

Causes & Movements

(Views and Comments)

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The handbook of the British Association which holds its annual meeting in Manchester next week, has an article on "Manchester of To-day," which suggests that an extremely interesting; article on that subject might be written by someone who possessed the necessary details. Among the observations on its temper and tradition, Manchester is given distinction particularly as being the breeding-ground of Causes and Movements: a distinction for which the two crusades in favour of Low Diets cited—the Temperance and the Vegetarian Movements—seem only a meagre basis. The writer, doubtless, has his reasons for this economy of illustration, but it is an economy which must strike anyone who has even a slender acquaintance with that city. Perhaps the war makes it inopportune to emphasize Pacifism, and the rising Cult of the Masculine, which is the immediate consequence upon it, makes mention of the Insurrectionary Feminine seem dowdy and antiquated, if not actually undignified; but it is difficult to see what prevents Manchester's cradling of the Labour Movement, and the lead it has taken in the nineteenth century Democracy at least obtaining adequate mention.

It is just possible that the differences hinted at between the mental atmosphere of Manchester and that—say—of London could have been indicated with more point in a comparison drawn between the "Intellectual" as he appears in Manchester and the "Intellectual" as he appears in London—if by "Intellectual" one may mean the articulate persons who can and like to talk about the things to which their souls move them. The Manchester Intellectual is above all things the "Earnest" Young Man and still more "Earnest" Young Woman, whereas with the London Intellectual it is as the breath of his aspiration to be Tolerant rather than Earnest. And he is accordingly far less exciting. The Earnest One anxiously debates the Universe as one who seeks that sole "True Light," of which found, he is to be the devotee and servitor. That "lights" are true or false not merely according to one's fleeting view of them but eternally and absolutely he has no doubt. The "true blue" Manchester Vegetarian, for instance, has no doubt whatever that the archangels in heaven will on occasion discuss the problem with the seriousness of any earthly convert, whether having forsworn the enjoyment of all dead meats it remains "right" to wear leather shoes: their only difference, and, of course, advantage being that they are able not only to put the question even as frail mortals, but can supply in full that answer which mortals as yet know only in part.

It is this absolute point of view which makes the Earnest One so splendid in Movements. He sees his Cause as the pivot on which the Universe turns and from thence derives that momentum which is to carry him past whatever distractions rise up between him and the one thing worthy. Which explains why where the Earnest are, there the Movements are also: and why he is found particularly in the provinces. An "absolute" point of view requires additional room and scope, and this the provincial city is best able to supply. Interests there not being so varied and close packed as in the capital cities, the "absolute" standpoint is not so liable to get nastily jolted. And in return for this elbow-room as it were, the Earnest Ones invest the provincial cities with what appears to be a greater degree of vigour: actually the effect of an emphasis in assertion which their "Absolute" authority permits them: an emphasis reiterated and ever yet again, in relation to the one thing worthy. In the capital city where an effort has to be made to make a greater number and a wider variety of powerful interests fall in and work amicably together, such aggressive emphasis is far less possible, and the wider spirit of tolerance, which is just this diminution of an aggressive emphasis, is the consequence. Here, not only is the force of emphasis lessened, but the total value set upon the power of Discussion also is less. Where powerful interests are negotiated alongside and in amongst competing strong interests, it is understood that these cut deeper than any argument can, and an air of folly appears to hang over the squandering of temper and energy upon verbal niceties. It is noteworthy that the Tolerant kind not merely tolerate the Earnest, but often appear genuinely to admire them: perhaps in the manner that grown-up people admire the serious play of children as an enjoyment more abandoned and whole-hearted than their own. In neither case do they admire to the point of imitation, however: whether because they are not able to catch the "Absolute" point of view, or because they feel that they cannot afford the luxury, or because they know that Time metes out retribution to players who abandon themselves too utterly to the game, and never fails to make clear sooner or later that the World does not really split in twain over the ethics of Eating Meat or the Numerical Constitution of the Trinity, or the right of Women to Vote or the "Absolute" view of anything. With the Earnest the value of full "free" Discussion is placed at its highest, and everything is arguable. It is the first article of faith that all differences of interests—being arguable—are therefore convertible, and that God is always to be found—through Talk.

