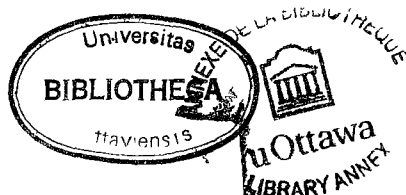


A STUDY
OF THE TECHNIQUES OF PERSUASION
USED BY HILAIRE BELLOC
IN HIS WRITINGS ON THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

by Sister Mary Winifred, R.N.D.M.

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INTRODUCTION

The death of Hilaire Belloc in 1953 drew to the attention of the literary world this man, who, during the first forty years of the century, came increasingly to be recognized as the belligerent apostle of Roman Catholicism in England. Belloc has been the subject of a number of books, including those by Robert Hamilton, Las Vergnas, Mandell-Creighton, Renee Haynes, Frederick Wilhelmson, J.B. Morton, and Mrs. Marie Belloc-Lowndes, the last two as recently as 1955 and 1956. The first five consider Belloc's work in a general way, with a desire to analyze his aims, to explain him to modern readers (this especially in the case of Wilhelmson), and to establish his place in English letters. Morton's book, on the other hand, as a memoir by an intimate friend, leaves aside all analysis of his work and presents the man in all his great good humour, his extreme loquacity, his amazing humility, and, running through it all, his immense courage. Mrs. Lowndes' book presents the beloved son, brother, and husband, somewhat of a problem to his family, yet recognized first by them as a young man of amazing potentialities.

There have also been numerous magazine articles with Belloc as the object of their praise or blame. Though all agree that Belloc's preoccupation with the past as the

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foundation of the present colours everything he wrote, few authors have limited their studies to his historical work. Again, though all admit that he is one of the few modern authors who throughout his life is consistent in his point of view, no one has considered in any detail the means which Belloc uses to convince his readers of the correctness of this point of view.

Apparently there has been only one thesis written on Hilaire Belloc, Satire in the Prose Writings of Hilaire Belloc, presented to Boston College in 1939 by Eugene Joseph O'Neil. This thesis is a general treatment of Belloc's prose writings as they demonstrate his use of satire and irony, and it has been valuable in pointing out the many ways in which he employs this particular "weapon". The chapter on Belloc's historical books is somewhat brief and too general to be of much help in this study, but the Bibliography has been most useful.

Another thesis, The Character and Influence of John Henry Cardinal Newman: A Comparative Study of Newman, Thompson, Belloc, and Chesterton, presented by Sister Marie Thaddea de Sion to the University of Saskatchewan, contains little new information on Belloc, but is of value in revealing Cardinal Newman's opinions on the best methods of convincing the reading public.

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The purpose of the present thesis is to report on an investigation made into the persuasive techniques of Hilaire Belloc, in their twofold aspect of literary style and historical system. Having pointed out the various devices employed by Belloc, the writer will attempt to evaluate them in the light of criticisms made, and of general literary principles. Any opinion as to the successfulness of Belloc's work will necessarily be based on or at least influenced by the judgments of these men whose works have been mentioned. It is, therefore, in the study of his style, with particular consideration given his techniques of persuasion, that it is hoped this thesis will make some small contribution to learning.

Mr. Belloc has, however, written so voluminously, that it is necessary to make some choice among his works. His travel essays, particularly those contained in The Path to Rome, were among the first of Belloc's writings to attract public attention. Nonsense verse, political criticisms, religious polemics were followed during World War I by detailed analyses of the military tactics of the generals of both sides, winning for their author the respect and attention of an ever-widening audience. The Servile State fell on deaf ears at the time of its publication, but has since gained ground, especially in the United States, where enlightened sociologists have discovered it and are amazed

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to see its prophecies and forebodings gradually being fulfilled. It is in history, however, that Belloc finds his most lasting interest, and history is the topic which reappears again and again through all his writings. One finds it serving as a foundation for his warnings as to the probable fate of modern civilization, appearing as the topic for many of his essays, shading his musings over the glorious vistas of the Alps, and even peeping out between the lines of his nonsense verse.

What is more natural, then, than that one should single out from among Belloc's over one hundred and fifty books those specifically dedicated to the subject which in one way or another dominated most of his prose and much of his poetry? After the death of Hilaire Belloc, Theodore Maynard wrote:

it was in the field of history that he uttered his strongest challenge. To see him rightly therefore we must look at him here and, for the moment at least, put all his other activities into the subsidiary place he himself deliberately set them.¹

and Frederick Wilhelmson wrote at almost the same time:

"The Bellocian vision, while poetic and religious, finds its completion in history."² Nor is this opinion of

¹Theodore Maynard, "Hilaire Belloc", in The Catholic World, Vol. 178, No. 1063, issue of October, 1953, p. 8.

²Frederick Wilhelmson, Hilaire Belloc: No Alienated Man, Sheed & Ward, 1953, p. 35.

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Belloc's work of late origin; as early as 1916 Thomas Seccombe was writing:

To paraphrase the pompous expression of Gibbon, History and Geography were his bat and ball. Neither to him were abstractions. He took a lively interest in both, and sought the earliest opportunity of applying his knowledge. They have always been his two most efficient arms of offense, and it is principally with their aid that he has made the impression he has made upon the literature of our day.³

Within the range of history there are still a vast number of possible selections to be made. In a preliminary study such as this, it would seem appropriate to concentrate on that period which Belloc himself most preferred. According to W.N. Roughead, the French Revolution was his favourite period,⁴ but Douglas Woodruff says⁵ it was Belloc's publisher who persuaded him to write first on French history, because his views of English history were so controversial. At any rate, that his eventual concentration on the Reformation sprang from serious motives is evident when we consider Belloc's own declaration that:

³•Thomas Seccombe, "Hilaire Belloc", in The Living Age, (taken from The Bookman), Vol. 2, No. 3744, issue of April 8, 1916, p. 96.

⁴•W.N. Roughead, Hilaire Belloc: An Anthology of His Prose and Verse, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1951, p. 11.

⁵•Douglas Woodruff, "Hilaire Belloc: Keen Eyes to See", in The Ensign, (no volume or number), issue of August 1, 1953, p. 5, col. 2.

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The break-up of united western Christendom with the coming of the Reformation was by far the most important thing in history since the foundation of the Catholic Church fifteen hundred years before.⁶

Among his Reformation works those treating of England contain some of his most characteristic and most vital writing. According to Belloc, on the fate of England depended the success or failure of the whole Reformation. Speaking of England's apostasy he says: "it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this historical catastrophe."⁷ Had England not broken so completely with Rome, the Reformation would have been a failure, the Counter-Reformation would have been unnecessary, and not only a part, but the whole of Europe would today be united by the common bond of that ancient Christianity upon which our western civilization is based.

Surely to the relation of an event which he considered of such major importance any author would bring the utmost of his genius, and, indeed, Calvert Alexander has written that:

⁶Hilaire Belloc, Characters of the Reformation, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1936, p. 1.

⁷Ibid., p. 8, 12, 26, and 28.

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Belloc's very best work has been done in the Reformation period. Artistically his two biographies Wolsey and Cranmer are perhaps his greatest achievements; his How the Reformation Happened is his masterpiece of analysis.⁸

From both the historical and the artistic point of view, then, it seems natural to seek in this period the characteristic features of Belloc's historical writings.

Still another limitation must be set by defining the period to be considered as the Reformation. Here again the dates set by Belloc himself seem the most logical to accept. He divides the Reformation into two periods or phases, the first beginning with Martin Luther in 1517, and the second coming in the opening years of the seventeenth century and lasting in England until about 1688 or a few years later, but ending in France earlier than in England and in the German States earlier still.⁹ For the purpose of this study, then, the Reformation will be considered as occupying the time and concerning the people of England from 1517 to 1690.

There are many critics who condemn Belloc for the fact that he so obviously strives to convince his readers of his own particular theses. Some of these critics even

⁸Calvert Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1935, p. 307.

⁹Hilaire Belloc, The Great Heresies, London, Sheed & Ward, 1938, p. 175-177.

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state that because of his partisanship, Belloc's histories are of value only as works of art and not as scientific histories. The object of this work is precisely this artistic or literary aspect of the historical work of Hilaire Belloc. That author's accuracy as an historian, skill as a military tactician and knowledge as a geographer are not being discussed. This purports to be a literary, not an historical study. Neither is it intended as a detailed study of propaganda, nor an attempt to establish a set of criteria whereby to judge the success or failure of any particular method of persuasion. The intention is simply to study Belloc's methods of persuasion in their two-fold aspect of literary devices and historical techniques, and to attempt to evaluate those methods.

Before any detailed study can be made of an author's techniques of persuasion, it is necessary to have a definite idea of the forces that move him to write, the reading public to which he addresses himself, and the points on which he finds it necessary to persuade his readers. In order better to understand how he writes, and why he writes in that way, the student must discover why he writes at all. In other words, an author's aims must be noted before his methods. For this reason, the first chapter of this thesis will deal with Belloc's aim or purpose in writing on the English Reformation.

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The second and third chapters will contain the main body of the thesis, the second treating of Belloc's persuasive techniques in their literary aspects and the third analyzing those methods peculiar to his historical works. The final chapter will treat of the efficacy of Belloc's methods in fulfilling his aims.

CHAPTER I

BELLOC'S AIMS IN HIS WRITINGS ON THE REFORMATION

Since this thesis proposes to consider Hilaire Belloc as a persuasive historian, it is perhaps best to divide a study of his aims into two categories, first, his aims as a propagandist¹, and second, his aims as an historian. Gorham Munson tells us that "a definition of propaganda must reckon with the target, the method, and the purpose of the propagandist."² As a propagandist, Belloc addresses himself to two general classes of people, to Catholics and to non-Catholics. The latter group, or target, might be further divided into Anglicans and neo-pagans.

In addressing his fellow-Catholics, he has two general ends or purposes. First of all, he wishes to guard them from error. In his Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History"³. Belloc states that he is writing

¹•The word propagandist is used here in a somewhat loose sense, as signifying one who seeks to win another to his point of view. Belloc, it may be pointed out, is engaged more in persuasion, which addresses individuals, than in propaganda, which addresses the masses.

²•Gorham Munson, Twelve Decisive Battles of the Mind, New York, Greystone Press, 1942, p. 14.

³•Hilaire Belloc, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", London, Sheed & Ward, 1926, p. 1.

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principally for those Catholics into whose hands the Outline might fall - not because he thinks that the book is of lasting importance, but because "to check erroneous statement is always worth while", and, more important still, because:

One Catholic disturbed in his faith is more important than a host of the average reading public of England and America, drowsily accepting stuff they have heard all their lives, and reading it because they have always believed it to be true.⁴

The chief source of disturbance for the faith of a Catholic today is, according to Belloc, historical error. The fact that much of his work as an apologist for the Catholic faith lies in the realm of history is explained when one reads his statement made in 1926:

In my eyes at least, much the most formidable assault delivered against the Catholic Church today is the assault delivered from the historical argument (. . .) The modern white world, the world of the European races and their oversea expansion, is rapidly becoming divided into two fairly definite camps, those who accept the full mission of the Catholic Church and those who are convinced, by the study of geology and recorded History, that the Catholic Church is but one more example of man's power of self-delusion.⁵

A second purpose which Belloc has in mind as he writes to and for his fellow-Catholics, is to encourage

⁴•Ibid., p. 1.

⁵•Idem, The Catholic Church and History, New York, Macmillan, 1926, p. 8-9.

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them to join him in the battle for the Faith. It is his ambition to first lead and then keep up with a Catholic reversal of policy. He grows quite forceful about it as he writes that "the tide had turned" and that "the old process of perpetual retreat on the Catholic side, the old tiresome defensive note in apologetics" is being dropped, reversed entirely. To which avowal he adds succinctly that it is "high time".⁶ He believes that "a tide in the affairs of men" has reached its flood and must needs be taken advantage of. Writing on the same topic two years later,⁷ he tells his readers that anti-Catholic criticism has gone the cycle and Catholic apologists are at last in a position to use history, so often used as a weapon against them, in their own defence. Now is their time and opportunity to ferret out and expose the mass of false official history ensconced in the minds of the public. His spirited leadership, however, is not being followed, so that again in 1932, while warning against the abuse of Catholic propaganda, he urges⁸ that more Catholics must take up the

⁶.Idem, How the Reformation Happened, New York, McBride, 1928, p. 272-273.

⁷.Idem, "History is With Us", in America, Vol. 43, (No number), issue of June 28, 1930, p. 277-278.

⁸.Idem, "Catholic Propaganda", in America, Vol. 47, (No number), issue of August 13, 1932, p. 442-443.

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work of historians in England, in order to explode the anti-Catholic myths of English history.

As he writes on the Reformation, Belloc still has his Catholic readers in mind. It is for them that he strives to explain⁹ how it came about that the Catholic Faith, so essential and fundamental a part of all the culture that gives Europe its being, should have been, in a comparatively short time, utterly rooted out and replaced by a new thing, alien to the soil it sprang from, and yet firmly, and, to all appearances, permanently established there. To anyone really knowing Europe as it was at the end of the Middle Ages, this complete transformation presents a problem of an almost pathological nature.

Many critics find fault with Belloc's literary methods because, they claim, these methods are wholly unsuited to the work of converting Englishmen to the faith of their fathers. This criticism is legitimate only if one is sure that his intention is to convert his fellow-countrymen. It seems to this reader that in addressing himself to the Anglican members of his reading public, Belloc does not have their conversion, at least not their immediate conversion, in view. He is too well versed in the vagaries of human nature to imagine that the modern counter-Reformation

⁹Idem, How the Reformation Happened, p. 19.

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can be worked over-night. He realizes¹⁰. that fashion is one of the propagandist's strongest allies, and that in the process of making Catholicism fashionable, the order of progress will be first to make it fashionable to ridicule anti-Catholic history, materialism, and morals; then to make it fashionable to sympathize with Catholicism; only after that will Catholicism itself become the fashion.

But fashion Hilaire Belloc considers "a tawdry ally" and it is to the higher and more intellectual motives that he wishes to appeal. Consequently, in writing for his Anglican brethren, his principal aims, in this gradual progression to conversion, are to remind them of their Catholic European background, and to right the errors and supply the omissions of Protestant Whig historians. These two motives appear again and again in Belloc's books on the English Reformation. The reader is constantly reminded of the Catholic background of the English Church and the European foundations of the English nation. These are the subject and counter-subject re-echoing through all that great fugue that is his life's work. "Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe" has been called his one thesis, reiterated in a hundred different ways. One thing he wants to drive

¹⁰.Idem, "The Conversion of England", in Essays of a Catholic Layman in England, London, Sheed & Ward, 1931, p. 117-118.

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home, to his English readers at least, is that they were Catholic Europeans before they became Protestant Englishmen.

