

Sir Isaac Newton and Levity

By LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT

Contributing Editor of The Outlook

THE OUTLOOK has received the following pertinent letter, and I have been asked to reply:

Austin, Texas,
April 1, 1927.

Editor of The Outlook,
New York.

Dear Sir—On the subject of Questions here are one or two:

Why two articles on Beethoven and none on Newton?

Why did Mr. Arthur Brisbane, writing on the death of Newton (March 20, 1727), call it the date of his birth?

Why does the half-page article on Newton in the New York "Times" for March 20 say that the philosopher had been dead exactly one hundred years?

Why does Dr. William Lyon Phelps make no reference to this bicentenary in either his March or April "As I Like Its" ("Scribner's"), while mentioning the Beethoven centenary in the latter?

What does it matter—to Sir Isaac Newton?

Why did your interesting Contributing Editor recently call Sir Robert Peel Sir John Peel, and Lord John Russell Sir John Russell?

Is April first a good day to "fool with" an editor?

Very truly yours,
JOHN GRANGER.

To the last question I would answer, "Excellent." But fooling with an editor, like fooling with a buzz-saw, requires exact caution. Mr. Granger has not been as cautious as he ought to have been. He appears to think that on March 20, 1927, Sir Isaac Newton had been dead exactly two hundred years. Let him study the history of the Gregorian calendar, and I think he will find that he is thirteen days out in his reckoning. According to the modern calendar, March 31, 1927, appears to have been the two hundredth anniversary of Newton's death. For Sir Isaac was born December 25, 1642, O. S., and died March 20, 1727, O. S. The O. S. is important.

Why Arthur Brisbane and the editor of the New York "Times" should be so confused about the birth and death of Sir Isaac Newton is certainly puzzling. Perhaps, being good Democrats, they are more interested in the abolition of the law of prohibition than in the establishment of the law of gravitation. One of the most famous of Democrats once repealed the law of gravitation to his

complete satisfaction, thus proving himself to be as great a nullificationist as John C. Calhoun. William Jennings Bryan in one of his popular moral lectures, delivered to an admiring audience a few years ago, observed, "It is said by those who deny the truth of the Biblical miracles that we cannot suspend the laws of nature;" and then, taking up an inkstand from the desk in front of him and letting it rest on his outstretched palm, he added in his most resonant and impressive tones, "but I am now suspending the law of gravitation!" What would have happened to the ink, to the audience, and to the lecturer himself if he had really succeeded in suspending the law formulated by Sir Isaac Newton is amusing to imagine.

Why William Lyon Phelps has so far displayed no public interest in the Newton bicentenary he has not chosen, and therefore I cannot undertake to disclose. Possibly it is because he has a livelier interest in aesthetics than in differential calculus. Beethoven certainly was a more picturesque personality than Newton. The great composer who successfully violated the law of consecutive fifths is more appealing to the psychologist than the great mathematician who formulated the law of falling bodies; and the entertaining conductor of the "As I Like It" pages in "Scribner's" is at heart a psychologist. A thousand men—to say nothing of women—can see beauty in the original harmonic permutations and combinations of Beethoven where but one can comprehend the beauty of what scientists call the "magnificent" Newtonian formula

$$F=G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$$

The most interesting thing about Newton's mind that I have come across is that, while a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, he declined to take holy orders because he could not accept the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless he led a devout and pious life and was buried in Westminster Abbey, a contrast to the experience of Galileo, who, dying in the year of Newton's birth, had been threatened at Rome with excommunication, torture, and imprisonment because he taught that the earth revolves around the sun instead of accepting the Scriptural teaching that the sun revolves around the earth. Henry the Eighth was not an altogether admirable character, but he deserves some

credit for his break with Rome, for from that event may be reckoned the beginning of English intellectual freedom. If England had been a Papal state in the seventeenth century, Newton would doubtless have shared the misfortunes of Galileo.

So much for the gravity of Sir Isaac Newton; now for a little levity.

Mr. Granger accuses me of calling two of England's greatest Prime Ministers out of their names. If I did so, I will not make the defense of Dr. Johnson. When a lady asked him why, in writing his great dictionary, he defined *pastern* as the *knee* of a horse, Boswell reports that, "instead of making an elaborate defense, as she expected, he at once answered, 'Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance.'" It was carelessness, not ignorance, on my part that led me to refer to "Bobby" Peel as John, and to set down Earl Russell as a mere knight.

Peel and Russell were contemporaries. The first was born in 1788, the second in 1792. Peel, the son of a cotton manufacturer, was educated at Oxford; Russell was the grandson of a duke, and was educated at the University of Edinburgh. All but a half-dozen of the thirty-five or thirty-six men who have held the Premiership of England during the last two centuries have been university graduates. The English people choose educated men for their governors. Sir Robert Peel's name is immortalized in English slang. He created the Irish Constabulary, who were known as "peelers," and the London police force, who to this day are called "bobbies." But his greatest claim to the admiration of the public-spirited was his leadership in the abolition of the notorious Corn Laws, which had kept the price of food-stuffs so high that the laboring population of Great Britain and Ireland suffered from semi-starvation, and even famine. His wit was keen. Once when Feargus O'Connor, the Irish Nationalist, had asserted in a speech in the House of Commons that he would as soon have the devil sit on the throne as the Queen, Peel suavely retorted: "When the honorable gentleman sees the sovereign of his choice on the throne of these realms, I hope he will enjoy and I am sure he will deserve the confidence of the Crown." Peel was a liberal, a progressive, and a patriot—an honor to British statesmanship.

