

about himself in II Corinthians: a concrete manifestation of value in a life informed by a conviction of 'certain metaphysical propositions', a transparent submission to Christ. But Professor Mackinnon's presentation is once again *too* sympathetic; the conviction is Paul's merely, we are invited to acknowledge the value whether or not we share the conviction, almost by a willing suspension of disbelief. But St Paul, and St Ignatius of Antioch, were also martyrs, as, say, Cranmer in the last resort was not; and our acknowledgment of the value of a death which seals a testimony depends *constitutively* upon our admission of the determinate truth of the testimony. In spite of all Professor Mackinnon says at this point, I cannot feel certain that he has ever quite ceased to speak in *oratio obliqua*.

An attempt has been made in this notice to situate Professor Mackinnon's study in the context of a classical metaphysical tradition, an attempt the success of which is to be estimated by no means merely in terms of an uncovering of any deficiencies in his study, but primarily in terms of an enlargement of the perspectives of the tradition necessitated by the attempt so to situate it. And this has meant that the particularities of Professor Mackinnon's analyses (particularities which the present writer is hardly competent to discuss) have been unfairly ignored. Yet it is these particularities which make his book especially important, above all for the scholastic. It is to be hoped that all scholastics (including those enigmatic, anonymous Thomists at whom Professor Mackinnon glances in footnotes) will perform the exercise of working through his book; at the very least, their active hold upon their principles will gain in suppleness and agility.

R. L. STEVENSON AND THE LEPERS

GEORGE MARSHALL

THAT the first biography of the Belgian missionary priest who devoted his life to the lepers at Molokai should be written by a Scots freethinker, a grandson of the manse, is curious. That it should be the cause of a controversy which made Father Damien's name known throughout the world, and which may yet make it even better known and venerated, is an indication of the often seemingly round-about way in which God chooses that his will be done on earth. No two men with less in common and with less possible mutual sympathy than Father Damien and Robert Louis Stevenson could

easily be imagined. The one a Belgian peasant who only just managed to qualify academically for ordination, and who took the ceremony of being covered with a funeral pall at his profession so seriously and so literally that he promptly volunteered to be exiled to a living death in the leper colony at Molokai: the other a brilliant young Scots writer whose one object in life appeared to be to achieve a reputation as a wit and conversationalist. Their paths never crossed even. But Stevenson landed at Molokai a month after Damien's death, and was possessed shortly afterwards by a religious determination to defend Damien's reputation. The story is well known but what is not generally realized is that: (1) Stevenson had little time for missionaries in general, either Catholic or Protestant (he was associated in South Sea politics with the anti-missionary faction); and (2) his first impressions of Damien (based on what observers in Molokai told him) were not too favourable—it was only after reaching Australia some weeks later that he became a fervent admirer of Damien. What changed his mind is the biggest mystery in Stevenson's biography, though it is one that few, if any, of his many biographers have noticed, much less faced.

Stevenson visited Molokai in April 1889, in the course of his first Pacific voyage, and stayed there for eight days. Molokai was no longer the scene of unrelieved vice and squalor that it had been on Damien's arrival, but it was inevitably still full of pitiful sights. Stevenson was horrified as any man would be. 'I have seen sights that cannot be told, and heard stories that cannot be repeated', he writes to Sir Sidney Colvin (June 1889). That sort of feeling one expects; but what one does not expect is this (from the same letter): 'I never admired my poor race so much, nor (strange as it may seem) loved life more than in the settlement. A horror of moral beauty hangs over the place.' This is an unusual response, and if we bear in mind also his sense of shame at not being able to help ('I was happy, only ashamed of myself that I was here for no good') we can begin to understand why Molokai became so important to him. For the first time in his life he saw people (particularly the sisters) behave as he would have them behave, and yet at the same time he found himself incapable of doing likewise.

