

Jingo and Quaker: Odd Allies in an Oxfordshire 'Colony'

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This article looks at two improbable 'allies', Reginald Brabazon, 12th Earl of Meath (1841-1929) and the Quaker Edward Pease Sturge (1872-1951), who, in the early 20th century shared a common interest in the Wallingford Farm Training Colony,² Oxfordshire.

Colonies

For most readers today, the word 'colony' conjures up a distant location, probably tropical, where a minority of pale-skinned Europeans rule over an indigenous dark-skinned majority. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the word was commonly used to describe one of a number of agricultural, educational and/or correctional establishments in England (less usually in Scotland, Wales or Ireland). The Royal Philanthropic Society, founded in 1788 to address the problem of London's homeless and unemployed, set up one such 'colony' in 1848, at Redhill in Surrey. Evidence for British interest in the concept and its European origins around that time comes from a paper given by a London barrister to the Royal Statistical Society entitled *The Farm School System of the Continent and its applicability to the preventive and reformatory education of pauper and criminal children in England and Wales*.³ Among other 'colonies', one of the more colourful, in that same county of Surrey, was the 'Colony for Inebriate Women' at Duxbury, founded in the 1890s by Lady Henry Somerset, the wealthy survivor of a notorious Victorian marital dispute.

The beginning of that decade had seen the publication of the book which would become the best known manifesto for the inland colony. This was William (General)

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² Later known as 'Farm Training School' and eventually 'Turners Court'.

³ Joseph Fletcher, 1852 (London: James Ridgway).

Booth's *In Darkest England – and the Way Out*.⁴ The frontispiece, often since reproduced, shows the poor and dispossessed being rescued from the swamp of misery, vice, drunkenness, crime and so on by the Salvation Army's 'City Colonies' – 'casualty clearing stations', the General also termed them; cleaned up and refreshed in body and spirit, the involuntary 'colonists' then move on to the 'Farm Colonies' in the countryside, and finally to the 'Overseas Colonies' – Britain's Dominions.

Booth's initial idea was to acquire cheaply (preferably for nothing) the strips of unused land that he noticed alongside the railway track as he travelled the country and which he believed the unemployed could bring into economic use. Unsurprisingly, that idea was quickly abandoned, and in 1891 the Salvation Army bought 800 acres (320 hectares) at Hadleigh, in Essex, and set up its agricultural training colony.⁵

Three years after Booth's best-seller, another book appeared. Entitled *Colony of Mercy*,⁶ its author was Julie Sutter, daughter of a Scots missionary based in Germany. She had been impressed by the work of Pastor Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, formerly a Prussian army chaplain, who ran a large colony known as Bethel, at Bielefeld. Sutter's book, although more sober and less well known than Booth's call to arms, nevertheless caught the attention of a number of non-conformist (mainly Congregationalist) clergy in London; prominent among them were J.B. Paton, originally from Nottingham, and J.F.B. Tinling,⁷ who convened a public meeting in 1894 at which Julie Sutter was the key speaker. The outcome of the meeting was the foundation of a new charity called the National Union for Christian Service (NUCSS, later shortened to Christian Service Union – CSU). Its stated aim was to replicate the Bethel colony in England, take unemployed men and boys off the streets, train them in agriculture with the help of volunteer lay 'Brothers', and despatch them to make good overseas.

Tinling, Paton and their Congregationalist colleagues needed to widen the charity's base, bring in high-profile supporters, and raise funds. Tinling wrote to Sutter,

⁴ 1890 (London: Sampson, Low). Booth chose the title to mimic Stanley's best-selling 'In Darkest Africa'.

⁵ Although much of the land has either been sold, or is farmed by others, the Salvation Army maintains a (non-residential) training establishment at Hadleigh, with an excellent catering facility, open to the public.

⁶ 1893 (London: Hodder & Stoughton).

