

LORD ACTON AND THE CATHOLIC REVIEWS

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A VARIETY of books recently published on Lord Acton's historical and political ideas testifies to a general Acton revival. His preoccupation with the safeguards of liberty in the modern State and with the problems of power has rightly been found to have a special relevance to our own times; more so than it had to the comparatively tranquil days of Acton's own generation. But, as so often happens when people set out to discover a prophet, he defies the seekers. Rare are those wise men who follow a star, expecting to find a king, and recognize at once what they really find. In Lord Acton's case, too, there has been a good deal of shooting at crows and hitting of pigeons, and when the controversial dust stirred up by the Acton revivalists has settled, it may be discovered that his real greatness was not primarily that of the historian or political thinker at all, important and stimulating as his ideas are. It will be found that he was not a Liberal Catholic but a Catholic Liberal, which is a very different thing; that his political and historical ideas are not the expected panacea for our own ills, but need recasting in the contemporary moulds. But Abbot Gasquet's judgment will then not have been invalidated; it was that Acton's greatest claim to the attention of a later generation lies in his work as a Catholic journalist and editor, and in the part he played in the mid-nineteenth century, at a critical period in the history of English Catholics.

Sir John Acton was twenty-three years old when in 1857 he began his journalistic activities on the *Weekly Register*. In the following year he became associated with *The Rambler*, which, in 1862, was continued under the new name of *The Home and Foreign Review*, and owing to ecclesiastical opposition, ceased publication in 1864. There followed two short-lived experiments with which Acton was closely connected, the fortnightly *Chronicle*, which lived from 1867 till 1868, and the quarterly *North British Review* which died in 1871, but these two periodicals were not strictly Catholic reviews, though largely written by Catholics. Acton's activity as a Catholic journalist thus covered barely ten

years, but they were the most fruitful ones of his whole life.

The young Acton had spent seven years in Munich, studying history and classics in the home of the ecclesiastical historian, Professor Doellinger, because as a Catholic he found the English Universities barred to him. He had also travelled widely in Europe, Russia and the United States. But his mind was formed in German ways, and at a time when historical studies were passing from the artistic Gibbonian era to the scientific era dominated by Ranke. Moreover, Acton's family connections—the Dalbergs and Arco-Valleys in Southern Germany, the Minghettis in Cavour's Italy, Lord Granville in England, had deepened his interests in the affairs of the day in Church and State. With such a cosmopolitan background his return from Munich to the quietness of the family seat at Aldenham was something of an anti-climax.

Throughout Europe the Catholic revival was then certainly a cultural if not as yet a political factor. In England, however, it was mainly an ecclesiastical factor to which of course Newman's conversion and the restoration of the Hierarchy in 1851 had given the impetus. The Second Spring in England needed much sunshine yet.

One aspect of the influx of new converts into the Church was that some of the married members of the Oxford Movement, finding the Catholic priesthood barred to them, took up Catholic journalism as the next best thing. *The Tablet* was founded in 1840 as a Liberal organ by Frederic Lucas, a convert from the Quakers but, as Mr Douglas Woodruff put it, 'with little of their pacific qualities'.¹ Henry Wilberforce conducted the *Weekly Register*. Frederic Capes founded *The Rambler* in 1848, and in 1856 he was joined by another convert clergyman, Richard Simpson, a former vicar of Mitcham, who until his death in 1874 was to be Acton's closest friend and editorial colleague on *The Rambler*, *The Home and Foreign Review*, and *The Chronicle*. There was Thomas Wetherall, another convert clergyman; Newman himself edited two numbers of *The Rambler* in 1859 to make up for the scandal caused in certain quarters when this journal described St Augustine as the Father of Jansenism.

The convert element, that is, mostly the men from the Universities, thus dominated the scene of early Catholic journalism

¹ Introduction to *Essays on Church and State*. (Hollis and Carter.)

in England, and their efforts to educate the English Catholic body and remedy its want of spirit after three centuries of ghetto existence must be placed against the background of the English Catholics in the mid-century. It was also of some significance that the Catholic press began its life in England either before, or simultaneously with, the new Hierarchy. That fact accounted and accounts for an element of freedom which the Catholic press in Catholic countries has rarely enjoyed, being so largely a product and organ of the Hierarchy.

