

WORK AND PROPERTY

THOSE who find a congenial atmosphere in movements to preserve our countryside, to alleviate the lot of the working-class or to make marriage easier, will meet in Mr. Gill's writings a different level of criticism. He belongs to the small class of critics who have penetrated the merely symptomatic maladjustments of industrialism to conduct an arduous enquiry into the nature of its revolutionary achievements. He is the critic of the Leisure State. It is customary to refer to the Leisure State as the end towards which we are tending. But industrialism began four centuries ago and in that time has succeeded to such an extent in its revolutionary programme that it is reasonable to maintain that we are already living in a society which, if it has any positive form at all, is a Leisure State. That it is also a Servile State, that its leisure is more commonly unemployment or a highly lucrative opportunity for those in the entertainment trade, is explained away both by capitalists and communists; the former pleading for time to realise a more dignified Leisure State, the latter demanding the power to clean up rapidly the messy beginnings of others.

"The problem of leisure consists chiefly in this: that whereas in former times such culture as men attained was the product of their working life, now culture, if it is to be attained at all, is a product of leisure." (*Work and Leisure*, p. 39.) Many of our intellectuals appear to have abandoned a radically critical approach to the ideal of the Leisure State and, accepting its existence as inevitable, are occupied in an attempt to solve "the problem of leisure." The artist has at last been allowed to beautify industrialism, to introduce order into the sordid chaos of industrial beginnings; education is being approached with proposals to form a new type of man, the new man, who getting nothing from his work must get everything from his leisure. The "problem" of leisure comes from the fact that among the exponents of the Leisure State there is no common agreement on the standards to be applied to the "right" or the "wrong" use of leisure.

Mr. Gill, on the other hand, has turned his attention not to leisure but to work. He is from the Leisure State point

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of view a reactionary, i.e., one who will not view without profound criticism the "new man" required by the new humanism. That the greater part of work done under industrial organization is irresponsible and therefore inhuman is glossed over by the average Leisure State intellectual mainly because, having in company with every level of contemporary society lost any inflexible standards of judgment, he is either confused about the nature of work or holds that anyway the destruction of responsibility in work does not matter.

The importance of Mr. Gill's position is that he has resisted the contemporary rejection of inflexible standards. He has standards with which to judge the work of man under industrial conditions. Unlike the average educated Englishman, Mr. Gill has thrown off the fundamentally anti-intellectual liberalism that still dominates English education. In addition to being free from the kindliness which Liberalism has introduced even into truth-seeking, he is himself, in the practical sphere, a responsible workman. This is of the utmost importance for the understanding of Mr. Gill's criticism of industrialism. "We still have the people we call artists, the only remaining specimens of the kind of workman who existed before the industrial revolution," he wrote in *Work and Leisure*. We have in England no practical experience or concrete knowledge of a civilization based on responsible work, just as we have no experimental knowledge of the organic community. Widespread responsible work has gone, as the organic community has gone. Our contact with these things is through literature—a minority experience, or through Catholic Christianity and the traditional standards of right reason—another minority experience. So when Mr. Gill uses standards of judgment based both on Christianity and on the traditional standards of right reason (which he gathers together under the meaning of "art") and in addition calls upon his own personal experience of responsible work, he speaks a language largely incomprehensible in nearly every level of society in this country; clergy and laity, aristocrats and tradesmen, town and countrymen. It is only by great effort that his criticism of our industrial environment can be thoroughly grasped, and those willing to make that effort are startlingly few. Though it is generally known that Mr.

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Gill is "anti-industrial," it is not generally known why.

In his criticism of industrialism the word art occurs with what appears to be tedious repetition. Apart from the fact that his books are mainly collections of lectures (he is primarily a teacher, not a writer), this repetition is essential to his work. Those who reproach him with tedious repetition forget that he addresses himself to an audience that has lost Christian and rational standards and that standards cannot be formed by occasionally hearing the truth. That this reproach appears to have deflected Mr. Gill from a work that is manifestly his vocation is becoming a matter of deep regret. Rightly understanding the word "habit," we can say that a man's vocation is manifested by his habits. Mr. Gill has not succumbed to what M. Maritain has called "l'expulsion progressive des habitus par la révolution moderne." The fact is that our urgent need is for more, not less, of what Mr. Gill has been saying for so long; repetition, expansion, pedagogical reiteration! To maintain that Mr. Gill has done enough "destructive criticism" is ludicrous. It indicates an unawareness of the depth of industrial destruction. It might be remedied by a cross-reference to such enquiries as *Middletown* or Q. D. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public*.

In his recent work *Work and Property*¹ Mr. Gill does continue his work of enquiry and instruction. Among the reprinted lectures there are *Art and Industrialism*, *What is Art and does it matter?* *The value of the creative faculty in man*. Breaking new ground he applies Christian and rational standards to property, reinforcing his whole position in regard to industrially organized work. For an individual to find himself in a small, "powerless," minority in a condemnatory attitude towards a vast, materially powerful and at least temporarily victorious environment; and in addition to feel, as Mr. Gill evidently does in the chapter entitled *Work and Property*, that even the Church or at least most of the clergy are inimical both to his standards of judgments and to his application of them, is costing and extremely difficult. But individual antagonism to environment is not uncommon in history, nor futile—the communists are not the inventors of the "cell."

¹ *Work and Property*. Illustrations by Denis Tegetmeier. (Dent 7/6.)

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In this book he shows signs of an exasperated and sterile anti-clericalism and a tentative excursion into the realm of "solutions." He admits into the book a cartoon which, though useful for responsible Catholics, is by no means fitting for the kind of public the book will reach. Its anti-clericalism is not merely of the kind fashionable among the young generation: its brilliant insight into what is partly true of individuals makes no provision against the bitterest interpretation that is likely to be drawn from it. The result of such anti-clericalism is a blindness to the real activity of the Church in the world; the sort of blindness that reduces Catholic Action to sacristy talk. It is not only the artist whom industrialism has placed on a contemptuous pedestal: the theologian has shared the same fate. In a Christian civilization the theologian would not be as isolated and rare as he is now. Catholic Action is a real beginning of the Christian revolution which Mr. Gill clearly states is the only revolution that will restore true values. For a growing number of people he holds a responsible position of Catholic leadership. He has earned that position by his magnificent maintenance of Christian standards of judgments in an alien society. For Mr. Gill to keep sceptically aloof from the Church's initiative in this conflict between Christian teaching on man and the new anti-Christian conception of the Leisure State would result in the dissipation of his supremely valuable work in the preparation of the laity for Catholic Action; a dissipation into the futile divisions of "practical politics." No one has been more practical in our generation than Mr. Gill. It would be sad indeed if, urged by impetuous critics to "do something" he allowed himself to leave the one solid ground for hope—that of Christian renovation—for some illusory immediate solution. The destruction has gone deep. Reconstruction must begin at the roots. But it can come in only one way; the way implied in the Church's command for Catholic Action to transcend politics. Its work is more profound and radical. That this is true, the man who wrote *Work and Property* can hardly doubt.

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