

REVIEWS

Among the gods themselves Ódinn and Thór stand out and a separate chapter is devoted to each of these very complex figures. They are joined by Baldr whose story illustrates the contradictory nature of the sources. In the West Norse tradition he is the shining god, innocent and indeed full of fine qualities, whereas in Saxo's version he is a bullying, lustful figure devoid of any moral virtue. Apart from these two differing developments of his character, the myth has further interest as it seems to have been susceptible to Christian influence which found in the tragic death of Baldr a figure for Christ. The chief gods, or Aesir and Vanir, have their counterpart in the giants of frost and rock although the two camps appear to have intermingled over the begetting of the main figures of the gods such as Ódinn. Besides these is a host of lesser deities, inhabitants of rocks, waterfalls or trees, and also the tribe of guardian spirits of men or families, the *disir*. Animals often accompanied the gods or indicated their presence; two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, perch on Ódinn's shoulders (and are thought to represent his intellectual qualities of thought and memory), while Freyja appears in a chariot drawn by cats, and Thór in one pulled by goats. In practice horses were often dedicated to a god or regarded as seats of special potency. Finally Snorri gives a magnificently coherent account of the creation myth and the final doom of the gods, or Ragnarök, when the wolf Fenrir will break loose to fight with Ódinn, and Thór strive with the world serpent, until all ends in a consuming fire and the return of certain of the gods, including the virtuous Baldr.

Such material finds parallels in the myths and practices of other areas and Professor Turville-Petre discusses the possibility of the influences of one on another or of a common Indo-European source in particular instances. First and foremost, however, this book presents a Northern distillation. We are constantly being reminded that we cannot divorce the present from its roots in the past, and here is a book which enables us to find out what these roots are. All this appears in beautiful guise in the series 'History of Religion', well supplied with photographs, notes and a useful bibliography, the only thing lacking being a clear map of the whole region.

CHRISTINE THIRLWAY

BISHOPS AT LARGE, Some Autocephalous Churches of the past Hundred Years and their Founders, by Peter F. Anson, with an Introduction by Henry St John, O.P.; Faber and Faber; 70s.

It could perhaps be argued that this lamentable story is redeemed by Fr St John's introduction, for expense of spirit—if not a waste of shame—must be the verdict on those six hundred pages of misplaced erudition. One can say 'redeemed', for the first of the fantastic flock of nineteenth-century bishops who multiplied schisms and scandals was in fact an apostate French Dominican priest, Jules Ferrette, 'Bishop of Iona and Patriarchal Legate of the Syrian Jacobite Church for Western Europe'. At once the recurring note is struck: apostasy, the obtaining—

and then the multiplying—of 'valid' episcopal orders from obscure Oriental sources, the assumption of preposterous titles and mythical jurisdictions, a *folie de grandeur* of paranoid dimensions, the inevitable immersion in theosophy, druidism, spiritual healing, the crusades and the persecution manias. And, of course, the dressing up; the liberal selection of photographs gives a good idea of the lengths to which this sort of lunacy can go.

For lunacy is the only charitable judgment possible on many of Mr Anson's hierarchs. It is a pity that genuine, if misguided, attempts at effecting 'reunion' through such movements as Dr Lee's Order of Corporate Reunion, and respectable—if decidedly odd and certainly minute—bodies such as Vernon Herford's 'Evangelical Catholic Church,' should be mingled with the rabble of patriarchs and exarchs, metropolitans and beatitudes, who derived their 'orders' from Vilatte and Arnold Harris Mathew, and whose careers, so meticulously recorded by Mr Anson, seem to have consisted exclusively of consecrations and ordinations *sub conditione*, but certainly not *sine remuneratione*, when—as in too many cases—they did not actually attract the attentions of the police.

Mr Anson's book is based on the researches of the Revd Henry Brandreth, who in *Episcopi Vagantes* and in his *Life of Dr Lee of Lambeth* had already revealed the limitless extent of this strange ecclesiastical underworld. Such energy and perseverance in tracing the tiniest details of careers which, for obvious reasons, could scarcely be other than chequered, is worthy of a better cause. The story has of course its fascination, but it is told at such length in *Bishops at Large*, with its thickets of trivial details, that only those having a special interest in pedigrees and *de jure* titles of nobility, as well as in the more recondite aspects of fringe ecclesiology, can be expected to appreciate such an achievement.

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