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Theological Observer. - Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

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Theological Observer — Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches

Concerning Lutheran Union.— On the National Lutheran Council meeting in Pittsburgh, where the question of Lutheran union was one of the big topics to be discussed, the *Christian Century* writes: "An important step toward further unity among Lutherans was taken at the recent meeting of the National Lutheran Council in Pittsburgh. The council, which was formed during the First World War, brings together the leaders of about two thirds of the Lutherans in America for periodic consultation and for action on matters of common concern. At Pittsburgh it received a proposal from the editors of Lutheran publications, who were meeting at the same time, that the eight American Lutheran branches which have found it possible to cooperate in a number of matters should formalize this cooperation by establishing an entity to be called the American Lutheran Convention. This convention would act for the participating churches by taking charge at once of the new wartime activities of the churches and would also take over other common interests. Affiliation with the convention would not involve doctrinal commitments, although it is recognized that in time a closer union, doctrinal as well as in matters of public service, might come to pass. The National Lutheran Council received the proposal with enthusiasm and appointed a representative commission to perfect it. When this has been done, an extraordinary session of the Council will be convened to act upon it. The importance of the proposal can be judged from the fact that it will unite in service two of the three principal divisions of American Lutheranism. The United Lutheran Church, which was formed during the First World War from three separate synodical groups, has more than 1,400,000 members. The American Lutheran Conference, which was set up about ten years ago to include the Scandinavian-descended churches together with two other groups which have shown interest in the new proposal, has an equal or larger total membership. If this confederation is formed, only the extreme Lutheran conservatives, as represented by the Missouri Synod, will remain outside. Thus the trend toward Lutheran unity, which received its first great impetus during the First World War, seems likely to receive a further substantial push forward during the Second."

We can understand that the *Christian Century*, a non-denominational paper which is constantly advocating the uniting of churches, should be enthusiastic about the news of the National Lutheran Council action. Its editors cannot be expected to possess that desire to maintain soundness of doctrine which has been strikingly characteristic of the Lutheran Church throughout the centuries. An important question is, What will be the Lutheran reaction? At this writing we can quote the *Lutheran Herald*, the official paper of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, which submits a long discussion of this matter to its readers. We quote some of the paragraphs: "The question, of course, immediately arises as to what could be accomplished by the creation of such a

federation which is not now being accomplished? The answer to that question will in turn depend upon how general the participation of Lutheran groups in the federation would be. If it were possible to enlist *all* Lutheran bodies in America, we would have that for which we have long hoped and prayed: an agency through which all Lutherans might speak and act regarding external matters of concern to us all. The National Lutheran Council as today constituted does include two thirds of all American Lutherans. With the exception of a few small bodies, it is only the Synodical Conference which has not joined the Council. But the Synodical Conference includes one third of American Lutherans, and so long as it remains aloof, the Council cannot by any stretch of the imagination claim to speak for American Lutheranism. So at the very outset the question arises as to membership. Suppose that it proves impossible to enlist the support of the Synodical Conference, is the project thereby doomed to failure? Frankly, we are not decided in our own mind as to that. At present we would be inclined to say that, while certainly it would limit the usefulness of the federation, we would still favor its establishment. This for two reasons: First, because it is certainly a step in the right direction, in the direction of a greater degree of unity; secondly, because it would tend to make our joint efforts the more effective. As we see it, such a federation would not be based on the adoption of more doctrinal 'theses.' Frankly, we see no need, either now or in the future (immediate or remote), for more theses as the basis for Lutheran unity in America. Perhaps if we could have a 'statement to end all statements,' which should collate already existing agreements into one, it might serve a useful purpose. But we do not want additional statements. If we mistake not, one of the tasks before the unity commission of the American Lutheran Conference at present is to collate all these statements. That will be quite a book and will prove, we believe, that sufficient doctrinal basis for any future federation, whether confined to externals or including internal affairs as well, already exists."—Then follows a discussion of the attitude of the Synodical Conference, concerning which the editor says: "At times, when we read and hear statements from some of the leaders of the Synodical Conference, we become optimistic; then, almost in the same breath, we read or hear something from these same men which seems to place the whole thing in the limbo of the impossible. So we are puzzled." The editor in the next paragraph complains that Missouri Synod Lutherans apparently are afraid to acknowledge that in some external respects there is a "coordination" of efforts. Finally he says: "We still, however, refuse to become altogether hopeless over the picture. First, we do believe that those now working together in the Council are drawing closer in spirit all the time; secondly, we cannot doubt that many in the Missouri Synod have a deep-felt desire for a closer unity and may even come to the point some day of making a break with the elements in the Synodical Conference which remain adamant in their demands that they and they only are to be the arbitrators and definers of Lutheranism; thirdly, we believe that world conditions will force us closer together."

