

gent women nor the art of literary criticism were yet considered respectable. For both Mrs Meynell earned more than respectability. She proved to the world that both had something unique to offer to the life of the mind. No wonder she is pleased with herself. Yet her self-consciousness never embarrasses the reader: it is the artist's simple detached regard for a work well done and she embraces the reader warmly in her regard, and in the reflected light and warmth of her satisfaction our pleasure is increased.

The formal somewhat stilted style as exemplified in the frequent use of the passive voice and of meiosis reveals a bony or muscular quality of mind. Her form of criticism does not derive simply from Matthew Arnold's Victorian moralism nor does it decline into the shallow emotivism of ten years later. It has a precision that in a modern age might have been called machine tool. She is concerned (though I do not know that she ever says so in so many words) with the meeting point of matter and form in a poem: that thing we call style. In the essay on Gray's *Elegy* she contrasts Gray's

*Full many a flower is born to blush unseen  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air*  
with Shakespeare's

*The summer flower is to the summer sweet,  
Though to itself it only live and die.*

The thought of these two passages, she tells us, is cleft by an unfathomable difference. 'It is a difference from the beginning, as all style dates from the beginning, and even from beyond and before the birth of the thought.' That is a most shrewd comment on style and it betters Flaubert's 'Le style est l'homme'. Mrs Meynell knows where she is going and what she is looking for: that core of identity that makes a poem what it is and gives it something so much like the gift of life that we say it springs from the creative impulse. So back in 1897 Mrs Meynell detects the 'lack of singleness of heart' in Gray and the neo-classical style. That is saying a great deal when we recall that thirty

years later the canons of eighteenth-century classicism were still held up to English school-children as poetic ideals.

But let it be quite clear. Mrs Meynell is no mere debunker. Her purpose is always positive, to identify and place the matter under discussion whether it is a poem, a novel, a complete corpus of work or the literary characteristics of a nation. In her pursuit she is at once formidable and lovable. Her thought strides purposefully on and carries us with it. The reader is always conscious of being caught up in the momentum of her ideas. She never talks down to us. She pays her reader the compliment of assuming he is familiar with the terms of the debate. Sometimes this is obviously a teasing kind of game, as when in the essay on Gray's *Elegy* she deliberately delays quoting the Shakespeare couplet until the end. More often it is simply the adult assumption that people know what she means—in the essay on Dickens for instance, authorship is assumed to be a quality essential to the novelist.

For all her angular syntax, loftiness and what to us must sometimes seem remoteness she is never far away. This is brought about sometimes by her ready descent, if that is the word, into familiar informal comment as in the essay on English Women-Humorists (p. 112). But most of all in a paradoxical way this awareness of the writer comes from her very determination to subordinate herself to her subject. Not surprisingly this is most manifest in the essay on Francis Thompson, the longest in the work. But it is there throughout because we are never allowed to forget that there is something more important than Mrs Meynell's analysis and that is the poem itself. We recognize her because she is always saying Look, Listen. This is vintage criticism and because it is a vintage that has been scattered in various cellars and nearly lost we must be grateful to Mr Fraser for gathering it together in one vault.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

#### THE EXPLORING WORD, by David Holbrook. Cambridge University Press, 1967. 45s.

In *The Exploring Word* David Holbrook continues his mission, which he began in *English for Maturity* (1961), to improve the teaching of English in schools. In his first book he was mainly concerned to offer suggestions as to how English can be taught more creatively in secondary schools. In this new book he turns his

attention to Teachers' Training Colleges at a time when they are offering their students courses in a B.Ed. His argument is that the present system hinders rather than helps the teacher in the classroom. One of the reasons for this is that the whole aim of teaching English has never been really questioned at a

deep level. Why do we teach English? If we can find an answer to this question we can work out a system which is effective. Holbrook sees English as *the* central discipline: 'English is the fundamental subject since language is the medium of all education, and of thought and feeling, and in all its modes is a means to extend and deepen the individual's perception, and to enable him to prove outward reality' (p. 23). English is a way of articulating experience and this is what the child (and the teacher) needs to be taught. The teacher who is faced by a class of children should be able to *respond* to their attempts to express their experience in language and he should be able to *encourage* these creative abilities. The present system, largely, does not help the teacher for he is not trained to develop a sensitivity to words at his training college. The new 'creative' skills which Holbrook wants to see being taught in the colleges are much more difficult to test and it is safer to continue with an excessively academic kind of syllabus which demands a more 'objective' test in the examinations. So the system expects essay answers, which consist of half-remembered phrases from lecture notes which themselves are taken from the standard books on English Literature. What for instance is one to make of these sentences taken from essays: 'The political philosophy was one of mecantilism a period then governments were liable to interfere with god's order of things . . .' or of Coleridge, 'He withdrew from the eager intellectual life of a political lecturer to the contemplative quiet appropriate to the honeymoon of a poet'. Students are forced to write like this. What happens? The students become bored with producing these second-hand answers and weary with the frantic rush to cover the course from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf. Very rarely is there time to encounter the actual words of the texts.