It was understandable that Cardinal Wiseman should accuse the converts of setting up a convert party against the old Catholics, and the conflict between them, arising from a mutual lack of understanding of each other's standpoint, was as regrettable as it was unavoidable. Intellectually, the English scene was barren. 'Our old families', Richard Simpson wrote in 1859, 'our Catholic aristocracy, where they cultivate literature at all, have been so long accustomed to go to the general English literature that they never think of looking for distinctly Catholic books or periodicals, except as furniture for their oratories or chapels, and only extend a contemptuous patronage to the efforts of those who would get up a Catholic literature. We are consequently left to the patronage of the lower orders who are satisfied with a periodical literature of which almost every other religious body would have reason to be ashamed. Our novels are controversial or sentimental sermons decanted into trashy stories; our social science consists of the depreciation of the intellectual and moral conditions of our religious antagonists.'

There is a sensitive description by Archbishop Mathew in *Acton: The Formative Years* of the stuffy world Acton encountered and disliked after his return from Munich. It is of the country house at Thorndon where Acton met Cardinal Wiseman again in 1861. 'The atmosphere was that of a close preserve with the principals alike unaware either of their impending poverty or of their sometimes startling riches. Agricultural values in those decades before the great depression did well by the landlord of the Old Religion who spent his life on his own acres. There was all the business of a *coterie* as these cousins met with their great trailing families of Welds, Vaughans and Cliffords. There the old phalanx stood, the red carpet laid for the Cardinal on the hallsteps at Talacre. The ladies ready in their crinolines, prepared

to curtsy to his Eminence. The conversation feathered round the ghost of Ince where William Blundell was still reported to drag his lame leg on the stoneflagged passage. It was a little society in which romanticism channelled religion. The ladies would aver that the ghosts were souls in Purgatory demanding Masses. Upstairs the red lamp winked before the Spanish crucifix and its light just defined the new French work of devotion on the prie-dieu, the pages neatly marked with lace-fringed pictures. The air was laden with a warm secluded piety. In the gun-room the servants worked away.'

How natural for the converts to feel impatient with the intellectual and spiritual backwardness and complacency of their fellow-Catholics. But it was not after all their fault that they had been barred from the English Universities, and that the French Revolution had deprived them of the centres of higher education, like Douai, which during penal law times had been open to them on the Continent. The Catholics felt irritated for being lectured at by these newcomers, and resented that their loyalty to the Faith should be castigated by zealous neophytes. The vituperations between them were remarkable. 'Compared with other classes and religious bodies', wrote *The Rambler* in 1849, 'Catholics attack one another with a virulence, an uncharitableness, a reckless imputation of motives, and an ungentlemanly coarseness of language which can be paralleled in no other society professing to be guided by religious principles and to be restrained by the laws of common humanity.'

It was the old conflict between the Elder and the Prodigal Son, deepened by a feeling on the part of the former that the converted newcomers were unbalanced in their attachment to their common home and that they were advocating dangerous theological doctrines. In the year 1848 in which *The Rambler* was founded, Cardinal Wiseman, himself the founder, ten years earlier, of the *Dublin Review*, wrote this about the tasks of the laity: 'The Church does indeed often want your zealous co-operation, your social influence, your learning or ready pen, your skilful pencil, your brilliant talents, your weighty name, your abundant means. But the direction, the rule belongs to us. We will call you forth when the Church of God wants your aid; we will always gladly see you working with us, but we cannot permit you to lead, where religious interests are concerned.' The Cardinal was

not unsympathetic to the converts but he was not, with his own Spanish-Irish background, pleased with laymen freely voicing their opinions, and theological opinions at that, or criticizing the ecclesiastical Government. The *Dublin Review* expressed what he felt about these problems. In matters historical it was the custom to explain away or to deny what 'blots' there were in the past history of the Church. On the other side stood *The Rambler* in the eyes of which 'whitewashing' was the worst of sins. It derived about as much enjoyment from dragging the historical skeletons out of the Catholic cupboard, as Mr Graham Greene today in quite a different domain. Unpleasant facts had to be faced. *The Rambler* held that doing this was an essential condition for the growth of the Catholic mind.

Newman who said that you could not have a sinless literature about a sinful world was sympathetic. He desired to see a cultivated and educated laity able to defend their Faith. 'In all times', he wrote in 1851, 'the laity have been the measure of Catholicism.' During his own brief editorship of *The Rambler* in 1859 Newman expanded his views on the laity. In an editorial note on the Bishop's attitude towards the Royal Commission then sitting on the Poor Law Schools, he said that if the laity were consulted as they lately had been consulted on the dogma of the Immaculate Conception they should also be consulted in practical questions 'before the bishops took any step which perhaps they could not recall'. In the following number, in July 1859, Newman published his essay 'On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine', which was censured in Rome and which caused him to resign the editorship.

