

of one of the other six higher religions would have added weight to the argument.

If the picture of the modern world (post-1600 in Dr. Toynbee's terms) seems at times unfair, it also seems partial. The religious sentiment has played its part in exactly Dr. Toynbee's sense in the arts pre-eminently since the end of the 18th century. But the universal nature which he demands for religion gives small place to other expressions of man's spiritual aspirations.

THE most serious criticisms, however, of Dr. Toynbee's thesis can be directed at its feasibility and its desirability. If men are to be won to a world of higher religions living in mutual tolerance, then fanaticism even without violence must be avoided. Dr. Toynbee demands rightly that this tolerance must be based not as secular tolerance has been upon indifference but upon respect. Such a frame of mind would seem to demand that its exponents should have attained sanctity or become mystic contemplatives. For the general run of men such tolerance could only accompany a religion that at most filled part of their lives. They would seek other forms of spiritual expression, yet it is surely exactly here that a Universal State would be most deficient. Something here emerges from Dr. Toynbee's view that the failure of the aims of Hildebrand and of Innocent III spelt the end of

the last hope of the old Christian higher religion. European civilisation of the 12th century had many virtues, but it seems doubtful if man could have rested content with the range of expression it allowed to him and it is difficult to believe that Papal Europe could have satisfied his growing demands. The difficulties in the way of Dr. Toynbee's hopes are vast, but he may rightly ask us to accept them in view of our present situation if he can show us that his ends will satisfy. In the last resort, however, it seems possible or even probable that the universal establishment of the higher religions based on mutual tolerance would end in the apathy, frustration, and uniformity that he sees as the fate of Oecumenical States. And this is not perhaps surprising for such is the likely fate not only of Oecumenical States but of Utopias.

It seems disagreeable and churlish so to criticise a thesis put forward with such evident concern for humanity and distress at its peril, and put forward in the preface with such modesty, but Dr. Toynbee's teaching demands criticism if only because it is at once pessimistic, Utopian, and historically determinist. We have seen something of the effect of such teaching in the writings of Spengler and Marx. Unlike their teaching Dr. Toynbee's is, of course, benevolent, tolerant, and modest. Nevertheless it is well, I think, that the Anglo-Saxon world he addresses is so stoutly clothed in empirical armour.

Angus Wilson

DEMOCRACY AND AUTHORSHIP

RARELY a year passes without some petition or memorial or appeal being submitted to some statesman or bishop or eminent body of sorts, under the signatures of literary men calling on the said statesman or bishop or body to do something or other in favour of democratic government and democratic rights somewhere. From such occasions one might naturally conclude that writers are by the nature of their calling well disposed towards the parliamentary form of government. It is the one that is most apt to grant them that freedom of speech without which their calling is vain; the literary predilection for parliamentarism is logical. Yes, that is all true, and that is the orthodox view of literary politics, I believe. The fact remains that when you look into what has been written by authors on the subject of parliamentary elections, and parliamentary procedure, you will find almost nothing but sarcasm, irony, contempt, and abuse. Many masterpieces of poetry have

been addressed to tyrants and tyrannical noblemen and their wives and favourites, but precious little worth remembering to the House of Commons or the Chambre des Députés or the American Congress and Senate. One cannot imagine the genius of Andrew Marvell expressing itself happily in an Horatian Ode on the achievements of the Barebones Parliament. Last time Sir Anthony went to America no one sang "When Westward like the Sun you sailed away. . . ."

It is rather the fashion to think of Disraeli as a considerable novelist (not a fashion I have been able to follow), but if he was truly a great writer of fiction, then he seems to have been an almost unique exception to the rule that professional writers make bad statesmen. The French have found that they make good ambassadors, but that is about as far as they can safely go on the road to power. Lamartine went farther on that road than any other

Leonard Russell

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CASSELL

writer in modern times, and few people have suffered so great a political flop. Guizot was a great writer and a great statesman, so was Thiers according to some, but neither was a great imaginative writer like Chateaubriand. And Chateaubriand (a good ambassador) was as great a political failure as Lamartine. No, Disraeli was unique in the years between Addison and Sir Winston Churchill (who is not, by the bye, a successful novelist). We are therefore tempted to suppose that the sneers of novelists at the parliamentary system can be explained by the fable of the fox and the grapes. Mr. H. G. Nicholas has had the ingenious idea of collecting thirteen examples of parliamentary elections as described in English fiction. This may help to tell us whether fox-and-grapes is the correct diagnosis.*

ONE's first impression is how unreadable extracts from novels are. Without the design visible, without any chance for the reader to follow the novelist's skill in building up character and illusions of real experience, novels make dismal reading. I see now why so many critics of fiction have a peevish tone, for this is how most of them must read novels, by means of what Mr. Kingsley Amis, in a moment of disturbing honesty, has called "the reviewer's flip-through, that two-minute process." These peeps into the middle of stories result in curious perversions of judgment. Emily Eden comes out much better than George Eliot, and Mr. R. J. Cruikshank ties with Trollope. A prince of storytellers, H. G. Wells, appears merely as a bore. The novelist who knew elections better than all of them, Dizzy the Exception, is remarkably unmemorable in this extract from *Coningsby*, even though it contains his famous Tadpole and Taper. I wish I liked the *Pickwick Papers* as much as I am told I ought to. If I did I would declare the extract printed here the winner. I find it decidedly "hot-making," but despite this aversion, which I fear I entertain for the whole of that particular book by Dickens (I love the rest), I yet find the extract much easier to get through than the far more interesting material from *Felix Holt*. Why should this be so?