Everything, therefore, seems to be put on the easy side of discussion, but they promptly set about recovering stability by placing their own special view under direct patronage of the absolute. This relation to the Absolute is as essential to a "true believer" as faith in the efficient power of discussion. The two supplement each other like the two blades of a pair of shears. Robbed of either a belief can cut no way. That is why Movements which seem quite alive and robust in Manchester grow sickly or die in London. They find readiness to discuss in plenty: what fails them is the "absolute" point of view, which thrives really well only in those favoured spots of the provinces where there is in addition to the animation and leisure required for the discussion, the space which is necessary to accommodate its somewhat unwieldy bulk. Hence the diversion of Movements remains the specially distinctive sport of the intellectual grown-ups of the provinces. The designation "Starting of a Movement" is a rather interesting piece of mal-nomenclature. Rather than to "Start a Movement," to "Engineer a mental Standstill," and draw

out the pleasure of the "static" would be a fairer description. For Movements have to do not so much with definite activities as with states of mind: with "Beliefs": that is with some arbitrary stage in an unfinished and arrested thinking process. A Belief is essentially a Doubt: an Uncertainty. The aim of the people who start Movements in connection with any particular Doubt is to get their particular one for various reasons acclaimed as a Certainty. Though definite knowledge about it is not available, there will be found some few ready to say "Yea" and others to say "Nay." The Movement is to convert those who deny into those who affirm. To "win people to the Cause" is to persuade them to adopt the affirmative attitude towards the particular belief. One may examine to -the end that one believes, but examine to the end that one denies and you make yourself an enemy of the Cause. This "giving beliefs a run," which is what is meant by "pushing" a Movement, is comparable to the booming of a specific for some hitherto incurable disease, while experiments with it are yet only in their early stage: and before those working on it can come to any decision. The workers actually interested in the experiments are usually far more anxious to get on with the inquiry and arrive if possible at some definite certainty concerning it—favourable or otherwise—than to force a doubtful cure on a credulous public. But with the hawkers it is quite different, and just as they desire first and foremost that the public shall buy: the leaders of a Movement desire above all things that the people shall believe: what they desire is Credence; definite knowledge or activity is asked for only at a considerable way behind that. The idiosyncrasies of the "movemental" mind are responsible likewise for a strain in the meaning of "Loyalty." A Movement forces loyalty—which is steadfastness of attention—into a curious dilemma. Steadfastness of attention directed towards a definite End, and steadfastness of attention fixed upon a Belief is calculated to produce very different effects. It will succeed in the ordinary course of affairs in successfully accomplishing the End, but the belief it will almost inevitably destroy. In the pursuit of an End the movement and change, which close attention always produces, take place within the line of effort, which brings the End nearer attainment; but in a Movement which is concerned mainly with Belief the action takes the form of making an ever increasing number of people affirm the one idea. The idea thus lives constantly under attention, and given attention an idea—any idea—must develop. Thus, it is not the people, but the idea itself which is most in danger of being converted: a state of affairs due to the attempt to bring together two incompatible conditions. Keen mental energy and beliefs are mutually destructive: the one diminishes in direct proportion as the influence of the other increases, and the thinker who subjects beliefs to energetic thinking develops them rapidly to the point where they disintegrate. So followers of Movements find themselves sworn to devotion to a fixed idea, whereas no idea can remain fixed, if one devotes one's mind to it. Unless one's mind is inordinately dull.

It is therefore because, being inclined to Causes and yet having more mental energy than the prosecution of a Cause warrants, a provincial city like Manchester or a vast province like America becomes a seething mass of Movements and Beliefs. Loyalty to a thought in the sense of refusing to allow attention to develop it, makes prompt diversion of thinking energy an urgent necessity, and the energy which is in excess of the amount which is "good" for the Cause thins itself out by spreading over a vast number of similar half-developed arrested Thoughts. The penetrative lengths to which loyalty forbids it to go are made up for by a comprehensive sweep over the surfaces of a number of such. So the crank—the believer—usually is streaked by a whole bunch

of beliefs. To make the stationariness demanded by the Cause feasible the believer takes out in variety for what he may not incline after in penetration, and is forced by the nature of things to appear as the intellectual frivoller.

The Causes which have achieved renown, however—and their number is more than considerable—are those which have managed to attach themselves to people of first-rate temper if of slightly second-rate intellect: the Martyrs and Leaders. They are men who, while having energy above the ordinary yet fail to strike oil on their own account, and fall just short of the intellectual clearness which would enable them to direct their energies upon purposes of their own. Their capacity being far too great for them comfortably to "sit up" with it, they are impelled by the necessity of finding something upon which to expend it, and end by harnessing it to some "Belief," which is lacking a champion: to a Cause. Thus, whereas men of first-rate temper with intellect and experience to match have an attitude toward Opinions and Beliefs which sees in them possibly useful instruments to be shaped so as to assist their own main ends, a man with a high temper but less intellect will adopt an Opinion in order to provide himself with a purpose: and in the remaining part of his activities he will become a servant to that. An Opinion for him has become a Cause, and he, the Cause's adornment; and where necessary also its slave, courting all attendant martyrdoms. It is not a question of temper or of tenacity or of character which divides the two, but mental virility. In the sequel it resolves itself into the question: who is to remain master—the Thinker or the Thought? With the Worldly it is always the Thinker: but for the Earnest—the Follower after the Absolute, it is the Thought.

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