

Parliament through the systematic establishment of Select Committees. But his book *The Two Cities*,⁶ on whose cover he is depicted, grandee-style, against a background of red wallpaper and gilt mirrors, scarcely alludes to Britain's economic problems. Those Tories who are now pleading for a more consensual approach to politics made no radical attempt to tackle the country's chronic economic problems when they had the chance—their most memorable legacy to the analysis

⁶ *The Two Cities*. By NORMAN ST JOHN-STEVAS. Faber and Faber, £12.95.

of these problems was "You Never Had It So Good." Yet even they do not deny that radical changes are necessary.

As for the Labour Party, the less said about its contribution the better.

Perhaps, having lived so long in a fool's paradise, we shall have to face the fact that we can no longer afford those things which eased our economic decadence—universities and Nobel Prize winners, public service broadcasting and subsidised theatres, comfortable civility—except on terms affordable by Japanese tourists. Perhaps we shall come to terms with the idea that Mrs Thatcher represents—not salvation, as she claims, but nemesis.

Blind Spots & Believers

Islamic Attitudes—By DAVID SPANIER



I REMEMBER one day, browsing in the school library, coming across a book on Islam. At that inky teenage time, when scripture lessons were an excuse for idling, it was fascinating to discover another world of theology, with so many echoes of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, yet complete in itself. The last chapter was given over to the idea of *jihad*, holy war, by which the faithful of the Prophet would, as I recall, smite all non-believers, and more or less wipe them out. To a schoolboy it seemed jolly good stuff. It was only many years later that one came to realise, by God, they meant it seriously.

Nowadays, one must hope, some acquaintance with Islam, its ideas and aspirations, is part of every sixth-form study. Islam is important, in much more immediate ways than theological speculation would imply. A large part of the world is trying to conduct its life according to the teachings of Islam, very often in real or imagined conflict with our own life in the Western world. The point is made, comprehensively, by Daniel Pipes in his useful study *In The Path of God*.¹

"As fundamentalist Muslims took power and achieved international importance in such states as Pakistan and Iran, understanding Islam became necessary to interpret their goals and ideology. Islam also gave direction to

governments in Saudi Arabia and Libya, influenced electoral politics in democracies such as Turkey, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and posed important challenges to Communist régimes in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. Islam heightened domestic tensions in Nigeria, the Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Burma, and it defined rebellions against the central government in Chad, Ethiopia, Cyprus, Lebanon, Thailand and the Philippines. It fuelled international conflicts between Turks and Greeks, Arabs and Israelis, Pakistanis and Indians, and Somalis and Ethiopians."

As a journalist concerned with international affairs, one can see the relevance of this, even if it might take a lifetime of study to give each case its due. Mr Pipes served for a time in the State Department as an advisor. Did Washington take his advice? One wonders. American policy in the Middle East, whatever the importance assigned to Islamic ideology, has tilted for the most part heavily in favour of the State of Israel, whose leadership, in the past year or two anyway, has been symbolised by an Old Testament pursuit of vengeance in its Lebanon campaign.

Western thinking has for long been blind about Islam, Mr Pipes maintains. This is not so much because of the subject's complexity, he believes, rather a consequence of an historic animosity towards Islam, and a disinclination to acknowledge the political force of religion. (Surely to goodness we all know about Northern Ireland.) His point, and the point of his book, is that Islam, unlike Christianity, contains a complete programme for ordering society.

And nowhere is it being applied more stringently than in Iran. Iran indeed is a test case—for assessing Islam in practice in a modern state, and as the country which has most engaged Western concern. Two books address this dual preoccupation: *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* by Shaul Bakhash² and *Iran Under the Ayatollahs* by Dilip Hiro.³ One can read them both and still feel one has not understood Iran

¹ *In The Path of God: Islam and Political Power*. By DANIEL PIPES. Basic Books \$22.50, £15.00.

² *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and The Islamic Revolution*. By SHAUL BAKHASH. I. B. Tauris (3 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8PW), £13.95, \$18.95.

