

who, when seeking no mere 'hearty fellowship' but precisely the depths of the divine mystery given us in Christ, find it most profoundly in a liturgy which affirms itself as the Lord's Supper and the Breaking of the Bread; something which

does not strive to be as far removed as can possibly be managed from that brotherly meal which was the very form in which Christ gave us his eucharist.

C. HASTINGS

THE MIND OF DANTE. Ed. U. Limentani. *C.U.P.* (1965), pp. 200, 25s.

These seven lectures were given in the Lent term at Cambridge by two Italians and five Englishmen, all but one members of the Department of Italian, to mark the centenary of Dante's birth, and to 'serve as an introduction to his works and an interpretation of his art and ideas'. This form of introduction is more successful than the usual pattern of political and social background and of biography (as in Professor T. G. Bergin's *Approach to Dante*, the Bodley Head, London (1965), pp. 326, 35/-), because it is also an interpretation, and, without repeating the meagre and well-known biographical facts, reports on recent research and puts forward new ideas. The first essay, however, by Professor Natalino Sapegno of Rome, author of a well-known commentary (1955-6-7), is an exception since he seems still stuck in Croce and De Sanctis though anxious to move on from them, and talks of the 'genesis' of the *Comedy* in the manner of Vossler. Dr Philip McNair attempts the difficult task of saying something new about the 'poetry of the Comedy' by putting a sharper edge on the question of allegory and symbolism. But the acceptance of the Letter to Cangrande as genuine seems to me to make clarity on this question impossible. Dr McNair himself refutes what the Letter says of Dante as 'Florentino natione, non moribus,' and does not explain why Dante so insists on the literal truth of the details, 'che io vidi'. On the Crocean problems of 'structure' he argues well that a structural element such as the Mount of Purgatory is a poetic image, an original creation within a Hereafter that Dante did not invent. The theatre of Dante's dramas is as much a work of imagination as the dramas themselves, and essential to their interpretation.

Fr Kenelm Foster, O.P., handles religion and philosophy in Dante with his customary skill and delicacy of touch. Dante's Christian faith never wavered, but he had philosophical difficulties about the competence of reason, creation *ex nihilo*, the relation of matter to God, the limits of freewill, the salvation of the unbaptized. His

final answers in the *Comedy* are orthodox, yet not dictated by authority, but thought out independently – quite independently of St Thomas, for instance. Fr Foster rightly stresses the extraordinary enthusiasm that Dante shows in the *Convivio*, a 'passionate intuitive experience' of philosophy and 'so potentially poetic'. Dante's problem, and ours, is to relate his secular concerns, especially as focused in the *Monarchy*, for this life to his religion. I would dispute some of Fr Foster's formulations, but with the diffidence of an amateur in such a field, and as a learner from him.

Dr Patrick Boyde's lecture on 'Dante's Lyric Poetry' sharpens the appetite for his (and Fr Foster's) forthcoming commentary on the *Rime*. His characterization of the *Vita Nuova* as a book of poetry, superbly constructed, as in fact fulfilling the promise of an unprecedented poem for Beatrice in its last chapter, is excellent, but I am not convinced as he is by De Robertis' discovery in the *Vita Nuova* of numerous echoes of philosophical works against Dante's own description of it as rudimentary, nor that its title has any reference to spiritual rebirth. Boyde rightly exhibits the variety of Dante's poetic experiments in rapidly succeeding phases of production, at once followed by theoretical reflection on them. Dante's lyrics are not an overflow of emotion; they are technical triumphs, and exhibit a dramatic element which looks forward to the *Comedy* in all its variety; yet they are valuable in themselves. But the *Vita Nuova* is the real precursor of the *Comedy*, to which Dante had to return in spirit before he could begin the *Comedy*.

