

are not Ebionites, and the novelist, imitating the action of grace, is not an infallible church to suppress them. For all that one admires in *Brideshead*—the City, the treatment of suffering, the useful and delightful Blanche, and Ryder's father—there is this difficulty, that intransigence when it gets into the texture of a novel breeds resistance; one fights rather than becomes absorbed. To suspend disbelief in these circumstances would be an act of sentimentality; a weakness not wholly unrelated to intransigence, and according to some discoverable in the text itself as well as in many readers.

The Jews

The Jews in our Time. By NORMAN BENTWICH.
Pelican Books. 3s. 6d.

ANTI-SEMITISM to-day is one of the definitely discredited and discreditable opinions. Though it still grows—and occasionally howls—in the underworld, it can no longer be paraded by persons who would be thought cultured or decent-minded. Since the Nazi massacres, it is generally recognised for what it is—the Shame of Christendom, the ghost of the Middle Ages hovering over Europe. Up till the Second Great War, the anti-semitism of a Belloc, a Léon Daudet, could still be respectable; *anti-* versus *philo-sémitisme* was, like socialism, one of the stock subjects of debate; upon my generation—the one born before the First Great War—the theories of the brilliant, unfortunate, Otto Weininger exercised a powerful influence. To-day the thing continues only as a pestilence of the gutter; it has been stripped of its mediæval mystique, its metaphysical trappings.

Of course, it is not alone the bad conscience of Christians which has produced this desirable result; much more we have to thank for it (among other results, not all so good) the fading of theology, both Christian and Judaic. Christianity, it must be remembered, was from the Judaic point of view a Jewish heresy—a Gentile plagiarism and vulgarisation; and the progeny could not forgive the parent which disowned and anathematised it. The Christian regarded Jewry somewhat as the old-fashioned Protestant regarded the Roman Church—as the Beast, the Antichrist, the very “Mystery of Iniquity.” “We hate” (as Weininger himself somewhere said) “whatever reminds us unpleasantly of ourselves;” there is, notoriously, no hatred like the hatred of kindred. Hitler, though dubiously a Christian (even in the formal sense), was, as one hopes, the last of the heretic-burners. More than

this—if we accept the plausible enough view of Freud—the anti-semitism of Northern Europe was a subconscious revolt against Christianity itself. To the late-converted Nordics, Christianity was an alien yoke, often forcibly imposed and always secretly resented. They were like servants who revenge themselves on their masters by inhumanity towards those masters' poor relations. In a word, it was for giving Jesus of Nazareth birth, and not for delivering Him to death, that the pagan “old Adam” in the Christian could not forgive the Jews.

The diabolist view of Israel was on this showing the dark shadow of mediæval Christianity—the price we paid for forcible baptisms and centuries of only half-sincere conformism—the hidden flaw in Christian faith, which took its terrible revenge in the 20th century. (In that century, the mediæval seers had said, the Antichrist would come. The Antichrist, it might be said, *did* come—as the projection of our Christian diabolism.) Now at last that age-old nightmare has rolled away, and the air is comparatively clear. Modern Christians and Reformed Judaists can talk to each other—with immense mutual benefit. Even Pope Pius XI was able to say “Spiritually we are Semites.” The two great monotheist religions of the West can pay each other honours, the two religions which have believed, in their different fashions, in Redemption through Suffering—and so many of whose adherents have lived their belief.

We have had many books on the Jews in recent years, but there have been few more careful and convincing than Mr. Bentwich's. He avoids any analysis such as the foregoing—which I do not know if he would accept. Recriminations and pessimism are foreign to his generous humanistic tone and purpose; and indeed, psychological probing (since it must cut deepest into our Christian consciences) comes perhaps more helpfully from Gentile thinkers. He writes as a passionate Judaist, a firm believer in the still unfulfilled mission of his race. He scarcely considers what, for non-Jews, has been the major Jewish contribution to that effort—namely, the life and teaching of Christ; and the only weakness (I feel) in his book is that he understresses the Jewish exclusiveness—for surely Jews have not sought, since Roman times, and do not now seek, to make converts. Christianity, it seems to Europeans, was Israel's true gift to the world, though it need not be her last; a gift, moreover, which has been very poorly repaid. The Chosen People idea has been a definite provocation to less ethically-conscious races; for, granting the moral genius of Israel, men will still feel the ethic (say) of the Old Testament to be lacking in certain nuances—for instance, personal pathos and tenderness. The lonely