Acton then took over as owner together with Richard Simpson and Capes, the founder of *The Rambler*. The Editors were Acton and Wetherall with Simpson, but owing to Acton's frequent absences abroad and his duties as a member of Parliament, Simpson was invariably left in sole charge of the actual running of *The Rambler*. Editorial conferences mostly took the form of letters exchanged between Sir John Acton and Richard Simpson. Simpson's personality is of some importance for an understanding of the difficulties which *The Rambler* encountered, and for which he bore a share of the responsibility. He was undoubtedly one of the most able writers of the Oxford converts. His biography of Campion remains, as Mr Evelyn Waugh notes

in the introduction to his own life of Campion, the authoritative work on the saint. He was a Shakespearean scholar of note and as an essayist had modelled himself on the style of Lamb, but had more substance. His one weakness—and a fatal one it proved in the circumstances—was his great sense of robust fun and an inability to pay the respect and reverence due to persons in authority, especially ecclesiastical authority. In Simpson they invariably evoked the opposite trait. Newman criticized Simpson's writings for a 'provoking habit of peashooting at any dignitary who looked out the window as he passed along the road'. And Acton often had to restrain him. 'It will be a great advantage', he put it mildly in one letter to Simpson, 'if like some of the quarterlies which keep a jester, like kings of old, we separate our wit from our wisdom and putting the former into a place by itself, avoid the danger of making a connection in our serious articles. Your pen, as the French have it, *déborde quelquefois*, as you very well know. Why should there not be a special limbo for *facetiae* too good to be altogether omitted and yet unfit for appearance in the midst of graver things?' Once Acton had to rebuke him for not ending an article 'as the Pythagoreans ended the day, with a hymn, but like a scorpion's tail with a sting'.

The charge continually brought against *The Rambler* by its critics was that it dabbled in theological speculation, but in those days of the declining temporal power, years before the dogma of Papal Infallibility established a clearer division of what was and was not of the Faith, it was very difficult for any intelligent Catholic to keep clear of theology. In self-defence Simpson wrote to Bishop Grant of Southwark on April 23rd, 1862: 'Brought up as I was, I have no other resource but literature. And being a Catholic, I cannot help writing as a Catholic—in matters defined taking the one side defined; in doubtful matters choosing my side according to my convictions and trying to recommend my opinion to others. I am convinced in what I have written I have not gainsaid any definition of the Church, nor gone beyond the liberty of all Catholics in doubtful points. And I am convinced also, in spite of many blunders and follies, the general line I have taken is one that is supremely necessary for the cause of truth.' *The Rambler's* motto was: *In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*. Simpson's charity was supreme. Next came the emphasis on liberty in doubtful matters.

Acton's contribution to this literary partnership was a complementary one. Simpson, who was fourteen years his senior, had the drive, Acton indicated the direction. Simpson's interests were literary, political, theological and metaphysical; Acton had a sound historical training and a vast knowledge, and he was familiar with current affairs in Europe, being related to or knowing most of the chief actors in them. Simpson liked playing the part of the devil's advocate; Acton's was the voice of prudence. With an eye on the formidable opposition confronting them, Acton wrote to Simpson: 'It will be a prodigious tactical error if we begin the attack, or if we go farther to the left. We may speak more openly, but we must not speak more onesidedly and partially. On the contrary our dodge is not to leave them any legitimate ground which they can occupy to our exclusion on the great questions of the day. It must not be said that we confine our view to one aspect of things or that we overlook important considerations in the eagerness to help a particular opinion to its rights'. (October 1st, 1861.) Two days later he emphasized the same point: 'We must trim our sails according to the new state of the weather, justifying our character before the world as the lay Catholic organ.'

That was what, a hundred years ago, *The Rambler* wanted to be: the lay Catholic organ. 'My principle', Acton wrote, 'is peace among Catholics; for Protestants of good will a golden bridge; polemics to be directed chiefly against freethinkers.' Acton's aim was a platform for the instruction of his English fellow-Catholics and that indeed *The Rambler* became. He disliked the shallow apologetics of Faber, Morris, Ward and Dalgairns and their lack of scientific method and of original learning. Apologetics he detested. He wrote to Simpson (January 19th, 1859): 'You want things to be brought to bear, to have an effect. I think our studies ought to be all but purposeless. They want to be pursued with chastity like mathematics. This at least is my profession of faith.'

