

Sermon Cards

G. B. Shaw Theologian

By Rev. James M. Gilis, C.S.P.

It is a notorious fact that the typical American business man, politician, doctor, lawyer, writer, public speaker, senator, congressman, complete the list yourself—has little if any accurate knowledge of theology. In Continental Europe it is not, or used not to be so. Public men in France, Spain, Italy may or may not have accepted a theology, or professed a religious belief; but whether they accepted or rejected, they know something about it. So also, it has been in England, something to recent years to a lesser degree.

But your typical American, native-born or adopted, seems to have been somehow immunized against the first rudiments of theology. Even if he calls himself religious and sometimes goes to church, he usually has a very superficial understanding of "what it's all about." As for being able to catch the meaning of a fairly subtle remark on a theological subject, he is simply incompetent.

Recently there came from the press a biography—one more biography—of George Bernard Shaw. That space-grace Irishman seems somehow to have fascinated both readers and writers. He has, as the boys say, "the Indian sign" on them. They cannot leave him alone even now that he is his intellectual and artistic dotage. We have a surfeit of biographical articles and books, anecdotes, news reports, witticisms (fetter and thinner of late) about this curious combination of genius and mountebank. Perhaps that phrase is the key to the popular interest in Shaw. If he were truly a prophet, or only a prodigy, the world might pay little attention to him. But his being at once a fool and a sage captivates the public.

Whatever he is and whatever be the secret of his holding the limelight so long, you have to admit that he seldom talks about something of which he knows nothing. He even has caught hold somehow of certain theological truths. "I am so thoroughly an Irish Protestant myself that I have all my life scandalized the Irish Protestant clergy, and made the Irish priests chuckle, by declaring a Protestant Church is a contradiction in terms. The true Protestant is a mystic, not an Institutionalist."

Upon which, John Courtney who reviews the new biography Heskeith Pearson's "G. B. S." comments: "The truth of the matter is, Mr. Shaw has no understanding of either Protestant or Catholicism. He is just playing with words."

There you have one more proof, the latest in an interminable line, that the typical American (in this instance an adopted American) even though he be a fairly famous writer, is out of his element in the atmosphere of theology. It isn't G. B. S. but John Courtney who "has no understanding of either Protestantism or Catholicism." That very sentence of "Shaw the true Protestant is a mystic, not an Institutionalist" is too deep and too true for Mr. Courtney. He just doesn't know what Shaw is driv-

ing at. If he did he wouldn't say "Shaw has no understanding" of the one religion or the other. It may seem strange of me, above all men, to be at it again, defending Shaw. I have written and spoken against him from time to time. I have even gone so far as to say that he himself lost the title of one of his own plays "The Devil's Disciple." But the devil knows theology and the devil's disciples. Voltaire, a kind of eighteenth-century Shaw knew a lot about theology. That's what made him dangerous. Without that knowledge he would have been an ignorant and therefore unimportant fanatic, like those who here in America attempt to discredit the Church and the Christian religion.

Yes, Shaw "has something there." In fact he has a great deal there. He has got hold of a radical fact. And he states it accurately. He speaks not of the "typical" or the "usual" Protestant, but of the "real" Protestant. He says that sort of Protestant is "not an Institutionalist." Naturally, to men like John Courtney the statement seems a paradox. Courtney says so, and goes on to remark that "paradox is dated," and that Shaw's reputation will suffer in time to come because of his paradoxes: "The who lives by paradox shall die by paradox."

On the face of it Courtney would seem to be right. No one goes in for "Institutionalism" more than the Protestant. The usual Protestant. The typical Protestant. He is strong for Church membership, for organizations such as the Y. M. C. A., Christian Endeavor, Epworth League, Watch and Ward Society, Chautauqua, Bible Classes, Mission Auxiliaries, Propaganda and Pressure groups (quite legitimate), Salvation Army, Federation of Churches, Federation of Christians and Jews. The Protestant world is full of them. Actually so, but Shaw would say not logically. For the "true" Protestant is one who looks upon a church or any form of organized religion as a matter of secondary importance.

