

## REINHOLD SCHNEIDER—A NOTE

MARIE HEYNEMANN

ON September 23, the annual Peace Prize awarded by the German Book Trade will be presented to Reinhold Schneider at St Paul's Church in Frankfort on the Main. This prize was founded in 1949/50, and has been given every year to an author of any nationality or religion who by his life and work has contributed to the future peace of the world. Albert Schweitzer and Martin Buber, Hermann Hesse and Carl J. Burckhardt were previous prizewinners. Anyone who knows Reinhold Schneider's life and work would agree that he deserves the award as fully as his predecessors.

On May 13 of this year Schneider kept his fifty-third birthday; it is also the birthday of the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, one of his favourite historical characters. He was born in Baden-Baden of a Protestant father from the *Erzgebirge*, and of a Catholic mother from the shores of Lake Constance, he himself being baptized in the Catholic Church.

According to a short sketch in his book *Erbe im Feuer* ('Heritage in the Fire'), his childhood was a happy one, although rarely can parents in the twentieth century have shown so little understanding of their son's vocation and gifts as Reinhold Schneider's father and mother. Schneider senior was an extremely taciturn man: father and son rarely spoke to one another. When he died rather young of an incurable disease, the author's mother married a Catholic physician in Baden-Baden with whom Schneider's relations, although good, have again not been based on any profound understanding on the elder man's part.

Partly perhaps because of this early lack of understanding, it was many years before Schneider became aware of his special gifts. After his matriculation he became an agricultural student, but the heavy manual work involved proved to be beyond his physical strength. Discouraged by this first failure, he next entered a Dresden printing firm as an apprentice, but his heart was not in it—later he was to speak of this period in his life as 'my seven years in a business prison'—and he readily gave it up when an opportunity offered itself for travel in Spain and Portugal.

It was while in Portugal that he wrote his first book: *The Life of Camoes*. Little did he think at the time that his own life was to develop on similar lines to that of the great Portuguese poet. Schneider never lost his affection for these countries, and it gave him a particular pleasure to accept an invitation last year to lecture in certain universities there.

On his return to Germany he settled first at Potsdam and finally at Freiburg, the intellectual centre of German Catholicism. But meanwhile another formative influence on Schneider's life and thought had taken place. This was his stay in England in 1934-5, which he devoted to visiting most of the cathedral towns. About this time he wrote that he was overwhelmed by the sense of continuity expressed in English institutions and the English intellectual tradition, and that he loved equally well the cathedrals and the calm beauty of the English landscape.

In 1936 he published a history of England from the landing of Caesar to the death of the elder Pitt. He called his book *Das Inselreich, Gesetz und Groesse der Britischen Macht* ('The Island Empire, Law and Greatness of the British Power'). Some historians might smile at the enthusiasm of the style, which reads like Shakespeare in prose, but the lay-reader is fascinated by his powerful description of landscape, events, the pageantry of royalty, the cathedrals: those 'fortresses of the Lord' where peace and grandeur reigned.

'History', according to Schneider, 'is the evolution of a nation in relation to God. Everything that men accomplish must be measured in terms of eternal values. In the course of history, Eternity makes ever varying demands on mankind for decisions which will become their destiny.' It is easy to see from this why Schneider has come to hold of late that history can only be truly represented in the drama, and why his some hundred and fifty works include such historical plays as *Der Eroberer* ('The Conqueror') and *Der grosse Verzicht* ('The Great Resignation', i.e. of Pope Celestine V). But of all his historical writings, perhaps the most important is his *Las Casas vor Karl V*, his only book so far to be translated into English.<sup>1</sup> The subject enabled Schneider to analyse the conflict between men and the state, and the part a Christian should play in this conflict. The frightful events of which he had to tell, such as the exploitation and suppression of

<sup>1</sup> Published as *Imperial Mission* by the Gresham Press, New York.

minorities and the attempt to annihilate an entire people, were being repeated in Hitler's Germany while he wrote. This background gives point to such passages in the book as the following: 'Las Casas looked unflinchingly at the Emperor. But when Charles remained silent, the monk drew himself up to his full height and said: "It is certain that judgment will fall upon this land. For he who fails to fulfil the highest duty, bears the heaviest guilt. Therefore God's anger will fall upon this land and shatter its power and abase its sceptre, and take away its islands and possessions. And if those who rise from the ruins accuse the Lord, and ask why he has brought this misery upon the land, I shall rise from the tomb and testify to God's justice. They should have borne the Lord across the sea on their shoulders, but they bore Satan instead. God does right when he destroys the might of this land. Great punishment must follow great sin".' After a very small edition of the book had appeared, the Nazis forbade him to publish any more books.<sup>2</sup>

But a man like Schneider who feels that he has a mission could not be silenced. Friends published his works in Alsace and distributed them widely in anonymous pamphlet-form. More than five hundred thousand copies of his commentary on the Our Father were dispatched, and many were to be found in the pockets of dead soldiers. He was passionately aware of his responsibility to protest in however small a way against the Nazi regime, very often a hair's breadth separating him from the concentration camp. On the collapse of Germany he remarked in a letter that his activity under Hitler 'showed in a modest way what ought to have been done by many'.

After the war, Schneider engaged in an attempt to bring out a popular edition of the world's classics in order to fill a gap produced by the wholesale Nazi suppression of so many valuable books. But this proved a failure. It was probably too early for such an enterprise: the German people were impoverished and starving and had no money even for cheap books.

In his *Daemonie und Verklaerung* ('Demonology and Glorification'), Schneider had the courage to challenge many traditional literary judgments. By pointing out the less attractive German characteristics which Faust typifies—lust for power, arrogance, false sentimentality, lack of patience and modesty—he tried to

<sup>2</sup> Now for about nine years *Las Casas* has been a standard text in Bavarian schools.

break a spell which had bound German youth for generations, a spell equally cast by Wallenstein of whom Otto Ludwig said, 'All moral values fluctuate in this drama, which poisons youth in the most subtle manner'.

But Schneider's criticism is not only a negative one. It was he who rediscovered Franz Grillparzer, the great Austrian dramatist. And for Schneider, *Koenig Ottokars Glueck und Ende* ('King Ottokar's Good Fortune and Death') is one of the best dramatic representations of German history.

The more we become absorbed in Schneider's work the better we realize that his choice of an historic or literary subject is always made with the intention of glorifying God and Christ. He is indifferent to fame and financial reward; all he seeks is a public which will read his books and listen to what he says. Above all he is a man who feels he has a mission on earth, namely to interpret the events of his own time in relation to God.

This is even more clearly revealed when he deals with a purely religious subject as, for example, in *Die sieben Worte am Kreuz* ('The Seven Words from the Cross'), where it is the relevance to contemporary events that is stressed. But all his work reflects a life steeped in religion, and a man whose unshakable faith forms the background of all he writes.

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## ANANDA COOMERASWAMY, 1877-1948

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

**T**HE name Ananda Coomeraswamy conjures for me folk-weave ties, strange theories of social credit, and Ruskin-Morris sympathies. Before now he has been labelled a crank—and I think that there is some truth in the charge. By the same coin, Eric Gill has also been called a crank. Yet, now that their work can be seen in retrospect, a fair degree of modification is necessary.

There is a type of Englishman or American, as there is a type of Indian, who while remaining loyal patriots find that both patriotism is not enough and that their countries can only be best