

BIOGRAPHY

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA. By Johannes Jörgensen. (Longmans; 12s. 6d.)

A book of rare beauty and sympathy, qualities it retains in its English dress through the skill of the translator Ingeborg Lund. Jörgensen's work was a labour of love, a love to which he came as he admits very late, achieved in the very place and atmosphere in which Europe's greatest woman-saint dwelt. Yet it would be untrue to suggest that his biography replaces the work published so many years ago by that amazing woman Mother Francis Raphael Drane, who, living in the middle of England in her Dominican Convent at Stone in Staffordshire, far removed from the scenes of Catherine's life, yet managed to grasp so clearly the character of the great saint. To-day one can still see her wonderful collection of Italian works which, together with her own memories of former visits to Siena, gave her this knowledge of background, just as her own religious life gave her the key to Catherine's sanctity. It is pleasing to see the grateful acknowledgement paid to the kindness of the Stone Sisters in Jörgensen's preface for the use of much of this material.

One point which may be controverted is the author's suggestion that Catherine's troubled death-bed was due to her domineering spirit in life which thus revenged itself on her at death. Was it not rather due to the awe she felt on coming so close to the Divine Spouse whose infinite sanctity had been her lifelong contemplation? The sight of this infinite sanctity led her, as it led her holy father Saint Dominic, to tremble at her own sloth in running in the ways of His commandments; and this holy fear thereupon seized her, not as a temptation but as an act of adoration mingled with marvellous contrition.

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

LENIN. By Christopher Hollis. (Longmans; 10s. 6d.)

We still lack the perspective with which to study the Russian revolution that began in 1917. The communist experiment and the quick processes of liquidation were perhaps merely phases in a movement not yet completed, and judged from our present standpoint the figures of its leaders must appear curiously foreshortened. Yet, even while it is still too early to decipher the significance of their individual achievement, they are passing into contrasted mythologies.

Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov was born in the spring of 1870 and

did not die till January, 1924, and yet already he has become the centre of two myths. The Lenin of the debased form of anti-communist apologetic is patently a composite. Such elements in his story as the relation between his own paralysis and the death of Butkevitch are as old as Lactantius, while others only reflect that nightmare vision of Communism as a slightly mongoloid looking Russian equally red in tooth and claw. It is probable that the real Lenin would have accepted the mythology of the Right with indifference as an inevitable tribute to his rôle; the mythology of the Left might have proved more disconcerting. From the time he was a university student he had worked against Tsarship; his position in the new Russia seems most explicable as the expression of a Tsar-mystique. His distaste for the expression of religious sentiment steadily grew more vehement; his tomb is now a shrine, his few possessions relics, his photographs have grown into ikons.

It is the primary value of Mr. Hollis's biography that it disregards all mythological accretions. His Lenin would be equally disowned by controversialists from the Right and Left; 'a model son, a model husband, and a model brother,' reading Jack London with pleasure, translating the Webbs, intelligent, laborious, sincere and ineradicably bourgeois. Such an impression is emphasised by the mass of careful detail on the slow manoeuvrings of his years of exile and even by the proportions of the study. It is not until page 221 that we reach the congress at the Smolny and the beginning of Lenin's real power; the book closes sixty pages later. Mr. Hollis would seem to consider the organising ability of Trotsky as the vital factor both in the success of the October revolution and in the maintenance of Bolshevik predominance through 1919-1920.

It seems at first an intrinsically convincing picture. Yet the existence of a mythology has a significance quite apart from its content, and it is difficult to conceive how Mr. Hollis's Lenin could have the personal dynamism to become the subject of the Lenin myth. But even if Mr. Hollis's study is perhaps incomplete, it remains among the most satisfying of this year's biographies; refreshingly realist, balanced, and objective. The illustrations seem admirably chosen, though for many reasons it is to be regretted that they do not include the photograph of Alexander Ulianov now preserved at Peter and Paul.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.