The first tenet of his faith is that the Bible is to be privately interpreted and religion personally apprehended. He believes that with or without a church he will receive the revelation of God. Bible in hand and the Holy Spirit in his mind, he knows the Truth of God. He needs no pope, no church, no theologian. Luther expressed it graphically when he told the peasants that with the written word under their eyes and God within their soul they knew Christ and His Teaching as well as Jerome or Chrysostom or any of the fathers or theologians. That is what Shaw had in mind when he called Protestants "mystics."

Now if that primary belief of Protestantism were followed, it would fare badly with Churches. If a man in his own home, Bible in hand may receive the Divine communication, he need not (and may indeed but he need not) join any organization for worship. Even if he does join a "Church" he reserves to himself the right to believe or disbelieve what the Church teaches. He feels no obligation to any "Church." He may leave one and join another. Or he may join none, as he pleases. That's what G. B. S. has in the back of his head when he said that a Protestant is not an Institutionalist and that a "Protestant Church is a contradiction in terms." Mr. Courtney, typical non-theological American, just didn't understand.

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Library Signpost

Twentieth Century Revolution: II

By Rev. Benedict Ehrmann

Last week I marked the turn of the year in this column by an article on the revolution which is progressing with increasing intensity in this twentieth century. What I wrote there was the merest halting preface to a vast subject. Though it has its profound academic and philosophic side, set down on reams of paper, it has concrete, everyday importance for every single person, no matter how poor his education may be. Every one of us is being affected by this revolution. The point of special interest to Christians is to win the revolution for Christ. We don't want the house swept and garnished, only to have it occupied by seven devils worse than the one which was cast out.

One phase of the revolution is already far advanced; that is, the one affecting the material circumstances of life. Compare our external way of life with that of our grandparents. We have electric light, telephones, moving pictures, radios, automobiles, central heating, aeroplanes, to mention only the more conspicuous of our gains. Besides these, there are the marvellous advances in medicine and surgery and chemistry. Consider any one of these items for a few moments and the difference it has made between modern living and that of two generations ago. This will give you a good gauge of one phase of the twentieth century revolution.

The other phase has just about begun, and is advancing much more slowly. That is the moral one. From a particular point of view, it seems a pity that the sensational advance of scientific development should have come at a time when social conscience was in a decline. While people's lives were being materially improved in a score of ways beyond the wildest imaginings of their nineteenth century ancestors, their consciences were being coarsened and warped by materialistic and utilitarian education. One result has been that they have not used their new-found goods to improve their souls. Christ's accusing words come often to mind. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" Never before have those words been so comprehensively fulfilled as today in the conduct of man.

In Chapter 3 of his "Outline of Sanity," G. K. Chesterton gives an acute diagnosis of the process by which our economic gains have been accompanied by mortgages of conscience all along the line. Though it is long, I submit it to my readers as valuable evidence from a keen and wise observer of the problem we are discussing.

"A great nation and civilization has followed for a hundred years or more a form of progress which held itself independent of certain old communications, in the form of ancient traditions about the land, the hearth, or the altar. It was advanced under leaders who were confident, not to say cocksure. They were quite sure that their economic rules were rigid, that their political theory was

right, that their commerce was beneficent, that their parliaments were popular, that their press was enlightened, that their science was humane. In this confidence they committed their people to certain new and enormous experiments to making their own independent nation an eternal debtor to a few rich men to piling up private property in heaps on the faith of financiers to covering their land with iron and stone and stripping it of grass and grain to driving food out of their own country in the hope of buying it back again from the ends of the earth to loading up their little island with iron and gold till it was weighted like a sinking ship to letting the rich grow richer and fatter and the poor poorer and more numerous to letting the whole world be cloven in two; to with a war of mere masters and mere servants; to losing every type of moderate prosperity and candid patriotism, till there was no independence without luxury and no labor without ugliness; to leaving the millions of mankind dependent on indirect and distant discipline and indirect and distant sustenance, working themselves to death for they knew not whom and taking the means of life from they knew not where; and all hanging on a thread of alien trade which grew thinner and thinner.

