

analogy of attribution. But most of the essential ideas behind the scholastic principle, even including the idea of proportion, would seem to be touched upon. At a certain point, however, Newman is not interested to probe any deeper. He leaves it to the power of grace to be able to do with human words whatever God wants to do in the way of conveying knowledge even of himself to those whom he created to know and love him.

It is to Newman's mind the depth of ingratitude and irreverence to complain that God has revealed mysteries to us. Even if the darkness of faith had not many advantages for our spiritual lives here on earth, it would be contemptible presumption for a creature to dictate to God what God should reveal to us; and foolish to ask whether God revealed them as formulae without meaning or as giving some sort of knowledge, though imperfect. If they could not possibly have any meaning as a revelation of God, why did God reveal them? While we rejoice in the light, let us humbly accept the darker shadows thrown into sharp prominence by that light. And, whether we can see it or not, we can rest assured that God in his Providence knew that it was necessary for our spiritual formation in Christ that we should accept them.

THE CRITICS' PROBATION

By

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A recent reading of the reviews of Wilfrid Ward's *Life of Cardinal Newman* in 1912 has deepened a long-harboured suspicion that appreciation of Newman is very much a moral matter. Whether you agree or disagree with his conclusions, you will never do him justice until you yourself begin to feel some spark of his deep and self-disregarding love of truth. Just acknowledgements have yet to be made by the literary spokesmen of England to the titanic genius of this great Englishman; but the failure, if failure it can be shown to be, is mainly a moral one.

When his biography appeared in 1912 it was met by a cautious but unmistakable disparagement of the Cardinal's intellect. None of the writers indeed stooped so low as some of those of the generation before, when Carlyle, with shattering imperceptiveness, had described him as possessing "the intellect of a moderate-sized rabbit". Lord Morley too, more sweetly but with hardly less critical obtuseness, had written: "Mill had none of the incomparably winning graces by which Newman made *mere syren style* (*italics mine*) do duty for exact, penetrating and coherent thought: by which moreover he actually raised his church to what would not so long before have seemed a strange and inconceivable rank in the mind of Protestant England. Style has worked many a miracle before now, but none

more wonderful than Newman's." To trace the Catholic Revival in England to Newman's style needs nerve enough. But only the conviction that his readers knew the writings of Newman as little as he, could have steeled honest John Morley to accuse the author of *The Grammar of Assent* of abandoning exact, penetrating and coherent thought for mere honeyed words. Such assurance is possible only to men who know they are supported by numbers. It is the courage of the big battalions.

The absurdity of these estimates was not renewed by the 1912 reviewers. They had to read the *Life* at least, while Lord Morley sounds as if he had read nothing of Newman but "Lead, Kindly Light". But their drift is identical and unmistakable. There is a boundless admiration for his literary artistry coupled with a curious insensitiveness to the colossal intellectual power of the Cardinal. It was as though, knowing beforehand the conclusion of it all, they had simply refused to follow him through the long, subtle, infinitely patient intellectual inquiry that is headed (as though by chapters) *Oxford University Sermons, Ariens of the Fourth Century, Development of Christian Doctrine, Idea of a University, Grammar of Assent*, and had preferred to concentrate upon such comparatively innocuous work as the *Lyra Apostolica* and the *Dream of Gerontius*. It is clear from these reviews of March, 1912, that Newman was not read, or was read with little of that patient attention without which it is simply impossible to be just to this searching, truth-enamoured soul.

The *Contemporary* indeed refers, but in a kind of aside, to "his vast intellectual powers" and owns that "his mind was of absolutely first rank". The *Quarterly* studiously avoids any such admission, and in a long article labours to fix upon him the character of a hopeless neurotic whose feelings flooded his mind and nullified his conclusions. "His transports of emotion were tempestuous . . . such a life is not normal. One cannot mistake the overstrain". Nor can one mistake the direction in which the writer is marshalling his readers; the comfortable conclusion is soon upon us: "Newman had in an eminent degree the skill in verbal fence characteristic of the Oxford of his generation . . . reasoning meant more to him than truth, tradition than testimony. Never consciously insincere, he constantly gave the impression of insincerity. You could not detect the fallacy but a true instinct told you it was there". There is a crescendo here that soon reaches its triumphant climax: "With Newman reasoning invariably degenerated into sophistry".

