

THE GREAT RACE MYTH

By T. A. JACKSON

CONSIDERING the immensity of the advance made in modern physics, chemistry, and biology it is remarkable how slowly old ideas are dislodged in the crowning science of all—sociology. "Remarkable," truly, but by no means hard to understand, especially to a Marxist.

Theories concerning the electrical constitution of matter may, to a philosopher, be the most breathlessly revolutionary notions that have been advanced since Copernicus knocked the pillars from under the "solid" earth and sent it spinning through space—no longer the centre of creation, but a mere one among the many satellites attendant upon the Sun. They may! But they challenge no vested interest, and they affront no ruling-class prejudice. On the contrary; they open up fascinating possibilities of newer and bigger profits and they can be made to appear new and more damaging weapons against the "materialism" which has been for a century associated with every successive wave of revolutionary unrest.

Not so with sociology. At long last every privileged order depends upon the passive acquiescence of the masses whom its privileges despoil, and this submission can only ultimately be maintained by some form of superstition—belief without evidence, or in spite of evidence, that the privilege arises as a natural necessity and that any attempt to destroy it would bring disaster to the rebels followed by an ignominious return to the nature dictated subjection.

The "Great Man Theory," which Carlyle tried (and failed) to make revolutionary, is not only still with us, but enjoying (as the publishers' lists of new "biographies" show) a renewal of youth, and the War brought a rebirth of its pseudo-scientific elaboration—the Great "Race" Theory.

Or what comes to the same thing, the theory of naturally Evil and Backward races.

Few people would to-day advance in cold blood all the assertions made and "proved" with an elaborate apparatus of erudition about the Germans during the war years. But many have only relented towards the Germans (or Prussians) to transfer the theory of natural vileness to the Russians (or the Jews); and who among prominent politicians and publicists is there bold enough to abandon the time-honoured conviction that the "White" races are and must be for all time superior in all cultural possibilities to the Blacks, Yellows, and Reds wheresoever found?

Dr. Hertz* has the superlative merit of challenging all this "Race" nonsense with a whole army-corps of facts, well-selected and well-arranged. He shows abundantly how impossible it is to classify human beings into races by any but the broadest and most provisional lines of demarcation and that all these lines when drawn leave large marginal areas overlapping. He shows how whether we take skin-and-hair-colouring, skull configuration, stature or language, no hard and fast line can be drawn and that everywhere there is evidence of variation, past, present, and potential. Most of all he shows how impossible it is to find, and how absurd it is to expect to find, a pure-bred race.

Indeed, he has no difficulty in demonstrating that just those peoples who have historically made the greatest stir in the world have been of a highly complex racial admixture and have derived their success from that fact.

He is not content merely to refute; he goes on to explain. Race theories—whether the ordinary "patriotic" infatua-

* *Race and Civilization*. By Frederick Hertz (Kegan Paul, 18/6).

THE CONSTANT DROP OF COPPERS

Wears away the biggest debt. See page 225.

tions common to the most primitive peoples and to the greatest of Empires, or the elaborated "scientific" formulæ which seek to elucidate history and solve current social problems in terms of race—all he shows "have their roots in the desire of certain castes or classes to maintain their privileged position."

Being "little else than the ideological disguises of dominators' and exploiters' interests," they "belong to the earliest stock of human thought" and recur with each social crisis which challenges a dominant class or exploiting order.

They were first given a pseudo-scientific formulation under the stimulus of the French Revolution (represented by reactionaries as a revolt of the naturally "inferior" Gauls against the naturally superior (Teutonic) Franks) and after the Revolutions of 1848 they were elaborated into a system by Count Gobineau, who was confessedly actuated by a "hatred of democracy," of "revolution" and of "liberal ideas."

To him the Germanic races were the natural aristocrats of the world and its well-being depended upon their ascendancy. Expanded by pseudo-Darwinians to comprise the whole "Aryan" races—(interpreted to mean the more or less Teutonic whites)—this became and remains the popular conviction among West European reactionaries.

It was used repeatedly as a reason why the "Teutonic" British should hold the Celtic Irish in subjection, as a reason why negro-slavery should be perpetuated in America, and as a reason why the whole of the earth should become subject to the European Empires—or one among them.

While its special "Teutonic" or "Germanic" form had to be modified drastically to suit the needs of war propaganda, the theory still forms the psychological implication of all British colonial policy—and, be it noted, is not challenged by even the declared colonial policy of the Labour Party. That a revised form of it is the basis alike of Mussolinism and 100 per cent. Americanism needs no proving.

Dr. Hertz, by the way, rather spoils us for the enjoyment of his work, by certain naiveties, in an early chapter, about British colonial policy. He thinks, for instance, that the admission of Indians to self-government on an equality with the British is "merely a question of time." But these faults are as nothing by comparison with the service he renders in demonstrating that the "qualities" of a people depend upon their economic and social circumstances much more than upon any alleged "racial" bias, capacity, or limitation.

It will be a service to the cause to ensure that this book gets into every free library and into as many hands as possible.

STOP PRESS

Mark Starr is leaving for the States for a visit of about a year. He will give a course of lectures at Brookwood, the American Labour College. He carries with him the best wishes of the N.C.L.C.

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