

THE USE OF MEMORY: PUBLISHING AND OTHER PURSUITS by Tom Burns. *Sheed and Ward*. 1993. Pp. 202. £19.95.

Autobiography is described as “the writing of one’s own history”—perhaps that implies from one’s own point of view. Tom Burns has lived a long and so enthusiastic life, with varied and sometimes fascinating activities. He is now 87 years old, though much of the book must have been written some years ago. The first chapter is titled “The Vanished World of Wimbledon”, where, after being born in Chile, he spent his early childhood. The world has changed several times since the First World War; and I fear that these changes have resulted in an ignorance, even among those who are now becoming middle-aged, of what and who have gone before. All the more reason, therefore, for the reader to be told of worlds out of which our present lives have developed. Stonyhurst in the 1920s, “finishing” in Paris for a year or so, then import-export, and, through the Catholic Evidence Guild meeting Frank Sheed, who was just starting the publishers Sheed and Ward. Soon Tom Burns would start his own review that he called “Order”. This now never seen review has disappeared into the mists, but its founder remembers it as “penetrating deeper into the heartland of contemporary problems”. Only he can tell us now of the experience of editing “Order”; there was “more than a whiff of Paris in the review”. But how often one wishes that he would tell us much more. That world of Aldous Huxley and Ottoline Morrell, of Christopher Dawson and Father Martin d’Arcy—should one need to put SJ after his name to identify him?—of Thomas Gilby and Gerald Vann, both OP. “Maritain and his Dominican mentors like Clerrisac and Garrigou-Lagrange” have long since vanished. We would like to be told more of the whys and wherefores, and especially how a close friendship with David Jones and Eric Gill was compatible with “dancing debutante days” and with General Franco, whose entry in the book’s index is larger than anyone else’s.

After Frank Sheed declined to accept Tom Burns as a partner in Sheed and Ward, Burns moved to Longmans, Greens and Co to where, it seems, he head-hunted “my leading authors at Sheed and Ward”. He had great ideas of reform; “the Catholic list had virtually withered away, the book design was drab beyond belief”—the “literary tradition had virtually disappeared”. But the war of 1939 demolished all these dreams, and after the war the firm “virtually lost its identity; no place for me, I decided”.

Tom Burns returned to London from Spain, where he had been Press Attaché at the embassy, at the end of the war: he came to take charge of Burns and Oates; his experience was apparently much needed. After two years he headed what seems to have been a management take-over, at the suggestion of the chairman, Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre. The terms were “not too onerous” characteristic of Oliver CE—and a re-structuring programme was developed with Burns and Oates, *The Tablet* and also *The Universe* on which everything else depended financially, but which the new chairman “abhorred”. The board was impatient for results. “None of them (including Douglas Woodruff) were interested in my books except

as merchandise—never as messages”. It is odd to me that Douglas Woodruff is presented as having no interest in the books. So the firm went into voluntary liquidation, to be bought by Herders. After three years Herders went “into a disorderly retreat” and apparently the assets of Burns and Oates were scattered.

In 1967, Tom Burns inherited the editorship of *The Tablet* after Woodruff’s thirty one years. Woodruff, we are told here was not a great editor. I remember the Dominican, Bede Jarrett, who presided over “the vintage years of that ancient Order in England”, telling me in 1933 that before anyone disagreed with Woodruff they should carefully review their evidence. Let me only say that I do not recognise the Douglas Woodruff presented in these pages, (though, of course, Tom knew Douglas Woodruff far better than I), nor the statistics of *The Tablet*’s history under his editorship. They appear fundamentally to differ from those presented by Michael Walsh in his “*The Tablet*”, published in 1990. For example, we are told (p. 145) that the average age of readers of *The Tablet* when Douglas Woodruff left was “over seventy years”. But in Michael Walsh’s book (p. 63) we are told that “no less than 72% of them were under 55 years old or more”. That, of course is old enough. Michael Walsh wrote that there was little obvious need for Woodruff to retire in 1966; “he was still running a paper that, at least judged by its circulation figures, was as successful as it had ever been”. Yet Tom Burns (p. 167) writes that “today the list of subscribers is more than double what it was when I took over from Douglas Woodruff”. Michael Walsh says that the average age of readers is much as it was. Now the circulation is about double that which the present editor inherited from Tom Burns, who had presided over “a steep and steady decline to a nadir of not quite 8500 in 1978”. (“*The Tablet*” p. 68). I presume these anti-Wodruff passages were written before Michael Walsh’s book was published. There have been two years or so in which to make the corrections. *The Tablet* reviewer called this book, even with its sharp edges, “a gem”; he also referred to Douglas as “the great and cultivated Douglas Woodruff”. I go along with that description; surely he was greater than any of the historic editors of *The Tablet*, even though he himself seems to have disappeared for a time into a vanished world. Tom Burns has tried to re-create his version of that vanished world in *The Use of Memory*.

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ETHICS IN AN AGE OF TECHNOLOGY by Ian Barbour, *The Gifford Lectures Volume 2*, SCM Press 1992, 312 pp, £17.50.

This book is a serious attempt to come to terms with the multiple ways in which new technologies are changing our lives, and to sort out the good from the bad. Rejecting both the optimism of Technology as Liberator, and the pessimism of Technology as Threat, Professor Barbour wants to provide human and environmental standards by which modern technologies may be judged. Scenarios of future technological heavens or