
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

MISCELLANEA CRITICA.

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FOR one person that reads Spenser's prose, a hundred will read his verse: in fact there are quite a number of people who have barely heard of "our sage and serious Spenser" as a prose-writer at all. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising, as—unlike Milton, who wrote more prose than poetry—Spenser's contribution to our prose literature is practically confined to a single tractate—though a long one—his *View of the present state of Ireland*. This piece, written towards the close of the sixteenth century, is well worth studying, not only as marking a particular moment in the development of English prose, but as furnishing an important commentary on contemporary affairs in the (so-called) Sister Isle. This historical essay does not read like the work of the great poet that Spenser was: it is a plain business-like description, by an eye-witness, of the miserable state of affairs in Ireland during the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, intermingled with many pithy observations, some harsh judgments, and some practicable suggestions. It is difficult to resist the reflection that the "tribal Irish" have not changed much, in essentials, since the poet's day. The following passage, taken from the beginning of the dialogue—for it is in dialogue form that the whole essay is written—might have been composed any time these last few years: not only is it valuable in itself but gives a very fair idea of Spenser's prose as a whole:

"There have been many divers good plots devised, and wise counsels cast already about reformation of that realm; but they say it is the fatal destiny of that land that no purposes, whatever are meant for her good, will prosper or take good effect, which, whether it proceed from the very genius of the soil, or influence of the stars, or that Almighty God hath not yet appointed the time of her reformation, or that He reserveth her in this unquiet state still for some secret scourge which shall by her come unto England, it is hard to be known, but yet much to be feared."

It is interesting to compare such a sentence as this with well-known passages from Hooker or Milton. If Spenser's prose has, generally speaking, little of Hooker's unadorned gravity of style, it possesses something of its strength, though it is less stiffly Latinised in construction; at the same time it is free from Milton's gorgeous rhetoric, his splendour of imagery, or his unmeasured vituperation. It is still somewhat hampered by the model of the periodic sentences which we find in Cicero, whom so many of our Tudor (and later) writers loved to imitate, forgetting that such sentences are alien from the proper genius of our own language. We had to wait till Dryden showed us a more excellent way, despite the fact that, in the Prayer Book and the Authorised version of the Bible, this proper genius had already found due and faultless expression.

Two other passages from the *View* shall be quoted, for they lay stress on great political truths :

" Laws ought to be fashioned unto the manners and conditions of the people to whom they are meant, and not to be imposed unto them according to the simple rule of right ; for else, instead of good they may work ill, and pervert justice to extreme injustice."

If politicians had but remembered this, how much anguish and vexation might have been spared ! Spenser himself, such is human inconsistency, not seldom overlooked his own aphorism.

" Regard and moderation ought to be had in tempering and managing this stubborn nation of the Irish, to bring them from that delight of licentious barbarism unto the love of goodness and civility."

It is interesting to mark the policy advocated by Spenser for the final pacification of the country. He firmly advocated the methods employed by his political superior, Lord Grey ; that is, he would grant no concessions to rebels but beat them down until, for sheer misery, they were compelled to yield to *force majeure*. There were, indeed, those who urged Reformation, which would (they imagined) be followed by willing subjection. Spenser and his friends judged otherwise ; they would first secure subjection, and then, and not till then, proceed to a reformation. To the leaders of revolt no mercy ought to be shown, but their unhappy dupes, if completely submissive, might be suffered to live in places, chosen by the Government, where they could cause no further trouble. The lands should be assigned to English settlers ; under each settler some Irish would remain, as tenants, at a fixed rent ; the whole country to be garrisoned to secure tranquillity for the future. Such a course the poet justified by the practice of ancient Rome in her conquest of England. Spenser, stout Protestant that he was, had little doubt that much of the Irish imbroglio was due to Popish teaching and intrigues ; and perhaps it is not unlikely that, had the Protestant Reformation succeeded in Ireland, as it did in Scotland, the problem of government would have been shorn of its perpetual difficulty.

