

Thomas More : *THE DEBELLATION OF SALEM AND BIZANCE*, edited by John Guy, Ralph Keen, Clarence Miller and Ruth McGugan (The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St Thomas More, vol. 10), New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987, xcix + 483pp. + 13 plates, \$ 60 (£ 50 in UK).

IN the late 1950s, when the Yale Edition was fully under way, the hope was that twenty years would see it complete. That this hope is now set fair to be fulfilled in a little over thirty is a considerable achievement, especially after the false start with the text to be used for the English works. Thanks to generous initial private benefactors, backed subsequently by other private, institutional and public subsidies, to the energy and pertinacity of -- above all -- the late Richard Sylvester and of his successor as executive editor, Clarence Miller, not to mention the efforts of a succession of editors and assistants and not least to the commitment of the Yale University Press, the end is in sight. Thirteen of a projected fifteen of those imposing, indispensable blue volumes, some of them in more than one part, are now available. We lack only the English poems, the *Life of Pico*, the *Four Last Things*, the *Supplication of Souls*, the *Letter against Bugenhagen*, and the *Letter answering John Frith*. All of these are in press or in active preparation. And we have had *parerga* such as the facsimile and transcription of More's prayer-book. In due time we may also hope for a thoroughly revised version of Elizabeth F. Rogers's pioneer edition of More's correspondence, as well as of Gibson and Patrick's *Bibliography*.

1976 was a great year, with Martz and Manley's *Dialogue of Comfort*, Haupt's *Treatise on the Passion* and other works, and Miller's superb *De tristitia Christi* -- the last volumes that Sylvester was to see in their final state. The rhythm that Miller has been able to maintain, as particular and as general editor since then, is enormously impressive. *De tristitia Christi* was followed in 1981 by Lawler, Marc'hadour and Marius's *Dialogue concerning Heresies*; in 1984 Miller (with others) edited More's Latin verse; he was joint editor of *The Answer to a Poisoned Book* (1985); Daniel Kinney's *Letters to Dorp* and the rest, with the 'new' manuscript of *Historia Ricardi III*, came out in 1986. Here now, dated 1987 though not in fact available until the spring of 1988, is *The Debel-*

lation of *Salem and Bizance*, for which Miller has been senior textual editor as well as contributor in other respects. As he would be the first to point out, indeed as he and the others concerned make clear in this volume, he and all the Yale editors are reaping what Sylvester sowed and tended, and what Louis Martz has all along vigorously protected.

At this moment, it is right to recognize these debts, owed as they are by every student of More. Especially, perhaps, when one has to do, as with the present edition, with an outstanding performance.

The *Debellation* itself has been scrupulously edited and, according to the excellent Yale custom, we are also given the text of the pamphlet to which it is an answer, the anonymously published *Dialogue between two Englishmen, whereof one was called Salem and the other Bizance* (*Salem and Bizance* for short). The rest of the familiar, reassuring Yale apparatus is also there: illustrations, table of corresponding pages between the first edition of 1533 (the only printing in More's lifetime), its reprinting in More's *English Works* of 1557, and the present edition, as well as glossary and index. It is all a great help to the reader, even to that not very large class of reader who has more than once read through the constituents of the controversy in which the *Debellation* is all but the final shot.

With that controversy, More's career as a polemicist on behalf of the Church had entered a new phase. Hitherto, he had been sure of powerful backing for what he wrote, in Latin or in English, to refute opponents whose identity was known and could be acknowledged. The issues had been theological and ecclesiological, the opponents heretical and officially unsupported, to say the least. Now he had to turn to defend both himself and the English clergy against attack, on legal grounds, in the vernacular, by an adversary undoubtedly orthodox, of whose identity he had to profess himself ignorant though well knowing who it was and that the attack had the approval of those in political power. In this new pamphlet battle the other side was being taken by the eminent and now aged common lawyer and legal theorist, Christopher St German (c. 1460-1541). Debate centred on the ecclesiastical jurisdiction in England, the procedures of the church courts, especially in regard to heresy, and what was seen as the English clergy's strong tendency to consult its own interest.

The controversy between More and St German was an important turning point in English legal history. Behind it lay heavy political and ecclesiastical manoeuvrings, which it is the great merit of John Guy's Introduction and Commentary to have reviewed with the utmost clarity

and cogency. Guy's explanatory matter, together with the long Appendix on St German's later career as adviser to Cromwell and to Henry, gives this volume its extra dimension and distinction.

