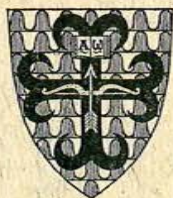


FROM THE HOUSETOPS



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TOYNBEE, THE JUGGLER

DANIEL SARGENT

I SEE in some Catholic periodical that Arnold Toynbee's *A Study in History* is a prose masterpiece marred by some errors concerning the Catholic Church. This is like describing Hitler as a man who became a corporal in the German Army during the First World War, and who during the Second had an unfortunate love affair.

It is quite true that Toynbee is a good story-teller. If he were not slightly ashamed of himself for being such, he would have been even a better one, but he is a good one even then. Yet people are not reading him because of that. It is quite true also that he makes some "errors" about the Catholic Church. I call it an error that he should say that Gregory VII committed an outrage in 1075 when he took up the quarrel against Lay Investiture. But such errors will not make the fortune of the book. People run to read Toynbee because they expect him to give them a religion.

Possibly Toynbee, himself, would say that this is the fault of his readers, and not his. And it is quite true that he sticks to his scientific tone in show of noble reticence. When he quotes Our Lord, he is careful to refer to Our Lord's words as what Jesus Christ is alleged to have said. He will be the "humble" scientist, not the prophet. But as Mark Anthony averred, "I come to bury Caesar not to praise him," and then went on to praise him, so Toynbee teases us with prospect of a religion. He has his civilizations climbing a mountain, and we grow excited. The mountain suggests Dante's Mount of Purgatory where people were going somewhere. And then religions keep popping up in emergencies, — higher religions. Surely some highest may pop up. And now today we are on a terrace from which we may fall. We are faced by a dissolution of our civilization. "When civilizations pass into dissolution," he says, "they regularly leave behind them a deposit of universal states, and universal churches, and barbarian war-bands." Whereupon he asks the question: "And what is the destiny of the universal church in which every higher religion seeks to embody itself?"