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Views and Opinions

Christianity and To-day

THE BISHOP OF KENSINGTON has been dealing with the "Problem of Suffering"—that is, the religious problem of reconciling the belief in a God of goodness with the world as science and common-sense knows it. As is usual in such cases he leaves the subject worse than he finds it. Also, as usual, his chief trouble is a professional one. He has discovered that

during the past twenty-five years enormous numbers of people have left organized religion because of their failure to reconcile suffering with the love of God.

The way of the preacher is crooked, for even in stating the obvious fact that numerous people have given up religion, he has to present it as though it were merely a sense of dissatisfaction with the Churches. We are to believe that people are still very religious, but do not like Church doctrines; whereas the question of reconciling a belief in the existence of a good god with the world as it is, and as it always has been, is not a question of organized or unorganized religion, it is a question of Theism versus Atheism, and the loss of "enormous numbers of people" marks an exodus in the direction of Atheism.

In any case the grounds of the Bishop's concern is what one may call a trade consideration. It is the lament of a shopkeeper when he finds his business shrinking, and decides to change the quality or the character of the goods he offers for sale. No one can find fault with the tradesmen for so doing, one even congratulates him on his alertness. But the Bishop, poor soul, has a difficulty that does not meet the shopkeeper. The latter can change the quality and character of his wares if he will, and when he will. His sole aim is to stock goods that meet the needs of his customers. But the Bishop is hawking a *revealed* religion, his stock is made up of goods that, honestly, admits of little change. The most he can do is to get new labels printed, with a slightly different wording, and trust that his customers will have so little judgment as not to realize what has been done.

This is the major difficulty that must always face a *revealed* religion. A religion that man discovers for himself may always be modified, until it is at last modified out of existence. Man is frankly trying to understand the world in which he is living, and his understanding must be determined by his knowledge. He may modify his opinions, or reject them altogether because he never laid claim to infallibility. To return to our metaphor, the tradesman may honestly change his stock because he aims at suiting his customers. The Church, as the custodian of a revealed religion, is compelled to find customers to suit its wares. And its only way to-day is to breed them. That is why the Churches are alive to the fact that if they miss the child they will never secure the adult. Adolescence and maturity do not always bring wisdom, but they do usually bring a more lively awareness to facts and a greater capacity for testing theory by experience.

* * *

Religion and Life

There is a certain logic about religion in its primitive stages that is quite absent from religion as it exists in sophisticated times. When primitive man persuaded himself that the world was dominated by all sorts of "spiritual" powers he was not fool enough to shut his eyes to obvious facts. He did not say gods were all good, neither did he say they were all bad. His beliefs were born of his experience and, wrong as his beliefs were, they were not patent absurdities. He did not when he found himself, or others, attacked by disease, or had to face some natural catastrophe, fall on his knees and praise God for his goodness; he did not say that an earthquake was sent by his gods in order to improve his character. Primitive man was wrong in his conclusions, but he was neither essentially a fool nor a knave. He promptly divided, with a rough but justifiable logic, his gods into good gods and bad gods, and he was more on his guard concerning the bad ones than he was fearful of the good ones. If we are to have gods, that appears the more reasonable view for men to hold, for in its relation to us nature does present a pleasant and an unpleasant aspect, a friendly and an unfriendly attitude; and if gods do express themselves in nature they are obviously of all kinds and qualities.

Christianity offers no real departure from this primitive conclusion. It tried to get, religiously, all the logical advantages of primitivism, and at the same time to evade the disadvantage that arose from the clash of early beliefs with later knowledge and a more civilized sentiment. It adopted one aspect of the Zoroastrian plan, but with small intellectuality in its expression. The Church had a God whom it proclaimed good, and it laid the responsibility for evil on his rival, the Devil. Each of these potentates had his retinue of lesser spirits, but in analysis the devil was the more respectable of the two chiefs. His purpose was plain, and he

paid cash for the worship offered. The other had a system of deferred payment, and no one could ever be certain that the cheques were honoured when presented, or even if they ever were presented.

The time came when devils went out of fashion, but their existence is still guaranteed by the whole history of Christianity, and one might easily trace the growth of unbelief in God in terms of the decay of the belief in the activity of devils. In this direction religion ran true to form. I think it was Aristotle who said that pain taught man philosophy. There is truth in this inasmuch as one may safely assume that it was the unpleasant side of life, the undesirable accidents of life, that at least gave point to the enquiry "Why?" for which science in due course substituted the more relevant "How?" And with the decay of belief in Satan the full responsibility for the pain and evil and injustice in the world became God's. The Devil was God's scapegoat so long as people believed in his existence. When circumstances made a personal devil impossible a new situation was created. For the Christian who set the Devil on one side there was only one "spiritual" potentate left—God. If he was the only one to be worshipped, he was the only one on whose shoulders responsibility could be placed. The world was of his making; not merely the shaping, but the making of the material of it. He became responsible for it in essence as well as in form. The excuse that God gave man "Free-will," and so left him to choose good or evil is not even an excuse—it is a plain absurdity, invented to rationalize an impossibility. Man was made by God. He was what he was because God had made him as he is. This, of course, is not science, but it is good, sound Christian theology. No man "chooses" the course that is the less attractive to him. In any situation he takes that which offers the greater attraction, and if God had made man different he would have behaved differently. Man has a right to say to God, "I am as you made me. If you had not made me what I am I should not have acted as I did." I agree with Winwood Reade that if there be a day of judgment it will not be the place of man to sue for mercy; his place will be that of an accuser charging his creator with gross carelessness or deliberate brutality. If God made man, the responsibilities are all on the side of God. If God wished man to be different from what he is, he should have made him different. Paul justifies the brutality of God by saying the potter has power over his pots; he makes one vessel to honour and another to dishonour. Well and good, but not even the potter has the right to blame his pots for their not being better than he made them. And no potter, however clumsy his workmanship, would dream of blaming the pots for their being as he left them.