The debate itself was in embryo in St German's *Dialogue between a Doctor of Divinity and a Student of the Laws of England* (*Doctor and Student*), published in Latin and in English between 1529 and 1530. It broke out of its shell in St German's *Second Dialogue* (1530), his *New Additions* (1531) and his *Treatise concerning the Division between the Spirituality and Temporalty* (late 1532 or early 1533, with successive editions until perhaps 1537). It was in full feather in More's *Apology* (Easter 1533), a reply to the *Division*, in *Salem and Bizance*, St German's reply to More's *Apology* and in the *Debellation* itself, More's retort upon St German's reply. The text with which we have to do, in other words, is an answer to an answer to an answer. What makes following its arguments and counterarguments, if not an aesthetic pleasure, at least the sort of intellectually rewarding experience that one gets when involved argument is made plain and issues clearly stated, is Guy's breadth of command, sureness of touch and economy of explanation. This is the mark of a profound and practised acquaintance with the legal and political background, as well as of new discoveries of and about St German's writings, and about the precise nature of his involvement in the confusing and cannibal politics of the 1530s. True, the statement of all this in the present instance gains from its having been refined from Guy's own previous publications, one of them in *Moreana* itself. That is the reader's good luck.

Guy's achievement has been entirely to change our picture of St German. He can no longer be seen as the equivalent, in the contest over the ecclesiastical jurisdiction in England, of H.A.L. Fisher's 'needy rabbi haled out of ghettos' for the Divorce. At the least, he is Aaron to Thomas Cromwell's Moses, Melancthon to Cromwell's Luther. To call him, as Guy does, More's most redoubtable English adversary may be going a little far, except in the politico-ecclesiastical-legal sense. In theological debate, that title was surely Tyndale's, as More himself would have felt. All the same, as Guy clearly shows, St German was no merely adequate legal disputant in the matter of the spiritual and the lay jurisdiction. He was an experienced, independent-minded jurist, whose fundamental book, *Doctor and Student*, made him fully More's match on level ground. He was also the more troublesome an opponent for being, as More explicitly recognized, orthodox in his religious opinions. He had already reflected deeply and was to continue to reflect on the nature of and the grounds for the Supremacy.

St German was of a Warwickshire gentry family, a member of the Middle Temple who had made a legal reputation and retired from practice by 1518. The first fruits of his leisure were *Doctor and Student*, a work which retained its importance for English legal theory until the reforms of the 1870s. Its attack on clerical privilege was followed up in the *Division*, where there was expounded in a polemical context the principle (already enshrined in *Doctor and Student*) that the clergy should have, under English law, neither greater nor less favour than the laity. St German aimed to show the reasons for the grudge and strife that had grown up between the two, and what measures were necessary to remove these discontents. These measures were to be based on English common law, except where the clergy could prove that an ecclesiastical law rested expressly on divine law and had not been made by the clergy to further its own interests. St German was voicing, especially, lay complaints about clerical privilege : clerical immunity from royal justice, the *ex officio* procedures of their courts, especially in cases of heresy, and the independent legislative powers which they employed (he claimed) to maintain and enhance their status. Particular grievances were the leniency of the church courts to clerical offenders and their harshness towards laymen, their inquisitorial methods and their use of the 'oath of speaking the truth', by which the accused might be made to incriminate themselves, without resort to trial by jury.

In his *Apology*, More defended his own conduct in the work of extirpating heresy and attempted to crush St German's pamphlet under several times its own weight of paper and print. No change was needed, he claimed, in 'the old approved laws, for anything brought up for new' ; moreover, were the practices of the church courts to be brought into line with those of the royal, 'the streets would soon swarm full of heretics'. At the the end of September 1533, in *Salem and Bizance*, St German renewed his attack on the alleged bias and injustice of the ecclesiastical courts. More produced an immediate answer. The *Debellation*, his most legally intricate and technical book, was written in ten days. There is every reason to believe, as Miller must have the credit of first observing, that More began it with what is now its fifteenth and far its longest chapter : it runs to a quarter of the whole. Here and in the sixteenth he defends the spiritual courts and their conduct towards heresy. He further scandalized St German, no doubt, by maintaining the opinion expressed in the *Apology* that, when it came to weighing evidence and assessing the credibility of witnesses, one judge was more to be trusted than two juries, and by pointing out that the royal courts also some-

times had to admit suspect evidence : it would, after all, be a curious felon who took along an honest man to witness his felony. On the other hand, here -- as in the *Apology* -- More was sometimes either misinformed or disingenuous. Modern research, as Guy's table shows, has dealt hardly with his claim that few heretics had been brought to trial in the last twenty years or so.

So the matter is argued back and forth, without the possibility of agreement. More was prepared to accept the English clergy and their practices with all their faults, reckoning them as good as those found anywhere. St German was not. Though, as Guy puts it, they 'shared a deep concern for the unity of Western Christendom', theirs was a lost hope. In a sense it had been lost since the first serious moves of the Reformation Parliament against the clergy. Guy is at his best in his careful and judicious statement of St German's position vis-à-vis the Commons moves and the press campaign against the spirituality ; he shows how the debate between him and More was finally overtaken by the First Act of Succession and Henry's new heresy law of 1534.