⁷ As is not unknown, even among non-conformist clerical gentlemen, some coolness later arose between Paton and Tinling as to which should take more credit for seeing Sutter's ideas put into practice.

suggesting she hand over royalties from her book, but without success. The NUCSS was, however, able to recruit a good number of other non-conformists, some Anglican clergy (including bishops), together with land-owners and businessmen. Having raised a small amount of capital, the first colony that the NUCSS set up, in 1895, was, like the two examples above, in Surrey, at Lingfield. Like its German model, it took in not only the unemployed, but orphaned or 'difficult' boys and epileptic children (for whom there was little other provision in England at the time). After a few years the numbers of epileptics had grown so substantially that the Lingfield colony was devoted entirely to their care, and the NUCSS decided to open a second establishment, dedicated to the training of young males.

In 1911 the charity bought the 515 acre (280 hectare) estate known as Turners Court, some three miles from Wallingford, and the Wallingford Farm Training Colony was officially opened (by the Lord Mayor of London) in 1913. Apart from changes of name, the structure, size, aims and oversight of the Wallingford Colony changed considerably during its 80 year existence (it finally closed in 1991) but in essence it was a residential home devoted to housing and training boys (and, initially, young men) who were unemployed, homeless, orphans or otherwise 'difficult.' Up to the end of the 1920s the majority of boys were referred (and paid for) by Boards of Guardians; after that the typical Colony resident was a boy who had been placed in the care of local authority Children's or Social Service departments, sometimes after referral by magistrates. On average, throughout its existence, boys spent between one and two years at the Colony; at its height up to 300 'colonists' were housed there.

Allies

Our two 'odd allies', Reginald Brabazon, Earl of Meath, and plain Edward Sturge, exemplify extreme politico-philosophical wings of the mass of supporters garnered in by the NUCSS and cajoled into financing the Wallingford Colony. In 1912 an appeal was launched for £20,000 (equivalent perhaps to around £1.5 million today) to purchase Turners Court and put up the Colony's first permanent buildings (the first colonists had to make do with old farm buildings or wooden huts). Both Reginald Brabazon and Edward

Sturge would contribute financially then and in later years, the latter almost certainly the more generous of the two, but our interest in them lies less in their financial contribution (both were wealthy men by the standards of the day) than in the views they held and (more particularly in the case of Meath) publicly expressed, and the philosophies they represented.

Reginald Brabazon, who became first President of the NUCSS at the end of the 1890s, very much the charity's public face and a highly political figure, was born in 1841, second son of the 11th Earl of Meath; his elder brother died young, Reginald inheriting the title in 1887. Educated at Eton, fifty years later he recalled the impact of that school's Spartan regime:

'I remember on one occasion – a very snowy day, a splendid master, by name Balston, whom we all loved . . . saw some boys brushing the snow from their knees. He stopped . . . and let fly at the boys: "You young worms! Do you call yourselves British boys? And you can't stand a little snow on your knees! Shame on you! Your fathers are the rulers of England, and your forefathers have made England what she is now. Do you imagine that if they had minded a little snow that Canada would ever have been added to the Empire?"'⁸

Brabazon inherited sizeable estates in Ireland and England, adding control of further property through his marriage to the daughter of the Earl of Lauderdale. He entered the British diplomatic service, serving in Frankfurt and Berlin during the Franco-Prussian war, and then in Paris, where he and his wife arrived 'with the fires of the Commune still smouldering.'⁹ His memoirs (written half a century later) suggest some regret at his having missed the excitement of the street fighting during the suppression of the Commune. Other stories of communard *petrolleuses* setting fire to the houses of the terrified Parisian bourgeoisie certainly helped inform Brabazon's robust reaction to leftist demonstrations like the 1886 street riots in London, and his vocal opposition to socialism of all shades.

⁸ Meath, *Memories of the 19th Century*, 1923 (London: John Murray) p.19.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.51.

His biographer notes that both in Germany and then in Paris Brabazon acquired a 'feeling of resentment towards the Germans for their arrogance and hostility and premeditated coolness to the [British] Embassy staff' that would last the rest of his life.¹⁰ An anecdote included in Brabazon's own memoirs illustrates both this antipathy to Prussian militarism and his own neo-feudal view of how aristocrats should behave at a time of war between nation-states. During the German invasion of France, he writes indignantly, the French nobleman, the Marquis de Tolosan, invited some German officers to dine at his chateau; they accepted, but insisted that the Marquis could not sit with them, but must eat below with the servants: 'Is there any nation except the Germans whose officers could be capable of such insulting behaviour?'¹¹

In 1873 Brabazon was offered the post of second secretary at the embassy in Athens, but turned it down, he said at the insistence of his wife's family who thought that Athens was a remote backwater and that he should concentrate on running his estates. He then divided his time between his Irish lands, and political and philanthropic work in London. With his wife, he founded the Brabazon Employment Society (1881) to provide interesting occupation for those who 'from age or ill health are forced to pass the weary hours idly in our workhouses and infirmary wards.'¹² He became a London County Council alderman and campaigned, both within the Council and in his writing, for more open spaces in working-class areas, cleaner streets, public wash houses, and compulsory physical and technical training for the young.