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destiny of Jesus was as it were a reflex of the lone destiny of Israel; but because it was an *individual* destiny, it has the touch of other-worldliness (and what is the same thing, universality) which is absent in Israel's spiritual equipment, and which brought a new idea into the world. If a Jew created totalitarian communism, there is something that smacks of totalitarianism, and this-worldliness, even in the noblest Jewish dreams of the Millennium. Israel's racialism, in her prophets and philanthropists, has meant a national dedication to humanity; but it has certainly called out an answering (and darker) racialism in her neighbours—to her own and humanity's hurt. In short, the Jew has been too often like the bigoted idealist who unintentionally raises the very devil; a paradox which none has seen better than that Jewish Christian saint, Simone Weil.

For all that, it is impossible to read Mr. Bentwich's account without feeling an excited admiration; admiration for the resilience of a nation which—after the foul murder of more than a third of its people—faces the future with buoyancy and hope. Mr. Bentwich is a Zionist, and writes with infectious enthusiasm of the achievement of the new state. That colonisation—like most colonisations—has had its less happy side; and the Arab Case (which the writer perhaps could not do justice to within the proportions of this book) is a very real and urgent one. But, together with the Last Stand of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Zionist effort has given the lie to the story that Jews cannot fight—as the last war similarly vindicated the Greeks. There was a time when it was thought that these two races, to which we owe the best part of our culture, were hopelessly effete and degenerate. The suggestion is scarcely heard to-day.

Mr. Bentwich, rightly I think, sweeps away the case for Assimilation—the case in which most Communists believe, and which has dictated the policy (in the main) of the Soviet Union. The liberal compromise, which made the Jew a (nominal) equal citizen if he would sink his nationality, has failed—founded as it was on unreality; the nations could not digest this foreign body, however much his desire, in the 19th century, often was to be absorbed—and their irritated frustration produced the great tragedy of our time. The solution urged by Belloc, of Jewish *enclaves* within states, could never in practice have meant anything but the Ghetto—as one step to the Concentration Camp. The people who gave us the idea of nationalism—as it gave us our religion—can come to rest only in a territory. The argument against “double loyalty” is raised, in the case of the many who are not, and can never be, citizens of Israel; but, as Mr. Bentwich excellently says,

“Multiple loyalties are desirable, and it is a part of the life of free democracies to hold to ‘the sacred differences.’” Jews now can be self-respecting guest-citizens of our various states, which is the only condition of equality; at the worst, it is hard to see that they will be more in danger than in the past, or their hosts fancy themselves more endangered by them. And the national *terroir* is adjusting the psychological imbalance of the Jewish people—whose straitened life in the Christian Era had forced upon them the unhealthy one-sidedness of urbanism.

The narrative which Mr. Bentwich relates has something of the marvellous and the romantic. We learn that

Bokhara, in Central Asia, which, till the Russian conquest in the latter part of the 19th century, was a sealed and mysterious city . . . had an ancient Jewish population, whose origin goes back to the early dispersion of the Jews in the Persian Empire of Cyrus. The Jews there acquired the physical character of the Turkomans; they wore the same gorgeous many-coloured robes, and an embroidered skull-cap, and they had long beards. When . . . the Jews heard of the movement to return to Zion, some of their grandees and scholars set out for Jerusalem. They were the wealthy among the Oriental population, and the quarter in which they walked in their gay robes was the colourful suburb. Some of them brought valuable libraries. In religion they were mostly mystics. . . .

Again,

There is, or was at the beginning of the Second World War, a small remnant of an ancient settlement in China, at Kai-Feng-Fu in the province of Hunan. It is believed to date from the early centuries of the Christian era. Mediæval travellers and Jesuit missionaries of the 17th century gave reports about them, and described their religious ceremonies.

And lastly (an item at which one cannot repress a smile):

In the Middle Ages the stock of Black, that is Indian, Jews were gradually supplanted in authority by new immigrants, who came from the Mediterranean lands under stress of persecution. The White Jews were more alert commercially and financially, and they seized power, and treated the Black Jews as serfs. With that signal capacity of Jews for assimilating and imitating the ways of their neighbours, the White Jews regarded the Black Jews as Untouchables, and excluded them from their Temple. They employed slaves, and the half-breed offspring, Brown Jews, were considered one caste higher than the Blacks. . . .

