

In fact, quite incidentally and avoidably, a misleading view of the Eucharist is conveyed in the essay in which this word occurs.

BERNARD KELLY.

THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI, with translation and comment by John D. Sinclair, Vol. III, *Paradiso*. (John Lane, The Bodley Head; 12s. 6d.)

Readers of Mr Sinclair's already published work on Dante have been waiting to see what he would make of Dante's masterpiece, the *Paradiso*. They will not be disappointed: he has produced a fairly reliable translation, and a really good, though brief, commentary. With its small variety of incident and vocabulary, the *Paradiso* may be easier to translate than the *Inferno*, but it calls for specially close attention from its commentators. Even in Dante, there is less pressure to the square inch elsewhere, and that quality of 'relevancy', so rightly stressed by Mr Sinclair, is here at its subtlest and most intense. Doctrine has to be caught on the wing, in flashes of imagery, or, where it is explicit, it must be carefully related to its situation in the poem, and to the whole Dantean point of view, and the latter must be understood in and through the imagery.

All this Mr Sinclair has largely succeeded in doing, hence his comments ring true, and are nearly always really enlightening. Besides, he is so concise and modest, that one is nearly always more aware in reading him of the poet than of the commentator. Witness especially his handling of Canto ii, vi, xiv, xviii-xx: the sustained interest and freedom from platitude of these sections are due, and could only be due to Mr Sinclair's real familiarity with Dante's mind and imagination and the beat of his heart, and this keeps him, as a rule, very close to the poem itself. Not always, however: a certain distaste for the poet's scholasticism sometimes, I think, blunts the critic's sympathy, and again a bias—which I hope it is not offensive to call Protestant—slightly deflects, now and then, his judgment. A scholastic training is not, by itself, a qualification for reading the *Paradiso*, but from the poet's own point of view, it was an indispensable qualification for writing it. Hence the slight irrelevance of Mr Sinclair's finding, in Canto vii, 'a high and simple doctrine of the soul', despite the fact that 'the manner of the discourse is academic and scholastic' and 'unreal'. The same trend appears when he suggests an opposition between devotion to our Lady and the theology of the Trinity (p. 488), and that the close of Canto xi is a deliberate parody of St Thomas's 'wordy mannerism'—a cheerful but unpalatable view, I think.

A slightly different, more 'sectarian' bias seems to have confused the comment on Canto v (concerning vows), and perhaps the interpretation of Dante's view of St Francis's stigmata. Did Dante hold that this *ultimo sigillo* took the saint 'beyond the Church'? Yes, in one sense—as the pattern of Canto xi, 88-108 certainly implies—but not in another sense; for the Church, and even the Papacy, extend

into Paradise in the person of St Peter who still speaks of Rome as *luogo mio*. One might note too signs that Mr Sinclair is not very familiar with the history of medieval philosophy. Note 1, on Canto ii, and Note 9 on Canto x are over simplifications.

But these are relatively small blemishes in a commentary which so justly discerns the three main characteristics of the mind expressed in the *Paradiso*: its strict, tough rationality, its concern for the practical, its preoccupation with beauty as the cosmic manifestation of God.

The first of these, Dante's intellectual integrity, his scorn of loose thinking and superstition, is particularly emphasised. It is related to the poet's 'homely, sometimes even vulgar imagery', whereby he preserves 'the vigour of reality in the ethereal heights': and it is characteristic of Mr Sinclair to give, at this point, examples drawn from all over the poem, though he is immediately concerned with Canto xxvi.

He gathers up evidence already noted to throw light on a particular context, thus bringing home the quality of 'relevancy'. Far from being tedious, these recapitulations are intensely interesting, which is a measure of their value and of the commentator's skill. His brief work is probably the best yet published in English on the *Paradiso*.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

ROSSETTI, DANTE AND OURSELVES. By Nicolette Gray. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)

The theme of this attractively produced and generously illustrated little book is ambitious. This is to show how Rossetti failed as illustrator and translator of Dante and the implications of his failure for modern man. In this short essay there is so much logical thinking that one could wish Mrs Gray had elaborated her material into a longer book. Thirty-two out of fifty-five pages are taken up with an analysis of Rossetti's paintings and as a result the rest is unduly compressed.

The crux of the matter centres round the importance of the Image or Symbol in art. To the Catholic vision of Dante, Beatrice (romantic love) was an image of the love of God, and his own love for her an approach to the understanding of truth which his contemporaries could appreciate. But between Dante and Rossetti intervenes the Reformation. In the resulting world of private judgments the Symbol had no universal application. For Rossetti, Dante's love seemed a personal affair. Romantic love from a means to the understanding of God's love is seen as a private and human fulfilment. The Image becomes an idol.

Hence arises the modern dilemma. So long as the artist is content to paint 'honest little pictures' of scenes and objects the answer is simple. But he cannot often be so content. The Idea can only be expressed through the Symbol. But since all that is left to an unbelieving generation is the private Symbols of personal idolatries the alternative seems to be an exhibition of Surrealist despair or the