

selves to the work of restoring the masterpieces of the Orient. An important place was given to the study of the Jewish origin of our Christian culture, as Pius XII had encouraged historical, musicological research on this subject. One of the most agitated séances was devoted to the organ, where a heated discussion about electronic organs ended in temporary toleration where necessity forces the use of electronics. Seventy-five pages of the account are devoted to this argument.

On the 2nd of July at Versailles, M. Joseph Samson, choir master of the chapel of the Cathedral of Dijon, gave the delegated of the congress an unforgettable talk on "The notion of quality and the renewal of French religious contemporary music." The congress was hardly over when the news of his sudden death was heard. M. Samson had agreed to speak on "the testament of an old man who has never separated his work from his prayer—the testament of an old man who has sinned much—but who has never looked on his work except as a means of salvation."

At the séance M. Samson was heard by an audience which was exceptionally attentive and sensitive to the message of this old man, who had for so long been the servant of sacred music. We will end this account with quotations from his final talk. "Easy success is a meager pittance given mercifully to mediocrity." "If the singing is not there to make me pray, let it be silent tumult, let the singers keep quiet." "If the singing lacks the value of the silence which it has broken, let it give back the silence." "A work of art acts only through its quality." "Quality, quality not the easy" . . . "Care-quality-love." . . .

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**APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN SCULPTURE.** By Dom Hubert van Zeller, O.S.B. New York. Sheed & Ward, 1959. \$3.75.

Monks, according to the rule, alternate spiritual endeavours with physical labor. In one of Huysman's novels, there is a Trappist who relaxes from meditation by assisting sows in their birth pains. van Zeller, Benedictine author and expert on spirituality, gives us, in this new book, an insight into his own brand of manual avocation. Men of the world mostly envisage art as an escape into the spiritual. van Zeller plunges from the metaphysical that is his daily fare into art as a material ob-

ject that both implies and excites the senses. His approach never strays away from the objet d'art envisaged as an object, severely shuns the dubious realm one could dub the fourth dimension of art.

The title is to be understood in its narrower sense. "Someone hacking at a lump of stone" is van Zeller's description of the sculptor. Stone itself is the leit-motiv that runs through the book. Its weight, its grain, its density, dictate laws that freeze inspiration within the stony chunk. As the reproductions are all of carvings by the author, it is easy to check where it is that his intense respect of the material leads him. There is little doubt that any one of his finished carvings looks very much like the original block of stone it started from.

The most intense part of the book treats of sculpture in the making, understood in its narrower sense of subtracting from the quarried block. Punctuating the unchecked monologue, carrying the mind along the very rhythm of muscular exertion, one seems to hear the unevenly spaced strokes of mallet on chisel. Less exciting is van Zeller when he sizes and labels sculpture as a finished product, when he aims to buttress his own workman's creed with facts culled out of the history of art. In the few pages devoted to the centuries that saw the rise of our Occidental tradition forced simplifications bypass some minor truths. Such dissimilar masterpieces as are the Laocoon and the Venus of Milo are lumped together as being both "in the Greek manner." The definition of the Byzantine style as linear manages astonishingly to dismiss Hagia Sophia, perhaps the most convincing and noblest among man-created volumes.

Being both a monk and a sculptor, van Zeller may speak with authority on the subject of Christian sculpture, sculpture as an accessory to the cult. He sees its golden age in a medieval past where priest, artist, and parishioner, all thought as one. A stone-lover and a purist at his craft, van Zeller remains acutely uneasy however when confronted with the unbridled richness of forms in these ancient arts. Gothic polychromy is only grudgingly acknowledged. Understatement is taken for granted as a mark of good breeding and of good art. Spanish saints, sculptured it is true, but also gessoed, gold-leafed and painted, with dolls' eyes and human eyelashes the bloody flagellated Christs dressed in velvet, and the Do-

lorosas in mourning weeds holding lace handkerchiefs to glass tears, that one contacts in Mexican village chapels, are curtly dismissed: "It is not the function of sculpture to elicit gasps of surprise, waves of nostalgia, transports of grief."

As concerns modern art, van Zeller's position is mildly conservative. In his case as in ours, scanning honestly what texts on the subject have come from Rome results in honest puzzlement. He accepts mild distortion from the model as in the nature of art, a distortion mostly brought about by the nature of the material. He has little to say about distortions born of vision and of passion. Mild as his attitude may be, and because of that very mildness, it may well carry weight with clerics more conservative than he. Priests who still shop for "saints" out of the pages of religious goods catalogues may feel encouraged to contact sculptors directly. To look at van Zeller's own carvings, partaking unabashedly of the nature of stone, and flaunting each stroke of the chisel, makes clear the fact that plaster, after all, is not the noblest of media in which to praise God.

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**LE LIVRE DE L'ARCHITECTURE MODERNE.** By Michel Ragon. Paris. Robert Laffont, 1958.

This is a book for the layman who may shy from more technical explanations of today's architecture. Michel Ragon writes in a breezy style which explains much that may have puzzled the layman, and even the architect. He entertains strong convictions but gives sane reasons for his opinions.

The subject matter is varied. We have chapters on the folklore of modern architecture, the influence of the engineers, the history of modern architecture, etc. An invigorating chapter deals with the opponents of "modern architecture"; then there are considerations of religious art and architecture. Pen-portraits of famous architects, from Frank Lloyd Wright to Richard Neutra, and a chapter which gives a resumé of architecture in twenty countries, complete this fascinating survey of "l'architecture moderne."

M.L.