There is now no excuse for neglecting Spenser's historical work, as a finely printed edition of the whole of it has recently been issued.[1] The editor, Professor Renwick, has done his work with scrupulous care ; and his notes are, so far as they go, most valuable. Yet it seems a little doubtful whether his method of editing the text will commend itself to ordinary readers, as distinct from specialists : and for this reason. He reproduces the text with all its Tudor spelling unmodernised, and its wretched punctuation unchanged. Result : the page, as presented to us, is not nearly as legible as it might be. Imagine the A.V. of the Bible printed to-day as it was printed in 1611 ; it would be an effort to read it. However, it seems the fashion nowadays to gratify bibliophile purists in these

[1] *A view of the present state of Ireland*, by Edmund Spenser (Vol. IV of Spenser's complete works). Edited by W. L. Renwick, M.A., Litt.D. Eric Partridge, Ltd., at the Scholartis Press, London. 1934. Price 10*s*. 6*d*.

matters, at the cost of irritating ordinary readers. And Professor Renwick's work, for all its editorial scrupulosity, is left unindexed—not without detriment to the work. None the less, we are grateful to him for his exact labours, and to his publishers for issuing the book in so handsome a "format."

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Among the lost epistles attributed to Saint Paul, the so-called "Letter to the Laodiceans" holds a place. But it is spurious. The author of it evidently had in mind the words of the Apostle in Colossians iv. 16, but he misunderstood their meaning. Originally written in Greek, this Letter was, for centuries, occasionally inserted among the Canonical epistles, without any hint that it was other than genuine. Yet it may have some slight interest, even to-day, if only as showing how far the Pauline spirit had influenced the early Church. Jerome denounced the Letter as apocryphal, though it was largely read in the Eastern Churches. It is found in quite a number of ancient manuscripts, but the precise date of composition is unknown: possibly it may belong to the second century. The Greek original having been lost, we know it to-day only in a Latin version. I do not remember ever having seen an English translation, so I venture to give one here, duly noting that the text of the sentence marked with a dagger is obviously corrupt: I have endeavoured, however, to give the sense approximately.

"Paul, an apostle, not indeed of men or through man, but through Jesus Christ, to the brethren in Laodicea: grace be unto you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"I give thanks to Christ in all my prayers, in that ye abide steadfast in Him and constant in His work, waiting for the promise at the Judgement Day. Be not deceived by the vain speaking of some who would turn you aside from the truth of the Gospel that I preach. Now shall God bring it to pass that the things taught by me for the advancement of the truth, may by you be wrought, to the end ye may attain unto life eternal.†

"Already are my bonds manifest unto all, even those bonds which I suffer in Christ: wherein I greatly rejoice. And this, for me, is to everlasting salvation, which thing hath been accomplished by your prayers and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whether in life or death. For unto me Christ is life, and death is joy. And this end shall He bring to pass in you, that ye may possess the same love and be of one will.

"Therefore, beloved, even as ye have heard from me when I was present with you, so also do, unceasingly, in the fear of God; and it shall be unto you life for evermore, seeing it is God that worketh in you. And whatsoever ye do, do without wavering.

"For the rest, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord, and eschew them that defile themselves with lust of gain. Let all your supplications lie open before God, and continue immovable in the mind of Christ. And whatsoever is true and pure and chaste and just and worthy to be loved, that keep. And what ye have heard and have received, treasure in your hearts, and peace shall be with you.

"All the Saints salute you. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

"See to it that my letter to the Colossians be read also among you."

