

Dialectics

(Concluded)

By F. J. McNey

ALEXANDER POPE approached the subject from a different angle, and arrived at practically the same conclusion, but not knowing what he had discovered, or even that he had discovered anything, he wandered off again into confusion worse confounded, he says:

"One thinks on Calvin heaven's own spirit fell;
Another deems him instrument of hell:
If Calvin feel heaven's blessing or its rod,
This cries there is, and that there is no God.
What shocks one part will edify the rest;
Nor with one system can they all be blest.
The very best will variously incline,
And what rewards your virtue punish mine."

Pope is here considering good, bad, right, and wrong, as moral concepts, and has noticed that the same man may be considered a good man and a villain by another group, all at the same time. This, no doubt, is a very confusing state of affairs to a metaphysician, but it is a proof of dialectics, one of the best. History just swarms with such dual personalities.

With men, who, at one time or another, have acted as a combination villain, and hero, all in one, at the same time. In fact, every hero is an inverted villain. Where would it be possible to find a better illustration of paradox than this? Where, a better proof of the interrelation of all things and ideas? But, if a hero and a villain are one and the same thing; if the qualities of a hero and a villain may be combined in the same person, at the same time, how is it possible to distinguish between, or classify, heroes, and villains, at all? Let us suppose that of two antagonistic groups of people, each has a hero of its own. Now the hero of each group is the villain of the opposite group. Which is the hero, and which the villain? If we examine the character of two such hero-villains, we may find very little to choose between them, as far as character, and conduct, is concerned, but we will find considerable difference between their desires, and opinions, and theories of right, and wrong, based on the conflicting economic interests of the groups, or classes, they represent. Men and women who understand dialectics do not worry their heads about either heroes or villains. They know that the thoughts and actions of men are determined mainly, by economic conditions, and economic interests, modified to some extent by education or lack of education, historical, and mythical, tradition, inherited characteristics, and so forth. They know, furthermore, that every great man, or hero, is merely the exponent and advocate of the economic interests of some particular group, or class, in human society, and consequently, the villain, tyrant, and bad man of every other group or class, whose interests are in opposition. Everything that such a hero-villain may say, or do, or leave undone, no matter what it may be, is right from one point of view and wrong from another, and the group, or class, that has the power or might to enforce its view makes its view right, for the time being. Thus we see the codes of ethics, and theories of right and wrong, are also relative and variable and as much subject to the law of change as anything else in the universe.

"New occasions teach new duties;
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth."

These lines from a poem written by James Russell Lowell in 1844 express, perhaps the best known, and best understood, form of dialectics, the evolutionary form, the exchanges brought about by time, not only in material objects, but also in ideas, theories, customs, morals, the good, the true, and the beautiful, etc., arising from the material conditions. For instance, five hundred years ago it was quite true to say that the horse was the quickest and best means

of locomotion known to man, but it is not true today. Five hundred years ago it would have been untrue to say that men could fly; it was not even customary with prophets at that time, but it is quite true to say that men can fly today, not with wings of course, but with machines made for the purpose.

Now in conclusion I wish to say a few more words about the exaggeration and misinterpretation of dialectics. In the opening paragraphs I have mentioned some of the exaggerations. The evolutionists, that are so evolutionary, try to run ahead of evolution. The revolutionists, that are so revolutionary insist on having a social revolution, even though the great majority of the workers are opposed to it. The dialecticians, that are so dialectical consider it superfluous to define, explain, or classify, the terms and phrases they use, such as, "direct action," "mass action," "use your economic power," "long live the class struggle," and so forth. And to be honest about it we must admit that such terms and phrases are far more romantic, and far better sucker bait, without being defined and explained. But some people are not so romantic; they like to know what they are talking about themselves, and to have others understand them as well, consequently, they try to the best of their ability to define and classify, the words and terms they use. And while it is impossible to give a word or learn a definition that will hold good forever, it is quite possible, if we are not in too much of a hurry, to give it a definition that will be logical at the time of speaking, and that may hold good for a year or two, at the end of that time we can revise it again if necessary. We will do very well if we "keep abreast of truth," as Lowell says, without trying to run ahead of it. Let us see what Dietzgen has to say in this connection:

"Language is only reasonable when it classifies the world and distinguishes things by different names."
"Thus our science of understanding finally culminates in the rule: Thou shalt sharply divide and subdivide and further subdivide to the utmost the universal concept, the concept of the universe, but thou shalt be backed up by the consciousness that this mental classification is a formality by which man seeks for the sake of his information to register and to place his experience; thou shalt furthermore remain aware of thy liberty to progressively improve the experience acquired by thyself in the course of time, by modifying thy classification."