* * *

Looking at Life

The Bishop agrees that "there is no problem for the Atheist." This is a curious admission to make. Once upon a time the usual cry was the Atheist had no answer to the problem of evil. Of course he has not. Neither has he any answer to the question of what a stick would be like without two ends. But if there is no "problem of evil" for an Atheist, what conclusion are we to draw therefrom? In science and in life the Atheist is in just the same circumstances as those that face the Christian. From the time he rises in the morning until he goes to bed at night he has exactly the same kind of problems with which to deal as the Christian has. The Atheist comes into life in the same manner as does the Christian; he passes through life in the same way; he leaves it in the same manner. In all the essentials of life the two face the same problems and deal with them in the same way. There is no common problem of life with which the Atheist cannot

deal as well and as thoroughly as does the Christian. There is no branch of life, no situation connected with life, whether in politics, literature, science, art, sociology, commerce, sport, or travel, with which an Atheist cannot deal as successfully as a Christian. And in all these things they both have the same methods of dealing with them. In the scientific laboratory the Christian can do as good work as the Atheist, so long as he leaves his religion on the doorstep. The same is true of all the other branches of life we have mentioned.

The problems of life—the necessary problems of life—touch each alike, and may be dealt with by a common method. God need not enter into them, and, if the work is properly done, God *does* not enter into them.

Why then does the Bishop of Kensington admit that the Atheist, as such, has no "problem of suffering"? He sees suffering, he suffers in person, and he does what he may to prevent or to lighten suffering? Why then is he not faced with a "problem of suffering"? Why, then, does the Atheist get through life as well as the Christian? How comes it that he is not only able to explain the nature of suffering, and to do what he can to alleviate it, but has no problem of suffering such as faces the Christian?

The answer, of course, is that the "Problem" is one that arises out of the Christian theory of things. It has no existence outside a religious theory of things. The Christian, after positing a wholly unscientific theory of nature and man, and when he discovers this theory gives rise to a "problem" that has no real existence, finding moreover that he cannot explain it in terms of his own belief, calmly turns round and challenges anyone to explain it. The truth is that neither "good" nor "bad" has the slightest relevance to nature outside our own standards of good or bad, desirable or undesirable. We are able to deal, to a growing extent, with those phenomena that are unpleasant to us, and to, here and there, ward off disasters. But we have no need to account for "good" or "ill" in nature, outside sentient existence, because these categories have no being. I may put the position in the words of Mr. F. C. S. Schiller:—

So long as we are dealing with finite factors, the function of pain and the nature of evil can be more or less understood, but so soon as it is supposed to display the workings of an infinite power everything becomes wholly unintelligible. We can no longer console ourselves with the hope that "good becomes the final goal of ill," we can no longer fancy that imperfection serves any secondary purpose in the economy of the universe. A process by which evil becomes good is unintelligible as the action of a truly infinite power which can attain its ends without a process; it is absurd to ascribe imperfection as a secondary result to a power which can attain all its aims without evil. . . . God can have no purpose and the world cannot be in process.

CHAPMAN COHEN

MAN AND GOD

Let loose the lusts, ye Gods, that they may leap
From leash, and scatter helter-skelterwise
Abroad,—your ravening hounds of hell,—to heap
Our dunghills with their dirt and slobberies:—
Your dogs of war that snarl and growl and keep
Their hackles up when naught else justifies
The fighting fever:—curs that worry sheep
In wanton sport: that play the part of spies,
Snuffling with noisome relish round the filth
Of dust-binned garbage:—mongrel vagabonds
That lope in loneliness, and lick by stealth.
Let loose the lusts, ye Gods.

Mankind responds;
Encourages; then, sickened, seeks for help:—
At last embraces Death, that fears no whelp.

The Decline of Dickens

The art of the pen is not to labour with a drop-scene brush, but to rouse the inward vision.—George Meredith.

Nought may endure but mutability.—Shelley.

DICKENS' reputation is not what it was. Young people of to-day are not familiar with all his books, but only with one or two. From being a best-seller he has become a classic. This position has its drawbacks, for classic writers are as much talked about as read. In the case of Shelley, for example, "chatter about Harriet" is as prevalent as the reading of his poetry. Even with regard to so august a writer as Shakespeare, there is far too much talk of cryptograms. Really great writers, such as Boccaccio and Rabelais, have two sets of admirers, the one discerning their true merits, and the other regarding them as pornographic. It is a chastening thought that the most popular poet of the nineteenth century was Longfellow; the most popular theologian Spurgeon; and the most popular play, *East Lynne*.

Public taste affects the reputations of authors, great and small, and public taste changes. Our grandparents liked Dickens' humour, but they loved him best when he wallowed naked in the pathetic. Old and young, rich and poor, snivelled over the deathbeds of little Nell and Paul Dombey. It was sheer, unadulterated sentimentality that the critics and general readers applauded most. Macaulay wept over Florence Dombey, Jeffrey spoke of "the divine Nelly," and Thackeray regarded the death of little Paul as "stupendous writing." George Eliot and Ruskin thought far otherwise. The wind has now veered to their quarter, and most people would agree with W. D. Howell, the American critic, when he pronounced the pathos of the *Old Curiosity Shop* as being "preposterously overdone," and that fiction is now a finer art than in the days of Dickens.

