

REVIEWS

of English Catholic literature.' To realize the justice of this appreciation it is sufficient to read the collection of addresses delivered by the Archbishop during the past few years. It clearly evidences the fact that on practically every important occasion of national Catholic life we almost inevitably entrust Archbishop Downey with the task of rendering articulate our thoughts and aspirations. He has preached the panegyrics, at once dignified and delightfully personal, of most of the bishops who have died within the last three or four years. At every episcopal consecration he is there to explain the significance of the occasion ; he has become one of our foremost spokesmen on the perennial question of Catholic education ; the joy and thankfulness of the Catholic body on the occasion of the centenary of Catholic Emancipation was eloquently expressed by him in some memorable addresses ; if the B.B.C. wish to know what a Catholic dictator would do, they naturally ask Archbishop Downey.

The more important of these addresses are gathered together in this volume. They are all extremely eloquent in a way that is all too rare nowadays. Yet they are never mere rhetoric. The Archbishop, being a supremely able preacher, knows exactly when to be topical, reminiscent, humorous and ephemeral ; but the body of the address is always concerned with some important and relevant truth. The sermons have an unusually intellectual and even learned tone about them, for Archbishop Downey altogether scouts that exaggerated simplicity which so many preachers seem to cultivate. The sermon delivered at the funeral of Archbishop Keating is quite one of the best short statements of the episcopal office we have read ; it is done with superb artistry by relating the career of Archbishop Keating to that of William of Wykeham. Many of the addresses are polemical, yet there is never the slightest suggestion of the accents of the special pleader.

The publishers intend to supplement this volume with another containing the Archbishop's more specifically philosophical and scientific addresses.

I.C.

ART CHRONICLE

The English Exhibition opened at Burlington House on January 6th. It has provoked an immense quantity of literature which aims for the most part at providing a working approach for the average visitor to the exhibition. At the extremes stand Mr. Herbert Read's essay on English art in the December number of the *Burlington Magazine*, and Mr. Eric Underwood's *Short History of English Painting* (Faber & Faber; 7/6). Mr. Underwood writes for an audience that has apparently less than average intelligence, Mr. Read for those who like their reading

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thinned out with Nietzsche and a little André Gide. Neither is entirely satisfactory; it is from their failures rather than their successes that we must deduce, if we can, some generally applicable approach.

Mr. Underwood's work is entirely ungeneralized. His book consists of a number of short biographies based on the common assumption that to understand a painter's work it is necessary to have some knowledge, however superficial, of his life. Now it is obvious that in a monograph every biographical fact is of importance; it is equally obvious that in a short introduction to a big subject only a very small percentage of this fact is relevant. For example, if one is as ignorant as Mr. Underwood assumes, it is not of the slightest interest to know that Holbein 'left a number of illegitimate children, for whose maintenance, however, he made provision,' or that the Butts who was painted by Bettes was an ancestor of the Butts who patronized Blake. These two facts can have no conceivable relation to the painting which is, and should remain, the pivot of the discussion. But there is a second class of facts in an introduction such as this, those namely which are irrelevant until their recondite relevance is disclosed. We can say, 'Till he was nineteen Lawrence worked in crayon,' a fact of no particular interest, *or* we can go further and add, 'Till he was nineteen Lawrence worked in crayon; this explains the crudity of his colour and his absence of feeling for paint.' Mr. Underwood's book consists largely of irrelevancies because he fails invariably to grasp the implication of facts which in other hands would become relevant.

It is unjust to associate Mr. Read's work with Mr. Underwood's. When Mr. Read writes on painting what he produces is invariably fresh, rich and authoritative. It goes without saying that his present article has all these virtues. His attitude is original, but at the same time it is the attitude of a critic who has more than purely pictorial experience—and that after all is an essential qualification in any writer on English painting. Here Mr. Read proceeds from the general to the particular. He works from the tacit assumption that pictures are more important than personalities—an assumption which only Mr. Underwood could dispute—and goes on from this to deduce the component characteristics of the English style. The first of these he describes as linear quality, 'the bounding line with its infinite inflections and movements,' expressive of the freedom and grace for which England stood in the tenth century; the second 'what Ruskin, in rather shocked tones, called "our earthly instinct," 'the tendencies in other words exemplified by Shakespeare's fools and the 'monkey in the margin.' The linear style, according to Mr. Read, persists in Matthew Paris

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and the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold until under the influence of the Renaissance it decays, and for four centuries consequently 'English art (which is different one ought to remember from an art in England) is non-existent.' In Hogarth and Gainsborough for the first time these specifically English and specifically mediaeval qualities reappear. Hogarth has the 'je ne sais quoi de sinistre, de violent et de resolu qui respire dans presque toutes les oeuvres du pays du spleen,' while Gainsborough's 'thin brush strokes, deft and dexterous, feathery in their lightness' express 'a joy in linear rhythms, a desire for clarity and coherence.' Reynolds by contrast, thanks apparently to the 'empirical bias of the Puritan,' produced works which stylistically are unEnglish and are national only in so far as the portrait painter reflects the English character, so that Blake and Flaxman are for Mr. Read the final representatives in figure painting of 'the original characteristics of our art.' In landscape painting similarly only the Girtin-Turner epoch is 'completely and peculiarly English.' Wilson and the pre-Wilsonian landscape painters, and even Morland and Ward, 'have English characters and paint English scenes, but in the intimate or spiritual sense they are not English at all.' Indeed, Mr. Read contends that the nationality of English landscape can be tested only by application of Wölfflin's distinction between linear and *malerisch*, and that when it is so tested 'in Wölfflin's sense the English water-colourists are always linear,' while Constable and Turner are English in so far as their work was an intensification and objectification of the Celtic love of nature. Such briefly is Mr. Read's thesis, and in spite of the inevitable injustice of a paraphrase it should be plain that this brilliant and stimulating essay is something which no visitor of the exhibition can afford to neglect.