There is some reason to think that, whatever may be his ultimate niche in critical appraisal, Newman can never again be treated with the crude partisanship of the above. The mood of 1912 has finally departed. One hears of impenitent Liberals,

but hardly, I think, of impenitent Hegelians. The Prussian domination of English thought endured up to the outbreak—in some quarters far beyond the outbreak—of the Great War; and it is from the standpoint of Prussian philosophy, taken as the norm and test of culture, that Newman is treated so curiously. Dean Inge notes that at the Oriel of 1832 and among the ablest men “there was great ignorance of much that was being thought and written elsewhere . . . Knowledge of German was rare”. Mark Pattison in a rhetorical burst summed up, a generation before, the official English attitude to Newman: “The force of his dialectic and the beauty of his rhetorical exposition were such that one’s eye and ear were charmed, and one never thought of enquiring on how narrow a basis of philosophical culture his great gifts were expended”. (Although these great gifts were endlessly exerted to sift and analyse that very basis!). “A. P. Stanley once said to me: ‘How different the fortunes of the Church of England might have been if Newman had been able to read German’! That puts the matter in a nutshell; Newman assumed and adorned the narrow basis on which Laud had stood two hundred years before. All the great development of the human reason from Aristotle down to Hegel was a sealed book to him. There lay a unity, a unity of all thought, which far transcended the mere mechanical association of the unthinking members of the Catholic Church: a great spiritual unity by the side of which all sects and denominations shrink into vanity”.

In cold fact there is no unity between Aristotle and Hegel and no development from Aristotle to Hegel. There is a development from Kant, through Fichte and Schelling, to Hegel; and it is one that M. Gilson can describe as “really and truly a murderous” one, “and all the blood for which they are responsible has not yet been shed”. He was writing in 1937; and the prophetic implication was soon to be realised, for the Nazi State owed *much* to the Hegelian conception of the State as the march of God through history. But a unity of all the philosophers from Aristotle to Hegel is as fantastically untrue as is the grouping of the philosophers on one side and the “unthinking” sects and denominations on the other. It made pleasant reading for the confident Progressives of the eighties: but it had little foundation in fact.

It is now dead, beyond a peradventure; and it may at last be possible for Newman to obtain a hearing and a judgment on his own merits, without reference to an assumed, if mostly unspoken, conviction of German inerrancy. But the reader of Newman must be made aware of two elements in the writer that are less common than writers in general would have us assume. These are first a rare, one-pointed and quite selfless love of truth; and second a mind of keen, rapier-like quality that could

distinguish aspects and nuances of truth when others saw only the broad fact. The first receives the lip-service of mankind. All writers claim to be seeking the truth; but how many want truth though the Heavens fall in consequence? The truth "as I see it" is for most men more important than the truth, whatever may become of me. But truth itself was the supreme and dominating motive of Newman's life, and quite apart from the question whether he ever attained it, no assessment of his work can stand that does not recognise this.

It was for example, the explanation of the painstaking care with which he always stated his opponent's case, often imparting to it a new force. Says Dean Church: "With a frankness new in controversy he had not been afraid to state (the case against him) with a force which few of his opponents could have put forth. With an eye open to that Supreme Judge of all our controversies . . . he had with conscientious fairness admitted what he saw to be good and just on the side of his adversaries". With this eye open to the Supreme Judge, he cultivated a gift of exceedingly rare quality, and one that by its unexpectedness furnishes much embarrassment for the critic; I mean, an extraordinary watchfulness over self. His great determination to get at the truth soon taught him that the main obstacle to truth in all of us is ourselves. "A great many of our assents", he says in the *Grammar of Assent*, "are merely expressions of our personal likings, tastes, principles, motives and opinions, as dictated by nature or resulting from habit; in other words, they are acts and manifestations of self; now what is more rare than self-knowledge? In proportion then to our ignorance of self is our unconsciousness of those innumerable acts of assent which we are incessantly making". Self-knowledge and self-crushing were for him part of the price to be paid for the truth; and he paid it with a generous thoroughness that gives an austere and rarified quality to all he wrote and, it must be added, often leaves his critic limping painfully behind. What Dean Church said of the Oxford Authorities of 1841 is sometimes true of later writers upon the same matter:—"The Heads entirely failed to recognise the moral elevation and religious purpose of the men whom they opposed . . . This mark of moral purpose and of moral force was so plain in the movement that the rulers of Oxford had no right to mistake it . . . They must have the blame, the heavy blame, which belongs to all who, when good is before them, do not recognise it according to its due measure"

The easy confidence of some of his critics accords ill with the Cardinal's stern and selfless pursuit of truth wherever it led. Dean Inge rescues a long and brilliant misinterpretation of the Cardinal by a noble, eleventh-hour tribute to his unworldliness: "Newman's confidence towards God was of a still nobler kind.