In reading the above we are struck especially by the author's statement that in his opinion no more doctrinal theses should be drawn up. That is a strange position to take when one seeks to bring about unity in the Lutheran camp. If that policy had been followed in the sixteenth century, we should not have received the Formula of Concord. But the question whether further doctrinal statements have to be written and adopted is really of minor importance. What is necessary is that doctrinal unity be achieved before fellowship is declared to be established. With respect to purely external matters there is some cooperation or coordination even now. The difficulty is that at times the line between purely external matters and matters involving fellowship is extremely difficult to draw. But what is truly essential is that doctrinal unity be achieved before fellowship is declared to be established. When the General Council was founded in 1867, Dr. Walther and Dr. Sihler of the Missouri Synod sent a communication to the meeting urging that before an organization was formed, there should be discussions to bring about real doctrinal unity. Our fathers did not think that the Lutherans in our country should be in a hurry to form a large organization. But they exhorted all Lutherans to be concerned to have unity in faith brought about and maintained. The discussions in recent years have shown that there are a number of topics concerning which confusion and erroneous teaching are found in the camp of Lutheranism in America; chief among these are the doctrines of inspiration, conversion, predestination, and the last things. Among matters of church practice concerning which unity will have to be established are membership in lodges and unionistic activities. If the National Lutheran Council through its organization will bring about a thorough airing and examination of the things that are now debated in the Lutheran Church of America, it will render an important service to the cause of true Lutheranism. A.

Luther's Aristotelianism. — Prof. Henry Schaeffer, of Maywood, Ill., closes a rather keen and helpful study of the theme "Biblical Thinking and Aristotelianism in Theology" (*Lutheran Church Quarterly*, January, 1942) with a rather confusing and historically misleading paragraph, in which he says: "Luther himself did not always escape the insidiousness of the Aristotelianism in which he had been trained from his youth. The young Luther, it will be remembered, *accepted absolute predestination* [italics ours] on the basis of certain statements in the Bible. But the mature Luther had had time to consider another series of Biblical statements, which did not altogether agree with his youthful position, namely, such passages as John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.' According to H. E. Jacobs the Synodical Conference prefers the young Luther in this regard, while the United Lutheran Church prefers the mature Luther."

Very much for one's view on this point depends, of course, on what one regards as the "young" and as the "mature" Luther. We admit that in his early theological career Luther had not yet quite cast off Scholasticism or Aristotelianism, if one prefers to call it so. In other words,

Luther at first still showed at times the Romanistic egg-shells of his theological incubation. But at the time when Luther, according to church-historical mythology, is said to have taught an "absolute predestination," he was no longer a "young" but a rather "mature" Luther. Commonly the charge that Luther taught "absolute predestination" is based on one of his most mature works, *De Servo Arbitrio*. This great monograph on the human will is regarded by some as so completely Calvinistic in tenor and tone that very good Calvinists have published it as a witness to their doctrine of absolute predestination. But *De Servo Arbitrio* appeared in 1525 and by that time Luther had very well grasped the import of John 3:16 or, let us say, of the *sola gratia*, and the *universalis gratia*; for between 1517 and 1525 Luther wrote not only very many expositions of these central loci of Christian theology but also long treatises and whole books in defense of them, such as his commentary on Galatians, which appeared in 1519, his "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" (1520), his numerous exegetical works on Old and New Testament books, his Bible translation "Das neue Testament deutsch" (1522), etc., by all of which he broke completely with scholastic theology. Again, it may be said that in doctrinal essentials authoritative *Dogmengeschichte* does not recognize any difference between the "young" and the "mature" Luther. On the very day when Luther nailed to the doors of the Wittenberg Castle Church his famous Ninety-five Theses, he understood John 3:16 as clearly as he did on February 18, 1546, when he died. The "young" Luther differs from the "mature" Luther only in secondary matters, not in essentials; there is a difference only of degree, not of kind.

