

The Occasion and Need of a Burke Newsletter

EDITORIAL BOARD

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ON DECEMBER 27, 1958, in New York City, a conference on Edmund Burke was held at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association of America. This conference, under the chairmanship of Dr. Peter J. Stanlis, University of Detroit, was attended by the following persons: Fr. Francis Canavan, S.J., St. Peter's College, Jersey City; Thomas W. Copeland, University of Massachusetts; John Fitzgerald, Boston College; Robert Fox, St. Francis College, New York; Will Herberg, Drew University, Madison, N. J.; James Lucier, University of Michigan; George McElroy, University of Chicago; Thomas H. D. Mahoney, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; J. M. Purcell, Duquesne University; Vincent Ryan, Wayne State University; Milton S. Smith, Southeastern Louisiana College; Eldon M. Talley, College of

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The theme of the conference was "The Present State and Basic Needs of Scholarship on Edmund Burke." Papers were read by Dr. Peter J. Stanlis, Dr. Milton S. Smith and Fr. Francis Canavan, S.J. Dr. Bertrand Sarason was to have read a paper but missed the conference because of illness. In the discussion period following the papers several conferees suggested that in the light of the remarkable recent revival of interest in Burke's political thought a Burke newsletter was badly needed. A few weeks after the Burke conference, C. P. Ives, Peter J. Stanlis, and Russell Kirk worked out the practical arrangements which will make it possible for *The Burke Newsletter* to appear regularly in MODERN AGE.

Editorial Policy

The editors of *The Burke Newsletter* will follow a policy of objective reporting of all news pertinent to scholarship on Burke.

We shall include announcements of works in progress, M.A. theses and doctoral dissertations, notices of the publication of books, important articles and outstanding reviews, new editions of Burke's works, cognate studies in related subjects, the teaching of Burke in seminars, lectures on Burke, reports of conferences on Burke, etc. We shall present everything that will give a clear and full picture of Burke studies and of literary productions which are important for a greater understanding of Burke and his times. We hope to pool the efforts of many writers and to include news from Britain and European countries as well as the United States.

In treating Burke's political thought we shall avoid making partisan judgments, and will simply present an objective account of what Burke believed or said. As *The Burke Newsletter* will be read by the intelligent reading public, and not merely by academic specialists, we shall write in a clear and simple style suitable to our readers, with a minimum of scholarly apparatus. We invite helpful suggestions and constructive criticism from our readers. Contributions of materials on Burke should be sent to Dr. Peter J. Stanlis, Department of English, University of Detroit, Detroit, Michigan.

*A Report on The M.L.A. Conference,
December 27, 1958*

Dr. Stanlis opened the conference with two brief papers: "The Present State and Basic Needs of Scholarship on Burke," and "A Definitive Bibliography of Burke." He pointed out that in 1949, Professor Thomas W. Copeland, in his book *Our Eminent Friend Edmund Burke*, predicted that "we are entering upon a period in which Burke will be more actively studied than he has been in at least a century." There were good reasons for this statement even before 1949, because increasingly during the past two decades and more there has been an outpouring of books, articles, reviews and doctoral dissertations on Burke, as well

as new editions of his individual works and selections from his writings. A recent doctoral dissertation by Naomi J. Townsend, *Edmund Burke: Reputation and Bibliography, 1850-1954* (University of Pittsburgh, 1955), reveals that in the last 150 years, up to 1955, Burke has been "discussed in 440 publications, varying from special studies of his character and career to analyses of his thought and place in literary and political history." In the United States, between 1931 and 1950, Burke has been the subject of eleven books, thirty-three chapters or sections of books, eighty-two articles and fifteen doctoral dissertations. From 1953 through 1958 interest in Burke has soared greatly, with the publication of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (1953), the Copeland-Smith *Checklist of the Correspondence of Edmund Burke* (1955), Ross J. S. Hoffman's *Edmund Burke, New York Agent* (1956), Charles Parkin's *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought* (1956), Carl B. Cone's *Burke and the Nature of Politics* (1957), H.V.F. Somerset's *A Note-book of Edmund Burke* (1957), Peter J. Stanlis's *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (1958), and the recent appearance of Thomas W. Copeland's edition of *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke* (1958), the first volume of a projected series of ten. At least three other books on Burke are complete in manuscript form and will likely be published in 1959. When we add to these major publications the large number of specialized articles and unpublished dissertations on Burke it is clear that scholarly interest in the great Whig statesman is flourishing as never before.

Two things have combined to bring about this remarkable revival of interest in Burke. The most immediate occasion of the Burke revival was the release of a private collection of approximately 2,500 manuscript letters to and from Burke. This correspondence has lain dormant for almost a century and a half in the archives

of Wentworth Woodhouse, and at Milton, the homes of the Earl Fitzwilliam family. The letters were first made known to scholars in 1938, and were made generally available in 1949, at the Sheffield Library in Yorkshire and the Northamptonshire Record Society in Northamptonshire, England. The historical importance of this correspondence soon attracted many American and British scholars in history, literature and political science. The result has been the beginning of a thorough re-evaluation of Burke's relationship with scores of important political and literary persons, and the re-interpretation of his part in the affairs of England, Ireland, America, India and France. Much "pure" scholarship has been done since 1949, and gradually the new knowledge of Burke will be assimilated and synthesized into an organic whole. Until this process is completed the definitive works which ultimately will be written on Burke will have to be deferred.

