

Assisi. Men might sneer as they did at the 'Peasant Pope', contrasting him with his predecessor Leo XIII; but he was a peasant with the manners of a prince and, as Pope, with the conscious authority of a Caesar. At his first audience with the diplomatic corps he astounded all by his simple dignity, his ready grasp of affairs of State and the clear direct exposition of his own views. Speaking to a Frenchman during the crisis of the expropriation laws he declared that he was no diplomatist: his task was to defend the law of God; while many were concerned about the goods of the Church his concern was for her good; he would prefer to endure the loss of churches of stone than to see the destruction of the Church herself.

NEWMAN AND POLITICS

TERENCE KENNY

SINCE Newman's death in 1890 there have always been those who have pictured him as being in some way cut off from his age, so that, although his life traversed the nineteenth century, they think it would be difficult to gather evidence from his writings of the precise period to which he belonged. Now this opinion has been held not only by those out of sympathy with Newman, who have held it as a kind of reproach against him that contemporary secular affairs seemed to interest him so little, but has often been held also by many who were so convinced of the sanctity and otherworldliness of the great Oratorian, that they thought it quite too much to suppose that mundane matters, like a war in the Crimea or a Trust Bill in Parliament, could succeed in gaining his attention. The limit in this direction has been reached, now that a recent writer has portrayed, in a brilliant and informative book,¹ a Newman, saintly indeed, but quite oblivious of the political world about him, or beyond his shores; a man, in fact, who would best be represented, at the time this author was writing, by a churchman of eminence who did not seem aware of the war in Korea. With this judgment what before was a matter of over-emphasis, or misconception, becomes

1. S. O'Faolain, *Newman's Way*, 1952.

a definite mistake, which as long as it lasts makes an adequate understanding of Newman impossible.

Now in trying to arrive at the truth about Newman's attitude to contemporary events, it is not necessary to take into account the social and political philosophy which can be found in his works, though the value of this would be lessened if it were decided that Newman had simply no interest in social or political matters; but what is essential to bear in mind is the peculiar standpoint from which Newman viewed the social and political world. In the first place, it must be admitted that Newman's whole view of social life is coloured by St John's words, 'the whole world is seated in wickedness' (I Jn. v. 19); but this in itself is no reason for expecting him to ignore politics, as can be seen from the actions of medieval churchmen who were also dominated by the same idea. It was not the inevitable evil of the world so much as the particular form of evil of the times which influenced Newman's attitude to contemporary affairs. In 1878 he writes, 'For the last fifty years, since 1827, there had been a formidable movement among us towards assigning in the national life political or civil motives for social or personal duties, and thereby withdrawing matters of conduct from the jurisdiction of religion. Men are to be made virtuous, and to do good works, to become good members of society, good husbands and fathers, on purely secular motives.'² An example of this was the Temperance movement, which Newman opposed throughout his life. Thus when he scandalized his brother, Francis, by saying that, for his part, he did not know whether there were too many ale-houses or too few, it must not be supposed (as it sometimes has been), that Newman was confessing to ignorance or lack of interest, since there were few question about which he felt more strongly. Perhaps he considered it useless to explain to his Unitarian brother, what really was the case, that the Temperance movement was for him a revival of the Pelagian heresy, that he would resist it as far as he dared, as he would those other social movements of which it was the type.

Again, 'the noblest aspect of man is not the social, but the intellectual',³ said Newman, and consequently till the end of his days he appeared to believe that the problems of his age were

2. Letter to Canon Longman, May 28, 1878, *Oratory MSS.*

3. M. Allies, *Thomas William Allies* (London 1907), p. 113.

primarily intellectual, not social. Whatever may be thought of this point of view, and many will doubtless prefer the attitude of a Bagshawe or a Manning, it is a point of view which can be gathered from his published works alone, and if it is not duly appreciated there results an entirely unnecessary mystery about one aspect of Newman's work.

The question is then, bearing in mind his general standpoint, and ignoring any deeper questions, what interest did Newman show in the affairs of his day? as much, for instance, as most reasonably educated men would show? The truth seems to be that Newman showed all of this and more.

Perhaps, although this point can be established from his published works, and the evidence of his acquaintances, this evidence is so dispersed that it is rarely considered as a whole. However, the words of J. A. Froude are frequently quoted:

'Newman had read omnivorously; he had studied modern thought and modern life in all its forms, and with all its many-coloured passions. . . . He spoke to us (undergraduates) about subjects of the day, of literature, of public persons and incidents, of everything which was generally interesting. He seemed always to be better informed on common topics of conversation than anyone else who was present.'⁴ About the extent of Newman's reading, Froude cannot be uncritically received, since he was merely putting forward an inference; about Newman's interest in current events he is surely conclusive, as speaking from his own knowledge, and with no conceivable reason for exaggerating; though Henri Bremond was not the last to refuse to accept this. This opinion of Froude's does not stand alone; the same conclusion emerges from a collation of the remarks in various memoirs of many of those who knew him, some of them particularly well—Fathers Ryder and Neville, Aubrey de Vere, Thomas William Allies, and Tom Mozley, for example: but better even than all this would be some contemporary reference pointing in the direction of Newman's political interests. Here a letter of J. B. Mozley's seems very appropriate, in which he says, 'I walked out with Newman the other day, and had a great deal of talk, as you may expect, on things in general—political events, political men, political aims.'⁵

4. Quoted O'Faolain, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

5. *Letters of J. B. Mozley* (London 1885), March 9, 1832, p. 27.