As Earl of Meath, however, his primary passion, and the one which commended him to the NUCSS' founders, was the promotion of the British Empire, the need to educate the young in its glories and to take every step to defend it against those whom he overtly identified as its foes – the Germans. 'His desire was that . . . the children of the Empire should grow up with the thought of its claim upon their remembrance and their service.'¹³ Between 1890 and 1914 Meath campaigned for the Union flag to be flown

¹⁰ J.O. Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth & Empire', 1970, *Journal of Contemporary History* 5:4 p.97-111.

¹¹ Meath, 1923, p.192. Pastor von Bodelschwingh, as a German army padre, had also been in Paris, but Brabazon did not meet him until later (see below).

¹² Ibid, p.222.

¹³ Duke of Connaught, at the unveiling of Meath's memorial statue in Lancaster Gate, 25 May 1934 (quoted Springhall, op cit, p.97).

from public buildings and for a school holiday to celebrate the Queen's accession, ' . . . the scholars meeting in the morning . . . to sing the National Anthem and to salute the flag.' After Victoria's death he continued to speak and write in favour of the observance of 'Empire' Day, with eventual success: by the 1920s some 80,000 schools throughout the Empire were said to be observing this kind of ceremony.¹⁴

In the interest of stiffening the Empire's military sinews Meath founded the Lads Drill Association and the Duty and Discipline Movement; the aims of the latter were given as 'to combat softness, slackness, indifference and indiscipline' and 'to give reasonable support to all legitimate authority.' Effectively a military wing of the Scouting movement, the DADM council included Baden-Powell among its members and the HQs of the two organisations were in the same London street.

In 1907 Meath engineered a House of Lords¹⁵ amendment to a Government Bill which would have permitted the use of public funds to pay for military training in schools; the Liberal administration reversed the amendment in the Commons and Meath was never able to get it reinstated. Through the 1900s he continued to campaign for compulsory military service in Britain; after conscription was introduced in 1916 he spoke vehemently in the Lords against conscientious objectors, whom he lumped together with German spies and traitors. He edited the *Soldier's Pocket Companion*,¹⁶ a small volume designed to be carried into the trenches and containing a mixture of imperial propaganda, practical instruction (useful phrases in French and German; how to mend a field telephone) and religious comfort.

Meath himself was, of course, too old for military service, as was our second 'odd ally'; apart from that they would seem to have had nothing in common. Edward P Sturge differed from Reginald Brabazon both in substance and in the relative lack of surviving evidence about his work and beliefs. Where Meath left substantial published works, including two sizeable volumes of memoirs, together with articles and public speeches, Sturge appears to have published virtually nothing himself and is represented only in those papers that survive from the NUCSS and other organisations he supported, plus a

¹⁴ Now Commonwealth Day, 9 March, and considerably less visible than Meath would have wished.

¹⁵ Although an Irish peer, Meath sat in the Lords as Baron Chaworth (see Springhall, op cit).

¹⁶ 1915 (London: Church Army/Crosby Lockwood).

couple of privately published works of family history and some scanty references in sectoral journals.

