

adapted with remarkable success to Western minds — and changed in the process. Is it too far-fetched to see in the present struggles within the Anglican community symptoms of a real incompatibility, a real incapacity for further adaptation and compromise which will apply to the temporal as well as the spiritual life of Western nations? If the interpretation is

correct, Western civilization may have to reverse much of its so-called “progress” before it can attain again to even a temporary unity. In the process of reaction, I believe a more searching inquiry is likely to be made into the ways in which the so-called stagnant civilizations of the East have maintained their equilibrium for so many centuries.

## ***II—The West's Defense***

**by G. K. CHESTERTON**

**I** SUFFER from only one slight hesitation or weakness in retorting controversially upon Mr. Metta's criticism of Western progress; and that incidental disadvantage is that I entirely agree with about three quarters of what he says. But the quarter with which I do not agree happens to be rather important and something more than a mere section of the whole. Of course one does not need to be an Oriental to see the simple fact that change is not progress. This perception only requires that one be not a raving lunatic. Softening of the brain is change; but even those earnest progressives who most conspicuously suffer from it have never been quite so soft as to identify it definitely with progress. Taking poison and writhing in agonies is change; but few would describe it as progress, though some of the more serious might describe it as effort or physical exercise. But of course Mr. Metta both means and maintains something more than is implied in this obvious distinction.

He means and maintains two things, at least, with which I should substantially agree. First, that the presumption of progress, in the sense of taking it for granted that the fifteenth century is better than the fourteenth, is a piece of muddle-headed and thoroughly bad philosophy. And, second, that the preoccupation with progress, in modern times, has in fact led to a vast amount of senseless and aimless change which amounts to little more than a perpetual appeal to snobs to follow the fashion and to trade to follow the latest stunt. I repeat that in this I entirely agree with him.

But, to begin with, he seems to have forgotten one fact not unimportant for a general criticism of the West. In this I say I should agree with him; but so would Plato agree with him and Dante agree with him and Shakespeare agree with him and Montaigne and Swift agree with him, and probably even Rousseau and Wordsworth agree with him. Even the too active Europeans whom he holds up as terrible examples of Occidental restlessness would probably agree with him. Alexander the Great presumably enjoyed change, in the sense of travel; he enjoyed adventure and danger, as many healthy men have done. But if it be suggested that he quite seriously believed that the civilization of his Macedonian Empire must of necessity be superior to the culture of Athens in the high moment of Pericles, I very gravely doubt it. At least if Alexander thought so, he must have forgotten all he learned from his great tutor, Aristotle, who laid down in bold and defiant terms the imperishable and unpopular truth that a state can hardly be too small and can very easily be too large.

### **JULIUS CÆSAR, REFORMER**

Julius Cæsar was doubtless in some aspects simply a jolly fellow on the make; in some other aspects, a man putting many things right that had really gone wrong. There is no doubt that Cæsar believed in *reforms*; and especially in the general reform of smashing up the (by that time) hollow and pompous and hypocritical oligarchy that was called the Republic. He was

not the last Italian in history to feel that sort of impatience with the sacred institution of a parliament.

But if we ask whether Cæsar believed in progress, as a thing quite distinct from reform, in the general theory that things improve in process of time, I should again be most profoundly skeptical. The very evil against which Cæsar fought was one of the hundred examples of the fact that things do not grow better, but grow worse; and that even republics do not remain reasonably republican. If we could examine the mind of Cæsar on the matter, I strongly suspect that we might have found him murmuring words not altogether dissimilar from those which were set to verse by the friend of his favorite and successor:

*Damnosa quid non imminuet dies  
Ætas parentum peior avis tulit  
Nos nequiores mox daturos  
Progeniem vitiosiore.*

But anyhow, there is no evidence that a man believed in all the modern nonsense about progress merely because he found it exciting to fight with the Gauls or amusing to deliver political speeches.

In short, the first criticism of Mr. Metta's thesis which I should be inclined to offer is that, in criticizing the worship of progress in the West, he greatly exaggerates the extent to which the West *did* worship progress. The worship of it, or at least the exaggerated worship of it, is not so much a character of Europe as compared with Asia, as a character of the last few years as compared with all the other centuries everywhere. I admit that there has always been a difference between the spirit of change in the West and of changelessness in the East; but I do not think it is due merely to the very recent, the very crude, and the very priggish theory of progress.

#### WHAT IS PROGRESS?

There is no great difficulty about stating the reasonable theory of progress. It might, I think, be stated thus: whatever be the ultimate merits of East and West, there is in the West a certain type of vivacity and vivid concentration which makes it tolerably certain that any particular good it is pursuing for the moment will be in a considerable measure increased. Granted that the building of Roman roads, or the codification of Roman law, or the applica-

tion of Greek logic to Roman theology, or the organization of armies, or the framing of constitutions, is in some degree a thing worth doing, that thing will be done. For a long time it will be done more and more successfully, until it suddenly occurs to somebody that something totally different is more worth doing. And that, in its turn, so long as it is thought worth doing, will be done more and more successfully.

