

The text by itself should prove a sufficient recommendation for Miss Prescott's book, but its excellent illustrations, the fifteenth-century maps and views and line-drawings are an added pleasure, the fulfilment of the promise of an unusually gay and delightful jacket.

AELRED SQUIRE, O.P.

THE GENTLEST ART IN RENAISSANCE ITALY. An Anthology of Letters in Italian, compiled with an Introduction by K. T. Butler. (Cambridge University Press; 50s.)

Letter-writing was cultivated as an art in Europe so long as the three conditions that favour it obtained; 'the existence of a cultured society with a good deal of time on its hands; a regular, but not too frequent postal service, and no speedier means of communication. In the Italy of the sixteenth century these conditions prevailed to an admirable degree.' So writes the late Mistress of Girton in the Introduction, composed before her death, to this collection of Italian letters of the Cinquecento; now published, posthumously, as a memorial to Miss Butler's work in Italian studies. And in some ways it is a worthy memorial. She loved beautiful things, and this book in type and format is a beautiful object. It is also, so far as the letters themselves are concerned, probably the best anthology of Italian letters of the Renaissance period—when Italy was a century ahead of the rest of Europe in this art—ever published in England or perhaps anywhere. There are 260 letters, all written before 1600; and most are here reprinted (many for the first time) from *Epistolari* of that period or a little later, or 'come from manuscript collections edited in more recent times'. The letters are grouped under eleven headings ('The Family Circle', 'Friendship', 'News', etc.), and their writers include, of course, such famous people as Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Cardinal Bembo, Isabella D'Este Gonzaga (who appears, if I am not mistaken, twice over in the index), Tasso and St Aloysius Gonzaga (the only saint in the book, represented by his last letter to his mother written ten days before his death).

Scholars, however, will be quick to remark blemishes. The index is, as I have suggested, imperfect. There is a teasing lack of biographical, historical and textual information. The letters are in old Italian, but there is no glossary. There is no critical apparatus at all. And even the choice itself of the letters may seem a bit one-sided. Why, for instance, does the religious revolution of that age leave hardly a trace in this book? There may be a good reason for this, apart from the anthologist's *placet* which, from one point of view, is reason enough; but the fact remains. Did one not know it already one would hardly suspect that all these busy, cultivated, vivid people were contemporaries of the Reformation; and that if Luther was not an Italian, St Ignatius became,

perforce, a Roman. There is no echo here of the Council of Trent.

But the book takes its character from the woman who died while preparing it. It is a woman's book, after all. And that perhaps is why the section entitled 'The Family Circle' is the largest and the liveliest; that, and the very deep Italian attachment to the family. All the letters that have to do with children—and they are numerous—are characteristically warm, and frequently witty too. Along with the ardour and melancholy of the great artists, of Tasso, Michelangelo, Politian, it is the wary and practical affection of Italian fathers and mothers that one remembers best on closing this book.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, 1788-1792. By Gaetano Salvemini. Translated from the Italian by I. M. Rawson. (Jonathan Cape; 18s.)

The first version of this important book was published in Italy as far back as 1907. The author thus became well-known on the Continent—for even French historians acknowledged the value of the book—long before the advent of Fascism, of which Professor Salvemini proved a staunch opponent no less than a well-informed critic.

The present edition, excellently translated by Mr Rawson, has been revised by the author himself who up to a point was able to incorporate more recent research. All the same, the reviewer finds himself in something of a dilemma. Is he to apply the standards of 1954 or rather those of almost half a century back when the idea of the book under review was first conceived and the first edition brought out? For there is no doubt that the standards are different and that Professor Salvemini has not fully contrived to bring his interesting study up to date. This criticism applies particularly to the chapter on the intellectual movement that led up to the French Revolution. Apart from this aspect, the author's account of the origins and early years of the Revolution is still very useful. The chronological limitation to the short period from 1788 to 1792 makes it possible to throw into relief what Professor Salvemini and, incidentally, also Hilaire Belloc considered the paramount issue, namely the abolition of the monarchy, the significance of which sometimes tends to be minimized in recent pseudo-sociological works on the Revolution. The role of the individual in history is stressed when the author insists how time and again Louis XVI failed to live up to the country's expectations. The book is equally stimulating in its analysis of the pre-revolutionary class structure. At the same time facile sociological abstractions are avoided, and indeed we are reminded that no single formula will cover that motley crowd of revolutionaries, 'able and incompetent, disinterested and self-seeking, resolute and cowardly, the criminals of September and the stalwarts of Valmy'.