The Sturge family, originally farmers not far from Bristol, had been Quakers since the mid-17th century. In the next century, branches of the family settled in the West Midlands, and by the 1820s Sturges were substantial corn merchants in Birmingham. Among Edward's immediate ancestors was Joseph Sturge, anti-slavery campaigner, supporter of electoral reform and universal suffrage in the 1830s and, most significantly, a pacifist. Towards the end of the Napoleonic wars, when Quakers were permitted to opt out of militia service on payment of a fine (the money hypothecated to providing a substitute) Joseph Sturge refused to pay, was convicted and had two ewes and six lambs confiscated, although his biographers suggest that Joseph's stand helped speed up the abolition of the tax on Quakers. In January 1854 Joseph Sturge was one of a group of Quakers who set off for St. Petersburg (travelling by sledge the final sector from Riga) to meet the Tsar, with a view to averting war between Russia and Britain. The Tsar is said to have received them politely but the mission failed.¹⁷

Edward Sturge displayed all the typical Quaker, middle-class, quietist views and attitudes. He was educated at a Quaker school in Somerset where the regime was probably scarcely less Spartan than at Eton, but where the boys – and girls: the school was, nominally at least, co-educational¹⁸ – would certainly not have been harangued about the glories of Empire as was Reginald Brabazon; the young Edward's main achievement seems to have been in woodwork. He then started work as a joiner and cabinet maker before working for the Newcastle firm of shipbrokers and shipbuilders, Wigham Richardson. Finally he joined his brother Arthur working in marine insurance in London, eventually becoming a Lloyds underwriter in 1913.

Apart from his business interests, which flourished, Sturge was a supporter of such typically small-scale and unostentatious activities as penny banks and lending libraries. He helped fund and worked actively for the (Quaker) Adult Schools in

¹⁷ Alex Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge & the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* 1987 (London: Croom Helm); Elizabeth Sturge, *The Sturges and Early Quakerism* 1930 (privately published).

¹⁸ The present author can vouch for the school's tradition of asceticism surviving to the 1940s. Although Quaker schools were pioneers in co-education, in the 19th century boys and girls lived, studied and ate in separate wings of the building.

Birmingham, then in London for the Bedford Institute (later known as Quaker Action) an association providing education, mission churches and what was termed 'moral training', meaning essentially the preaching of temperance. Like Joseph Sturge before him, Edward was a life-long supporter of the National Temperance League, the Band of Hope Union, the Temperance Collegiate Association and similar bodies; when he died around half of the formal letters of condolence to Edward's widow appear to be from these and similar associations. Although temperance was not a main plank in the NUCSS's platform, distance from the nearest public house had been a factor in choosing the site of the Wallingford Colony.

Much of Edward Sturge's educational and social work took place in London's East End, at the Hoxton Hall, a former music hall bought by the Society of Friends in 1893 and used as an alcohol-free social club and education centre. Sturge was a regular visitor and speaker at meetings there, notably during the Second World War, when the hall became a refuge for local residents bombed out of their homes and Sturge 'valiantly continued to journey . . . through the blitz and the fly-bomb periods in order to encourage those bearing the brunt of the war situation.'¹⁹

Earlier, during the First World War, while Meath was composing his stirring advice to soldiers in the trenches, Sturge and his family took up the cause of the conscientious objectors (COs) to military service, including those convicted and imprisoned, Sturge being a regular visitor to COs in Wormwood Scrubs: there could hardly be a greater contrast with the bellicose exhortations which Meath contributed to the *Soldier's Pocket Companion*.

While Meath served as President of the Christian Service Union, rallying Anglican and Tory support and providing (fairly modest) funds, Sturge served either as Treasurer, chairman or committee member up to the time of his death in 1951. He also provided rather more by way of financial support: it was Sturge who paid for the Colony's first typewriter and its Warden's first motor car, and paid off the debts of a Warden who retired through ill-health during the Second World War. He contributed at

¹⁹ Obituary in *Hackney Gazette*, 21 Mar 1951. It was during a visit to Hoxton that Edward Sturge met with a street accident which resulted in his death.

least £1,000 towards a new building, named after him in 1945; Meath had never achieved that kind of recognition, although 'Sturge House', smallest of the Colony's residential blocks, proved a somewhat dubious memorial: by 1960 it was roundly condemned by civil servant inspectors as 'a most unpleasant and depressing bungalow. Sanitary accommodation is primitive.'²⁰

'Social Imperialism'

What kind of cause was it that could unite these two men, seemingly at opposite poles of the political/philosophical spectrum? (Not just these two, of course, but hundreds of other supporters of the NUCSS). Aside from nebulous thoughts of wanting to 'do something' about the poor and unemployed, the key feature of the NUCSS, able to appeal equally to Jingo and Quaker, militarist and pacifist, was its central policy of *emigration* to Britain's overseas Dominions.