Lord John Russell, who succeeded Peel as Prime Minister, was a contrast to his predecessor in many ways. Peel was a man of great physical vigor who could work sixteen hours a day; Russell was weak and ailing as a child and almost a semi-invalid throughout his life.

"But," says a contemporary, "within that feeble body was a spirit that knew not how to cower, a brave heart that could pulsate vehemently with large and heroical emotions, a soul that aspired to live nobly in a proud and right manly career." Russell's record on the whole justifies this somewhat flowery eulogy, although he has been criticised by some Americans for his attitude towards the North during our Civil War. But that may have been due to his failure, generally, to handle foreign affairs successfully. One of his colleagues and rivals,

the Earl of Derby, said of Russell's foreign policy that it was usually a policy of "meddle and muddle"—a characterization that some dissatisfied critics are giving to the present foreign policy of the American Government. Like Peel, Lord Russell was capable of a witty retort. A political opponent who had changed his party allegiance from Liberal to Tory once taunted him with indulging in the "cant of patriotism." "I quite agree," was Lord John's rejoinder, "with the honorable baronet that the cant of patriotism is a very offensive

thing. But I can tell him a worse—the recant of patriotism."

This political pun recalls the *bon mot* of the cheerful cynic who recently said in my hearing that England is to be credited with the discovery of two great laws of motion—one in the realm of physics, one in the realm of politics. Sir Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravitation, or the law of falling masses; Mr. Lloyd George discovered the law of levitation, or the law of rising politicians who pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

From Bronks to Bronx

By ELMER T. PETERSON

FOR a century the East called the West provincial. Now the West calls the East provincial. Both may be partially right, but largely wrong.

The Americanized Kipling formula should read: "East is West, and the twain have met."

If the Freudian word "complex" were not so overused and misused, there would be a temptation to refer to the East-West complex. This perennial question of what the West thinks of the East and *vice versa* has existed ever since De Soto, Marquette, and Joliet hacked trails for covered wagons.

More momentum was given the important question when Colonel G. R. Clark captured Vincennes for Virginia and the town was made the capital of the then Indian Territory. The establishment of Fort Dearborn, thereafter called Chicago, caused additional speculation, whose heat mounted to fever degree in 1849. The West was elastic, and expanded as if it were a rubber balloon and the East were the rigid and static mouthpiece.

PRINCE WILLIAM of Sweden, in a recent visit to Kansas, made this pertinent inquiry:

"Where does the West begin? They told me at Kansas City that it begins there. Please tell me."

"Oh, it begins out in the Rockies," said a student editor. The Prince was still puzzled.

In these days the complex is symptomized in such queries as:

"What do the Iowa butter-and-egg men think of Broadway's new shows?"

"Do Oklahoma City business men wear chaps and ten-gallon hats?"

And here is a queer thing. One fac-

tion contends that there is an abysmal chasm between East and West, possibly at the Hudson River, perhaps even as far west as Cincinnati, and that one or both sides of the chasm are hopelessly provincial, stewing in their own respective juices, or placidly undergoing cerebral exostosis, each ignorant of how the other side lives.

The other faction emits gentle groans of amazement and despair in the discovery that the East and West actually have met, despite Kipling's pessimistic forecast to the contrary, and points to the alleged dreary standardization of the American panorama.

Both factions are dejected. The country is doomed if it does, and doomed if it doesn't.

OUT of the conflicting hypotheses constructed by intellectual melancholics there emerges a cheerful thought: It may be believed that the American people are approaching a condition in which they will speak the same language, wear the same number of ears apiece, eat the same kind of food for breakfast, read the same literature, dress alike, enjoy the same motion pictures and "revues," listen to the same radio programs, take the same irascible attitude toward the income tax, use the same slang, and drive the same makes of automobiles, and yet all this may come to pass without the penalty of slavish mental standardization. Americans will probably enjoy the same latitude in psychic processes that they had when a large section of the population was engaged in fighting Indians, digging gold ore, or branding wild steers. They will probably preserve the ability, in some miraculous manner, to make up their own minds without inter-State or

transcontinental assistance or suzerainty.

A naïve, old-fashioned New York journalist who had not made a trip to the Middle West since 1886 recently deplored the change that had occurred in the land of the Comanches, Sioux, and Osages.

He viewed with alarm the fact that he did not see a single killing, that he saw a groom in an English uniform outside an Omaha hotel, that none of the young men in the dining-room chewed tobacco, that the young women used lip-sticks, bobbed their hair, and wore dresses the same as their sisters in Hartford or Camden, that the hotels served the same kind of food and had the same kind of waiters as those of New York.

"Conformity, our greatest enemy, has triumphed," he wrote in sad disillusionment. And he concluded from these outward facts that the West is "aping the East."

PERHAPS the West does take many of its cues from the East. What of it? The automobile originated in the Occidental city of Detroit. The airplane's genesis took place near Dayton. The bungalow came from India via California. Batik came from Java or Siam by approximately the same route. The ukulele came from Hawaii by way of the west coast. Motion pictures and bathing beauties mostly originate in or near Los Angeles. The most striking new idea in American painting receives impetus from the art colonies of New Mexico and the sun-drenched pictures of Sandzén, of Kansas. Modern slang had its inceptive stimulus at Hazelton Farm, Brook, Indiana. The modern tired school of rural realist fiction seems to have had its start in Minnesota. Jazz