

Aihil Obstat.

HERBERTUS THURSTON, S.J.
Censor deputatus.

Imprimi potest.

✠ GULIELMUS
EPISCOPUS ARINDELENSIS,
Vicarius Generalis.

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PREFACE

This is a book that is indeed "penetrating in judgment and perfect in form," as Dom David Knowles has characterized it. And there can be no better entry into the magisterial scholarship of Hippolyte Delehaye, or an introduction to hagiography, than this little book.

"What is a saint? Who were saints? What are the tests for sifting out bogus, ghost and bilocating saints?" These are some of the questions that hagiography raises, and, Dom Knowles continues: "The hagiographer is plunged at once into the nightmare of early medieval diplomatic and forgery, into all the tangled chronological difficulties of the *fasti* of half the sees of Europe, into the labyrinthine ways of martyrologies, necrologies and calendars, into the linguistic, social and psychological varieties of Christian sentiment—Greek, Persian, Egyptian, Syrian, Slav and Oriental, into the magical mists and colours of the Celtic wonderland, and into the changes and translations that lapse of centuries and popular devotion can bring about in a matter that is of its nature peculiarly dependent upon personal knowledge and popular acclaim." To these factors must be added "the theological background and the judgment of credibility, possibility and moral and spiritual sanity inseparable from the subject-matter": that extraordinary group of gifted Jesuit scholars known as the Bollandists have not had to worry for problems and material to keep them occupied. To all the technical and critical problems with which the Bollandists, who have devoted themselves to hagiography, have been concerned during their three centuries of activity will doubtless someday be added an

examination of "the frontiers of natural and supernatural activity." That society (never more than six strong) is indeed an immortal group blessed by "the uncovenanted gift of genius," and one may well echo Knowles' Vergilian wish that the fortunes of such a house stand firm and that their successors' names be numbered on the roll.

There are few fields of scholarship that touch so many others, and that reach out into those other fields to bring tools and results to bear upon their own, as does hagiography: folklore and anthropology, mythology and iconography, liturgy and ecclesiastical history, literary history and even literary criticism, place-names—these are but the major fields touched by hagiography.

Yet, "there is no form of literature into which people rush so frequently without any sort of preparation," as Delehaye writes (p.214), and the primary concern of his introduction is to classify methods and texts:

To indicate briefly the spirit in which hagiographic texts should be studied, to lay down the rules for discriminating between the materials . . . to place people on their guard . . .

In his Preface to the third edition twenty years later, Delehaye indicated that there had been an insistent demand for a new edition and it has been nearly impossible to obtain a copy of the English translation for a long time. "Naturally the text has had to have some touching-up: in twenty years, scientific hagiography has made progress and we would not want to fail to take account of it. But we also wanted to keep the first appearance of this little book; and to handle over again, to introduce there all the developments one would wish, would have forced us to repeat what we have had occasion to say in special works, to which we shall send the reader."

There were misunderstandings: some had thought that saints were *hors de cause* of scientific investigation; that hagiographical texts are the only documents studied for the history of the saints; or that Delehaye himself manifested a destructive criticism. The aim first, this later preface emphasizes, has been not to crowd this book with details that would here be digressive—there have been two books devoted to these special questions: *Les origines du culte des martyrs* (1912) and *Les passions des martyrs et*

les genres littéraires (1921). And in this preface he concludes: "Let them be persuaded that we do not make war on the legends; that would be a foolish enterprise. All the Academies have joined to declare that the torment of Saint Lawrence could only have been as narrated—until the end of the world the *gril* [grill] will be the one emblem in which one will recognize the famous Roman deacon. The work of the legend can count among the great unconscious forces of nature. It is impossible that the popular soul be forcefully impressed by a great event or by some powerful personality without its feelings finding expression in its stories where fantasy throws off all restraints. To declare that legend has flourished abundantly around the sanctuaries is simply to state the importance of the cultus of saints in the life of the people. The legend is the homage of the Christian people to its protectors. One cannot slight this title. Only, one should not take it for history. That is a confusion which the zeal for the glory of the saints does not require and which offers serious troubles."

In Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941) are to be found the great attributes of the early Bollandists. For about a quarter of a century, until his death, he was the leader of the group; and he was hailed by the whole world of learning as a great scholar and the Bollandist par excellence. ("One of those supreme masters that arise from time to time among the Bollandists," writes Nigel Abercrombie in his biography of the great English liturgist, Edmund Bishop.) He was honored by l'Académie Royale de Belgique, l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, l'Académie pontificale romaine d'archéologie, the British Academy, the Mediaeval Academy of America, and many others. A selected bibliography of his writings follows.

