

THE LETTERS AND DIARIES OF JOHN NEWMAN. Vol. XVII, *Opposition in London and Dublin, October 1855 to March 1857*. Edited by C. S. Dessain. *Nelson*, 1967. xvi + 602 pp. 126s.

The opponents were the London Oratory with whom Newman was in 'painful controversy', Cardinal Wiseman who was treating him with 'extreme rudeness', and the great majority of the Irish bishops who were in such disagreement about the University of Dublin that 'a chronic state of things' had developed, with Dublin wearing him away and Tuam repelling him.

The outline of the controversy with Fr Faber and the London community is widely known. It all started over Fr Dalgairns' wish to be appointed extra confessor to the nuns at Stone. How easy to think of it all as yet another example of Newman's exaggerated sensitiveness and pessimism—I don't think anyone who knew him well ever accused him of those things—to think of it all as another storm in a tea cup. Controversies in which deep points of principle are at issue are only too frequently trivialized; for Newman, in his dispute with the London house, what was at issue was the nature of an Oratorian congregation—did the Oratory consist of independent houses or not? Because Newman was convinced that he saw clearly what was at stake, he was ready to go to any length, to suffer fatigue and indignity, to defend what he believed about his own house and life. Little did the London house realize the effect when it applied to Rome for a dispensation for itself and for Birmingham, and then stuck its toes in when told it was wrong. 'A controversialist of superb gifts, perhaps the most gifted in the history of English letters', to quote Professor Cameron, was out totally to rebut the position the London house had adopted. We can see him doing just that in the first part of this volume. Sometimes he was exasperated, sometimes, I expect, unfair; but here is a genius, whose 'senses, even the commonest, were exceptionally delicate' (J. A. Froude), showing us what commitment to an ideal and to a religious family can mean, even when the opponents were good Christian men, of the same religious family. Here is a living life; and it provides excellent spiritual reading, a real study of the development of a great person.

'He was the most transparent of men. He told us what he believed to be true. He did not know where it would carry him' (Froude). In fact, this commitment, in face of every sort of ecclesiastical obstacle, cardinals, bishops, priests—what he called the 'camarilla'—led him to the place he now occupies, the first teacher of the modern Church. But what determination, courage, sense of humour, integrity, were needed.

'One hears tales of men who cannot speak and are bound, and taken to and fro at the will of others. *Obmutui et non aperui os meum*. I go to Rome to be snubbed. I come to Dublin to be repelled by Dr McHale and worn away by Dr Cullen. The Cardinal taunts me with his Dedications, and Fr Faber insults me with his letters. I would be let alone, but I have no means of defending myself more than if my hands and tongue were tied. I cannot explain anything to friend or foe intelligibly. . . . I can only think of my own lines, tho' Christians are worse than heathens, "Sit in the gate and be the heathen's jest—silent and self-possessed". What enormous irritation Job must have felt when his friends came and prosed to him' (30 October, 1856).

All those who are in positions of ecclesiastical authority have had many excuses for the mis-use of that authority removed by Fr Dessain's vast undertaking. No one can meet Newman and remain the same; or see how he was treated, and how he treated others, and not be moved to reconsider his own position. The price is big, and the work quite hard. Both are worth while, for the future's sake. To Fr Dessain especially, if he will forgive my saying so, were the patriarchal hands of the old Father 'stretched with love and awe towards those, our unborn successors, whom on earth we shall never know'. This is the context in which this 'great undertaking' is proceeding. The T.L.S. has said that it compares in magnitude with the setting up of the Catholic University in Dublin. The publishers of these volumes, realize, I am sure, how great, how lasting and how honourable is their work.

BEDE BAILEY, O.P.

MORE POWER TO THE PEOPLE. Young Fabian Essays on Democracy in Britain. Edited by Brian Lapping and Giles Radice. *Longmans*. 21s.

The Young Fabians have devoted their first book to an examination of the workings of democracy in Britain. They have no difficulty

in pointing out that democracy—if by that word we mean a very full participation by the people at large in the process of government

and administration—is not very highly developed in this country. And this in spite of universal suffrage, Labour governments and the considerable lip-service paid to democratic principles by most sections of the community. When decision-makers in the Civil Service are shielded from responsibility by their traditional anonymity, when students and others use physical violence to prevent people expressing their views, when a responsible public figure can advocate a government of businessmen, then it must be assumed that many of us do not yet understand what democracy is all about, while others all too easily betray their lack of confidence in it. The problem is not only to find ways of democratizing our institutions, but to combat the strong undercurrent of opposition to democracy which has always been there and is now presuming to speak more loudly in the face of Britain's psychological and economic difficulties.

It cannot be said that the Young Fabians face up to the question of defending democracy. Their emphasis is all on improving what we have, although of course the improvements would be substantial. So we read, for example, interesting contributions on the workers, the consumer, the firm, the professions, local and central government and the mass media. Schemes for increasing the power of rank and file Labour Party members, industrial workers and consumers are proposed. It is suggested that working people are handicapped by a lack of understanding of their rights and of how to express them. The bureaucratic processes are unfamiliar and complicated. Moreover, there is a long tradition of believing that there is not much 'we' can do about 'them'. An interesting suggestion made here by Lucy Sison and Rosalind Brooke is for Consumers' Shops in every High Street through which all complaints against the authorities could be channelled and seen through to a conclusion by a qualified and competent staff. Most of the ideas in the book aim at enabling the public to get at those in control more easily. A greater influence on, and therefore participation in, decision-making is the goal.