By the time the NUCSS was formed, in 1894, emigration was widely accepted as a tool of social policy, reducing the numbers of unemployed and – especially since the 1880s – perceived as lessening the risk of social unrest and violence. A Colonization Society had been formed as early as 1830; Australia, New Zealand and the Cape were favoured destinations. By the 1870s around 100,000 people were leaving Britain and Ireland each year; in 1890 nearly 300,000 sailed from British ports. Organisations like the Royal Philanthropic Society, the Salvation Army and Dr. Barnardo's vigorously promoted emigration among the young. To middle-class supporters of the NUCSS like Edward Sturge, it offered a cost-effective way of redeeming men who 'had made errors or had fallen into bad ways, or had descended into debt or indolence.'²¹

With the rise of Germany and the USA as military and commercial threats, emigration took on an additional imperialist tinge. In the 1880s the historian, J.A. Froude,

²⁰ National Archive BN 63/3222.

²¹ E. Richards, *Britannia's Children*, 2004 (London: Hambledon & London) p.118.

urged state aid for emigration to counterbalance the growth of the United States which 'have been made stronger, the English [sic] empire weaker' by the 4 million or so Britons who were estimated to have moved to the USA; In the same decade, a series of lectures by J.R. Seeley linked relief of poverty and unemployment with imperial expansion to the 'white' Dominions – the coming together of perceived social, economic and military benefits for which later historians coined the umbrella term 'Social Imperialism'.²²

The sympathies of the Earl of Meath in this respect are explicit: in the 1880s, in the wake of 'socialist riots' in London, he wrote,

'The only hindrance to the more rapid colonization of Greater Britain lies in the difficulty of traversing the intervening ocean and in the sentimental *but erroneus* feeling that by emigrating to the colonies a man is leaving his country behind him.'²³

Again in 1901 he enthused about,

' . . . the magnificent future which awaits the sons of British blood if only they . . . boldly resolve to take upon their shoulders that "white man's burden" – the protection and uplifting of dependent races – of which by far the largest portion has fallen to the lot of the British empire.'²⁴

Edward Sturge's political leanings, by contrast, appear to have gone unrecorded although as a non-conformist and a successful City tradesman it would be extraordinary not to find he was a Liberal. Like the Tory Meath, Sturge could evince a strong distaste for socialism: in 1936 he was chairing a Wallingford management committee as the Colony was thought to be coming under attack from seditious propaganda spread by an Italian communist, Dr George Tioli, said to be operating among the local unemployed.

²² J.A. Froude, *England and Her Colonies*, 1886 (London: Longman, Green); J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 1883 (London: Macmillan).

²³ Meath, *State-directed Colonization, its necessity*, 1886 (London: Edward Stanford) p.6; emphasis added.

²⁴ Meath & others, *Our Empire, Past & Present*, 1901 (London: Harrison & Sons) p.19.

Colony staff were despatched to the Home Office to see if Tioli could be deported, but by then the Italian had already left to join the International Brigade in Spain.²⁵

Sturge might abhor Meath's anti-German hyperbole and anti-pacifist stance, but, along with other Quakers serving on NUCSS committees, he was happy to endorse the emphasis on emigration in the charity's publications, and to cheer the parties of 'lads' setting off to the Antipodes several times a year.

Conclusions

Are there any lessons to be drawn from looking at these two contrasting lives and the 'colony' that brought them together? Firstly, the creation of the NUCSS and its 'colonies', provide one more illustration of the influence exerted by German example on British social policy and practice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (national education, pensions and insurance systems are well known major instances). The Christian Service Union, although it referred approvingly to the work of the Salvation Army and its Essex 'colony', preferred to trace its own descent from the Bielefeld agricultural colony of Pastor von Bodelschwingh. The Earl of Meath, virulently anti-German though he may sound, was himself a fan of von Bodelschwingh, visiting Bethel on at least one occasion.

German influence on British social practice was still present after the First World War, when the German 'Strength through Joy' movement helped inspire British interest in 'healthy athleticism' and the popularity of cycling, hiking, hostelling and camping holidays. And Edward Sturge, having lived through the anti-German tirades of Meath and others, became, like many others in the Society of Friends, a well-wisher of the German pacifist and communitarian *Bruderkhof* movement.

