

St. John's Collegian

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Liberalism II

Last Friday evening's formal lecture, delivered by Commander Ford K. Brown, pushed even farther the thesis recently pronounced from the same platform by Mr. Meiklejohn.

The Anglo-Saxon-American concept of freedom, one to which almost all of us unconsciously adhere, was presented this time through the writings of William Godwin—father of Mary Shelley, hence father-in-law of Percy Shelley, and for much less obvious reasons a considerable subject of the lecture.

Godwin, a tough eighteenth-century rebel, incorporated his views into a book called *Political Justice*, which was the text for the evening. A pre-French Revolution liberal, Godwin flourished amid the contemporary numbers of narrow-minded, uncompromising, stubborn Nonconformists in England. Sneering at the Calvinistic view of man as wholly corrupt and utterly incapable of doing good—much less of even wanting to do good—he set about to discover the possibility of the existence of freedom, for "freedom enables us to distinguish between virtue and vice," and previous accounts of man as a political animal were unsatisfactory. Plato's *Republic* was an impossible vision; what was needed was a realistic, sensible and non-supersitious approach to the question; an approach that was useful and untainted with theology.

Such a brew of reason, utilitarianism and very religious atheism produced startling results. In the search for freedom, practically everything went out the window. The Lords and Commons in particular, government in general, law, marriage, the church, private property (the cause of classes)—in short, all ordered, positive human institutions—were declared by Godwin to be obstructive to the real freedom of man. It was the human polity itself, the society or group of individuals, that constituted the stranglehold on liberty; therefore the only way to

recover it was to abolish any authority that usurped it. Only then do we attain the ultimate freedom—that of pure reason. Freed from the dominance of any political or social influence, man finds complete freedom in the activity of the intellect. The "quintessence of nonconformity" had really reached a radical position.

Himself evincing no relish for Godwin's ludicrous political fumbles, Commander Brown offered, in refutation of them, two precepts.

The first is to be taken literally: "Truth can never be stated so as to be understood and not be believed." This would appear to be nothing more or less than the Greek-Scholastic principle of "common sense," and its application reduces *Political Justice* to the status of an "absurd, unreal book."

The second is to be taken analogically: "The soul pays a dear rent for her habitation in the body." In line with eighteenth-century educational theory, Godwin held the opinion that the mind is a "tabula rasa"; that all our knowledge comes from experience; that the sum total of man's character results from the disposition of his external circumstances. It is a simple matter to get back to the tablet—we lop off foot, leg, thigh, lungs, gall bladder and other external circumstances, and if the "ectomies" are sufficiently thorough, we arrive at the brain-in-itself—the thinking member of the body, and the sought-for tablet.

Similarly, attacking the body politic in the quest for freedom, we dissect and eliminate all those human institutions described above, and, if the analogy hangs together, we should find ourselves free at last. Indeed, free of freedom, for there is no tyranny more remorselessly dominant than that of reason.

But, as Mr. Brown pointed out, the analogy proves a poor scalpel. For the brain is not peculiarly the seat of reason; the entire body is reasonable, and every member a thinking member. The soul is not the form of the brain, but of the body.

Returning to the analogy, it is found that man does not realize freedom by abolishing all institutions, or by withdrawing into the pure reason, any more than, as is thought by some, the soul achieves her freedom by withdrawing from the body. We pay rent and don't complain to the landlord.

Saturated with the tradition described by Messrs. Brown and Meiklejohn, we find it hard to believe that freedom exists only in terms of authority. The resolution of the dilemma still preserves within us a lack of confidence.

We can only regret that Commander Brown did not trace the threads between Godwin's principles and the French Revolution, and the hawsters that must exist between those principles and the aerial politics of Shelley's poetry.

N. A. G.

College Meeting

At College Meeting Thursday Mr. Smith relayed the latest communiques from the Army, Navy, etc., training programmes.

The A-12 and V-12 examinations will be given March 15, in the library, at 9:00 A. M. The age levels are from 17 to 20 for the V-12, or up to 22 for the A-12. A.S.T.P. training is open to those morally and physically qualified. If one is between 17 and 18 years of age, one can enlist as a hospital corpsman, which will ensure assignment to the Medical Corps. In the same age group, but with less rigid physical requirements, is the job of radio technician, which will involve one year's training in radio. Inform Mr. Smith by Feb. 14 if you are interested in any of these.

The President spoke on women in dormitories, *de quo iussa nota*, pointing out that it is not so much a problem of morals as of mores.