To borrow from the biographical sketch by P. Peeters: perhaps the best epitaph for Delehaye would be a repetition of his own words inscribed in the dedication of his *Origines du culte des martyrs* to his predecessors De Smedt and Poncelet: *In pace cum sanctis.*

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Bollandists:

There is no full treatment of this group, and the best accounts are those of De Smedt in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1907) and of A. de Bil in the *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques* (1937). The section in Aigrain's *L'Hagiographie* (cited below) is largely based upon Delehaye's essay—*A travers trois siècles: L'Oeuvre des Bollandistes, 1615-1915* (1920), and to this should be added P. Peeters, 'Après un siècle (1837-1937),' in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. lv. Biographical sketches by Peeters of De Smedt, Poncelet, Van den Gheyn, Van Ortro, Delehaye and Bosmans, which originally appeared in *Analecta Bollandiana*, have been reprinted as *Figures Bollandiennes* (Brussels, 1948). Father Peeters, who died in 1950, has been memorialized by Devos in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. lxxix. There is a brilliant essay by Prof. David Knowles—an address to the Royal Historical Society, 'The Bollandists,' first published in the *Transactions R.H.S.*, 5th ser., vol. viii (1958)—which is to be reprinted in a volume on Great Historical Enterprises; I have quoted from it above and have found it to be altogether admirable as a survey.

Delehaye:

During a half-century of productivity Delehaye published more than a hundred dissertations, editions of texts, lists of manuscripts, etc., in *Analecta Bollandiana*. The following are his more important general works:

Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca, Brussels, 1895.

Les légendes grecques des saints militaires, Paris, 1909.

Les origines du culte des martyrs, Paris, 1912—2nd ed., 1933.

Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires, Paris, 1921.

Les saints stylites, Paris, 1923.

Sanctus, essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité, Paris, 1927.

Of his "four classics of critical scholarship"—an edition of the Byzantine synaxary, 1902, a commentary on the martyrology of St. Jerome, 1931, a study of the Roman legendary, 1936, and a commentary on the Roman martyrology, 1940—one may adapt Knowles' praise of Peeters' work on Oriental hagiography: "it is for the specialist to appreciate and for the profane to admire such work."

Recent Scholarship:

There has been a flood of scholarship during the past two decades in matters hagiographical, but it would be a rash and profaning student who would presume to annotate Delehaye's work. Fortunately, there is the recent work of René Aigrain, *L'Hagiographie—Ses Sources, Ses Méthodes, Son Histoire* (Paris, 1953), to bring together the bulk of this recent work; and the student will soon turn to the riches of the *Analecta Bollandiana*.

There is much on saints' lives in the work of Urban T. Holmes: see his *History of Old French Literature . . .* (New York, 1948), Chapters 4 and 24, and his Bibliography of medieval French literature, vol. I in *A Critical Bibliography of French Literature* (Syracuse University Press, 1947), ed. D. C. Cabeen. There will soon be available a revision of J. E. Wells, *A Manual of Writings in Middle English* under the general editorship of J. Burke Severs, to guide the student through the mediaeval English sources and treatments; still useful are G. H. Gerould, *Saints' Legends* (Boston, 1916), and especially C. W. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Cornell University Press, 1947).

In the field of folklore stories one may single out the work of Stith Thompson; his *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1932-1936), is now appearing in a revised and enlarged edition (Indiana University Press, 1955—.).

THE TEXT

The text for the present edition is the English translation by Mrs. V. M. Crawford (London, 1907), which was made from the second French edition; that translation has been compared with the third French edition of 1927, and later bibliographical changes and additions have been incorporated, or noted, in brackets.

R.J.S.

Feast of St. Basil the Great 1961
Notre Dame, Indiana

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

RECENT progress in scientific hagiography has given rise to more than one misunderstanding. Historical criticism when applied to the lives of the saints has had certain results which are in no way surprising to those who are accustomed to handle documents and to interpret inscriptions, but which have had a somewhat disturbing effect on the mind of the general public.

Religious-minded people who regard with equal veneration not only the saints themselves but everything associated with them, have been greatly agitated by certain conclusions assumed by them to have been inspired by the revolutionary spirit that has penetrated even into the Church, and to be highly derogatory to the honour of the heroes of our faith. This conviction frequently finds utterance in somewhat violent terms.

If you suggest that the biographer of a saint has been unequal to his task, or that he has not professed to write as a historian, you are accused of attacking the saint himself, who, it appears, is too powerful to allow himself to be compromised by an indiscreet panegyrist.