On Dante's Political Thought Professor Limentani is interesting, but to me unconvincing, since I cannot believe that 'Dante never altered his views at any stage during his exile from Florence', that the *Comedy* accepts the scheme outlined in the *Monarchy* and that Dante even interrupted the composition of the *Comedy* to write the *Monarchy*. Was Dante then unaffected by what Fr Foster oddly calls 'the rise or collapse of his hopes in the Emperor Henry

VII'? Do the *Monarchy* and the *Comedy* really show 'the same sense of mission?' But Limentani knows all the moves in this argument.

Dr J. Cremona's essay on Dante's views on language is a clear survey of what intensive research has brought to light in recent years. To the beginner the oddest part of Dante's beliefs about Italian and Latin is that Latin is not the parent of the vernacular, but the other way round, a construction on the basis of a vernacular. In the Latin of the *de VE* Dante declared that the vernacular is nobler, and in the Italian of the *Convivio* that Latin is superior in nobility, virtue and beauty.

Dr (soon to be Professor at Edinburgh) C. P. Brand, author of books on the Italian Influence on the English Romantics and on Tasso (with a final section on his influence in England), contributes a discursive but interesting highlighting of what Dante has meant to different periods and to a number of English poets, as patriot and philosopher and reformer as well as poet of love and hate, and as theoretician of language to Coleridge. Too many Englishmen seem not to have got as far as the *Paradiso* (p. 180).

COLIN G. HARDIE

PRE-REFORMATION ENGLISH SPIRITUALITY. Edited and introduced by James Walsh, S.J. *Burns and Oates*, pp xiv, 288, 30s.

The useful biographical and bibliographical notes to this anthology of articles about English spiritual authors make interesting reading. For one thing the majority of the works referred to have been written during or since the last world war (this of course includes modern editions of the medieval texts); and another point of some significance is that quite a number of the seventeen authors of these essays served in the armed forces during that war. If the turbulent times of the fourteenth century threw up its great mystical writers, so it seems has the disturbed and revolutionary period of the mid-twentieth century forced a great number of people to turn to these early masters of contemplation for some permanent foothold in the Christian life.

But of course this anthology provides a surer foothold than the fourteenth century English mystics with their highly specialized and individualistic approach. It takes the reader from the eighth century Bede right up to Thomas More and Augustine Baker, revealing a tradition which is perhaps characteristically English, but in its total stretch not quite so characteristically insular as some of the later writers would suggest. Another point of interest in the biographical notes is that Professor E. J. Arnould, who contributes the essay on Richard Rolle, came to his researches into the writing of that mystic through lecturing on Anglo-Norman literature. One of the proofs that this tradition was not broken by the Norman invasion lies in the continuity of the English vernacular right up to More. The foundation of this study of English spirituality was really laid by Professor R. W.

Chambers, earlier this century, in his brief outline *On the Continuity of English Prose*. A great deal of this prose was religious in nature, written for the edification of the nuns and laity of the times, so that as they learnt to express their love of God in their prayers, they were preparing the way for the unrivalled vernacular of the Authorised Version.

We must however be careful to avoid insularity. Mr Donald Nicholl, at the very beginning of the volume, has some apropos phrases about St Bede: 'There is a sense in which it is misguided . . . to speak of *his* mystical teaching at all. For though he was a teacher he was at every instant conscious of being a Catholic teacher, whose duty is to come ever closer to the mind of the Catholic Church . . . When a person, in fear and trembling, assumes the office of teacher and begins to announce Catholic truth to the unlearned, he must above all things avoid giving to that teaching some special interpretation of his own'. English spirituality is Christian, Catholic spirituality, if it be genuine, but expressed in the English idiom. It will be found to be the same as that of the early Christians in the middle-east and the Roman Christians on the continent – at any time in the past two thousand years.

The essays have first appeared as articles in *The Month*; and there is inevitably some lack of balance. Hilton and More receive the same length of treatment as William Flete and Margery Kempe. Edmund Colledge O.S.A. makes out a good case for the authenticity of the latter case despite her early madness; and she is of undoubted interest as a manifestation