Of the correction of false history there will be more later. Suffice it to say at present that Belloc is one of those who think that a nation's past is of prime importance in fashioning its present, and that insofar as that past is accurately recorded and intelligently interpreted, to that extent is the present well and solidly built upon it. He believes that the past is the object lesson for all politicians - Communists, nationalists - all claim history as their foundation. Ideas of racial superiority rising out of false history have warped the vision of a united Christendom for two generations of University students, a myth of racial superiority which was one of the chief causes of both World Wars. Thus, as he affirms, "in our morals, as in our laws, in our particular policies, domestic and foreign, true history strengthens the State. False history weakens it."¹¹.

Among his non-Catholic readers, however, Belloc does not address himself primarily to those of the Protestant religion. His quarrel - if quarrel it may be called - is primarily with those he calls the "neo-pagans". These,

¹¹.Idem, "The Proofs of the Past", in The Living Age (taken from The Eye Witness), Vol. 59, No. 3590, issue of April 26, 1913, p. 252.

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he is convinced, are the real opponents of the Catholic Church, and, indeed, of religion itself.

There remains (. . .) much of the old Protestant argument (. . .) But of far more weight in my judgment, at the present moment, is the general argument that (. . .) the Faith is but an illusion.¹².

That this new paganism is the object of Belloc's constant attack is pointed out by Douglas Woodruff. Commenting on a recent castigation of the Catholic Church by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr. Woodruff writes¹³. that he, like most Catholics in England, has been under the impression that since the war and the mutual understanding it fostered, such controversy between Anglicans and Catholics has waned. He goes on to state that the modern battle of Catholicism has been with secularism and paganism in all its forms, and not with the Established Church. Newman, Wiseman, and Manning strove openly for the conversion of their Anglican brethren, but Belloc and Chesterton take up arms, not with the Archbishop of Canterbury, but with Wells and Shaw, not with the Church Times, but with the New Statesmen.

And what is Belloc's message to these neo-pagans? It is a message of faith, not so much in the existence of

¹².Idem, The Catholic Church and History, p. 8-9.

¹³.Douglas Woodruff, "Anglican Outlook", syndicated column "Europe Today", in The Ensign, Vol. 6, No. 2, issue of October 31, 1953, p. 1, col. 5.

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God as in His Providence for man. The modern world, so Belloc believes, needs to be impressed with the importance of religion. This is another of his favourite themes. It was the Christian religion which built our civilization, and it is only a return to that religion which will save our civilization from reaching the lowest level of the decline into which it has fallen. Further, he seeks to impress upon his readers the fact that the Catholic Church alone today holds the answers to all the problems which an irreligious environment might present to men. The Catholic Church alone teaches with certainty in the midst of the error and corruption of our twentieth century world. Probably the best proof which Belloc presents for the truth of the claims of his Church is the mere fact of her continuing existence, despite the many and dire persecutions leveled against her.

As an historian, Hilaire Belloc writes for two groups of people, for himself - Poet, Grizzlebeard, and Sailor - and for others. The Poet loves history in itself, is enthralled with the romantic past, especially the Medieval Past, in which he sees the perfect fruition of human culture. (How poetic and impractical this must seem to the readers of a scientific age, an age of progress which looks only to the future!) Grizzlebeard, one feels, loves the ironies of history, bitter or sweet, depending on

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personal sympathies, is fascinated by the paradoxes and absurdities revealed therein, and seeks answers for the problem of how certain enormities have ever come to be believed. (One can imagine the roar of laughter on reading in G.B. Shaw that Joan of Arc was the first Protestant martyr.) And the Sailor loves the hills and the sea, becomes involved in maps and strategies, admires Cromwell as a cavalry man while despising him as a Puritan.

For Others, Belloc has one wish - that they may have a clear, vivid, accurate picture of the past, in order better to live the present and build the future. It is his firm conviction that the historian must bring the past to life. The armies which march across the pages of his books must be composed of living men, not puppets. The kings and queens who command and intrigue must be men and women of flesh and blood, moved by human motives and reacting in human fashion.

In order thus to re-create the past, the historian must understand the times of which he writes and the forces which moulded the characters he describes. Here is the port of entry for inaccuracy, a foe to be ever guarded against. Here slip in those "enormities" and "absurdities" which puzzle the Grizzlebeard. Belloc has listed as the chief cause of historical error the fault of "reading history backwards". Thus historians look at sixteenth

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century England with twentieth century eyes, and imagine that the English were always Protestant and that Catholicism was some alien thing imposed on them from above. Or they look on Henry VIII's break with Rome and claim that he intended all the time to set up a new Church, forgetting his title of "Defender of the Faith" and his intense devotion to the Mass, chief object of hatred to such genuine Reformers as Cecil and Cranmer.

To the righting of such errors Belloc has devoted the best and most strenuous of his efforts. One admires his gift for vivid portraiture in such biographies as Wolsey and Cranmer, his grasp of military tactics in Charles the First and Cromwell, his psychological acumen in The Last Rally and James the Second, but in all his books, from How the Reformation Happened to The Silence of the Sea, one experiences that sense of falsehood attacked, of error noted and corrected, of truth and accuracy striven after. These are his ideals. It will be the business of the next two chapters to study the methods which he employs to fulfill these ideals.

CHAPTER II

BELLOC'S LITERARY METHODS OF PERSUASION

This study of Hilaire Belloc's literary methods of persuasion will discuss, first, the general characteristics of his style, namely, the lyric, dramatic, satiric, and philosophic qualities, second, the mechanical or technical features such as sentence structure and figures of speech, and next, the mentality which inspires this style. Finally, the chapter will evaluate Belloc's use of these literary devices as techniques of persuasion.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Belloc's style is its perfection. Well does he realize that those who read him will find much to criticize in what he says. At least they will find no fault in how he says it. A determined antagonist, he is also a master craftsman. Each weapon that he wields is hammered out on the anvil of his own genius. Each missile that he projects is ground smooth and hard and sharp on the whetstone of his wit.

A student reading through Belloc's work in chronological order finds, very early, the strength of movement and vitality of description that characterize his most mature writings. In 1914 Burnell Payne was writing:

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"I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that his is the best English prose of the day."¹ That this was not the opinion of all Belloc's admirers is evidenced by George Shuster's comment on Belloc's books on the French Revolution:

From the technical point of view these books are uneven and betray, despite their general vividness and individuality, the hand of one learning to write.

Belloc is not a master of style like his brother-in-arms, the incomparable Chesterton.²

His later work, that relating to the English Reformation, is, so it seems to this reader, a constant revelation of nature's gift of a forceful, flawless style. It has been said that no one has written better essays in English since the days of Addison and Steele.

He has immense capacity for brilliant, almost breath-taking grandeur of prose, yet, for the most part, he seems to restrain and curb this urge for the magnificent. He resorts rather to clear, direct, simple modes of address. Perhaps he suspects that on large parts of his audience his subtle humour, his flights of fancy, even his most moving elocutions, are completely lost.

¹•Burnell Payne, "The Work of Mr. Belloc," in The Living Age, (taken from The British Review), Vol. 63, No. 3648, issue of June 6, 1914, p. 606.

²•George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature, New York, Macmillan, 1922, p. 256-257.

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This splendour, this grandness of manner, lies both in the ordering of his thoughts and in the words in which he clothes them. His sentences sing - it is what men call the "lyric element".

The morning sun sparkled on the swirl of the river and on the tiny wavelets, on the pouring stream of the high spring tide, which brims to its fullest in London near mid-day, at the change of the moon, when the current is strongest. A small cold wind was blowing from the east, from the very gates of the morning. All the Thames was awake to life with hammering and the calls of boatmen and the splash of oars. The life of the sea itself, the salt, was mounting into London River.³

Yet he cannot be called romantic. There is nothing soft or sentimental about Hilaire Belloc. He loves to reminisce, but it is always towards a rational end. Often enough his emotions show through, in spite of constant efforts to control them, but they are the emotions of a strong man: indignation at injustice, scorn for pusillanimity, distaste for hypocrisy, or frank, ribald amusement at the incongruities of life.

This emotional quality of his work can perhaps best be described as dramatic. Commentators have remarked that Belloc uses every medium of literary expression except the drama. True, he wrote no plays for presentation on the

³Hilaire Belloc, The Last Rally: A Story of Charles II, London, Cassell, 1940, p. 297.

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stage, yet much of his work has a strong dramatic element. He says himself⁴. that if history could acquire a sense of tragedy, not just personal, but for the fall of a great culture or a great movement or idea, then it would acquire the great quality of dignity. The classic example of Belloc's greatest tragic work is Wolsey.

This work is divided into two parts: The Setting of the Tragedy, in which are described the stage, programme, plot and cast; and The Action, which is divided into five acts, with an interlude between the third and fourth. There is all the paraphernalia of making clear what has gone before and hinting at what is to come, of introducing the characters, and of explaining the forces which have moulded and continue to move them. There is suspense leading to a climax, and a swift falling away to the end. And there is drama within the drama as he unveils before our eyes such images as this:

Conceive that figure, splendid in the scarlet of his office, with vivid pageantry about him, expressing in its gesture and poise complete domination and all the dignity of rule. Its ornaments of gold are all about it; its train of great men to do its bidding; its crowd of servitors. Let such a figure and its retinue be seen as upon a hill-top, brilliantly lit by an opposing evening sun. The majesty and brilliance of the group is

⁴.Idem, "The New Historians", in The New Statesman, Vol. 33, No. 850, issue of August 10, 1929, p. 553.

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violently impressed upon our sight because there lies behind it, in awful contrast, one dead curtain of black cloud. They are turned away from it; they do not feel its approach. It breaks and they are swallowed up.⁵

There is drama too in the gradual revelation of the man Wolsey. We see him advancing to the peak of the Church's hierarchy, and using his position to destroy the very clerical organization by which he rose; condemning the evils of the Church of his day, and himself holding several parishes and livings; acquiring a reputation as one of the greatest foreign ministers in Europe and blundering in every foreign effort he attempted.

In the dramatic portrayal of this particular figure, however, there is none of the satire which marks so much of Belloc's work. In 1906 Cecil Chesterton called him "the most brilliant and stimulating of contemporary English satirists."⁶ Chesterton may, of course, have been prejudiced, for he and Belloc were friends and co-editors, but the opinion has been repeated continually since that day, even by those who have suffered from contact with his razor-edged wit.

⁵•Idem, Wolsey, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1930, p. 30.

⁶•Cecil Chesterton, "Hilaire Belloc", in The Living Age, (taken from Temple Bar), Vol. 23, No. 3258, issue of December 15, 1906, p. 690.

Belloc's satire turns most frequently on those men of whom Protestant, Whig historians have made heroes. When he writes of how Mary Tudor directed her persecution against Cranmer, his acid comment is, "He was unjustly treated, for he was always ready to recant."⁷ This Cranmer is the man whom Belloc describes as "the former Chaplain of Anne Boleyn, now by the grace of Anne Boleyn Primate of England,"⁸ the same whose last hours Belloc describes in a peculiarly icy tone, telling how he "went to Confession and took Communion with outward joy" but his last words were:

But as for that recantation, I repent it right sore because I know it was against the truth (. . .) This is the hand that wrote it, and therefore it shall suffer first punishment.

. . . This is the way in which Cranmer died.⁹

In sharp contrast, Belloc has for Wolsey a certain compassion as he pictures him making

his long and full confession to the Head of the House. He was at that business a full hour and what passed is hidden to us, only save that his soul was clean at last.¹⁰

7. Hilaire Belloc, How the Reformation Happened, New York, McBride, 1928, p. 148.

8. Idem, A History of England, New York, Putnam, 1928, Vol. 4, p. 108.

9. Idem, Cranmer, London, Cassell, 1931, p. 304 and 313.

10. Idem, Wolsey, p. 296.

finally, uttering those last words beginning with the oft-repeated expression: "If I had served my God so diligently as I have done the King, He would not have given me over in my gray hairs" and, so speaking "of the things to which he had hitherto been so blind"¹¹., passing away at the hour he had foretold.

Oliver Cromwell is another victim of Belloc's withering scorn as the author details the hypocrisy of the Protector:

He protested that he would rather serve under Fairfax than lead the greatest army in Europe, and, having so protested, took Fairfax's place and accepted the Command-in-Chief.¹²

One of his most effective pieces of irony is an essay entitled "A Leading Article".¹³ This essay pretends to be an editorial written on January 29, 1649, commenting on the condemnation of Charles Stuart. The piece has a journalistic air of justice, impartiality, and freedom. Yet the editor, as might be expected of the times, is extremely careful not to offend or even to disagree with those in power. Who can fail to wince as he reads the unctuous words:

¹¹•Ibid., p. 297.

¹²•Idem, Cromwell, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1934, p. 281.

¹³•Idem, "A Leading Article", in This and That and the Other, London, Methuen, 1912, p. 254-259.

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Mr. Cromwell - whom surely all agree in regarding as a representative Englishman - and that very different character, Mr. Ireton, whom we do not always agree with, but who certainly stands for a great section of opinion, are at one upon a policy which has received no serious criticism. . .

"no serious criticism"! The author continues to minimize the uprising in favour of the King and the support given him. He never calls Charles by his title and goes so far as to reprimand him for "wearing his hat in the presence of men of such eminence as Mr. Justice Bradshaw." The whole farce ends with the pious hope that no one who will attend the execution will be guilty of anything "that might make it necessary for the Government to use severe measures utterly repugnant to the spirit of English liberty."

Belloc has a particularly keen eye for ironic situations in history. In several books¹⁴ he mentions the fact that Protestants, Calvinists in particular, claim Holy Writ as their sole authority and use it as their chief argument against that very Church which brought the Old Testament to Europe, added to it the New Testament, preserved the whole through the Dark Ages of barbaric invasion and

¹⁴.Idem, Crisis of Civilization, New York, Fordham, 1937, p. 14

and

"William Tyndale", in The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1940, p. 41.

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gave to it its power by declaring it of divine inspiration. In Oliver Cromwell¹⁵. he names as one of the ironies of that cavalryman's life the fact that the very fleet which Charles I had begun and which Cromwell and Parliament feared and sought most eagerly to destroy should in the end have proved the strongest force in aiding the Protector to further his ends in international affairs.

Another facet of Belloc's satire is revealed in his occasional use of understatement:

But the Reformation did produce a special form in the general progress of instruments and physical science. This special form is, as I have said, Industrial Capitalism, with which all Europe to-day is actively at issue. It cannot be called a fortunate result.¹⁶

More frequently he uses over-emphasis:

But why do they say this? Why do they fly in the face of the existing evidence and put forward as historical a state of affairs for which they not only have no proof, but which is the opposite of what all the existing proofs point to?