There are, however, two different purposes for which the public needs channels of communication with the decision-makers. It is one thing to provide workable and accessible facilities for complaints of specific injustice, to be dealt with and if possible redressed, or for groups of people to be given a say in the working of institutions like the firm or the professions; it

is another to provide for the influence of public opinion on the policies and behaviour of governments. I do not feel that these writers tackle this problem adequately. Public opinion is not, of course, something there to be consulted but which often is not. People frequently do not have formulated opinions until pressure is imposed to create them, and then it is more than likely that the views even of individuals may be confused and contradictory. The first need, then, is a people trained to think things out for themselves and confidently expecting their views to be heeded. The key to providing this lies in education, and it is disappointing to find education given only scant attention in this book. At present the educational system is still geared in large measure to producing 'responsible citizens', i.e. ones who will give no trouble to those running the show. An articulate and thoughtful public must be the aim of a democratic and long-term educational policy. Only then will formulated public opinion be given its full weight in government. One must confess, however, that the problem of the participation of the people in government and the prevention of the formation of élites divorced from the people they govern has as yet been solved nowhere. Nor has the difficulty, rightly stressed in this book, of providing reliable two-way information been solved. Certainly our present mass media give us a curiously distorted picture of the world—a picture apparently geared more to the technical necessities of the various media, or to what the purveyors consider 'we' want, than to loyalty to an ideal of accuracy and balance.

The main disappointment of this book lies in its relevance to the situation I mentioned earlier, namely the increased activity of anti-democratic elements in the community. There is a widespread loss of confidence in the British political system as yet another set of politicians fails to avoid crises or to give us confident hope for the future. Our venerable parliamentary system has weathered many storms, but this does not guarantee that it will always do so. At this moment, then, these Young Fabian essays give the impression of concentrating on comparatively secondary issues when the vital question of the day is the future of British parliamentary democracy itself. How much longer can we muddle on before an exasperated people turn to some British *de Gaulle* or an even nastier alternative? It may be that it is too late to believe that improvements, however radical, in the existing set-up

will be enough. I would like to have seen the Young Fabians tackling such questions as whether our existing institutions—Parliament, trade unions, local government and the like—can ever be expected to cope with the complex problems of modern British society, and if not, what revolutionary new structure should replace them and how should such a change be accomplished with the least painful disruption.

I suppose most readers of this book will not exactly recoil in surprise at the fact that no essay is devoted to the Christian Church. Yet in these columns at least one is inclined to ask what place there could possibly be for a non-democratic Church in a democratic State. Is 'more power to the people' a cry that could with profit be heeded even in ecclesiastical government?
GEOFFREY PONTON

CONJECTURES OF A GUILTY BYSTANDER. Thomas Merton. *Burns and Oates*, London, 1967. 328 pp. 42s.

In the interval since that rather noisy book *Elected Silence* we have grown so used to being shouted at, bullied and cajoled by spiritual mentors of one complexion or another that a modestly companionable book to assuage our confusions comes as something of a treat. One had already been saying to oneself in the early pages of Fr Merton's new volume that here was something that might fulfill some of the therapeutic functions of the journals and stories of Julian Green, when it emerged that Green was indeed explicitly somewhere in the background. This is only fitting in the case of someone who now recognizes his personal involvement in the difficult ecumenical task of bringing Europe and America together. 'To identify myself completely with this country is like accepting the fact of a hidden Jewish grandfather in Nazi Germany. My European background gives me a protective colouring, no doubt. I am, as it were, a Jew with blond hair and blue eyes. But no, I remain a citizen of a hated nation, and no excuses will serve. I know for a fact that this does have some influence on the way my books are received in some places in Europe.' Neither here, nor in the other references to this recurrent theme, has Fr Merton yet achieved the concision and affectionate, yet detached, penetration that Green brings to these same matters seen in reverse. Meanwhile, since he aspires to this, it may yet become evident that some contribution to mutual understanding was indeed part of that 'eschatological secret' towards which, like Mother Julian of Norwich, he feels himself to be orientated. It is *à propos* of something ecumenical in the more conventional sense of that word that he says: We must contain all divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ.

There is a lot of pleasant and even memorable writing in this book, which disclaims to be a sequel to the *Sign of Jonas* and is, in fact, less of a

journal than a series of reflections more like those which made up *No man is an island*, a book which wears as well as anything Fr Merton has written. It vindicates the notion that 'true solitude is deeply aware of the world's needs. It does not hold the world at arm's length.' Those thoughts which refer more or less directly to monastic life are on the whole brief and fairly widely dispersed, but those who know it from the inside will recognize their often devastating justice. For the rest there are reflections of greater or less profundity that grow out of commerce with a number of minds of contemporary interest and importance. But Fr Merton keeps his best wine until the last. What he has to say about the true nature of freedom, which begins at p. 298, sparked off by an ingenious confrontation between Anselm and Sartre, desperately needs to be said in a way that can be heard. It would be frivolous to worry too much about the accuracy with which the ideas of the two writers, out of whom the discussion develops, are represented—though it cannot be too wide of the mark. There is a truth here which was once better understood and needs reasserting. 'For Anselm, it is clear that God's will is not a force that presses down on the man from the outside. It works on man from within himself and from within the ontological core of his own freedom. Made free, in the image of God, man's freedom contains in itself a demand for infinite freedom which can be met only by perfect union with the freedom of God, not only as an external norm but as the source of our own love. Here philosophical notions of freedom necessarily break down and the perfect freedom of the Christian can be accounted for only by the indwelling Holy Spirit.' Although the connexion is not explicitly made, Fr Merton goes on, as if by a natural instinct, to consider the obverse of all this in the fate-bound world in which more and more people live. 'Note',