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Years ago, when I happened to be spending an hour or two in the company of that great scholar, the late Professor J. E. B. Mayor,

he frankly lamented the fact that English scholars, while producing edition after edition of familiar classics, were singularly neglectful of books really important in their way but unfamiliar to the majority. Certainly we have far more commentaries on Virgil, Homer, Horace, and so on, than we know what to do with; nor will future commentators be able, probably, to throw much further light upon these writers. The Professor mentioned one writer in particular whose claims on our attention had been, for so long, overlooked—Jerome in his letters. True, during the past year, a beginning has been made by way of rectifying this neglect; in the Loeb Library you will find now a volume of selections from the correspondence, with an English version. But this is not enough. Jerome's letters contain a wealth of information on all sorts of interesting topics; but, for a just understanding of them, a full exegesis is required. But nothing is being done. Again, it is surprising that such an historian as Ammianus Marcellinus is still left unedited, though the Germans have supplied us with a good (unannotated) text; and there are no translations available, apart from the old Bohn version —long since out of print—and the fine Tudor rendering by that "translator general of the age," Philemon Holland; and this huge folio is not easy to come by. English scholarship has done little or nothing for Ammianus. Another book that imperatively demands attention is the *Divine Institutes* of Lactantius, who, if not a deep thinker, had a clear grasp of his subject, and wrote in admirable Latin. No complete annotated edition of Lactantius appears to have been issued since Büneman's two volumes, and these are close on two hundred years old. Among Greek works, we look in vain for a commentary on Plutarch's once famous *Moralia*—a perfect mine of good things. And for a complete rendering we still have to consult the pages of (yet again) old Philemon Holland. The great scholars of the Renaissance, and later, had a far ampler reach than our specialists of to-day; and it would be a pious task to reprint their annotations, after winnowing out the wheat from the chaff, and revise their oftentimes inadequate texts. Gataker's edition of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius is a model edition which others might endeavour to imitate: his commentary, alike for fullness and erudition, has never been surpassed, yet it is getting on for three hundred years old. Those old scholars had a grasp of antiquity, in all its parts, which modern scholars, not seldom so departmental in their outlook, seem to lack.[1]

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It appears to be little known to most people that the cruel practice of *Suttee* (the English form of the native "sati" = a virtuous wife) is frequently alluded to in the Greek and Latin classics. As I am not aware that the passages, where the rite is mentioned, have so far been collected, I propose to set out, for the convenience of students, the chief of those passages. The earliest authority is

[1] Read Mayor's preface to the fourth edition of his Juvenal, pp. xi, xii (Vol. I, 1886).

HERODOTUS (v, 5), who writes as follows: "Among the Thracians the following custom is observed. Each man among them has many wives; no sooner does a husband die than a sharp rivalry takes place among his consorts on the question which of them the husband loved best. She to whom the honour is adjudged, after receiving the praises of men and women, is slain over the grave by the hand of her nearest relative, and is then buried with her husband. But the others deem it a great calamity, for nothing is considered a worse disgrace." Here, as we see, inhumation takes the place of the Indian concremation, but the principle is the same.

In the *Supplices* of EURIPIDES (1058–65) Evadne's story is introduced:

IPHIS. And dost thou then appear near both tomb and pyre?
EV. Aye, for I am come here as a glorious conqueror.
IPH. What is this victory of thine? I would fain hear.
EV. A victory over all women beholden by the sun.
IPH. In the works of Athena, or in wisdom of mind?
EV. In virtue; for, dying, I shall lie close by my husband.

To this episode the Roman poet MARTIAL (iv, 75), refers: "arserit Euadne flammis injecta mariti"; and OVID (*Tristia*, V, xiv, 37) has this distich:

> "Mark how the wives of Hector and Admetus,
> And how Evadne, steeled their hearts to mount
> The kindled pyres."

STRABO (first century B.C.) writes as follows (700, 714): "when the husbands [in Cathay] die, their wives are burned along with them"; and he gives, as a reason for the custom, that it was to prevent women from poisoning their husbands, adding that "the women were said to come voluntarily (*ἀσμένας*) to the pyre while those that hang back are held in dishonour." In DIODORUS SICULUS (xvii, 91) it is said that "there is a regular custom among these people that wives should be burned together with their [dead] husbands," and assigns to the custom the same reason alleged by Strabo. Diodorus in another passage (xix, 33) declares that this rule (*τὸ δόγμα*) of concremation applied to all women except those who were pregnant at the time, or were mothers already; a woman who refused such self-immolation was for ever debarred from the customary rites and sacrifices *ὡς ἀσεβοῦσαν*, as guilty of impiety.