The answer is simple. They want to suppress evidence for the strong Catholic feeling in England at that time. They want to make out that the English people in the early years of Elizabeth supported William Cecil - which is a falsehood. They want to make out that even from the first years of Elizabeth, there was a grand saga of sea-faring heroism proceeding on the Protestant side.

¹⁵.Idem, Oliver Cromwell, London, Ernest Benn, 1927, p. 45.

¹⁶.Idem, How the Reformation Happened, p. 268.

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They want to identify this with the spirit and destiny of the English people. They want to hide the part played by Philip of Spain in supporting Elizabeth and to antedate the quarrel between Cecil and the Spanish Government. In other words, they want to present a myth as though it were real history and this, in plain English, is telling a lie.¹⁷.

and most devastatingly he uses sarcasm:

As we approach the break in Christian Unity, generally called the "Reformation", I look with interest at Mr. Wells's work to see whether his combined intelligence and instruction will stand the strain.¹⁸.

There is one delightfully witty caricature of an event which must be mentioned here as a last example of Belloc's satire. It is the description of the pompous reception given Cardinal Wolsey's Red Hat (capitalization reminiscent of A Bad Child's Book of Beasts):

When the Hat came out from Rome it started with particular pomp, it journeyed with the same, and its passage through south England to Westminster was a pageant and a triumph. Never was a dead object, of dead stuff and stiffening, brought nearer to idolatry. We shall assist at a sort of worship of the Hat.¹⁹.

The principal impression left by Belloc's work is one of force, vigour, downright violence. Yet a careful

¹⁷.Idem, "John Hawkins", in The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays, p. 60.

¹⁸.Idem, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", London, Sheed & Ward, 1926, p. 93.

¹⁹.Idem, Wolsey, p. 164.

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reading reveals many passages of deep philosophical thought. His biographies of Charles II and James II are outstanding not only for their vivid descriptions of those royal personages, but also, and more important, for their penetration into the motives that moved the brothers, and for their ponderings on the really important elements in a man's life.

It is scarcely possible to find beautiful thoughts more felicitously expressed than in the passage:

But there always comes a point after which no temporal object whatever, no worldly consideration should hold against the Eternal. If indeed all conviction of eternal things be an illusion, then justice itself may be sacrificed to a temporal need, but if the great virtues (among which justice stands so high, and bearing witness to a conviction upon divine things higher still), if these are to be put first, then one must, in any temporal task, come to a point where the defence of justice and faith have a claim superior to everything else, however important: even one's country, even one's public functions - and of public functions the highest, indistinguishable from the good of the country, is sovereignty.²⁰

The question of James's acknowledgment of the claim of the Church upon his mind and soul, and Charles's refusal until his last moment on earth is one which concerns Belloc greatly. Whether because he too has felt the penalty of his own Catholicism, or because this failure of Charles, in the midst of so many fine qualities of character, seems

²⁰. Idem, The Last Rally, p. 101.

incongruous and enigmatic, he returns to it several times, puzzling over it and striving to explain it:

It is not for us to weigh the credit and the debit of others in the supreme matters of the soul. We know the obvious rule in black and white; having come into touch with reality, having grasped the truth, we must bear witness to it at all costs. So James did to his eternal honour; but so Charles could not, because the cost was so desperately, so ruinously high. What! Must he give up that to which he had devoted the whole of so militant, so finely militant a life? Must he sacrifice all that intelligent, tenacious helmsmanship? Must he lose the prize for which he had steered that ship during more than thirty years of stress and ceaseless labour?

Yes, that was the price demanded of him - and he could not pay it. Never was a higher price demanded of any man. Let no man say that he would himself have paid it. No such demand was made upon the brother James but on him, Charles, the demand was made, and it was too great.²¹

One of the important features of Belloc's persuasive style is a disconcerting talent for change of speed. Titterton²² compares Belloc's method of attack to the solid Roman phalanx, advancing steadily, unswervingly, the short swords flashing. From time to time the cavalry dash out - "but that was merely a grace-note, an insolent slap in the face" - all through it, "with slow and iron insolence the phalanx went on". The reader is amazed at the varieties

21. Ibid., p. 173.

22. W.R. Titterton, "Belloc - He Loved England Well Enough to Fight Her", in Universe, London, Vol. 93, No. 4826, issue of July 24, 1953, p. 6, col. 1.

of mood and tone at the command of this master of English prose.

From the purely technical point of view, Belloc employs practically every literary device available. One of his favourites is a brief, pungent, clincher sentence coming at the end of a paragraph, composed of one or several long, complicated sentences. This construction occurs so frequently in some of his books that the reader begins to look for it. Thus we read:

We must of course from the outset postulate the plain truth that Cromwell was the man who killed Charles Stuart. There were a great many other factors as there always are in any event whatsoever, and particularly in a public event where thousands of disputing men are concerned. But the one man mainly responsible before history for the death of the King is Oliver Cromwell. He did it.

Yes; he did it. We must postulate that.²³

These short sentences are not reserved solely for the ends of paragraphs. They can also serve to speed up the movement, to emphasize a humorous situation, and to carry the reader forward to a succeeding chapter. A good example of this use is found in Cranmer:

²³•Hilaire Belloc, Cromwell, p. 201-202.

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Henry's uncertain vacillating temper and now too prolonged familiarity with Anne had led to bickerings and to short quarrels, but still the position seemed to stand firm; they had only to wait for the child that was to come. As the hour of Anne's delivery approached Henry's spirits rose and Cranmer's assurance with it. It would be plain sailing. The child would certainly be a boy. The astrologists had made sure of that, so the King had no doubts. Down in the Palace at Greenwich in the first days of September the event was awaited; when Sunday morning, the 7th, came it was at hand. And somewhat about three o'clock in the afternoon of that day the child was born. It was a girl.

And then he goes on to Chapter VII which begins: "It was a girl: and they christened her Elizabeth."²⁴.

Belloc is convinced that to be impressive, to be genuine, history must above all be vivid. And so we have the constant use of figures of speech, of comparisons, antithesis, description. He frequently compares the rise and spread of Protestantism in the sixteenth century to the rise and spread of Communism today. In describing the decline of the Monarchy in England after 1540, so that by 1660 only its form or shell remained, he comments:

It is nearly always so with institutions at their decline and disappearance. Their form survives and even deceives, like a sort of very active ghost, long after their substance has dissolved into air. So the Senatorial power in Imperial Rome under the real power of the Commander-in-Chief, the Emperor. So our Parliamentarians today under the real rule of finance.²⁵.

²⁴.Idem, Cranmer, p. 115 and 119.

²⁵.Idem, James the Second, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1928, p. 35.

In the same book,²⁶ he compares marriage and property-holding, declaring that marriage is either an indissoluble sacrament or a terminable contract; property is either of right or not of right. Just as abuses of the law dealing with rightful property-holding lead to Communism, so abuses of the law dealing with marriage lead to Divorce.

In The Last Rally Belloc employs one of his most striking metaphors, a metaphor which is maintained throughout the book. Here he compares Charles II's career to a ship's voyage. The whole figure is outlined in the titles of the chapters - The First Grasp of the Helm, The Fair Run, The Sunken Reef, Gathering Storm, Full Gale: The Popish Plot, Hurricane and Harbour, Drop Anchor. One of the best single examples of his enlarging on this comparison comes near the end of the book:

The dying-down of that gale, the quietening of that "Terror", was but an entry to a final and more violent phase and a concluding hurricane which the master just rode out: just, barely. It is often so with a perilous passage; the worst gusts are at the end.²⁷

This comparison in terms of the sea is a favourite of Belloc's. We find him writing, "The water

²⁶•Ibid., p. 127-129.

²⁷•Idem, The Last Rally, p. 281.

was no longer smooth. Wolsey had felt the swell of the open sea, and there was weather ahead."²⁸.

In Charles the First the soldier replaces the sailor as Belloc, several times throughout the biography, compares Charles's steadfastness of character to an army under seige.

With the metaphor's sister figure, the simile, Belloc is not so profuse. One of the most delightful samples of it occurs in The Last Rally:

For Buckingham had been so rooted in the Court connection that an association with his memory was like the savour of an onion in a dish. The savour of the Villiers connection made all the difference.²⁹.

Hilaire Belloc, as a persuasive artist, knows the importance of words, and uses them to their fullest capacity. He has a peculiar facility for adapting his language to his audience. He must have his sentimental, tradition-worshipping English readers in mind as he writes:

By 1525 the Mass had been stamped out in Zurich and its departure had been preceded by a violent iconoclasm committed by these Mountaineers upon all the inheritance of beauty which their ancestors had left them for a guide. Such loveliness was connected with the official Church, and it must go. A host of others was to follow through more than a century, ruining the legacy of Scotland, horribly maiming that of France and the Rhine and the Netherlands; murdering our ancestral wealth in living stone.³⁰.

²⁸.Idem, Wolsey, p. 226.

²⁹.Idem, The Last Rally, p. 51.

³⁰.Idem, How the Reformation Happened, p. 75.

Surely these words: committed (signifying a crime), inheritance, ancestors, legacy, ancestral wealth (against sacred things), violent, barbaric destructions, ruining, horribly maiming, murdering (in a despicable manner), are calculated to move his readers to disgust for and resentment against the movement which caused such sacrilege.

Some of Belloc's most expressive sentences contain words of his own coinage. He says of the Church of England: "it was bound up with the village squirearchy"³¹. and of Charles I's judge, Mr. Justice Bradshaw: "It was courageous on the part of the bullet-proof-hatted regicide."³². He can too, as he demonstrates so humorously in the story of Mr. Benjamin Franklin Hard in The Path to Rome, expound on the connotation of words. In describing Oliver Cromwell he makes himself quite clear as he writes:

he possessed (. . .) that quality which we call hypocrisy, cunning, or diplomatic skill, according to whether we desire to blame, ridicule, or praise it.³³

Many of Mr. Belloc's most telling blows are contained in inoffensive looking parentheses. Time and again

31. Idem, The Last Rally, p. 28.

32. Idem, Cromwell, p. 322.

33. Idem, Oliver Cromwell, p. 45.

he refers in a bracket to "(the world that writes our official history)",³⁴ and to his opinion of it, "The anti-Catholic official legend makes that moment the point of departure, and (for once) it is right."³⁵ Parliamentarians need expect no mercy from him either as he writes, "Thugs (as even the House of Commons knew), were an Oriental sect."³⁶

An essential feature of any program of persuasion is repetition, or reiteration. It is what Mr. Munson describes as "Overwhelming insistence upon a theory until it prevails upon the masses."³⁷ and what Mr. Shuster calls "hammering the sophist".³⁸ Belloc tells again and again of the essential nature of

the matter of religion, upon whose colour every society depends, which is the note even of a national language, and which seems to be the ultimate influence beyond which no historical analysis can carry a thinking man.³⁹

He reminds England of its Catholic background:

³⁴•Idem, How the Reformation Happened, p. 62.

³⁵•Ibid., p. 64.

³⁶•Idem, The Last Rally, p. 96.

³⁷•Gorham Munson, Twelve Decisive Battles of the Mind, New York, Greystone Press, 1942, p. 91.

³⁸•George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature, New York, Macmillan, 1922, p. 250.

³⁹•Hilaire Belloc, "Ronsard", in Essays of To-Day and Yesterday, London, Harrap, 1926, p. 17.

"What was England in 1558? (. . .) All the moral landscape of the country was Catholic"⁴⁰. and again:

No one can doubt who reads the literature of that day (especially in its common popular form, the play) that England remained a Catholic country, in general tradition and social convention right on till the death of Elizabeth.⁴¹

He insists that nothing but a return to the Catholic religion can save European culture; that the "official" history, as taught in English schools, has an anti-Catholic bias and is more often false than true; that William Cecil was the real founder of the Anglican Church; that greed was the prime cause of the Reformation; these are his theses. They are like bugle calls echoing through a camp. He intends them to re-echo through his readers' minds as they do through his own.

For these themes are but the outpourings of Belloc's mind, and his modes of expression are but indications of his temperament. Even the best and most beautiful of styles would be, without a soul, both farcical and vain. It is Belloc's own peculiar spirit that makes his work charming or irritating, effective or futile. No study of his work, then, can be complete, no evaluation of

⁴⁰•Idem, A History of England, Vol. 4, p. 258.

⁴¹•Idem, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, New York, Harper, 1942, p. 247.

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that work can be attempted, until his mind and temperament are revealed.

The most obvious, the all-pervading element in Belloc's spirit is his firm conviction of and his deep attachment to the Catholic faith. He never lets his reader forget that he is a Catholic. There is no question but that he looks at every event and every person from the point of view of Rome. In writing of the great moral struggle in the world today, he informs the reader unequivocally: "there are not many churches: there is one. It is the Catholic Church on the one side and its mortal enemy on the other. The lists are set."⁴² In other words, all these Anglicans and Methodists and Presbyterians, insofar as they oppose Catholicism, have no right to call themselves members of a religion, because the only religion is Catholic.

This spirit also reveals itself in his preference for a Catholic audience. He writes primarily to save the faith of his fellow-Catholics. He writes for them also because in them he expects to find his most intelligent,

⁴².Idem, The Great Heresies, London, Sheed & Ward, 1938, p. 274.

thoughtful audience: "outside the Catholic Church very few people nowadays put any questions to themselves ultimately; they are content to drift and feel."⁴³. He might be said to be expressing the same preference in a less obvious manner when, in Europe and the Faith,⁴⁴. he states that history is clear and comprehensible to a Catholic because a Catholic is a part of that supreme force which moulds all history - religion.

Besides being a Catholic - he would prefer to have it phrased "because of being a Catholic" - Belloc is a humorist. His humour takes many forms: it is sometimes dry, sometimes kind, sometimes bitter; often enough it has the quality of extremely subtle wit; and quite frequently it is downright buffoonery. His attitude toward the matter of humour in history he expresses with characteristic emphasis:

It has been wittily said that God, in permitting men to be wicked, has happily made them stupid - to which it might be added that Divine Providence has also been very good to us in making wicked actions so particularly funny.⁴⁵.

⁴³.Idem, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", p. 112.

⁴⁴.Idem, Europe and the Faith, New York, Paulist Press, 1920, p. viii.

⁴⁵.Idem, Cranmer, p. 99.

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It will be noticed that Belloc's is not the genial, friendly laughter one associates with Gilbert Chesterton. Much of Belloc's laughter springs from his disdain for smallness of soul. Hypocrisy is to him of all weaknesses the most disgusting, and ranking next to it comes cowardice. He takes a certain grim pleasure in the sight of cruel - and especially of Puritanical - men receiving their just desserts. Thus when describing how Charles II set about punishing certain men responsible for his father's undoing, Belloc writes:

The most shaken of the men thus destroyed was the vehement insulter, Peters, that oddly inspired, half lunatic Puritan divine who had ridden at the head of Charles's escort in the Via Dolorosa from Hampshire to London, reviling the defenceless King (. . .) But he rallied from his shaking, I am glad to say, by a draught of strong waters.⁴⁶

Similarly, there is real bitterness in his comment on Thomas Cromwell's end:

Such men commonly die well, satisfied and full of honours. It is a happy exception that Thomas Cromwell died otherwise - by the axe and whining for life.⁴⁷

An earlier description of that whining bears the same acid tang:

⁴⁶•Idem, The Last Rally, p. 91.