Luckily, Dickens had other facets to his genius. Present-day readers may be bored by his pathos, which so often verges into bathos, but they can laugh at Samuel Pecksniff, and enjoy the trial scene in *Pickwick*, to say nothing of Sam Weller and Mr. Winkle, and so many of his characters, who are sufficiently numerous to have returned their creator to Parliament. With all his limitations, Dickens was capable of sheer artistry, witness the concluding pages of *The Tale of Two Cities*, and the episode of Samuel Pecksniff and the leaves. And his caricatures not only pleased his readers, but seized the popular imagination. "Bumbledom" has become a synonym for parochial activity, and the "Circumlocution Office" for the eternal red-tape of Bureaucracy. Politicians have been called Pecksniffian.

Dickens was as fierce a Radical as William Cobbett, and he was as much of a Crusader as Bernard Shaw. In his early manhood he was an Unitarian, and although he discarded church attendance in his later years he never seems to have abandoned his heretical views. Dickens attended Little Portland Street Unitarian Church. Even in the broad-minded Unitarian fold he was very advanced. Of mission work he was impressed unfavourably, as evidenced by his writing, "So Exeter Hall holds us in mortal submission to missionaries, who (Livingstone always excepted) are perfect nuisances, and leave every place worse than they found it."

Again, when that stalwart Freethinker, Robert Morrell, founded the National Sunday League, Dickens was heartily in favour of the movement for light and liberty. He not only helped the League with money, but gave readings from his works for its benefit. Nor was this a sudden impulse, for Dickens

wrote a pamphlet, entitled *Sunday Under Three Heads*, in which he trounced soundly the then Bishop of London for his uncivilized views regarding Sunday recreation for working people. Indeed, Dickens was a hard-snell heretic. He had a very strong aversion from dogma, and described himself as "morally wide asunder from Rome," while of Puritanism he was an uncompromising opponent. Even in the *Pickwick Papers*, the most light-hearted and irresponsible of his books, written in early manhood, he lashes religious hypocrisy with all the zest of a Moliere. In creating the characters of the Rev. Mr. Stiggins and the oily Mr. Chadband, Dickens did not pay a compliment to the clerical profession, of which he had no great opinion.

An amusing instance of the great novelist's playfulness with regard to religion was his naming a dummy book in his own library, *Evidences of Christianity by Henry the Eighth*. Keen critics have always noticed the strong strain of Secularism in Dickens' writings; and Matthew Arnold, in his ever-delightful book, *Friendship's Garland*, pictured himself taking his foreign friend, Arminius, to the House of Commons to hear the pious Sir William Harcourt "develop a system of unsectarian religion from the life of Mr. Pickwick." It is true that Dickens did write a life of Christ primarily intended for his young children, but it is so heretical that its author would have been burnt alive in the Ages of Faith, and was never published during his own lifetime. John Forster, Dickens biographer, says that "upon essential points he had never any sympathy so strong as with the leading doctrines of the Church of England." This is a fine example of Christian camouflage for even Forster might have noticed that Unitarianism and Anglicanism are as the poles asunder. Indeed, Unitarianism has been described as "a feather-bed to catch a falling Christian." Forster did not want to offend Victorian susceptibilities, as may be seen in his extraordinary reticence in dealing with Dickens' domestic troubles. And we have all learned a great deal since Forster's very respectable *Life of Dickens* first cumbered the shelves of the circulating libraries.

Byron, Laurence Sterne, and Bernard Shaw, are European writers. With all his genius, Dickens remains a Cockney Shakespeare. Much of his work is as surely dated as a museum piece. His most enduring quality is his humanity, which is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. With perfect propriety he could have echoed the words of Abou-Ben-Adhem, "Write me as one that loves his fellow men." Deep down in his heart was the sympathy with the class from which he sprang, and which he never deserted.

MIMNERMUS

LIFE

Crouched low upon that Hill of Void there cringed
Before the Unknown each separate Vice, life-size:
While a million lesser meannesses and lies—
Flesh-pricking, silly parasites—enfringed
Their greater brethren, clustered o'er them:—singed
Moths, and pear-drunk wasps and fretful flies.

Far lower down the Virtues, suppliant-wise
Knelt proud-secure in prayer.

Then there impinged
Upon that icy nothingness—a Voice,
A shivering breath of counsel, tearing crest
And stirring the gentler slopes.

"Not yet rejoice,
Nor weep. Return again to Earth, and breast
Labours and struggles—till ye find the best;
And truest Loveliness be your last choice."

The Rise and Progress of Civilization

THE genesis and development of human culture has long exercised the minds of anthropologists. Leading representatives of the diffusionist school, such as the late Professor Elliot Smith and Dr. Perry traced the origin of civilization to the Land of the Nile, from which region discovery and invention spread to all those regions of the globe where culture has been established. Now, Lord Raglan has come forth as an iconoclastic evangelist of the diffusionist party who expresses even more pronounced views than those championed by his illustrious predecessors.

In his brief but pregnant book: *How Came Civilization?* (Methuen, 1939), his lordship contends that knowledge is absolutely essential for the appearance of even a modicum of culture, and this therefore, arose among communities far removed from savagery. He opines that Asia was the cradle of all superior cultures that have ever arisen in the world. The doctrine of diffusion, he avers, "merely assumes that prehistoric times were not very different from historic times. Among the chief features of recorded history are conquests, migrations, and colonizations which completely transformed the cultures of vast areas. In modern times we have the European colonization of America, Australia, and South Africa. Earlier we have the Roman conquest of Western Europe and the Arab conquests of North Africa. . . . North Africa has been the home of great civilizations, Egyptian, Carthaginian, Greek, and Roman, yet there is little in its present culture which antedates the Arab conquest."