As in the Old Testament, the story of Israel has never been without its saving comedies.

Arland Ussher

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—Leonard Russell, *Sunday Times*. 30/-

HEINEMANN

Artists at Odds

Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. An Essay in Contrast.
By GEORGE STEINER. *Faber*. 30s.

TOLSTOY or Dostoevsky? Aristotle or Plato? Goethe or Schiller?—the great pairs of disputing twins continue to exercise our imagination and inflame our natural partisanship. We are right, I think, to treat these neat dichotomies with at least an initial suspicion. In order to point a contrast the rivals are so often weighted in the direction of their differences, and in the process their own words tend to be forgotten. The answer to Mr. Steiner's question is, of course, "Both!" and for a great deal of his book this seems to be the answer that he is giving us. But we realise clearly enough by the end that the author is a convinced partisan and that his earlier tributes to Tolstoy have been paid partly at least in order to give more weight to the ideological summing-up against him.

There is a real complaint to be made here. When a more or less precise question of belief is involved a critic should make his own position clear from the start. This is particularly needed in our own time when the question of Christian belief is at issue. A bad habit is developing, and should be checked. Non-Christians find it satisfactory to use Christian metaphor as a means of adding a spurious depth and richness to their theories, so that we are often left in ignorance of whether religious language is being used metaphorically or not. This is permissible, of course, in the rhetorical and imagist language of poetry: it is a dangerous and annoying practice in works of prose exposition. I would like to know whether Mr. Steiner is a Christian; and I don't know. When he writes about Original Sin does he mean that he believes in an historical Fall of Man? Even the blurb seems to be deliberately contributing to our uncertainty. "Mr. Steiner believes that without an awareness of the presence of God (*or a denial of that presence*) [my italics] certain ranges of intensity cannot be attained." How ambiguous can you get? And it matters more than Mr. Steiner seems to think that we should be fully informed about his religious position.

This is no more than a preliminary stutter of irritation, though it is not a trivial one. In general this is a good, learned, and thought-provoking book, in spite of the pervasive fault which I have mentioned and in spite of a rather ominous beginning. "We can speak in one breath of the *Iliad* and *War and Peace*, of *King Lear* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is as simple and as complex as that." He does not save himself from the simplicity by paying deference to the complexity. There is a good

deal of this initial bombination about stature before Mr. Steiner gets down to his serious occupation, which is to examine his two writers and their works with the closeness which we may properly demand. But he does do this; and the greater part of the book is an illuminating study of the texts, in which Mr. Steiner shows very clearly that he is both well-informed and perceptive. His general critical position is made clear both early and late in the book: early he writes that

immemorially literary criticism has aspired to objective canons, to principles of judgment at once rigorous and universal. But on considering its diverse history one wonders whether such aspirations have been or indeed can be fulfilled. One wonders whether critical doctrines are ever more than the taste and sensibility of a man of genius, or a school of opinion, temporarily imposed upon the spirit of an age by force of presentation.

And towards the end of the book this judgment is reiterated in a brisker, and better, form; "In matters of poetry or myth there are no solutions, merely attempts to make our responses more adequate and of a more precise modesty." This seems to me to be the only sane view of the critical function, and Mr. Steiner adheres to it with admirable consistency.

He shows us a Tolstoy who was epical, earth-bound, a brilliant observer of the world, and a passionate though limited moralist. One of his boldest strokes is to choose three of the most admired, and "spiritual," passages of *War and Peace* and attempt to show that they do not deserve the admiration that has been accorded them. "In the three examples cited, we come to a point at which the tone falters and the narrative loses something of its rhythm and precision. This occurs as we pass from the portrayal of action to the interior monologue. Every time, the monologue itself strikes one as inadequate. It takes on a forensic note, a neutral resonance, as if a second voice were intruding." This seems to me to be well observed.

Mr. Steiner then shows us a Dostoevsky who was dramatic, anti-humanist, heretically Christian, *profoundly aware of the evil in the world* (and of its inevitability), anti-moralist and pessimistic. This is, of course, the conventional portrayal, and it is hard indeed to think of a contrary one which would carry any conviction. What Mr. Steiner usefully does is to show that much of the mechanism of Dostoevsky's novels is, in a sense, extraneous to their matter, and that a confusion about this has led to confusions about the real nature of what the novelist was saying. He shows that Dostoevsky took a great deal of his apparatus from the Gothic novels