Benedict de Spinoza *by F. Pollock* [1]

IT is now two hundred years since there died, in an obscure lodging at the Hague, Benedict de Spinoza, a philosopher appreciated in his own time only by a very few. His name was indeed widely known, but it was for the most part known only to be execrated. For some time after his death Spinozist was current among the theologians of Holland as a term of opprobrium. Spinoza's thought, however, was of that vital kind which sooner or later cannot fail to make for itself a way into its due place. Some three-quarters of a century after his death came the great awakening of letters and philosophy in Germany, and the leaders of that movement, among whom the name of Lessing must be mentioned first, were not slow to perceive Spinoza's importance. Ever since that time his influence has been a widening and increasing one: not that I stop to maintain this in the strictest sense which can be put upon the words, for I do not think a philosopher's influence is properly measured by the number of persons who agree with his doctrines. Philosophical doctrines have been, and will doubtless continue to be, matter of controversy, but it is no matter of controversy that the life of a righteous man who gives up all else that he may seek the truth for its own sake is a sure and priceless possession for all the generations of men who come after him.

Baruch de Spinoza was born at Amsterdam on the 24th of November, 1632. His parents were members of the Portuguese synagogue, a community established towards the end of the sixteenth century by Jewish exiles from Spain and Portugal, who had turned to the United Provinces as a safe asylum. For at this critical time Holland, it should be remembered to her eternal honor, was the most tolerant commonwealth in Europe. Spinoza was brought up in the course of Hebrew learning then usual, and at the age of fifteen was already distinguished for his knowledge of the Talmud. He was also familiar from his youth up, as his writings bear witness, with the masterpieces of the golden age of modern Jewish literature. From the tenth to the twelfth centuries there flourished at the Mohammedan courts of Spain and Africa a series of Arab and Hebrew philosophers who held a position with regard to the societies in which they lived much like that of the Catholic schoolmen afterwards with regard to western Christendom. Like the schoolmen, they set themselves to effect a fusion of the Aristotelian philosophy with the accepted theology of their churches; and the schoolmen were in fact acquainted with their work to a considerable extent, and referred to it quite openly, and in general with respect. [2]

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[1] In the course of this paper I shall have to refer several times to Dr. A. van der Linde's Benedictus Spinoza: Bibliografie (The Hague, 1871), which gives a full account of the literature of the subject.

[2] The names of Ibn-Roshd (Averroes) and Ibis-Sina (Avicenna) were familiar in Europe, and Dante groups them (*Inf* iv. 143) with the leaders of classical science and philosophy. Ibn-Gebirol (Avicebron), a Jewish member of the school, broke with the Aristotelian tradition to take up Neo-Platonic ideas. His philosophical work was discredited and fell into

The Jewish schoolmen, if we may so call them, cannot be said to have founded any distinct philosophical doctrine; in philosophy they were hardly distinguishable, if at all, from their Mohammedan compeers. But they gave a distinct philosophical cast to Jewish theology, and thereby to Jewish education. Two names stand out foremost among them. Ibn-Ezra (1088—1166 A.D.) was a traveller, astronomer, grammarian, and poet, in addition to the learning in theology and philosophy which made his commentaries on the Scriptures classical. But the chief of all is Moses ben Maimon (1135—1205 AD.) who became known in Europe as Maimonides, the father of modern Jewish theology. He was regarded with such veneration as to be compared to the great Lawgiver himself, so that it passed into a proverb, "From Moses until Moses there arose none like unto Moses. [3] The Jewish peripatetic school was also represented in Provence, where, in the fourteenth century, Levi ben Gerson, the most daring of all the Jewish philosophers, and Moses of Narbonne were its most conspicuous members. This philosophical treatment of theology was on the whole generally accepted, but did not pass without controversy: in particular R. Chasdai Creskas, of Barcelona (flor. 1410 A.D.), whom Spinoza cites by name,[4] combated the peripatetics with great zeal and ability from an independent point of view. A mind like Spinoza's could not well have found anything more apt to stir it to speculation and inquiry than the works of the men I have named. They handled their subjects with extreme ingenuity, and with a freedom and boldness of thought which were only verbally disguised by a sort of ostentatious reserve. Both Maimonides and Ibn-Ezra delighted to throw out hints of meanings which could not or must not be expressly revealed. Maimonides, in the introduction to his principal work, entreats the reader who may perceive such meanings not to divulge them. Ibn-Ezra says in his commentaries: "Herein is a mystery; and whoso understandeth it, let him hold his peace."[5] The mysteries were, however, not so carefully concealed but that an open-eyed reader like Spinoza might easily find in them the principles of rational criticism which he afterwards developed in the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*."

At the same time Spinoza was far from neglecting secular learning and even accomplishments. His master in Latin, after he had acquired the rudiments elsewhere, was Francis van den Ende, a physician of Amsterdam who had a high reputation as a teacher, and was also well versed in the natural sciences. It is highly probable that he communicated this part of his knowledge also to Spinoza, who certainly had very sound instruction of that kind at some time; for it is remarkable (as Mr. G. H. Lewes has well pointed out) that Spinoza seldom or never makes mistakes in physics. The references and allusions in Spinoza's writings show that he

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oblivion among his own people; but it became current in Europe in a Latin form, and was used by Giordano Bruno, through whom it may have thus come round to Spinoza.

[3] In later times the proverb received an extended application in honor of Moses Mendelssohn, the grandfather of the musician, himself a philosopher and the restorer of Jewish culture in Germany. Maimonides' reputation was not established without conflict. About 1235 his opinions were formally condemned by the synagogue of Montpellier.

[4] "Judæum quendam, Rab Ghasdai vocatum." — Ep. XXIX., *ad fin*.

[5] Ap. Spinoza, *Tract. Theol. Pol*., c. 8, § 9. The mystery seems innocent enough to a modern reader.

had a fair knowledge of Latin literature; of Greek he knew something, but not much.[6] He wrote a Latin which, though not classical, was a very sufficient instrument for his purposes, and which he handled with perfect freedom. He seems to have been also familiar with Italian; and Spanish and Portuguese must have been almost as native to him as Dutch. About this time the philosophy of Descartes was in the first flush of its renown, and, like most new and brilliant things, was vehemently suspected of heresy. Spinoza made himself thoroughly familiar with it, his companions in this study being Henry Oldenburg and Dr. Lewis Meyer, the most constant of his friends in after life. It is at least doubtful, however, whether he was at any time a Cartesian. When he published a short exposition of the system in 1663 (the only work he ever set his name to), it was with an express warning that it did not represent his own opinions. At the same time it is beyond question that Descartes exercised a powerful influence upon the form and direction of Spinoza's speculations. Until of late years his part in this matter has been unduly exalted, and that of the Jewish philosophers underrated, or rather forgotten; but it would be very possible to carry the reaction to excess. In Spinoza's own time it is pretty certain that those who knew him only at second hand looked on him as a sort of erratic Cartesian. We know what Locke thought of the Cartesians as a body, and thus Locke's entire neglect of Spinoza may be explained. Those who followed Locke in England seem to have taken for granted, after his example (though in Berkeley we do find specific references to Spinoza), that Spinoza' s philosophy was not worth serious attention.

