

## Editorial: A Penny a Page

It would no longer be natural or prudent to define the Civil Service as 'that department of the government service which is neither naval nor military'. *Beeton's Illustrated Dictionary of Religion, Philosophy, Politics and Law* gives no note of its year of publication, but it shows by this and other internal indications that it belongs to an age before the foundation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force. One piece of external evidence is conclusive by itself: a copy that has recently come into our hands has a bookplate showing that it was a prize awarded to Joel Hobson of St Andrew's Church, Wolverhampton, on 19 September 1897.

Improving the minds of the public is still one of the ambitions of publishers, and in the last few months we have received copies of the first ten Past Masters in a series edited by Keith Thomas and published by the Oxford University Press at 95p each (about a penny a page): Aquinas, Bacon, Burke, Dante, Galileo, Homer, Hume, Jesus, Marx and Pascal. Even a cursory comparison between the two enterprises provides food for reflection on time's revenges, and especially on fads and fashions in popular education. Mr Beeton's Dictionary has no article on Aquinas, Burke, Dante, Homer, Galileo or Marx, and it includes 'Paschal' but not Pascal. There is a longish account of the Baconian Philosophy, but the entries on Hume's Philosophy and on Jesus Christ consist of two words and two brackets each: '(See SCEPTICISM)' and '(See CHRISTIANITY)'. The Christian religion nevertheless occupies a high proportion of the space in the Dictionary, and is matter-of-factly presented as established by evidence as well as by law. The article on John, Gospel of, is typical: it entertains no doubt, and says that none has ever been entertained, that the Gospel is the work of the Apostle, son of Zebedee. Elsewhere there are unqualified references to 'the true principles of religion'. The political definitions are not so committal. 'RADICALS' is 'the name given to a political party in England who are opposed to half-measures and wish to have all the abuses that may have crept into our constitutional system completely rooted out and our institutions remodelled'.

The advertising pages provide further particulars of Ward, Lock and Co.'s catalogue, and permit no doubt that the present day Oxford University Press and Mr Thomas are outclassed as popular guides to the world of learning. The promised additions to Past Masters will still leave the series far behind Ward and Lock's *Universal Instructor; or, Self-Culture for All: a Complete Guide to Learning and Self-Education, meeting the requirements of all Classes of Students, and forming a Perfect System of Intellectual Culture*. This comprehensive work heads a list that includes many more

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specialized manuals on public speaking, needlework, domestic medicine, farm management and country life.

The period flavour of the whole production is strengthened by the impeccable standard of proof-reading, but there is at least one intriguing editorial lapse of a different kind. One article reads: 'FORNICATION, *for-ni-kai-shun*. Illicit sexual intercourse. (*See* PROSTITUTION).' But there is no entry for Prostitution. Did Mr Beeton censor his own publication? Or perhaps it was Mrs Beeton, emboldened by the fact that her *Book of Household Management*, advertised on another page, had already reached its 401st thousand.