

Outspoken Essays

Outspoken Essays, by Ralph Inge, C.V.O., D.D., Dean of St. Paul's. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.

DEAN INGE stands with Bishop Gore as one of the two strongest figures today in the Church of England. They certainly do not stand together in any other respect. This latest volume by the Dean is so much his best that it brings him out in a new quality. As a craftsman in his chosen subject of metaphysics and other philosophy he has not done the exact work which alone could have special distinction. As a historian of mysticism his labors have been useful, but he has too little the mystical temperament and mind to be an adequate interpreter. As a preacher he has been always impressive without greatness. But here, as a free-lance, as a critic of life, men, morals, institutions, dress, foods, the Labor party, political economy and literature, he is his true and powerful self. The scholar, the citizen and the preacher blend, and the acute observer joins them. Mr. Shaw, who has danced a delicious hornpipe before the book, and hailed its author as "our most extraordinary churchman, our most extraordinary writer, and in some very vital respects our most extraordinary man," tempers this more-than-justice to the author with the scantiest notice of the contents of the volume. The assaults on democracy and on articles of the Christian creed have attracted most attention, but the three essays that centre each in a man, those on St. Paul, Newman and Bishop Gore are perhaps the most memorable pieces of work. At all points we find the mind of this dignitary of the church swimming vigorously in the mid-stream of the intellectual life of our time.

The elaborate attack on democracy moves on familiar lines but is wholesome reading. Democracy in time of peace does not bring the best men to the top, is a ready victim to shibboleths and catchwords, guilty of iconoclasm, obstruction, tyranny, is liable to the fatal diseases of anarchy and corruption. Moreover, the majority impose taxes on the minority. The learned writer sustains these charges by striking illustration. He is willing to see monarchy restored in Russia as well as Germany. But he is by no means the common Tory. "We shall not attempt to prophesy what the political constitution will be. Every existing form of government is bad," etc. Then may not democracy be the best? To prove his point he must show it not only bad but worse. Incidentally he remarks: "A very good case may be made out for having an ascetic order of moral and physical aristocrats and entrusting them with the government of the country. Plato forbade his guardians to own wealth, and thus secured an uncorrupt administration, one of the rarest and best of virtues in a government." Who are the parties who are ultimately to choose or accept these aristocrats and "entrust" government to them? Surely he would say, the people, who have the numerical power. But that is democracy—at least if the people may revoke the trust and accept others—the essence of democracy being that the people shall have *security* for their good government. What seems Dean Inge's underlying tendency of thought we may concede to him. The people for the most part should not hope to govern, but only to choose their governors or leaders. This thought was the starting point of the life work of John Stuart Mill. How, he asked, shall the people know whom to choose, who are the genuine experts, how to "bring the best men to the top?" They know in some spheres already who are the experts, as for instance, amongst engineers, surgeons

and the like. This shows, reasoned Mill, that the true experts will be recognized by the people when they are recognized by their brethren in their own craft and specialty. In what subjects are they so recognized? In certain practical arts and sciences, yes; in politics, no. Politics is "a matter of opinion," certain practical sciences are not. Mill then went to work to study the methods of reasoning in these successful sciences in order to find the secret of their method and apply it to such an unsuccessful science as politics, and to social science at large. His "logic" concluding with the "logic of the social sciences" was the result. His great work of formulating the methods of the physical sciences was done in order to apply them, with the changes required by the subject-matter, to the sciences that were still chaotic; in other words, to improve the standard of reasoning in those sciences, as it has been improved (but only in very modern times) in chemistry, etc. The token of a successful science is that its experts will be recognized as such because the tests of expert work are definite. Make them definite in politics and you will have recognized experts, and the people desiring their own welfare will as naturally choose tested experts for their governors as they go to a tested carpenter or plumber, or consult a tried and approved sanitary engineer. This would bring us to the unfamiliar conclusion that the hope for democracy lies not primarily in the reform of the people but in the testing of political thought. It lies first of all with the thinkers and not with the populace, for the need is to make thought respected. For example, they should be on a level of reasoning that would forbid fancying it to be a good argument against democracy to point out its defects without showing that some other system has less defect. Such an argument should be instantly condemned by the thinker's own mind as an obvious fallacy. Yet such arguments abound and impress on every side. In fine, what is needed to reform democracy is logical education, beginning with those who undertake to inform and guide their fellows. This clever book is strewn with those arbitrary opinions whose prevalence is the deepest reason for the failure of democracy. It is odd that Dean Inge should speak only of "moral and physical aristocrats," forgetting aristocracy of intelligence. If he holds up ascetic simplicity and discipline of life as an ideal for the leaders of the state, let him not forget the more difficult and exacting high discipline of thought. There is as much room for heroic control of impulse and rigorous order in the responsible task of thinking as in any other task of life.

Dean Inge omits one of the chief intrinsic defects of popular government, that it is so uninteresting. It was interesting for Frederick II or Napoleon to transform and shape a nation; it had all the excitement of huge creative work. It is less exciting for a feeble unit in the population to cast his vote. To divide power and initiative into minute fractions makes the possessor of each fraction feel it relatively unimportant whether he exercises his power or not, or even exercises it aright. There is a very similar situation in morals. The object of moral rules, just like the object of political institutions, is the general welfare. Yet the individual might feel that his own petty lying or thieving would by itself make small difference to the general welfare. Since, if everyone reasoned thus that welfare would be wrecked, morality attaches a sacredness, a peculiar solemnity to moral obligation, counting it a disgrace to be indifferent thereto. It is really one of the functions of the church to teach a similar sacredness in

the citizen's obligation to vote, to vote his best, and to think with conscience for that purpose. The sacredness of civic duty, extending to the judgments of the mind, is a thing that the clergy can inculcate by spoken teaching, and yet more impressively by example.