But there is another way in which the dialectic method is misunderstood, and misapplied. This, we might call the reverse method, for want of a better name. The idea seems to be, to find out what the average capitalist thinks, says, and does, and then think, say, and do, the opposite. And while this system works out all right in a large number of cases, it occasionally leads to some very ridiculous conclusions. For instance, if the average capitalist always has the best of everything properly cooked for his dinner, then of course the revolutionary worker must insist on having the worst of everything badly cooked. True, that is what we generally get. But, while it is dialectically possible for a necessity to become a virtue under certain circumstances, it is a poor policy to make it so on every occasion. Again, if the capitalists always wear good clothes, and live in good houses, then the highest ideal of the workers must be hovels, and overalls. Not long ago I heard a man (who evidently imagined himself to be a revolutionist of some kind) advocate that the workers should boycott capitalism. He was, not only a champion of overalls, which he said no worker should be ashamed of wearing as his best apparel, but he went further and suggested that we all learn to go bare-headed and thereby save the price of hats, and at the same time strike a savage blow at capitalism. Just imagine the psychology of a revolutionist who would advocate that the worker should deliberately, and voluntarily, lower their own standard of living, as a revolutionary measure. But it is only one of the many paradoxes of human life. It takes all kinds of men, and all kinds of ideas, to make a world, and we must deal with the world as it is, not

as we might like to have it, always remembering that the only thing that is absolute, the only thing that has no beginning, and no end, is the universe, and the only thing that never changes, is the law of change.

WORRIES FOR THE BOSS.

(Continued from page 1)

marines." "There can be no doubt"—he maliciously remarked, "that England never intends to use her battleships against France and that she probably keeps those battleships for the purpose of sardine fishing; but then let her allow poor France to build submarines for the botanical exploration of the ocean bottom."

For England that other fact must seem very significant too, that the American government as well shows an interest for botanical research. The explanation of this fact is very simple. In case of a world conflict, blockade by help of submarines will play a very important part in the struggle between America and Japan. America is preparing not only her own submarines in case that England were to fight on the anti-American side, but is very willing to allow France a considerable submarine fleet,

The same is the case with the air forces

What can be expected from Washington?

It were ridiculous to approach this question from the point of view of disarmament. The issue is not even the limitation of armaments, but the establishment of such relations between both naval and land forces which by not giving any considerable superiority to any one of the several state groupings, would compel to come to an agreement upon disputed questions. This was the view of the international stock exchange too,—the value of war industry shares did not fall, in spite of the positive Wilsonian trills of Messrs Hughes and Harding.

The capitalist powers are so afraid of a new world war, that once they have got into the blind alley of the disarmament question, they will be forced to try and demarcate their political and economic interests. They tried it in Versailles; the results are known. In Washington they tried to untangle the skein of contradictions in one field, the far eastern question,—but they did not and will not succeed. They can not succeed for the simple reason, that questions of world-wide interest cannot be solved without Germany and without Soviet Russia

If, in order to avoid complete chaos and a new war, the former victors will make an attempt to unravel the tragic international knot, they will have to forget Versailles and Washington, and summon a new international conference where all nations and states will be represented. This conference would differ from all previous conferences by recognising three facts in the first place: 1,—that America is the wealthiest country of the world. 2,—that Russia again exists as a first class world power, again uniting all her territories from the Pacific to the Bering, and 3,—that the former victors will hasten their own ruin if they continue their efforts to shove the unbearable weight of economic burdens on to the shoulders of Germany and Russia instead of rebuilding the world's economy by common effort.

—Rosta Wien.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM.

(This is as handy a way as any to send your subs.)
Western Clarion, P. O. Box, 710.
Vancouver, B. C.

Official organ of the S. P. of C. Published twice a month.

Subscriptions: Canada, 20 issues, \$1; Foreign: 16 issues \$1.

Enclosed find

Send "Western Clarion" to