However, in view of the frequent assertions to this effect the question is in place: "Did Luther really teach an absolute predestination?" We cannot here discuss this subject in detail. Nor is this necessary; for in his monumental "Historical Introduction to the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord: On Predestination" (*Triglot*, pp. 195-228) Dr. F. Bente, instructor in Symbolics at Concordia Seminary for more than thirty years, has so ably and unanswerably proved that Luther *did not* teach an absolute predestination that the above-mentioned charge ought not to be brought against him any longer. Beginning with section 234, Dr. Bente shows that the doctrine on predestination taught in Article XI of the Formula of Concord is in reality Luther's doctrine on predestination and that neither Luther nor Article XI teaches an absolute predestination. Section 234 proves the theme "Luther Falsely Charged with Calvinism." Section 235 presents a "Summary of Luther's Views." Section 236 then shows the "Object of Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*." The climax of the discussion follows in section 241, "God's Grace Is Universal and Serious," which is a total denial of absolute predestination. From section 246 on Dr. Bente shows what Luther actually taught on election before and after his *De Servo Arbitrio*. The section establishes perfect agreement in Luther's doctrine on predestination both at the beginning and the end of his theological career. Luther always taught the *sola gratia*, the *gratia universalis*, and the *vocatio seria et efficax*, as also the *electio ad salutem in Christo et propter Christum*. These sections present Luther's

true doctrine on predestination, while the historical treatises of most modern dogmatians describe it one-sidedly and unfairly. This is true even of Luthardt's *Kompendium der Dogmatik* (cf. 13. Auflage, Jelke, pp. 174 f.). Unfortunately Dr. Bente's fine work is presented in small type and as prefatory to our Confessions in the *Triglot*, so that it does not receive the recognition which it deserves. A true scholar's excellent research, representing both historical and theological truth, is thus passed by, while less reliable, or even altogether misleading treatises on the subject are accepted as authoritative. At this time when the study of theology is again becoming popular in circles where it has been egregiously disliked (cf. the popularity of J. S. Whale's *Christian Doctrine* and other recent similar works), we Lutherans will do well to review the precious doctrinal treasures which have been bestowed on us by God's grace in the past in so full a measure. J. T. M.

What Shall We Preach? A Diagnosis of the Present Theological Situation.— Under this heading, Dr. Louis Berkhof of Calvin Seminary, has published a very praiseworthy article in the July (1941) issue of *The Calvin Forum*, which *Christianity Today* (October, 1941) reprinted in toto. Lack of space does not permit us to follow the example of *Christianity Today*, but we shall in compensation stress a few salient points and publish a few paragraphs from it to show how fortunate our Church has been in escaping the curse of Modernism by adhering to God's Word without fail. The essay begins with the remark that today graduates of many seminaries are vexed with the perplexing question as to what they should really preach. Modernism has removed from them the Christian message of salvation. When it discovered that the Church, thus deprived of its spiritual life, no longer had a mission and a message (J. R. Campbell once suggested that it might be well to burn all seminaries), the advocates of the social gospel tried to fill the void with "a Kantian gospel of activism." But the social gospel failed so miserably that J. R. Campbell, for example, once the great apostle of the new theology, entered the Roman Catholic Church, and the Universalist evangelist Benjamin Fay Mills returned to the orthodox fold. After Machen had pointed out the divergencies between the social gospel and the Gospel of the New Testament, humanists entered the fray, accusing the Modernists of insincerity, dishonesty, and inconsistency, while Barthianism, with its more positive theological emphasis, weaned away from this great delusion such leading men as Reinhold Niebuhr and kindred spirits, who demand a more realistic theology, "the Theology of Crisis, deeming it essential to get back to the idea of revelation in some sense of the word." Professor Berkhof says: "Some Modernists feel that they ought to get back to revelation, but this does not mean that they are inclined to return to the Bible as the infallible Word of God. That is a Rubicon which they will not cross. And, sad to say, they derive comfort from Barth and Brunner on this point."