The same scant stress on intelligence is seen throughout in the author's view of Christian morals. There are two possible views of the Christian ideal of life; they differ according as we fix attention on the one who acts or on those who are helped or hurt by his action. If our attention is on the latter we shall not belittle material things, seeing that kindness must wish to give material benefits to others, and that the tone of the whole life, mental and spiritual as well as other, is known to depend largely on physical conditions. But if, on the other hand, we fix attention on the person who acts, our emphasis will be against material things, for what he needs is to be taught to give and not to take, to think of the good of others and control the instincts that care only for his own; in a word, to be unselfish. Properly speaking these are the two halves of Christian morality. But in only one of these cases is there a mood to be imparted; you do not have to preach solemnly to people about receiving benefit but only about giving it. So it happens that the Christian preacher, in speech and in print, keeps praising the mood of indifference to material things, the superior value of spiritual attitudes to any good whatever, etc., etc. This is the burden of Dean Inge's whole moral deliverance. It is of course wholly sound so far as it would open our eyes to the comparative worthlessness of many luxuries, whether for self or for others, and help to a balanced estimate of the real values in life. But for the most part it simply forgets the object for which morality exists at all, and which current morality so largely fails to compass, namely: human welfare. It is the duty of intelligence to keep hold of the clue and to see to it that ethical idealism really subserves the happiness of humanity. The clue is lost though the mood is elevated when the author writes: "It is not necessary to remind the reader that in Christianity all the paraphernalia of life are valued very lightly; that all the good and all the evil which exalt or defile the man have their seat within him, in his own character; that we are sent into the world to suffer and to conquer suffering; that it is more blessed to give than to receive," etc. As moral teaching on things social and economic from a Christian leader this is simply false to the life and thought of Christ. It is untrue that according to Christianity people in general are sent into the world to suffer and bear suffering. Is "a cup of cold water" amongst "the paraphernalia of life" which are to be lightly valued? Are meat for the hungry, clothing for the naked, shelter for the homeless to be so reckoned? Good and evil in a man's character mean simply the dispositions that make for or against the general welfare. It is morally blessed to give and no *moral* blessedness of course attaches to receiving; it is morally blessed to give, but the object of giving is that others may receive and enjoy; it is morally blessed to give because it is so vitally important that the material goods of life (when they really are such) should be received by those who need them and not monopolized by those into whose hands they first fall. There is no shadow of warrant in Christianity for condemning economic or political movements because they concern themselves with the material conditions of the poor. There can be no question about such movements but one: are their aims really such as to advance human welfare? It is a question for intelligence alone.

When the author comes to set up mysticism against organized Christianity or what he calls institutionalism he sees an antithesis where none exists. The imaginary foes could only, to use the expression of a great teacher, charge furiously down parallel lanes at each other and never clash. Christianity is essentially mystical, but it is also essentially social and corporate. Strangely enough, this champion of mysticism does not appear to be a mystic. And he is more nearly a stoic than a Christian. Strangely, also, this opponent of institutionalism incidentally proposes a new religious league ("since religion has a cohesive force greater than any other bond") with apparently a definite faith and a still more definite rule of life, with "provision for community life, like that of the old monasteries, for both sexes," and a distinctive dress.

However, the more controversial parts of the book, on which we have lingered, are not, it must be repeated, the parts of most permanent value. The essays on St. Paul and Newman are masterpieces in their kind. And the vigor of mind and pen are a pleasure from first to last.

D. S. M.

A Socialistic Constitution

A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain, by Beatrice and Sidney Webb. New York: Longmans Green.

TO a generation which needs, above all, hard thinking as the main specific for its ills, Mr. and Mrs. Webb give the best that is in them. No one not intimately acquainted with the detailed structure of English politics can possibly realize the full significance of this volume. For that structure is, to put it bluntly, beyond repair in the old sense. The rude shock of Cromwell apart, the British constitution is the child of happy accidents; but the day for undesigned change has gone. The state has embarked upon experiments for which its present machinery is unfitted; and by those experiments it must stand or fall. It was not difficult to govern in the age when religious controversy most largely occupied the attention of the state. It was simple to administer when the main task of statesmanship was to avoid embarrassment. But the state today has entered the domain of economics and it legislates for a critical audience of forty millions. The nineteenth century formula of government by the discussion of well-meaning amateurs has ceased to have application or meaning. The day of the expert has arrived; and the chief problem before us is to combine the power his knowledge must demand with democratic control.

It is a complex task, and Mr. and Mrs. Webb supply a complex scheme to meet it. There is no field of social organization they do not enter; and there is no field where their analysis is not at once amazingly suggestive and incomparably well-informed. Not indeed, that there is not ample room for criticism and even criticism of fundamentals. It could, I think, be said with truth, that Mr. and Mrs. Webb have not thought out with adequacy the relations between the two parliaments they propose to institute; and, in particular, how a parliament to which the control of finance is confided can avoid becoming a dominant partner in a structure where the concept of a nice equipoise is vital. Mr. and Mrs. Webb, moreover, have a trust in the working of committees the evidence for which is lacking. A committee is, at best, a hopeless substitute for a great administrator like Lord Haldane, for