He was interested in the political education of Catholics. There is, he said, a philosophy of politics to be derived from Catholicism on the one hand and from the principles of our British Constitution on the other—a system as remote from the absolutism of one set of Continental Catholics as from the doctrinaire constitutionalism of another set. He recommended the reading of Burke

as a teacher for Catholics. He showed how in France and Germany schools of writers had arisen at that time who could deal with philosophical, historical and theological subjects in a scientific and impartial manner and were doing more to exonerate the Church from the charges of her opponents than her zealous defenders. And he was particularly concerned with the methods of controversy. The true ultramontane, he wrote, and that was what he himself wished to be, 'is one who makes no parade of his religion, who meets his adversaries on grounds which they understand and acknowledge; who appeals to no extrinsic considerations—benevolence or force, or interest, or artifice—in order to establish his point; who discusses each topic on its intrinsic merit—answering the critic by a severer criticism, the metaphysician by closer reasoning, the historian by deeper learning, the politician by sounder politics and indifference itself by a purer impartiality.'

The Rambler and its successor, *The Home and Foreign Review* soon made their mark in England and abroad. At a time of flourishing quarterly reviews, when people had time to read articles of generally no less than thirty or forty pages, Mathew Arnold could say of them: 'Perhaps in no organ of criticism in this country was there so much knowledge, so much play of mind'. Acton obtained the collaboration of the best European scholars. Doellinger and Constantin Frantz, the German Federalist and Bismarck's opponent, wrote from Germany; the fascinating convert Baron d'Eckstein contributed from France among other articles an outstanding essay on Lamennais, which is of some interest for the political tone of these journals. They were liberal in the English sense of the word, and if sympathetic to the Continental Liberals, nevertheless extremely critical of their anti-clerical traditions and of their policies aimed at enlarging the functions of centralized Government. 'If these Liberals have one thing in common', Acton said, 'it is their disregard for liberty.'
The Rambler and *The Home and Foreign Review* had as little time for Lamennais, the Father of Christian Democracy, as for the Catholic absolutists such as de Bonald, because both were basing their systems on a historical misconception, namely on the belief that the theocracies of antiquity and the Middle Ages were meant to be the permanent order of things, whereas they represented in fact a phase of decline.

The contributions to these periodicals were animated by one aim: to reconcile Catholics with the modern world as it had emerged from the French Revolution. Simpson often made the important point that the prejudice against the Church among educated Englishmen was not so much a religious prejudice against her dogmas as an ethical and political prejudice. 'They think that no Catholic can be truthful, honest or free, and if he tries to be so publicly, he is at once subject to persecution.' The existence of *The Rambler* was to be an answer to this prejudice.

It is difficult to imagine who the readers of these periodicals were, given the Catholic situation in the 1850s. Readers among the old families were no doubt few; converts and Anglican clergymen composed the main group, and there were readers on the Continent and in the United States. Mr Gladstone was a subscriber, as we know, and the beginning of his later friendship with Acton was the letter Gladstone wrote to the young editor praising his essay on 'The Causes of the American Revolution' in the *May Rambler* of 1861. The circulation of the reviews was naturally limited, from 500 to 3,000 copies, and the business side, as indeed the possibility of expansion, did not seem to have much interested either Acton or Simpson. Both had independent means and added out of their own funds to cover expenses and to pay contributors, a practice introduced by Acton who felt strongly on that subject.

The most impressive section of *The Rambler* and *The Home and Foreign Review* were the unsigned book reviews. Reviewing was a very serious business in those days and handled by Acton in the thorough German fashion. In one issue of *The Home and Foreign Review* alone there were ninety-four notices of books, of which Acton had written thirty-four, each a competent criticism, showing familiarity with the relevant documents, with the latest authorities on the subject, and with modern methods of criticism. 'There are fifteen books on the subject', wrote one reviewer scornfully, discussing a point of medieval scholarship, 'but the author seems to have heard of only three.' There was no other periodical in England to compete with the literary scholarship of *The Rambler* and its informed opinion on foreign publications and continental affairs.

