

Review

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Wraeck (1660) finds the chief interest of the story in its forecast of a greater champion:

Who in dying shall deal a deadly blow to death.

Milton follows the Biblical story more closely and his interest is dramatic and personal, not doctrinal. It is as risky to judge of Milton's final views by the wandering cries of Samson in his suffering, or of the Chorus in their dismay, as to read the philosophy of Shakespeare in the passionate despair of Macbeth:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player.

In the very spirit of the greatest Greek tragedy Milton portrays the inscrutable workings of the divine in which yet are traceable the high purposes of justice:

All is best though we oft doubt
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns
And to his faithful Champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously.

Such a view has not been found incompatible with the Christian faith.

We do not think that M. Saurat has established his contention that Milton was a great thinker and wrote a great metaphysical poem. Milton was a bold but not a subtle thinker. In rejecting traditional doctrines as irrational he did not escape involving himself in others equally irrational. As Professor Raleigh says: 'his heresies may be reduced to a single point; the ultimate basis on which he rests the universe is political not religious.' Politics are the devil; the great forcing house of mutual hatreds and injustice. Milton's whole thought was too polemical in character to attain to satisfying wisdom, but a noble spirit of justice and faith pervades his troubled and splendid poetry. But M. Saurat has written a carefully documented, sane and temperate study which contrasts admirably with some recent German criticism determined to find in Milton a physical and mental degenerate. Milton was a great Puritan in his love for what Emerson calls the restrictive virtues and his rejection of any intermediary between God and man. He did not share the Puritan view that all human righteousness is filthy rags, that man is saved only by the unmerited grace of Christ. He was a child of the Renaissance in his confidence in reason; a great Englishman by virtue of his faith in justice.

EDINBURGH.

H. J. C. GRIERSON.

Charles Dickens. Von WILHELM DIBELIUS. Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner. 1916. 8vo. xiv + 525 pp.

This massive work, begun long before the war, came for notice last year. In the preface (Christmas, 1915) the author duly explodes against England, but his allusions to 'Einkreisungsintrige' and the like do not

call for reply. The book, as a whole, is without bias indeed is somewhat stiffly 'scientific' in temper and method. It leaves an effect of coldness, despite a certain pounding liveliness of style that is maintained to the end. Through a great part of this treatise Charles Dickens is exhibited as an illustration of something not himself; first and foremost, of the play of political forces and social energies, his connexion with which is the thing to be decided; and, secondly, of the pedigree of a number of literary forms, themes, types, and other abstractions. These, no doubt, are both important topics; but the risk is that Charles Dickens should appear to come out of it all less as a man than as a body of material:—as a point, without length or breadth, in which many 'tendencies' are seen to converge. These tendencies, in their turn, are grouped round, or issue from, a multitude of other equally dimensionless points; which happen, however, in the last resort, to be other human beings. Such are the well-known risks of the 'historical' method, when overdone, in its application to works of literary art and to artists. Professor Dibelius is not an exceptional, but he is a representative, sinner; and he can scarcely complain if he, too, must be partly reduced to a 'tendency.'

He does indeed tell us much and at length about Dickens as a man. Few people can know so much about Dickens, or about books about Dickens. He has worked at the literature of the subject, it is plain, for years; he has it, both the obvious and the obscure literature, at his fingers' ends. His notes and his valuable bibliography prove this. We must take our hats off to the mass of Dr Dibelius's information. He has been along all the by-ways, has rummaged among the obscure periodicals. He adds to Forster and corrects him in sundry details, though paying fair tribute to him. Dr Dibelius has usefully massed the material for the future, the up-to-date *Life of Dickens*; he has not written, or affected to write, that *Life*. He has classified the mental and moral habits of his author under headings, usefully again, but rather scholastically: 'Rastlosigkeit,' 'visionärer Rauschzustand,' 'ungeheure Lebenskraft,' 'Geschäftsinstinkt,' and so following. Dickens's extravagances, his florid dressing, his uneasy manners, are debited against him; his gift for friendship, his concern for his poor neighbours, are duly credited to the account. The result is a balance-sheet rather than a picture. It does not make clear why Dickens was and is loved, or how he won the personal prestige which is disclosed by the numerous facts and figures Dr Dibelius adduces. Nor do we quite know, at the end, whether or not Dr Dibelius cares for Dickens as a man.