In this sense the Western world is certainly progressing now. It is progressing in practical or applied science, for instance; especially in the matter of communications. So long as it is regarded as supremely thrilling that the voice of Lord Tallboys should come through from the North Pole, the West really will work wonders in reaching the Pole and establishing the communication. When it is suddenly realized that the voice of Lord Tallboys is just as much of a bore when it comes from the North Pole as it is when it comes from the next room, the West will transfer its wonderful energies to something else.

But by this concentration of energy certain real reforms are achieved at certain periods. It is probable, for instance, that the philanthropic capitalism of men like Mr. Ford will, in the long run, prevail over the mere sweating and swindling of the hireling; though, there again, there is no saying what may happen if a



revulsion takes place under some calamity or drastic change of creed. On the whole, if we ask how many of the workers are employed, or how many of the employed are decently paid, we may find that during a certain period there has been a certain progress. If we alter the question, for instance, and ask how many independent men there are who do not need to be employed and who would be insulted by being paid, we shall find there has been no progress but a huge slump or reaction. The sense of honor, as it exists in the true small proprietor, does not exist in the most model modern employment. In short, it all depends on what the test is; but the truth remains that when the West has established its test, it does put forth prodigious activity and acuteness in order to pass that test. But this characteristic, which dates from before Alexander and Aristotle, is much older and deeper than the little fashionable fad called progress. It would be better expressed by the word *adventure*.

Now I anticipate, with a sad smile, that what I say will be called a paradox; but what I say is this. I am well aware that much is absurdly called progress when it is merely change. But I rather think I am in favor of change even when it is not progress. A doctor attending a man in Chelsea tells him to go to Margate "for a change." He does not mean that Margate is an ideal city, or that it is better and more beautiful than other places; not even the wildest doctor could believe this. He does not regard the pilgrimage to Margate as a progress — even a pilgrim's progress. But he does regard going to Margate as an adventure, and perhaps the nearest the man can get to piracy on the high seas. On the whole, there is much more to be said for the riverside town where Carlyle and Whistler watched the mists upon the river, than for some seaside town where innumerable Hebrew stockbrokers watch the seaside Pierrots without ever looking at the sea.

But it does not follow that there is not a healthy change in the smell of the sea after the smell of the river. And this sort of change, which the ancient Christian tradition calls a holiday, is quite a different idea from that of perpetually marching along a road to better and better places, and never wanting to come back. The paganism of antiquity understood it when it established the Saturnalia. The Cathol-

icism of the Middle Ages understood it when it said through the mouth of its great theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, that man must have jokes and sports, since neither the most spiritual contemplation nor the most sociable utility can be continued unrelieved. And the long history of freaks, of breaking out of the frame of society, of humors and adventures in the ends of the earth — that does seem to me a real Western characteristic much more worthy than the little progressive pretensions that are only about eighty years old. To see another aspect, to see a new aspect, of any particular thing is a benefit — always granted certain elementary conditions, of which something may be said in a moment. It is enough to say here that there are some strange skeptics who, because they have seen a hundred facets of the same diamond, come to the extraordinary conclusion that there is no diamond at all. Yet even those exponents of extravagant negation are, I should suspect, at least as common in the East as in the West.

There is one point which Mr. Metta makes which I think is particularly pointed; and upon that I am particularly in agreement with him. It is when he claims that much of modern democracy, or rather, what is called democracy in the West, has heavily sinned against the ideal of liberty. It has interfered with the citizen in things in which many Oriental despots, and indeed, all sorts of despots, have in practice left him free. I can quite believe that these intimate interferences were often absent from old Asiatic autocracies; so they were from old European autocracies. If you make a list of the ordinary things that an ordinary poor peasant has actually wanted to do, you will find that modern philanthropists are much more oppressive than Ivan the Terrible or Torquemada. The ordinary man with a spade or a hayrake did not desire passionately to write a pamphlet against the Constitution. He was seldom troubled with dreams of building a brick chapel in which to preach some new fine shade about the definition of the Trinity. Consequently, he could not generally be burned as a heretic or hanged as a traitor. But he can be fined, or put in prison, or sometimes even shot by the police, for drinking the ordinary hay-maker's mug of ale, or in some places for letting his children help him in hay-making; or in other places (by a supremely ridiculous recent law)

for not wanting the voting-paper which was granted to him because he was supposed to want it.

I am quite as conscious as Mr. Metta of the comic incongruity and injustice of these modern modes of tyranny. But there is something to be said on the other side, considered as a comparative criticism of the East and West. And I think it is true to say that where and when such tyranny did exist in Eastern custom, it was much less easy to alter it or even to criticize it. Mr. Metta will not confuse me with the vulgar scoffer at the great civilizations of Asia if I say that some religious and moral customs that were really bad have been rooted in Oriental antiquity and repeated through countless Oriental generations.

I have heard it said (I know not if it is true) that the long continued custom of burning Hindu widows was actually founded on a verbal error in the reading of the sacred books. This is one of the few cases in which I think that the Higher Criticism might possibly be of some use. And I think that the Higher Critic would have had a better and an earlier chance in Europe. It was not, perhaps, half so silly in a Chinese woman to squeeze her feet as in an European woman to squeeze her waist. But hundreds of Europeans made fun of the European woman's waist, even while it was the fashion, and probably in consequence it soon ceased to be the fashion. It may fairly be doubted whether in old China, if left to itself, it would ever have ceased to be the tradition.