Very striking is the writer's analysis of the Modernists' quandary today. He writes: "They have lost their message and are becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that the Church of our day has no message of its own and is therefore quite useless and ineffective. They

are groping about for light and are trying to discover some useful message but refuse to sit at the feet of the Lord of the Church and to learn of Him what they should preach. They still feel that it must be a this-worldly rather than an otherworldly Gospel, just another system for the regulation of the life of the world. They still prefer the wisdom of the world to the foolishness of the Cross. And if they succeed in discovering some message to take the place of the original message, it will only be one which, like that of the false prophets, is a word out of their own heart. They will continue to preach, with great diffidence and hesitation, their own fallible opinions and will not be able to address the Church with an authoritative, "Thus saith the Lord."

Most heartening for us Missourians, who have borne the disgrace which a fearless confession of orthodoxy entails, is the author's concluding article in which he writes: "What an immense advantage they have who recognize Jesus Christ as the Lord of the Church and therefore as the only one who has the right to determine the message of His servants! They need not start with an anxious quest for a message, since they are willing and glad to be merely messengers of the King and are satisfied to know that the King has determined once for all the nature of the good tidings that must be conveyed to sinful men. And if they are ever in doubt about it, they have but to turn to the written record, which is always at their disposal. They can refresh their mind on that point as often as they wish, for the message is essentially the same for all generations of men. Not only is there no need of changing it at every turn of the road, but there is absolutely no warrant for such a change. Every essential change brought on in the message impinges on the rights and prerogatives of the King and is a manifestation of disloyalty. Naturally, this does not mean that the form of the message may not change. Formal adaptation will always be in place, and a change of emphasis will frequently be required; but the heart of the Gospel and its fundamental implications will be forever the same. May the day speedily come when preachers everywhere return once more to the message of the King and substitute for their hesitant 'I opine' or 'I imagine' the authoritative 'Thus saith the Lord.' Then the pulpit will again become a real power in the land."

J. T. M.

The "Moody Monthly" Not a Safe Guide.—The *Moody Monthly* is being read, as we understand, also in Lutheran circles. Its insistence on the deity of Christ, His vicarious atonement, the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, and other fundamentals, as also its aggressive mission spirit, makes it delightfully refreshing in this age of doubt and cynicism. But the *Moody Monthly* is by no means a safe guide for Lutherans to read. Its "Practical and Perplexing Question Department," for instance, exhibits many perplexing and misleading answers. For one thing, the periodical is thoroughly premillennialistic, and the replies at times go to extremes of dispensational enthusiasm. There are other points on which it is equally unscriptural. In answer to the question why God created man when He knew what a turmoil man would make, it says that God created man with the possibility of sometime choosing evil because this was the only way for man "to develop Godward,"

which suggests an Arminian background of original neutrality, similar to the Romanist claim that man originally was made in *puris naturalibus*. At any rate, Scripture gives us no ground for assuming that man in the state of innocence was to develop Godward; for he was created positively good. Again, the *Moody Monthly* claims that "the literal Elijah will himself come prior to the second coming of Christ, just as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah prior to the first coming of Christ." Here, too, we have a speculation which contradicts Scripture. Still more amazing is the belief, expressed in the same issue, that "the fallen angels apparently entered into the bodies of men, who became polygamists." Quite naively it adds: "This interpretation is plausible and makes the sons of God (Gen. 6:2) to be fallen angels." This explanation of Gen. 6:2 is, of course, preposterous.—The question whether Christ, while sojourning on earth, gave a new commandment, is answered without any qualification in the affirmative: "He did, the commandment to love one another as He loved us" (John 13:34). There is no reference to the fact that this commandment was new only as "to its peculiar applications to Christians, the clearness and power with which it was taught, and the motives with which it was enforced." (Cf. *The New Testament with Notes*).—The question "Is one's salvation lasting?" is briefly answered thus: "Since our regeneration is the work of God, we believe it [our salvation] will last." This intimates the old Calvinistic doctrine of final preservation of the effectively called, which ignores the believer's firm trust in God's gracious promises to keep him in Christ Jesus to the end. (Cf. Phil. 1:6.) The copy from which these replies have been taken was submitted to us for special study. It proves that Moody teaching on many points is certainly not sound Lutheran theology and Biblical truth. For this reason the *Moody Monthly* should be read with great care and should be kept from all who cannot discern between true and false doctrine.

