

Containing

A few of the more pungent & lengthy extracts which had to be omitted from THE GENTLEST ART; one or two of them perhaps, shall we say, rather emotional than rational thought

 While any chance reader, & I myself, had regarded Les Tart as just another sheet, it has come to me recently that past contributors must regard it in another light altogether - and with some justification, e.g., in the case of JTBurke. However, none of them made any protest except, recently, DRSmith. I should have liked to quote one of his Fables of Misch-Masch, which are not only excellent entertainment but give his subjective view very well & indicate that all other correspondents who have been quoted in Les must all feel very annoyed; but I see now that they are "not of course for publication". However, his letter says:-

"Your verse in "Moonshine" was the most entertaining thing in the Fido mailing this time, taken by itself, but of course, as I mentioned before, for a real hearty laugh it is best to read one of the most fiery War Bulls & then the "Snag" & the Gent. If Medhurst and yourself deliberately tried to parody the worst of Youd's crimes of dogmatism & unfair abuse of his editorial privileges by exaggerating them wildly you have certainly succeeded marvellously."

This I feel like resenting hotly, but it must be admitted that Smith is a logical-minded chap even if I seldom agree with him. Therefore there's probably something in what he says. Elsewhere I am accused of "fiery intolerance of opposing opinions". But why? In Smith's case I quoted at great length his views on war, & while I can appreciate & admire the attitude of almost all my militant friends, from Hopkins to Youd & back through Turner to anyone you like, I do not like Smith's; but his were the ones people read in LesTart. I daresay I'm dogmatic, but I've tried not to show it in print. If it was re the spiritualist matter, I said to DRs in effect: "Those who have had first-hand experience with these things, like RGT, Erikopkins, PROBE members &c., do not make any definite assertions one way or another, but they all hold more investigations would be valuable; those like yourself who have not had the chance of investigating first-hand, often do not keep an open mind at all, at all: I think this is hardly logical." Dogmatic? If the kick was at cutting letters, I have answered that & I sticks to me guns. Extracts follow, to satisfy the ghouls.

 RMedhurst wrote this, after seeing the 1st. Tart. "Then there's Smith. I should imagine that his part of the country hasn't been excessively troubled with bombers & bombs. Theoretical reasoning can be very, very beautiful. But under certain circumstances the theoretical reasoner, as with my Cambridge landlady who "couldn't believe" that people were really being killed in London by bombs, can only be adequately described by two words, & they are bloody fool. Does that shock anybody? Well, Mr. Smith, when you look through the cracks in the cheap material the Council has put up over the spaces where our windows used to be, you see down our road great gaps in the rows of 3 & 4 story houses, where two or three at a time are just a low heap of rubble. You can see a smashed-up shelter where 20 or 30 people were, before the bomb dropped. There was a London tube station recently that was flooded out when a bomb burst the main. When the bodies were finally got at many people were found with their heads buried in their arms in a last futile attempt to save themselves. That "urge of every man to be better than his fellows, even if it is at dumb endurance of agony" is very pretty armchair stuff, my friend. I wonder why the people of London forced their way into the forbidden tubes? Why the hell didn't they stay up above & outdo their neighbours in enduring agony? For the last four months I've had to leave my parents behind in one of the worst-bombed streets of south-west London, in the magnificent protection of Morrison's beautiful brick-shelters, but not because they want to endure agony better than their fellows: merely because they couldn't happen to get away. I've seen a good many people crack up & lose their nerve in this city, but this dumb endurance of agony must be quite a rarity. I should imagine it's exclusive to intellectual non-Londoners. * * * As for this superstitious worship of

3/ The power of the machine, it would seem to be the same kind of intellectual grovelling, for example, that the Catholic inquisitors performed to their wretched little God. Rather than stand lost in admiration for the machine that mangled a boy's arm, to me the more fundamental consideration would be that the firm would probably try to do him down for his compensation. I can only hope that Mr. Smith stays at the right end of his fascinating machines of destruction." To which, I see on looking further down, he adds: "You know, I can quite understand why this Smith confesses to being afraid of psychoanalysis!"

It's probable that I shall be accused of stifling arguments again if I mention that this is how George Medhurst & I, being thin-skinned, feel about things - altho I wouldn't phrase them thus - while DRS, being thick-skinned, thinks just the opposite. Since it is purely a matter of feelings & has nothing to do with intellectual reasoning (tho that may be enlisted to 'verify' conclusions), how can it be argued? Smith's arguments sound just as silly to me as RGM's do to Smith. For surely, if you, say, are in love, how can you persuade all your friends that they must be as well?