To these graver studies Spinoza found time to add no small skill in drawing. He filled a book with sketches of distinguished persons of his acquaintance, as we are told by his biographer Colerus,[7] who had the book in his possession. The same writer tells us that Spinoza's master, Van den Ende, had a learned, witty, and accomplished daughter, who took part in teaching his pupils, and Spinoza among them. From a learner, the tale says, he became a lover, but was supplanted by a fellow-pupil named Kerkering, who wooed and won the lady, not unassisted by the material persuasion of a valuable pearl necklace. The story passed current until it was rudely called in question by the facts which Dr. van Vloten discovered and published in 1862. True it is that Van den Ende had a daughter, but she was only eleven years old at the latest time when Spinoza can have been her father's pupil. True it is that she married Theodore Kerkering, but not till several years after, in 1671. He was, like her father, a physician, and earned a considerable scientific reputation by his work in medicine, chemistry, and anatomy. The match appears to have been a very natural and proper one, and the rivalry with Spinoza and the pearl necklace must be dismissed as inventions. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the tale of Spinoza's love for Clara van den Ende is wholly without foundation. Van den Ende

[6] He expressly disclaims anything like critical competence in it (*Tract. Theol. Pol*., cap. 10, *ad fin*.).

[7] The name is a Latinized form of Köhler. He was the minister of the German Lutheran congregation at the Hague.

probably continued to see something of his former pupil until, to his misfortune, he left Holland;[8] and we know that Spinoza was from time to time at Amsterdam. Besides this, nothing forbids us to suppose that even from an earlier date there may have sprung up a half romantic, half childish affection between Spinoza and Klaartje. Beatrice was only nine years old, and Dante himself only ten, when the "glorious lady of his soul" first showed herself to his eyes, and the word came to him, "*Ecce dues fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi*." So that if any one is minded to cling to this one piece of romance in Spinoza's life, I think he may do so by taking the story with some such qualification as here suggested.[9] I must confess, however, that my own inclination is, on reflection, towards entire unbelief. The story as told by Colerus is not credible, and any credible story we may devise in its stead must be so different from that given by Colerus as to rest in truth on no evidence at all. Besides, the testimony of Colerus is here at its weakest; he does not report this matter, as he does many others, as being within the actual knowledge of himself or his informants, but refers for confirmation to authorities which are all but worthless.[10]

So much we know of Spinoza for the first twenty-three years of his life. We may well believe that he had not long attained man's estate before the freedom of his thought and discourse, and perhaps also laxity in ceremonial observances, began to excite attention among the elders of his people; but, whatever suspicions may have been conceived, and whatever informal warnings may have been given, no action was taken till 1656. A community which owed its existence to flight from repeated persecutions might be expected by a hasty observer of human nature to practise toleration itself; but experience is far from warranting such an inference. Witness the example of the settlers of New England, whose first use of their freedom from the yoke of episcopacy was to set up a new ecclesiastical tyranny after their own patterns of a kind not less oppressive and infinitely more vexatious. There is too much reason to fear that the Jewish exiles from Spain and Portugal had learned some of the evil lessons of the Inquisition.[11] Apart from this, the synagogue of Amsterdam had good reasons of secular policy for being scrupulous even to excess

[8] Van den Ende migrated to France, where he involved himself in a political conspiracy, hoping that it might turn to the profit of his own country, and was hanged at Paris in 1674.

[9] Most recent writers, including Auerbach, to whom it must have given a pang to cast away the foundation of his charming novel, treat the whole story as a fable. Dr. van Vloten himself (*Benedictus de Spinoza*, 2nd ed., 1871, p. 21), and Dr. H. J. Betz, of the Hague (*Levensschets van Baruch de Spinoza*, 1876), take a line not unlike what I have given in the text. Dr. Rothschild (*Spinoza: zur Rechtfertigung seiner Philosophie u. Zeit*, Leipzig, 1877) boldly maintains Colerus's account as historical, and dismisses the objection as to dates with the remark: "*Es giebt frühreife Naturen*."

[10] Kortholt.(*De tribus Impostoribus Magnis*, No. 82 in Van der Linde, cf. No. 287), and the article on Spinoza in Bayle's Dictionary. Korsholt's "three impostors" are Hobbes, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and Spinoza. The book has nothing to do (beyond the studied similarity of title) with the famous, perhaps mythical, *De tribus Impostoribus*, which is a standing riddle of bibliography. Of this, however, a spurious French version circulated in MS. in the eighteenth century, under the name of *L'Esprit* — or, bound up with Lucas's biography, *La Vie et l'Esprit — de M. Benoìt de Spinoza. See Van der Linde, Nos. 99—102*

[11] Dr. Grätz (*Gesch. der Juden*, x. 14) says: "They had brought with them from Spain the fatal passion for maintaining the purity of the faith and exterminating heresy. The rabbis of Amsterdam introduced the new practice of sitting in judgment on religious opinions and beliefs, setting themselves up as a kind of Inquisition."

in its appearance to the outer world. Holland was indeed the land of toleration; but toleration was not such as we are nowadays accustomed to, and at this very time theological controversy ran high. - The battle of Remonstrants and Contra-remonstrants was yet fresh in men's minds; and it behoved a society of men foreign in religion, language, and manners, which had been at first received with suspicion, and which existed only on sufferance, to let nothing pass among them which could lay them open to a charge of promoting new heresies or being indifferent to the general interests of religion. Hence we can understand the extreme anxiety to avoid an open schism which marked the first proceedings in Spinoza's case. The elders would have preferred to retain Spinoza in apparent conformity, and offered him as the price of this a pension of one thousand florins. This being declined, it was probably considered that the only safe course remaining, though not a desirable one in itself, was for the congregation to renounce its freethinking member as completely as possible. Meanwhile some obscure fanatic, thinking himself no doubt a messenger of divine justice, outran the zeal of his masters. One evening an unknown assailant set upon Spinoza with a dagger;[12] but he was on his guard in time, and the blow pierced only his coat, which he kept afterwards as a memorial. This was a sufficient warning that Amsterdam was no safe place for him, and he left the city without waiting for the final decision of the congregation upon the charge of heresy against him. This was given on the 27th of July, 1656, to the following effect:—

> The chiefs of the council do you to wit, that having long known the evil opinions and works of Baruch de Espinoza, they have endeavored by divers ways and promises to withdraw him from his evil ways, and they are unable to find a remedy, but on the contrary have had every day more knowledge of the abominable heresies practised and taught by him, and of other enormities[13] committed by him, and have of this many trustworthy witnesses, who have deposed and borne witness in the presence of the said Espinoza, and by whom he stood convicted; all which having been examined in the presence of the elders, it has been determined with their assent that the said Espinoza should be excommunicated and cut off from the nation of Israel; and now he is hereby excommunicated with the following anathema: —
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> With the judgment of the angels and of the saints we excommunicate, cut off, curse, and anathematize Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of the elders and of all this holy congregation, in the presence of the holy books: by the six hundred and thirteen precepts which are written therein, with the anathema wherewith Joshua cursed Jericho, with the curse which Elisha laid upon the

[12] The exact place and circumstances, which however are not material, are variously related.