His wife tells us that he followed Damien's life 'like a detective', but he was not at first very impressed by what he heard. One is tempted to suspect that he was jealous of the ignorant peasant who had been able to do what he himself would have liked to do but could not. His detective work was carried out under difficulties. In the first place Stevenson had no knowledge of the native tongue and was therefore unable to question most of the patients. Furthermore, his anti-Catholic prejudice (which was as strong, as obvious and as reluctant as his prejudice against Jews) made him give insufficient weight to the

testimony of the Sisters and of Joseph Dutton, Father Damien's assistant, and too much weight to the evidence of local Protestants. 'My sympathies', he admits, 'flow never with so much difficulty as towards Catholic virtues. The passbook kept with heaven stirs me with anger and laughter. One of the sisters calls the place "The ticket office to heaven".' Most of the evidence he listened to was slanderous in character. It would be a mistake to imagine that Damien was popular in Molokai—to the administrators he was a confounded nuisance, to the patients he was a stern teacher who seized by force the instruments for making liquor and waged war on immorality in every form (and at the time of his arrival there was plenty of it). Rumour had it that Damien had contracted leprosy through illicit relations with female lepers. Stevenson heard, and apparently believed, this and other rumours. He admired Damien, naturally, but he was at the time quite willing to repeat rumours which he afterwards castigated with violence. His letter to Colvin treats the subject almost humorously: 'Of old Damien, whose weaknesses and worse perhaps I heard fully, I think only the more. It was a European peasant: dirty, bigoted, untruthful, unwise, tricky, but superb with generosity, residual candour and fundamental good-humour: convince him he had done wrong (it might take hours of insult) and he would undo what he had done and like his corrector better. A man, with all the grime and paltriness of mankind, but a saint and a hero all the more for that.' This is more tolerant, but it is no less libellous, than the letter of the Reverend Dr Hyde which was later to arouse Stevenson's anger.

Stevenson was apparently not aware of it, but the Board of Health for Honolulu had carried out an inquiry into the rumours in 1887, two years before Stevenson's visit. The results of this inquiry, which were to the effect that Damien may have been dirty but was certainly none of the other things he was accused of being, should have scotched the rumours for good, though they did not. Obviously someone had an interest in keeping such rumours alive. It would have been an easy matter for Stevenson to have studied the report of the inquiry, but the matter was not important enough at the time for him to take the trouble. The result is that when the time came for him to defend Damien's memory he had no evidence to produce and had to depend on striking a rhetorical pose while accepting, for the sake of argument, the truth of the rumours. The most remarkable things about the defence are: (1) that by and large it was successful; and (2) Stevenson had obviously ceased to believe in the rumours himself though he had no fresh evidence to go on.

The attack by Dr Hyde, a Congregational minister in Honolulu, was viciously phrased, but in content was no worse than Stevenson's

own remarks in his letter to Colvin. It took the form of a letter from Dr Hyde to the Rev. H. B. Gage of Sydney, who had asked for information on Damien. Stevenson read it in *The Sydney Presbyterian* (whether the writer intended it to be published or not is doubtful), and promptly locked himself in a room and worked feverishly on a reply, muttering angrily all the time according to his wife. This is the letter which aroused his anger:

'In answer to your inquiries about Father Damien, I can only reply that we who knew the man are surprised at the extravagant newspaper laudations, as if he was a most saintly philanthropist. The simple truth is, he was a coarse, dirty man, headstrong and bigoted. He was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders; did not stay at the leper settlement (before he became one himself) but circulated freely over the whole island (less than half the island is devoted to the lepers), and he came often to Honolulu. He had no hand in the reforms and improvements inaugurated, which were the work of our Board of Health, as occasion required and means provided. He was not a pure man in his relations with women, and the leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness. Others have done much for the lepers, our own ministers, the government physicians, and so forth, but never with the Catholic idea of meriting eternal life.'

Whether Hyde really believed these lies or not no one will ever know; but there is now no doubt that they are lies. All that anyone who was in a position to know the facts ever admitted against Damien is that he was dirty, which is not very surprising of a man who started every day by washing the sores of the lepers in the hospital.

Unfortunately mud tends to stick, and it is probable that Hyde's slanders would have persisted had they not been attacked by a man with Stevenson's literary reputation. The novelist was taking a calculated risk with his reputation by attacking Hyde with such vigour, but it was a risk which in the event paid off. At the time it looked like a risk which would *not* pay off. The newspapers at first refused to print *An Open Letter to the Reverend Dr Hyde of Honolulu*, and Stevenson himself, after publishing the work as a pamphlet, fully expected action for libel. He was also aware that if there were an action he would be ruined. He writes to Charles Baxter (March 1890):

'Enclosed please find a libel: you perceive I am quite frank with my legal adviser; and I will also add it is *conceivable* an action might be brought, and in that event *probable* I should be ruined. If you had been through my experience, you would understand how little I care; for upon this topic my zeal is complete and, probably enough, without discretion.'