³ *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*. By DILIP HIRO. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £20.00.

(though, granted, feel better informed about it). Just to take a personal example as a journalist; from time to time, young men arrive at my office with long lists of people who have been imprisoned, tortured and murdered in the post-Shah revolution—some 40,000 names, I believe, have been collected—and then the other day a young man came with another list, 2,000 names long, of the torturers themselves. . . . What a ghastly catalogue, and how hopeless the ordinary citizen must feel in the face of such enormities, even if in the nature of things there is no way of telling how true they are.

What is one to make of it all? Surely a little more than Mr Hiro's bland comment that the régime has taken actions which have lost it much of the goodwill it enjoyed abroad in the early days, and that whatever the true figure of executions, such actions by the Islamic Republic have "damaged its image." Quite so. There is a wealth of detail in his account and much good reporting, which is always refreshing, rather than historical judgments. He is broadly sympathetic to the Islamic revolution, which as he says is still going on. The most vivid image of the process comes from Dr Bakhash. On the day the Shah fled the country, he found himself surrounded by euphoric crowds in the streets.

"From opposite ends of a side street, two cars, each packed with celebrants, came at great speed towards the crossing. The driver of the first car was driving on his extreme right; the driver of the second car on his extreme left. The predictable happened . . . an ironic foretaste of the many collisions that lay ahead."

With his fluency in the language, Dr Bakhash gives a sense of inwardness in writing about the policies and personalities of the régime, and is particularly revealing about Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iran's success or failure is bound to affect other Islamic experiments. Both these books look at the situation that may arise when Khomeini goes. Whatever happens, it is evident that the clergy will continue to play a dominant role.

FOR ANOTHER VIEW, and a very entertaining one, of the

⁴ *The Pride and The Fall: Iran 1974-1979*. By ANTHONY PARSONS. Jonathan Cape, £8.95.

⁵ *The Persians Amongst the English: Episodes in Anglo-Persian History*. By DENIS WRIGHT. I. B. Tauris, £17.95, \$29.50.

events that determined the Shah's fall, one may turn to Anthony Parsons' *The Pride and the Fall*.⁴ How agreeable it must have been for the Shah, cosseted by flatterers and courtiers, to be able to converse on a regular basis, and apparently so frankly, with the British Ambassador. Unfortunately for the Shah, while he much enjoyed ranging over the expanse of foreign affairs, he would never discuss internal Iranian affairs with the Ambassador until it was too late. Sir Anthony spends much time in his account agonising over whether he should have foreseen the whole thing, and if so, whether British policy should have been pursued in a different way. He is fairly hard on himself. What one can say is that British exports to Iran, which when you get down to it were the basis of our concern, show every sign of picking up under the new management. (Persian travellers and diplomats have long taken an interest in England, as another Ambassador, Sir Denis Wright, demonstrates in an anecdotal historical survey, *The Persians Amongst the English*,⁵ containing much new material.)

The Shah's chief blind spot was that he took no interest in the Islamic law and culture which not only permeated but to a large extent controlled the life of his country. But, one might suggest, the Islamic experience as a whole has a blind spot, and that is its intolerance towards the West, towards other cultural experiences. This may not have always been so throughout historical times, but mistrust and distemper seem very prevalent in Iran today. Such attitudes are born of a superiority complex, yet it is clear that the Islamic renaissance, from an economic point of view certainly, has passed its peak.

"In retrospect", observes Daniel Pipes, summing up the effect of the great oil boom:

"the revival will appear as a curious aberration. Just as the power of a commodity price-setting organisation (OPEC) defied long-term trends, so the concomitant resurgence of Islam was fortuitous and transient. Islam's revival was inappropriate because it resulted in such large part from freak circumstances, not Muslim achievements; the unearned nature of the oil wealth cannot be ignored. Buoyed by unexpected good fortune, Muslims allowed themselves to imagine that they had solved their basic problem, the inability to come to terms with the West."

A State Department view? Or a large measure of truth? Iran's moral influence may be indeed fated to end—but at what cost is still to be reckoned.