By that time, More had already returned to theological controversy with his *Answer to a Poisoned Book*. In this, he was again attacking a nameless adversary, and a different one. It is a curious fact that all St German's writings were published anonymously, where More's were not. That this review has been able to speak with confidence of St German as author of *Division* and *Salem and Bizance* in particular is chiefly due to Guy's work. In attributing these pamphlets to an obscure parish priest or religious recluse, activated by malice to broadcast his complaints wholesale in the vernacular instead of keeping them close in Latin among the learned, More was using legitimate means of concealment. When he surrendered the Great Seal on 16 May 1532 he had, as he later reminded Henry, petitioned to be allowed to retire into private life, to prepare his own soul for the greater trials he knew to be coming and to assist matters, as far as he could, by his prayers. Yet here he was meddling again in what he must have known to be politics. There can be no doubt that he knew his opponent's identity. He must have known that he was intervening against the run of affairs and that all St German's works, up to 1535, had been produced by Thomas Berthelet, the King's Printer. Knowing how his intervention would seem to Henry, More characteristically and for a truth he believed to be higher than the King's, chose to make it. This intervention, as much as his refusal to attend Anne's coronation, must have been decisive in his relations with Henry. The *Apology* and the *Debellation* refuted Henry's jurisdictional policies as John

Fisher had refuted the Divorce. 'Within the volcanic recesses of the King's consciousness', as Guy puts it, 'Thomas More's mere existence came to pose an intolerable threat'.

For this reason alone the *Debellation* would have an importance that transcends its faults of expression and construction. Hastily written, it is not a masterpiece of English prose. Its first fourteen chapters rehearse More's previous argument with St German. Its last five flog tediously away at various dead horses. Its central two, composed first, as we are several times told in this edition -- I counted to three before giving up -- are a powerful counter to the danger that More saw all too plainly. If, even for them, the modern reader needs a firm resolution to follow every word, there can be no doubt of the importance of the question at issue.

It has already been emphasized how much that reader owes to the Introduction to this volume and to Guy's Appendix concerning St German's later career from 1534 to 1541 as independent adviser, though never pensioner, on ecclesiastical and social as well as legal matters. The Commentary, too, succeeds in being both ample and succinct. It would be easy to single out particular notes for praise and I have found none that could be reasonably curtailed or enlarged. That Platina's name was not Bartolomeo Platina (p. 282), but Bartolomeo Sacchi, called Il Platina from his birthplace, and that his so-called portrait from Reusner's *Icones*, here reproduced, is rather a factotum than a true likeness, is the best I can do.

A penultimate word for the well printed text. According to Yale custom this is that of the unique single edition of late 1533 (there being no extant manuscript), with necessary emendations and the errata (including the largest) corrected from the leaf at the end of the *Answer to a Poisoned Book*. As with the other polemical works, this was the copy-text for the text in the 1557 *English Works*, the sixty-four substantive errors of which -- about par for that far-from-monument of printing -- are faithfully recorded in the textual apparatus.

And finally for the rest of the apparatus. The Glossary is in general well done, though straying occasionally into period use, as when it glosses *shrewed* as *noughty*; or recording *y^e* at 95/17 twice in different senses (one clearly wrong); not glossing *pryckyng* or *spurne* (of a horse), *corage* or *cheke* (for check), and using the erroneous expression 'renounced' for 'abjured' heretic, *s.v.* faggot.

The Index is likewise full and on the whole good, though it does not find space for poor Clyffe (mentioned on p. 16), the lesser known

of the two fools who found shelter in More's household. It is sad to see Clyffe slip out of history thus. As far as I know, he never figures in accounts of More or of English iconoclasm or anywhere else. Though More speaks of him as 'a man as well known as Master Henry Patenson', it is Patenson who gets all the limelight -- including an entry in the Index of this edition. More compares Clyffe to the heretics who had battered down the image of his name saint, Thomas Becket, on London Bridge. Clyffe, in his feebleness of mind no worse than they, had addressed the image of the Virgin on the same bridge and, getting no reply, had broken off the head of the image of the Christ Child on her arm. When 'honest men, dwellers on the bridge' came to complain of Clyffe to his master, Clyffe asked them whether they had repaired the damage. Hearing that they had not, he rebuked them, just as (More says) St German rebukes me for not at once repairing the strife between clergy and laity of which he complains.

Like others of More's stories, this is a little laboured. It would be a pity if this review were to end with a similar labouring of a minor omission and not by repeating that this is an edition of great value and distinction.

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• In an article « J.H. Hexter and the Microrhetoric of History » (*Clio*, XV, 1986, pp. 259-275), W.H. Dray discusses the rhetoric of historians, and particularly that of J.H. Hexter in his *History Primer*. An example of this type of writing is Hexter's statement that Henry VIII's payment to More of £ 200 for his counsel at a time when More disdained the court « may have seemed rather like thirty pieces of silver. » Dray points out that Hexter's views allow him to make this assertion despite the fact that there is no evidence for More's having thought it : « If it is true that More might at least have thought of it in the indicated way and that most others could not have done (or, at least, would almost certainly not have done so), that means that More was an extraordinary man... ».

Seymour B. HOUSE