This attitude is remarkable. There is a great gulf between the jocular, disrespectful references to 'old Damien' of June and the reverent tone of the *Open Letter* of February of the following year (1890) which refers to Damien as 'that noble brother of mine', 'the dead saint', 'one of the world's heroes', and 'the father of all who love goodness'. The change cannot simply be due to a desire to score points in controversy. Stevenson was nothing if he was not sincere, and this particular work was written in the heat of the moment and without the opportunity of revision (which is perhaps why it is one of his best works): he obviously believed firmly in everything he said about Damien.

Yet he had learned no fresh facts in the meantime. He had no evidence to refute Hyde's accusations. For the sake of argument he has to accept every one of the charges, though he adds humbly, 'God forgive me for supposing it', but he turns every one of them on to the accuser. What strikes him is the pathetic absurdity of the situation—the well-fed and well-dressed minister sitting in his comfortable study and penning his attack on a man who has just given his life in the most hideous circumstances for the most wretched of fellow-creatures. It has suddenly occurred to Stevenson that neither Hyde, nor himself, nor anyone else has the right to criticize the man who made Damien's gesture. This is the theme of the letter, and it is this that made it probably libellous, for Stevenson, who had met Hyde and been entertained at his house, parades details which make it appear that the minister lived in luxury and sloth, and goes on with some very forthright opinions on the man's character. It was probably these latter parts that Stevenson later in life wished he had not written, but it is as well that the letter was published as it was for even the personal abuse has a noble effect and it was undoubtedly well-deserved. 'You make us sorry', he says, with angry sarcasm, 'for the lepers who had only a coarse old peasant for their friend and father. But you, who were so refined, why were you not there, to cheer them with the lights of culture?' I think that 'Why were you not there?' can also be read as 'Why was I not there?' There is both shame and anger in the writing of the letter. It is an indictment of the whole human race who deposited the lepers on an island and left them virtually to look after themselves so that people could avoid the unpleasant thought of their existence. For Stevenson it was an opportunity lost both to himself and to Hyde. He has one good thing to say about Hyde: 'I am persuaded your letter was inspired by a certain envy, not essentially ignoble, and the one human trait to be espied in that performance. You were thinking of the lost chance, the past day; of that which should have been conceived and was not; of the service due and not rendered.' This seems to me a perceptive remark and it seems that a similar envy is to be detected in

Stevenson's own letter. But there the resemblance ends, for the impulse aroused by Stevenson's envy was as generous as Hyde's was mean. Stevenson confidentially predicts the raising of Damien to the altars of the Church and accuses Hyde of volunteering to be the devil's advocate. It would not be too fanciful to see Stevenson imagining himself as promoter of the Cause.

Hyde today has one action to his credit. He did not sue Stevenson for libel. He contented himself with dismissing the novelist as 'a Bohemian crank, a negligible person, whose opinion is of no value to anyone'. Stevenson himself suggests that 'if the world at all remember you, on the day when Damien shall be named Saint, it will be in virtue of one work: your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage'.

The puzzle behind this whole romantic story lies in what happened to Stevenson while he sat behind locked doors composing the letter. He suffered a sort of conversion during those few days. It applied not only to his attitude towards Damien, which had changed incredibly, but towards his attitude to the world. Stevenson was never the same man again afterwards; the incident conditioned all his future writing; it was probably responsible for the more serious tone of his future work; it may account partly for the greatness of his final, unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston*. No human being can ever sort out this sort of puzzle, but it is interesting to think about, this meeting between novelist and saint.

SOME BOOKS ABOUT LOURDES

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE centenary of the apparitions at Lourdes has inevitably inspired a new literature which ranges from critical editions of the written sources to popular ballads. The variety of emphasis and the levels of taste revealed in these books reflect the universality of Lourdes itself—its capacity to engage the serious attention of the scholar as well as the uncritical affection of the simple believer.

Most important of the centenary publications is *Lourdes: Dossier des Documents Authentiques*, edited by Abbé Laurentin (Lethielleux). Four volumes are projected, of which two have already appeared (Vol. I: *Au temps des seize premières apparitions*; 1,200 francs; Vol. II: *Dix-Septième Apparition, Epidémie des Visionnaires, Gnosés et Faux Miracles, La Bataille Administrative, Fermeture de la Grotte*: 1,500 francs). It is a