CORRESPONDENCE

CATHOLIC DRAMA.

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

Dear Sir,—The article by Mrs. Reginald Balfour in your July number on M. Henri Ghéon's Plays will have been read with interest by all lovers of the drama. Special mention has naturally been made of one of these, *The Marvellous History of St. Bernard,* translated by Sir Barry Jackson, and produced by him at one of the West-end theatres with a success that was scarcely less marvellous. Mrs. Balfour suggests that the brilliant French playwright might with advantage turn his attention to English subjects of Catholic interest for some of his future plays.

This thought suggests another : why should the Catholics of England have to have recourse to a French dramatist for plays of predominantly English interest? Is there no native talent that could be employed for the purpose; and if not, why not?

The question leads to an interesting train of thought. As those interested in contemporary drama are aware, England is in the throes of an intense and vigorous dramatic renaissance. Ample evidence of this exists, not the least being the remarkable report, recently issued and noticed prominently in all the papers, by the educational Committee on the influence of the drama on adult education. In the last few years an astonishing number of local dramatic societies have sprung up all over the country, and some of these have not only succeeded in materially influencing the national taste in drama, but have succeeded in capturing the London stage. Many of them are amalgamated with the British Drama League in a sort of dramatic federation for the furtherance of their mutual interests. A marked feature of this dramatic renaissance is the admitted effect of religion on the mind when presented in dramatic form. The Catholic Players—an Anglican Society—gave evidence as to its potent educational influence in the sphere of religious instruction; evidence was also forthcoming of the vivid effect produced, and the great emotional appeal made, by the representation of Greek religious plays, not only on cultured intellects, but on simple, rustic minds. But where, one feels inclined to ask, does the Catholic Church come in in all this? What is

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the Catholic Church doing in this national matter? Frankly, it must be admitted, she does not come into the picture at all.

Yet have we not here a powerful means, ready to our hands, for giving our own people the best form of healthy social and intellectual entertainment, and of making the voice of the Church heard by the nation at large on all those questions of moral, social and spiritual import on which she has a right to speak, and on which, we venture to think, her teaching would be welcome? If the tragedy of Ædipus, or other pagan drama, has power to affect simple but earnest souls even to tears, does not the story of the Church contain matter of the highest dramatic interest, that should prove infinitely more moving and potent for good?

The need, in fact, exists for a national Catholic drama; there is a need and a demand for it. Many of us are firmly convinced that there is talent among us to produce excellent Catholic plays if only it were encouraged, and that the production of mystery or miracle plays, especially, would be eagerly welcomed if forthcoming.

It may then come as welcome news to hear that a first humble but practical step has been taken to promote a National Catholic Drama. The Roswitha Society was founded at the end of June of this year for the distinct purpose of encouraging the writing and production of plays Catholic in feeling, teaching and story. The Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Oldmeadow, has already successfully produced at least one miracle play—*The Fisherman's Net*—and she hopes that the Roswitha Society will produce another of her plays in the coming winter season on the story of St. Caecilia. Another such society is the 'Little Players of St. Francis,' which intends, I believe, to produce the story of the Poverello by one of its promoters. Here, then, is a beginning. If their success should encourage others to follow suit and induce talented Catholic authors to essay this field of writing hitherto unexplored by them, and others interested in the drama, to form local societies in parishes throughout the land for the production of Catholic plays, the creation of a national Catholic drama would become an accomplished fact. In course of time the various local bodies could form a federation under one general society on the lines of the British Drama League, and a healthy Catholic dramatic literature created for the nation.

Apart from the Sacred Narrative of our redemption, which forms so rich a mine hitherto scarcely touched for the creation of Miracle plays, and the general story of the Church, so rich in

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subjects capable of dramatic treatment, the annals of the Church in England itself—especially in its penal days and the stirring adventures of its martyrs and confessors—contains an almost exhaustless treasure-store of subjects on which to draw as full of dramatic interest as any secular tale. We have many writers of high merit who confine their attention to the writing of romances because this is the only *métier* for which there has been hitherto a call; but they could probably write Catholic plays if there were any chance of their being produced.

The nation needs a Catholic drama: the Roswitha Society and other groups are coming forward to supply the want; all Catholics should watch the experiment with interest, and encourage it with intelligent sympathy and support.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

FRANCIS J. BOWEN.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SHADOW OF THE CHAPEL. By Kenneth Potter. (Chapman and Hall; 7/6.)

Here is a school story in which the reader is invited to turn his attention to the least interesting persons in a school—the masters. The boys are incidental: they flit in and out and provide a background and an occasional chorus for the dominant figures on the pedagogic stage. The title of the book offers a clue to the plot. The chapel, so often acclaimed the heart of a school's life, the source of boyish inspiration, the creator of tradition and *esprit de corps,* becomes in Mr. Kenneth Potter's novel the point from which radiate all the petty jealousy, intrigue and discontent liable to arise among a haphazard collection of average men thrown together in unsought intimacy with no stronger bond of union than a common profession. Compulsory attendance at chapel is made out to be the bugbear of the masters. Those, who attend regularly, do so, for the most part, to curry favour and win promotion. The most fervent and regular attendant at chapel is an unbeliever whose virtue is duly rewarded by his being appointed to a house mastership—to the disgust of two more likely competitors who outvie one another in petty intrigue and childish suspicion. Expediency seems to be the only motive that prompts anyone to go to chapel. The book is a severe satire on a hollow system in which religion and church-going are regarded as nothing

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