[13] "*Ynormes obras que obrava*." This I had supposed to be a piece of "common form" with no definite meaning; but I learn from a friend possessing special knowledge that it probably refers to distinct breaches of the ceremonial law; some such overt act, beyond mere speculative opinions, being required to justify the excommunication. (Cf. Grätz, *op. cit*., 172, 175.)

children, and with all the curses which are written in the law. Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night. Cursed be he in sleeping and cursed be he in waking, cursed in going out and cursed in coming in. The Lord shall not pardon him, the wrath and fury of the Lord shall henceforth be kindled against this man, and shall lay upon him all the curses which are written in the book of the law. The Lord shall destroy his name under the sun, and cut him off for his undoing from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the book of the law. But ye that cleave unto the Lord your God, live all of you this day.

And we warn you, that none may speak with him by word of mouth nor by writing, nor show any favor to him, nor be under one roof with him, nor come within four cubits of him, nor read any paper composed or written by him.

Thus was Baruch de Spinoza cut off from his own people and from his father's house. Not only was he an outcast from Israel and deprived of all fellowship of his nation and kindred — and the ties of kindred are with his people of exceeding strength and sanctity — but he became as it were a masterless man, a member of no recognized community, having none to stand by him or answer for him. Such a position might well seem a grave one in itself, apart from the shock to his personal feelings.[14] Altogether the blow must have been such as it is at this time hard for us to understand. Spinoza, however, received the news of the excommunication with perfect equanimity. "This compels me," he said, "to nothing which I should not otherwise have done." Henceforth he disused his Hebrew name Baruch, and adopted the Latin form Benedict, which has the same meaning, and by which he is generally known. He now had to depend on his own work for a livelihood. It was a rabbinical precept that every one should learn a handicraft; and in compliance with this Spinoza had learned the trade of making lenses for optical instruments, which was no doubt chosen as congenial to his philosophical and scientific studies. He became so skilful in this art that the lenses of his make were much sought after, and some which were left undisposed of at his death fetched a high price. By this means he earned an income sufficient for his limited wants, and also a reputation for a thorough knowledge of optics which appears to have spread more quickly than his fame as a philosopher. In this manner he was brought into correspondence with Huygens and Leibnitz. We find Leibnitz, for instance, writing to him in 1671 to ask his opinion on certain optical questions, and treating him as a person of recognized authority. Leibnitz's behavior to Spinoza some years later can only be called shabby. He professed great interest in Spinoza's philosophy, and endeavored to get a sight of the unpublished MS. of the "Ethics," which Spinoza's prudence did not allow him. On his return from a stay in Paris, Leibnitz visited Spinoza in person. In later years he

[14] It is said that the Jewish elders represented to the civil authorities of Amsterdam that Spinoza was a dangerous person, that the Reformed clergy, supported their request, and that Spinoza was actually banished from Amsterdam for a time. But Colerus knows nothing of this, nor is it in itself probable.

joined the vulgar cry against him, and borrowed a fundamental idea from his philosophy — which he also marred in the borrowing — without the slightest acknowledgment. The letter now in question begins thus: —

> Among your other titles to fame [he says] I understand that you have excellent skill in optics. To you therefore I have chosen to send this attempt of mine for what it may be worth, as on this subject it would be difficult to find a better critic.

The friends who were best acquainted with his work believed that if he had lived longer he would have made some important addition to the science.[15] As it was, Spinoza's "excellent skill in optics" was only indirectly useful for the advancement of knowledge by affording him the means of cultivating philosophy. On the death of his father, indeed, he became entitled to share with his two sisters an inheritance of some value. The sisters, imagining, as it is conjectured, that the excommunication had deprived him of civil rights, endeavored to exclude him from his share. Spinoza was of opinion, as we know from his writings, that in a country where just laws prevail it is every citizen's duty to resist injustice to himself for the sake of the common weal, lest peradventure evil men find profit in their evil doing. He now acted on this principle, and asserted his rights before the law with success. Having done this, however, he declined to profit by them, and when the division came to be effected he gave up everything to his sisters but one bed, which he kept as a visible symbol of the established justice of his claim.

We know little of Spinoza's movements with certainty till the end of 1660 or beginning of 1661, when we find him at Rhijnsburg, a village near the mouth of the Rhine not far from Leyden. Thence he paid frequent visits to the Hague, where he increased his acquaintance with men of learning and eminence. This society must have had growing attractions for him as time went on, for in 1664 he moved to Voorburg, which is almost a suburb of the Hague, and finally about 1670 to the Hague itself. The greater part of what we know of his doings in after years is derived from the selection of his letters which was made — with a far too sparing hand unfortunately — by the editors of his posthumous works. The series of letters begins in 1661: the most important of Spinoza's correspondents, and also the most interesting to Englishmen, is Henry Oldenburg. Oldenburg spent the best part of his time in this country, where he settled in 1653. He was acquainted with Milton, and was the intimate friend of Robert Boyle; he shared Boyle's scientific tastes, - and was the first secretary to the Royal Society (1662), and editor of its "Transactions." His friendship with Spinoza was already of long standing at the time now in question; he had lately visited Spinoza at Rhijnsburg, and the letters are a sort of continuation of the philosophical conversation they had then held. The first of Spinoza's answers to him contains a characteristic point: "It is not my way," he says,

[15] The only scientific work left by him was a small treatise on the rainbow. It was supposed to have been lost, but it was, in fact, published at the Hague in 1687 (Van der Linde, *Bibliografie*, No. 36), and has recently been discovered and republished in Van Vloten's "Supplement."

"to expose the mistakes of others." A thoroughly constructive habit of mind, an almost insuperable aversion to enter on criticism for criticism's sake, runs through the whole of Spinoza's philosophical work.

In 1662 Oldenburg strongly advises Spinoza not to hesitate about publishing some work relating partly to theology, partly to philosophy, which means presumably the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*."

> I would by all means advise you not to begrudge to men of letters the ripe fruits of your ingenuity and learning in philosophy and theology, but let them go forth into the world, notwithstanding any possible grumbling from petty theologians. Your commonwealth is most free [Oldenburg was writing from England]; and therein the philosopher should work most freely. . . . Come then, my friend, cast out all fear of stirring up the feebler folk of our time against you; we have sacrificed enough to their ignorance and trifling scruples; let us spread our sails to the wind of true knowledge, and search out the secrets of nature more thoroughly than has yet been done. In Holland I should think it will be quite safe to print your treatise, and there is no reason to fear its giving the least offence, among men of learning at any rate. If such are your promoters and patrons — and such, I answer for it, you will find — why should you fear the detraction of the ignorant? [16]

In the following year Oldenburg was again pressing Spinoza to finish and publish a little book on "The Amendment of the Understanding," of which we now have only a fragment, published among the "*Opera Posthuma*."

> Surely, my excellent friend, I believe nothing can be published more pleasant or acceptable to men of true learning and discernment than a treatise such as yours. This is what a man of your wit and genius should regard, more than what pleases theologians, as their manner now is; they care less for truth than for their own advantage.

