

REVIEWS

THE FACE OF THE SAINTS, by Wilhelm Schamoni, translation by Anne Freemantle (Sheed and Ward; 21s.), presenting *120 Authentic Likenesses of Saints in Full-page Illustrations, Each Portrait Accompanied by a short Biography*, invokes one criterion only—that of authenticity. It is therefore hardly fair to judge it on aesthetic grounds. Yet for none but 'artistic' reasons can all the likenesses have been reduced or enlarged to a uniform dimension. This is regrettable, for the coins, seals, cameos, engravings on wood or metal, have in the process of being 'greatly enlarged' been coarsened beyond measure. Hence at first glance a somewhat disappointing impression, which belies the book's true worth.

Nor has, in all cases where choice was possible, the best portrait always been selected. The painting of St Thomas More, probably a copy from a lost Holbein original, is inferior to this artist's superb and undoubtedly authentic study for the same portrait at Windsor Castle. One Holbein drawing from the royal collection is here reproduced, representing St John Fisher; but scant justice is done to the biting lines and scrupulous retouching of the original.

The frequency of evident portraits in the first Christian millenium is striking but should cause no surprise. Early Byzantium, no less than late Rome, had what Dr Schamoni calls 'the will to true portraiture'—*horan tou somatis ton tupon*. Much as the commemoration of individual martyrs paved the way for the Common of Saints, so did factual representation in the earlier Christian centuries (*e.g.* the apse of Sta Pudenziana) prepare the sublime conventions of Moissac and Chartres. Nor does primitive art in any way exclude observation. It is noteworthy how, at a much later period, the art of Siena, which remained 'primitive' in sharp contrast with that of her neighbours, is particularly rich in consistent portrayal, *e.g.* of St Catherine, of St Bernardine, of Bl. John Colombini. Earlier images of saints affording us precious and reliable information were, as Dr Schamoni shrewdly points out, all individual products: it is the new technique of multiple reproduction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which has 'falsified the visualisations given to the general public'.

Perhaps the criterion of authenticity might with advantage have been adhered to even more closely. However it is not so certain as might at first appear that a lapse of one or more centuries invalidates likeness. Witness the persistence throughout the whole course of Christian art of the contrasted physical types of Saints

Peter and Paul. The resemblance between relatively late portraits of the two brothers, St Basil and St Gregory of Nyssa, raises a nice point in Byzantine iconology: is the likeness *physical*, preserved by a hard-dying memory of direct observation, as the author opines, or is it *ideal*, due to a purely stylistic iconographical tradition?

It is a pity that a work so original, so opportune, compiled with such infinite pains, should not be implemented by greater precision in detail. Reproduction throughout leaves much to be desired. In no case are particulars given of the medium or dimensions of the originals, and their whereabouts is most vaguely indicated.

On the whole, the greatest interest centres in the death-masks. The likeness thus obtained is, as the author himself hints, so different in kind from that of a work of art that one wonders whether they might not with advantage have formed a separate section or appendix. This however would have made it less easy to check portrait by mask. How instructive this can be is proved by confronting the death-mask of St Benedict Joseph Labre with Cavallucci's portrait. Admirable as this is (Maurice Denis considered it a model of hagiographical painting), no one could have inferred from it alone the peculiar, and typically French, angle formed by beetling brow and projecting nose. Most beautiful and touching is the mask of St Camillus de Lellis, though scarcely more so than those of St Francis Borgia and St Philip Neri.

Among the paintings perhaps the most illuminating are a profile of St Bernardine from the school of Squarcione, curiously complementary to the usual three-quarter face Sienese likenesses; Gentile Bellini's St Laurence Giustiniani; the contemporary portrait of St Catherine of Genoa; and the extraordinarily beautiful countenances of St Josaphat Kuncevic and of St Theresa Margaret Redi. Whether authentic or not as a portrait, the thirteenth century stained-glass window of St Elizabeth of Thuringia blends the charms of youth and immortality.

The photographs reveal a St Bernadette of surprising delicacy and a Ste Thérèse de Lisieux really capable of writing *l'Histoire d'une âme*.

The text comprises an interesting chapter on 'the True Face of the Saints' and another on holiness and canonisation. The biographical notices might have been both more concise and more informative. Much space is devoted to stigmatisation, bodily incorruption and similar phenomena; at the same time it is clearly stated that these are no proof of holiness.

So enterprising and timely a work deserves better translation: the present one betrays greater familiarity with German than with English idiom: e.g. 'The problem was to discover genuine portraits of every saint' should obviously read 'of each saint'. Comparison with the original would be necessary to establish confidence in its general accuracy and to pronounce on the merits or demerits of

having 'shortened Dr Schamoni's introduction, . . . embodied notes he added at the volume's end in the body of the English edition and substituted in some instances saints of the Western Hemisphere for European saints.' But few would willingly forgo the haunting evocation of St Rose of Lima painted when she lay dead.

The attribution of the title 'Seraphic Doctor' to St Francis can scarcely be imputed to the learned author. Perhaps the compositor is to be thanked for the 'ascension (*sic*) of Henry VIII' (p. 118) and 'the Order of the Mostly (*sic*) Holy Redeemer' (p. 250). 'Preacher-Monk' (p. 102) and 'minor brothers' (p. 112) are novel variations on the hoary confusion (*passim*) between monk, friar and religious.

May a second edition freed from such blemishes and more amply documented be a first step towards the realisation of the author's hope that 'this collection may be completed by the inclusion of individual portraits that for some reason or other could not be obtained', and of others as yet 'undiscovered for the great community of the faithful and for the world of unbelievers'.

Place might have been found in the English edition for the portrait of Bl. Oliver Plunket, painted in prison and preserved near his shrine at Downside Abbey. Might not a similar volume of as many true portraits as may be extant help to quicken devotion to our English martyrs?

DESMOND CHUTE.

THE IDOL AND THE SHRINE, being the story of Maurice de Guérin, with extracts from the Journal of Eugénie de Guérin, presented by Naomi Royde Smith. (Hollis and Carter; 15s.0d.)

When Eugénie de Guérin's Journal appeared in a private edition in 1855 it aroused immense enthusiasm among critics, who did not hesitate to compare it with the *Confessions* of St Augustine and the *Pensées* of Pascal. Several years later the public edition was at once a popular success. Eight editions appeared in two years, and the book was translated into several languages. The *Journal* consisted of letters addressed by Eugénie to her brother Maurice, who died in 1839 when only twenty-nine years of age. He had already earned the approval of Georges Sand and Sainte-Beuve for his poetry, and his prose-poem *Le Centaure* remains as proof of his genius—undeveloped indeed, but yet authentic.

Thus it was that Maurice himself was eclipsed by his sister, whose book (never intended for publication: *C'est pour un*, she insists) was wholly devoted to him. It was a strange irony, and Miss Royde Smith has had the excellent idea of re-adjusting the balance of their reputations. She begins with a short biography of Maurice, the son of a substantial family of landowners in Languedoc who went to Paris, became the pupil of Lamennais, lost the Catholic faith which had been the centre of his family's life, married, and came home to die a few months after. There follows a translation of his sister's Journal, kept over eight years, and continued even after Maurice's death, so great was Eugénie's devo-