

EDITORIAL

## METAPHYSICAL BELFORD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**F**ATHER JOHN L. BELFORD of the Brooklyn Catholic Church of the Nativity, who in last month's issue of his parish paper *Mentor* advanced the proposition that "the Socialist is the mad dog of society, he should be silenced, if need be, by a bullet," explains in this month's issue of the same *Mentor* that "what was written in the *Mentor* was not given as the doctrine of the Catholic Church"; that "it was the opinion of a man who is at once a Catholic priest and an American citizen"; and that "as a citizen he has a right to warn his country and his fellow men of what he believes to be a real peril."

In other words, when Father Belford recommended the silencing of the Socialists the way mad dogs are silenced, it was not the "priest" who spoke, but the "man."

Metaphysics proceeds from hard and fast lines. The exigencies of metaphysical reasoning require the ignorance of the fact that there are no hard and fast lines between social, any more than between natural, entities. Metaphysics, in order to promote the understanding of types, ignores the transition and connecting links between them. Under metaphysical treatment the palfrey is one animal, the draught horse another animal; President Taft is one being, the present glutton in the White House another being; the millionaire Harry Thaw is one thing, the paranoiac who slew architect White another thing;—sharp lines distinguishing each from the other. Adopting the metaphysical method, Father Belford distinguishes between himself as "priest!" and himself, again, as "man."

As a bit of Jesuitical casuistry [by the way, we miss the suffix "S.J." to Father Belford's name], the reasoning, according to which the priest, one entity, is not responsible for what the man, another entity, does, is nothing new—but for that very reason the casuistry recalls certain historic incidents that should cause either the priest or the man into which the Reverend Sir splits himself, [we shrewdly suspect

both] to pause—and consider.

We shall take up one of these instances.

In the early days of the colonization of the South, when what now is the boundary-line between Georgia and Florida was the dividing line between the North American possessions of the British and the Spanish Crown, some straggling British soldiers were one fine day seized by a Spanish detachment, were hanged with their faces towards the Georgia side of the line, and above the dangling bodies a placard was nailed bearing the inscription: “Not as Englishmen, but as Heretics.” Shortly after that, and some straggling Spanish soldiers happening, in turn to fall into the hands of the British, the stragglers were, in turn, hanged; they were hanged opposite the place where the British soldiers recently hung; they were hanged with their faces towards the Florida side of the line; and to their dangling bodies a placard was fastened with the inscription: “Not as Spaniards, but as Murderers.”

The casuistry that divides the official from the man is a double edged sword. Two can play at that game—as the priest part in the anatomy of the Rev. John L. Belford may, to his sorrow, discover if the man part in his anatomy were to commit, or attempt murder.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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