappointing. The exhibition emphasised intensively the difference between their generations—Watteau, we too often forget, died a whole decade before the birth of Fragonard—and the contrasting attitudes of mind of which they are typical. Watteau's pictures that is, are primarily intensely individual decorative patterns, while in Fragonard we can find germs of the same subject interest that manifests itself in Diderot, and which in Fragonard's case tends to moderate and concentrate his natural facility. Colonel Balsan's *Jeune Fille en Vestale* showed how closely Fragonard at his weakest approximates to Greuze—it was on Boucher's advice that he studied both with Greuze and Chardin—but there was unfortunately no example of the way in which Greuze at his best approaches Fragonard. It was from Chardin, of course, that Fragonard learnt the almost inexhaustible nuances of a palette with a comparatively low range of tone which becomes in *L'Invocation à l'Amour* (Schiff coll.), structurally roughly an inversion of the Wallace collection *Fountain of Love*, definitely Rembrandtesque, and which it is worth while to contrast with the clear, high tones of Watteau's Rubensian *Vierge avec Enfant* in M. Goulinat's collection.

Boucher and Chardin were quite inadequately represented. In Chardin's case this was perhaps no great misfortune; most of his work looks silly surrounded by Sévres. Like Poussin or Cézanne, he is par excellence a classicist, gallery painter, independent of environment in a way that the minor decorative artist is not. Boucher, however, might have gained immeasurably from such a setting, and after the boom in his stock during the 1931 French Exhibition it is a pity that nothing was done here to support his inflated reputation. 'Quelle couleur!' as Diderot exclaims, 'quelle variété! quelle richesse d'objets et d'idées! Cet homme a tout excepté la vérité. Ce peintre est à

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peu près en peinture ce que l'Arioste est en poésie. Celui qui est enchanté de l'un est inconséquent s'il n'est pas fou de l'autre. Ils ont, ce me semble, la même imagination, le même gout, le même style, le même coloris. Boucher a un faire qui lui appartient tellement que dans quelque morceau de peinture qu'on lui donnât une figure à exécuter, on la reconnaîtrait sur-le-champ.' Which after all is a more sympathetic appreciation than the popular picture of Diderot would lead us to expect.

Three Chardins were shown, and of these only one, Baron Henri de Rothschild's brilliant *Goblet d'Argent*, was altogether worthy of the praise contemporaries like Diderot lavished on the painter at his best. 'Si je destinais mon enfant à la peinture, voilà le tableau que j'achèterais, "Copie-moi cela," lui disais-je, "copie-moi cela encore,"' and he tells the story of how Greuze 'montant au salon et apercevant le morceau que je viens de décrire le regarda et passa en poussant un profond soupir . . . cet éloge est plus court et vaut mieux que le mien.' The same collector's *Singe Peintre* is a smaller and on the whole less picturesque version of the Louvre painting, while M. Cailleux's *Le Lièvre* was only of interest if we related its passionate concentration to the artificiality of Boucher's more or less contemporary *Lindabride*.

Two of the pleasantest surprises in the exhibition were Mme. Vigée Le Brun's portraits of *Mme. du Barry* and *Les Enfants d'Esthal*. She painted Mme. du Barry three times, once in a peignoir and a straw hat, once 'robed in white satin, holding a crown in one hand and with one arm resting on a pedestal,' and once towards the end of 1789 to the accompaniment, as she declared, of distant guns. The first two were intended for the Duc de Brissac, whom of course she met at Louveciennes; the face of the second, however, was altered and rouged at the request of a later owner beyond recognition. The assassination of Berthier and Foulon caused her to leave the third unfinished, and it was only completed on her return to France twelve years later. That loaned by Lord Duveen was the earliest of the three and formed a delightful illustration to the description in the *Souvenirs*. She first met Mme. du Barry in 1786, when, forty-five and stout and with a complexion that was 'becoming withered,' she was still something of a coquette with a pronunciation that 'did not agree well with her age.' Her mind she found more natural than her manners, though she dressed simply in a white muslin dressing-gown, went for daily walks in the park, and resolutely refused to particularise about the past: she had become a model of uninteresting benevolence.

Such simplicity makes a strange show beside the ornate portrait which Drouais had painted of her twenty-two years earlier

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and the befeathered poseuse of Lord Roseberry's full-length Fragonard. It is the essential difference between Watteau and Fragonard over again, a democratic art, an art, that is, which is natural in so far as it insists on the common denominator of humanity and if not positively didactic, at least illustrational to the extent of needing a title like *La Liseuse* to justify the existence of a painting at all, succeeding to one which, monopolised by an exclusive moneyed aristocracy, had become more and more specialised and more and more exotic. Into such company Mme. Le Brun brings an odd whiff of reality.

Elizabethan painting was similarly specialised and to some extent similarly fostered. It, too, was stylised and therefore primarily decorative. Both were secular periods—you will remember the joy with which Diderot greets one of Boucher's infrequent *Nativities*—and serious painting consequently took most frequently the form of portraiture. This similarity of opportunity renders all the more remarkable the contrast between the extraordinarily high level of achievement of the French painter in the eighteenth century and the laborious incompetence of the average English painter of the sixteenth. The approach is that of Drouais, but of a Drouais without taste, without technique; 'sans naïveté,' in fact, 'pas de vraie beauté.'

JOHN POPE-HENNESSY.

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THE VISION HIGH. By Rev. M. D'Sa. (Burns Oates & Washburne; 5/-).

Fr. D'Sa's poetry is simple, bright, but loosely constructed and inclined to jingle. *The Vision High* is an imaginative rendering of a theme more fully developed in the *Divina Commedia*. East meets West in the heavenly hierarchies, where the exclusiveness of caste is transfigured by Christian charity.—(B.K.)

LYTTON STRACHEY. An Essay by Clifford Bower-Shore. With an introduction by R. L. Mégroz. (The Fenland Press; pp. 94; 2/- paper; 3/- cloth.)

It is too early to estimate Mr. Strachey's influence on English satire or on the development of the historical novel, yet his work will always retain a special significance in the literary history of England for living through the vogue of simplicity he retained a zest for the ornate; maintaining a high tradition of English rhetoric, isolated in a generation of essayists trained in the Augustan discipline. It is little more than a year since his death and this is the first detailed appreciation of his completed work.