Born at the dawn of doubt: 1840 and the first issue of The Tablet

The Tablet was born, at a time of bitter divisions, hunger and disease, into the world of railways, mills and factories, ... world's oldest religious newspaper was launched just at the moment when the 'sea of faith' appeared to be draining away.

Newman's Apologia ends with his leaving his university, on 23 February 1845. It is a characteristically brilliant ... are fairly esoteric: "I have never seen Oxford since, excepting its spires, as they are seen from the railway."

It is an arresting sentence because the reader is suddenly brought into the modern age. The previous pages had been about ... are looking through the window of a train. We see not just the spires of Oxford, but the belching chimneys of Birmingham.

Five years before Newman left Oxford, in the year that The Tablet was founded, England was on the verge of what came to ... ways an excellent Pope, who, among other things, established both the Etruscan and the Egyptian museums in the Vatican.

When the teenaged Prince Albert was taken for an audience with Pope Gregory in 1839, the young know-all from Coburg ... mean. Gregory, an expert Egyptologist, was tolerant and polite, and did not tell the young man he was talking nonsense.

Six months later, in February 1840, Albert went to England and married his cousin Victoria. He might have been an ... of it. He was a believer in science, progress, industry, commerce: all the things which made Gregory XVI feel queasy.
The second and third waves of the Industrial Revolution had produced a powerful, wealthy and wealth-producing middle ... they reformed, and began to teach modern history and science, two subjects which made theology a much tougher challenge.

One of the pioneers of university reform was Prince Albert, and one of the first Englishmen knighted by the prince, on ... until you reached October 4004 bc, the month in which Creation and the Fall of Man both appeared to have taken place.

Lyell showed, not merely that the planet was infinitely older than this, but that the geological theory posited on the ... to the idea that the Divine Mercy did not allow a single sparrow to fall to the ground without the care of the Father.

Tennyson's anguished reflections on Lyell, in stanza after stanza of In Memoriam, are testimony to the emotional and ... for one who revealed himself exclusively through the Jewish Scriptures and the Christian Churches, seemed almost petty.

And what, besides, of those who had not had the privilege of being born in a part of the world where the light of the ... than was understood by "poor little talkative Christianity" (as E.M. Forster was to call it in A Passage to India).

Moreover, if the world of "heartless, witless" Nature appeared to be morally neutral, and the great world of humanity ... was being cracked apart by the growth of middle-class, industry-funded money, and by the anger and suffering of the poor.

The Chartist movement was not simply, as its name suggested, one which called for the extension of the parliamentary ... of something crueller than slavery for those who were producing the prodigious wealth of early Victorian England.

It was through that bitterly divided, often hungry, increasingly smoky, disease-ridden land of England, in the decade ... water-borne diseases. They had to wait until 1849 before Dr John Snow published On the Mode of Communication of Cholera.

By its sheer filth, injustice, baffling pain and dawning scientific awareness, it was certainly a challenging time for ... Arnold hearing the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" as the Sea of Faith pulled out, down the shingle of Dover Beach.


A.N. Wilson - The Tablet