

REVIEWS.

ST. THOMAS BECKET IN ART.

St. Thomas Becket in Art, by Tancred Borenius, Ph.D.,
D.Lit. pp. xix + 122, with 44 Plates. Methuen &
Co. Ltd., 1932. 12s. 6d.

“An enquiry concerning the representation of St. Thomas Becket in art,” writes Professor Borenius, in the Preface to his new book, “takes us into many countries and across many centuries: we can gauge from this material with what eagerness the mediæval artist availed himself of the chances offered by a subject-matter so near him in time: while it is of peculiar interest to observe how the different countries and periods of art, each in their way, condition the representation of St. Thomas.” On these lines, with the help of reproductions, from paintings, illuminations, stone-carvings, ivories, enamels, as each craft in turn lent itself to the re-creation of the time-honoured story, Professor Borenius follows out his study. We can well believe that, as he assures his readers, pre-occupation with St. Thomas Becket has provided him over years with intellectual companionship and a fascinating experience.

From the standpoint of art the cult of the English martyr can be compared only with that of St. Francis of Assisi in its swift passage from country to country and its long continuance as a source of inspiration. Nothing in the nature of a portrait exists but imagination was very quickly at work. Curiously enough Henry II's ambitious marriages for his daughters helped from the first to give to the cult an international rather than insular character. When Joan of England married William the Good, King of Sicily, in 1177, the impression of the Canterbury tragedy and of her father's remorse must still have been fresh upon her mind. In any case among the mosaics in William's Cathedral of Monreale

is to be found the first extant representation of Becket, a stylised figure, named and wearing the pallium. The story reached Spain in the wake of Eleanor, Henry's second daughter, who became in the very year of the martyrdom the child-bride of Alfonso II of Castile. She founded a chapel of St. Thomas in Toledo Cathedral and her chaplain, Bishop Jocelyn, another chapel in the Cathedral of Sigüenza. Late twelfth and early thirteenth century wall-paintings in the church of St. Maria Tarrasa, north of Barcelona, although much restored, still present, in the vigorous Spanish manner, vivid scenes from the Saint's life and martyrdom.

Matilda, eldest of the English princesses, introduced St. Thomas into Brunswick. With her consort, Duke Henry, she was a pilgrim to the Shrine in 1184, and to Henry the Lion, rather than, as Professor Borenius suggests, to his son Henry, the first associations of the Cathedral of Brunswick (St. Blaise) with St. Thomas must surely be attributed. On the south choir-wall of this church is, we are told, one of the most remarkable of the picture-chronicles of Becket, four of the scenes belonging to the original thirteenth century composition.

The English Merchant was also a missionary of St. Thomas in Germany, where the earliest representation occurs in a chapel of the Bülow family, in the church of Doberan in Mecklenburg. The cruel exile of the Archbishop's kinsfolk, traditionally at least, carried his fame to Italy and extended it in Sicily. "Indeed," says our author, "all over Italy there exist families claiming descent from St. Thomas Becket's relatives." In Iceland St. Thomas was second in popular esteem only to St. Olaf of Norway, and although images and paintings have now vanished, thirteen churches still bear his dedication.

Professor Borenius groups his pages under three headings. He describes successively the single representations of St. Thomas in Art, the series of scenes from his history, and last and most significant, the representations of his martyrdom. An artistic impulse which is active throughout four or five centuries, inevitably undergoes modification,

and acquires conventions of its own. There is no break in the chain, but evolution—from fact to legend, from contemporary devotion to the free handling of the artist in whom far-off events arouse no stir of personal emotion. The stylised mosaic at Monreale had innumerable successors in England as on the Continent. There are paintings of Becket's figure in country churches like Hauxton, Fairford, Hadleigh in Essex, Lower Halstow and Maidstone, in the Relic Chamber at Norwich Cathedral, on a pier of St. Alban's Abbey. Usually, to distinguish him amid the saintly throng, he wears the pallium, has the right hand raised in the act of blessing and a cross-staff in the left. Among sculptured effigies, the beautiful late twelfth century high-relief panel which comes from the house at Sens traditionally St. Thomas's home during his exile, perhaps most nearly suggests portraiture. An early fourteenth century English example is on a door-jamb of the Chapter House at Haughmond Abbey in Shropshire. "No indubitable statue of Thomas of London remains in his own city,"—this was the price paid to the iconoclast for the veneration of long centuries. His figure appeared until 1539 on the Common Seal of the Corporation "seated between groups of worshippers, laymen on the left and clergymen on the right; . . . while an inscription touchingly invoked the protection of St. Thomas on his native city: *Me quae te peperit ne cesses Thoma tueri.*"

Professor Borenus mentions the empty niche on Chichele's Tower at Lambeth, where the effigy of the saint once stood, "to which the watermen of the Thames doffed their caps as they rowed by in their countless barges." He does not give the sculptor's name; it was the work of John Triske "Magister de les fremasons" and cost 33s. 3d. The scant survival of pilgrims' signs, bearing the saint's mitred bust or showing his manly taste for horseback, is due to the fate which quickly, then as now, overtakes the frail relics of a holiday.