The second great cause of the Burke revival is quite apart from the availability of the Fitzwilliam papers. Even during the 1920's, as the anarchy created by the First World War and the Russian Revolution consolidated as political tyranny throughout much of Europe, scholars perceived that what Burke had said about the problems of war, revolution, reform and empire, and what he had written on the nature of justice, social order and civil liberty, contained a wealth of wisdom that was badly needed by contemporary society. The conception of Burke as a political philosopher and defender of "the commonwealth of Europe" has found a rich appreciation in the work of many writers during the past three decades. It is significant that between 1953 and 1958 there appeared three new editions of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, with another edition to appear in 1959.

Scholarship on Burke badly needs a definitive edition of his correspondence, his speeches and his general known works, all of which should be collated with the manuscript materials. The existing editions of

Burke's known writings are hopelessly inadequate. Beyond all this there still remains the problem of Burke's authorship of the *Annual Register*, and of the extensive anonymous pamphlet literature of his era. Not only Burke's own political pamphlets, but the replies provoked by his writings and activities in the controversies over America, India and France have never been systematically listed and studied. The absence of thorough bibliographical knowledge of these primary sources makes much research in Burke closer to inspired antiquarianism than to truly scientific scholarship.

Dr. Milton S. Smith's paper, "Burke's Letters in Future Scholarship," pointed out how the *Checklist of the Correspondence of Edmund Burke* could be used for the propagation of Burke scholarship. The *Checklist* identified 207 published sources of Burke's letters, and 81 manuscript sources, for a total of 7,000 letters between Burke and some 1,200 correspondents. When the *Checklist* was published in 1955, 80 per cent of these letters remained unpublished either in part or in full. The letters are identified alphabetically by correspondent, and also chronologically, and again by a list of locations of sources.

Dr. Smith outlined several uses of the *Checklist* and stressed two in particular. The projected annotated ten volume edition of Burke's correspondence, under the direction of Dr. Copeland, is organized on a chronological scheme. While such an organization assures a unity in time, it works against a topical or biographical unity. Thus, although one of the more important of Burke's correspondences was with Henry Dundas, the letters to Dundas are to be found not in one but in three of the projected volumes. Obviously, the *Checklist* will aid the user of the annotated edition to pull letters together into a topical or biographical unity. Also, since the annotated edition will omit most of the letters to Burke, the *Checklist* will be useful to set Burke letters into their full "in-letters" context.

A second major use of the *Checklist* will be in editing and publishing separate correspondences which fall into natural units. Dr. Ross Hoffman's *Edmund Burke, New York Agent* is a classical example of a unit correspondence; the sub-title, "with his letters to the New York Assembly and intimate correspondence with Charles O'Hara, 1761-1776," indicates the nature of the unity in this correspondence. Dr. Smith also mentioned the utility of the *Checklist* for general research in the eighteenth century, by persons not primarily interested in Burke. The 1,200 correspondents include key figures in two generations of British public life. Their letters to Burke will illuminate many broad areas in literature and politics.

Fr. Francis Canavan, S.J., read a paper called "Burke's College Study of Philosophy," in which he traced out the likely early sources of Burke's philosophical principles. Fr. Canavan pointed out that Burke could have acquired his philosophical convictions from many sources other than his college studies. Yet the range in principles of Burke's "deeply religious yet intensely practical" political convictions was contained in many of the textbooks he studied at Trinity College, Dublin, from 1744 to 1748. Fr. Canavan limited his analysis of Burke's college study of philosophy to five textbooks.

Franco Burgersdijck's *Institutionum logicarum libri duo* (1626), repelled Burke because of its metaphysical speculations and insistence upon strict mathematical logic. Yet Burgersdijck also taught a scholastic thesis which, as a general principle, Burke always accepted, that "there is only one absolutely first cause, namely God." In Burke's second year at Trinity he probably studied selections from another textbook on logic, *Logica, Selectis disputationibus et quaestionibus illustrata* (1618), written by Martin Smiglecki, a Polish Jesuit. Smiglecki strongly emphasized the Aristotelian distinction between speculative and practical knowledge and reason. The object of speculative knowledge is the necessary; the ob-

ject of practical knowledge is the contingent and variable. This distinction between speculative and practical reason was again stressed in a fourth year textbook by Robert Baron, called *Metaphysica generalis* (1657). Baron, who was a professor of divinity in Marischal College, Aberdeen, taught that the speculative disciplines are concerned with the ultimately necessary, and are beyond human control. Practical disciplines bear on the contingent, are concerned with action, and are within human power. Speculative reason judges between truth and falsehood; practical reason judges between good and evil. In his fourth year Burke studied a work by Eustache de St. Paul, a French Cistercian monk, called *Ethica, sive summa moralis disciplina* (1655). According to this text moral philosophy guides human conduct in general and even in universal terms. Prudence is the application of more philosophy to individual actions in their concrete circumstances. Finally, also in his last year at Trinity, Burke probably studied a work by Robert Sanderson, who became Anglican Bishop of Lincoln. Sanderson's text, *De obligatione conscientiae*, consisted of lectures delivered at Oxford in 1646-47, embodying the Thomistic doctrine of Natural Law. "This natural law," wrote Sanderson, "is an impression [on man] of that eternal and archetypal law which is in the divine mind; and is part of that divine image on which man is said originally to have been founded and formed in Genesis I. . . ." Sanderson also taught that prudence did not deny but complemented moral principle.

Fr. Canavan drew no causal connections between the principles of philosophy which Burke read in the textbooks at Trinity College, and the frequent appeals to these same principles in his best known political works. He merely affirmed that a knowledge of Burke's reading in college supplied excellent grounds from which to refute the claim that Burke was an empiricist in his political thought.