Comment: *Newman's Library*

Two more, containing the letters from May 1843 until October 1845, the most dramatic of all the crises in his life, will complete the splendid set of thirty one volumes of *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*. One more will contain a general index, together with a supplement of belatedly found letters. By any standards, this is a great work of scholarship, doing credit to publishers and printers as well as to Stephen Dessain (who brought out the first volume in 1961) and the others who took up the task after his death.

Volume VIII, edited at the Birmingham Oratory by Gerard Tracey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, pp. xxviii+644, £70) runs from January 1841 until April 1842. The main incidents brought to life in these fifteen months were Newman's attempt in *Tract* 90 to show the compatibility of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England with Catholic doctrine; his part in the attempt to stop the creation of an Anglican/Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem as a counterweight to the Orthodox and Catholic bishops; and his part in trying to prevent an Evangelical Anglican from obtaining the chair of poetry in Oxford — all three ending in frustration, all three of interest now only to specialists.

Of much greater interest are the incidentals of Newman's life: his voracious desire for books, for example. Writing from Oriel College on 11 February 1841, he commissions his friend J.R. Hope (Hope-Scott from 1853), who was visiting monasteries in Italy, to buy '£50 worth of divinity', listing — but only 'as specimens'— the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum* (42 volumes), Muratori's *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (25 volumes), the *omnia opera* of Isidore, Bonaventure, Bruno, Francisco Suarez, and Thomas Stapleton (the Counter-Reformation controversialist). He wanted Luke Wadding's *Annales Ordinis Minorum*. He wanted Gabriel Vasquez's 8-volume commentary on the *Summa Theologiae* (he already had St Thomas's works). Finally, he wanted the *Codex Liturgicus Ecclesiae Universae* (13 volumes, 1749-66), then the most valuable collection for the study of the Eastern liturgies. How many of these books he ever acquired, and how deeply read in any of them he was, would be interesting questions. As a glimpse into the theological world he yearned to explore the list is awesome and quite affecting. These were presumably books to which he had no ready access in Oxford.

Newman was buying 'a lot of books', he writes to Mrs John Mozley (12 February 1841), 'for it is a good investment'. Indeed, as his

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2000.tb06454.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

account books show, he spent £858 on books in the course of 1841: a considerable sum in those days. In the summer of 1841 he paid for the conversion of an empty barn at Littlemore into a library. In February 1842 he writes to J.W. Bowden, saying that he has his books 'nearly all in their places' — and thinks of insuring them: not expecting much danger of fire — 'but I am somewhat given to fancy mischances', going on to remark, somewhat wryly, that if they were to be destroyed by 'a mob shouting No Popery', the insurance would not hold anyway.

Just occasionally, a name in a letter or in the diaries defeats the editor's attempts to identify the person; but, such was the range of Newman's correspondence, the Index of Persons and Places alone enables readers to find their way into the endlessly fascinating world of middle-class Victorian England. Georg Hermes is mistakenly indexed with medieval authors, though correctly identified in the text: in one of the long letters Newman wrote to Nicholas Wiseman (then President of Oscott, never sent but filed away, he hopes, jokingly, that the bishop of Trier whom he believed — approvingly — to be 'against dressing up Images' was not 'an Hermesian'. The works of Hermes (dead since 1831) had recently been placed on the Index: his influential attempt to rethink Catholic doctrine in the light of Kant's philosophy being regarded as a sell-out to Enlightenment rationalism. It was on the *Hermes* that Newman made his famous voyage to the Mediterranean in 1832/33; it is unlikely that he ever read anything by Georg Hermes. Writing — and retaining — letters which were probably never even intended to be sent, reveals something of Newman's quirky character..

As Gerard Tracey says, in his substantial yet compact introduction, these letters cast light on events that were to become central in the *Apologia* and thus on how Newman's character and theological development are to be interpreted. The complexity of no other mind has ever been more minutely disclosed — which does not mean that only one interpretation of these and other events in Newman's life imposes itself (let alone his own version). This volume, like all the others, impeccably edited and beautifully produced, portrays Newman and his age in wonderful detail, never susceptible to easy assessment.

The age is very remote from our own, and none the less fascinating for that. For all the weight of biographical and autobiographical documentation, the man himself retains his mystery. It is hard to imagine, even, why he thought some of these books would have been such a good investment.

F.K.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2000.tb06454.x Published online by Cambridge University Press