The criticism of the novels suffers from the same sort of treatment: it can be called 'schematic'—a pedantic word for a pedantic thing. The famous characters, Micawber, Pickwick and the rest, are often split up and sorted out, as though for a census, under 'Berufstypen,' 'Heldentypen,' 'Frauentypen,' and many other 'Typen.' Then come sections on Dickens's 'conduct of the action,' on his 'Naturgefühl,' and on his 'pathos and humour.' All good subjects, of course, and in a sense inevitable; but I think the method—this exhaustive, notebookish, cata-

loguing method—is a mistaken one. Not only ‘science’ and conscience, but art and selection, are required, if we are to understand an artist and his works. There is, for example, a most inadequate section on ‘diction.’ In quoting examples of Dickens’s notorious blank verse, Dr Dibelius scans amiss more than once; he writes a stress upon syllables where no Englishman would place one. But more than that, we should hardly know from Dr Dibelius that Dickens—Dickens serious—can be a great master of English prose. All this is a pity, the more so that Dr Dibelius says many pointed things by the way. He sketches very well (pp. 353–5) the various types of criminal in the novels. He remarks that his author’s pathos has sometimes ‘a frightfully metallic ring’ (p. 286); he gives a good inkling of Dickens’s religious convictions, or emotions (pp. 229–230); does justice to his mastery (pp. 142, 370) of ‘Massenszenen’; and calls Mr Pecksniff ‘der Virtuose des Heuchelns’ (p. 158). As I am saying some adverse things about Dr Dibelius, let me, in justice, give a short specimen of his less abstract and more cordial style:

Er hat uns London beschrieben, wie es dem Reisenden sich von fern als dunkle Nebel- und Rauchmasse mit seltsamem Lichtschimmer darüber ankündigt, sein morgendliches Erwachen, das laute Getriebe auf seinen Strassen, die verfallenden aristokratischen Häuser mit ihrem Schmutz, ihrer Winkeligkeit und Schabigkeit, die atembeengende luftlose Enge einer Fremdenpension im Herzen der City, das Menschengewimmel eines dichtgedrängten Massenquartiers, die Schiffergegend an der unteren Themse, den mächtigen Strom und seine Ufer mit ihren Lichtreflexen bei Nacht, die Verbrecherviertel der Jakobsinsel und die marschige Umgebung des Ostens, und er hat all diese Bilder nicht nur beim konventionellen Sonnenschein und in der Stimmung des Alltags entrollt, sondern auch in der tödenden Langeweile eines Londoner Sonntags, in dem endlosen Regen und dem alles durchdringenden Nebel der schlechten Jahreszeit; seine grossen Beschreibungen des Londoner Winternebels gehören sogar zu den glänzendsten Leistungen auf diesem Gebiete (pp. 419–420).

It could be wished that Dr Dibelius oftener ‘let himself go’ in this way. Some of his judgments on particular works and personages have the interest of extreme oddness. It is always good to see the foreign point of view. What Briton would have spoken of Sam Weller’s ‘etwas grobkörnige Weltklugheit’? or have been reminded, ‘ziemlich deutlich,’ by Uriah Heep’s serpent gaze, of Coleridge’s Geraldine? (p. 270). Or have found out that Quilp is probably ‘einfach aus der orientalischen Märchenwelt übernommen’ (p. 135), although confessedly (note, p. 468) a ‘definite model’ cannot be found in the Orient? Or have surmised, though less positively (p. 112), of the meeting between Nancy and Rose Maylie, that ‘hier dürfte der Einfluss der Szene zwischen Rebecca and Rowena am Schluss des Ivanhoe deutlich sein’ (‘deutlich’ again!). I do but recite these views; many of them seem to be prompted by a wild passion for finding at all costs some ‘historical’ filament of analogy or ‘influence,’ when really Dickens is either just inventing, or is drawing from the universal stock. It is also excessive to say that the ‘normal form of the English *Roman* was created,’ for the first time, in *Oliver Twist*. And Dr Dibelius may well be thought to deal too lightly with the stories Dickens wrote after 1850. He says (p. 294) that the literary historian will not find much that is fresh in them and that they show

no essential development in Dickens. Yet the change of atmosphere, style, and plan is very marked. Accordingly, that masterpiece, *Great Expectations*, receives no considered judgment at all; we hear nothing of the living organism, though certain elements of it (the characters, incidents, etc.) are cut up into thin sections and mounted on separate microscopic slides.

Dr Dibelius, all the same, makes many contributions of value to literary history in the more rigid sense of the term. He brings out the debt of Dickens to Combe, Egan, and others (already noted by him in *Anglia*, Vol. xxxv); and especially his debt to the 'variety theatre' of Charles Mathews (pp. 68, 465), already indicated by the researches of Kitton and others. He clears up a confusion concerning the date of Dickens's visit to the original of Mr Squeers (p. 467). He gives (p. 468) the 'sources' of Dickens's reading about the Gordon riots;.....here, you writers of theses, is a subject made to your hand! He has some illuminating pages about the emergence of the child as a theme for modern verse and fiction (pp. 109, 129, 262). He indicates clearly the influence of the melodramatic stage on the novels (p. 397). All this is well, in spite of a proclivity for going too far afield, or too far back, in the paper-chase after 'influences.'