But it is not really a question of what can be gathered from other people, but the evidence which Newman supplies himself. It would be tedious, but possible, to compile from Newman's many volumes a long list of allusions to, or isolated passages about, the contemporary scene; but though these are often significant from the very naturalness with which they appear (the discussion on the influence of the Press and the role of political parties which is to be found in *Loss and Gain* is an example of this), it hardly seems necessary to insist on them. Not necessary, in view of his *Lectures on the History of the Turks*, in which he attempts to forecast the future of the Turks from a glance at their past; or in view of his brilliant analysis in *Who's to Blame* of the responsibility for the misfortunes of the Crimean War; or of his lively sally against Brougham and Peel and the 'Useful Knowledge' school in the *Tamworth Reading Room*; in view of these three works alone it should be impossible to subscribe to the picture of a Newman ignorant of contemporary affairs. One wonders how some of the believers in an exclusively other-worldly Newman can begin to explain the fact that when he edited the *Rambler* for two editions in 1859, he wrote the lengthy 'Contemporary Events' sections himself, with none of the complaint about the burdensomeness of the task that the great Acton made. One suspects that the explanation is simply that they do not know he wrote them, or they have never read them.

If the mass of published material on Newman is not thought to supply sufficient evidence for the claims made about him here, though it surely does this, recourse must be had to the material available at the Birmingham Oratory. Many of the letters of the Anglican period of his life have been published, but these could scarcely have been expected to have had much to say about politics; conducting the Oxford Movement seems to have pushed objects of lesser importance out of his letters, and in any case he relied on politics at that time to divert the opposition, not to engage his own attention too much—'The Corn Laws, the Belgian Question, Canada, Afghanistan will in a while divert people's thoughts . . . we shall not tire . . .'⁶ he wrote in 1839. The letters of the later half of his life have been partly published in the two volumes of *Ward's Life*, but unfortunately Ward was never allowed to publish the third volume of the letters that he had planned, and,

6. Letter of January 22, 1839, *Letters and Correspondence of J. H. Newman*, Vol. II, p. 280.

to judge from his pencil markings, had he been so, a much higher percentage of letters of political interest would have seen the light.

If these letters, which came so near to publication, are taken into account with all the other material at the Oratory, some interesting facts emerge, which, to anyone examining it with the picture in mind of the sort of churchman who today would not know what was going on in Korea, should come as a distinct shock. About wars Newman seemed particularly concerned—numerous letters can be found on the military exploits in which this country was engaged; there are many cuttings from newspapers about the prospects and relative strength of antagonists, for example a long article from *The Times* about the organization of the Russian army; and Newman has copied down in a notebook the war establishment of Russian army units—but all this should not really be a surprise to anyone who has so much as seen Newman's room, where on a cupboard there is still pinned the map of General Gordon's campaign which Newman put there. Newman preserved cuttings about the tax on real property and its relation to agricultural interests; on arguments about Capital Punishment; on many of the clerico-political questions of the day such as tithe commutations and Church Rates; on the Poor Rates (and one remembers his copy of the Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners of 1836, and his anxiety to persuade his brother-in-law to make a special study of the Poor Law question); cuttings about the terrible conditions in the Winson Green prison, which the novelist Charles Reade made notorious by his *Never Too Late to Mend*; cuttings which, though far outnumbered by others of a less political nature, are interesting as pointing to a Newman too little known.

The great collection of letters, of which the bulk will ultimately see the light, provides similar testimony. They supply information which is nowhere else available—that Newman did not trust Peel for example—as well as confirming and underlining hints which can be gathered a from a wide variety of sources. The subjects discussed in them are diverse—the effect of the subdivisions of property in France, of small-holdings, on the status of French women, the Franco-Prussian war and the prospects of France generally in modern Europe, and not only does France receive attention but Kandahar and South Africa too are not

neglected. Very interesting is his discussion with Lord Blachford in 1872 on Anglo-American relations. 'For the last forty years', he writes, 'the Yankees have in the eyes of the whole world been insulting us, and presuming on our tenderness for them, remorse at our past tyranny and love of kindred. The more you grant the more they ask—to be considerate is deemed cowardice. So that it is the very worst policy to seem to be afraid of them.' One wonders how much he likes Americans when one comes across such a familiar phrase as—'I know many whom I love and admire, but . . .'; at all events he thought Palmerston 'with his coarse theatrical ways was the chap to deal with the Yankees'.⁷

Among other topics discussed are such as the problem of what to say to people complaining of lack of religious toleration in Spain; the Reform Acts of the nineteenth century; the position of the Colonies—'is not one of the most essentially important questions for us the treatment and the prospects of our Colonies?' he asks⁸, and again, 'How shall we and they stand politically in reference to the non-British world?' he asks in the course of a further discussion.⁹

But, without extending the list, it can be seen that the picture of a Newman ignorant of the world about him is false, and stands in the way of a fuller understanding of him. Of course, it would be equally false to exaggerate his interest in the events of his age, and it must be understood that the letters which have been mentioned here, even when added to similar ones not mentioned, form only a small part of his vast correspondence; it is undeniable that Newman, whose standpoint for viewing social and political matters has been hinted at, kept such matters in their due place.

Yet the picture which has been complained about is assuredly wrong. How could that picture truly represent a man who, at the age of eighty-two, was busy enrolling himself under the same banner as the dreadful Professor Huxley, in order to protest against a scheme to build a Channel Tunnel? or the old man of eighty-four, scarcely able to hold a pen, writing about the situation in Russia and Afghanistan?

7. June 14, 1872; *Oratory MSS.*

8. June 20, 1877; *Oratory MSS.*

9. December 11, 1877; *Oratory MSS.*