And he conjures Spinoza by the bond of their friendship, by every duty of increasing and spreading abroad the truth, not to withhold the publication, or, if he indeed has grave reasons for withholding it, at least to write and explain them. [17] Oldenburg was a sincere friend to Spinoza, and a person worthy of all respect; but one cannot help observing that it is extremely easy for a man to be thus valiant in counsel when he does not risk anything on his own part. When Oldenburg in later years became better acquainted with Spinoza's results, he was himself not a little taken aback. Now, in spite of answers which were not encouraging, Oldenburg returned again and again to the charge he would never desist till his request was satisfied; meanwhile it would be the greatest possible favor if Spinoza would give him some summary of the contents of the treatise. All this while Spinoza and Boyle were holding a scientific correspondence on chemistry and pneumatics in the form of long messages contained in the letters between Spinoza and Oldenburg, though they seem to have exchanged nothing directly. There is no doubt that Boyle knew a good

[16] Ep. VII.
[17] Ep. VIII.

deal of Spinoza, and took much interest in his work. In 1665 Oldenburg writes: "Mr. Boyle and I often talk of you and of your learning and philosophy." Boyle is also mentioned as joining in Oldenburg's exhortations to Spinoza to persevere in philosophical research. We find allusions in Oldenburg's letters of this time to the miseries of the plague and of the war between England and Holland. A certain book about which Spinoza had asked has not yet reached England "because the plague has almost put an end to all communication, besides which this fearful war brings a very Iliad of mischiefs (*nonnisi malorum Iliada*) in its train, and is like to leave but little civility in the world." He adds that though the meetings of the Royal Society are suspended, Boyle and others go on working in private.

After 1665 there is an unexplained break of ten years in this correspondence, which is but imperfectly supplied by letters between Spinoza and other persons.

The most interesting of Spinoza's other correspondents is Simon de Vries. He was a man younger than Spinoza, his pupil in philosophy, and of much promise. He died in his master's lifetime, having shown his gratitude by material benefactions so far as he was allowed. Once he offered Spinoza a present of two thousand florins; this was declined. He was unmarried, and it was his intention to make a will leaving the bulk of his property to Spinoza. But Spinoza, knowing that Simon de Vries had a brother living, pressed on him the duty of thinking first of his own kindred; so that De Vries finally made the brother his heir, and charged his estate with an annuity of five hundred florins to Spinoza. After his death Spinoza would not entirely accept even this; when the annuity came to be paid in due course, he refused to take more than three hundred florins, which he said was quite enough for him. The letters between Spinoza and his young friend belong to the year 1663, and throw light both on Spinoza' s manner of life and on the growth of his philosophical system. They show that the leading definitions and propositions of the first part of the "Ethics" were already sketched out in MS., and were in the hands of several of Spinoza's friends, who had formed a kind of philosophical club at Amsterdam, and held regular meetings for the study and discussion of the work. De Vries was commissioned, it seems, to write to Spinoza for the explanation of such points as remained obscure to the company. He says in the same letter:—

> At times I complain of my fate in being so far from you. Happy, most happy is the companion who dwells with you under the same roof, and who can at all times, dining, supping, or walking, hold discourse with you of the most excellent matters. [18]

Spinoza willingly gave the desired explanations, and replied thus to the complaint:

> You need not envy my fellow-lodger. There is no one I like less, or with whom I have been more cautious; so that I must warn you and all our friends not to communicate my doctrines to him till he has come to riper years. He is still too childish and inconstant, and cares more for novelty than truth. Still I hope he will amend these youthful failings some

[18] Ep. XXVI. a. I use Auerbach's notation for references to the lately discovered letters and parts of letters.

> years hence; indeed, so far as I can guess from his disposition, I am pretty sure of it; and so his general character moves me to be friendly with him.[19]

It is worth observing that these and other letters of the same time, such as the very important one to Dr. Meyer, in which the notions of space, time, and infinity are discussed, show that as early as 1663 Spinoza's philosophy was fully formed as to its main features. This at once fixes the permissible limits of any speculation upon the growth of Spinoza's ideas which may be founded on a comparison of his earlier and later works. For instance, the avoidance of purely metaphysical discussion in the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," published in 1670, must be set down not to uncertainty or immaturity of thought, but to deliberate reserve dictated by reasons of policy.

At this time (1663) Spinoza published the "Principles of Cartesian Philosophy." It has already been mentioned that in this book he was not speaking for himself, and he attached no value to it (as he informed Oldenburg), save as a means of attracting attention and, patronage in certain places (alluding probably to the De Witts), such as might encourage him to publish something more substantial of his own. The book seems to have done its work in assuring the author's reputation. In 1664 we find William van Blyenbergh, a worthy merchant of Dort and a man of good family, introducing himself to Spinoza by letter in these terms:—

> Dear Sir and unknown Friend, — I have already several times carefully read over your treatise lately published with its appendix. It will be more proper for me to speak to others than to yourself of the instruction I found in it and the pleasure I derived from it. This much I cannot forbear saying, that the oftener I go over it with attention, the more I am pleased with it, and I constantly find something which I had not marked before.

He proceeds to ask several metaphysical questions.[20] Spinoza received his unknown correspondent with a warm welcome.

> Unknown Friend — From your letter I understand your exceeding love of truth, and how that only is the aim of all your desires; and since I direct my mind upon naught else, this constrains me to determine, not only fully to grant your request, which is to answer to the best of my skill the questions which you now send or shall send hereafter, but to perform all else on my part which may avail for our better acquaintance and sincere friendship. For myself, there is among things out of my own control none I prize more than entering into the bond of friendship with men who are sincere lovers of truth. For I believe that nothing in the world, not being under our control, can be so securely taken for the object of our love as men of this temper; since ‘tis no more possible to dissolve that love they have for one another (seeing it is founded on the love each of them hath for the knowledge of truth) than not to embrace the truth itself when once perceived.

[19] Ep. XXVII. a. These two letters are for the first time given in full in Van Vloten's "Supplement."
[20] Ep. XXXI.

Blyenbergh sent to this a very long reply, from which Spinoza discovered that their notions of philosophical inquiry did not agree so well as he had supposed. "So that," he says, "I fear we shall get little mutual instruction by our correspondence. For I perceive that no proof, however firm it may be as a proof, may have weight with you unless it agrees with the construction which you or certain other theologians may put upon the Scriptures." For my part, he continues in effect, I confess I find the Scriptures obscure, though I have studied them several years; and on the other hand, when I obtain sufficient proof of anything, I know not how to refuse assent to it. And he goes on to show that Blyenbergh has completely misunderstood his position. This, however, did not put an end to the correspondence, and sundry other letters passed. In one of these Van Blyenbergh throws in by way of postscript the sage question "whether we cannot avoid by the exercise of prudence that which otherwise would happen to us;" to which Spinoza could only say: "As to the question added to the end of your letter, since we might put a hundred like it in an hour and never settle one of them, and you hardly press for an answer yourself, I shall not answer it." Soon after this they met, and had a friendly conversation. Blyenbergh attempted to renew the correspondence, but this time Spinoza distinctly declined it.

We have also letters to various persons, chiefly on scientific topics, which approximately cover the next few years. Mr. Lewes has called attention to the interest shown by Spinoza in an experiment in alchemy to which he was at the time disposed to give credit.[21] And at the time there was nothing surprising or absurd in this; we have evidence, however, that some years later Spinoza had become more sceptical. For in 1675, when his friend Dr. Schaller had written to him from Paris, describing some similar process, Spinoza replied almost bluntly that he had no mind to repeat the experiment, and felt quite sure that no gold had been produced which was not there before.[22]

In 1670 was published the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," of which I give the title from an English translation (London, 1689):-

> A Treatise partly theological and partly political, containing some few discourses to prove that the Liberty of Philosophizing (that is, making use of Natural Reason) may be allowed without any prejudice to Piety, or to the Peace of any Commonwealth; and that the Loss of Public Peace and Religion itself must necessarily follow, when such a Liberty of Reasoning is taken away.