Lord Raglan also notes that in every other invaded territory concerning which we possess adequate information, the conquerors have more or less submerged the original cultures. In the speculative realm, Christianity has spread from a single source to many climes, while Buddhism was diffused from India to China and Japan. Islam again, has spread from Arabia to Central Asia, Northern and other African areas and as far distant as Java. In much the same manner inventions such as electrical contrivances, steam-power, printing and gunpowder are now reaching all parts of the planet and superseding other devices.

Until recent generations, communication, migration and transport were entirely dependent upon wheeled conveyances and sailing ships. These, apart from horse riding, were the only means of transport from the twilight of European history until modern modes of locomotion had been invented. In addition to these methods of travel there has been throughout the ages a fairly continuous movement of peoples, followed by resettlement, and the newcomers would naturally carry their culture with them. Also, it is obvious that the disclosures resulting from the excavator's activities indicate a previously unsuspected cultural reciprocity between distant regions of the world. Consequently, there was not merely interchange of commodities between different peoples, but also the introduction and influence of novel sentiments and concepts. There is now little doubt that diffusion has played an important part in the acquisition and development of human culture. As Raglan says, this "has taken place from the earliest times, and is at the present moment going on all around us."

In our author's opinion, environmental influence in fashioning forms of culture has been immensely exaggerated. He urges that, in many instances, what superficially appear to be the outcome of environmental causes are really nothing more than illustrations of

diffusion, modified by changed geographical or climatal conditions.

Lord Raglan avows the pessimistic opinion that man, instead of being naturally progressive, is positively retrogressive in character. He points to the once potent, but now departed civilizations of the Near East, as well as to the ruins of long extinct cultures nearly buried within the wilds of two hemispheres in Africa, America, and elsewhere.

How may the inception, advance and decay of these defunct cultures be explained? Raglan dismisses the hypothesis that races like individuals have their periods of birth, puberty, maturity, and senile decay. He also pours pitiless contempt on the Nordic superstition. Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Saxons—all Nordic it is alleged—destroyed Roman civilization. The preposterous claim that everything of worth in Latin culture was the product of Rome's Nordic element is equally untruthful. "So far as we know," declares Lord Raglan, "the Northern races, whether Nordic or not, had no part in the foundations of civilization, which were laid in the Nile-Indus region long before any speakers of the Aryan languages—and the Nordics of Europe are all Aryan speakers—entered this region. It was formerly believed that the civilization of India was due to Aryan speakers, but it is now known that the civilization of the Indus valley had reached a very high state long before their arrival."

Indeed, the Teutonic barbarians reduced Western Europe to savagery. Science, medical services and letters were blotted out. The Roman roads, sanitary appliances, and baths fell into disuse in Christian Europe, and were forgotten until they were reintroduced from the Moslem East. As Raglan testifies: "Much of the culture of Rome was lost to Western Europe for centuries, and would have been lost altogether had it not been preserved by the Byzantines and Arabs. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Western Europe was recivilized from Arab Spain."

But where are the Arabian, Indian, Persian and Chinese civilizations now? It is said that for the past 500 years, these splendid cultures, so far as they survive at all, are mainly dependent on past achievement. European intervention in their domains was apparently made possible by a decline previously pronounced in those seats of former prowess. In America the same sad story is recorded, for the Peruvian civilization was at its height in 800 A.D. and, according to Wissler that of the Mayas two centuries later. Both seem to have been decadent at the Spanish invasion.

Many scientists have meditated over the decay that is almost universally evident throughout Polynesia. Metal working, textiles, ceramics, once so common in the islands have nearly disappeared. Moreover, New Zealand, New Guinea, Africa and Australia all provide evidences of native deterioration in the arts and crafts. Raglan makes a selection from the vast array of recorded instances which suggest a general, if not universal tendency towards retrogression. From his survey, he concludes that there is not a scrap of reliable evidence supporting the optimistic theory of inevitable advance, whether among civilized or uncivilized stocks. In fact, he argues that any tribal or other social aggregate if left entirely to its own devices tends to run down hill. It is even asserted that man's natural condition is that of unredeemed savagery. Towards this, we are warningly told, man ever tends "when he is not checked or forced in the opposite direction, by that unexplained, but highly artificial, localized, and spasmodic process which we know as the progress of civilization."

The practically insurmountable restraints imposed by tradition and taboo among lowly peoples, among whom every innovation is viewed with suspicion and dislike, as well as the technical difficulties involved,

are said to preclude savage discovery and invention. Our own culture, in all but its more recent advances was derived from the Mediterranean region, while the Greeks themselves were materially indebted to the arts and crafts and other possessions of Western Asia, Crete and Egypt. As to the inceptions of civilization, Raglan thinks that science can only surmise, and that certainty will, in all probability, prove unattainable, whatever our increase in knowledge.

Raglan places the evolution of primitive man from some ape-like form at some 500,000 years ago. This emergence is assumed to have occurred in Asia, and the transformation was due "to some special and local stimulus." This is claimed to have been capable of converting apes into the men of the Old Stone Age, while a later localized stimulus urged aboriginal mankind along the road to civilization.

Lord Raglan's chapter on the Machinery of Diffusion is very suggestive. He also deals with the distribution of the bow, domesticated animals, the plough and hoe, while pottery, the mummy and canoe are also reviewed. The vexed cultural problems of Negro Africa, and the evidences of the indebtedness of the culture of the native races of the New World to the Old, are likewise most suggestively, if provocatively, discussed.