If, again, you venture to express doubt concerning certain miraculous incidents repeated by the author on insufficient evidence, although well-calculated to enhance the glory of the saint, you are at once suspected of lack of faith.

You are told you are introducing the spirit of rationalism into history, as though in questions of fact it were not above all things essential to weigh the evidence. How often

has not an accusation of destructive criticism been flung, and men treated as iconoclasts, whose sole object has been to appraise at their true value the documents which justify our attitude of veneration, and who are only too happy when able to declare that one of God's friends has been fortunate enough to find a historian worthy of his task.

One might have thought that this simple analysis of the attitude of suspicion which so many devout souls assume in regard to historical criticism would suffice to demonstrate the injustice of their prejudices. Unhappily, it is less easy than might be supposed to efface an impression which, as they think, can only have been inspired by piety.

The conditions under which so many accounts of martyrs and lives of saints have been put together are, as a rule, too little known for any common ground of criticism to be available. Many readers are not sufficiently on their guard against the vague sentiment which endows hagiographers with some mysterious privilege of immunity from the errors of human frailty to which all other categories of writers are liable.

We therefore believe that we shall be doing a useful work if we try to classify, more definitely than has been done hitherto, the various methods pursued by pious writers, to sketch in broad outline the genesis of their compositions, and to show how far they are from being protected against errors which exact history is bound to denounce.

It may, perhaps, be as well to warn the reader from the first against an impression that might be gathered from a study which is mainly devoted to the weak points of hagiographic literature.

To give assistance in detecting materials of inferior workmanship is not to deny the excellence of what remains, and it is to the ultimate advantage of the harvest to point out the tares that have sometimes become mingled with the wheat to a most disconcerting extent.

The simple narrative of heroic days, written, as it were, with pens dipped in the blood of martyrs, the naive histories, sweet with the perfume of true piety, in which

eye-witnesses relate the trials of virgins and of ascetics, deserve our fullest admiration and respect.

For that very reason they must be clearly differentiated from the extensive class of painfully-elaborated biographies in which the features of the saint are hidden by a heavy veil of rhetoric, and his voice overborne by that of his chronicler. There is an infinite distance between these two classes of literature. The one is well known, and its own merits recommend it. The other too often passes undetected and prejudices the first.

It must surely be admitted that from this simple task of classification, the need for which we are anxious to demonstrate, it is a far cry to that work of destruction which we may be suspected of having embarked upon.

Moreover, if we recommend any one who feels drawn to hagiographic studies to plunge boldly into the realm of criticism, we should advise no one to advance blindfold, neither have we dreamed of disguising the fact that by misapplying methods of research, however efficacious they may be in themselves, there is danger of being led to quite inadmissible conclusions.

It is easy to satisfy oneself on this point by glancing through the chapter in which we have discussed the questions touching upon mythological exegesis, so much in vogue at the present day. Certain brilliant displays which have taken place in that arena have dazzled a public more preoccupied with the novelty of the conclusions than with their trustworthiness. It has been our duty to lay down the necessary limitations, and to show how they may best be observed.

We do not profess to have written a complete treatise on hagiography. Many points which may suggest themselves to the reader have not even been touched upon, and we make no pretension of having exhausted any one of the subjects of which we have treated.

The quotations and examples might have been multiplied almost indefinitely. We believe ourselves justified, however, in resisting the temptation to impress the reader by a cheap display of erudition, and in avoiding everything that might have encumbered our exposition without adding

anything to the force of the argument.

To indicate briefly the spirit in which hagiographic texts should be studied, to lay down the rules for discriminating between the materials that the historian can use and those that he should hand over as their natural property to artists and poets, to place people on their guard against the fascination of formulas and preconceived systems, such has been the aim of this volume.

Controversy—an evil counsellor—has been banished as far as may be from this little book. Nevertheless we shall occasionally be compelled to call attention to other people's mistakes. Defective methods, alas, frequently take shelter behind names of the highest credit, and sometimes, when attacking erroneous views, one may give the impression of attacking persons. For the critic it is a real cause for regret that in the thick of the fight blows sometimes fall on those at whom they were not aimed. Let it be understood, once and for all, that we have aimed at nobody.

Some chapters of this study first appeared in the *Revue des Questions historiques* (July, 1903). We have slightly revised and completed them in a few places. Except for two or three unimportant additions, this new edition of the book is simply a reprint of the first, which appeared in March, 1905.

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THE LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAGIOGRAPHY

FROM THE FRENCH OF
PÈRE H. DELEHAYE, S.J.
BOLLANDIST

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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