

29 May 1909

No subject was chosen for this paper and it can have, therefore, no title. It will not be a dialogue, which is a pity, perhaps, and it will discuss the present position of metaphysics in the Society. There can be no doubt, ~~whether~~^{can they?}, that this subject has gone quite out of fashion, and is likely to remain out of fashion for the present. There are ~~probably~~^{I suppose,} several ^{distinct} reasons for this. But I doubt whether it is ~~this~~^{the chief} reason.

^{chiefly due} ~~to~~ the chance that our younger brothers happen to have rather woolly minds. Even Norton no longer gives us a stiff logical; and his reason is not ~~that~~^{that} really that he doesn't think the present Society quite up to our. It's because the thing is out of fashion. He doesn't find that he in the least wants to write for the Society one of the old-fashioned arguments.

We must face the fact, ~~that~~^{then}, that our more subject has gone by the board. History, politics, religion - they've gone; and now metaphysics has gone too. I suppose we have some new subjects

which they used not to know about. But that doesn't alter the fact that metaphysics, which used to interest Sheppard so much, ~~has~~ ^{has} gone out of his ^{now} life, - probably for good.

I lament the change, but I don't see how it could have been prevented. For the subject has become professionalized - like mathematics or ~~Political~~ Political ~~Science~~ Economy. There ~~are some~~ is a certain number of things which most of us think we know, but which it would bore us to repeat; and, beyond ~~that~~ these, technicality reigns. The amateur is out of it and even amongst experts ~~the~~ ~~thing~~ ~~is~~ ~~being~~ ~~beyond~~ ~~the~~ ~~medium~~ ~~of~~ ~~conversation~~ is becoming an awkward ~~with~~ ~~medium~~ of discussion. If metaphysics is not all p's and q's, it's something of the kind - something with which the hearthrug has, plainly, nothing to do.

The change is to be lamented, and it was delightful when metaphysics was still in the hearthrug stage. Yet I doubt whether it ever will

be in the hearts my stage again.

One might argue that experience is against this, ~~and~~
 One might say that when McTaggart invented
 Hesper, it was the fashion at first, and that,
 when Moore invented being and states of mind,
 it amused Sheppard for a year or two, and
 that when the next brother abolishes states of
 mind, we shall ~~again~~ listen to him with amusement.
 I don't, however, think ^{that} this is true. A definite change
 has occurred, so that when he abolishes states of
 mind we shall not listen to him with amusement.
 Metaphysics, in fact, is no longer literary and has become
 scientific. It is no longer a work of the imagination,
 and is concerned with intolerable details. All
 future metaphysics, therefore, will be dull; just as
 all future theories of the constitution of matter will be
 dull. What a charming place the Royal Society must
 have been about 1650! How exciting the Moral
 Science Club was six years ago! How little Sheppard
 would enjoy either of them now and for ever
 and ever!

in the future

Isn't it quite out of the question ~~more~~ that anyone ^L should write on Philosophy ^{as} well and be as amusing as

Hume? It's as impossible, isn't it?, as that anyone should write poetry about science as good as Lucretius's. So much for metaphysics. It has become professionalized. The professionalization of science has been, ^{at least,} ~~at least~~ useful; but in the case of metaphysics the change is ^{distinctly} ~~distinctly~~ a loss.

~~and~~

The process does not stop here. One by one the subjects of polite conversation ~~as~~ ~~as~~ or an amateur's enjoyment are removed from us. It might happen in the case of art, I suppose. Things might easily reach a point; when ^{to} ^{gain} ^{to} ~~the~~ ~~more~~ ~~knowledge~~ ~~required~~ ~~for~~ the appreciation of a picture ^{would be} ~~was~~ the work of a lifetime.

I wonder if gossip will ever become professionalized. I suppose it may. Greenwood thinks it has already.

I may be quite wrong, ^{of course} ~~perhaps~~, from beginning to end. These subjects may be just as interesting as they always were, if I were not so familiar with them. Their apparent departure, one by one, ^{is merely} ~~perhaps~~ the effect of time. It may be due to the ~~of~~ cause which is also the explanation of why the angels are so witty. It's not because they're specially fond of making jokes. They're driven to it. There's nothing else for them to do.

But I may, on the other hand, be right. That the Society's papers are dialogues, plays and novels supports me. They're driven to it. There's nothing else for them to do. The subjects for a stiff logical no longer exist.