

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

sterility of abstract art, in the particularisation of coloured geometrical shapes. Unless, as Mrs Gray suggests, he turns as Rossetti did, to the illustration of the myths and legends of literature an alternative now discredited but one which produced the lasting wonders of Greek, medieval and renaissance art.

JANET CLEEVES

LEON BLOY: *A Study in Impatience*. By Albert Béguin. Translated by Edith M. Riley. (Sheed and Ward; 12s. 6d.)

This happily translated book will be an excellent introduction to the mind of Léon Bloy—that violent, provocative, disconcerting, and yet challenging and most appealing, man and writer, whose influence on spirits attuned to his own burning spirit was so intense and far-reaching. Indeed, if he had done no more than bring about the conversions of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain his interest for us would have been enormous. But they are only outstanding members of the group of friends and disciples who gathered round Bloy in his later years: Pierre Termier, Pierre van der Meer, the abbés Roblot and Léonce Petit, Frédéric Brou, Jean de la Laurencie, the painter Rouault, for example. As one of them wrote, 'those who had seen him came back again for his words and still more for the eloquence of his silent presence'. For they had perceived 'the essential splendour of his work' in spite of the strange medley of matters swept along in its torrential flood.

Madame Maritain's vivid memories are fresh in our minds: the 'greatness, simplicity, imperturbable conviction, contempt for contingencies, singleminded purpose' which made him resemble an Old Testament prophet; but also the violence and intolerance which made Barbey d'Aurevilly compare him to a cathedral gargoyle 'pouring out the waters of heaven on the just and the unjust'—the waters of heaven, and the anger of God interpreted by the personal indignation of the prophet.

The Historical Introduction specially written for the English translation is exceedingly useful. The biographical sketch gives a clue to much in a writer all whose work is a revelation of his personality—his 'identity' to use his own word. Bloy entitled one set of his journals *The Pilgrim of the Absolute*, and he wrote once to Jean de la Laurencie: 'God had given me the sense, the need, the instinct, of the Absolute . . . a very rare gift that I felt even in my childhood, a faculty more dangerous and torturing than genius itself, since it implies the constant wild appetite for what does not exist on earth and since it isolates one endlessly'. This instinct for the Absolute took strange and disquieting forms in his boyhood—he might have been another Rimbaud; but from the time of his conversion he could be satisfied, for himself and others, with nothing less than absolute fidelity to supernatural truths. The torturing longing made the spectacle of unheroic living, especially among professing Christians, an abomination to him. Hence his utter intolerance ruthlessly expressed of those who fell short of so exacting a standard; and his intense effort, through all