⁴⁷•Idem, Wolsey, p. 106.

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Cromwell's pleading for his life was desperate. He wrote a letter ending with the clamant words, "Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!" Might he not kiss once more the hand of Henry (that large fist with red hairs upon it), in order that the perfume of it might waft him to Heaven.⁴⁸

A third mark of the Bellocian spirit is an honest desire for fairness and impartiality, combined with an utter conviction of the correctness of his own views. His two books on Oliver Cromwell are excellent examples of the former characteristic. In them he strives continually for an attitude of detached objectivity. In both books he states as his purpose to tell, not so much what Cromwell did, as what he was. Previous histories have presented the Protector in gigantic proportions, either as Hero or Villain. Belloc confesses that he was brought up in a household where Cromwell was regarded very highly. Yet one feels throughout the two books a cold, deep-ridden scorn, almost hatred, for the man. Belloc dwells on his virtues - chastity, domesticity; yet his description of the man is devastating as he demonstrates Cromwell's tremendous ability for successful dissimulation - a talent which he never used except when necessary! The author is at pains to explain,⁴⁹ almost to condone, Cromwell's

⁴⁸.Idem, A History of England, Vol. 4, p. 159.

⁴⁹.Idem, Cromwell, p. 244 ff.

actions in Ireland, based as they were on religious fanaticism and a sincere belief that these Catholics were idolators and damned; that he, Cromwell, had been divinely selected as the one to exterminate these enemies of God; that he was doing God a favour in killing as many of them as possible, and that "to God alone" the glory was due. But all Belloc's efforts at objectivity are lost in the comment made after Cromwell's death:

But Cromwell was not there. He had gone to discover whether there were beatitude for his reward who had hewn to pieces the enemies of Jehovah, or whether he should fall shrieking into the hands of an angry God; or whether Death be indeed no more than a mighty sleep.⁵⁰

In another respect, however, Belloc is much more successful in his efforts at fairness and impartiality. This is in the matter of the abuses in the Church prior to and during the Reformation. He admits quite frankly, and sometimes in considerable detail, the corruption in the Church, especially in its hierarchy - priests making a mockery of their vow of celibacy, bishops enjoying immense incomes from sees they had never visited, and, above all, Popes, increasing in importance as Italian princes while becoming spiritually more and more degraded. A typical passage of this kind occurs in A History of England:

⁵⁰.Ibid., p. 347.

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It will help anyone to understand the religious result of those few years if it be remembered that Wolsey was also a typical Churchman in that day of hopeless corruption throughout the officials of the Church. It was not odd in him to seize on all manner of revenues; to have an illegitimate daughter; to make an abbess of her - yet to say Mass regularly; to be a bishop for revenue (of more than one see), to aim at the Papacy - and to live wholly in this world.⁵¹

Fairness and impartiality are necessary, of course, but, as John Hargrave remarks, "Half-hearted propaganda is worse than none."⁵² Conviction is the absolute essential. Here Belloc does not fail. Weakness or a half-heart can never be predicated of Hilaire Belloc. He has definite, and frequently aggressive, opinions on every subject he attacks. And, as Arthur Compton-Rickett points out, Belloc is always "on the attack". Discussing the modern writers such as Shaw, Chesterton, Bennett, and Belloc, Mr. Compton-Rickett states:

They do not talk over their ideas with us as did the elder writers; there is no genial button-holing; no mellow discursiveness. They think it better to spring at our throats, and hurl their ideas at us with a catapultic violence that is often disconcerting and daring.⁵³

⁵¹.Idem, A History of England, Vol. 3, p. 399.

⁵².John Hargrave, Words Win Wars, London, Garner Darton, 1940, p. 70.

⁵³.Arthur Compton-Rickett, A History of English Literature, London, Jack, 1931, p. 664.

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In an admirable essay⁵⁴. outlining the plan which he believes Catholic historians should adopt, Hilaire Belloc gives three rules or directives. The first is to adopt "a spirit of hostility", "a spirit of the offensive", for no battle is ever won which is continually fought on the defensive. In another place he writes:

As it seems to me (. . .) we need Tertullians. We must be militant. There were, perhaps, in the past, moments when that spirit was unwise; to-day, it seems to me demanded by a just judgment of the situation. Our society has become a mob. The mob loves a scrap, and it is right.⁵⁵.

Again and again Belloc seems to warn his readers: "This is how it was. What I tell you may sound strange because it clashes with what our 'official' history has been teaching for years, but it is nevertheless true." His attacks on Protestant Whig historians are continual. These are the adversaries on whom he never lets up. Only towards the end, in Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, does he seem to ease off his offensive. Let it be understood that he does not find fault with all the modern Protestant historians. It is the 18th century Gibbon, the

⁵⁴.Hilaire Belloc, "The Counter-Attack Through History", in Essays of a Catholic Layman in England, London, Sheed & Ward, 1931, p. 140.

⁵⁵.Idem, "The Conversion of England", in Essays of a Catholic, p. 115.

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19th century Macaulay, and their 20th century followers like Coulton and Wells, who irritate him. Many of the new writers he commends for their efforts to delve into original sources and to penetrate the mind of the age of which they write.

These repeated sallies against unreliable history are a definite part of his general campaign. He understands the principle of persuasion which requires a repetition, not only frequent and prolonged, but unwavering. According to this method, there must be no compromise, no advantage admitted to the enemy. Gorham Munson cites Common Sense as an example, where Thomas Paine expertly applies

the principle of fixing war guilt absolutely and unqualifiedly upon the enemy (. . .) Throughout Common Sense you will find not the slightest hint of any right on England's side.⁵⁶

Hitler, too, never admitted "the least shadow of rightness to an enemy's case or the smallest doubt about his own."⁵⁷ Belloc does not carry his insistence to quite that extreme, but he displays fairness and impartiality towards historical personages rather than towards Protestant historians.

Through his work, then, Hilaire Belloc appears - an incomparable stylist, a flaming satirist, a skilled

⁵⁶•Gorham Munson, Op. cit., p. 79.

⁵⁷•Ibid., p. 266.

technician, and an unwavering apologist of the Catholic truth. It is now possible to make some evaluation of his literary techniques and of his use of them as methods of persuasion.

As previously stated, Belloc's most outstanding literary characteristic is the unfailing perfection of his style. Sister Thaddea⁵⁸ writes that Belloc is always on his "style-guard", always conscious of the vehicle he is using. This reader has never found Belloc guilty of neglecting content for manner. Certainly many of his essays are mere "pot-boilers", stylistic tours de force, written On Anything and On Everything, and obviously not expected to survive. But in his histories and biographies, in those works which he takes seriously, style becomes a vehicle, essential but secondary. Only rarely in these works does Belloc engage in conceits, and then always in the form of a digression (what in The Path to Rome he calls "a parenthesis"), obviously not a part of the important work at hand.

Students of fine writing can find no better model for their essays, whether formal or familiar. No anthology

⁵⁸. Sister Marie Thaddea de Sion, The Character and Influence of John Henry Cardinal Newman: A Comparative Study of Newman, Thompson, Belloc and Chesterton, Thesis presented to the University of Saskatchewan for the degree of Master of Arts, 1929, p. 102.

of modern English poetry is considered complete without "The South Country". His travel books give permanent existence to Europe as it was before the two World Wars. Lovers of the past need look no further for living, breathing history. There are many people who speak with affection of his child's verse, and, it may be presumed, introduce their children to it.

Though the numerous reprints through which Belloc's books have passed make it evident that they were once extremely popular, it must be admitted that their popularity has waned. Most modern readers find Belloc's thought too abstruse, his humour too out-moded, and his manner too Edwardian. To a generation of comic-book addicts his style is too formal, his English too correct. For them, his work carries no message, for it is incomprehensible.

Yet is not this statement a condemnation of the audience rather than of the author? Experts in the field of pictorial art claim that it is the duty of the one viewing a painting to study it until he grasps its message, until, so to speak, he learns the language of the painter. The same principle can be applied to the literary arts; the reader must, if he hope to draw profit from an author, expend some effort to assimilate the ideas of that author. Must an author of genius, to satisfy a public smug in its own complacency and unwilling to exert itself to follow a

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line of close reasoning, bury his God-given talents and debase his art with twentieth century slang and the shallow thinking born of modern high-speed living? Fortunately for posterity, Belloc dares to give expression to his deep philosophic ponderings, adheres to his flawless style, and wins his audience almost in spite of itself.

The Reverend Gordon Albion has summed up Belloc's prospects in this age of jet propulsion in an article written at the time of the author's death:

For generations now, man has been in headlong flight from God and has flung himself on his knees before the false Moloch of the machine. Perhaps the Atom Bomb, the logical outcome of his idolatry, will blast him from his mental aberration. If and when men return to sanity, Belloc will be recognized as one of the prophets of his age.⁵⁹

When such a time comes, men will be led to plumb Belloc's depths as much by the grace of his style as by the profundity of his thoughts.

Then, as now, however, there will be those who will be turned from him by the sharpness of his satire. Of the art of ridicule Belloc is an undisputed master. Yet the value of satire as a method of persuasion may be held in doubt. People of delicate sensibilities insist that is is useless, that it serves only to make one's enemies more

⁵⁹•Gordon Albion, "The Man Who Re-Wrote History", article in The Catholic Times, issue of July 24, 1953, p. 7, col. 2.

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bitter and determined in their opposition. Many of Belloc's critics believe that his work would be more widely read and of greater influence did his style resemble the quiet reasonableness of Lingard rather than the rabid fury of Cobbett. It would be interesting to discover which of the three historians has exerted the greatest influence on modern readers and writers of history.

Theodore Maynard is one of the severest of the Catholic critics of Belloc's pugnacity. He writes:

we are still too much given
To prove our doctrine orthodox
By apostolic blows and knocks
and have forgotten the sweet reasonableness of the
Gospel in our furious desire to be cracking some-
body's skull. It is about time that we learned
that the most effectual way of making other people
Catholic is by ourselves becoming Christians.⁶⁰

There are no statements of good will in Belloc. There is "reasonableness", but it is not "sweet". He shows no affection for his opponents; in fact, he manifests every desire to wound as frequently and as seriously as possible, and rather hopes his enemies will die as a result of the wounds. His attitude is summed up in

⁶⁰. Theodore Maynard, The Story of American Catholicism, New York, Macmillan, 1941, p. 571.

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Heretics all, whoever you be,
 In Tarbes or Nimes, or over the sea,
 You never shall have good words from me.
 Caritas non conturbat me.^{61.}

It would appear that he does not distinguish between Protestantism and Protestant, between Sin and Sinner, and he is supported in this frame of mind by John Hargrave, who declares, "You cannot attack The System and avoid attacking the human beings who run The System."^{62.}

It will be remembered that Belloc's main attack is leveled against the Church's modern enemies, neo-paganism and Communism, Shaw and Lenin. It seems reasonable that he should choose to meet these antagonists with their own weapons, slashing satire and violent force. That it is effective appears from Douglas Hyde's statement:

It was precisely those features of Belloc's writings which some of our intellectuals affect to dislike - his polemizing, his aggressive defence of the Faith he held and the vigour of his language - which first attracted me to him.

It was sufficiently like the hard-hitting Marxist world in which I had spent 20 years, where the battle of our time is seen as being indeed a battle upon the outcome of which hangs the future of mankind and which means everything to those who fight it.

^{61.}Hilaire Belloc, The Path to Rome, Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1954, p. 351.

^{62.}John Hargrave, Op. cit., p. 25.

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It was, that is, just sufficiently like it not to seem too unfamiliar - and yet it was so blessedly different too.⁶³.

Mr. Hyde is apparently one who gives Belloc credit for at least a share in his conversion, and it was Belloc's sledgehammer tactics which won his attention.

Probably the best single example of Belloc's use of this militant method is his Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History". Wells and Belloc had always been bitter adversaries. When the Outline was published Belloc began a series of commentaries on it. Wells sought in vain a periodical which would carry his reply and finally published a book called Mr. Belloc Objects. In it he accuses Belloc of falsehood and ignorance, and challenges him to quote authorities for his statements against Darwinism as proposed by Wells himself. Before the Companion was collected in a single volume Belloc published Mr. Belloc Still Objects, in which he refutes Mr. Wells's objections and begins a list of authorities which is enlarged in the Companion. Of much more interest than the topic of this quarrel is the manner in which it is carried on. As one contemporary wrote:

⁶³. Douglas Hyde, "Paying Off a Debt", special to Catholic Herald, (London), (No volume), No. 3514, issue of July 24, 1953, p. 4, col. 6 and 7.

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It is not often in these days of literary good manners (. . .) that we are treated to the blazing spectacle of a prize ring wherein two champions slug it out (. . .) nowadays we have to get along with examples of polite dismissal or pale sarcasm.

.
 Nothing has been proved except that both men are hard hitters. Pacificists though we are, we enjoy the fight.^{64.}

The tactics of both Belloc and Wells certainly warrant the description of "slugging it out". ("Mr. Wells means to say all that is in him, and if there is not much in him, that is not his fault."^{65.})

Again the merits of this method may be questioned. We have the opinion of the editor of The Nation: "Nothing has been proved". Yet another contemporary, writing in The New Statesman, and showing himself quite obviously prejudiced against all things Catholic, admits that Belloc has the best of the argument, not only because "at this particular sport Mr. Belloc is ten times more skilful than Mr. Wells" - but because in the substance of the argument, Belloc is in the right:

64. "Warrior Wells and Battling Belloc", editorial in The Nation, Vol. 125, No. 3243, issue of August 31, 1927, p. 194.

65. Hilaire Belloc, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", p. 4.

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For in this particular matter Mr. Belloc has on his side not only the Pope, but a very substantial proportion of the pundits of modern science, and Mr. Wells has allowed him to steal their thunder.⁶⁶

Winning one argument can scarcely be called final victory, yet on this occasion it would seem to have been, if one can accept the judgment of an editor writing after Belloc's death:

When, in his many controversies, he struck with all his power, his adversary died. For example, his "Companion to Mr. Wells' Outline of History" (sic) killed Wells: he never received a good press in England thereafter.⁶⁷

If this is true, and Wells's reputation really did suffer seriously from Belloc's victory over him, then it may be that Belloc is right when he states⁶⁸. that if you want to attack the misconceptions of a man who, because he is an enemy of the Faith, writes false history, you must attack him from every side and attempt to show that he is unworthy of belief in anything. As George Shuster has phrased it,

⁶⁶.R.B., "A Notable Controversy", editorial in *The New Statesman*, Vol. 28, No. 709, issue of November 27, 1926, p. 202-204.