The final thesis of the book is that "In a free commonwealth it should be lawful for every man to think what he will and speak what he thinks." And little more than two centuries ago, in the freest country in Europe, this opinion was put forth without the name of the author, and with the name of an imaginary printer at Hamburg, and had to be gradually led up to by an investigation of the principles of Scriptural

[21] Ep. XLV. Lewes, Hist. Phil., ii. 180 (3rd ed.).
[22] Ep. LXV. b. (Van Vloten, Supp., p 355.)

interpretation and the true provinces of theology and philosophy. To modern eyes the introduction looks much bolder than the conclusion. I forbear to say more of the contents and character of the work, as Mr. Matthew Arnold has already given an admirable account of it in his essay on "Spinoza and the Bible."

The opposition which Spinoza doubtless expected was not long in showing itself. Early in 1671 Spinoza writes to a friend not named:—

> When Professor N. N.[23] lately saw me, he told me, among other things, he had heard that my "Theologico-Political Treatise" was translated into Dutch, and that a person whose name he did not know was on the point of printing the translation. I therefore earnestly entreat you to inquire diligently into this matter, and stop the printing if it can be done. This request is not from me alone, but also from many of my friends and acquaintance, who would be sorry to see the book prohibited, as it certainly will be if it appears in Dutch.[24]

The book was, in fact, formally condemned some time after; it does not appear exactly when, but it must have been before 1673, in which year no less than three editions appeared at Amsterdam with entirely false titles, purporting to be works on medicine or history. It is hardly needful to say that it was also put on the Roman Index, and in that catalogue it may still be seen in a very mixed company.

In the same year a Doctor Lambert van Velthuysen sent to Spinoza through a common friend a long letter, which repeated in violent language all the current topics against the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," and finally charged the writer with covertly teaching atheism. This fashion of controversy survives to our own day, and has been improved upon. We have invented the term *materialist*, which makes a fine gradation possible. When we want to say in a short and decided form that we disagree with a man's philosophical opinions, we call him a materialist. If we wish to add to this that the disagreement rests on theological grounds also, we call him an atheist.

Spinoza, having a fancy for the exact use of words, did not like these controversial amenities, and replied (though it was unwillingly that he replied at all) more sharply than was usual with him; he obviously thought the criticism almost too perverse to have been made in good faith. But here too we may note his even temper and peaceable disposition. The letter ends thus: —

> I do not think you will find anything in this which can be considered too harsh in manner towards my critic. But if anything does so appear to you, pray strike it out, or alter it if you think fit. Whoever he may be, I have no wish to exasperate him and make enemies by my work; in fact, since this is a common result of discussions like the present, I could hardly

[23] The name is deliberately suppressed by the editors of the "*Opera Posthuma*."
[24] Ep. XLVII.

> prevail on myself to write this answer; nor should I have prevailed on myself, unless I had promised you.[25]

Nevertheless, Van Velthuysen and Spinoza were afterwards on friendly terms. One of the latest of Spinoza's letters is addressed to Van Velthuysen, and relates to a project of publishing some notes and explanations to the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," including, it seems, this very correspondence, or something founded on it. The letter is a model of literary courtesy and good feeling, and as such is worth giving.

> I am surprised at our friend Neustadt having told you that I thought of replying to the various writings against my treatise which have been published, and intended to include your MS. in the number. I am sure I never intended to refute any of my opponents, for none of them have seemed to me worth answering. All I remember to have said to Mr. Neustadt is that I purposed to publish some notes explaining the more difficult passages of the treatise, and to add to these your MS. And my answer, if I had your leave for so doing. This I desired him to ask of you, and added that in case you should be unwilling to grant it on the score of certain expressions in the answer being rather severe, you should be at full liberty to strike out or alter them. Meanwhile I have no cause of offence against Mr. N.; but I thought it well to show you the real state of the case, so that, if I cannot obtain your leave, I might at any rate make it clear that I had no intention of publishing your MS. against your will. I believe, indeed, it may be done without any risk to your reputation, if your name is not affixed to it; but I will do nothing unless you grant me leave and license to publish it. But I am free to confess you would do me a far greater favor if you would set down the arguments with which you think you can attack my treatise; and this I most heartily beseech you to do. There is no one whose arguments I should be more glad to consider; for I am aware that your only motive is affection for the truth, and I know the candor of your mind; in the name of which I again entreat you not to decline giving yourself this trouble.

Van Velthuysen afterwards expanded his letter into one of the many answers to Spinoza's treatise that were published in the next few years. In 1674 Spinoza mentions that he had seen an answer to the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," written by a professor at Utrecht, in a bookseller's window, but on looking into it found it not worth reading, much less answering. "So there I left the book and its author. I smiled inwardly as I considered how the most ignorant of men are everywhere the boldest and the most ready to write books."

In 1672 occurred the one striking incident of Spinoza's life after his excommunication. The public misfortunes of that year, the French invasion of the Netherlands, the outbreak of popular discontent, and the massacre of the brothers De Witt by the infuriated mob of the Hague, belong to general history. Spinoza was a personal friend of John de Witt's, had accepted a small pension from him, and may

[25] Epp. XLVIII., XLIX.

through his means have taken some part in politics. He was moved by this event, it is said, so much beyond his wont, that he could hardly be restrained from expressing his indignation in public at the risk of his life. Shortly afterwards the Prince of Condé, being then in command of the French army, invited Spinoza to his headquarters at Utrecht. His only motive appears to have been a genuine desire to make the philosophers acquaintance. The invitation was accepted, and Spinoza betook himself to Utrecht with a safe-conduct. Condé, however, had in the mean time been called away, and Spinoza went home without seeing him, having turned a deaf ear to the suggestion of the French officers who entertained him that he might probably insure a pension from their king if he would dedicate some work to him. On Spinoza's return to the Hague sinister rumors got abroad concerning his journey, and Spinoza's landlord was for a time in fear that the mob would attack and storm the house for the purpose of seizing him as a spy.

Spinoza, however, comforted his host with these words:—

> Fear nothing on my account, I can easily justify myself; there are people enough, and of chief men in the country too, who well know the motives of, my journey. But, whatever come of it, so soon as the crowd make the least noise at your door, I will go out and make straight for them, though they should serve me as they have done the unhappy De Witts. I am a good republican, and have never had any aim but the honor and welfare of the State.

The danger passed off, but Spinoza's conduct under it is none the less worthy of admiration; and the incident has its value in the light it throws on the general esteem in which he then stood. For the consciousness, not merely of an innocent purpose, but of a character above the possibility of rational suspicion, was necessary to make Spinoza's visit to the French headquarters prudent or justifiable; and the authorities of his own country would assuredly never have consented to it had they not felt absolute confidence that the public good would in no way suffer by it.