Professor Borenus describes in some detail a silver counter having on one side the bust of Archbishop Becket,

on the other a bust of Sir Thomas More based on the Holbein portrait. It remained for the sixteenth century to group together in life and death two victims of two masterful kings, and to find numerous analogies between them. The "Tres Thomae" of Thomas Stapleton's book were of course St. Thomas the doubting apostle, St. Thomas Becket and Sir Thomas More. In mediæval art Becket's companion saint is either St. Peter, whose death-day on June 29th closed the first half of the year as Becket's, on December 29th, did the second; or St. Stephen, the first martyr.

More distinctive than the images to be identified only by the symbols of staff and uplift hand, are those which show the sword of martyrdom still piercing the cloven head: "a rapid sketch of this type," we are told—and it is a further proof of Becket's everyday popularity—"came to be used for marking the documents relating to Canterbury in the Exchequer Archives." A "reliquaire-chef" of St. Thomas is depicted in a window of Fairford Church; no doubt a head of the same type was venerated in the Corona of Canterbury Cathedral. A comparison of the stained-glass example on p. 39 with Hollar's drawing (Plate III, Fig. 5) shows how far more attractively the mediæval artist could handle this kind of subject. In later paintings the sword lies at the saint's feet, sometimes also his severed crown.

The scenes from Becket's life described in Part II are based in part upon history, as for example the sentence of exile, the martyrdom and burial—in part upon picturesque legend. The two and twenty scenes of Queen Mary's Psalter begin with the tale of Mathilde, the Saracen Princess, who followed Becket's father to England, knowing only the words "Gilbert" and "London." A Life of St. Thomas in French verse found illustrators of the school of Matthew Paris, adept in humorous and vivacious incident. Indeed the examples reproduced on Plates XI and XII, such as the landing of St. Thomas at Sandwich, or his parting from Pope Alexander, make the reader echo Professor Borenius's lament that the Lives of the Saints written and adorned "elegantiissime" by Matthew Paris himself no longer exist.

The German fourteenth century poem in which "Thomas von Kandelberge" figures as a poor student whose mind is given up to our Lady's service, seems to have inspired no illustrator.

The chronicles in stained glass afford the most splendid re-creation of the famous scenes ; in France at Sens, Chartres and Angers, in England, in St. Thomas's Chapel of Canterbury Cathedral, where they present "a microcosm of mediæval life."

Similar painted series may have left traces in the Fitz-Hamon Chantry at Tewkesbury, in the south aisle of Merstham church which was on the pilgrim route to Canterbury, and at St. Cross at Winchester. In sculpture the fifteenth century bosses in the cloister at Norwich contain the most complete sequence.

The subjects vary to some extent. The Thomas altar painted in the fifteenth century by Meister Francke in the Kunsthalle at Hamburg, for the Confraternity of merchants trading with England, introduced the pilgrimage of Louis VII, as well as the curious incident connected with Strood. There "the people insulted Becket as he rode through the town by cutting off the tails of his horses." The Strood scene reappears on the North German sea-board at Tettens, a district in which keen interest in St. Thomas was long maintained.

More frequently than and independently of any other scene, the tragic close inspired painter and craftsman. Numerous archbishops, from Hubert Walter onwards to Cardinal Pole, had the Martyrdom engraved on their seals. Abbeys and Priories also adopted it, as for instance at Arbroath. Professor Borenius does not include the Canterbury City seal, with its doggel inscription, nor the order given at the Dissolution to Will Oldfield, the Bell-founder, to put out of it Becket and his murderers, for the sum of 2s. 8d. The Martyrdom lent itself to the lovely craft of English alabaster work (though the Kentish example at Elham Church represents the Council of Northampton). It inspired the embroiderer in gold and coloured threads to set it out on

mitre, cope and dalmatic. It figures on reliquaries and tokens, on a splendid ceiling-boss at Exeter, a font at Lyngsjö in Sweden, a bas-relief at Chartres, the three last-named providing some of the most striking of Professor Borenius's illustrations.

Of all Becket memorials the finest were perhaps the Châsses supplied by Limoges enamellers to contain the widely-scattered relics of the Saint. The cynic might, indeed, at this point recall that the bones, presumably of St. Thomas, discovered in Canterbury Crypt in 1888, represented a complete skeleton, save perhaps for the few "ossicula" reserved by Archbishop Stephen Langton at the date of the Translation. "The number," says Professor Borenius (p. 85), "of surviving Limoges châsses, either intact or more or less broken up, containing on the face a representation of the martyrdom of St. Thomas, is very large—larger than that of the châsses connected with any other saint—and they can be traced throughout the length and breadth of Europe, from Sweden in the north to the kingdom of the two Sicilies in the south . . . all date from the thirteenth century . . . the series breaks off abruptly in the fourteenth," when, indeed, the making of châsses of this character apparently ceased. The subject "lent itself to the frieze-like treatment" required for the châsse; in the enameller's hands it became highly conventionalised; for instance an altar with a chalice at which the saint kneels, though historically inaccurate, is usually introduced.