Secondly, although I have chosen to tag my two 'odd allies' 'Jingo'²⁶ and 'Quaker' respectively, their lives taken in the round show how dangerous it can be to pin simplistic labels on figures from the past: nobody lives his or her life *only* as Tory, Radical, militarist, pacifist or whatever. Reginald Brabazon, apologist for the imagined certainties

²⁵ Oxfordshire County Record Office: Turners Court Youth Trust archive. Tioli's fate remains uncertain but most accounts suggest he was killed by communist forces in Spain.

²⁶ *The Times* (23 Sept 1924) reviewing Meath's second volume of memoirs seems to me perverse in concluding: 'There is no corner of his work in which the seed of "jingoism" can grow.'

of a feudal past, also campaigned for radical reform of the House of Lords (he wanted to replace half the inherited seats with nominated peers from the Dominions). He was, in addition, a visionary town planner, imagining London re-born as a continental capital, the Thames embankment 'transformed into leafy boulevards lined with commodious seats' and London's narrow streets replaced by 'covered glazed arcades, bright with light and colour,' (he also referred with coy practicality, to 'other conveniences, more difficult to describe, but which are greatly needed, especially by women, and which it is hoped may shortly be found within the metropolis in larger numbers than at present',²⁷ a hope sadly unrealised in 21st century London).

Edward Sturge's portrait photograph, taken for the opening of Sturge House at the Wallingford Colony in 1945, shows him, unsmiling, a drably-suited ity gent. He was – as we have seen – a lifelong teetotaler, yet by all accounts took great delight in his visits to the Hoxton Hall and the company of East-End street traders. A staunch pacifist and opponent of conscription, he continued to chair the committee which oversaw the financing and organisation of the Colony's cadet corps, membership of which was virtually compulsory during the Second World War.

Finally, the presence of such diametrically opposed characters as Meath and Sturge among the Wallingford Colony's hundreds of supporters, sympathisers and staff, can act as a sort of shorthand reminder that institutions, large and small, commonly function by compromise. Farm colonies, political parties, Oxford colleges, all are effectively coalitions, whose individual members find enough common ground for day-to-day purposes. During the two world wars the Colony's management might have encouraged – required, even – the 'lads' to join the army or air force cadet forces, but at the same time Superintendent, staff and management committees managed to welcome and work with the two dozen conscientious objectors who were posted there to work on the land in 1916, replacing 'Brothers' fighting in France.

As in all institutions, authoritarianism and consensus existed in varying proportions over the years in the persons of the Colony's Superintendent or Warden, his

²⁷ Meath, *Social Aims*, 1893 (London: Wells Gardner) p.140, 141. The Countess, his co-author, may be credited with the plea for more public conveniences.

staff and their supervising committees. The concept of a 'band of brothers', living and working in egalitarian harmony of which Julie Sutter wrote, was derived, she said, from the example of von Bodelschwingh, yet the good Pastor is recalled by others as a distinctly dictatorial manager: his technique, we are told, was to listen patiently to all that was said (by fellow committee members) 'without contradicting' and then 'to go off and do what he thought was right.'²⁸

Sutter herself could write of the 'perfect discipline' at Bethel,

'although really there is no one to enforce it . . . every troop [goes] its way with an overseer – not a slave-driver but a man to keep them to their work by *just working with them*. . . He keeps up the cheerful tone, and shows them the beauty of work.'²⁹

Yet a few pages earlier a line drawing (not by Sutter) captioned 'Colonists reclaiming the soil' shows a score of smock-clad workmen digging and pushing wheel-barrows under the palpable supervision of a frock-coated official with hat, boots and what appears to be a riding-crop standing on a small eminence; he may or may not be showing his charges 'the beauty of work' but is all too clearly *not* 'working with them'. A non-confrontational 'sense of the meeting' style of management, familiar to Sturge and anyone who has sat through Quaker business meetings, works in some circumstances; others may call for the firm smack of Meath's Duty and Discipline Movement.

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²⁸ www.bethel.de.

²⁹ J. Sutter, 1893, p. 159, original emphasis.

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