

EDWARDIAN ENGLAND 1901-1914 ed. Simon Nowell-Smith: *Oxford University Press, 75s.*  
 SCENES OF EDWARDIAN LIFE by Charles Petrie: *Eyre and Spottiswoode, 35s.*

'The England I remember was the one I left in 1914 and I was happy to go on remembering it that way. Besides I had the Maharajah's army to command – that was my world, and I loved it, all of it. At the time it looked like going on forever. If only it could have gone on forever.' These wistful lines from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* suggest something of the spell that the years just before the first world war exert over our most turbulent contemporary critics. It can hardly be doubted that distance lends enchantment to the view, but it is a view which is peculiarly evocative today – it seems to offer one affluent society the opportunity to see the style and idiom of another. And that it is another, the details of the myth make abundantly clear – the veteran motor cars, the gleaming buckets of champagne (the decade 1900-10 marks the highest recorded consumption of that drink), the spas and gaming-tables at Marienbad and Baden-Baden, the endless garden parties with the *décor* taken from *My Fair Lady* and the music from Elgar. But technicoloured though the picture may be, readers of *Edwardian England* are made quickly aware that documentation is available.

A clue as to why this myth should have such discernable roots in reality is given in the sentence with which Miss Marghanita Laski opens her excellent chapter on 'Domestic Life'. 'In so far', she writes, 'as any single group in a community imposes a popular image of its domestic life on an age, for Edwardian England that group was the very rich'. Wealth rather than class shapes the image, money was more easily acquired than blood. This is coming close to applying the time-honoured epithet to the Edwardian age that it was vulgar – but this 'vulgarity' cannot simply be dismissed in the ostentatious display of wealth and power, it was a symptom too of a new social mobility, the class barriers were lowering, the door of the rich man's castle was ajar, and the poor man

stood no longer so statuesquely at his gate. 'Getting-on' was not the simple gospel according to Samuel Smiles; the concept was deepened, Fabian ideals were effectively entering the practical world of politics, the Labour Party was born, the Suffragette movement decorated the streets of London with banners, and Lord Northcliffe was turning the uses of literacy to hitherto unknown and spectacular ends. It was this social dynamism together with a glowing self-awareness that effectively contributes to the 'vulgar' element in Edwardian society; to catch a similar vibration and notice a similar response today we can usefully think of Texas. 'Whether with plenty or in poverty Edwardian life was essentially based on material values and if religion played in several groups an important social part, there were few in which it was cherished as of spiritual value.' Miss Laski's summary seems too stark to accept if we think of some of the many biographies and autobiographies that have been written about the period and an essay like Lawrence's 'Hymns in a Man's Life' clearly speaks for many. Unquestionably, it was not a period of spiritual ferment – it had none of the high anguish of the mid-Victorians and the mood of *In Memoriam* was more alien to Edwardian ears than to our own. But we should be wary of judging the religious sense of the age too much in terms of the literature and speculation it produced and to see Edwardian religion as a form of socially acceptable behaviour is to categorize spirituality too easily. One of the points that is made several times in the course of *Edwardian England* is that religious impulses were finding more generous outlets in educational and political channels. But this secular idealism goes back deep into the nineteenth century and in *Culture and Anarchy* – that quintessential Victorian critique – it finds a memorable expression. These years certainly do see the end of one particular piety; after the first world war the

sense of the family was never to be the same again and this was true in every social class.

Like its predecessor *Early Victorian England*, published some thirty years ago, *Edwardian England* exhibits in good measure one of the great qualities of a symposium in that it manages to convey in an authoritative way the variety of the period without pressing that variety into the mould of a thesis. From this point of view, the chapters on 'The Political Scene', 'The Economy', 'Domestic Life', and 'Thought' are particularly valuable. Roger Fulford on 'The King' seems uncertain about just what kind of essay he is writing – an official encyclopaedia entry, or a more personal assessment. The result is a certain vapidness in which sentences like this – 'one of his biographers tells us that like all polyglots the King was a dull letter-writer, but we are left wondering whether there was in fact anything deeper to his character' – make too frequent an appearance.

The major weakness of the symposium is in its treatment of literature, or, more accurately, in its omission of literature. Its place is taken by a chapter entitled 'Reading' written by Derek Hudson. This chapter, while bringing together interesting information about the best sellers of the day, the establishing of such famous series as 'World's Classics', 'Everyman', 'The Home University Library', and current newspapers and periodicals, cannot, within its terms of reference, examine the ways in which the serious literature reflected and was shaped by the age. This is work, which calls for the literary critic, and a valuable opportunity for a serious assessment of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy (to confine attention to those authors which Simon Nowell-Smith in his editorial chapter refers to as 'essentially Edwardian') is neglected. The novel is referred to by most of the contributors in the course of the volume, but always in terms of illustrated documentation, so it is not surprising that the novel most frequently mentioned is V. Sackville-West's *The Edwardians*, which really provides a fictional analogue to Miss Laski's chapter. What is interesting for the literary critic is not just that Bennett 'sheds light' on his age in terms of providing footnotes for the social historian, but that the age was such that it could turn him into one of the readers he himself so devastatingly described, 'I see at the bookshop counters people on whose foreheads it is written that they know themselves to be the salt of the earth. Their assured curt voices, their proud carriage, their clothes, their similarity of manner, all

show that they belong to a caste and that the caste has been successful in the struggle'.

