

being partial to *consumers*. I suppose Mr. Brown means consumers who do not produce ; and he has already told us that consumers who do not produce ought not even to consume. He forgets that the body of persons who consume without producing, and who have no alternative but to do so, is growing year by year ; and that the task of the future is not to turn them into producers, but to make them better consumers ; and to remove for ever the stigma from unemployment. It follows, therefore, that any system of economics which is designed in the interest of the consumer has that much to recommend it ; and that the need to-day is not for political but for economic radicalism. The radicalism of this book is of the kind that has long become conventional. Mr. Brown has still some distance to travel before he can call himself an effective revolutionary.

E. W. F. TOMLIN.

MR. ELIOT AND EDUCATION

ESSAYS ANCIENT AND MODERN, by T. S. Eliot (*Faber and Faber*, 6/-).

To many who are aware of a great indebtedness to Mr. Eliot every new prose book of his that comes out nowadays is something for a painfully apprehensive approach. They have too much reason for fearing that they will find themselves condemning him by criteria, their way to which, looking back, they recognize as representing in a considerable degree his influence. *Essays Ancient and Modern* is not altogether new ; the dust-jacket may be cited :

‘ This book takes the place of *For Lancelot Andrewes*, which is out of print. The Essay on Thomas Middleton is omitted because it has already been published in *Elizabethan Essays*, and other essays omitted because the author does not think them good enough. Five new essays, not previously collected, have been added.’

The essay on Middleton seems to me certainly no better than the essay on Crashaw that has been suppressed. The new essay on Tennyson seems to me the worst essay in literary criticism that Mr. Eliot has yet published. It opens :

‘Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear. He has three qualities which are seldom found together except in the greatest poets: abundance, variety and complete competence.’

And what follows does not make these sentences look any more like the utterance of an interested and disinterested mind that knows what it thinks and is concerned to say it as clearly and precisely as possible. The flabbiness to which the air of brisk directness merely calls attention is pervasive. Later on we read:

‘even the second-rate long poems of that time, like *The Light of Asia*, are better worth reading than most modern long novels.’

—We immediately think of a reverse proposition that would be equally undiscussible and equally profitable.

We have already been told in the first paragraph that Tennyson ‘had the finest ear of any English poet since Milton.’¹ In spite of all that comes between we are still surprised (because of that eminently quotable first clause, which will have a currency that Mr. Humbert Wolfe, whose ‘interesting essay’ Mr. Eliot respectfully dissents from, could not have given it) when we read:

‘Tennyson is the great master of metric as well as of melancholia; I do not think that any poet in English has ever had a finer ear for vowel sound, as well as a subtler feeling for some moods of anguish.’

But it is not an occasional vulgarity of phrasing that is the worst offence; far worse is the subtlety of statement that disguises critical indolence and gives endorsement to time-honoured critical (or anti-critical) fallacies:

‘The surface of Tennyson stirred about with his time; and he had nothing to which to hold fast except his unique and unerring feeling for the sounds of words. But in this he had something that no one else had. Tennyson’s surface, his technical accomplishment, is intimate with his depths . . .’

¹*cf.* a sentence quoted in *Scrutiny* for last December: ‘Palgrave’s chief and best guide was Tennyson, on whose fine ear the metres of the ‘metaphysicals’ must have grated as did those of his friend Browning . . .’

If that last sentence means anything, either Tennyson's depths are not those of a great poet, or Mr. Eliot ought not to have been content to talk so much, so redundantly and so loosely about Tennyson's technical accomplishment as a matter of a fine ear for vowel sound and an unerring feeling for the sounds of words. Actually, Tennyson's feeling for the sounds of words was extremely limited and limiting: the ear he had cultivated for vowel sound was a filter that kept out all 'music' of any subtlety or complexity and cut him off from most of the expressive resources of the English language. To bring English as near the Italian as possible could not have been the preoccupation of a great English poet, however interesting the minor poetry that might come of it. The term 'metric' that Mr. Eliot has sponsored seems calculated to rehabilitate the discredited fallacies of the prosodic approach.

These fallacies are peculiarly hard to shift, the incapacities associated with the phrase 'fine ear' are inveterate, in the normal product of a classical education. Why this should be so Coleridge virtually explains in the first chapter of *Biographia Literaria*; and Wordsworth, in the following lines, suggests the condition of a classical training's being something one may properly be concerned to preserve:

In fine,

I was a better judge of thoughts than words,
 Misled in estimating words, not only
 By common inexperience of youth,
 But by the trade in classic niceties,
 The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
 From languages that want the living voice
 To carry meaning to the natural heart;
 To tell us what is passion, what is truth,
 What reason, what simplicity and sense.

—The training in Latin and Greek must not be made a substitute for training in English. It would seem to be axiomatic that if one does not bring an educated sensibility from one's literary studies, what one brings away should not be called a humane education. And it would seem to be equally axiomatic that it is only in one's own language that one's sensibility can, in the first place, be

educated. And the result of the assumption that if Latin and Greek are looked after the rest will look after itself is the cultivated classic who thinks that Mr. Belloc writes good prose and that it is a mark of a liberal good taste to account Miss Dorothy L. Sayers Literature. The recognition that English must be looked after involves the recognition that it must be looked after at the university level—or at any rate that it is not merely and patently stupid to suppose so.

In Mr. Eliot's essay on *Modern Education and the Classics*, however, we read:

'The universities have to teach what they can to the material they can get: nowadays they even teach *English* in England.'

