

NOTES ON OLD BOOKS.

‘A REMEDY FOR SEDITION,’ 1536.



THE full title of this interesting pamphlet is as follows: ‘A Remedy for Sedition wherin are conteyned many thynges concernyng the true and loyall obeysance that comūnes owe unto their prince and Soveraygne lord, the Kynge. Anno MDXXXVI.’ It is anonymous and is of considerable interest, both as a specimen of printing and on account of its literary qualities. Bibliographically, it is a small quarto, very well printed on good paper in an excellent black letter type by Berthelet. The collation is, A to E₄ in fours, F six leaves, with the colophon as follows on the verso of F₆: ‘Londini in Aedibus Thomae Bertheleti Regii Impressoris, cum privilegio.’ Around the letterpress of the title we find the same border as was used in the Chaucer of 1532. There are copies of this work in the British Museum and in the Huth Collection, and no doubt in addition to my own a few others may be extant, but it is of a high degree of rarity.

The authorship has sometimes been attributed to Sir John Cheke, tutor of Edward VI, restorer of Greek learning to England, and Professor of Greek at Cambridge in 1540. However, this scholar was born in 1514, and at the age of twenty-

two is extremely unlikely to have produced this work. He did write 'The Hurt of Sedition, How grievous it is to a Commonwealth,' which was published in 1549; but this fact does not give weight to the suggestion that 'A Remedy' came from his pen. We cannot say with any degree of definiteness who may have been the author, and there is no internal evidence to help us towards a positive conclusion. We can say, however, that the work was written in 1536 at the time of riotous disturbances in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and that its author was a well-read cultivated man who had in all probability travelled extensively on the continent. His style is lucid and idiomatic, and some of his comments and criticisms are bold to temerity, although throughout there is a plea for respect for constituted authority and for devotion to the King and his interests. This appeal for devotion to an excellent King is repeated in a number of forms at intervals, and when we remember the irascible and headstrong character of Henry VIII, and the almost Oriental availability of his executioner, we must admit that the repetition of these doses of appeal and flattery was a wise precaution. Some of the author's comments and reflections are so apposite to occurrences in this present decade of the life of nations that we are astonished to find them set forth in print nearly four hundred years ago in a state of society which we know to have differed from our present state in multitudinous ways, but which a reading of this work proves to have had many marked fundamental similarities. The author was a keen observer of

contemporary society, and was familiar with ancient and mediæval literature. He quotes with approval from Plato as follows :

they (that is mundane things) be well distributed when the chiefe and prime honour is geven unto qualities of the mynde, the seconde to the bodye, the thyrde to external thynges, as nobilitie, possessions and ryches.

Have four centuries of so-called civilization given practical force to our acceptance of this principle? Much that he says is worth quoting, and although the spelling may be archaic, the philosophy is certainly not.

Not quoting this time, he says :

What ende of robberyng and spoilyng there shall be yf the poore may evermore robbe the riche, if the stronger may pull from the weaker. Must you not abyde the same lawe that you make yourself? Must not you whan you have spoyled them that are ryche, and so made yourselves welthy, suffre that they now being poore, spoyle you, riche? And than must not ye be poore agayne?

Four hundred years ago it seems also to have been necessary to argue against the rabid type of Socialist. Further on our unknown author says :

Some say povertie is the cause that men come to be theves, murderers, rebells, but I thynke nothing so, for I knowe dyvers realmes where povertie reyneth moche more than in Englande, yet rebels there be none. The rote is lower, dygge deper, ye may perchance fynde it. Education, evyll education is a greatte cause of these and all other myschefes that grow in a comūne welthe, . . . No man is borne a craftisman, youth must be beter brought up, or ever the olde lyve welthely.

A remarkable tribute is paid to the Jews, many of whose characteristics are found to be excellent.

I have oft mervailed to see the diligencye that the Jewes use in bryngyng up theyr youthe, and ben moche ashamed to se howe negygent Christen men are in so godly a thyng. There neyther man woman, nor child of any lawfull age but he for the most parte knoweth the lawes of Moyses, and with us he is almoste a good curate that knoweth VI or VII of the X Commaundements. . . . I have been amonges them that are in Italy, I never harde of a Jewe that was a thefe, never that was a murderer, . . . they may well thynke theyr religion better than ours, if religiō be tried by mens lyves.

Thus the author speaks of certain turbulent happenings in Oxford.

In Oxford, I know the name of the northorn and southorn proctour hath been the cause that many men have been slayne.

Things are quieter at that seat of learning now.

Many striking remarks are made on the subject of idleness, some of them curiously to the point in connection with conditions in certain industrial areas to-day.

In Englande the grounde almoste nourisheth us alone. It is an incredible thinge to see howe soore, men of other nations labour, howe much we play, how lytle they consume an theyr belies, how much we devoure, howe poore they be and howe welthy we are, . . . God hath gyven us too good a countrey, we may here, too many of us lyve ydle. . . . Howe moche grounde is lost in Englande? How much corne myght we carie into other countreys, if we wolde use the commodities of our realme? Howe

many heathes be there that wolde beare other frutis than shrubbes, brakes, bromes and ferne, if they were well handeled?

Special severity of comment is reserved for excess in eating and drinking, particularly the latter.

Memorie, wytte, ye the very mynde which is immortal, almost is slayne with surfettis. . . . All the senses be drowned with drinke and cloyed with too moche fedyng. . . . Is it not a shame that we can not be as discrete, as wyse as the brute beastes? . . . Bibbers wil be offeded with him that shall go about to make them lyve better, to make them lyve longer, to make them rycher, to tourne theyre drynkinge money into stuffe of household. . . . You will thynke I knowe London well that I make this offer unto you. Blyndefelde me, carye me after to what place ye woll, I wyl lyttel fayle to tel where ye set me, and before whose doore. They that know not my cunnyng wyll skace beleve me. I praye you can ye set me in any place, but I may say and lye lyttel, I am nowe before a Taverne or an ale-howse. Fayle I maye, but farre I can not fayle.

The author finishes his work with a long quotation from Erasmus containing a highly laudatory reference to Henry VIII, and he himself adds a number of classical references, and some more flattery of that dangerous potentate. Whoever he may have been, the writer of 'A Remedy for Sedition' was certainly a man of culture, learning and power of observation, and a considerable traveller. His observations incline us to say, '*tempora mutantur, nos non mutamur in illis.*'

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