⁶⁷.F. O'Dea, "The Death of Hilaire Belloc", editorial in *New Zealand Tablet*, Vol. 80, No. 29, issue of August 5, 1953, p. 4, col. 2.

⁶⁸.Hilaire Belloc, "The Conversion of England", in *Essays of a Catholic*, p. 117.

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"If history is worth troubling about, surely one is permitted to attack error savagely."⁶⁹.

To return to Theodore Maynard, shortly after Belloc's death he wrote⁷⁰. that that author might have gained a better hearing had he put his case less strongly, for often his readers discount what he says on account of its being too partisan. Belloc would scorn anything other than open partisanship; he is seeking to convince, not to coerce his readers. In one place he expresses admiration for the historians of the 17th and 18th centuries who stated their facts boldly, but defended their theories as theories, "nearly always with the violent personal note which in controversy is an admission that one is defending a theory."⁷¹. But at least they admitted that they were theories; they did not present their ideas as facts to be dogmatically accepted, as did Gibbon and Green. It will almost certainly be postulated that "the violent personal note" occurs very frequently in Belloc, yet an intense

⁶⁹.George N. Shuster, Op. cit., p. 262.

⁷⁰.Theodore Maynard, "Hilaire Belloc", in The Catholic World, Vol. 178, No. 1063, issue of October, 1953, p. 10.

⁷¹.Hilaire Belloc, "The Proofs of the Past", in The Living Age, (taken from The Eye Witness), Vol. 59, No. 3590, issue of April 26, 1913, p. 250.

study reveals few occasions when his strictly historical works are actually "violent". J.B. Morton insists that "Belloc disliked and despised violent methods as a means of convincing an opponent."⁷² Yet such a study as has been mentioned fails also to reveal clear distinctions between fact and theory. It is with him more generally "these are the facts", apparently justifying Frank Swinnerton's opinion⁷³ that Belloc's style is too authoritative to be persuasive. Yet in further defence of Belloc's vigorous manner Cardinal Newman's statement regarding his own quarrel with Charles Kingsley might be quoted:

I have ever found from experience that no one would believe me in earnest if I spoke calmly (. . .) but if I said something sharp, they abused me for scurrility (. . .) but they believed me.⁷⁴

There are also those who hold that it is not fitting for members of a minority to adopt such an aggressive attitude. Munson apparently does not agree, for he states that

⁷²•J.B. Morton, Hilaire Belloc: A Memoir, London, Hollis & Carter, 1955, p. 11.

⁷³•Frank Swinnerton, The Georgian Literary Scene 1910-1935, A Panorama, New York, Farrar Straus, (1934), p. 90.

⁷⁴•John H. Newman, letter to Sir William Cope, quoted by Wilfred Ward in The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman, Vol. 2, London, Longmans Green, 1912, p. 45.

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"while we are in the minority, we carry on the work of criticism and of exposing errors",⁷⁵ and Calvert Alexander points out⁷⁶ that Belloc's aggressive method is warranted by the position of the Church today. She bears no responsibility for conditions in the modern world. This world was built in direct opposition to her precepts and directions. She has, then, no obligation to defend it. She is free to criticize and condemn modern civilization as much as seems necessary.

Here again, however, there must be reservations made. To be a critic of the New Order is neither original nor strange. What is more, he who finds fault with the present state of affairs can be sure of finding plenty of support, but, as Swinnerton remarks:

when, instead of proceeding to say that the world can best be set right by something new, a man says that it can only be set right by a return to something old, he is thrown into a defence of the past.⁷⁷

Vindicating Belloc's emphasis on the Roman and the Catholic foundations of European civilization and his desire to return to the principles which formed that civilization is

⁷⁵•Gorham Munson, Op. cit., p. 251.

⁷⁶•Calvert Alexander, The Catholic Literary Revival, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1935, p. 278.

⁷⁷•Frank Swinnerton, Op. cit., p. 84.

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the statement of His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII:

When a society is perishing, the true advice to give to those who would restore it is, to recall it to the principles from which it sprung; for the purpose and perfection of an association is to aim at and to attain that for which it was formed: and its operation should be put in motion and inspired by the end and object which originally gave it its being.⁷⁸

It would seem that Belloc again has the Pope on his side.

It has been remarked that the predominant element in Hilaire Belloc's spirit is his Catholicity. Critics may disagree over whether his chief claim to fame lies in his prose or in his verse, but all agree in recognizing him as a "Champion of the Faith". Here lies his greatest glory, yet, in the eyes of many, his greatest weakness, for in the England of the first quarter of this century, the England in which Belloc wrote, Catholicism in an author repelled more readers than it attracted.

Clyde R. Miller states, "The appeal to our 'we-group' associations is one of the most powerful a persuader can make."⁷⁹ This is what Munson calls appealing to the "common culture heritage" idea⁸⁰. and Lee classes as the

⁷⁸.Leo XIII, "The Condition of Labour", in Five Great Encyclicals, New York, Paulist Press, 1939, p. 13.

⁷⁹.Clyde R. Miller, The Process of Persuasion, New York, Crown, 1946, p. 67.

⁸⁰.Gorham Munson, Op. cit., p. 74.

"Plain Folks Technique".⁸¹ According to this method the persuader attempts to give his message worth by identifying himself with his audience, making them believe that he is a plain person - one of them. Here Belloc may be said, in some respects, to fail, for he associates himself with a very small proportion of his English audience. He makes the Catholic reader proud to be Catholic, one of the chosen few in the midst of Protestant-turning-Pagan England. He persuades this reader to accept his ideas because he, Belloc, is also a Catholic. But the non-Catholic reader, in England far in the majority, is left out, laughed at, and contradicted.

Maisie Ward criticizes⁸² this tendency to exclusiveness when she cites the example of Wells's ignorance concerning the doctrine of the Fall and Belloc's merely laughing at him, without any effort to enlighten him. On the surface at least this criticism seems justified, for in his historical writings Belloc does not often go into theological explanations. The omission is excellent as far as his Catholic readers are concerned; they are looking for history, not theology; but those non-Catholics who have not

⁸¹ Alfred McClung Lee, How to Understand Propaganda, New York, Rinehart, 1952, p. 70-71.

⁸² Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1943, p. 504.

been turned away in the first place by their anti-Catholic bias are likely to be repelled by their feeling of strangeness, discouraged by their ignorance, or angered at reading what seem to them outlandish claims. The objection is only partially answered by the reminder that Belloc expects the bulk of his audience to be Catholic and is therefore justified in ignoring the minority who are not among the initiated. J.B. Morton does not think any such justification necessary, for he writes:

Belloc knew, and sympathized with, the difficulties of the unbeliever, and often provided him with better material for debate than the unbeliever had discovered for himself.

.....
he never made the mistake of acting or talking as though his own impregnable convictions, his personal certitude, were proof of anything.⁸³

The technical aspects of Belloc's English, such as striking paragraph formation and brilliant figures of speech, are an important part of his pleasing style. The brief, memorable sentences are calculated to draw one up short by their emphasis on a particular point, while the figures of speech are the window-dressing which take century-old episodes out of their moth-balls and parade them before our eyes, albeit they are clothed in the garb of an English sailor or a French artilleryman. These are the devices

⁸³. J.B. Morton, Op. cit., p. 11-12.

which serve to emphasize Belloc's points and are of value in bringing them home to the reader.

Words are the messengers which carry thoughts from one mind to another. Lee speaks⁸⁴ of them under the heading of "Omnibus Symbols" and classifies them as "Name-Calling" or "Glittering Generalities" (virtue words), according as they are intended to rouse hatred or love in the minds of their hearers. Belloc makes more use of Name-Calling than of Virtue Words, and his epithets are well calculated to stir to amusement or disgust. The criticism might be made that Belloc should make more use of Virtue Words, thereby building up the reputation of the Catholic Church, but to say this would be to forget that in the major part of his work Belloc is only beginning the work of conversion, and it is his conviction that conversion to Catholicism will come only after the public has learned to ridicule anti-Catholicism. His purpose is destructive rather than constructive.

Belloc's use of repetition is skilful. His reiteration of particular points is sufficiently varied in its presentation to avoid tedium, and yet the ideas are repeated frequently enough to insure remembrance. Belloc's repetition, however, does not reach the proportions of

⁸⁴•Alfred McClung Lee, Op. cit., p. 64-65.

"overwhelming insistence" spoken of by Mr. Munson as converting a theory into a "physical force".⁸⁵ It seems likely that, had it done so, it would have served to repel rather than to attract his readers. Even restrained as it is, his insistence on some points has caused considerable resentment and opposition. He has only one slogan: "The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith", and that it is remembered is testified to by the fact that practically every commentator on Belloc's work sooner or later quotes and criticizes it.

This chapter has studied the literary features of Hilaire Belloc's writings on the English Reformation, has probed the mind behind these writings, and has discussed the value of these literary features as part of his plan of persuasion. It remains now to discover how he applies and adapts his great literary and persuasive talents to the writing of history.

⁸⁵•Gorham Munson, Op. cit., p. 91.

CHAPTER III

BELLOC'S HISTORICAL TECHNIQUES

Belloc writes¹. that if the ideas in a book are not put with literary power, they will never persuade men. But if the persuader is at the same time an historian, then he must use certain techniques which are not merely literary, but which are particularly adapted to the writing of history. If he has for one of his primary aims to dissuade his readers from their slavish acceptance of the falsehoods of "official history," then he must take special pains to make his own version of the same history both credible and pleasing. This chapter will study Hilaire Belloc's historical method, his constant striving for perspective and clarity, his vivid reconstruction of the past in stirring events and living persons, and his documentation of the sources from which he gathers his information. Finally, it will evaluate the part these techniques play in his larger plan of persuasion.

In The Path to Rome². Belloc speaks of the Ballon d'Alsace as the "knot of Europe." From it one can look

¹.Hilaire Belloc, "William Tyndale," in The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1940, p. 39.

².Idem, The Path to Rome, Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1954, p. 92-93.

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down upon three divisions of men, the Gauls, the Germans, and the Highlanders. In reading Belloc's history, one often has the sensation of being on this same "knot of Europe" and looking down, not on only three, but on all the divisions of men which make up the European people. He sees Europe as a whole - he sees it as Christendom - and England, he never forgets, is part of it.

Belloc makes important and effective use of his vantage point by giving his readers a clear, broad picture of Europe. He writes, in the first place, books of a general nature, such as How the Reformation Happened and Characters of the Reformation. These books go into detail on particular events and characters, but, since "True history is simply history which puts the past in its right proportion,"³ from time to time he places each event or character in its own special historical niche, and, so to speak, stands back to get the scene in its proper perspective. Within his biographies too, devoted as they are to individuals, Belloc gives a comprehensive survey, not only of the period in which that person lived, but also of the time which preceded it.

3. Idem, "On Proportion," in The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays, p. 23.

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Thus, in The Last Rally, Belloc does not begin with the birth of Charles II, but with a picture of the England into which he was born. He explains the economic situation, the growing importance of the city of London, the continuing strength of the Catholic spirit. He repeats the story of Mary Stuart, of James I and of Charles I, not only because heredity will help to explain Charles II's character, but also because an understanding of the present circumstances depends on their being placed in their true light with regard to the whole story of the collapse of the English monarchy.

In Cranmer, too, Belloc goes to some pains to fill in the whole picture by a careful description of Cranmer's background - not just family, but social and educational. He describes Cambridge, the foundation of Jesus College, the place of the Church and the clergy in that day. He even introduces such men as John Fisher and Erasmus, scholarly, influential men of whom Cranmer must have heard in his youth and whose ideas might have influenced his.

Belloc's last biography, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, offers a good example of his method of presenting the conditions of the times. This book has been criticized as being a mere hodge-podge of ideas, flung together between two covers. A thoughtful reading of it, especially at the end of a study of Belloc's earlier books,

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invites the conclusion that the last half of the title is more appropriate than the first. It is not so much the story of Elizabeth, as of the Circumstances into which she was born, through which she lived her unhappy life, and among which she died her miserable death. This would explain the chapters on The Crown, Torture, Toleration. The book appears to be a last summary of Belloc's thoughts on the time of the Reformation, a gathering together of all the tag ends, a setting straight of all the principal ideas and ideals of the age. In other words, it is what its English title calls it, an Elizabethan Commentary.

Belloc's panoramic vision gives his work a certain continuity, and a very definite consistency. This continuity is established in a number of ways. Chapter Two mentions the repetition of ideas from book to book until the reader is not only persuaded that these ideas are logical, but convinced that they are correct. Belloc also carries words or expressions from one book to another. Thus, when he wants to make vivid the actual length of a period of time, instead of merely stating it in years, he refers to it as "a long lifetime". Or he points out that a man who was in his early twenties and beginning to take an active interest in public affairs when one event took place, was already a very old man when something else happened sixty years later. This mode of expression appears most frequently

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when he is describing the gradual disappearance of the Mass in England. In writing of the "Reign of the Cecils" he explains:

Their continuous supremacy outlived short human memories. By the time Robert Cecil was dead only the very old men, nearing eighty, recalled experience of the national Catholic life. All who counted in public life, every one under sixty, had grown up in an England where the attempted practice of the old religion was ruin or death.⁴

Hilaire Belloc helps his reader to follow his thought and to understand his writing by still another means. This is to place, near the beginning of each book, a summary of his exact object in writing that book. Of Wolsey Belloc writes:

I propose to present his character and story with this object: to cite him as the great example of those who do mightily yet cannot see what they are doing and who stand on the edge of doom with no vision of its approach.⁵

In Charles the First, his aim is to solve the problem of "How and why did English kingship so fail in the person of its last possessor, Charles Stuart?"⁶ James the Second

⁴•Idem, A History of England, New York, Putnam, 1928, Vol. 4, p. 258.

⁵•Idem, Wolsey, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1928, p. 29.

⁶•Idem, Charles the First: King of England, London, Cassell, 1933, p. 3.

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is "an attempt to portray a character of capital interest to English and European History, (sic) of which our academic historians give but a caricature."⁷ Belloc writes two books on Cromwell in an attempt to show him as "a determined but very ordinary soul,"⁸ neither magnificent Hero nor damnable Villain. Cromwell is especially worthy of note in connection with the present point, for it gives not only a general summary of Belloc's intentions, but also a specific outline of the course he is to follow in attaining his goal.

In Belloc's largest work, the four volumes of A History of England, there are careful explanations of the divisions made, justifications for the titles given, and outlines of the ground to be covered. Quite frequently these introductory remarks are summarized and Belloc's opinions on what is to follow epitomized in a single memorable sentence. At the end of the Introduction to the section on the Cecils, he says that he is going to investigate "what world it was that governed Elizabeth and is still called, in too many of our histories, 'Elizabethan England'".⁹

⁷Idem, James the Second, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1928, p. vii.