I have read in another review of this book that, according to rumour, the Russians broadcast the Eatanswill election from time to time to warn the Russians against the horrors of democracy. I incline to believe that true. Dickens is well known to Russians who take him very

* *To the Hustings. Election Scenes from English Fiction*. Selected by H. G. NICHOLAS. Cassell. 18s.

seriously, not regarding him as a humorist. I was once told by the late Francis Moore, who knew the Russia of Nicholas II very well, that it was the belief of many politically-minded Russians of those days, that Dickens's account of the Eatanswill election in the *Pickwick Papers* had delayed the establishment of parliamentary institutions in the Empire by at least fifty years. A strength of this piece of writing, for propaganda purposes, is that it can be picked out and read by itself as a whole. It is perhaps part of the immense popularity of *Pickwick* that it is one of the few acknowledged masterpieces of the world in which, without losing any essential quality, you can pick and choose what you want. It was written for publication in instalments, and the young Dickens could adapt himself perfectly to his editor's need.

Toiling through this book I sighed for something by Thackeray. If he had introduced an election into one of his books, it would probably stand on its own in the same way, for he also wrote for publication in instalments. Being a devoted Thackerayan I would enjoy all of it including the long hollow sermon at the end of the chapter. "O my children, what will men not do for the sake of letters which may be attached to their names? See yonder Knight of the Most Ancient Orders of Bath and Thistle; where, pri'thee, was his knightly chivalry when, etc., etc., etc."

Trollope wins easily for me, but I had the advantage of having read the whole of *Ralph the Heir*. Belloc's *Mr. Clutterbuck's Election* was the saddest disappointment. That great man never seemed to have the least understanding

of political matters, and though his account of an election is probably well rooted in experience, it reads like fantasy of a shallow kind. Let me add that I belong to that small and chosen band which regard Belloc as a superb novelist of the Peacock family. It is curious how well Emily Eden comes out of this unfair test. Possibly she had an advantage in being an unfranchised woman and could look on election antics with a true and heartless detachment. Galsworthy's election scenes in *The Patrician*, not his best book, are profoundly absurd. Mr. R. J. Cruikshank holds the attention in this extract from *The Double Quest* because his book was a *roman à clef*. These snippets are as amusing as the fulldrawn portraits, and the innocent American girl-recorder is a pretty little peg with whom we would get unspeakably bored in a full-length novel. Trollope wins, of course. He gets right down into his election, and though he probably described these scenes in a foxy spirit (remembering Beverly), he convinces us that the grapes were horribly sour in truth. Nevertheless, I think he shows more to advantage on almost any other of his subjects.

THE best advice to aspiring authors of fiction is to leave elections alone. Although our fate depends upon them to a large extent, they are not very interesting in themselves. The great facts of experience, the great emotions of human life, are not present at such occasions. The convictions are largely party-line toeings, the passion is simulated, there is no love, and even the hate is not all real. Humbug by itself and unaccompanied is a thin theme.

Christopher Sykes

AUNTIE

I SAID something last month about blurbs—"which can manage to put one off every book ever written." This needs some qualification. The blurb may put the critic off, but it is obviously designed to put Auntie on. Whether it effectually does, and whether (if so) this is an advantageous exchange, are obviously the publisher's business; and, equally obviously, it is not the critic's business to teach him that. All the same, I wonder what Auntie thinks about it sometimes. Auntie paddles off to the County library with her string-bag and brolly, and emerges with the former heavier by a gay little volume about smiling* by some foreign lady, whose half-title announces:

* *A Certain Smile*. By FRANÇOISE SAGAN. John Murray. 8s. 6d.

This is the story of a love which any modern girl might experience and which, in fact, many do. It portrays with deep feeling the dilemma of a young girl who falls out of love with her student friend and into an entanglement with his uncle. The situation between the girl caught in her first great emotional crisis, etc. . . .

Auntie's cup of tea. Nice average young modern girl. Some heart-throbs, some laughter, a few April tears. The pleasant whiff of a little adultery (these French!) in a gleefully Puritan nose. But what does Auntie make of paragraph One?

We had spent the afternoon in a café in the Rue St. Jacques, a spring afternoon like any other. I was slightly bored, and walked up