In 1673 Spinoza received a courteous letter from Professor Fabritius, of Heidelberg, who was commanded by Charles Lewis, the Elector Palatine, to offer him the chair of philosophy at that university. This letter contained the following sentence: "You will have the largest freedom of speech in philosophy, which the prince is confident you will not misuse to disturb the established religion." It seems by no means unlikely that this condition was inserted merely as a matter of form. The elector probably knew the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*;" and if he seriously meant to impose restrictions, he would have laid down something much more definite. Spinoza, however, answered thus:—

> Had it ever been my desire to occupy a chair in any faculty, I could have wished for no other than that which the Most Serene Elector Palatine offers me by your hands: and especially on account of that freedom in philosophy which the prince is pleased to grant, to say nothing of the desire I have long entertained to live under the rule of a prince whose wisdom is the admiration of all men. But since I have never been minded to give public

> lectures, I cannot persuade myself to accept even this splendid opportunity, though I have given long consideration to it. For I reflect, in the first place, that I must give up philosophical research if I am to find time for teaching a class. I reflect, moreover, that I cannot tell within what bounds I ought to confine that philosophical freedom you mention, in order to escape any charge of attempting to disturb the established religion. Religious dissensions arise not so much from the ardor of men's zeal for religion itself, as from their various dispositions and love of contradiction, which leads them into a habit of decrying and condemning everything, however justly it be said. Of this I have already had experience in my private and solitary life; much more then should I have to fear it after mounting to this honorable condition. You see, therefore, that I am not holding back in the hope of some better post, but for mere love of quietness, which I think I can in some measure secure if I abstain from lecturing in public. Wherefore I heartily beseech you to desire the Most Serene Elector that I may be allowed to consider further of this matter.[26]

In 1674 Spinoza had an amusing discussion with a person whose name is withheld on the existence of ghosts. In his first answer Spinoza gives an exquisite turn of politeness to his incredulity. He was delighted, he says, to get his friend's letter and have news of him.

> Some people might think it a bad omen that ghosts should be the occasion of your writing to me; but I find something much better in it when I consider that not only real things, but even trifles of the imagination, may thus do me good service.

The correspondence continues, on Spinoza' s part, in a tone of courteous banter. At last his friend attempts to overpower him with the authority of ancient philosophers. The reply to this last argument has a distinct importance, as showing what were Spinoza's notions about the philosophical systems of Greece.

> The authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates has not much weight with me. I should have been surprised, indeed, if you had brought forward Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius, or any of the supporters of the doctrine of atoms. It is no wonder that those who devised occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms, and a thousand other fond things, should have imagined ghosts and apparitions, and given ear to old wives to diminish the authority of Democritus, whose fame they so envied that they burnt all his books. If you choose to believe these, how can you deny the miracles of the Virgin and all the saints, recorded by so many renowned philosophers, historians, and theologians, of whom one hundred can be produced for one that has recorded a ghost?[27]

It is obvious that Spinoza's knowledge of Greek philosophy was slight and at second hand; but it is significant that his sympathy, so far as his knowledge went, was all with Democritus and the atomic school. The sort of metaphysic which in our own time is always clamoring against supposed encroachments by physical science would have found no favor in his eyes.

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[26] Ep. LIV.
[27] Ep. LX.

In 1674 he wrote an important letter explaining the difference between his view and Descartes' on free will.

> I call a thing free if it exists and acts merely from the necessary laws of its own nature, but constrained if it is determined by something else to exist and act in a certain determinate way. Thus God exists necessarily, and yet freely, because he exists by the necessity of his own nature alone. So God freely understands himself and everything else, because it follows solely from the necessity of his own nature that he must understand everything. You see then that I make freedom consist not in a free decision of the will, but in free necessity. . . .
>
> Imagine, if you can, that a stone, while its motion continues, is conscious, and knows that so far as it can it endeavors to persist in its motion. This stone, since it is conscious only of its own endeavor and deeply interested therein (minime indifferens), will believe that it is perfectly free and continues in motion for no other reason than that it so wills. Now such is this freedom of man's will which every one boasts of possessing, and which consists only in this, that men are aware of their own desires and ignorant of the causes by which those desires are determined. So an infant thinks his appetite for milk is free; so a child in anger thinks his will is for revenge, in fear that it is for flight. Again, a drunkard thinks he speaks of his free will things which, when sober, he would fain not have spoken.[28]

In 1675 the correspondence with Oldenburg is resumed.[29] By this time the "Ethics" were completely written, and Oldenburg exhorts him to publish the book, though not with such pressing earnestness as he used in former years. He wishes to have some copies sent over to England, and will undertake to dispose of them; yet he wishes their consignment to him not to be talked of. His temper had probably become less valiant since he read the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*."

Spinoza writes, in answer to Oldenburg,[30] that he did go to Amsterdam to see about printing the "Ethics." But the rumor had gone before him that he had in the press an utterly atheistic book; and certain theologians had actually commenced proceedings against him. The Cartesians, who had by this time a respectable reputation to preserve, were only too glad to find a convenient and edifying occasion for disclaiming Spinoza, and joined eagerly in the cry against him. He determined accordingly to put off the publication; and the result was that the "Ethics" did not appear in his lifetime. The work had a certain private circulation, however, among Spinoza's friends. In the same year, 1675, we have a series of letters raising sundry questions on the most abstruse points in the system. The objections here stated are by far the most acute of those which Spinoza had to encounter from his various correspondents, and it gave him no small trouble to answer them. He does not,

[28] Ep. LXII., §§ 2-4. The latest editor of the letters objects to Bruder's division into paragraphs as pedantic: a principle which, if consistently carried out, would make it impossible to give a reference to any passage in most of the classics, to say nothing of the chapters and verses in the Bible.
[29] Ep. XVII., *et seq*.
[30] Ep. XIX.

indeed, give a complete answer, and all but admits that he cannot. The chief part in these letters is now assigned to Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhausen, a young German nobleman, who was intimate with both Leibnitz and Spinoza, and afterwards became a member of the French Academy of Sciences, and was distinguished in mathematics and physics, and most chiefly by advances in optics. In the construction of lenses, in particular, he arrived at brilliant results; and one may guess that this special study was the common ground on which his acquaintance with Spinoza was first formed.[31]

In 1676 Spinoza received an extraordinary letter dated from Florence, and written by one Albert Burgh, identified by Van Vloten's plausible conjecture with the fellow-lodger whose facilities of intercourse with Spinoza Simon de Vries had envied, and of whose temper and capacities Spinoza had expressed the doubtful opinion already quoted. He now informed Spinoza that he had been received into the Church of Rome, and proceeded, to denounce with all the zeal of a proselyte the profane philosophy he had abandoned. He tells Spinoza that all his learning is merely chimerical, and laments that he should suffer himself to be so deceived by the devil. He asks, with delightful simplicity:—

> How do you know that your philosophy is the best of all that are, or have been, or will be taught in the world? Have you examined all the ancient and modern systems of philosophy which are taught here, in India, and all over the face of the earth? And even if you have, how do you know you have chosen the right one?

Spinoza framed the obvious retort in the easiest and most effective manner by repeating the convert's own words:—

> How do you know that your teachers are the best of all those who teach, or have taught, or will teach other systems of religion? Have you examined all the ancient and modern systems of religion which are taught here, in India, and all over the face of the earth? And even if you have, how do you know you have chosen the right one?