Now much of this argument is familiar, for it has often been said before. I think that Holbrook's great merit in this book is that, drawing on wide experience of teaching, he offers a great deal of practical help. He is able to convey the 'feel' of the harassed teacher who has returned home with a pile of exercise books and does not know how to set about using the children's own writing to make the lesson interesting. The examples he gives of children's work are fascinating and emphasize that the teacher must be taught himself to read sensitively before he can teach others to read. He

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must also be able to find his way about English Literature with insight, able to choose poems, for instance, which will help and encourage the child. In some entertaining and persuasive chapters ('How to be a Good Parrot', 'Processed Unloading', 'A Training in Insincerity') he shows that the present system does not do the work it should do. Then, in the best section of the book ('Meeting in the Word') he outlines what his own approach would be. It is full of good sense. For instance, he takes *The Ancient Mariner* and shows how the poem can help wonderfully in exploring the inner perplexities of a growing child. He then shows from some fine children's poems how their experience is very similar to Coleridge's more mature insight. In a good chapter on seminars he explains how the creative discipline of teaching can be taught in this open exchange of views where people really say what they feel instead of trotting out well-turned phrases about what they 'should' feel. There is nothing vague about this sort of discipline although examiners may feel uncomfortable at the sound of the word 'creative'. In a seminar critical terms can be worked out and learnt in discussion and these are terms which must be

known if literature is to be taught with any clarity.

There is an appealing moral urgency about Holbrook's demands. He has no scruples about saying what is right and what is wrong, what books are worth reading and what books must be left for private reading. He is sure to annoy many people in his provocative chapter, 'Questioning Fashion'. He has, it seems to me, the right sort of confidence. One of the troubles of the present system of teaching English is a lack of the right sort of confidence. The staff feel secure with the old type of essay, answer and mark down original ideas, the students find there is no time to respond to the real words and so do not trust their own judgment, and finally the children are infected by the same disease and are just bored. Holbrook provides in the section 'Essential Resources' a great deal of helpful material to guide teachers. In the rest of the book he has given a very sensitive account of how to use this material. It might do much to restore confidence and encourage teachers to try these less 'secure' methods. This book will be rewarding for any teacher; for the English teacher it is indispensable.

DAVID SANDERS, O.P.

ON THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE, by John Henry Newman. Edited with an introduction by J. Derek Holmes and Robert Murray, S.J. *Geoffrey Chapman*. 21s.

Fr Wilfred Harrington has written that 'many, in the face of modern biblical studies, are genuinely perplexed'. A great deal of this perplexity can be traced to confusion over exactly what it is that makes the Bible different from other writings. The difference is, of course, that God is the author—the Bible is 'inspired'. Incredibly, this doctrine has in recent times often degenerated into a rigid belief in the literal truth of every word and fact in every book. Even Catholics have fallen for this, although they get little support for it from fathers, Councils or popes. Today, one suspects, years of neglect have left large numbers of Catholics uneasy and confused. It is vital that the Bible be read widely and intelligently. For this to be done, one basic requirement is an acceptable theory of inspiration which can be understood by the generality of people and which will convincingly explain the Church's official teachings in the light of related historical and other circumstances. A tremendous amount has been done in this century to this end, and of writings available in English, those of Frs Rahner and Benoit are most important. The two essays by

Newman on inspiration have been rather neglected since he wrote them in 1884, the reasons being their comparative inaccessibility and the misunderstandings of his contemporaries, which relegated them to the list of theories rejected by the Church. Now they are republished with a long introduction by the editors who convincingly show that the Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II substantially bears out what Newman was trying to say.

The problem of biblical inspiration has been approached in various ways, each of which tends to complement the others. Benoit gives a modern exposition of St Thomas's theory which is based on causality and is concerned with the relationship of God as author with the human authors. Rahner places the authenticity and formation of the canon of scripture firmly with the community of the early church. The Bible is a constitutive element of the apostolic church, willed by God in his foundation of the Church within salvation history and eschatological in character. The apostolic church is the permanent ground and norm for everything that is to come and the Bible is this self-definition reduced