There is a well-known passage in the poems of PROPERTIUS (III, xiii, 15–22) which may be roughly translated as follows: "Happy the funeral rites for eastern husbands, whom the blushing Dawn dyes with her steeds. For so soon as the last torch has been laid to the pyre, a crowd of devotees stand around with unbound hair, and strife arises about who shall die and follow her lord, alive; they deem it a disgrace not to be permitted so to do. Victoriously they burn, and yield themselves to the flame, and lay their scorched faces on their husband's bodies." CICERO, in his *Tusculan Disputations* (V, xxvii, 78) writes in similar fashion: "Women in India, when the husband of any one of them is dead, compete with one

another to decide whom the husband loved best (for each man has more than one wife, as a rule); and she who is victorious, followed by her kinsfolk, goes joyfully to lay herself alongside her husband on the pyre; the conquered rival goes sadly away."—The careful reader will note the words "certamen" and "victrix," which appear in many of these extracts.

The brief statement of VALERIUS MAXIMUS (first century A.D.) differs little from that of other writers: "Indian women, inasmuch as by ancestral custom several are married to the same man, on the death of the husband fall to great *strife*, to decide which of them he loved most. The *victorious* wife, exulting in her joy, is escorted to the pyre by friends and kinsmen all wearing cheerful looks, and casts herself upon the flaming pyre, and is burned together with the husband as if she were the luckiest of women. The surviving wives, with sorrow and in mourning, remain alive" (II, vi, 14).

Next we come to AELIAN (second century A.D.): "Among the Indians, when the husbands die, their wives submit to the same funeral pyre. This is an object of ambition among the women, and the one chosen by lot is cremated [alive] with the man." PLUTARCH, in the *Moralia*, 499 *c.*, also speaks of the practice thus: "The honest and chaste dames of the Indians, such as entirely love their husbands, strive and are ready to fight with one another about the funeral fire; and as for her who obtaineth the victory and is burned therein together with the dead corpse of her husband, all the rest do deem right happy and testify so much in their hymns and songs" (Phil: Holland's version, 1603). EUSEBIUS, in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* (277D) thus briefly alludes to "suttee": "Indians burn their dead, and with them burn their wives with their own consent (ἑκούσας)." It is remarkable how constantly (though not always) this point of their willingness to undergo the fearful ordeal is stressed. See quotations from Strabo and Valerius Maximus.

Later on we find that Jerome, in his diatribe against Jovinian (I, xliii), has more than one chapter dealing with "suttee": one paragraph here will suffice: "The Indians and almost all barbarians have a plurality of wives. It is a law with them that the favourite wife must be burned with her dead husband. The wives therefore vie with one another for the husband's love, and the highest ambition of the rivals, and the proof of chastity, is to be considered worthy of death. So then, she that is victorious (cf. 'victrix' above), having put on her former dress and adornments, lies down beside the corpse, embracing it, and to the glory of chastity despises the flames as they burn beneath her." Cf. Marco Polo, *Travels*, III, 20.

In later times we find plenty of allusions to this rite of concremation, e.g. Montaigne, *Essays*, II, 29, and Tennyson, *Death of Œnone*:

> "And muffling up her comely head, and crying
> 'Husband!' she leapt upon the funeral pile,
> And mixt herself with him, and past in fire."

It is perhaps worth remarking, in reference to this last passage, that Apollodorus, III, xii, 5, gives a slightly different account; according

to him Œnone died another death by her own hand after the death of Paris : *ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν*, she hanged herself.

The late Professor Max Müller (*Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. iv) [1] shows that " suttee " never formed a part of Indian religion in its older and purer form, but that the practice was justified through a flagrant corruption of the Vedic text by priests. " Tantum *relligio* potuit suadere malorum."

[1] Cf. Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, p. 252 ; E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. I, p. 465.