

EDITORIAL

Michael Kimmitt

The Undercover Revolution: How Fiction Changed Britain

Iain Murray

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Sixty years ago, Christian bookshops were largely devoid of useful material! There were, of course, Bibles, and Inter-Varsity Press had printed some reference works for students but my recollection was of pious and basically Arminian dross!

Then in September, 1955, there appeared the first issue of *The Banner of Truth* magazine written and published by Sidney Norton and Iain Murray, ministers of St. John's Church, Summertown, Oxford. By the third issue, October, 1956, Iain had moved to London as assistant to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel and appears as the sole editor. It was about this time that I became aware of the magazine and subscribed. In November, 1957, we read that it had been incorporated into a trust—The Banner of Truth Trust—which was to start producing books! The rest, as they say, is history.

It is interesting to note in the providence of God that in the U. S. Jay Green had started the Sovereign Grace Book Club only a little earlier. The Puritan Conference started in 1950.

It is clear that there was a decisive shift back to Calvinism, though certainly in some circles and bookshops it was resisted and unwelcome! I say shift back because all the English standards—the *Thirty Nine Articles*, the *Westminster Confession* and the derived Congregationalist and Baptist ones—are decisively Calvinistic. Some of us were mere bit players but Iain Murray edited the *Banner* for a number of years, pastored churches, ran conferences and has written a stream of nearly twenty books, the latest being *The Undercover Revolution: How Fiction Changed Britain* which deserves a comment and welcome.

The scene is set by an opening quotation:



British Reformed Journal

Evangelical morality was the single most widespread influence in Victorian England. It powerfully influenced the Church of England, was the faith of the Methodists, and revived the older nonconformist sects; it spread through every class and taught simple comprehensible virtues.

It would be absurd to think everybody was moral! But broadly there was an accepted set of values which lasted until the 1950s. When I started work, the managers were almost all married men who went home to their wives and families at the end of the day. I and my contemporaries did the same! But when I left, one observed the next generation was exhibiting divorce and sexual breakdown.

It is the thrust of this little book of some hundred pages that the writers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century initiated that breakdown. We are given potted biographies of Robert Louis Stevenson and Thomas Hardy, both men with evangelical fathers, who rejected the faith, as well as introductions to Edmund Gosse; Bertrand Russell; Lytton Strachey, author of *Eminent Victorians*; the Bloomsbury Group; H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw. Immoral standards abounded: adultery, divorce and casual fornication. And inevitably pain, loneliness and a hopeless end. They sowed the wind; we are reaping the whirlwind!

But thankfully Iain Murray does not leave it there! For in Part Two he tackles what is the relevant issue: Is Christianity fiction? In some eighteen pages, he produces an excellent apologetic. Particularly useful are the dates showing how early the faith spread. Christ's death and resurrection were in or near AD 30; by AD 61 Christians are recognized in Rome. But get the book and absorb the argument.