

REVIEWS

creative.' Surely a decree may be an approval of a custom which if contrary to the law cannot possibly be 'read in the light of the original rubric to which it refers!' Yet Mr. Webb makes that the general norm of interpretation of these decrees. On this question he is far too dogmatic. If rubrics may sometimes be changed or moderated, so, too, decrees may lose their binding force by non-observance. Let me take an example, one which is actually referred to in the book. Candles placed on the altar for Mass may, says Mr. Webb, be of equal height. Now the *original* rubric in the *Ceremoniale Episcoporum* laid down that candles should be of unequal height. A question was sent to the congregation whether, since in Brittany the candles were all of the same height, the rule of the *Ceremoniale* ought to be observed. The reply was that 'the reason given excuses from the precept given by the ceremonial.' This answer is illuminating, for the reason which excuses from the law is that *de facto* they are not all equal. In view of Mr. Webb's insistence on reading all decrees 'in the light of original rubrics' one is tempted to ask him how it is that he can allow the candles to be of equal height? The Congregation has the right to modify any liturgical law which is of ecclesiastical origin and when it does so it is not for the private individual to go back to the original rubric. I think it would be truer to say that the rubrics must be read in the light of the authentic decrees, just as the Codex must be read in the light of an authentic interpretation.

The Directions for Altar Societies and Architects is, as its name implies, a book similar to the one reviewed above. It is perhaps more lenient and conservative and certainly less absolute and dogmatic. The ruling on antependia for example is milder than Mr. Webb's and is an indication of the complexity of the liturgical law. The book is an enlarged and completely revised edition of some instructions issued by Cardinal Vaughan. It gives a concise statement of the liturgical law: for churches that follow the Roman Rite on the construction and ornamentation of altars, chapels, the baptistry and mortuary chapel; the making of sacred vessels and vestments. The reviser in his very modest preface hopes that the book will be of use to all who have the care of the church and be a guide to architects and others engaged in the production of what is needed for divine worship. I am sure it will be.

K. W. -G.

IDA ELISABETH. By Sigrid Undset. Translated from the Norwegian by Arthur G. Chater. (Cassell; 8/6.)

The scene is Norway of the present day, but the woman might be anywhere. She is a universal, by great art embodied in an individual. Hence both the philosophy of the

BLACKFRIARS

novel and its delicate, quiet, observant study of human personality. Heroic without heroics, that is the formula; but if heroism is the form, the material is the ordinary run of life, its undertones and unexpected moments of intense sensation—the saloon smell of a coasting steamer, the sight of sprouting birches, the atmosphere of a little draper's shop. Rare, this union of a sense of unearthly value and of fact. The following passages may hint at the quality of this great book, so restrained and strong and yet so moving.

First, *das mitgefühl*, the mother and her dying child: 'Again the little frame was shaken by spasms, the eyes rolled and rolled under their lids which had grown so thin—there was a pause, but soon the spasms returned, more feebly, and the collapse was more marked than before. And after another while—she did not know how she knew it, she **saw** it, but it was not a thing she could see with her eyes. It was as though she had been through this before, in giving birth—the moment the child was born a wave from an invisible and infinite ocean had swept over her, and torn something asunder, but when the wave withdrew again the little twitching, puling creature lay beside her, as though the two had been washed up on a beach. The same wave from an invisible eternity now went over her again—and it was as though the fierce, tearing pain she had then felt in her body was but a crude image of that which now tore her in two. The wave drew back, but now it had taken Solvi with it—what was left on the bed was not Sölvi.'

A bedroom scene: '“If you attempt to touch me,” she said calmly and distinctly, “I shall pour paraffin over you as soon as you're asleep and set light to it.”'

The thesis: 'She had come by degrees to the conclusion that after all . . . it was perhaps necessary that there should be some who had a sort of call to be mothers and sisters to all and sundry. To be young and in love and to wish one could feel and act as though we two are one thing and all the rest of the world something else—that was *happiness*, no doubt most people felt that in their hearts. But if this instinct of happiness were really such that no one could resist it—if no one could hold against this thirst within him—well, then there would be an end of mercy in this world. Then finally there could be no question of leniency for the disabled and those who can never help themselves.'

A Catholic novel with scarce a mention of the Church, a story of a vocation to sacrifice without the exterior obligations of religion.

T.G.