But impressive as all this was, the venture was bound to come to an end sooner or later. Newman constantly counselled prudence.

In one letter to Acton he enumerated four mistakes of which he thought the editors guilty: first, to have departed from the original concept of *The Rambler* as a purely literary magazine with the purpose of raising the tone of Catholic writing in England; second, to have taken up theology and treated it in magazine fashion; third, that this was done by laymen; and finally, that there had been attacks, often disguised, and mostly scathingly ironical, on ecclesiastical personalities. The young Acton resented Newman's criticism, knowing that it came from the man who more than anyone else professed to be on his side but dared not say so publicly. But all were agreed that theology should be dropped, though this was difficult enough under the continuous artillery fire from the *Dublin Review* and *The Tablet* where theological arguments were used to strengthen the 'ecclesiastical' case, particularly to defend Manning's extreme views on the temporal Power. *The Rambler*, which foresaw that the temporal power was passing away, and was anyhow only an accidental, historical accretion of the Church, caused grave misgivings in Rome and in ecclesiastical circles in England. Because of these misgivings the name *Rambler* had to be dropped, and the review reappeared with much the same programme and staff as the quarterly *Home and Foreign Review* in July 1862. After eight issues, in April 1864, the end came. It was a voluntary death and on that account perhaps all the more tragic.

The immediate cause was the Apostolic Brief which Pope Pius IX addressed to the Archbishop of Munich on the subject of the Munich Congress of the previous September. This was a gathering of some hundred German Catholic professors and theologians, concerned as Acton put it 'to infuse a new spirit into the Catholic body, and to create a new and authoritative centre of learning, which shall prevent hereafter the conflict between science and religion. It will enable the Catholic writers of Germany to vindicate the Church from the reproach that faith is inimical to freedom, that we are hampered in our investigations, that we acknowledge a power which may prevent the publicity of truth, or impose untruths on our belief.' The Apostolic Brief reminded the faithful of the submission due to the Index and ecclesiastical discipline, and it was understood by Acton and Doellinger as having an important bearing on the whole purpose of *The Home and Foreign Review*, though this periodical was not specially

mentioned. It seemed however to Acton that by censuring the principles for which it stood, Rome had indirectly censured his own review. 'Catholic writers', he said, 'are not bound only by those decisions of the infallible Church which regard articles of faith; they must also submit to the theological decisions of the Roman Congregations and the opinions that are commonly received in the schools. And it is wrong, though not heretical, to reject these decisions or opinions.'

Acton judged it therefore both more respectful to the Holy See and loyal to the principles which he had defended in the Review, to interpret the words of the Pope as they were really meant rather than elude their consequences by subtle distinctions. One of these principles was the recognition of the infinite gulf which in theology separates what is of faith from what is not of faith; another, the recognition of the practical difference which exists in ecclesiastical discipline between the acts of infallible authority and those which possess no higher sanction than that of canonical legality. He went on to say that it was the design of the Holy See not of course to deny the distinction between dogma and opinion but to reduce the practical recognition of it among Catholics to the smallest possible limits.

He felt that it would be wrong for him to abandon principles that were sincerely held or to assail the authority that assails them. 'The principles have not ceased to be true, nor the authority to be legitimate because the two are in contradiction. To submit the intellect and conscience without examining the reasonableness and justice of this decree, or to reject the authority on the ground of its having been abused, would equally be a sin, on one side against morals, on the other against faith. The conscience cannot be relieved by casting on the administrators of ecclesiastical discipline the whole responsibility of preserving religious truth; nor can it be emancipated by a virtual apostasy. For the Church is neither a despotism in which the convictions of the faithful possess no power of expressing themselves, nor is it an organized anarchy where the judicial and administrative powers cannot command submission.'

The answer to the dilemma, as it seemed to Acton, was to 'sacrifice the existence of the Review to the defence of its principles, in order that I may combine the obedience which is due to legitimate ecclesiastical authority with an equally conscientious

maintenance of the rightful and necessary liberty of thought. A conjecture like the present does not perplex the conscience of a Catholic; for his obligation to refrain from wounding the peace of the Church is neither more nor less real than that of professing nothing beside or against his convictions.' And he concluded the last number of *The Home and Foreign Review*, 'a partial and temporary embodiment', as he described it, 'of an imperishable idea', with these moving words: 'The principles it has upheld will not die with it, but will find their destined advocates and triumph in their appointed time. From the beginning of the Church it has been a law of her nature, that the truths which eventually proved themselves the legitimate products of her doctrine, have had to make their slow way upwards through a phalanx of hostile habits and traditions, and to be rescued, not only from open enemies, but also from friendly hands that were not worthy to defend them.'