The fundamental weakness of Mr. Read's case is its exaltation of geography. Painting can be seen in two dimensions, locally in relation to the things which preceded or succeeded it and temporally as painting of a certain date independent of locality. Mr. Read persists in treating his subject in one dimension only, and those aspects of it which are incapable of purely local explanation he dismisses as non-typical. The odd thing about his thesis is that in its support he calls in distinctions which are based on precisely that temporal aspect of which the remainder of his article is a negation. To bolster up his own arguments for the nationality of style he brings up arguments which were intended to prove its supernationality. Mr. Read believes that the linear and the painterly cannot coexist within the same tradition; Professor Wölfflin's whole book argues this very coexistence. For Mr. Read English painting is the localization of a temporal phenomenon.

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The subsidiary weakness of Mr. Read's essay is his distinction between English art and art in England. Either we accept a geographical standard or we do not. In neither case are we justified in arbitrary elimination of one group of painters because it cannot be reconciled with another. Style is not national only when it is unique. If Bonington is French, it is residence not style that makes him so. Ghaeraedts and Lely similarly are Englishmen, and to exclude them from the English tradition is to eliminate elements which make the formation of the tradition explicable. In short, it is impossible to reduce a subject so large and so complex as English painting to order by the logical application of preconceived criteria. One might just as well say that only English romantic painters are English or that only English sporting pictures English, as that linear quality is a test of nationality. English painting should be studied and considered not as a unified, abstract subject, but as a series of interrelated units, the interests of which are alternatively individual or collective.

Mr. Read's essay proves that it is possible to argue only from the particular to the general; Mr. Underwood shows the form such an argument should avoid. One can accept therefore as two fundamentals of the ideal introduction to the subject that the interest of the average visitor to the exhibition will be a local interest, an interest in the painting that has been produced in England, and as a corollary that the English tradition consists of all the painting that has been produced by artists working for an appreciable part of their career in England, irrespective of its subject or its style and not simply of a small proportion of it. The development of this tradition is confused by a failure to realize the full implication of the artistic severance which the Reformation involved. In art the effect of the Reformation was economic rather than religious. Its importance is not that the artist suddenly ceased to be inspired by religious idealism or any nonsense of that kind, but that with the secularization of church property a new demand arose to which the supply could only slowly be accommodated. Chaeraedts is connected with William Baker only in so far as the mediaeval English fresco and the Elizabethan portrait were both expanded miniatures. It is arguable that there was some affinity between the technique of Hilliard and that of illumination: it is not arguable that Tudor and Stuart portraiture depended on the frescoes and illuminations that preceded them. During the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries the English painter is groping his way towards a personal idiom. **His** work is not mature, but it is not for that reason **unEnglish**. If we are content to realize that English portrait painting begins with Joannes Corvus, that English landscape painting begins

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with Sir Nathaniel Bacon, and that religious painting in England ends with Baker, that these three categories are quite distinct and overlap only in certain instances, we shall have done much to clarify our impression of English painting as a whole. This point is made by Mr. R. H. Wilenski in his otherwise disappointing Outline of English Painting (Faber & Faber, 2/-).

The courses of English portrait and English landscape painting are roughly parallel. In portraiture it is Mytens who first adumbrates a style that is definitely *malerisch*; in landscape the influence of Rubens can equally be traced. What Mierveldt was to the Stuart portrait painter, Gaspard and Siberechts and Momper were in the sphere of landscape painting. The two traditions mature simultaneously (coalescing in Gainsborough and Wilson) and simultaneously they decay. These processes extend over what is relatively a very short period indeed. Thanks to the Reformation they both of them begin, so to speak, from scratch, and its formation consequently gives the English tradition an interest which French painting has not got. The English tradition is not a myth, but a fact, and it is only through appreciation of its formation, its features and its ramifications that one can form a coherent impression first of the contribution of the individual artist and secondly of the relative value of English painting as a whole.

JOHN POPE-HENNESSY.

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This review is published by the Catholic students of the University of Louvain. It is a remarkable achievement. Magazines published by undergraduates are, as a rule, however brilliant, of transitory value and without any definite standards. This review, on the contrary, unpretentious and not in the least 'arty' or self-conscious, is written from a definitely filmic critical position, and is, moreover, a practical guide to good films. One can trust its judgments. The articles deal with general problems connected with the cinema, the cinema as an art, the social rôle of the cinema, the psychology of the audience, music and the film, and so forth; with the principal films in every country in Europe, in America, China and Japan — and in these numbers it would be hard to find any film of real importance omitted; finally with films actually being shown at the moment of publication. In a true Catholic spirit it admits excellence wherever it is to be found — supremacy, of course, to the Soviet films, to