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ECHopkins: "What an extraordinary fellow is DRSmith! He seems forever to brood upon himself like an introspective Tchehov, but producing the weirdest results. "The great clean guns" indeed: they're filthy, & they stink. The whole import of Smith's reasoning is that mankind has a general love of powerful machinery & an inclination to annihilate themselves with it. This is a false syllogism: men love machinery: machinery efficiently kills: therefore men love to kill efficiently with machinery. That is Smith's dissertation as a syllogism, & showing it to be obviously false. It may be obviously false, but I still agree with Smith that in many cases they admire the machinery & do the killing without a single thought. What he means is that some men love machinery; some others love to kill men, & they use machinery because it is more efficient. After all, mere stone flints & bows & arrows did not prevent wars, quite the opposite in fact. When a 'great' man organised spearmen, cavalry, &c., & went a-conquering, the slaughter was terrific; a good show, chaps. There was no "Kamerad!" & a wall of wire netting until the Armistice is signed (if you're lucky). No, genuine butchery, disembowelling on the premises was the order of the day. Need we wonder at the fertility of the land, it is well fed with bones." . . . There's lots more, all every bit as good, but I can't go on for ever. There may also be some refutation in Eric's latest letter of what I said above, in brackets; but 'tis 40 pages long, & I can't think where. . . . Still, he finishes up with a remark whose significance will doubtless be lost on DRS (how I misuse that man!)-- "Finally, if one must worship power & machinery why not adopt Vulcan, & discard Mars? Industry must carry on: wars need not." . . . No, ECH is not one of these irrational C.O.s - he registered for the RAF on Feb. 22nd.

Regarding the 2nd. sentence of the above extract, I quote CSYoud (dated 15th. Jan.): "Doesn't DRS ever remind you of James Agate? Remember who Maurice Hanson likened him to? That's a game that could be played by shelter-fans: since we are all going to be famous one day to what contemporary figure's will our reputation will our reputation be most akin? Douglas Webster I see as a Siegfried Sassoon or E.J. O'Brien. Now tell me how you imagine me!" A first-class scheme - I can see Burke & Hopkins excelling at this! Please roll in the suggestions, then: no purely slanderous ones will be printed unless accompanied by at least twice as many serious attempts - altho of course all the more doubtful ones will be most gleefully accepted.

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DRSmith tells me I cut him short long before he came to the point in the spiritualism argument. I can only say that, firstly, I had a whole 3-pager of comments from him that month, besides piles of stuff from other people, & I can hardly cram it all in; secondly, I treated RGM a good deal worse than him, for the same reason. Still, I'm sorry if I confused the issue, & his second par. follows--- "Like Medhurst's old gentleman with an umbrella. Note what an excellent lead that is -- many people have crossed the path of an old gentleman with an umbrella -- & how easy, in a lengthy "concentration" to elicit the full information by vague hints & so

3/ on! The medium was out of luck that time [she didn't know DRSmith was going to learn of her activities], many a person would have had a pelation of these characteristics, but she made the best of the material provided & the "message" shrieks to the skies of charlatany. "All is forgiven", the stock message of mediums when inspiration fails, so often trotted out that it is a wonder anyone dare use it. And not all the shots were so successful! [Yet RGM in his extract did go to fair length - all of which I couldn't quote - to point out that he is no more a babe in arms than is DRs, & from experience found "the percentage of clear-cut successes is wildly above chance." It will take a lot to make me believe in Medhurst's particular medium.]

Anton Ragatzy: "You will note, upon referring to my letter, that I did not criticise Medhurst for his research (I myself shall, some day, carry out a research into similar subjects) but the method of carrying it out (or at any rate, reporting it) was not very useful. A research should consist of:- (1) Enquiry into the claims of mystics. (2) Enquiry into the theory (ies) of ditto. (3) Enquiry into the proofs offered to personal experience. The extract you gave did not contain any good example of any of the above." The fault, then, was mine, for the Medhurst report contained all 3 requisites. But while Ragatzy's criticism is reasonable, I must be spiteful & agree with JFParr: "Smith's comments upon spiritualism are much too much un-Smith-like - I wonder if he really calls that constructive criticism? Tut Tut, Mr. Smith, are you not degenerating? Even H.G.Wells could criticise it better than that. Supreme insult!" [?]

Further extracts from the original RGMedhurst letter: "...another fairly typical case. The medium had described, to a lady member of the audience, a "little elderly lady", some sort of relative, I forget just what. He (the medium) went into details, to ask the woman whether she knew someone of the name of Pansy. The woman was obviously puzzled. "Pansy...Pansy, why do I get the name Pansy?" he wanted to know. "Oh, yes, pansies, those large purple ones with yellow spots!" He had already described how the spirit lady had, in life, the hobby of collecting roots & cuttings from people's gardens. He went on to tell the woman in the audience (who confirmed it) that somebody had once given her these pansies to give to the deceased relative, "who was so pleased with them!" * * * Prophecies are frequent. Thus, one lady was told that a young female relative of her's was going to "sit for something", presumably, some examination. "She will fail the first time through nervousness", said the medium, "but my message to you is, let her go in again, & the second time she'll pass alright." I haven't, as yet, been able to check up on any of these prophecies.* * * Not all these shots are so successful as the two I mentioned. Quite frequently relatives are unrecognised, while sometimes things go seriously wrong. And often, of course, the descriptions & messages are so vague that they might mean almost anything. But I am prepared to say that the percentage of clear-cut successes is wildly above chance. You can believe, if you want to, that the medium has somehow managed to collect a vast amount of personal information about almost all the members of her audience, information that the people themselves have often forgotten. Myself, I prefer an "impossibility" to an extreme improbability any day: I might mention that the man who did the pansy trick, among much more that was impressive, had just come down from London & purported to be a stranger to the audience. Or you might believe that it's a big conspiracy between the medium & the audience to defraud the friend I am investigating with, & myself, out of the 3d or 6d we put in the collection plate."