Mr. Sasser reiterated the rules about use of college equipment by outsiders, for irreplaceable goods have been stolen.

Arts

Undoubtedly the best picture around here this coming week is *Mayerling*, which will be presented by the Film Club on Saturday night at 8:30 in the Gym. This is the sort of thing we like to apply the word *classic* to. It is a beautiful love story, beautifully told. Charles Boyer is the unhappy prince and Danielle Darrieux is the lovely Marie. *Mayerling* was directed by Anatole Litvak before the fall.

Destination Tokyo will still be in town (at the Capitol) on Sunday. This is one of the more exhausting but informative service pictures. It all takes place in a submarine that flits about the Japanese mainland within spittin' distance of Fujiyama in order to get weather information for the Tokyo bombing. The acting is on occasion excellent and the whole thing stacks up favorably with *Action in the North Atlantic* and *Air Force*.

We cannot recommend too heartily that you avoid *Lost Angel* and *Mine Sweeper*. The latter contains Jean Parker for reasons we will never know. And the former consists almost entirely of angle shots of Margaret O'Brien, who is too cute for words.

On Sunday at the Republic the insect kingdom has its day with Basil Rathbone and Gail Sondergaard in *The Spider Woman*. This is the predecessor to *Five Little Centipedes* and *How They Grew*. Big scene—Rathbone stealthily approaching Miss Sondergaard with a Flit gun.

Following *The Spider Woman*, there will be a field day for the kiddies at that same theatre on Wednesday and Thursday. It is Walt Disney's *Dumbo*. This is full of color and a lot of happy drawings. Somehow it doesn't pack the punch *Snow White* did. We guess we were younger.

The Phillips Gallery in Washington is conducting a series of exhibitions this winter that ought to interest most people. Currently there are prints and drawings of people from Gericault to Renoir on display.

A.Y.D.

The next meeting of the AYD will be held Sunday evening, February 13, in Room 24, McDowell, on *Japan*, with George Bingley as speaker.

CALENDAR

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

Fri., Feb. 4 — Sat., Feb. 12, 1944

Friday, February 4:

3:00-5:00 P. M.
5:45 P. M.
6:45-8:00 P. M.
7:00 P. M.
8:00 P. M.

Athletics
Vesper Service
Bible Class
Meeting of the Chorus
Formal Lecture — *Stravinsky* — Nicolas Nabokov

Gymnasium
Great Hall
McDowell 22
Humphreys Hall
Great Hall

Saturday, February 5:

10:30 A. M.-12:00 M.
8:30 P. M.

Athletics
The Film Club presents
—*Mayerling*

Gymnasium
Iglehart Hall

Sunday, February 6:

2:00-4:00 P. M.
8:00 P. M.

Recorded Concert
Soviet Foreign Policy—
Nicolas Nabokov

Humphreys Hall
Woodward Hall

Monday, February 7:

3:00-5:00 P. M.
4:00-6:00 P. M.
5:00 P. M.

Athletics
Recorded Concert
Dormitory Managers
Meeting
Vesper Service
Meeting of the Chorus

Gymnasium
Humphreys Hall
McDowell 21
Great Hall
Humphreys Hall

Tuesday, February 8:

3:00-5:00 P. M.
5:45 P. M.
7:00-8:00 P. M.
8:00 P. M.

Athletics
Vesper Service
Bible Class (Freshman)
Mathematics Club

Gymnasium
Great Hall
McDowell 22
McDowell 21

Wednesday, February 9:

3:00-5:00 P. M.
5:45 P. M.
7:00 P. M.
7:30 P. M.
8:00 P. M.

Athletics
Vesper Service
Projective Geometry
Class
Boat Designing Class
Math. Refresher Course

Gymnasium
Great Hall
McDowell 21
McDowell 22
McDowell 24

Thursday, February 10:

3:00-5:00 P. M.
4:00-6:00 P. M.
5:45 P. M.
7:30 P. M.

Athletics
Recorded Concert
Vesper Service
College Meeting

Gymnasium
Humphreys Hall
Great Hall
Great Hall

Friday, February 11:

3:00-5:00 P. M.
5:45 P. M.
6:45-8:00 P. M.
7:00 P. M.
8:00 P. M.

Athletics
Vesper Service
Bible Class
Meeting of the Chorus
Formal Lecture — *History is a Wheel*—
Stringfellow Barr

Gymnasium
Great Hall
McDowell 22
Humphreys Hall
Great Hall

Saturday, February 12:

10:30 A. M.-12:00 M.

Athletics

Gymnasium

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