

REVIEWS

ENGLISH DRAWINGS OF THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES. By Francis Wormald. (Faber; 30s.)

The importance of a book on the history of a special period and style of art in a journal of this nature lies in the light it throws on the spirit and religion of the age. And alternatively the history of the religion of the age will throw light on the art. Too often these histories follow parallel paths and are never allowed to meet. But it is fascinating to follow Professor Wormald's erudite yet living account of the line drawings in these English MSS. with the story of the Christian life of the age. With the revival of monasticism under St Dunstan came the revival of Christian life in England and inevitably an increase in the use of books of prayer and learning. These were influenced in their making by the Carolingian renaissance on the continent, but developed with a vivacity and joy that seems to be English in origin. It is a pity that the scribes' masterpieces of living figures should be termed 'illusionist', as distinct from the later formalisations that are called 'stylist'. This professional term should be changed. There was no illusion in the life of those monks inspired by the simplicity of the great St Dunstan; and while they invariably copy continental archetypes and never 'invent' or 'create' their own figures or scenes, they inspire an entirely new life into the original types. No wonder Professor Wormald on two occasions is driven to compare these drawings with early Chinese work, for in both the artist is intellectually, spiritually, alive and informs the material he uses with that life. No illusion here. When the first freedom of spirit begins to fall back on to fashions and laws the 'stylist' makes his patterns, though the artist does not cease from inspiring life into the figures of the page. And during these two centuries the great spiritual leaders were insisting at once on the 'stylised' form of Eucharistic worship together with the freedom, the 'illusionist' vitality, of the vernacular scriptures and preaching. Both elements were at work in the religious revival. It is interesting however to note that while the Anglo-Saxon spirit lingered after the Norman conquest mainly at Worcester under St Wulfstan, the Anglo-Saxon drawing was still encouraged at Canterbury under Lanfranc. A study, then, of Professor Wormald's text with a careful comparison of the fifty-eight excellent plates will help greatly in the understanding of English spirituality, and should form the background to anyone's plans for the re-introduction of the new spirit of Christianity into this country. The reader will be struck particularly by the sower (plate 12), the spirit brooding over the waters (plate 18), and the wheel-like figure (plate 27).

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