

For example, to say that 'the Russian people for the most part are not politicians', is one thing, mercifully true of countries other than the U.S.S.R.; but then to add, 'but [the Russian people] use the politicians that lie to hand for doing the job that needs to be done, just as we do', is a different thing altogether, arousing astonishment, query and doubt.

Mr Miller usefully draws frequent attention to the past history of Russia, which we, with a different heritage, are apt to forget. From this he infers that Russians are accustomed to—and are perhaps even psychologically attracted to—absolute autocracy, a police-state system, the use of religion by an autocrat as a footstool to support his policies and to actions by the ruling power which, in our so-called democracies, would today provoke immediate revolution, were it conceivable that such methods should be attempted among us. He observes that whereas we have learnt how 'various parts of society' may 'go on living together, often in mutual disapproval', the Russian temperament is such that 'mutual disapproval, if it is strong enough, means that different groups do not go on living together: one or the other is condemned to death'. Mr Miller fails to draw from this assertion any conclusion.

It is a misfortune that, presumably in his love for the Russian peoples, Mr Miller has found himself obliged to employ at times language and arguments reminiscent of the 'fellow-traveller'. To dismiss, with the death of Beria, the M.V.D. as a passing phenomenon for which the Soviet rulers were hardly responsible, may temporarily please Mr Krushchev, but other inferences, such as the laudation of Stalin, may not make Mr Malenkov happy.

DESMOND MORTON

INTRODUCTORY PAPERS ON DANTE. By Dorothy L. Sayers. (Methuen; 21s.)

The first thing to say about this book is that it fairly throbs with life; and the second is that despite some inaccuracies and much exaggeration—a by-product of liveliness—it is a very good introduction to some aspects of the *Divine Comedy*, and in particular to its theological structure, and, in a lesser degree, to its function as expressing the poet's personality. Under the latter head I include Miss Sayer's stress on Dante's humour, to which she devotes a fairly convincing chapter (though her translation of the *Inferno* had put one on one's guard), and also her stress on the 'popular' character of the great poem. This point Miss Sayers delights to emphasize: 'Dante wrote for the common man and woman', and again, with more precision: 'Dante is a difficult poet, in the sense that he deals with a great subject . . . but he is not a wilfully

obscure poet'. Once we know his assumptions and technical vocabulary, he is 'for the most part lucid as the day . . . his poem is as public and universal as the Christian Faith itself': to which Dr Barbara Reynolds in her Preface, gives a scholar's slightly qualified support: 'This does not mean that he was a "popular" writer, but simply that he wrote for a public wider than the academic circle'. And his message, Miss Sayers is convinced, is as relevant now as it ever was: the *Comedy* is spiritually contemporary; a 'vital nutrimento' for the twentieth century, to which it only awaits that introduction which Miss Sayers is, of all people, the best qualified to effect. With her enthusiasm, her learning, her commonsense and her plain English, she is obviously Dante's angel to the Anglo-Saxons. In passing, her training in Dante studies has been British in, I think, a rather limiting way; though indeed she is little worse for her devotion to Charles Williams, and in some respects is the gainer by it. Her gift of confidence is fortunately no more obvious than her other and better gifts of piety (both humane and Christian), of energy and of intelligence; and I personally feel the more bound to salute these qualities in her, since I question many of her judgments and I am not attracted by her style.

Perhaps her chief qualification to write on Dante is her intellectual energy. A lazy reader may enjoy Dante in small doses, but no poet so richly repays hard work. Miss Sayers has read the *Comedy* 'innumerable times'; she has ransacked her pretty extensive vocabulary, translating it; and, more to the point here, she has really tried to understand its theology. Indeed her two most theological chapters, 'The Meaning of Heaven and Hell', and 'The Meaning of Purgatory', seem to me the best in the book. In both, the exposition of doctrine—preliminary to a swift survey of one or other of the three parts of the *Comedy*—is very well done indeed: it is both serious and popular, honest and light-hearted—but not, thank goodness, facetious, though this cannot be said of other sections of this book. The chapter on Purgatory is especially remarkable for its serious attention to Catholic sources and for the balanced way it keeps in view both elements of the Catholic doctrine, the 'ameliorative' and the satisfactory, 'internal amendment and external amends'. She finds both elements in St Thomas (Ia-IIae, 87, 6) and has a just sense of the way they harmonize in the *Purgatorio*: 'in Dante . . . they are fused and blended together, with the emphasis laying always on the purification of the heart and the eager consent of the will. You pay the price—but you pay it because you want to, and because it is your only means of expressing your love and sorrow: and in paying you grow clean and fit to receive the forgiveness freely offered and to return to that right relationship which nothing but your folly ever disturbed.' I doubt whether anything better has

been written on the theology of the *Purgatorio*, whether the Christian character of that exquisite third of the *Comedy* has ever been more simply and convincingly related to Catholic teaching.

I have dwelt on what seem to me the excellencies of this book, because if I were to press my objections to certain points, I should become rather involved and excessively tedious. Besides, it is nice to pay compliments. But I must add that if much of Miss Sayers' book is theological explanation of the *Comedy*, and very good too, a large part of it, and in her eyes just as important a part, is taken up with an attempt to explain Dante's allegorical method: and here I find myself admiring her ingenuity, amazed at her assurance and unconvinced by her conclusions. And to those of her readers who are beginners in Dante, I should like to say, perforce dogmatically, two things: that it is less necessary than she thinks to sort out and define the four 'senses' of the *Comedy* before one starts to read it; and that her confident elucidation of these four 'senses' is unsupported by the main tradition of Dante scholarship and is very questionable in itself. But it is quite good reading.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

THE ENGLISH TRAVELER TO ITALY. By George B. Parks. Volume I, The Middle Ages (to 1525). (Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura; £3 15s.)

This volume, itself long (669 pages), is but the first part of Mr Parks' work on *The English Traveler in Italy*. It covers 'Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain', 'The Earlier Middle Ages (1066-1300)' and 'The Ending Middle Ages (1300-1530)', and describes for each period the travellers themselves and the means they took—routes, transport—to get to Italy, and tries to assess the nature of their impressions and the nature of any cultural exchange between the two countries. In this last respect, the author is not interested only in Italian influence on England; for the last period, for instance, he suggests (p. 453) that 'it could indeed be argued that Italy drew more intellectual sustenance from England, than England from Italy. Englishmen came to Italy to study law; a few came to study the new classical learning. Students at Italian universities, on the other hand, who were Italian in the majority, studied philosophy and theology, and something of the methodology of science, in frequently English terms. We cannot strike a balance here, but we may at least note something of an exchange.'

The bulk of the story is naturally taken up by the ecclesiastical travellers, an archbishop going to receive the pallium, clerical litigants appealing to the curia, lay litigants in ecclesiastical causes, and by pilgrims. But we do not get the story only of the travels of clerics,