

SAINT BRIDGET OF SWEDEN. By Johannes Jorgensen. Translated from the Danish by Ingeborg Lund. (Longmans; 2 vols, 25s. each.)

Considering that Jorgensen first projected this great work as far back as 1902 and completed the second volume as recently as 1943, we cannot complain at having had to wait a mere eleven years for this excellent translation. St Catherine of Siena, Saint Francis of Assisi and now Saint Bridget: what a debt the Danish scholar has placed us under, and what a literary achievement is his!

In this last work he naturally follows the line of Bridget's *Revelations*, those almost unending series of volumes which when first published at Lübeck in 1492 ran to 864 folios. They form to all intents and purposes an almost complete autobiography of the saint, but are difficult enough to estimate. After Cardinal John Torquemada had examined the 123 suspected propositions drawn from them and had submitted them to the Council of Basle (1434), he declared them free from error, but the same Council suggested nevertheless that they should be corrected by some competent theologian. Benedict XIV, speaking of these and other revelations, said that it is not obligatory or even possible to give them the assent of Catholic faith, but only human faith in conformity with the dictates of prudence which presents them as probable or worthy of pious belief; and speaking of Bridget's revelations in particular he declared that the ambiguity of the theological phrasing should be leniently and piously interpreted.

Indeed, some of the revelations present difficulties, more especially where she takes the individual popes to task. Her visions of the fate of Clement VI are terrifying enough, as also are those of Innocent VI, with which however Jorgensen does not deal. The much-valued history of the Avignon Popes by Mollat does something to clear away the difficulty. Mollat finds no reliable evidence against the morals of Clement, pointing out that the accusations rest entirely on the statements of his opponents, such as the untrustworthy Petrarch, possessed of an almost ungovernable hatred for the exiled pontiffs. For exiled they were in fact, owing to the utter impossibility of living in Rome with anything like security.

As was to be expected, Jorgensen's description of the saint and the story of her life are beyond praise.

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

POLITICS IN POST-WAR FRANCE. By Philip Williams. (Longmans; 35s.)

This is not an easy or exhilarating book to read. In some 400 large pages Mr Williams has described the way in which the Fourth Republic works. He presents his extremely detailed knowledge both of institutions and personalities very clearly, though sometimes he refers to

technical terms like *scrutin d'arrondissement* and only explains them in a later section. He speaks in a detached way of the various elements in the Republic: Catholic, Communist, Laicist, etc., but it is surprising to find Freemasonry unmentioned in a chapter on Pressure Groups and only just mentioned elsewhere. There is here an enormous mass of information, detailed and comprehensive, carefully arranged, the occasional repetitions serving to emphasize points of importance.

The Fourth Republic has a paper Constitution drawn up after the war with the intention of giving France a new set of political institutions. It would avoid those faults of the Third Republic which led to the disaster of 1940. The instability of its governments, the splinter parties, the predominance of the legislative, the fiscal inefficiency it had displayed, were to be eliminated by a 'new deal'. The main theme of this book is to show how, despite some interesting achievements, the paper Constitution has been so modified in practice that the present political situation in France is almost identical with that which preceded the Vichy régime. Mr Williams quotes a saying current as far back as 1948: 'The Fourth Republic is dead—it has been succeeded by the Third.'

In his fair-minded way Mr Williams points out that the feature which least favourably strikes the English observer, the frequent changes of Ministry, is misleading. The personnel of successive Ministries is almost identical. It is only that the French proclaim in a dramatic way what the English understate as 'a re-shuffle of the Cabinet'. There is some truth in this, but not much. The Prime Minister does change and no single person can provide a focus of political confidence. Much time is spent in these crises. A bad impression is created. And, judging by results, essential measures are not taken. The Ministries of the Third Republic did not secure their country against Hitler, and the contemporary Ministries do not suggest that they would be more successful against the threat of today.

The difficulty is a basic one. The cultural life of France is very strong and satisfying to the human being. The Frenchman does not want to have it changed and he fears a powerful government which may seek to change it, even though national security be its motive. The ancient Chinese culture flourished behind the Great Wall and the France of the Third Republic tried to live, undisturbed by Hitler, behind the Maginot ramparts, which were not even continuous. There are no battlements which can preserve this serene and satisfying, but self-centred, way of life today. It will only be preserved if the French can learn to trust a strong government, having found a means to establish a government in which they can put their trust.

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.