It rested on an unclouded faith in the Divine guidance, and on a very just estimate of the worthlessness of contemporary praise and blame. There have been very few men who have been able to combine so strong a faith with a thorough distrust of both logic-chopping and emotional excitement, and who, while denying themselves those aids to conviction, have been able to say calmly and without petulance, that with them it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment . . . There are few parallels to the neglect of his own literary reputation by Newman. (It is a fact) that a man who must have been conscious of rare literary gifts made no attempt to immortalise himself by them. It was for the Church, and not for himself, that he wrote as well as lived''.

The subtle, penetrative power of Newman's mind would need a long article to itself: here it is examined very briefly in the light of another passage from the same article of Dean Inge. "Judged by ordinary standards, Newman's criteria of belief do seem incompatible with intellectual honesty. Locke . . . lays down a canon which condemns absolutely the Cardinal's doctrine of assent. 'There is one unerring mark,' he says, 'by which a man may know whether he is a lover of truth in earnest, namely, the not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built on will warrant.' Newman himself quotes this dictum and urges against it that men do, as a matter of fact, form their judgments in a very different fashion. To most people, however, the fact that opinions *are* so manufactured is no proof that they *ought* to be so. To most people it seems plain that the practical necessity of making unverified assumptions . . . is a satisfactory explanation of the presence of error, but not a reason for acquiescing in it. But such is Newman's dislike of 'reason' that he rejoices to find that the majority of mankind are not guided by it."

If Newman's mind were not of an extraordinary subtlety, one would despair of saving the above passage from intellectual dishonesty, by even the most ordinary standards. Nobody would suspect from reading the above that Newman not only argues against Locke, but adduces Locke himself against Locke, and easily shows that the philosopher had in mind one set of assents when he exacted full "proof", and another when he agreed that sometimes opinion "rises to assurance". The mind has not an "opinion" that we live on an island, that we shall die, that European history is in outline as historians tell us it is. It has no less than a full assurance of these things and a complete repose in its possession of these truths; and it has no need, e.g., to sail round the island, in order to secure that repose. Nor would anyone learn, from Dean Inge's words, that far from disliking reason, Newman rejoiced that reason was so much more

abundant than the exactor of "proof" seems aware. We find it unnecessary to sail round the island, not because we prefer "unverified assumptions", but because the motives of our belief are so numerous and various and converge from many quarters, and because the mind has a native power of penetration to the inner unity beneath these vast accumulations. "The human mind", he once wrote, "in its present state is unequal to its own powers of apprehension; it embraces more than it can master. I think we all ought to set out on our enquiries, I am sure we shall end them, with this conviction". What it can master, it states in logic; but there is much more that it accomplishes, and it was this larger field, lying at a deeper level, that was Newman's special interest in the *Grammar of Assent*. To it, following the English philosophy that he knew, he has given the term "Illative Sense", which Fr. D'Arcy in his study of the *Grammar of Assent* has amended to "Interpretation".⁽¹⁾ This fine study should be read with the *Grammar* itself. It completes the thesis of the *Grammar* and links up those numerous unproved certitudes of the normal man with the very pattern of life itself. What Newman calls an accumulation of probabilities Father D'Arcy sees as a "massive content of inextricably interwoven beliefs" whose sum is really infinite and makes up the very stuff of reality.

Newman was handicapped by a faulty philosophical terminology and by an undoubted bias towards "sensible" experience—both things inherited from Locke and the English sense philosophy, which was the only one he knew well. For example, he is, in words at least, a Nominalist: and his disparagement of the universals makes painful reading for the scholastic. But his mind overleapt the limitations of his reading, and, as we have seen, was able to vindicate the human intellect's native energy against Locke's narrower conception of its power. Justice is yet to be done to his masterly analysis of human certitude and especially to his insistence that between "reason" and "intuition" there lies a much neglected but important third, which he calls "implicit reason".

In all that he wrote he exhibits, besides depth, a great patience and a great detachment: and these are first moral before they become mental qualities: and in consequence he still awaits a critic of moral stature large enough to do justice to these. In the *Apologia* he speaks of himself, in a simple and very moving understatement, as a man "who has given up much that he loved and prized and could have retained, but that he loved honesty better than name, and truth more than dear friend".

(1) *The Nature of Belief*, by M. C. D'Arcy, Chaps. IV, V & VI.