

## **Blackfriars**

The resultant volume is still small, but inexpressibly precious because of the stirring beauty of the Passion itself. It is characteristic of acts of martyrdom to be vivid, arresting: so much so that these qualities afford a handy test of genuineness; but it is doubtful if any exist in which the pulse of life is more evident, the glow of faith steadier, than in those of the Carthaginian martyrs.

After Perpetua had been thrown, and gored by a mad cow, 'looking for a pin, she likewise pinned up her dishevelled hair; for it was not meet that a martyr should suffer with hair dishevelled, lest she should seem to grieve in her glory. So she stood up . . .'

J.G.

THE GOLDEN THURIBLE. By Wilfred Rowland Childe. (Cecil Palmer; 5/-.)

The poems in *The Golden Thurible* comprise the fruits of Mr. Childe's imaginings and pious musings cast in elaborately pictorial settings. Readers who are already acquainted with his work will not be surprised to hear that doves, lilies and towers occur and re-occur, and that the words crystal or crystalline, amber and milk-white do their accustomed overtime. Each poem bears the stamp of finished workmanship, and yet the reader is left dissatisfied, for although Mr. Childe has a feeling for words and an unquestionable ability for evoking word-pictures, he employs these assets to the detriment of his subject-matter, which he weighs down with a load of imagery, not hesitating to use unsparingly the obviously poetic in word or phrase, surfeting by an excess of sweetness. The poems which please most are those where the thought is least adorned as in *The Greek Angel*, *Don Quixote*, *Prayer for the Faithful House of Limador* and *Our Lady Queen of Peace*. After so much prettiness throughout the book it is refreshing to come across such an unpicturesque trio as the Devil, the worm and the homely flea in *The Repentance of Dr. Faustus*, a poem which shows Mr. Childe can be forceful on occasion.

K.K.

ST. IGNATIUS. By Christopher Hollis. (Sheed & Ward; pp. x, 287; 7/6.)

It is a mistake to dally too long over the reviewing of a book, especially when it is an unusually interesting book—as Mr. Hollis's certainly is—and one apt to provoke comment, favourable and unfavourable. Perhaps the present reviewer's judgment has been somehow clouded by what he has read and heard said about the book since reading the book itself. For he has

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read the publisher's rhapsody and the impressive catena of 'blurbs' set forth in the advertisements; moreover he has eaten meals to the accompaniment of the reading of the book in a monastic refectory and he has 'listened in' to the (generally shrewd and pointed) post-prandial common-room comments which have sometimes been expressed with a directness and bluntness not always conspicuous in book reviews. Further, Mr. Hollis has given his own estimate of the book in a strange fashion. He says: 'If you have a grain of sense, burn my book when you have got this far' (and we are only at page 6) 'and go and read Dryden instead.' This reviewer did neither. Perhaps he lacks the grain of sense. Now if Mr. Hollis really meant us to burn his book before we had finished the first chapter, why did he go on with it himself; and if he didn't mean it, why did he say it? There is so much in the book that is good that we are glad and grateful that it persevered to Chapter xvii and we think the reader who cannot also persevere as far will lack something more than a grain of sense.

The book begins in the manner which has become a convention in the 'modern' life of a saint. It is the convention to belittle what may be called the old-fashioned life and to declare that the worst of all biographies are the Lives of the Saints and that they are the greatest obstacles to the would-be seeker after the true faith. 'There are honourable exceptions,' says Mr. Hollis, 'such as Fr. Martindale's *Vocation of St. Aloysius*, but nine out of ten of such biographies cannot but seem to the general reader intolerably dishonest.' Mr. Hollis goes even further and says, 'the more pious the hagiographer, the more dishonest the hagiography'—a serious indictment, and evidently in Mr. Hollis's vocabulary the word 'pious' means something very reprehensible and has nothing to do with piety which is a gift of the Holy Ghost. These intolerably dishonest biographies are never specifically named. Perhaps charity forbids: we wonder which particular nine-tenths of the Lives of St. Ignatius Mr. Hollis had in view when he made his severe condemnation. It would be an unpleasant task to name names and compile a kind of *Index expurgatorius Vitarum Sanctorum prohibitarum* and anyhow easier to draw up the slender list of honourable exceptions; but the offenders should be known. Dishonesty is a serious crime and doubly serious when aggravated by the scandal of impeding the approach of sincere folk to the Faith.

Mr. Hollis tells us that all the historical data of St. Ignatius's life have been already presented and well presented: his own

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special interest as a biographer is psychological, *i.e.* he undertakes to interpret his hero in the light of the knowledge he has of the workings of his own mind and soul and his experience of life and people as they have come to him. Such a biography will have a noticeable tinge of autobiography and will tell us about Mr. Hollis as well as about St. Ignatius: it will be subjective and contain conjectures which the author will not always expect us to accept without demur. For instance we cannot but dissent from the views (of a distinctly Freudian flavour) put forward with regard to certain forms of bodily penance, to 'sex' matters in general and to what he calls Rabelaisian talk in particular. (This last-named matter has been admirably dealt with in a valuable criticism of the book in the September number of *The Month*.) We should dissent from his suggestion that holiness is something utterly abnormal and saints like the people of exceptional spiritual abilities, as it were the boys in the scholarship class in comparison with the mob who take the easy pass course. It was ever the traditional teaching of the Church until the seventeenth century that God's grace is the normal germ of sanctity and there is a literal sense in which all are called to be saints. The Thomistic revival is fortunately leading us back to the older tradition and lifting Christian ideals from the low level which has been the breeding ground of spiritual mediocrity.

If these criticisms seem unduly captious, be it said that the secular papers have sufficiently stressed the excellences of the book, its sound historical background, its marvellous power of compression, its vivid and animated presentation of the saint and his period and surroundings, its humanity, its wit and readability. Perhaps we have viewed the book too narrowly from the point of view of the monastic refectory whereas the book was written for the great big public who would not accept the refectory view of St. Ignatius at any price. Be it so. The old-fashioned life of the saint was so taken up with the thought that the saint was the product of God, a reproduction in human nature of the divine life, that nothing was too marvellous and stupendous to fit into it: the 'modern' life tends perhaps to emphasise the human element more than is expedient. Both extremes are liable to be misleading. The only really adequate biography of a saint is the autobiography, hence the satisfying qualities of such different books as *The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, *St. Augustine's Confessions* and the *Epistles of St. Paul*.

B.D.