

THE LEGEND OF THE SAINTE AMPOULE. By Sir Francis Oppenheimer. (Faber; 42s.)

When on Coronation Day the Queen is first given the fourfold acclamation of the people, and then at last supported by the magnates of her kingdom up the steps to her throne, we shall see perhaps the most ancient of the complex of rites which has evolved about the consecration of our kings. So, two thousand years ago and more in the Germanic homeland, the rulers who traced their descent from the gods were acclaimed from the four quarters of the earth to signify that they were the people's choice, and were borne aloft upon their shields to show that it was the people's loyalty which exalted them. But Alfred's heathen ancestors across the North Sea knew nothing of the Byzantine crown which she will wear, the bishop's pontificals in which she will be vested, the anointing which, above all, will mark her as *Rex et Sacerdos*, 'after the order of Melchisedec', as the Psalmist mysteriously remarks of such mysteries. At all times in the history of kingship, we can see the need and the wish to make a sacred office yet more sacred, to multiply the graces which come upon its holders and through them.

Sir Francis Oppenheimer has produced in *The Legend of the Sainte Ampoule* a most apposite reminder of the particular veneration in which the kings of France were held, because they were anointed with chrism from the very vial, it was averred, which the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove brought down from heaven to the hand of St Rémi for the hallowing of the waters at the baptism of Clovis: and the author has set himself the task, aided by vast erudition and all the critical apparatus of the contemporary art historian, of tracking the various elements of this legend to their source. It is only possible here to mention one of his principal theses, which is that the growth of the legend of the baptism of Clovis belongs to the class known as 'figured traditions', that is, that it derives from a popular identification of a common representation of the baptism of Christ, partly Roman in origin and anti-Arian in purpose, showing the dove descending bearing an ampulla symbolising the baptismal oils (there are many excellent photographs of surviving examples of this 'design', including those from the Brunswick Casket, the Chatsworth Benedictional and the silver shrine of St Mary at Aachen). It is the author's contention, argued with great plausibility, that such baptismal scenes became popularly identified with incidents of the Reims hagiography, so that the river-god signifying the Jordan became instead the Vesle, the attendant angel St Vaast, St John Baptist St Rémi, and Christ King Clovis. About this central contention a series of minor contentions, some of them less satisfying, has been grouped: it may be thought that the author has fallen into the common error which besets those who make a significant discovery, in trying to fit not necessarily relevant facts into a

pattern spread too wide. It is, for instance, doubtful whether liturgists, those exact and exacting scientists, will concede him all his indications of the Roman-Gallican conflict in the Charlemagne era. In succeeding centuries he advances on to firmer ground; and his account of the various stratagems used to promote the claims of Reims to be the coronation church, if it were read by the canons of Westminster, should remind them of the good fortune by which their church has since the Conquest enjoyed immunity from attack upon its pre-eminence.

ERIC COLLEDGE

BRIDGE TO ISLAM. By Erich W. Bethmann. (Allen and Unwin; 15s.)

STUDIES IN MUSLIM ETHICS. By Dwight M. Donaldson. (S.P.C.K.; 27s. 6d.)

Here are two books on Islam, each by an American Protestant missionary possessed of long experience in the field and some acquaintance with Islamic languages and literatures. Further than this they have nothing in common.

Mr Bethmann's work is an extraordinary 'scrapbook', opening with an imaginary trip to Jerusalem, passing on to a consideration of Muhammad's person and of certain general Islamic ideas, and then rapidly reviewing country by country, the whole Islamic world: all this in two hundred, by no means closely packed, pages! The treatment, despite frequent displays of statistics (those more than usually false guides where the East is concerned), is utterly superficial, much of the work being devoted to speculation on the political and religious future of Islam and Islamo-Christian relations. The writer is alternately crudely 'scientific' and embarrassingly sentimental: at one moment one catches an echo of a State Department pronouncement, at another all is quiet confidence and *savoir faire* in the best tradition of Mr Dale Carnegie. The style is not engaging and reads at times like a literal translation from a foreign tongue.

Dr Donaldson's book, on the other hand, unites a wealth of learning (though not always of accurate scholarship) with cogency of exposition and a sense of form. Even the professional Islamist must welcome a book which for the first time surveys in fair detail the whole range of Muslim ethical thought, presenting it as an organic growth rooted in the Koran and fertilised by Hellas. At the same time, the general reader can strike up here, as nowhere else at present, a passable acquaintance with some of the outstanding persons and writings of Islamic civilisation: the introductions are made by way of translations by eminent scholars or through appreciations based on the standard work of such scholars. Dr Donaldson also contributes some original material of his own.

The work is sympathetic yet objective, suffering not at all from having been in part originally planned as a course of lectures to American Protes-