But it will scarcely be unjust to Dr Dibelius to say that his chief concern is not with Dickens as a writer. His chief concern is to state precisely the position and service of Dickens in the history of political reform and of philanthropy. His treatment of this subject must, I fear, be called top-heavy. The first chapter, of some sixty pages, is a laborious sketch of the condition of England, political, religious, and industrial, in 1830; the sixth chapter, of over forty pages, is on the 'soziale Lage' of 1843. So that, what with other like interludes, and with the epilogue, nearly one quarter of the whole text is scaffolding, which Dickens has to bear upon his back. It is really too much; less would serve, and serve better. On a more modest scale is the serviceable sketch of the poor law, as a prelude to the pages on *Oliver Twist*. The criss-cross of party sympathies on this vexed question, and the attitude of the novelist, are amply explained. Still, those workhouse chapters are merely a spring-board for the novelist, or, as Dr Dibelius says, a 'point of departure' for a story in which the beginning is forgotten.

The main thesis of Dr Dibelius's treatise may be roughly summed up, though he argues it with much wealth of reference and with not a little repetition. Dickens was no party man; he was not a great reformer, a great leader, whose pen swept away the abuses of prisons, schools, and law-courts; this is only the 'Dickens-legend,' already scotched but not quite killed. He was just a very powerful and popular 'Mitkämpfer auf Seite der Radikalen.' Yet he 'did much for the Fourth Estate in England'; he was a great reconciler of classes which were dangerously drifting into feud. He revealed the poor to the cultured; and he brought to the poorer classes the kind of culture, the kind of sympathy, that they wanted and could understand. In doing this he helped the country, and its literature too, over a remarkably awkward crisis. I am not sure

that these views are as novel as Dr Dibelius supposes. Surely they are now part of the general, educated verdict on Dickens. But Dr Dibelius with whatever surplusage, has worked them out fully and brought together the facts that warrant them. He seems too, in his own way, to enjoy the works of Dickens for their own sake, and that not merely because they prove something.

OLIVER ELTON.

LIVERPOOL.

Studi danteschi. Diretti da MICHELE BARBI. Volume II. Florence: Sansoni. 1920. 8vo. 167 pp. L.12,50.

Poesia e storia nella 'Divina Commedia.' Studi critici di E. G. PARODI. Naples and Florence: Perrella. 1921. 8vo. viii + 621 pp. L.15.

These two noteworthy volumes will be cordially welcomed by all students of Dante. The first, containing articles and notes of a character intended to throw fresh light on disputed points connected with the poet's life and works, makes its appeal rather to the specialist; the second, less concerned with minute questions than with the art of Dante in general and the relation of his thought with the history of his times, is addressed to a wider audience.

The new instalment of *Studi danteschi* follows the lines already laid down in its predecessor. The two longest articles, which occupy the greater part of the book, bear especially upon the biography of Dante. A full and exhaustive study by Bernardino Barbadoro, *La condanna di Dante e le fazioni politiche del suo tempo*, illustrated with some useful facsimile reproductions of documents, examines the whole question anew, and is a contribution of the first importance to our understanding of Dante's political career and the causes of his exile. Michele Barbi, *Per un passo dell' epistola all' Amico fiorentino*, investigates, with a great wealth of documents concerning Dante's relations and connections, the identity of the religious to whom the letter is addressed and that of the poet's nephew to whom it refers, proving conclusively that, with respect to the former, the identification with Teruccio di Manetto Donati, first suggested by Della Torre, cannot be sustained. For the MS. reading *vestri* ('per litteras vestri meique nepotis'), he would substitute *vestras*. The other articles deal with minor questions of literary or textual criticism. In the passage concerning Dante's preparation for the examination on Faith (*Par.* xxiv. 46-48), Pio Rajna finds a confirmation of Boccaccio's story of the poet's disputation in the university of Paris. Francesco d' Ovidio discusses the various interpretations of the line (*Purg.* iii. 72) describing the bearing of the souls of the excommunicated at the appearance of Dante and Virgil; Michele Barbi interprets the line in the *Vita Nuova* (ix. 9), 'In abito leggiier di peregrino'; Ermenegildo Pistelli contributes some critical notes on the text of the *Epistolae*, more particularly that of the Letter to Can Grande. Among the shorter notices at the end of the volume, Barbi gives new documents concerning Dante's grandfather, Bellincione, and a son of the latter, Drudolo di Bellincione d'Alaghiero, a previously unknown personage in the records of the poet's family.