With the infallible authority of the Church in Catholic communities, and the sacrosanct Scriptures in the Protestant denominations, the orthodox of both parties during the Reformation regarded all scientific discoveries as the devices of Satan. Vesalius revealed structures in the human body which completely discredited received doctrine, and the telescope disclosed moons and planets previously unsuspected in the skies. After a bitter struggle with theology science was at last released from sacerdotal shackles and, to its philosophy and applications, the whole of modern material civilization is due. Had natural knowledge been worsted in its conflict with religious obscurantism, this vast transformation would have been postponed indefinitely, and perhaps prevented altogether. As Raglan shrewdly says: "Before the sixteenth century there was no science, and a slightly altered set of circumstances might have prevented its rise, and caused civilization in Western Europe to follow the same course that it did in China and India, that is to say, to reach a certain proficiency in literature, the arts and the crafts, and then gradually decay."

T. F. PALMER

Scientific History and Christianity

I.

In view of H. G. Wells' statement, in effect, that the demolition of the Judæo-Christian mythology should be one of the major tasks of the scientific historian, it has been interesting to see what if anything has been done to further that desirable objective.

Probably Secularists who read widely in world-history had detected some difference between the treatment of Christianity and its effects in English and American books of history. Three of each kind are before me now. The former vary from neutrality (mainly narration of facts) to repetition or paraphrase of matter to be found in the works of Christian apologists: e.g., that early Christianity was "the salvation of learning," "gave the world schools," and was "a great moral and civilizing force." The three American books referred to—all written by university professors of history—are Botsford's *A Brief History of*

the World, Breasted's *Ancient Times* (a book much used in this country), and Robinson's *Medieval and Modern Times*.

Attention was drawn to the difference mentioned by lighting upon such passages as the following: "Almost from the beginning the Christians had opposed the study of the Greek and Latin classes, mainly because they were pagan. The scientific works of the ancients were especially shunned in the belief that they were contrary to Scripture. Through the neglect of the Christians, therefore, quite as much as through the barbarian invasions, most of the Greek and Latin literature was either destroyed or lost" (Botsford): "The supremacy of mind and of scientific knowledge won by the Greeks in the third century B.C. yielded to the reign of ignorance and superstition in the third century A.D." (Breasted): "The libraries and works of art were destroyed or neglected, and there was no one to see that they were restored. So the Western world fell back into a similar condition to that in which it had been before the Romans conquered and civilized it." (Robinson).

Some evidence of these and other statements of like tenour appears here and there in the books. But for abundant evidence of the intellectual and—taken in a wide and rational sense—of the social and moral deterioration that accompanied the development of Christianity and the associated ecclesiasticism we turn to another American book, viz., Robinson's *Readings in European History*. This is virtually a world-history in the form of original documents; and from it, unless otherwise stated, the excerpts quoted and summarized in this article are taken.

As regards the intense troubles of the later Roman Empire, which were to a considerable extent due to the aggressiveness of the Christians, we note the early, ominous conception of a universal, totalitarian church. This introduces the topic of the sects into which Christians soon became divided; though nothing is said of the sanguinary struggles between them:—

The old enemy of mankind was vanquished and overcome at the advent of Christ's kingdom. . . . So he devised new wiles by which he might deceive the unwary Christians, under the very name of Christianity itself. . . . He snatches men from the Church herself; and while they think they have drawn near the light and have escaped the night of heathenism, he casts over them in their ignorance other shades, so that they may call themselves Christians. They think they have the light, and yet walk in darkness. . . . Whoever is separated from the Church . . . is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. . . .

After stating that these heretics "sit in the seat of pestilence, are plague spots of the faith, deceiving with serpent's tongue and artful in corrupting the truth; vomiting forth deadly poisons," they are told that though such a man suffer death for confessing the name of Christ, his guilt is not washed away by blood. . . . "He who is without the Church cannot be a martyr. He cannot reach the kingdom of heaven." (From *Unity of the Church*, by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, died 258).

In view of the above and other early Christian writings incidental attention may be drawn to J. M. Robertson's statement that "The moral note which in the modern world is supposed to be typically and primordially Christian, that of the *Imitatio Christi* at its best, is the one note never struck by the Christian Fathers, or, if sounded, never sustained."

Following some persecution of Christians, Galerius in 311 issued an edict of toleration:—

We have been especially anxious that even the Christians should return to reason. For they have fallen, we know not how, into such perversity and

folly that, instead of adhering to those ancient institutions which possibly their own forefathers established, they have arbitrarily made laws of their own. . . . We, with our wonted clemency have judged it wise to extend a pardon even to these men and permit them once more to become Christians and re-establish their places of meeting; in such manner, however, that they shall in no way offend against good order.

Then, as J. M. Robertson remarks, as party strife among the Christians was becoming more comprehensive, more furious and more menacing, the Church was saved from itself by the State. Theodocius II. published (438) a collection of the laws of the Empire, which made it quite clear that the Government would tolerate no one who disagreed with the particular form of Christian belief which the State chose to sanction—"One God-head of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the blessed Trinity":—

We desire that all those who are under the sway of our clemency shall adhere to that religion. . . . All others we judge to be mad and demented; we declare them guilty of holding heretical doctrines; their assemblies shall not receive the name of churches. They shall first suffer the wrath of God, then the punishment which in accordance with the divine judgment we shall inflict.

Exemption from personal taxes, not only for the clergy but for *exorcists* and doorkeepers, was decreed. Manichæans were to be heavily fined and to have their houses confiscated; Eunomians and Montanists were to be excluded from all intercourse with any city or town, their books burnt, and anyone concealing them was to suffer capital punishment. Donatists, Jews and Gentiles (the last then commonly called pagans) were similarly condemned. *Slaves might be beaten into the orthodox faith.* The temples were to be destroyed, first in the towns and then in the cities.