Those words have not lost their force in the hundred years that have passed since, and we might ask ourselves what are the lessons to be learned from that pioneering experiment of Catholic journalism. Much has changed in the Church since Acton ceased to be an editor. For one, the tone of controversy among Catholics and indeed also with those outside the Church has changed. There has been a general growth of conformism since the dogma of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed in 1870. But this dogma removed from the field of theological and political speculation what throughout the nineteenth century and the attacks on the Temporal Power had been the central problem of Catholic discussion. How different the history of Europe might have been had that clarifying dogma been proclaimed fifty years earlier, thus releasing the Catholic intellectual energies and interests to cope with the burning problems of the times which the French and Industrial Revolutions had posed. As it was, Catholics were late in adjusting themselves to that new world. They had found the true bearings of the Rock of St Peter, but the modern national and democratic state meanwhile had to find its bearings without the Catholics. *Rerum Novarum* was the first papal recognition of the social question decades after the publication of Marx's *Das Kapital*, and democracy, too, was finally deemed acceptable only by Pope Leo XIII when the modern world had already been accustomed to deal with both problems without the

Church. The same is true today of the Catholic acceptance of Christian Democracy, which has become generally respectable while fifty, or indeed thirty years ago, such an acceptance of Christian Democracy, say in Italy, might have prevented the rise to power of Fascism. But the Catholic world was not very favourably disposed to Don Sturzo in those days.

These considerations bring me to my final point, which is the importance of public opinion inside the Church and the impossibility of separating that public opinion from the mass of the faithful, the laity. The present Holy Father has repeatedly recognized its significance. St Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians (4, 14) said: 'We are no longer to be children, no longer to be like storm-tossed sailors, driven before the wind of each new doctrine that human subtlety, human skill in fabricating lies, may propound. We are to follow the truth, in a spirit of charity, and so grow up in everything into a due proportion with Christ, who is our head.' This sense of Christian maturity was used by Pope Pius XI for the development of the principle of subsidiary functions, meaning that the individual should not be deprived by the larger group of what he can do himself and unaided. This principle, so it seems to me, applies in a special sense to the function of public opinion in the Church, and it was vindicated by the work of the Catholic reviews in Acton's times; it was again vindicated recently, when a leading article in *The Tablet* discussed a decision of the Holy Office relating to Catholic participation in the Council of Christians and Jews. If public opinion in the Church, this leading article argued, is considered necessary as the present Holy Father's repeated utterances show that it is, then the faithful ought not merely be expected to submit to a decision without reasons stated, but ought to be fully informed why this decision was thought necessary.

To develop a sense of Christian maturity is in a special way the task of a Catholic review, and of the layman. And he has an excellent case provided by the authority of the Gospel. Three simple lay people—and women at that—were thought worthy of being given the first news of our Lord's Resurrection. They had no rank or position in the Church; indeed, one of them, Mary Magdalen, hardly could be said to belong to the best Jerusalem society. But the Holy Spirit makes use of the strangest media. And not merely did the Angel tell the news first to three women,

he commissioned them also to inform the Apostles. 'So they came out and ran away from the tomb' and told the Apostles. 'But to their minds the story seemed madness and they could not believe it', St Luke writes. Only Peter rose up and ran to the tomb, and when he found confirmation of the women's story, he was 'full of surmise over what had befallen'.

Here then you have the noblest justification for the layman's place in the public opinion of the Church. The three women at the tomb, concerned as they were with 'news', may well be considered the first journalists. Their 'scoop' was a tomb, sealed and guarded, and yet empty. It was understandable that serious and dignified men like the apostles should find, to say the least, the story incredible, or at any rate the kind of story you might expect to hear from women. But they were not to be put off so easily, and finally Peter and John were persuaded to see for themselves, and to register, as it were officially, the miracle of the Resurrection. We might conclude from this that the function of public opinion in the Church is not only a matter of 'giving a lead', of receiving the necessary instructions and marching orders from above; but that it has its own independent and rightful place everywhere and at all times. The three women acted on their own initiative. They were impelled and called only by their love for our Lord. And they happened to be on the spot.