⁸Idem, Oliver Cromwell, London, Ernest Benn, 1927, p. 150.

⁹Idem, A History of England, Vol. 4, p. 254.

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What a number of ideas in those few words!

Still another technique which Belloc employs to make his history clear and easy to follow is to simplify the causes of an event by relating them one to another in such a way as to end finally with one major cause from which all the others sprang. Thus with regard to the Reformation as a whole he states, "The Reformation was much more Calvin and Calvin's book than it was anything else,"¹⁰. and of the Reformation in the British Isles:

But for Flodden Scotland would be Catholic to-day, and had not Thomas Cromwell destroyed the English monasteries England would be Catholic to-day; but, on account of Flodden, a Catholic England and Scotland would have been united, as are a Protestant England and Scotland to-day.¹¹.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Belloc's method is his knack for describing the incidents of history as if he were a contemporary of the event. George Sampson writes¹². of Belloc that it is his aim to project himself backward into the period of which he is writing and to reproduce, with the aid of documentary evidence worked over by his imagination, a complete picture of the incidents of

¹⁰. Idem, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, New York, Harper, 1942, p. 180.

¹¹. Idem, A History of England, Vol. 3, p. 407.

¹². George Sampson, The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, Cambridge, University Press, 1941, p. 193.

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the day as they would have appeared to an actual eye-witness. This writing as "a traveller in time" involves two specific theories; one is that history should be a vivid resurrection of the past, that is, it should make the past live again before the reader's eyes; the other is that, since history is the story of mankind, it involves individuals, and since these individuals are the all-important factor in the story, they too must be made real and living to the reader. As Belloc describes it: History

should attempt a perfect resurrection of the distant past in its detail and atmosphere, and a presentation of it so living by a combination of minute information and an exact order in the marshalling of that information as shall give the reader life in the past. He meets dead people, as he would meet a living character. Their particular actions fit in with their general aspect and with all that they are as complex human organisms. Their institutions seem naturally to flow from the way they live and think and act.¹³

In many of his books Belloc mentions the fact that one of the biggest difficulties for either the writer or reader of history is to avoid "reading history backwards". He admits that

¹³•Hilaire Belloc, "On a Method of Writing History", in The Living Age, (taken from Dublin Review), Vol. 52, No. 3502, issue of August 19, 1911, p. 492.

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men always read history in the light of their own times and find it difficult or impossible to put themselves into the skins of their ancestors, to see things with their eyes and feel things with the senses of the long past generation.¹⁴.

Again and again in his books we find such expressions as:

if we put ourselves back to the date in which the marriage took place, if we put ourselves into the shoes and skins of 1677 we shall see. . .¹⁵.

and of a still earlier day: "See through the eyes of English kingship how the new kingship stood there in the Palace of Greenwich in this year 1491. . ."¹⁶.

Belloc was, as Frederick Wilhelmson points out,¹⁷ fortunate enough to live in a time when there were still to be found the remains of the Christian Middle Ages. He could, in the walking tours of his early manhood, visit inns that were much the same as their predecessors of two or three centuries. He could discover sites of old buildings and study the contours of old battle fields because modern industry and two World Wars had not yet destroyed or built over these relics of an earlier day.

14. Idem, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, p. 250.

15. Idem, The Last Rally: A Story of Charles II, London, Cassell, 1940, p. 281.

16. Idem, Cranmer, London, Cassell, 1931, p. 7.

17. Frederick Wilhelmson, Hilaire Belloc: No Alienated Man, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1953, p. 37.

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It is the fact of his having actually seen the places in which particular events occurred that enables him to reproduce those events so accurately. Thus when he describes the various battles of the Civil Wars, he is able to write with certainty on the lie of the land, and, working from the evidence of contemporary documents, relate exactly the course of the battle. His early military experience, coupled with his supreme talent for describing and explaining military tactics, make him peculiarly well-fitted for this branch of historic study. Indeed, he has written whole chapters detailing the action of particular battles and explaining the outcome in terms of cavalry strength, gun power and earth works.

It is not enough, however, for Belloc alone to understand the circumstances and mental atmosphere of a particular period. It is necessary also that his readers understand these circumstances. And so we find him explaining carefully, sometimes at great length, the conditions peculiar to a particular period. He is at pains, for example, to make clear to his readers the strong position of the Catholic Church in England at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Readers today, seeing Catholicism as something alien to English culture, imagine it always to

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have been so, whereas in reality, "Of all Christian Europe, England was the province which seemed at this moment the surest of an uninterrupted Catholic future."¹⁸. Further, we who take for granted the phenomenon of literally dozens of different sects, all calling themselves Christian, forget that "No one in the Reformation dreamt a divided Christendom to be possible."¹⁹. (*italics his*)

Belloc makes an even more definite statement concerning the atmosphere in England, and, indeed, in Europe, when he writes:

to the men of that time this attempted religious revolution was what the Communist revolution is to-day. It was hated, dreaded and fought as we fight Communism. It was welcomed with flaming eagerness as our Communists welcome their own success.²⁰.

Economic conditions in a country also change with the years, and the versatile Belloc, economist as well as historian, devotes considerable space to explaining the extent and significance of these changes.

¹⁸.Hilaire Belloc, A History of England, Vol. 3, p. 397.

¹⁹.Idem, Europe and the Faith, New York, Paulist Press, 1920, p. 215.

²⁰.Idem, A History of England, Vol. 4, p. 290.

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Even words and institutions lose or change their significance as time goes on. "Treason" has remained a culpable act in our minds, but "heresy" as understood by the Tudors requires definition. "Excommunication" too has lost its importance to many people. "Divorce" today means the dissolution of a real bond, while four centuries ago it meant a declaration that no such bond ever existed.

"Whiggery" is a force we still experience but do not fully understand, - its immense strength in opposition to Charles II must be explained and described. And "torture" has to modern ears an abominable sound, but to the populace of the 16th, 17th, and even 18th centuries it was an institution taken for granted, perfectly normal (so long as not applied to oneself). Even death at the stake was a customary procedure, of no more horrible a nature than to call forth from an observer of the death of Latimer and Ridley, "Would that they had been burnt earlier, for then we should have had better crops".²¹.

This execution of Latimer and Ridley affords Belloc an opportunity for some imaginative description. It is an excellent example of the type of writing which enthralls his admirers but irritates his critics because it is based solely on conjecture. It is of Cranmer as he watched them

²¹. Idem, Cranmer, p. 296.

burning:

But did there not appear in the airs, between the eyes of the old man who looked towards the stake and the figure of Latimer on which he gazed; did there not float between them a vision which concerned them both? Might there not be seen in the smoke as it began to rise and whirl under the wind a cradle of chains suspended over a slow fire, and therein the agonized writhing form of Forrest, the Confessor of Queen Catherine, sent to such a death in this awful fashion by Cranmer's own act, and amid Latimer's jeers?

It was fifteen years ago - but had they forgotten such a scene? Cranmer, who had so willingly condemned that martyr for holding unswervingly what all men had held; Latimer, who had preached by the hour at the execution and had boasted of his gusto and joy therein, and how he had "played the Merry-Andrew at the roasting of the Friar."²²

Events must live if they are to have significance. One of the most moving episodes described by Belloc is in a short essay entitled "The Apprentice" which first appeared in The Eye Witness and was later republished in the series Essays of To-Day and Yesterday.²³ Sub-titled "January 30, 1649", it might be called an "historic tale", which has for its subject the execution of King Charles. Everything is there, the cold which made the horses of the cavalry shift uneasily; the black-draped scaffold with its startling patch of red velvet covering the footstool upon which the King would kneel, and the little block, which would prove

²².Ibid., p. 296.

²³.Idem, "The Apprentice", in Essays of To-Day and Yesterday, London, Harrap, 1926, p. 22-26.

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so low that the King would have to lie prostrate to facilitate the work of the axeman; the approach of the King; every detail of his actions; the sky-blue vest in which he would die; and, finally, the last human touch which sends the apprentice back, not to his master's house, but to his mother's, while the dusk turns to night and the snow begins to fall.

A historian, however, according to Belloc:

may know everything possible about the actual circumstances and events, but unless he knows the mind of people in that time, and of those people in particular, he cannot know how to order those events, what proportions or importance to give the individual circumstances - that is, he will not be able to attain to the truth about them. ²⁴.

In conformity with this conviction, Belloc studies history with a keen appreciation of the fact that "It is individuals who make and change history."²⁵. He writes always with a deep psychological penetration into the minds and hearts of his subjects. Much of his history takes the form of biography, which is the natural form of expression for a man who believes that one man, Wolsey, had it in his power to stem the tide of the Reformation; who sets up one man, James II, as the maker of the British navy; and who declares

²⁴.Idem, "On Knowing the Past", in This and That and the Other, London, Methuen, 1912, p. 229.

²⁵.Idem, Wolsey, p. 89.

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that one man, William Cecil, made the Church of England.

Belloc makes his portraits vivid from three aspects, physical appearance, biographical details (especially family background and early formative influences), and psychological make-up. Examples of Belloc's genius for description could be cited from every one of his books. The picture of Anne Boleyn "Bald above the eyes, lacking in brows, and with a stupid but very obstinate mouth. . ."26. is frequently quoted. There is an excellent image of Henry VIII in Cranmer:

What he saw was a large fat man, not yet quite forty (in his thirty-ninth year), coarse, with a straggling thin reddish beard on his very broad, flat face, small deep-set grey-green eyes far apart under very slight eyebrows upon either side of a rather shapeless nose. The face was not yet brutal; it was intelligent, there was in the whole carriage of the body a strength which the horrible disease from which the man suffered had already affected but had not yet undermined.²⁷.

Some of Belloc's subjects are revealed in a brief, telling phrase. We really see "the burly, vociferous, immensely energetic figure of Martin Luther".²⁸. Occasionally, he summarizes a lengthy exposition of a subject's character by an accumulation of precise, highly descriptive words.

26. Ibid., p. 74.

27. Idem, Cranmer, p. 64.

28. Idem, A History of England, Vol. 4, p. 12.

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His final picture of Cranmer at the height of his power tells us he was:

many things that many men have been - a hypocrite, a time-server, a coward, a great scholar, timid and suave in manner, courteous also, usually averse from cruelty, a splendid horseman, a gentleman, in his modest fashion an intriguer, and a quite successful layer of traps for the unfortunate.²⁹

It is surprising that the description of Anne Hyde has not been cited more often. It is striking:

Anne Hyde was dark, she was ugly, she was vivacious, she was intelligent. She had will. She had also what is rarer and not often an accompaniment of these: judgment. Her large mouth uttered sense and her blobby eyes - for they were bulging - looked firmly and strongly at mankind, comprehended it, and conveyed decisions.³⁰

As in his description of Anne, when Belloc seeks to portray her husband the soul beneath the exterior inevitably shows through and so we behold:

His tall figure, his firm, advancing step, his large determined features, his quick eye, all proclaimed his energy and will: his sensitive mouth that sad reserve which nature, not its own choice, imposed upon this uncompanied and uncompanionable soul.³¹

Probably the most decisive and at the same time the most satisfying description to be found in Belloc's books is the one of Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Lord Shaftesbury:

²⁹.Idem, Cranmer, p. 244-245.

³⁰.Idem, James the Second, p. 150.

³¹.Ibid., p. 28-29.

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eloquent, intelligent in the highest degree, industrious, without morals or honour, immensely wealthy, crapulous, tenacious, looking upon other men from a superior plane, successful, and very probably damned.³².

All these characteristics, physical and psychological, appear in men and women because of two forces which act upon their free will - heredity and environment. To each of these Belloc gives copious attention. Lineage counts with him, as he admits.³³. In fact, the matter of ancestry is sufficiently important to him to warrant the presence, in most of his books, of complex genealogical tables. He scarcely ever mentions Oliver Cromwell without bringing attention to the fact that his name was not really "Cromwell" at all, but "Williams", and that he had borrowed the surname from his wealthy and influential uncle, Thomas Cromwell. In his books on the Protector, Belloc is careful to detail Oliver's ancestry back through five generations to reveal not only his humble beginnings but also his great wealth accumulated by the confiscation of church properties. (Fear of losing this wealth would, according to Belloc's logic, have raised and strengthened in the Cromwell family an abiding fear and hatred of the Catholic Church.)

³². Idem, James the Second, p. 150.

³³. Idem, The Last Rally, p. 273.

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One interesting point might be remarked here, namely, a peculiar, rather gentle, and somewhat formal style which Belloc generally adopts when speaking of the Stuart Kings and especially of Mary, Queen of Scots. The only parallel style which this reader has noticed in Belloc is that old-fashioned manner which he uses in Joan of Arc.

For all these vivid descriptions, this keen analysis of character, this careful genealogizing, Belloc has to have some source of information, some authority to guide him. The citation of authorities can, however, take all the life-blood from a resurrected past. Nothing is more disconcerting to the ordinary reader than a long series of foot-notes, filling over half the page and consisting of numerous mysterious abbreviations and complicated number references. Such scholarly appendages may impress the reader with the author's great learning, but they are scarcely calculated to fill him with a desire for a deeper knowledge of history. Rather do they frighten him away from it.

This is Belloc's seasoned opinion, and this is the theory he puts into practice. According to him,³⁴ the

³⁴.Idem, "On Footnotes", in On, London, Methuen, 1923, p. 30-31.

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original use of foot-notes was to reinforce an argument in the text, without breaking the narrative. But for some historians the foot-note has become useful for deceiving the reader. Gibbon, Belloc accuses, employs it for this purpose by making a false statement in the text and then so qualifying it in the foot-note that scholars cannot contradict him and the ordinary reader is completely taken in. Another use of the false statement is to give a reference which, though it looks learned, is really valueless, a fact, of course, unknown to the ordinary man. Then there is the copious use of foot-notes by people who quote directly because they are too lazy or too ignorant to digest the material themselves and interpret it for their readers.

It should not be supposed from this, however, that Belloc ignores or omits all documentation. On the contrary, as he points out elsewhere,³⁵ scholarship in history is essential, for scholarship uncovers the facts which will in turn suggest and foster the ideas and judgments which are the fruit and flower of true history writing. In the same way, though comprehension of the mind of a period is essential to history, once a man understands that period he must continue to fill in detailed facts in order to keep his

³⁵. Idem, "On Knowing the Past", in This and That and the Other. p. 233.

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imagination from distorting his picture of the time as it really was; this minute information also serves to corroborate and justify general judgments of the past.

How, then, is this necessary evil to be handled? For this too, Belloc has his answer.³⁶ In the first place, the narrative should not be broken. Foot-notes should be given at the end of the book. If the historian is writing with great detail - describing weather, dress, and so on - he should take several sections and in an appendix show the scholars how he is drawing his conclusions. Finally, "Let him keep his notes and challenge criticism."