The rather rapid Christianization of the Romans naturally followed. But the conversion of the barbarians outside the Empire was mainly if not entirely a matter of converting the kings or chiefs. We have the interesting case of Clovis, King of the Franks, who had a Christian wife. Though for a time the King would not desert his gods, his first son was baptized as a Christian. The account continues:—

But the child, whom they called Ingomer, after he had been born again through baptism, died in his white baptismal robe. Then the King reproached the Queen bitterly: "If the child had been consecrated in the name of my gods he would be alive still. But now, because he is baptized in the name of your God, he cannot live."

Subsequently another son was born to them, and called in baptism Clodomir. He fell very ill. Then the King said: "Because he, like his brother, was baptized in the name of Christ he must soon die." But his mother prayed and by God's will the child recovered. . . .

The Queen incessantly urged the King to acknowledge the true God. . . . But he could not in any wise be brought to believe until war broke out with the Alemanni. Then he was by necessity compelled to confess what he had before denied. . . . It happened that the two armies were in battle, and there was great slaughter. Clovis' army was near to utter destruction. He saw the danger; his heart was stirred; he was moved to tears; and he raised his eyes to heaven, saying: "Jesus Christ, whom Clothilde declares to be the son of the living God, who it is said giveth aid to the oppressed, and victory to them who put their hope in thee, I beseech the glory of thy aid." . . . When he had said these things, the Alemanni turned their backs and began to flee.

He told the Queen how he had won the victory by

calling on the name of Christ; she sent for a bishop; and Clovis and more than three thousand of his warriors were baptized. [From Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*. In that work, Professor Robinson remarks, "the cruel and unscrupulous Clovis appears as God's chosen instrument for the support of the Christian faith" (*Medieval and Modern Times*.)]

We have also the better-known account by Bede of the conversion of the Northumbrians, with the amusing speech of the high priest, Coifi, at the conference. Coifi said:—

O king . . . I verily declare unto you that the religion we have hitherto professed has, as far as I can learn, no virtue in it. For none of your people has applied himself more diligently to the worship of the gods than I; and yet there are many that receive greater favours from you, and are more preferred than I, and who are more prosperous in their undertakings. Now if the gods were good for anything, they would rather forward me, who have been more careful to serve them. . . .

Support for the suggested change-over was forthcoming from elders and counsellors; the King gave permission to Paulinus to preach the gospel, and "renounced idols." Coifi undertook the work of destroying the temples and asked for arms and a stallion (as it had hitherto been unlawful for the chief priest to bear arms or to ride any animal but a mare). Proceeding to the temples he profaned them by casting in his weapon, and then commanded his companions to destroy the structures and all their enclosures by fire.

(To be continued)

J. REEVES

Special Pleading

HE is a rare man who doesn't occasionally exaggerate in order to enhance (in his opinion) the value of a point he hopes to make. Too often the value of the point is not so enhanced by the exaggeration. Christians may have slain their theological enemies in untold millions or in hundreds of thousands. The Christian who holds that his religion is a religion of Peace is in much the same ethical quandary when he is faced with the lower computation. Exact statement is what the scientific thinker aims at; he fails quite often, but if he has the mood and method of science this will be exhibited in degree in all his statements, and where exact knowledge is impossible he will be careful not to strive to emphasize his case by overstatement.

Special pleaders most men are. They justify themselves by the fact that already special-pleading characterizes conventional opinions, and because of that, can best be met by counter exhibitions of the same character. What this leads to is a hubbub which leaves the discerning individual to the thankless task of examining critically and painstakingly all the discordant voices. The parallel is to be found in our own law courts. Counsel for the Prosecution and Counsel for the Defence put forward a deliberately one-sided case. The Judge sits there and listens; ultimately he is called upon to "sum up." He weeds out all the unverifiable data, all the unjustifiable inferences, from the pleas of both Counsels. On the residuum he pronounces judgment. The process may be far from an ideal one, but so far that matter are most processes—and it is far from foolish. It does make the attempt to elicit the best that can be said *pro* and *con*. Learned Counsel may be superciliously dismissed as "special pleaders" by some—they are so by many. This overlooks that not only are the

Counsel *deliberately* special pleading, but the whole legal process is built on the assumption that they are so doing. This is understood—and consequently the business of “doing one’s best” for one’s client becomes perfectly ethical. Where the process is capable of prostitution is in the presence of a jury and/or a judge “who is not very wise.” Then we may have exhibitions of rhetoric deplorably devised to defeat the ends of justice. In an imperfect world such outlets exist everywhere. It does not alter the fact that the Counsel for the Defence does not profess to be impartial—he does the best he can for his client—and it can be, and often is, a task that calls for the highest forms of mental and logical ability.

If the writer of polemic were to adopt the same attitude little fault could be found with him. There is no harm in Special Pleading advertised as such. It would in time sharpen the wits of his reader and make him realize that his (the reader’s) function is a *judicial* one. His mental processes would be sharpened and he would in time not only attempt to give a verdict, but be proud of his verdict when given. What makes propagandism of the baser sort open to a line of criticism that leaves the law-courts unscathed is that the special pleading that issues from, for instance, the press does not purport to be special pleading. It pretends to be judicial, and when it tries to pass off to the reader the one-sided presentation of a Counsel for the Defence as the patient and conscientious summing-up of a Judge, then it becomes ethically contemptible and the process plainly anti-social.