J. T. M.

Education without God.—In *The Calvin Forum* (December, 1941) Dr. H. J. Ockenga, in an article entitled "Conflicting Ideologies and the Coming Kingdom," presents in a special paragraph, bearing the heading given above, the pitiful plea of "an undergraduate in a great Eastern University." Originally it was printed in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The writer rebukes the president of that university for the inconsistency of expecting from the students a crusading zeal for democracy and Christianity when the entire curriculum of the school is calculated to destroy faith in Christianity and democracy. Just now, when Valparaiso University is making new and laudable efforts to become what many of us desire it to be, a first-class university, firmly planted on God's Word and having an enrolment worthy of such a school, and when our well-planned Students' Welfare Work is being so ably conducted under Rev. R. W. Hahn and his capable associates, this appeal ought to strike us with special force. This is what the student has to say:

"You, sir, were brought up from earliest childhood in an atmosphere of traditional Christianity and democracy. You read, learned, and inwardly digested the Bible. Nearly every Sunday you went to

church, and there you heard and believed sermons which postulated the divinity of Christ, eternal principles of right and wrong, the existence of the human soul, a personal God, and a life after death. . . . During your youth you were educated to think that man is superior to animals, that he is a free agent, capable of choosing between good and evil. Loyalty to country was an ideal you came to cherish, and your schooling never caused you to doubt that man possesses certain inalienable rights. Unlike you, most of us have scarcely ever glanced at the Bible. When our elders refer to eternal verities, absolute ethics, we are likely to recall the lesson your instructors in sociology have driven home—that morals are relative to time and place, that what is good in one society is bad in another. . . . Our biology courses now conceive of man merely as one species of mammal. Furthermore, is not your traditional doctrine of free will at odds with the basic assumption of modern science—determinism? We know not whether to praise or curse the current flag-waving and a belief that the American system is much better than any other. If men are but animals, why not treat them as such? An animal has no rights. The law among animals is the law of the strong. If there is no natural law in the universe, how do you justify those inalienable rights which the Declaration of Independence asserts men to possess? Why do you think America is worth defending? Personally I fail to understand how you, or any other college president, can expect us to become ardent Christians and democrats when the vital postulates on which these faiths are supposed to rest are daily undermined in the classrooms. One thing seems certain, and I state this with all the solemnity of which I am capable: you and other educators of the country are now rearing a brood of potential Fascists. No Promethean fires of faith and sacrificial zeal burn in our hearts. Our wish-washy adherence to Christianity and democracy pales into nothingness alongside the incredible devotion of German youths to the Nazi creed."

J. T. M.

Character Indelebilis.—That the Protestant Episcopal Church teaches that through ordination a certain indelible character is bestowed on a person is evident from this question and answer in the question-box of the *Living Church* (Episcopal), conducted by Bishop Wilson.

"It is my impression that an ordained priest is irrevocably a priest. If he is deposed, he is deprived of authority to exercise the functions of his office, but he still remains a priest. Is that right?—Answer: Quite right. Holy Orders, like Baptism, is indelible. In ordination a 'character' is imparted which can never be lost. Once a priest, always a priest. Holy Orders cannot be expunged or recalled. When a priest is deposed, he is denied the right to exercise his ministry in the Church—a question of jurisdiction rather than of Orders. In case the sentence should be lifted and he should be restored to good standing, he would not be ordained again. He would simply go on from where he had left off." Here we have evidence that in the Protestant Episcopal Church not all of the Romish leaven has been removed.

A.

