

The ten 'readings' in this volume were originally public *lecturae Dantis* delivered in Cambridge at different dates between 1970 and 1981 by nine past and present members of the Italian Department and the present Reader in Medieval Latin. They are but part of a far larger number of such Cambridge *lecturae* given in various series since 1969 by the same scholars and by visitors from other universities. This selection, as the editors remark, 'represents a fair cross-section' of what this reviewer can confirm from personal experience has proved a very popular and successful venture. It is dedicated appropriately to Uberto Limentani, on his retirement from the Serena Chair at Cambridge, as he devised, supervised and contributed often to the whole series.

The studies are explicitly intended for non-specialists. The reader is consequently spared the kind of improbable intellectual and textual acrobatics which sometimes characterise this genre in Italy. The keynote is a sober exposition of the various aspects of the chosen canto of the *Comedy*, soundly based in up-to-date scholarship and pitched at just the right level for its audience. This formula does not exclude the occasional excursion into the novel interpretation of language or allusion or symbol; but on the whole it guarantees that the known will be competently expounded in an interesting fashion by commentators who seek to wear their erudition as lightly as possible. One must not therefore ask from these studies more than they offer; and they offer quite a lot in the way of particular and general guidance for readers of the *Comedy* who lack special knowledge. For those who do not, they suggest here and there new lines of thought worth pursuing.

The cantos here involved and their readers are:  
*Inferno*, XIII (P Boyde), XXV (R Kirkpatrick), XXVII (J Davies), XXXIII (P Boitani);  
*Purgatorio*, III (P McNair), XXIX (P Dronke), XXXII (K Foster);  
*Paradiso*, XVII (U Limentani), XXVI (J Cremona), XXX (P Shaw).

No single canto is, however, a wholly self-contained unit: within the limits of time available, the readers set the context and establish the continuity of their assigned canto, clarify obscurities, explain allusions, comment on language, style and allegory, making frequent reference in their commentaries to other relevant parts of the poem and to other works of Dante. The result is to reveal a far broader spectrum of Dante's *Comedy* and thought than the apparent concentration on individual cantos might suggest. In a sense, therefore, as the dust-jacket claims, it is true that 'the book may serve both as an introduction and as a companion to Dante's poem'. It is perhaps more true that, if one started with the idea of producing an introduction and companion based on similar readings, one might well have made a very different selection of cantos. But such an observation is a privilege of hindsight, and would be asking this volume to be other than what it is, viz, a selection determined, so to speak, by historical accident, through which many aspects of Dante's style, thought, narrative technique, imagery and symbolism are illustrated.

Rather than attempt some account of each reading, it might be useful to indicate briefly some particular points which interested this reviewer: the broad approach of Boyde to sins in Hell as a prelude to detailed examination of *Inferno* XIII; the elucidation by Davies of the character of Guido da Montefeltro in *Inferno* XXVII – 'a hard, crafty man' in whom Dante suggests 'a fatal combination of resolution and deviousness', whose case is certainly to be read in relation to the different fate of his son Buonconte (*Purgatorio* V), but also to that of Manfred (*Purgatorio* III), who, though a special case in that he was excommunicated, raises more acutely a similar problem about Dante's 'knowledge' of damnation/salvation and the vital question of grace (on which see McNair's contribution); P. Boitani's vivid illustration of the gruesome episode of Ugolino, sharply focussed on mouths, teeth, hunger; the elegant humorous touches in McNair's scholarly discussion of *Purgatorio* III (though one might

disagree with his suggested explanation of lines 109–111); the conflicting interpretations (referred to in the editor's Preface) of the allegory of the procession in the Earthly Paradise given by P Dronke and K Foster, where the former (whose reading appears here in the revised form already published in *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch*, 53–54, 1978–79) follows a line akin to that of C G Hardie (viz. that it is some kind of allegory of Dante's personal experience), the latter the traditional explanation (except for the symbolism of the Tree, for which Foster offers original, if not completely persuasive suggestions); Cremona's interesting comments on Adam's 'reordering' of Dante's unspoken questions in *Paradiso* XXVI ('a rebuke to the expres-

sion of Dante's eager but uncritical curiosity, similar to . . . the curiosity that led him to peer too closely at the figure of St John'); and finally, P Shaw's suggestion that the rose of the blessed in *Paradiso* XXX may derive from the symbol of the *Roman de la Rose*, but as an intentional conscious contrast, so 'making amends for the aberrations of his youthful self' (i.e. for the composition of *Il fiore*: though it should be added that in 'his' version of the *Rose* Dante plays down the celebration of sensual love).

All the contributions are of a consistently high standard. This is a volume of *Haute vulgarisation* in the best sense of the term.

C GRAYSON

**Marius Victorinus, THEOLOGICAL TREATISES ON THE TRINITY, trans. by Mary T Clark R.S.C.J.**

**THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: A NEW TRANSLATION, Volume 69, *The Catholic University of America Press: Washington, D.C. \$24.95.***

It is widely held that the Latin fathers were less profound theologians than those who wrote in Greek. "Neither the Latin language", wrote Prestige, "nor the ordinary Latin intellect, was capable of the subtlety of the conception which approved itself to the Greek theologians". How far this view has become axiomatic can be seen in a recent assessment of Leo the Great. "Doctrinally Leo was clear and forcible", we read in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, "but not profound. He knew no Greek". Marius Victorinus did know Greek, and had read widely in Greek philosophy. But this has not saved him from neglect. Although he took a lively interest in contemporary theological developments in the East, his own contributions to the debate seem to have had no impact on the course of the discussion. Jerome, writing not long after Marius had died, describes his theological works as "extremely obscure; understood only by the erudite". Prestige does not mention him in *God in Patristic Thought*, and he merits one allusion, in a footnote, in Grillmeier's *Christ in Christian Tradition*.

No less than three editions of the theological works of Marius Victorinus have appeared in the last three decades. There have been several important monographs. There are many grounds for welcoming this awakening of interest. Marius' conversion to Christianity is a significant episode in the history of late Roman antiquity. As professor of rhetoric at Rome he was a well-known public figure, and his philosophical learning was highly prized amongst the non-Christian, upper-class intelligentsia. Not surprisingly, his conversion, late in life, caused a sensation. His writings shed some light on the motivation of that conversion. He found in the Christian scriptures a teaching which he thought had much in common with his own philosophical tradition, and upon his conversion he put that tradition to work in the defence of the Nicene doctrine against the Arians. This itself is interesting. For it has sometimes been held that the Arian heresy arose from an exaggerated respect for and dependence on Greek philosophy: Arianism has even been described as a watering down of Christian doctrine to make it more accept-