There are times when the Special Pleader is justified in putting forth his case, For or Against, and when it is not only justifiable, but may be almost a public duty. It is when it is felt that some aspect of a public question is so misrepresented in almost all channels of public information, that what can be said to the contrary is to all intents and purposes denied a hearing. Then the *ex parte* statement becomes a crying need. It need not necessarily take this complexion; it could be, of course, a scientific presentment of *pro* and *con* followed by the calm and imperative verdict that the facts demand. But if Counsel for the Prosecution has been allowed by gerrymandering, censoring and sloganizing, to have all his own way, there should be a time and a season for Counsel for the Defence to say his piece. And if it is plainly stated to be such and does not profess to be judicial, but is put forward on purely pragmatic lines, it would indeed be a stern moralist who got up on his hind legs and said: I have picked up work after work of special pleading by the Counsel for the Prosecution; all the newspapers say Here is Wisdom. But I am going to reserve all my virtuous condemnation for the one or two people who have the unbridled enfrontery to air their lopsided opinions in the form of Counsel for the Defence.

Theologians have always been Princes in the realm of Special Pleading. Suppression when possible has been their weapon; to be followed, when the occasion demanded it, by false emphases and the attempt to speak to a new brief rather than an old one without calling attention to the fact. Science has attempted to bring conscientiousness into the things of the mind; it has fashioned a mood and a method, and has brought about its beneficent results most effectively when its devotees have been possessed of a passion for truth, which is perhaps the most valuable of all its characteristics. But scientists are fallible men; they fall short always of perfection. But, from their principles, they have bred men in a stern mould who have sought in their own works for the fact wrongly so-called; they have gone through the works of their fellow scientists and pulverized as well as they could manage, the hasty assumption, the too-ready generalization. Scientific mood and method have provided the crucible into

which all scientific teaching must eventually be thrust. John Jones, Scientist, trains John Robinson in the sure and certain hope that John Robinson will—if he can—show where he, John Jones, Scientist, went off the rails.

This is one of the hardest things for the theologian to understand—apparently. For the theologian deals in absolutes. The theologian tells us things, and what the theologian tells us has to suffice. He lays down the Law. And from his mental cell, he pops out his head now and again and says: Scientist A contradicts B, Scientist F contradicts Scientist M. Ho, Ho, Ho, Ho, Ho, Ho! But his laughter has an echo that is grim.

Every humble writer or speaker that attempts to *teach* his fellows should hitch his wagon to a star. He should be *judicial* and couch his words so that the judicial will not grieve. It is a hard job and he will fall far short of his hopes, but this should not deter him. He will not, it is certain, obtain popular plaudits. These are reserved for the whole-hogger, the partisan, the man who is loyal to his party. But the man who is loyal to truth as he sees it, though he may not appeal to thousands, will appeal to a few—the judgment of which few “o’er weighs a whole theatre of others.”

T. H. ELSTON

Aoid Drops

What the Roman Church considers a very important commission has been appointed consisting of Catholics from England, Ireland and the United States, with “savants” from France and Italy, to clear up the mystery of the Holy Shroud. The question at issue is to decide whether this is the identical shroud that covered the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. The issue is quite simple. There is, of course, no evidence that Jesus Christ ever existed, none that he was ever crucified, none that he was wrapped in any shroud, or none that he ever rose from the dead. Still, if he did live, if he was crucified, if he was wrapped in a shroud, then this might as well be the shroud as any other—provided it was made of extra good linen. But the only way that this commission can settle the matter is by prayer. So why have a commission? Besides the Pope is God’s representative on earth. Why can he not get information direct from the holy ghost? There seems as much mystery about the Commission as about the shroud.

A Catholic writer wonders what effect the earthquake at the Crucifixion had on the world at large. Aye, there’s the rub! The earth was covered in darkness for three days, the dead rose from their graves and walked about the city of Jerusalem, but nowhere outside the New Testament did anyone bother about any of these things. They never even noticed them. The most wonderful things happened in the midst of a numerous people, and created less excitement than the visit of a Punch and Judy show to a village green.

What a generous man is the Bishop of Bristol! He is more than gratuitously generous, he is impertinently so. He is, for example, quite willing that cinemas should be open on Sundays provided children are not admitted, that substantial portion of the profits should be given to charity, and that the permission to open cinemas on Sunday should be “definitely” a war-time measure. There is indeed liberality, but he might—with less artfulness and greater honesty—have put it as follows: (1) Children must not be encouraged to stay away from Church (the Bishop’s own entertainment), because if they do stay away from his place of business when they are young they are not likely to attend when they grow up. (2) Those cinemas which do open on Sunday must be fined

for doing so. (3) There being a war on, the men in uniform must be kept in a good humour, and it is not good business to antagonize them.

We should like the Bishop to tell us whether his attitude indicates anything more than we have said. And at the same time, will he be good enough to explain on what ethical grounds it is wrong to see theatrical performances (whether on the screen or not) on Sunday—except when there is a war on—that may be seen without damage to morals during the remaining six days in the week? But bishops do not reply to straight questions, so we do not expect any reply.

Let it be duly placed on record, and let each one mark it on the tablet of his memory that on March 26, at 9 p.m., listeners heard distinctly the words, "Oh, blast it!" What greater evidence could one have of the chaste atmosphere of the B.B.C. and the sensitiveness of British receptivity than that this incident was duly chronicled in the Press as worthy of notice. That this occurred at nine o'clock, three hours after the "Children's Hour," was fortunate—damned fortunate.

In a recent issue we mentioned the matter of the "Mons Angels" and promised one day to retell the story of that imposture and the way in which some of the leading clergymen in this country tried to force it on the public. We have not forgotten that promise, but meanwhile we note that a certain Captain Hayward, belonging to a society of half-backed intelligences and storehouse of petrified stupidities, recently told a Bournemouth meeting of that cult, "How God won the last War." The captain says he himself saw "the White Cavalry." We have no desire to question that this gentleman may have seen white, black or blue cavalry floating in the sky. We may remind Captain Hayward that elephants, and blue tigers have been seen climbing up bedposts before now. If Captain Hayward went to a lunatic asylum—as a visitor—he would be able to come away with a fine stock of strange visions, never vouchsafed to ordinary men and women.