Religious Situation in Mexico.—A correspondent in the *Christian Century* (non-denominational) states that the attitude of the government toward religious education has undergone an important change. He writes: "Article III of the Mexican Constitution, the origin of the trouble, was revised in 1934, under the high pressure of political radicalism. 'Socialized education' was thus made compulsory for all public and private schools as well as the exclusion of all religious teachings and the duty of attacking 'prejudices and fanaticism.' The latter term was understood to include all religious creeds. As for 'socialism,' Marxist orthodoxy was plainly meant. Under the shadow of this reform, Communism took a firm grip on Mexican public education; but according to the new law the 'socialism' of Article III means simply 'the formation of the higher value of that which is social over that which is merely individual.' This particular definition, of course, is meant to put an end to the doctrinal monopoly of militant Marxism in schools. Teaching and propaganda of any religious creed or doctrine will still be excluded and prejudices and fanaticism will continue to be attacked. But in doing this, freedom of conscience and religious profession will be strictly maintained, and fanaticism or prejudices will not be legally understood to mean the profession of religious creeds and the practice of ceremonies, devotions, or worship forms, carried on according to the law. In consequence, the educators will not be allowed to attack, under pretext of fighting against fanaticism and prejudices, the licit religious beliefs or practices of the pupils. Thus the text of Article III was left untouched as a measure of political compromise (the antireligious forces are still strong), but the whole educational policy of the government has been radically changed and the fight against religion through the schools has been brought to a sudden stop. Under the new law of public education the door seems to be open again for religious teaching in private schools. The educational societies have extended a welcome to private initiative in the field of education. And with the new policy it will be possible for private schools to exist in carrying on their work without government interference in the realm of conscience. Private schools, of course, will have to submit to government supervision; but it seems that this will not be carried to the length of examining the private religious convictions of teachers and pupils. It is possible that it means also that private schools may include religious teachings and practices along with the officially supervised curriculum." Let us hope that this favorable report will not ultimately be found to be too optimistic. A.

Brief Items.—The *Christian Century* (non-denominational) reports on joint services held by a Protestant and a Jewish congregation in Brooklyn. The Protestant church was the Flat Bush Congregational Church. How sad that these Protestants do not realize how utterly such a course fails to render a real service to Jewish people!

In the Chicago area the Chicago Bible Society last year distributed the Bible in fifty different languages. That is work for which we can be grateful.

In Chicago there died at the age of 86 Dr. Andrew C. Zenos, a Presbyterian, who was one of the editors of the *New Standard Bible Dictionary*, published by Funk and Wagnalls.

The president of the University of Chicago, Dr. Hutchins, recently made the announcement that the A. B. degree will now be conferred at the end of a two-year course. He expressed the view that the elementary-school education, which now covers eight years, should not require more than six and that the secondary education can be sufficiently attended to in another six years, at the end of which period the A. B. degree could be conferred. It will be noticed that he cuts off four years from the span of time which now is allotted to elementary, high-school, and college education. He holds there should be no specialization before the course thus briefly pointed to has been completed, and concerning specialization he insists that it should not be inflicted on students who have neither the interest nor the ability for it. Whether the plan proposed will be widely favored is a question that everybody asks.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of the Anglican Church, Dr. Cosmo Gordon Lang, resigned his position and intends to retire. He is more than 77 years old and expressed the thought that the times call for the leadership of a younger man. The *Living Church* (Episcopal) expresses the opinion that Dr. Lang will be given a temporal seat in the House of Lords. The news has just come that the Archbishop of York, Dr. William Temple, who is 60 years old, has been appointed to succeed Dr. Lang and that Dr. Cyril Garbett, Bishop of Winchester, will succeed Dr. Temple at York.

In the religious press it is announced that Dr. John R. Mott will retire as chairman of the International Missionary Council. Since 1910 Dr. Mott has been extremely active in behalf of the International Missionary Council.

The late Dr. A. T. Robertson is quoted in the *Western Recorder* as having warned his Church of the danger of sacramentalism coming in on the side of the ecumenical movement of which he saw but the beginnings. W. C. Taylor of Rio de Janeiro writing in this journal sees a danger to the peculiar doctrines of Baptists in the trends of the day. He writes: Dr. A. T. Robertson warned in his day of a revival of sacramentalism. If it could be seen then on the horizon, there is now little else that can be seen. The ecumenical movement in religion is, first and foremost, ecumenical sacramentalism, bent on making that universal Christianity. Thus writes the *Presbyterian*. Dr. Robertson was woefully wrong in his evaluation of the Sacraments, but he was right in viewing the ecumenical movement with suspicion. A.