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Since I stencilled Part 4 quite a few letters have arrived, from Messrs. Clarke, Hopkins, Parr, Ragatzy, Rosenblum, Morgan & others; thanks to those for comments, & apologies that they couldn't be quoted largely. Also, deepest thanks to the Ego for providing two stories, "Mirror of Dreams" & the magnum opus "Raymond", for the scheme outlined in Fido. Could I beg others to follow his example? I have asked one or two friends in the course of correspondence, & almost any week now I may take a week-end off & write all the authors or would-be's I can think of. In anticipation, might I ask all readers who are willing to waste the postage to pass round any stories, to

mention this the next time they write JMR or DW; or, if they're not in the habit of so doing, to drop either of us a line. This is a clumsy method, no doubt, but the only one which will provide a rough & ready scale of preference for readers.

Erikovkins: "Smith is right, you know. [Hush, man, hush - can't you see I'm trying to prove he's all wrong?] Political economy is essential for the continued existence of men in cooperation but because you associate politicians (modern & past variety) with self-seeking & selfish patriotism, you laugh at him. But, for the first time I think, I back him up. We must have political economy & the men to work it, but not, I grant you, elevated business men & old school ties who don't care a damn for equality & the rest of it until their own superiority is threatened."

Anton Ragatzy: " 'politics are artificial & not inherent in man, but they are necessary for the co-operation of men in groups...' (Smith) The writer of the above would make his meaning clearer if he substituted the word government for 'politics' (that is, if he means government, for surely he cannot imply that the politics of today, party controversy & inconclusive non-cooperation is necessary? If he does - then let him say so, & await the consequences!) [In other words, as I well realised at the time, I should merely have been quibbling over definitions, if DES held more or less the same views on party- & power-politics as we three do; but on the contrary, he finds much in today's politics to agree with him. Nicht wahr, Smith? * * * ...cooperation is a natural result of human evolution... But one glance at the present results of politics should suffice to show that the latter is very far removed from cooperation.."

[An extract from a letter of mine, written before AR wrote the above, but not received by him till after he'd written it.] I agree with you on this point, & recall a cutting - Nature, 3rd August, 1940:- "...the function of science is to unite the whole human family, whereas, the function of politics seems to be, both in the case of the human family and of each nation to create parties, to emphasise them as much as possible..." Endless political conflict results always in weak government. Internal party divisions (& in the case of the whole world, internal nationalistic divisions) are a source of weakness, expending humanity's energy without a compensating return in motive power. Co-operation, unity, integration - these are the essentials of the efficient, stable world-state." . . . I think I can hear Sam Youd muttering that this is all very dinky theoretical dreaming; granted that, any comments theoretical or otherwise will be welcomed. If anybody wants to attack me, I agree with all that's been said on this page.

I mentioned an excellent criticism by the Youd; so it is excellent (especially the 1st. sentence) & it follows-- "The gent Les Tart [yes, he's the fiend who made up that nickname!] grows more personable with each issue, & the controversies therein are enhanced in attraction by editorial discrimination in fore-shortening of letters. But as is inevitable with anyone who is not an intellectual curmudgeon, there is partiality. Not the rabid partiality I have shown in such famous causes celebres as the conscription row or the more recent pacifism fuss; but for all that an insidious, reasoning partiality that is more liable to influence unthinking readers. For instance, you butter Maurice's letter with the flattering "most unreasonable" & immediately negative it by "thinking" that he has misunderstood Johnny. Sorry, Doug, but I know Johnny better than you - I've known him longer - and Maurice certainly did not misunderstand him. And you draw a lovely red herring over the trail when you try to make out that Johnny was defending the German race : not attacking the British. Johnny himself believes this in the following sentences." . . . I hadn't thought of this partiality, which I'd been trying to keep out. However, all agree the Hanson letter was all-X. But I agree with JFB's 1st. point - that the English despise intelligence (& incidentally prefer "character"). He went on to deprecate this, but while it may be undesirable in individual cases (e.g. jobs will be filled by men with "character" but not special ability), in large-scale dealings the English may show a tolerance lacking in other countries.

This small selection, then, is dedicated to DRSmith, & if he's still cheeky after all this trouble I'll have to begin thinking of Fido readers, not him. DW