This system Belloc himself uses in a number of his books. Wolsey has notes containing the results of thorough investigation into such thorny questions as "Prices in Wolsey's Time", "The Papal Election in 1522", "The Authorship of the Divorce Policy", "The Authenticity of the Brief", and "The Consummation of Prince Arthur's Marriage". James the Second also contains explanatory notes of this type. It is possible, however, that though these notes sound to the student very complete, academic historians might find fault with them because they do not quote chapter and verse. They state the arguments and authorities for and against each point, and, as befits the work of an historian, whose work

³⁶.Idem, "On Footnotes", in On, p. 37.

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is to judge and interpret, as well as to relate, decide which is best.

Belloc, however, does not particularly like proving every statement, and once he has done so in one book he does not repeat the proofs in other books. In Volume Three of A History of England, for example, he discusses at some length the date of the origin of Henry's divorce. When the subject comes up again in Wolsey, therefore, he simply refers the reader to his earlier work. Similarly, the question of the changing value of money is dealt with in Wolsey, and taken for granted thereafter.

Of other academic paraphernalia Belloc does not make much use. His foot-notes are rare, and used to explain the text, not to refer to his sources. A few of his books have somewhat incomplete indexes, but these may be the work of the publisher rather than of Belloc himself. The Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History" includes a list of the authorities consulted before his condemnation of Wells's Darwinism. This list, however, is there more because Wells challenged him to prove his statements than because he, Belloc, considers it necessary:

It is cumbersome to load a book intended for general reading with quotations from Authorities and a mass of footnotes. Moreover, a reader of intelligence desires to hear the arguments rather than a mere list of expert names.³⁷.

³⁷. Idem, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", London, Sheed & Ward, 1926, p. 114.

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This last quotation sums up quite adequately Belloc's opinion in the matter of references. It will perhaps be of value to give here a sample of Belloc's method of arriving at definite probabilities. In describing the second battle of Newbury in Cromwell³⁸. it becomes necessary to establish the hour of the attacks, first on Prince Maurice's guns and then by Manchester on the east side of the field; it is also important to determine how long the fighting continued after the sun had set completely, because once it was dark the Royalist troops were able to withdraw. By reference to the Royal Observatory Belloc settles the point: "October the 27th (O.S.), 1644, is by the true calendar November the 6th, and the hour of sunset on that date in the latitude of Newbury is just after 4.20 p.m." and "the new moon was at five o'clock in the afternoon of October the 20th, October (O.S.) that year (1644), and was therefore exactly at the quarter on the day of the fight at Speen."

Panoramic view of Europe, vivid resurrection of the persons and events of the past, limited documentation, these are the principal elements in Hilaire Belloc's historical technique. It remains now to attempt to evaluate

³⁸.Idem, Cromwell, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1934, p. 173-174.

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these methods insofar as they serve to persuade Belloc's readers to accept as true his account and interpretation of the history of the Reformation in England.

Belloc's way of looking at history as one large unit is, in the opinion of this reader, one of the most scholarly features of his work. Most students, when studying the history of a country or period, like to see it as part of a whole. Though they are interested in details and are delighted when those details are presented charmingly, they like to remember the complete situation surrounding a particular event, for they believe that only in this way can they attain to an accurate comprehension of history. Students are coming increasingly to appreciate the importance of a grasp of the spirit of a period in preference to a mere knowledge of names and dates.

Belloc does not deny the importance of details; he writes³⁹. that accuracy in detail is an excellent minor virtue in an historian; but such accuracy is only a minor virtue, and he expresses a certain amount of scorn for the "Scientific" historian who,

³⁹.Idem, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", p. 3.

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having concentrated on one tiny section, on which he has become, he believes, an expert - at the expense of all other knowledge - is always disdainful of, and sometimes furious against, the man with a wide range of general knowledge, who is properly equipped for exposing the expert's absurdities.⁴⁰

Belloc is himself a man "with a wide range of knowledge", and he considers it necessary, after going over the mass of detail, to summarize it, to relate its parts, and to draw up a sort of general conspectus of the whole. Catholics especially, he believes, have spent too much time making a detailed defence of the Church. They have reached the point where they "cannot see the forest for the trees", and are losing ground in their struggle against really important failings such as the loss of public appreciation of the Catholic background of Europe.

To replace the fictions of official history with his own version of events is one of Belloc's principal aims. His presentation of history is made brilliant and vital with this end in view. By exercising his extraordinary powers of description he appeals both to the intellect and to the emotions: to the intellect by the careful and detailed explanations; and to the emotions by the vitality of his portraits. His decision to dwell on

⁴⁰.Idem, "Science as the Enemy of Truth", in Essays of a Catholic Layman in England, London, Sheed & Ward, 1931, p. 214-215.

"Characters" as much as on "Circumstances" is based on the belief that if the reader can be made to realize, almost to experience, the meanness of a man like Cranmer, the cruelty of an Ireton, the greed of a Thomas Cromwell, then he will gradually come to realize the base foundations on which the Reformation rose. If that reader can see the people who made history and come to know them as he knows the living people he meets every day, he will gradually recognize that many of the actions accredited to them by the old Protestant Whig historians were, in fact, impossible, given their particular temperament and the circumstances by which they were surrounded. But most important of all, if the reader can be convinced by such vivid presentation of scenes and persons that this, Belloc's, version of history is correct, then all the old, false ideas ingrained from his youth will begin to be undermined and little by little to tumble.

Mr. Munson states: "emotional force, creative imagery, a streak of imagination are prerequisites for a first-rate propagandist".⁴¹. There is no better instrument for exerting emotional force than a vivid portrayal of the human beings involved in a particular event.

⁴¹.Gorham Munson, Twelve Decisive Battles of the Mind, New York, Greystone Press, 1942, p. 90.

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Where in English literature is there to be found a more moving episode than Wolsey's return from York to London, dying as he went, and pleading with the King's men to cease their hounding after the money he no longer has? Where is there greater suspense and drama than in Cranmer's final trial, followed as it is by the sight of the old man running through the street to thrust his hand into the fire - "It shall be first burned" - ? Or where greater pathos than in the figure of Henrietta Marie, sitting, mute and sightless, for hours after she is told of the execution of Charles?

The chief criticism levelled against Belloc's re-incarnation of the past is that he is romancing, allowing his imagination to colour events and persons with the tints and shades which best fit into the colour scheme he has planned. In other words, he is twisting the facts, only slightly, but in the places where it counts most, to suit his own purposes. In reply to this accusation Belloc on several occasions makes it a point to justify the specific details which he gives. Thus he studies carefully the tides, to know whether the rowers on a barge going down the Thames at a particular time would have to work hard, or whether the out-going flood would carry them easily. Mention has been made of his reference to the hours of sunrise and sunset as determining the length of a particular battle.

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He tells somewhere of being accused of fictionizing when he speaks of the sun streaming over a man's shoulder as he wrote a certain letter. Belloc contends that he has reconstructed the scene exactly because at the hour of the day when the man was known to have written the letter, the sun's rays in that particular place are at the precise angle which would bring the light over his shoulder as he sat at a table in front of certain windows of the house.

Documentary evidence, Belloc claims, should be supplemented by a study of tradition and by the application of psychological principles. He admits⁴² that this method is extremely laborious for the historian and that dishonest historians can use it as well as honest men. There is, he concedes, no definite criterion by which the general reader may judge whether such history be honest or not. But he is sure that if many men write in this manner:

competition will decide (. . .) the sincere man will at once convince where the insincere man will not, for in the first place he will be impregnable to attack in his details and in the second place his facts will co-ordinate and fit in one with the other.⁴³

It is his practice of this theory which subjects Belloc to

⁴²Hilaire Belloc, "On a Method of Writing History", in The Living Age, p. 497.

⁴³Ibid., p. 497.

much adverse criticism.

Almost every critic of Belloc and his work mentions his neglect of references. Some writers, because of this omission, class him as an artistic rather than a scientific historian. Others, believing that art does not have persuasion as its aim, claim that Belloc's partisanship rules him out as an artist. It does seem peculiar that an author who professedly addresses himself to the most intelligent section of the reading audience should consistently refuse to employ the means ordinarily used in histories and other learned documents to acquaint the readers with his sources. Belloc's answer to this query is, of course, that he is writing for the intelligent few among the ordinary readers, not for the scholars who would be in a position to interpret or understand his references. The use of numerous foot-notes Belloc regards as mere pedantry, and one cannot forget his scorn for pedants.

Because he does not give his sources, he is often accused of falsehood. A few errors have been discovered in his work, but more and more the views he expresses and the statements he makes are being proved correct. Hugh Ross Williamson writes⁴⁴. that Belloc's chief effect on him

⁴⁴•Hugh Ross Williamson, "Historian: Time is on His Side", special to The Catholic Herald (London), (no volume), No. 3514, issue of July 24, 1953, p. 5, col. 1.

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was to stimulate him to investigate many problems of English history. Going back to original sources, Williamson was surprised to discover that in most instances Belloc was right and Pollard and Gardner wrong. According to Mr. Williamson, Belloc errs only rarely in smaller matters, and never in essentials. He gives the example of Professor Neale bringing out a History in 1953 which is hailed as "a major (and even revolutionary) historical work" because it arrives at a conclusion reached twenty-two years previously by Belloc, namely, that Elizabeth I's ecclesiastical policy did not reflect her own religious wishes but those of her Protestant masters. It would be interesting to compare Williamson's The Gunpowder Plot, published in 1953 and greeted by America as "A New Interpretation", with Belloc's account of the same incident in his fourth volume of A History of England.

It would appear, then, that in themselves Belloc's historical methods are good and effective means of persuasion. His history convinces because it is clear and vital. His comprehensive vision, though often limited to Europe, makes his work understandable, and his psychological penetration makes his characters live. It seems to this reader that Belloc's expectation that all historians might thus succeed in an attempted reincarnation of the past is idealistic, for all are not so gifted as he either in

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literary grace or in historical perception. His omission of adequate documentation, though justified in his own mind, seems to show a certain perversity, and yet, as Theodore Maynard expresses it, "an academic Belloc of the professional historian type is inconceivable".⁴⁵ It remains now for the last chapter to discuss what effect Belloc's work as a persuasive artist has actually had on those people to whom he addressed himself.

⁴⁵.Theodore Maynard, "Hilaire Belloc", in The Catholic World, Vol. 178, No. 1063, issue of October, 1953, p. 11.

CHAPTER IV

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Hilaire Belloc's aims, both as propagandist and as historian, may be summarized under these three headings: first, to impress upon his readers the importance of religion and the validity of the unique claims of the Catholic Church; second, to revitalize the past and to correct erroneous beliefs concerning that past; third, to bring to his side Catholics in the fight for religion and historians in the search for truth.

One way of considering the efficacy of Belloc's method in fulfilling the first of these aims is to study his comments on the position of the Church over a period of forty years. In 1902 he is just joining the battle in her defence. As if in anticipation of the struggle that is to come he remarks¹. that the Catholic Church is admired and loved by everyone until she comes out into the open, then suddenly her enemies leap to the fore and the Church is condemned as a hateful oppressor.

¹.Hilaire Belloc, Path to Rome, Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1954, p. 351.

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Maurice B. Rickett says² that already in 1914 Belloc felt that he was fighting a losing battle, and another commentator adds that as his life's work progressed "there became apparent a note of strain and exasperation, as of one who shouts perpetually at those who are deaf because they will not hear."³

It is not correct, however, to say that Belloc developed a defeatist attitude. One finds in his work that essential to good propaganda - especially to war propaganda - the promise of ultimate victory. He warns that the battle will be long and bitter, that the combatants will receive many and severe wounds, but never does he forecast defeat. On the contrary, one has the impression that Belloc lists the difficulties and darkens the dangers deliberately, in order, by this greater challenge, to attract the most courageous and daring to his side. Always, at the end of his warnings and forebodings, there comes a promise: "An insignificant body receive a truth. Often they are dispersed. In a century there is a multitude. Soon, the world."⁴

² Maurice B. Rickett, "Hilaire Belloc", in The New Statesman and Nation, Vol. 46, No. 1168, issue of July 25, 1953, p. 98-99.

³ Renee Haynes, Hilaire Belloc, London, Longmans Green, 1953, p. 14.

⁴ Hilaire Belloc, "On Convincing People", in On, London, Methuen, 1923, p. 91.

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J.B. Morton expresses both these ideas writing:

when one is young there is something romantic in battling against heavy odds, and being on the unpopular side. As one grows older, and responsibilities increase, it becomes a more serious matter. There are bound to be wakeful moments in the night when repeated effort without result (as it seems) takes on the appearance of futility, and the whole purpose of one's life is called into question. Belloc knew how to treat such momentary weaknesses, and he laughed them out of his life and out of his work.⁵

The decade between 1920 and 1930 was a time of prodigious effort - thirty-nine publications during that time, including the first three volumes of A History of England. It was a time of optimism, when he saw Europe turning towards the Faith which is its soul, "hesitating whether it will not return to the Faith."⁶ Though he knew that "those now living will not live to see it",⁷ he had hopes for the restoration of Christendom.

That Catholicism was on the increase seemed evident to many. In 1926 G.K. Chesterton is noting⁸ that conversion to the Catholic Faith is becoming more and more

⁵J.B. Morton, Hilaire Belloc, London, Hollis & Carter, 1955, p. 123.

⁶Hilaire Belloc, A Companion to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History", London, Sheed & Ward, 1926, p. 113.

⁷Idem, Europe and the Faith, New York, Paulist Press, 1920, p. 207.

⁸G.K. Chesterton, The Catholic Church and Conversion, New York, Macmillan, 1926, p. 111.

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common, so that even in those circles where Protestantism has been most firmly ensconced, holes are appearing in unexpected places, as first one member and then another returns to the Faith which has been so long ignored. Even non-Catholic periodicals⁹ are noting this trend towards Rome and expressing concern over it. In 1938 Belloc remarks that "the more powerful, the more acute, and the more sensitive minds of our time are clearly inclining toward the Catholic side."¹⁰ It would appear that those he addressed have heard him, and he is hopeful that they will exert great influence, for their conversions are of a kind to strike the public eye, and they are men and women who lead the country's thought. Belloc is not the only one who has noticed this particular phenomenon. Lamping quotes Mr. Francis Sheed as saying that "twelve out of thirteen outstanding literary men in England today are Catholic, and all converts to the Catholic Faith."¹¹

Yet these remain isolated cases, and Morton states that Belloc, seeing no popular movement towards the faith,

9. "The 'Roman Fever' in the Episcopal Church", in The Literary Digest, Vol. 88, No. 2, issue of January 9, 1926, p. 28-29.

