

Hardly a week passes without an announcement in the Catholic press of the acquisition by some Catholic body of a large country house with property attached. Here, I suggest, is that necessary material and spiritual security to be found by the would-be land settler, if the Catholic body will show itself co-operative. The latter will naturally want to make the best use of the property, and at the same time provide for the material requirements of the community living in the big house. But the cost of labour is high, and, as regards communities of Religious, lay brothers are difficult to find. If the work of garden and farm could be given over to Catholic laymen the latter would be able to perform a truly sanctified labour, while the community could become more and more self-supporting and healthily fed (and even clothed!). Needless to expound the argument farther, and to let one's imagination reach out towards the creation of that microcosm of society—the ideal Benedictine community. But that is my point. If the Deluge is to come, let us build the Ark—many Arks: if it is not, well, what better work than the Restoration of *all things in Christ*?—Yours, etc.,

BROTHER HUGH M. TODD, O.S.M.

*To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.*

Sir,—As a Victorian child, disciplined—as apparently Miss Mary Grain would desire—with a dog-whip, may I suggest that terrorism is the first and most obvious method of producing shiftiness and self-indulgent children. The shiftiness is protective, the self-indulgence compensatory—if no one else is going to protect and cherish you, you must protect and cherish yourself.

We are not responsible for original sin—except in so far as we produce children; but we are responsible for environment. Personally I regret that all the care and cockering is devoted to the lapsed and lost: who would seldom have fallen on the wayside, given decent homes and an inspiring apprenticeship to life.

But where are the decent homes and where is the inspiring apprenticeship?—Yours, etc.,

HELEN PARRY EDEN

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## REVIEWS

DANTE THE PHILOSOPHER. By Etienne Gilson. Translated by David Moore. (Sheed and Ward; 15s.)

Sooner or later M. Gilson was sure to write a book on Dante; the subject suits him so well. Few professional *dantisti* have a tenth of his knowledge of medieval philosophy, but what counts more in this book is that he is himself both a philosopher and a man of letters. He can write about philosophers and poets without

forgetting which is which, and about Dante with the aid of both disciplines. And these aid one another. Mere men of letters are seldom so precise, and mere philosophers are perhaps hardly ever so sensible.

There is a *Candide* (or a *Socrates*) in M. Gilson. He pretends that he knows so little, just in order to bring the subject within range: upon which he then turns the light of candour like the child's in Hans Anderson's tale about the Emperor's new clothes—except that M. Gilson's ingenuousness is quite deliberate. You think he is over-simplifying, until you suddenly and delightedly realise that his thought is moving along a line drawn with exquisite precision between opposed exaggerations. True, one is not always quite sure, when he criticises theories opposed to his own, that his rejections are not a trifle curt. Brevity's soul is wit; a dangerous thing in a historian. But wit is akin also to clarity. The effect of this book is not to provide new data, but to dispel confusion. And M. Gilson's own positive thesis is by no means hastily asserted. It takes him the whole book to fix the outlines of a sketch that is still only faintly emerging after 100 pages.

Giovanni Papini once declared that 'things Italian' were incomprehensible to Frenchmen, but the Italian *dantisti* will have now less reason to agree. They will appreciate, incidentally, Mr Gilson's deference to masters like Barbi and Bruno Nardi. The latter indeed has already paid him the high compliment of his studied disagreement on certain points, whilst accepting what will come, perhaps, to be regarded as the chief *negative* result of this book: the demonstration of Dante's non-thomism in the matter of (a) the double Final End of man (*duplex finis—duo ultima*), and (b) the non-subordination of Philosophy to Theology. These two points, especially the former, appear most clearly in the *Monarchia*, on which treatise M. Gilson writes with particular vigour and brilliance.

It would have been easy, in face of the opposite exaggerations of Mandonnet and Busnelli, to have over-stressed Dante's differences from St Thomas; but, though this discussion is not yet finished, it will be hard, I think, to show that Gilson in his turn has exaggerated. Subtly blending irony and respect in a way that is probably untranslatable (therefore see the French original) he pulverises *Dante le Théologien*. Not that anyone in Italy took Mandonnet's book very seriously anyhow, but Gilson's introductory polemic was worth writing if only as a lesson for beginners, simple, limpid and sane, in the handling of texts. There follows a section on the *Convivio*, where the views advanced are more questionable, but without over-emphasis; and a line, of preoccupation rather than of doctrine, is laid bare in Dante, connected with, and considerably helping to explain, both the bare doctrine of the *Monarchia* and the dramatic symbols of the *Paradiso*.

The effect of Gilson's analysis is that in and through Dante's

explicit teaching it lays bare a preoccupation with certain practical problems encountered in actual living, and the poet's immense effort to clarify his personal attitude towards the three 'authorities' which under God and for God's sake claimed and won his passionate loyalty: Aristotle (that is, Philosophy, and principally Ethics); the Emperor (that is, Politics); and the Pope (that is, Catholic Christianity). Three mutually corrective, but also mutually exclusive authorities whose inter-relation, in Dante's mind, involves precisely no subordination of any one of them, in its own sphere, to either of the others. Only God may command in the domain proper to each; and only in God are they all reconciled. This is less a philosopher's or theologian's 'system' than the 'map of life' of an intellectual warrior intent upon knowing exactly where he stands. He borrows, of course, and with immense gratitude, from 'good brother Thomas', but his position is simply his own. It might indeed be more exact to speak of Dante's 'position' than of his 'philosophy'; and certainly 'position' is the better word for what M. Gilson has tried to define. Hence it is misleading to alter his original title, *Dante et la Philosophie*, to 'Dante the Philosopher'. In fact M. Gilson hardly touches two main conceptions in the poet's 'philosophy': the contrast between creation and secondary causality, and the human mind's innate tendency to transcend the limits of the sensible world. The latter point is particularly delicate and is perhaps a little blurred by M. Gilson's emphasis on an aspect that stands in contrast to it; an emphasis required, however, by this admirable book's entire thesis.

The translation is sometimes inexact or at least insensitive. And nine times (on pp. 68, 92, 108, 146, 164, 166, 167, 188 and 242) it seems to me definitely wrong.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

THE MODERN APPROACH TO DESCARTES' PROBLEM. The Herbert Spencer Lecture in the University of Oxford, 1948. By Sir Edmund Whittaker, F.R.S. (Nelson, 1948; 1s. 6d.)

This lecture sketches, with Sir Edmund Whittaker's usual clarity and felicity of expression an outline of the relation of the mathematical and physical sciences to philosophy as seen by a mathematician. The hopes and ideals of Descartes, Leibnitz and Whitehead for the eventual mathematicisation of philosophy are related, the author maintaining the optimism of those thinkers while giving some indication of their lack of success. 'The situation today is not dissimilar to that which confronted Descartes; on the one hand there is philosophy, lacking unanimity, and dissociated from the growth of positive knowledge; and on the other hand there is a vigorous group of physical and mathematical sciences, bringing forth new triumphs continually.' This fact taken in connection with the immense advances made in 'mathematical' logic during the last hundred years might well provoke an inquiry into the grounds of these ideals. The most significant statement on this score in