"To the people who have been brought into this position many things may still be said. It will be right to remind them that mere wild revolt will make things worse and not better. It may be true to say that certain complexities must be tolerated for a time because they correspond to other complexities. And the two must be carefully simplified together. But if I may say one word to the princes and rulers of such a people, who have led them into such a pass, I would say to them as seriously as anything was ever said by man to man: 'For God's sake, for our sake, but, above all, for your own sake, do not be in this blind haste to tell them there is no way out of the trap into which your folly has led them; that there is no road except the road by which you have brought them to ruin; that there is no progress except the progress that has ended here. . . . Do not try to minimize the industrial disease by showing it is an incurable disease. Do not brighten the dark problem of the coal-pit by proving it is a bottomless pit. . . . At some later time, at some eleventh hour, when the fates have grown darker and the ends have grown clearer, the mass of men may suddenly understand into what a blind alley your progress has led them. Then they may turn on you in the trap. And if they bore all else, they might not bear the final taunt that that you can do nothing; that you will not even try to do anything. . . . Man may forgive you for blundering, and may not forgive you for despairing.'"

And so it is that economic and scientific progress have brought us to the catastrophe of World War, because it was promoted and utilized by a degenerating society. In a very terrible sense this is a war of machines, and the chances of victory are being weighed in terms of production. When it is over, the industrial system may be in a state of collapse, and men may be chastened enough to start reconstruction according to the dictates of conscience.

(To be continued)

This Modern Age



"But darling, the WPA, or whatever it is, says we should cut down on our heat."

FIVE and TEN Years Ago

From Jan. 6, 1938, Edition
Word of the death of the Rev. Andrew V. Byrne, 54, spiritual director of St. Andrew's Rectory, in Auburn, brought a special tribute from His Excellency, Bishop O'Hara released at the Chancery.

From Jan. 6, 1937, Edition
His Excellency, Bishop Kearney, inaugurated the custom of exchanging New Year's greetings with the people of Rochester at the episcopal residence, 547 East Ave.

For his frequent services over a quarter of a century to Belgian people in Rochester, the Rev. Camille A. Vander Meulen, C.S.B.C., pastor of Our Lady of Victory Church was honored by His Majesty, Leopold III, King of the Belgians, with the title of Knight of the Order of the Crown. The award was announced on the eve of the nineteenth anniversary of Our Lady of Victory Church.

Feast Days

- Sunday, Jan. 10.—FEAST OF HOLY FAMILY.
- Monday, Jan. 11.—ST. SYDNEY.
- Tuesday, Jan. 12.—ST. ANTHONY.
- Wednesday, Jan. 13.—ST. VERONICA.
- Thursday, Jan. 14.—ST. MILYAN OF POINTS.
- Friday, Jan. 15.—ST. PAUL.
- Saturday, Jan. 16.—ST. MARCELLIN.

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 12)

really love their country and believe in liberty for all men. For the cause; that should be our waking thought, our unforgettable slogan. Great days are before us, history is in the making. Our daily sacrifices of leisure in earnest devotion to increased production, of comfort in denying to ourselves unnecessary luxuries and unneeded purchases, of ordinary items in the food and clothing and heating fields, will be the outward expression of our eagerness to cooperate with our boys in service, the clear statement of our patriotic duty to have a full part in equipping them for a victorious outcome of the present war.

Buy more War Bonds, buy more War Stamps! Let our constancy in buying up to the limit of our ability, even outside the earnestness of the appeals so patriotically made by our fellow-citizens on the Selling Committees. Buy Bonds—more Bonds—For the Cause!

AND THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND

When Jesus told Mary and Joseph that He must be about His Father's business, they did not understand His word. It seemed to go against their realization of their responsibility for this twelve year old Child of their household. He had been lost, lost for three days. They had been seeking Him, searching for Him, worrying about Him! And now when He is found, He asks them why they had sought Him? Did they not know that He must be about His Father's business?

They did not understand the word He spoke to them. But full of confidence in Him, certain that understanding would come in its own time, they resumed their charge over Him, took Him back with them to the humble home in Nazareth. There was not attempt to interfere with His duty, with the Father's business about which He must be busy. Prayer and contemplation helped Mary and Joseph to an ever increasing understanding of the plans for man's salvation which were His Father's business, which He must be about.

The business of the Father must be carried out by His Children on earth. Every man has His vocation from on high. Some are called to the high vocation of the religious life, the Priesthood. Parents are often at a loss to understand the word of their children making known that they must be about their Father's business. Exercising their office in fullness of faith in God, putting no obstacle in the way of His call to one of their own, they will have the happiness that was Mary's and Joseph's, to see their little one advance in wisdom and age and grace before God and man.