10. Hilaire Belloc, The Great Heresies, London, Sheed & Ward, 1938, p. 272.

11. Severin and Stephen Lamping, Through Hundred Gates, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1939, p. 8.

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no mass conversions of whole villages,

underestimated the effect of his own work for the Faith. It produced no movement, but it made everyone aware that the Church was not a decaying survival, but was very much alive in their midst. They might have no sympathy with it, they might even hate it, but Belloc made it impossible for them to ignore it.¹²

The growth of modern materialistic paganism seems to oppress the old warrior, and the last of his historic works carries the lonely note: "What the future holds in this capital matter we none of us know, but we can all testify that for the moment the battle for the Faith in England has been lost."¹³ Yet even here he eliminates the sense of defeat by the phrase "for the moment". One recalls a phrase from an earlier book: "men of high action who die contented are so rare that you will hardly find them."¹⁴ No other Catholic in England deserved the title of "man of high action" as did Belloc.

Nor was he content with his efforts towards the righting of historical error. The year 1940 - his

¹².J.B. Morton, Op. cit., p. 126.

¹³.Hilaire Belloc, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, New York, Harper, 1942, p. 255.

¹⁴.Idem, "The Unfortunate Great", in The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1940, p. 65.

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seventieth - found him asking himself: "Is it now too late? That is a question no one can answer - but this much is certain: the chances of re-establishing true history are heavily against us."¹⁵. This is not, however, cause for discouragement, as he goes on in another essay: "the victor in controversy for the moment is not necessarily the final victor"¹⁶. and:

Therefore, let all good controversialists take heart. Their effort is not wasted, even when they fail; for even when they fail they have served as the anvil on which truth was forged (I use the word "forged" in no ambiguous sense), and if they have succeeded, why then they have been the hammer.¹⁷.

In Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance Belloc seems to be analyzing his own accomplishment in the field of history, measuring his success in the correction of error. He expresses the opinion that some of his work and that of his followers has been successful. The particular instances on which he comments¹⁸. are the heroism of the Jesuit missionaries to England and the episode of the Spanish Armada.

¹⁵.Idem, "Walter Scott", in The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays, p. 15.

¹⁶.Idem, "On the Use of Controversy", in The Silence of the Sea, p. 33.

¹⁷.Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸.Idem, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, p. 194 and 208.

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The first, he notes, has been emphasized by a few apologists, but the average Englishman still knows very little of the true story. The defeat of the Spanish Armada has grown, according to Belloc, to one of the best rooted myths in English history, but it is now "more truthfully written upon and better understood than any part of the English history during the great religious revolution."¹⁹ He writes that in 1942, yet when Douglas Jerrold published his England, Past, Present and Future nine years later, a reviewer in a Catholic periodical expressed tolerant amusement at Jerrold for disagreeing with the old textbook histories. The reviewer actually seems surprised at such daring as he writes:

At times he takes a Puckish delight, and it enlivens the narrative, to tilt at popular conceptions of history, as when he says England did not defeat Spain when it defeated the Armada in 1588.²⁰

Mr. Jerrold is hardly the man for taking "Puckish delight". He is much more likely in dead earnest when he points up these historical errors.

Yet on the whole Belloc expresses discouragement. He seems to doubt the importance of some of the issues he

19.Ibid., p. 208.

20.Thomas E. Lonergan, "To Present England Today Author Reviews Its Past", review in The Ensign, (no volume or number), issue of February 3, 1951, p. 12, col. 1.

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has raised:

It is an old story, and hardly worth going over again at this time of day, that burning was the habitual punishment not only for rebellion against the general sanctities of one's fellow citizens, but for other crimes. Nothing can prevent its appearing to the modern mind as an atrocity.²¹

Is there in that last sentence a note of exasperation, as if he suspects that all he has written on this topic has been lost?

In pursuit of his third aim, to win Catholics to his side in the struggle for religious recognition, Belloc apparently felt by 1931 that he was gaining some following, for he wrote that even the "gentle and apologetic"²². Catholic body already existing in England is causing concern and opposition. His reply²³. to Mr. Haldane leads one to believe that Catholic gentleness is on the decline, for when that biologist referred to J.B. Morton as fighting "a rear-guard action against the advance of science" Belloc is swift to inform him that the steadily increasing vigour of Catholicism in Europe and even in England cannot be

21. Hilaire Belloc, Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, p. 46-47.

22. Idem, "The Conversion of England", in Essays of a Catholic Layman in England, London, Sheed & Ward, 1931, p. 98.

23. Idem, "An Article of Mr. Haldane's", in Essays of a Catholic, p. 270-271.

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called fighting a rear-guard action, for such a term implies loss of ground, and the Catholic effort is definitely not losing ground.

After Belloc's death Francis Sheed wrote of him:

When he came down from Oxford, the tide was flowing all one way. The world had not much regard for the Catholic intellect, and no habit of listening to Catholics; Catholics, a minority apart, accepted the situation. Belloc turned that tide. It meant two battles, one with the world to make it listen, one with the Catholics to stimulate them to utterance in the face of the world. He won the first battle - and the other as a consequence - mainly by being a Catholic who could not be disregarded; he could no more be ignored than a tiger on your doorstep: he had a will for combat and a powerful equipment.²⁴.

Francis Thornton calls²⁵. the twentieth century Catholic literary revival "The Age of Belloc", for though Chesterton is its best-known and best-loved publicizer, Belloc stands ever in the background, inspiring Chesterton and drawing to the movement such men as Evelyn Waugh, D.B. Wyndham Lewis and Bruce Marshall. In much the same strain Robert Hamilton states²⁶. that Belloc influenced

²⁴ F.J. Sheed, "Hilaire Belloc Champion of the Faith", in Sheed & Ward's Own Trumpet, (no volume), No. 36, issue of September-October, 1953, p. 1, col. 2.

²⁵ Francis Beauchesne Thornton, Return to Tradition: A Directive Anthology, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1948, p. xiv.

²⁶ Robert Hamilton, Hilaire Belloc, an Introduction to His Spirit and Work, London, Doubles Organ, 1945, p. 48-49.

Christopher Dawson's history, Christopher Hollis's sociology, E.I. Watkin's philosophy, J.B. Morton's style, and G.K. Chesterton's thought. Yet J.B. Morton, who was one of Belloc's close friends, states²⁷ that the heaviest part of Belloc's burden was the lack of support of his fellow-Catholics. There were a few, it is true, who rallied around him in the battle, but by far the majority, even to the time of his death, became uncomfortable in the presence of his fierce polemic, and queried timidly if he could not accomplish more by being less combative. To which Morton adds the Bellocian comment: "I think we Catholics got a far better leader than we deserved."²⁸

Of all Belloc's obituary notices, the one most frequently quoted seems to be that from the Manchester Guardian which read: "If the Catholic Church is stronger in England today than it was fifty years ago it is largely because of Belloc and the most eminent of his disciples, G.K. Chesterton."²⁹

Belloc's impact on his fellow historians has, as Chapter Three states, been largely a matter of inspiring,

27. J.B. Morton, Op. cit., p. 121.

28. Ibid., p. 122.

29. quoted in The Catholic Herald, (London), (no volume), No. 3514, issue of July 24, 1953, p. 5, col.2.

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sometimes even of aggravating, them to thorough research into original documents. Roland Hill states³⁰. that Belloc as an historian has been more important for his overthrowal of conventional systems than for the accuracy of his particular researches. This is the conventional opinion of Catholics concerning Belloc as an historian. Recent research by such men as Jerrold and Williamson seems to indicate that the soundness not only of his general method but even of his particular researches may yet be vindicated.

Since this chapter opened with a consideration of Belloc's opinion of his own success or failure, it is perhaps appropriate to close it with two quotations from his writings on other men. First, to the question of whether Charles II foresaw the future stature of Milton in English letters, he replies that it "is not probable. It is very rare that the degree, the quality or the basis of literary fame are understood by contemporaries."³¹ Equally applicable to Belloc himself, though in a somewhat different tenor, are his words:

³⁰. Roland Hill, "Hilaire Belloc", in The Ave Maria, Vol. 78, No. 12, issue of September 19, 1953, p. 9.

³¹. Hilaire Belloc, The Last Rally: A Story of Charles II, London, Cassell, (1939), p. 92.

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The Jesuits, for all the tortures they suffered and for all their hardly human constancy, did not save England as they saved Poland. But who else made anything like that effort against such odds?³².

And who else but Belloc made such an effort against such odds as a Catholic faced in the England of the first half of this century? Surely we are too close to him to judge even his merits, let alone his effect on his own time. One thing is certain, if the Faith returns to England, or if truth returns to history, Hilaire Belloc will have earned his place in the vanguard of both these great victories.

³².Idem, How the Reformation Happened, New York, Robert M. McBride, 1928, p. 224.

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The Introduction to this thesis stated that Hilaire Belloc's chief aims, when writing on the Reformation in England, were to guard his Catholic readers from error; to persuade Catholic leaders to join him in the war against the "New Barbarism"; to remind Protestant England of its roots in Catholic Europe; to convince "neo-Pagans" of the importance of religion and the reality of God's Providence; and to present to Catholics and non-Catholics alike a clear, vivid, accurate picture of the past as informing the present.

As a means of attaining these ends, Belloc employs various literary and historical techniques. Chief among his literary merits is a magnificent, free-flowing style, which has in the past attracted many readers, and which, in the future, may well serve as the "open sesame" to lasting fame. At present, however, it forms a genuine barrier between him and many potential readers for whose land-bound, haste-impelled minds the high, pure, leisurely air of the mountain peaks is too rarified and too calm.

Belloc's satire has no equal in this century, and though many critics consider it too harsh to represent the true Catholic spirit, as a corrosive agent against the enemies of the Church, and against the historical error

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Belloc is attacking, it seems the best, if not the only, effective means available.

As an historian, Belloc's chief weakness lies in the absence of documentation. His reasons for this omission have been discussed, but the fact remains that he has left himself open to the charge of falsehood. Both Catholics and non-Catholics have criticized him and it is only the revelations of time and study which will vindicate his many controversial claims. His omission of references has, however, had two good results. Numerous historians have been led by him to go themselves to original sources in order to make their decision between Belloc's history and "official" history (deciding, more often than not, in Belloc's favour). Secondly, the young Catholic historians who are following his lead in the vivid presentation of history and the return to original documents are, in reaction to their exemplar, producing scholarly, well-documented volumes which can withstand any criticism. No where, however, has there arisen an historian who approaches Hilaire Belloc in genius for bringing the past to life and presenting it in flawless English. Such gifts are given but rarely, so rarely, indeed, that when they do appear they are not recognized.

The personality behind Belloc's work is perhaps too aggressive, and yet a man must use the talents he is given.

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Belloc's fault is that he was born in a time when it was customary in England to speak in whispers of one's Catholic beliefs. He came prepared to shout them from the housetops. Many critics find fault with his extreme pugnacity, yet it is this reader's opinion that Belloc is right when he says that the time for timidity has passed, that Catholics must move from the defensive to the offensive. But the first phase of the task is finished. The period of making fashionable the ridicule of things anti-Catholic has passed, and it is now the work of Catholic writers to make Catholicism itself fashionable.

Modern readers of Belloc tend to commit that fault of "reading history backwards". They see Bishop Fulton Sheen, Mgr. Ronald Knox, and Father John A. O'Brien making converts by the avenues of "sweet reasonableness"; they read the scholarly, well-documented Catholic histories of Christopher Dawson and Douglas Jerrold; they enjoy the Catholic comments on current events by Douglas Woodruff and Douglas Hyde; they laugh at the satiric wit of J.B. Morton and D.B. Wyndham Lewis; they make movies of the novels of Grahame Greene and Evelyn Waugh, all without realizing that the way for all this positive Catholic apologetic was first opened by men like Maurice Baring, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Cecil Chesterton, and Hilaire Belloc, battling at the beginning of the century to open the way for these

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younger writers, just as it was first opened for them by John Lingard and Cardinal Newman.

A final judgment on Belloc's success or failure cannot be made so soon after the event. His star, which began to wane at the beginning of the 1930's, will, almost certainly, rise again and wax strong when readers in English regain their appreciation of clear, forceful, beautiful style. It is this investigator's opinion that Belloc's chief fame will rest on his biographies, and that his reputation as an historian will grow in stature as the interpretations which once seemed paradoxical and absurd are vindicated by time and the careful research of students inspired by him to go past Gibbon and Macaulay to original sources. As a person, Belloc will continue to be loved only by those who, having escaped the modern mal de siècle, can share a robust joy in life, a zest for unvarnished truth, and a hearty conviction that anything worth loving is worth fighting for.

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Valuable as a contemporary comment on the battle between these two.

Review of Elizabeth: Creature of Circumstance, in The Catholic World, Vol. 157, issue of June, 1943, p. 333.

Comments on Belloc's treatment of "the Elizabethan myth" and remarks on his refusal to refer to evidence and authorities for novel statements.

APPENDIX

ABSTRACT OF

A Study of the Techniques of Persuasion Used by
Hilaire Belloc in His Writings on the English Reformation

This thesis has been a report on an investigation made of the persuasive techniques of Hilaire Belloc as found in his works on the Reformation in England. The first chapter sought to establish Belloc's aims. His writing was found to be directed to Catholics, with the intention of protecting them from historical error and of persuading them to join him in the public and written affirmation of their Faith; and to non-Catholics, with the desire of showing them the falsehoods of history, of teaching them the importance of religion, and of impressing upon them the validity of the claims of the Catholic Church.

Belloc's methods of fulfilling his purpose were described and evaluated in Chapters Two and Three under the separate headings of Literary Methods and Historical Techniques. His principal literary characteristics are a flawless style, apt figures of speech, repetition, ridicule expressed in satire and irony, and a vigorous, forceful personality pervading all. The techniques peculiar to his historical works include a panoramic vision, revivification of the past by means of vivid descriptions of persons and

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and events, and restricted documentation.

In evaluating these methods it was concluded that while Belloc's literary style may seem too elevated for the majority of modern readers, it has been in the past and will probably be in the future the means of attracting many readers. His ridicule was judged to be severe, but necessary for his task as he saw it. His militant personality made many enemies, yet it was his very audacity which won for the Catholic Church the audience her writers now enjoy.

Of Belloc's historical techniques, his breadth of vision and brilliant descriptions seemed excellent, but his lack of documentation was regretted as leaving him susceptible to attack from his opponents. The omission did, however, serve to make his history more readable, and it is being supplied by the young historians who are following his lead.

The final chapter attempted to determine Belloc's success or failure in the attainment of his aims. It revealed that Belloc himself experienced intense discouragement during his life, and, it is believed by many, died in the conviction that he had failed. Yet the work which he began is continuing, and it is possible that the day will come when he will receive the recognition due him, both as a literary artist and as an historical genius.

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