Burgh's letter runs to a great length, and is a curious specimen of unrefined theological amenity. I can give only a condensed extract as a specimen:—

> Do not flatter yourself [he cries] with the reflection that the Calvinists, or so-called Reformers, the Lutherans, the Mennonites, the Socinians, etc., cannot refute your doctrine. All those poor creatures, as I have already said, are in as wretched a state as you, and are sitting along with you in the shadow of death.
>
> Worm and ashes and food for worms that you are, how dare you set up for knowing better than all the Church? What foundation have you for this rash, insane, deplorable, accursed

[31] Tschirnhausen has received, I think, hard measure from Van Vloten and others for the unacknowledged use of Spinoza's work in his "Medicina Mentis." Not only was it the habit of the time to be careless in this duty, but Tschirnhausen may not unreasonably have been of opinion that his only way to secure a fair hearing for Spinoza's ideas was to conceal their true authorship. It is certain, however, that he gave offence to both Huygens and Leibnitz by appropriating, without acknowledgment, unpublished ideas which they had communicated to him (Van Vloten, *Benedictus de Spinoza*, App. III.).

> arrogance? What business have you to judge of mysteries which Catholics themselves declare to be incomprehensible?

One of his arguments is that it is presumptuous to disbelieve in alchemy and ghosts because Julius Cæsar would probably not have believed a prophecy of gunpowder. Finally, he threatens Spinoza with eternal damnation if he is not convinced. The immortal discourse delivered by Brother Peter in the "Tale of a Tub," which ends with invoking similar consequences on those who offer to believe otherwise, is hardly a caricature of this effusion.

Spinoza's answer,[32] which I have anticipated in part, was much the sharpest he ever wrote. As far as argument went he had no serious task; the letter contains, however, some striking passages. "As for your argument about the common consent of multitudes, the unbroken succession of the Church, etc., that is just the story I know of old from the Pharisees: for they produce their multitudes of witnesses with no less confidence than the adherents of Rome." They are the most ancient, the most persistent, the most obstinate of all the Churches; and if martyrs are evidence, they have more to show than any other. Even in ecclesiastical discipline, he says, Rome is surpassed by the Mohammedans, for they have had no schisms. This seems a rash statement for a writer versed in Jewish philosophy, which abounds in allusions to the different Mohammedan sects. It is, however, true in the sense that there has been in Islam no great visible rupture like the Reformation in Europe.

Of Spinoza's habits in daily life we know just so much as to make us regret that we do not know more. In outward appearance he was unpretending, but not careless. His way of living was exceedingly modest and retired; often he did not leave his room for many days together. He was likewise almost incredibly frugal his expenses sometimes amounted only to a few pence a day. But it must not be supposed that he shared the opinion of those who profess to despise man and the world. There was nothing ascetic in his frugality, nothing misanthropic in his solitude. He kept down his expenses simply in order to keep them within his means and his means remained slender because he did not choose to live at other people's charges. He used to say of himself that he was like a snake with its tail in its mouth, just making both ends meet. Doubtless he was indifferent as to money and the world's goods, but with the genuine indifference which is utterly removed from the affected indifference of the cynic. A man to whom he had lent two hundred florins — which must have been a considerable sum in proportion to Spinoza's income — became bankrupt. Spinoza' s remark on hearing of it was this "Then I must lessen my expenses to make up the loss; that is the price I pay for equanimity." In like manner he kept himself retired not because he was unsociable, but because he found retirement necessary for his work. There is ample evidence that he was none of those who hate or disdain the intercourse of mankind. He kept up, as we have seen, an extensive correspondence, of which we must regret that so little has been

[32] Ep. LXXIV.

preserved. He was free and pleasant in familiar conversation with the people of his house. On Sundays he would talk with them of the sermon they had heard, and would praise the sound learning and morality of their worthy Lutheran pastor, a certain Dr. Cordes who was succeeded in his office by Spinoza's biographer Colerus. Thus he won the esteem and affection not only of his philosophic friends, but of the simple folk among whom he lived; and such affection, as M. Renan has well said, is in truth the most precious of all.

Thus he showed in action the ideal of life set forth in those writings which he could not venture to publish in his lifetime, and which were supposed to strike at the foundations of religion and morality. And what is the rule proposed for the guidance of conduct by this man whose opinions have been called abominable, execrable, and atheistic? In one word, it is this: to use the world with cheerfulness and content, not abusing it, and remembering that the good of mankind consists in doing good to one another. Here are some of his precepts: —

> Nothing is more useful to man than man; men can desire nothing more excellent for their welfare than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all should make up as it were one mind and one body, and all together strive to maintain their welfare to the best of their power, and all together seek the common good of all. Therefore reasonable men desire no good for themselves which they do not also desire for other men, and so they are righteous, faithful, and honorable.[33]

Again he says that discontent and melancholy are good for no man: that it is the part of a wise man to use the world and take all reasonable pleasure in it. It is good to refresh oneself not only with moderate food and drink, but with pleasant prospects, music, the theatre, and other things which every man may enjoy without harm to his neighbor.[34] In the same way, though his own life was most quiet and sedentary, he strongly points out the advantage of being many-sided (as we should now say) in both mind and body, and thereby being apt to receive new impressions and put forth new activities.[35] This is one of the points, in which he curiously anticipates modern ideas about development and adaptation to one's environment.

He insists in the strongest terms on the importance of society to man's well-being.

> Society is imperfect [he says], but even as it is men get far more good than harm by it. Therefore let satirists laugh at men's affairs as much as they please, let theologians decry them, let misanthropes do their utmost to extol a rude and brutish life; but men will still find that their needs are best satisfied by each other's help, and that the dangers which surround them can be avoided only by joining their strength.[36]

Again he says:—

[33] Eth. iv. 18, schol.
[34] Ib. 45, schol. 2.
[35] Ib. 38.
[36] Ib. 35, schol.

> He who chooses to avenge wrong by returning hatred for it is assuredly miserable. But if a man strives to cast out hatred by love, he fights his fight in all joy and confidence, being able to withstand many foes as easily as one, and having no need to call on fortune for aid. As for those he conquers, they yield to him joyfully, and that not from failing strength, but because they are made stronger.[37]

Again:—

> The spirit of men is overcome, not by force of arms, but by love and high-mindedness.[38]

The following maxim contains a lofty refinement of morality, if one may so speak, to which it would be difficult to find a parallel even in Marcus Aurelius:-

> If a man wishes to help others by word or deed to the common enjoyment of the highest good, he shall first of all endeavor himself to win their love to him; but not to draw them into admiration of him, that a doctrine may be called after his name, nor in any manner to give cause for offence. Also in common talk he will avoid telling of men's faults, and will speak but sparingly of human weakness. But he will speak largely of mans excellence and power, and the means whereby it may be perfected; so that men may strive to live after the commandment of reason, so far as in them lies, being moved thereto not by fear or disgust, but in pure joyfulness.[39]

The mention of M. Aurelius suggests a parallel which I must note in passing, though I have not room to work it out. There is a singular coincidence between the ethical theory of Spinoza and that of the Stoics: I say coincidence, for Spinoza's slender acquaintance with Greek philosophy precludes the supposition of borrowing. The effort or impulse of self-preservation, which in his system is the mainspring of action, is really involved in the Stoic conception of "following nature." He holds that right action for man lies in the preservation — taken in the largest sense — of mankind not of the individual merely, because, as a matter of fact shown by experience, man is a social animal, and the welfare of the individual can be found only in society. He likewise constantly speaks of a *moral* life as equivalent to a life which is *reasonable* or according to reason. Both these positions are thoroughly Stoic. Nor are these the only resemblances.

