

REVIEWS

phrases in the abstracts printed at the head of each chapter and in the list of Contents, or the phrases themselves were inserted in the text after the number at the beginning of each section, or both these changes were made.

C. J. F. WILLIAMS

THOMISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY, Vol. I, by Georges Van Riet, translated by Gabriel Franks, O.S.B.; B. Herder; 46s.

In 1946 Dr Van Riet published *L'Épistémologie Thomiste*, a massive tome of some 700 pages dealing with the modern attempt to justify the realism of thomistic philosophy by a coherent theory of knowledge. When this movement began about 1850, it was not a case of thomism awakening from dogmatic slumber. It was occasioned by a feeling of dissatisfaction with the type of philosophy being taught in the seminaries and lycea of the time: an unpalatable mixture of various post-Cartesian ideologies. The early stages of the return to thomism were fraught with danger and looked upon with suspicion. We are surprised to hear of a Jesuit provincial being exiled because of his profession of thomism; and of a certain group of seminary professors describing themselves as a thomistic 'masonic lodge'! Perhaps no less significant is the story of a certain professor who suffered for his thomism and whose brother later became Pope Leo XIII. But the movements prospered, and the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), the foundation of the *Institut Supérieur de Philosophie* at Louvain and the *Institut Catholique* at Paris guaranteed the continuity of thomistic revival. Much has now been achieved in various branches of thomistic philosophy, surprisingly little on the crucial question that so preoccupied the pioneers of neo-thomism: the problem of knowledge. No agreement has been reached as to the conditions, the value and limits of human cognition. Maybe what was needed before a breakthrough could be accomplished was a reassessment of the achievements and failures of the past hundred years. Van Riet's monumental work has done precisely that.

This English translation, based on the 3rd edition, covers the first three chapters. i.e. about half of the French original. It is excellently done and beautifully produced. But 46s. is a stiff price seeing that the complete French original cost less.

NICHOLAS FOLAN, O.P.

THE COMPLEX QUESTION OF MIXED MARRIAGES, by Ladislav Orsy, S.J.; Burns and Oates; 2s. 6d.

The title of this brochure is well taken, since the question, as ably discussed by the author, is in fact exceedingly complex. As he points out, the problem can and should be set in three ways, 'theologically, legally in its proper historical context,

and not least ecumenically' (p. 5). On the theological level, the practice of the Church with respect to mixed marriages awakens charges of intolerance not unlike those formerly heard in ecumenical discussion, marked by the irritating (to the non-Catholic) assumption that we are in full possession of the truth. While the humble realisation that the truth possesses us—in varying degrees—has swept through the Church on an ecumenical level, those who must live a practical ecumenism on the level of a mixed marriage are involved in a different type of problem—the problem of two consciences engaged in the faith, or indifferent to it, as the case may be, and the often tragic problem of a child caught in the middle. All this complicated by the rather terrible fact that 'experience shows that few young people preparing for marriage realise the implications of their not having the same faith' (p. 12).

Present discipline has been questioned even among Catholics, especially with the current of change brought about by the council. Changes in law are asked for, particularly with respect to promises exacted and the law of the 'form' of marriage, which demands that all mixed marriages be performed before a priest and two witnesses. This, as the author points out, is the crucial point: 'The whole legal edifice stands on the *form* of the marriage' (p. 7). An awkward, two-edged fact is variously alleged both by those desiring changes and those opposed: 'A large number of marriages are indeed contracted (or "attempted") with a complete disregard for canon law. Hence, as marriages, they are invalid. Admittedly precise information is rare, but such information as we have is staggering. Two examples are known: thus, during 1955 not less than 80 out of 100 mixed marriages were invalid in Holland, and the figure of 58 out of 100 is given for Switzerland' (p. 14).

In conclusion the author notes rightly that 'the question of mixed marriages is a very complex one, full of pitfalls, and not lending itself to easy and sweeping solutions' (p. 22). Amen!

One can see the complexity from the author's admirable, if brief, exposition of the problem. Yet one cannot help wondering if, in the end, the problem is not in fact insoluble within present structures. Christian marriage, as a sacrament, appears to demand the ideal of a mature, informed Christianity. Such was the case of the mixed marriages to whom St Paul preached. They were converts, engaged in the faith as adults, having previously been engaged in marriage. It might be noted in passing that these two commitments were not always compatible.

This ideal is superimposed on a mass Christianity, an hereditary thing which is perhaps viable only in a society where *everyone* is a Catholic. Present law and pastoral practice are in fact attuned to such a situation, where the child, baptised in infancy, lives and grows in a milieu dominated by signs of faith. Boccaccio, e.g., was after all, a believer: faith permeated his world.

This world no longer exists in fact. Infants are baptized (as soon as possible) when in fact their faith may never reach the level of a recently engaged catechumen. Yet in this question present law is rather more demanding than it is for a

catechumen. The problems we face result from the survival of the structures of a Church 'in Christendom' among a people who no longer live in such a world. Present law demands of everyone a faith which in fact is manifested only by a privileged minority; and with these there is little or no problem.

In fine, we are inclined to carry the problem to another level, and ask if *any* solution is possible while the Church continues to receive into her fold infants who will—for one reason or another—be condemned to remain, *in the faith*, at an infant or pre-evangelised level. Everything is asked, but very little is given.

JORDAN BISHOP, O.P.

A HANDFUL OF DUST, by Evelyn Waugh; Chapman and Hall; 21s.

After thirty years, *A Handful of Dust* remains in the first rank of Mr Waugh's novels: a chilling blend of the farcical, the tragic and the macabre. It is the first of his essays in 'serious' fiction, and in its treatment of the doomed Gothic hero—not yet a Catholic hero—it points forward to such ambitious later novels as *Brideshead Revisited* and, in particular, *The Sword of Honour* trilogy where Guy Crouchback, a more complex and developed version of Tony Last in the early novel (both have appropriately suggestive surnames), realises the insufficiency of the gentlemanly ideal and is stripped of his romantic illusions. This new edition of *A Handful of Dust* is supplied with an 'Alternative Ending', and Mr Waugh explains in an introductory note how it came to be written; it appears that the harrowing penultimate chapter of the novel called 'Du Côté de Chez Todd', in which Tony ends his days having to read Dickens to Mr Todd in the Brazilian jungle, was written first and originally published as a short story. An American magazine wished to serialize the novel but was unable, no doubt for copyright reasons, to reprint 'Du Côté de Chez Todd': to accommodate it, Mr Waugh wrote the alternative ending which is now reprinted. The novel in that version was a much slighter but a more homogeneous story; the whole South American episode was dropped, and in the alternative ending Tony Last returns to England having merely idly cruised for a few months:

It had been an uneventful excursion. Not for Tony were the ardours of serious travel, desert or jungle, mountains or pampas; he had no inclination to kill big game or survey unmapped tributaries. He had left England because, in the circumstances, it seemed the correct procedure, a convention hallowed in fiction and history by generations of disillusioned husbands. He had put himself in the hands of a travel agency and for lazy months had pottered from island to island in the West Indies, lunching at Government Houses, drinking swizzles on club verandahs, achieving an easy popularity at Captains' tables; he had played deck quoits and ping-pong, had danced on deck and driven with new acquaintances on well-laid roads amid tropical vegetation. Now he was home again. He had thought less and less of Brenda during the passing weeks.