Merely that. Or rather, a little further on Mr. Eliot adds this (having dismissed *economics* and 'philosophy, when divorced from theology'):

'And there is a third subject, equally bad as training, which does not fall into either of these classes, but is bad for reasons of its own: the study of *English Literature* or, to be more comprehensive, the literature of one's own language.'

Of these reasons Mr. Eliot says nothing whatever.

To those who have been working at the problems of a modern humane education, and discussing the place of English in it, he must sound ill-mannered and ill-tempered. For of such work and such discussion he cannot be altogether ignorant. And he must know that conclusions opposite to his own have been come to by persons ostensibly better qualified to conclude and to pronounce. At any rate, one may suggest that he ought now, in common decency, to read the official Report on *The Teaching of English in England*,¹ or, more simply, Mr. George Sampson's *English for the English*, and tell us why he disagrees.

¹*The Teaching of English in England: Being the Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Education to inquire into the Position of English in the Educational System of England.* (1921). H.M. Stationery Office, 1/6 net.

When we re-read his essay to discover what he himself advocates we still find him, for all the *ex cathedra* manner, curiously vague, general and negative. He dissociates himself in large terms from all kinds of company, but for his account of what he positively wants gives us nothing but this:

‘It is high time that the defence of the classics should be dissociated from objects which, however excellent under certain conditions and in a certain environment, are of only relative importance—a traditional public-school system, a traditional university system, a decaying social order—and permanently associated where they belong, with something permanent: the historical Christian Faith.’

It would be very interesting indeed to be told just how, in Mr. Eliot’s view, the classics are permanently associated with the historical Christian Faith, and what are the conclusions for education—just what and how, for instance, the monastic teaching orders he desiderates would teach. But we cannot really believe that Mr. Eliot will ever tell us more. If he does not, however, we cannot take his interest in education very seriously.

There is, in fact, something very depressing about the way in which, nowadays, he brings out these orthodox generalities, weightily, as substitutes for particularity of statement, rigour of thought and various other virtues we have a right to expect of him. We no longer expect them, unfortunately. So that when, writing on *Religion and Literature*, he starts with the proposition that

‘Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint,’

we do not expect to be able to read with the sympathy that ought to be possible what follows. We expect to find that, in spite of anything that may be said or implied to the contrary, we are being offered something as a *substitute*. ‘We’ stands for readers who agree, or rather urge, that serious literary criticism leads outside itself and are intent on following it, but do not know of any fixed base ‘outside’ from which to move in the opposite direction. In the nature of the case we cannot, as Mr. Eliot himself has pointed out, hope to engage conclusively in argument with those who have

such a base. But, however little they may be impressed, we have to insist that what looks to us like weak thinking, failure in critical disinterestedness or courage, bad judgment, and so on, we must judge as such, and that a 'definite ethical and theological standpoint' is the reverse of recommended to us when its adoption has been accompanied by a decline in the virtues we can recognize.

The essay on *Religion and Literature* is too general to have much force for any readers but those who agree with Mr. Eliot already (to such indeed it is addressed). The rest of us must take it in relation to other things in the book—such things as the essays on Tennyson and education. And we in any case find it odd that Mr. Eliot should have had to learn from Mr. Montgomery Belgion (see the footnote on p. 100) that the fiction we read may affect our behaviour to our fellows, and odd that he should be able to refer to 'such delightful fiction as Mr. Chesterton's *Man Who Was Thursday* or his *Father Brown*' and say: 'No one admires and enjoys these things more than I do.' Of Mr. Chesterton Mr. Eliot himself once remarked that his cheerfulness reminds us not so much of St. Francis as of a bus-driver slapping himself on a wintry day to keep warm. That will seem to most educated and sensitive people a very kind way of indicating the level of Mr. Chesterton's art and propaganda.

F. R. LEAVIS.

ONTOGENETIC CRITICISM

IN DEFENCE OF SHELLEY AND OTHER ESSAYS, by
Herbert Read (Heinemann, 10/6).

This book in itself is of no particular interest, but deserves notice if only because Mr. Read has acquired something of a reputation and in the long essay which provides the title claims to be considered as a critic. He undertakes to redress the balance of opinion about Shelley, to mediate, in fact, between Professor Dowden and Professor Eliot. The latter, as was noticed in a recent number of *Scrutiny*, couched his objections in unfortunate terms, seeming to rest his low opinion of Shelley on his ideas and the difficulty of believing in them. To take up the challenge was to condone the offence to literary criticism and to extend it. Mr. Read, however, seems to have abandoned literary criticism proper. At least he suggests that the attack on Shelley through his ideas is excellent critical strategy, for 'a frontal attack on his poetry would not be very effective. You may say that this poem or that poem is bad, but however many reasons you may bring forward to support your opinion, an opinion and a personal one it remains.'

It would be unfair to Mr. Read to suggest that this is the whole of his approach. His 'first concern' he admits must be 'to vindicate the high value of Shelley's poetry.' He begins characteristically with Shelley's attitude to his poetry. But when this is over he proceeds to the business of sifting and rejecting and finds as one would expect, 'there is not a single long poem which does not suffer from lack of those most precious qualities of precision and objectivity.' (He has sufficient perception to dismiss the *Cenci*). But just as Mr. Read is about to take up this narrowed ground and begin his defence he announces, 'But first I think it necessary to establish the psychological type to which Shelley belonged.' It is evident that a frontal defence seems to the author equally ineffective. In justification of this deviation we find: 'the only kind of criticism which is basic . . . is ontogenetic criticism, by which I mean criticism which traces the work of art in the psychology of the individual and in the economic