

progressively revealed in the realms of art. And this hope centres in the liturgy, the matrix of all religious art, which is now coming into its own.

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THE PHAIDON PRESS has been celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, and has issued a handsome souvenir of the occasion.

PEOPLE AND FREEDOM announces that Professor George Catlin has assumed its editorship. The December number appropriately commemorates Virginia Crawford, whose death, with that of Wilfrid Meynell and Fr Maurice Watson, O.P., closes what may be called the Manning epoch of English Catholic history.

FARM STREET is a hundred years old, and a stream-lined brochure by Fr Bernard Basset tells the story, with illustrations ranging from twenty-shilling tickets for the opening Mass to the London blitz.

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## REVIEWS

APPROACH TO GREEK ART. By Charles Seltman. (Studio; 25s.)

In his preface the author says his new approach is not an attempt to go a little further than other studies of the subject but to start it somewhere else. The evidence being what it is, he is personally inclined to hold as a provisional hypothesis that fine art is either in the nature of poetry or of prose. But aware that his attitude may be unconsciously influenced by emotions or tradition, on the constructive side he has no intention of being dogmatic, though prepared to be dogmatic in combating lingering heresies for 'it is far easier to undermine outworn beliefs than to build certainties'.

Chapter I, 'The Cradle of European Art', points out that for centuries the usual approach to Greek art has given first place to sculpture, the second to painting, mainly as represented by drawings on vases, and the third to 'minor arts', grouping together the work of the die-cutters, gem-engravers, jewellers and metal-chasers, but it is questionable whether this accords with the view of the Greeks. Archaeology has now provided ample evidence of metal work in the Bronze Age civilisations of Crete and Greece, and here the author starts his approach. He shows that the early art of 'celature'—a comprehensive 17th century word for metal carving, chasing, etc.—permanently affected the whole Greek attitude to fine art. Behind the chryselephantine statue which brought immortal fame to Pheidias and Polycleitus lay a tradition going back to the Bronze Age, for such statues are the finest of surviving Minoan work, and the repute of the early art passed through the Homeric Epic to Greeks of the classical age. Evidence of the skill of the Minoan painter has only survived in frescoes on palace walls.

Chapter II, 'Poetry and Prose in Art', states the case for the author's provisional hypothesis. He points out that the twenty-seven works of art discussed in the first chapter stand for two very diverse kinds of aesthetic expression and artistic representation, that they express two kinds of thought, not two kinds of technique and efficiency. This is a fact which must be grasped for a clear understanding of any, and especially Greek, art, and its comprehension is aided by frequent and studied comparison between literature and the fine arts. The two kinds of thought, expressing two artistic moods, are distinguished as poetry and prose, and it is explained why this distinction should be used to assess 'Value' which, in the philosophic sense, appears to have an almost universal validity, while 'preference and taste are personal things'. Finally the author deals with two stumbling-blocks in the way of full understanding of Greek art, the words Beauty and Beautiful and the Theory of Growth and Decay. He believes that if it is possible to be rid of these the way will be clear for a study of ancient art along the lines of poetic and prose expression.

With the argument for his hypothesis well expounded the author resumes the story from where it was left in chapter one, the contact with Egypt, where 'enterprising and artistic Greeks met the unfamiliar problem of Egyptian monumental art'. In six chapters with such headings as Formal, Dramatic, Rhetorical Art, Biography and Portraiture, to indicate the method of comparison between Literature and Art, the story is carried to the time of Alexander, and it is completed in two more chapters dealing with the Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Roman periods as a single cultural unit. The story ends with Constantinople and the remarkable ivory caskets of which some are as late as the 11th century, the finest, the Veroli casket now in London, possibly dating from about 850 or even a century later. As the author says, the same satisfying art of the carvers in ivory which flourished in Crete about 1550 B.C. was still being practised in Constantinople 2400 years later.

Plates, many of them new, occupy 108 pages.

This is a notable and timely book, the work of a scholar familiar with classical literature and art, who in the light of the great accession of new evidence has given long and careful thought to a new consideration of Greek art as a whole. It is a contribution of great value to knowledge of Greek art by reason of the extension of its story at each end by so many centuries, but it is also a contribution of great value to the understanding of Greek art because it propounds an intelligible theory for the solution of the aesthetic problem. It is remarkable that Mr Seltman should have been able to deal so adequately with his subject in such comparatively short compass and present so much information and thought in a readable and attractive way.

J. J. R. BRIDGE.