Professor Borenius reproduces the fine copy of a panel picture on the tomb of Henry IV recently made by Professor Tristram.

Our summary may suffice to give intending readers some idea of the comprehensiveness of Professor Borenius's book. He has, indeed, assembled so large a number of examples that their artistic value must necessarily be unequal. It was perhaps needless to include in such well-furnished pages doubtful instances, such as the headless image at Arbroath, or the crude sixteenth century caricatures from the Rood Screen at Buckland-in-the-Moor.

Yet to complain of a slight superfluity is in no way to undervalue this striking contribution to mediæval iconography, this many-coloured picture-book of St. Thomas Becket. D.G.

IGHTHAM CHURCH.

The History and Records of Ightham Church by Sir Edward Harrison. 1s.

THE writing of church histories is an art which has shown steady advance within the last few years, more particularly in our neighbouring county of Sussex. With this advance Sir Edward Harrison has little difficulty in keeping pace, except, alas, in that his work appears in a paper cover, and one moreover which is slightly larger than the printed page and so will very speedily become untidy—which is the first stage towards neglect and loss. Were it not very important to study such questions as this we should not have criticised the cover because it is very clear that the price charged is not going very far towards covering the cost of this book, which contains folding plans, ten full page half-tone illustrations, two other full page illustrations and forty pages of reading matter. There is also a glossary—a happy thought—and a list of references. The chapters are: (1) The Churchyard; (2) The story of the Church; (3) Memorials in the Church, including the list of names on a war memorial, which is just the sort of thing which is worth preserving but is commonly overlooked; (4) The Rectors; (5) The Bells; (6) Gifts to the Church and Parish; (7) An Inventory of the year 1552; (8) From the Church Books; and (9) Ightham National School. All this shows a breadth of vision which is most welcome. Also there is a valuable illustration of an original tapestry by Dame Dorothy Selby and of its reproduction in the church, which were discussed by Sir Edward in *Arch. Cant.* XLII, pp. 147-8. We congratulate the author very heartily, and humbly suggest that this book be put on sale at the Post Office, this being the spot to which most people repair who desire to obtain a record of the village.

G.W.

CANTERBURY CASTLE.

The Story of Canterbury Castle and The Dane John and its Manor, by Dorothy Gardiner. J. A. Jennings, Ltd., Canterbury, 1932. (pp. 46. 7d.)

THE recent purchase of the desecrated Castle Keep at Canterbury by the City Council makes the appearance in print of these two papers, read to the Canterbury Archæological Society, particularly timely. There is not, I believe, any other account of the Castle in anything like the same detail, and the guide-books always dismiss it with most unsatisfying brevity. Mrs. Gardiner has not contented herself with repeating the vague and often unreliable conjectures of the 18th century historians, but has done a great deal of research among MS. sources, and the result is an admirable little pamphlet. It is illustrated by reproductions of four early engravings, including one of a plan of the Castle before the outer walls were destroyed, and a facsimile of a bill for its repair during the 13th century. A reproduction of the relevant portion of an early map of the city, or a sketch plan based on several such maps, would have made the early pages of the account even more lucid, but the omission (especially considering the modest price of the booklet) is not a serious one.

The second paper is shorter, but of great interest. Mrs. Gardiner settles the vexed question of the derivation of "Dane John" by reversing Somner's conjecture that "Dungeon Hill" was a corruption of "Danes' Hill"; she believes that the Normans named the group of early burial mounds after the new "donjon" that they had erected nearby. Her paper traces the history of the manor, from its ownership by the Chicche family in the 13th century to its conversion into a public garden in 1790.

The printers have carried the titles of both papers across every page opening, which is momentarily confusing, and they have marred the otherwise neat appearance of the booklet by setting up the title-page in very bad "gothic" type.

A.M.

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, MARGATE.

A Short History of Holy Trinity Church, Margate, 1825-1932, by Hugh Mercy Walton. Pp. 59. Privately printed by Simpson & Turner, Ltd., Margate. 2s. 6d.

THOUGH dating only from 1825, Holy Trinity Church, Margate, has already found an historian, and his book, while not essential to the archæologist of to-day, is not without interest to the general reader and will be of real value to the archæologist of the future. The short space of a hundred years has been sufficient for "legends" to raise heads which Mr. Walton's research has scotched—such as that the building of the church was helped by Trinity House. The book (copies of which can be had of the author, at Queen's School, Margate, or of the Vicar, the Rev. E. A. Cooke) is well written and is illustrated from photographs and from prints dating from 1848.

"SANDS, CLAYS AND MINERALS."

WE have received copies of the first two numbers of a new magazine called *Sands, Clays and Minerals* (A. L. Curtis, Chatteris, Cambs., quarterly, 5s. per annum). The contents include articles on Slate, the Manufacture of Portland Cement, Lithographic Abrasives, the Chemical Analysis of Clay, and Actinolite, and they are well illustrated with colour-plates and photographs. Though most of the articles are highly technical, their interest is not confined to the trade, and the paper is well worth the attention of geologists in general.