If the literary scene remains largely uninvestigated, the complex political and economic scene is splendidly handled, not least in the way Professors Briggs and Taylor bring out the discontents that 'the assured curt voices' struggle to conceal. Professor Briggs records 4 December 1905 as the turning point in Edwardian politics with the beginning of the great Liberal ministry under Campbell-Bannerman, but as the decade drew to its close the spate of economic, social and industrial reform had to give way at home to a series of crippling strikes, and abroad to the menace of Germany which became ever more of a threat, and trouble in Ireland so that civil war was virtually certain and only prevented by war elsewhere.

The Irish question is one Sir Charles Petrie takes up in *Scenes of Edwardian Life* and the manner in which he does so suggest the difference between his book and the symposium on the period. 'Was this not the time people will ask when the Home Rule agitation was sweeping the country and did not this issue set everybody by the ears? The answer is in the affirmative, but contrary to what is generally supposed in England, the Irish are interested in other things than politics, and it was these, of which sport in all its forms was the most important, that brought men and women together.' It is a sentence which in its leisurely, detailed, wryly amused tone is characteristic of the book as a whole, and it provides in its own much slighter way, a valuable postscript to *Edwardian England*. It is valuable because Sir Charles Petrie manages to make anecdote serve his purpose of illuminating general characteristics of the age, and so keep quite clear of the narcissism which is the bane of literary reminiscence. He is not evenly successful and the chapter on Oxford and Cambridge (really on Oxford) is little more than a not too successful collection of college stories. But in his account of life in the provinces, particularly of Liverpool, where his father was Leader of the Conservative Party, he has a real contribution to make. His remarks on transport are well suited to his discussive-narrative style and he draws attention to the surprising fact of how roads fell into disuse during the nineteenth century, because of the growth of the railways, so that some areas in 1900 were much more isolated than they had been a century earlier. He quotes one contemporary traveller, 'Densely populated as

England is, gridironed all over with railways, yet there are many districts in it the abode of loneliness, where the centuries come and go with little outward change, and the country looks much the same as it did in the days of the Stuarts, or even before their time'. The Wessex world of Hardy was still a living one as Blériot flew the Channel, the first Garden City was built, the theory of relativity was discovered, transatlantic wireless was heard, and the first hundred thousand of Britain's cars were on the

road. In their very different ways these two books provide an unusually good complement to each other – the official portrait, the personal snap-shot album – the former without stuffiness, the second without eccentricity. Taken together, they do much to restore imaginatively an age which for reasons of great complexity, fascinates us and leaves us fresh to ponder its special set of enigma variations.

IAN GREGOR

CONSTANTINOPLE: ICONOGRAPHY OF A SACRED CITY by Philip Sherrard. *Oxford University Press*. 63s.

In recent years there have been many books on Constantinople but this study is unique, for it deals not only with the City but with a civilization and a polity. In one hundred and thirty-four pages Mr Sherrard deals in turn with the place, people and buildings, with Constantinople as the New Rome, with Constantinople as the New Jerusalem and with its conquest by the Turks as the destruction of an Image. On a first reading the first section seems far too compressed for it is concentrated on the Palace, the Hippodrome and Haghia Sophia, it is not only that so much is omitted like the function of the town monasteries and the beauty of the Chara, the organization of the craftsmen and the flow of inter-continental trade. The Constantinople that Mr Sherrard describes is a city without brothels. But gradually when the book is being re-read it becomes apparent that the excisions are all-intentional, Mr Sherrard was not painting a naturalist picture, he has achieved an ikon.

It is the Ikon of Byzantium conceived as the capital of an universal empire, no other Byzantinist has ever portrayed this so well.

Partly this is due to Mr Sherrard's skill as an anthologist. There are citations from so many sources often quite unfamiliar, quite different in their period and in their provenance, Greek and Western and Islamic and yet combining in an overall unity. This is a work of artistry as well as scholarship.

There is no idealization, an ikon painter may concentrate on aspects of a reality but he does not idealize. On page 119 Mr Sherrard develops a theory of the Byzantine sense of collective guilt which is the only statement or theory of his that I would query. Of course there was much that was fetid in Byzantine civilization, for it was a civilization. Of course much classical paganism survived interwoven with Byzantine Christianity; as late as the fourteenth century Bryennios could write, 'we are certain that Nereids live in the sea and that Genii rule over each spot'. But I would doubt if either led to much psychological tension beneath the baroque rhetoric of self-denunciation there lay the tranquil consciousness of an utter superiority.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

EVOLUTION TECHNIQUE ET THEOLOGIES by A. Z. Serrand, O.P. *Editions du Cerf*.

The series in which this book appears focusses on the problem of working out a theology which will really answer the challenges and needs of the technological era. The volume under review, written with that attractively dry humour which is familiar to readers of the author's regular contributions to *Signes du Temps*, offers a schematized phenomenology of existing Catholic positions as regards the right relation

between the claims of the gospel and the purview of applied science, between Christ and Prometheus. In a subsequent volume Fr Serrand proposes to make sense of the variety of attitudes and to discuss the role the magisterium of the Church may play in recommending some particular one of them.

Fr Serrand discerns *eight* different attitudes 'Theology for Prometheus': the motto of