I have a very real respect for the dignified side of all such traditions; and for the way in which the true pagans of Asia, like the great pagans of antiquity, have a power of weaving religion in and out of all the web of human life — a thing for lack of which the West is suffering not a little laxity and depression to-day.

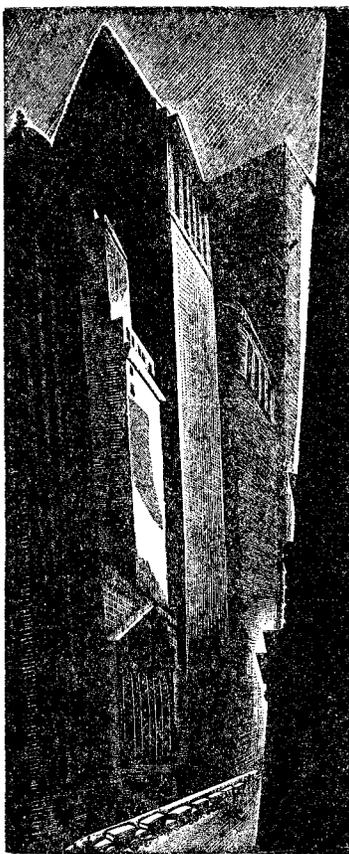
But I do think that such a religious system identifies morals and manners too much in one unchanging routine, and lacks the sort of ideas that can maintain a continual criticism from within.

#### THE RELIGIOUS SPUR TO PROGRESS

I do not believe that the critical activity of the West — and the changes induced by this activity — have been mainly due to the modern doctrine of progress. On the contrary, I believe they have been mainly due to the Christian doctrine of the Fall. That is, it comes not from a confidence that everything is continually rising, but from a suspicion that everything, left to itself, is continually falling. In this sense, some of the Asiatic systems are actually too religious. They make the social system too sacred. They do not allow enough for the fact that sin is perpetually rotting away the institutions of men, even the institutions that are founded on ideals.

The truth that inspires all real reformers is sufficiently expressed in the very word reform. Some systems feel no need for reform, because they have too much faith in form. They forget that if we really desire the form to be retained, we must see that the form is re-formed. The doctrine of the Fall, taken side by side with the other doctrine of the Creation and the Redemption,

presents to man two ideas permanently side by side — a standard or ideal to which he can approximate, to which he can at least appeal, and a confession of universal weakness in all the social expressions of it. It is far too large a generalization to say, in a sweeping sense, that this feeling of incessant vigilance and fight against sin is dangerously absent in Eastern mysticism. But I do think it is far less present than in Christian mysticism. And I think this is the real basis of "The Defense of the West."



Next month's debate, Norman Thomas vs. William B. Munro —  
"DOES BIG BUSINESS CONTROL OUR GOVERNMENT?"

# Sasha Chooses a Gift



Drawings by Gleb Botkin

by **HALLIE FLANAGAN**

**I**N THE HOUSE of Fedya the Communist, the Czar's palace is set up. The room is plain and cold, the flat desk is littered with papers and telephones, messengers come and go — but on the table under the window that looks across Moscow River, there is the Kremlin in miniature, the ramparts pierced with seven towers, the mosques and spires, the figures of priests and courtiers kneeling before the Czar. Not a room for toys nor for playing with toys, not a room of the past nor for thinking of the past; yet here is set up the palace of the Czars.

Men entering the room on errands look at the model curiously, measure Fedya with their eyes, and are silent. There is that in his face which forbids questioning. Once a Georgian, head of a village soviets, coming in to consult Fedya on the affairs of his province, burst into laughter when he saw the toy. He had drunk heavily and the fumes were still in his head.

"I could trample it under heel in three seconds," he leered, with a contemptuous jerk of the thumb.

"And in how long rebuild?" demanded Fedya, in a tone so strange that the Georgian, forgetting his message, backed hastily out of the door.

Fedya is a great man in the party now, though there are those who say that he has reached the peak and is about to pitch head-

long into the abyss which has swallowed other leaders. For in his last speech before the Soviet he argued that the army of the U. S. S. R. should be disbanded, that communism should be left to spread because of its inner power — without recourse to violence. There were those who muttered "Treason," when he said, "The canker which caused the decay of the old régime is already festering at the root of the new." Strange words these, from one who led men in the storming of the Winter Palace, from one who but recently urged that all remaining of the old order should be given to purifying flames. To-morrow, then, an order may come, and Fedya may go; but to-day he is still a great man in the party.

**III**

**E**IGHT YEARS ago he was a young idol smasher with holes in his boots, dreams in his head, and a wife and boy in a bare room over Nikolskaya arcades.

"Why don't you put the boy in the children's home?" everyone asked, less out of concern for Fedya and the girl than because the whimpering of the child annoyed them.

"Why don't you put him in the state school? How can you work with the crying in the house?"

Grushenka thought so too. She was young, she had not wanted the child. She had not