

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

WE have just glanced through a recent work by Canon J. A. R. Brookes entitled "Murder in Fact and Fiction." The book itself need not concern us; it is the prefatory note by the Canon that gives us pause, and to which we draw attention. This prefatory note is an intellectual curiosity.

IT is perhaps impossible for any of us to enter the mind of a Canon of the Church of England. What can we know of the intellectual processes of a man so elevated above his fellows, to whom orthodoxy—that comfortable latitudinarian orthodoxy that asks no questions and that is part and parcel of the economic and social privilege which is its main support—has become a settled conviction and who lives remote from the rushing torrent of challenges, important and unimportant, with which the fixed standards of civilization must be more and more assailed? Enthroned in a serene complacency a Canon is a Canon with little chance of having his philosophy of life disturbed or modified by influences that beat upon the charmed citadel of his religious, social and economic beliefs.

LET us take the mental measure of the Canon in the page which precedes the recital of famous murders:

"The secret spring of Bolshevism is to be found in the inferiority complex, which causes the ignorant and the incompetent to envy and dislike their superiors \* \* \* Any one who praises the inferior or mediocre, and affects to despise the beautiful and good is a conscious or unconscious Bolshevik \* \* \* To prefer the ethical standards of Ibsen or Shaw to those of Moses or Christ is a still more dangerous form of Bolshevism \* \* \* Alike in Ethics and Art there must be certain fixed standards, and those who prefer the ugly, the bizarre and the vulgar are helping to overthrow those standards, forms and traditions upon which our Christian civilization rests. Bolshevism objects to fixed standards because it knows that its inferiority will thereby be rendered manifest, therefore it seeks either to enter upon side tracks where competition is evaded, or to throw scorn upon the great geniuses of the Past, whom they have to acknowledge as their superiors."

THIS insistence upon "fixed standards" in Art and Ethics extends of course to the civilization we know which it is not obvious to the Canon is constantly in process of

change. Had he lived in the days when chattel slavery was an established institution he could have contemned assaults upon that system as endangering certain "fixed standards." According to Canon Brookes one may not prefer Ibsen and Shaw to Tennyson, or even hold that both hold a message for this generation, without being classed as a political Bolshevik.

AS one who places Tennyson above Shaw as a poet, Shaw not being a poet at all, and Shaw above Tennyson as a dramatist, Tennyson being a great poet and hardly a dramatist though he wrote poetic dramas, we protest against this confusion of "standards," ethical or artistic, with political institutions which cannot be submitted to the same criteria as ethics or art. And we insist that notions of "fixed standards" are dangerous notions whether in art, ethics or politics.

AND the preposterous notion that Bolshevism is a manifestation of the "inferiority complex," and not a blind reaction from an unjust social system, is of a piece with the rest of this prefatory note lugged into a volume dealing with famous murder cases. It appears not to have occurred to the Canon that the teachings of both Moses and Jesus were assaults upon the "fixed" ethical economic and political institutions of the time, that neither one nor the other has been put to the test by either Church or State, and that every step in progress is an interference with "fixed standards", which are never really fixed. But such is the reasoning of the Canon, and how can a Canon, unless an exceptional and courageous one, reason otherwise?

SOCIOLOGY is a term supplied us by Comte, which at other times he called Social Physics. He would have dignified it as a science and taught that "social phenomena are subject to natural laws, admittedly of natural prevision." (Martineau's Positive Philosophy.) He held that the natural laws of progress can be ascertained. It is needless to say such speculations mark an epoch in social and economic philosophy, though no serious attempt outside of George has been made to ascertain the nature and consequence of such laws. This work remains to be done and may yet form the subject matter of a great and enduring work.