Spinoza's health had been failing for some years before his death, and he was attacked by consumption, which possibly was aggravated by his work of glass-polishing. The last illness was short and almost sudden. It came on the 21st of February, I677. The day was a Sunday, and in the morning Spinoza had been talking to his hosts, Van der Spyck and his wife, as was his custom. His friend and physician, Lewis Meyer, came from Amsterdam at his request, and was alone with him at the last. When the people of the house came home in the afternoon, they found Spinoza dead.

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[37] Eth. iv. 46, schol.
[38] Ib. Appendix, cap. 11.
[39] Ib. Appendix, cap. 25.

Some time before this Spinoza had committed to Van der Spyck the trust of sending his unpublished papers to a bookseller at Amsterdam. This was duly fulfilled, and in the course of the same year the philosopher's posthumous works, including the "Ethics," appeared. They were received with even more violent opposition than the "Theologico-Political Treatise," and were forbidden by the States-General of Holland.[40]

Spinoza's first biographer, Colerus,[41] whose frank and honest admiration of Spinoza's personal character went along with a no less frank detestation of his philosophy, calls the "*Opera Posthuma*" abominable productions, and states that divers champions were providentially raised up to confute them, who had all the success they could desire. At this day there is probably no man living who has read these refutations, while the fame of Spinoza stands higher than ever.

He was an outcast from the synagogue, a stranger to the Church, a solitary thinker who cast his thought in difficult and startling forms. Notwithstanding all this, men of divers nations and of widely different opinions have joined together to do honor to the memory of Benedict de Spinoza, the philosopher whose genius has made him in some sort the founder of modern speculation, and the man who in modern times has given us the highest example of a true and perfect philosophic life.

It is impossible to attempt in this place any account of Spinoza's philosophy; and I may add that he is eminently one of those writers whose thought cannot be learned at second hand. It may be worth while, however, to give a very brief sketch of the manner in which his influence has risen and spread in modern times.

Spinoza very soon had eccentric followers as well as bitter enemies in his own country;[42] but in the European world of letters he was entirely misunderstood and neglected for the best part of a century. Leibnitz, the man most capable of doing him justice, preferred to take the opposite course, and he was ill-treated even by the people who might have been expected to take him up if only for the reason that he was hateful to theologians. He fared little better at the hands of Bayle and Voltaire than at the hands of orthodox apologists. To Lessing, the founder in some sort of German literature and criticism, belongs the credit of having seen and announced Spinoza's real worth. In a certain memorable conversation with Jacobi he said, in so many words, "There is no philosophy but the philosophy of Spinoza." This and much more came out after Lessing's death in a long correspondence between Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn, which finally degenerated into a

[40] June 20, 1678. The full text of the ordinance is given in Van der Linde's *Bibliografie*, No. 24.

[41] The Dutch original of his book (No. 88 in *Bibilografie*) is extremely scarce. There is one copy in the Royal Library at the Hague: the only other known one is, according to Dr. van der Linde, at Halle. The French version by which it is commonly known, and which is often taken for the original, is also scarce, but has been several times reprinted. The last reprint is in Dr. Ginsberg's edition of Spinoza's correspondence (Leipzig, 1876).

[42] See Van der Linde's *Spinoza, seine Lehre und dessen erste Nachwirkungen in Holland* (Göttingen, 1862), and M. Paul Janet's article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for July 15, 1876.

controversy. After the report of that one conversation, the record of all this is now of little interest; from these, however, and from other letters preserved among Lessing's works, the fact comes out that Lessing thoroughly understood Spinoza, and had grasped the leading points more firmly than many of Spinoza ‘s later critics.

Meanwhile Goethe too had found out Spinoza for himself, and he has recorded how the study of the "Ethics" had a critical effect on the development of his character.[43] And his statement is fully borne out by the witness of his mature work. Goethe's poems are full of the spirit of Spinoza; not that you can often lay your finger on this or that idea and give a reference to this or that proposition in the "Ethics," but there is a Spinozistic atmosphere about all his deeper thoughts. There is a set of speculative poems, "*Gott und Welt*," which gives the most striking instances; but the same ideas are woven into all parts of Goethe's work, and may be found alike in romance, tragedy, lyrics, and epigrams.

The influence thus started in philosophy and literature spread rapidly. Kant's great work in philosophy was independent of it; but a strong current of Spinozism set in immediately after Kant, and acted powerfully on his successors. Fichte, though his system widely departs from Spinoza's, had obviously mastered his philosophy and felt the intellectual fascination of it; and many of his metaphysical ideas are simply taken from Spinoza. Hegel said, "You are much of a Spinozist or no philosopher at all." In like manner Schelling said that no one could arrive at philosophical truth who had not once at least plunged into the depths of Spinozism. Novalis, Schleiermacher, Heine, and many others have spoken of Spinoza in words of enthusiastic praise. There is in Germany a whole recent literature of exposition and discussion about him, which is fast increasing, and to give an account of which would itself need a monograph.

In France the prevailing tone of philosophy has not been one that accords well with Spinoza; but he has met there with keen and intelligent criticism, which is the next best thing to intelligent admiration; and the beautiful address lately delivered by M. Renan at the Hague (besides the serious attention given to the subject by M. Paul Janet and others) is a sufficient proof that Spinoza has now at least found a response in the highest thought of France.

In England Coleridge, in this as in other things the advanced guard of the peaceful invasion of German culture and philosophy, spread the name of Spinoza, and much of his ideas, among the friends whom he delighted by his conversation. He used to say that the three great works since the introduction of Christianity were Bacon's "*Novum Organum*," Spinoza's "*Ethics*," and Kant's "*Kritik*" Coleridge's own position as to Spinoza was something like Jacobi's; he admired and honored him without accepting his teaching. It may well be that some part of the nature-worship of Wordsworth's poetry, which has been a most important element in our later English

[43] *Aus meinem Leben*, Book 14.

literature, was derived through Coleridge from Spinoza. But we must come down many years later before we find any certain manifestation of this part of Coleridge's influence. Those who have spoken of Spinoza to English readers as he deserves to be spoken of are still among us and working for us. We have Mr. G. H. Lewes's various articles and writings on Spinoza, to which he has given a finished form in his "History of Philosophy."' We have Mr. Froude's essay on Spinoza, perhaps the best general account of his doctrine which has been given in our language for those who do not make philosophy their special study. There is Mr. Matthew Arnold's admirable monograph on the "*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," whose only fault is that he has not completed it by a companion piece on the "Ethics." There are Mr. Huxley's contributions to pure philosophy, which do not treat of Spinoza directly, but have done much to put Spinoza's fundamental ideas into shapes adapted to the present state of our knowledge. The same may be said of Mr. G. H. Lewes's most recent work in "Problems of Life and Mind." Nor are other signs wanting of an active and increasing interest in Spinoza both at home and abroad.

It has been said of Spinoza by an able and not unfair critic (M. Saisset), that his theory was after all but a system, which has passed away like all other systems, never to come back. It is true that Spinoza did not found a school, and had few or no disciples in the proper sense. It would be difficult to name any one who ever formally accepted his system as a whole. But the worth of a philosopher to the world is measured not by the number of people who accept his system, or by the failure of criticism to detect logical flaws in it, but by the life and strength of the ideas he sets stirring in men's minds. Systems are the perishable body of philosophy, ideas are the living soul. Judged by this test, Spinoza stands on a height of eminence such as very few other thinkers have attained.

Colofon

Benedict de Spinoza by F. Pollock

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