

might find food for thought in St Thomas's remark in Book I of the *De Regimine Principum*: 'Homo non ordinatur ad communitatem politicam secundum se totum, et secundum omnia sua. . . . Sed totum quod homo est, et quod potest et habet, ordinandum est ad Deum'.

ANDREW BECK, A.A.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD. By Enid Starkie. (Hamish Hamilton; 15s.)

Dr Starkie is acknowledged as the leading authority on Rimbaud's life and work. But the study that she has recently brought out is by no means for the specialist or the French scholar alone. Rimbaud is one of the fascinating figures of all time. This book is more than a compelling biography: it is a minute and vivid chronicle of an immense tragedy.

He was a creature of astounding contradictions: the priggish, innocent and precocious schoolboy who went carefully along the path of vice that was a torture to him; the boy who goaded himself on that he might live all life, reach all experience in order to write the perfect poetry; the youth who considered himself almost the equal of God and hoped to attain him by a way that he was hewing out for himself. Dr Starkie presents this paradox of debauch and mysticism as a balanced whole, with sympathy and with insight.

At sixteen his sensitiveness had been wounded by an ugly world: he revolted from it, to find relief only in the accentuation of complete disgust. Yet all the time truth was his aim. With the mystics he agreed that the subordination of the personality is the first essential. But prayer he rejected, for the Church stood in his way—he wanted to make his own code of morality. So he went to the other extreme and chose to believe that he could break the chains that bound the spirit to the world by a systematic abuse of the self in debauch. He sacrificed himself to the one ideal in a way that was to him as hard as that of virtue. The writer, he said, should be a mere voice for the eternal, and the poet *se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens*. And this was his martyrdom. Debauch was for him a religious doctrine and the price for his knowledge was suffering. With his fatal thoroughness he drained the lees of degradation. He wandered the streets of Paris thin, filthy and verminous, tried every kind of drug, lived with Verlaine, and all the time wrote the poetry that was to have such an influence on his successors. But by the time that he had reached the age of twenty he had come to find like Baudelaire:

*Après une débauche on se sent toujours plus seul, plus abandonné.*

It was now that he wrote the *Saison en Enfer*: he considered his life had been false till then and that truly he had been living in Hell. There was a more optimistic conclusion to this last of his writings: life must be lived in an entirely new way and all ideas must be 'modern'.

After five years of wandering on the Continent he finally decided to settle down and work for a career. He found employment and relative happiness in Abyssinia, where he traded for twelve years—and here also he smuggled guns in trying to make money. At thirty-seven he came back to France and had to have his leg amputated: his health grew worse and he died the same year. On his deathbed he was converted; and it was thus, in the final surrender of his personal liberty, that ended his lifelong search for a God he had looked for in all the hardest places.

R. S. AUSTEN

COLLECTED POEMS OF ALICE MEYNELL: Centenary Edition. (Hollis and Carter; 12s. 6d.)

Mournful indeed would be the world that had no place for so gentle a visionary as Alice Meynell. Her word-painting is delicate, and her love of nature in all its aspects bears eloquent testimony to a loving nature and a deep tenderness. Her chiselled and polished verses are never ragged and her sense of music enables her to create rhyme schemes that, whilst never obtrusive, are well matched with the ideas she seeks to convey. She is a good painter of youth and age; her innocent eye does not prevent her from seeing all the pathos and tragedy of life. Like all religious people she is profoundly concerned with the problem of pain. She understands the dilemma of the man who cannot reconcile the existence of grief and pain with the conception of a loving and infinitely compassionate God. But she sees that when such a man revolts against the deity and declares 'There are no higher powers: there is no heart in God, no love', his act of rebellion is atoned for by the love that inspires such a reaction. Again, she refuses to yield to the sense of despair the horror of war provokes in her. When she compares the peace of nature with the strife of men, she is inclined to condemn man as ungrateful for the miracle of natural beauty, but she changes her mind when she acknowledges that war, which inspires acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, enables man to attain a stature denied to nature that is quite unique.

Her sense of sorrow and pity is all-embracing. Sometimes her grief is very personal as in the poems 'A Study' and 'A Poet to his Childhood'. She writes in the great tradition of English lyric poetry and is not only willing but even eager to acknowledge her debt to the past. But she is not a mere traditionalist; she is highly original, though she never strives for mere novelty. She casts her thoughts in brief but vivid stanzas which are always keenly inventive and alive.

True tragedy, in her eyes, is not the august sorrow and sublime irony of childbirth and martyrdom and old age and docile mother-