Writing in the *Daily Mirror*, "Cassandra" says:—

Any faint lingering doubts as to whether we had the backing of the angels as anti-Nazis, have now been completely removed by Dr. Robert McKew, a former Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight.

Says he:—

"I believe with all my heart and soul that the battle we are fighting to-day is God's battle. I believe that for His own wise purpose God has raised up the British Empire to be the means under man of building up the Kingdom of God on earth."

The really important feature of the existing situation is not that God has raised up the British Empire so that it might create the kingdom of God on earth, but that he persuades Germany, Russia, Italy and others to recognize the alleged fact. What is the good of God raising up the British Empire, etc., etc., if he does not persuade the rest of the world to recognize his purpose? There have been all sorts of gods, and they have passed out in all sorts of ways. We suggest as an epitaph for the Christian deity "He Meant Well."

The Education Committee of the County of Shropshire has appointed a Committee to consider whether the existing Religious Syllabus shall be continued, revised, or replaced. The committee will consist of seven members of the Education Committee, with twelve representatives of the Churches and four representatives of the teachers. Twelve ministers of religion, and eleven laymen, the majority of which will be already pledged to keep religion going. The Churches will feel quite safe. It reminds one of an advertisement sent out by Ford. "Ford cars can be had in any colour, provided they are black."

What wonderful people there are in the Christian pulpit! We are not altogether complaining of this. Even

the weak-minded must have some place of refuge, and if the type of parson we have in mind was not in the pulpit he might be in politics, or doing greater mischief than churning imbecilities to the accompaniment of sighs of thankfulness from an audience that would receive a shock if it heard from the pulpit nothing but common sense. So we appreciate this gem by the Vicar of St. Gabriel's, Leytonstone.

It was a Christian belief that civilization should be kept Christian.

No one will contest this gem of wisdom. When the Vicar has again occasion to say this, he might enforce it by pointing out that Moslems think the world should be kept Moslem, Buddhists that the world should be kept Buddhist—and so forth. God called the Vicar to his job; his qualification for it is quite plain—to God. So to relapse into piety we also say God only knows why he was selected. If Mr. Chamberlain arranges his cabinet, why not make him Minister of Information in the place of the godly Reith?

Probably in complete innocence Walt Disney is being attacked in some quarters over his latest film *Pinochio*. This is not because of lack of artistry—that never arouses religious opposition—but because he has named one of his characters "Jiminy Cricket" which is slang for Jesus Christ. "Jeepers Creepers" is also a euphemism for the same person. Now what will the English Censor do? We once had an American friend whose favourite oath was "Christopher Henry H. Christ," but why he adopted this we could never discover. Still, owing to the mention of Jesus it had great virtue, for it had a most soothing effect on my friend. I am quite sure that "Christopher Henry H. Bradlaugh" would not have been so powerful. Does not the hymn remind us "How great the power of Jesu's name!"?

The following two epitaphs of public characters we take from the *New Statesman*:—

TOM HARRISON

We buried Tom all proper with his Mass-Observer's badge,
And his notebooks—there were twenty thousand odd;
And he'd not been dead a week when a Report arrived
for Madge;
Heaven's 39.4 per cent. pro-God.

R. H. S. CROSSMAN

Whate'er he did, he did it well
Where'er he went, he shone there,
For long enough he worked like hell
And now at last he's gone there.

It is stated in the *Psychic News*, that a Church of England gathering—by nine votes to three—has decided that Spiritualism is true. This is about as important as a similarly decisive vote from the same source, declaring that the Bible is more or less true. That "God is a Spirit" is—let us say—as true as gospel. The Third Person of the Christian Trinity is a Ghost (wholly or Holy Church), and the Second Person of the same trio has a ghost for a father. We expect to hear next that even some of the Spiritualists themselves believe in Spiritualism—which is less axiomatic than it might seem to those who have never attended a Seance.

Cavalcade has had some correspondence about "Evl." One writer says "Scripture is not always to be read literally," but in the same letter says "Private interpretation is forbidden." As this writer claims that it is God who "sends the sword of war among the nations" we are in a difficulty—is "God" or is "the sword" to be taken literally? Anyhow mankind is taking WAR most literally. The writer apparently thinks that his private interpretation is NOT forbidden, when he refers to "Satan—or Adversary as the word simply means." We wish this man could convince his fellow-Christians so that at least a few of them might agree in their definitions. The only reference to SATAN in the Cambridge Bible Dictionary is "Satan; see DEVIL"!!!

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THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- D. URQUART.—We do not know of any such library as you name. But why not use your local public library and place on the Suggestion Sheet provided, the names of the books you require to read? They will nearly all be of public interest.
- E. G. MACFARLANE.—We are not surprised that your letter to the *Scottish Education Journal* was not inserted. It was too much to the point; and the aim of most papers when discussing the question of religion in the schools is to advertise the purely imaginary "fact" that there is a great demand for more religion. There is not. If there were, the clergy would not be running their present campaign. But your letter will have done good in showing that "there are others."
- J. HUMPHREY.—Thanks for address. Paper has been sent. We note your other item. It is good to keep up the agitation, even though it may produce no immediate result. But the growing use of the B.B.C. as a religious propagandist vehicle is little less than a public scandal.
- J. LAUDER.—Thanks for cutting. War conditions seem to have given the "dignified clergy" a chance to give the world more than the usual quantity of pulpit nonsense. But we really have not the time to join in newspaper controversy.
- H. SEFTON.—Thanks. Shall appear.
- W. J. POYNTER.—Next week; crowded out of this issue.
- C. BRUNEL.—Thanks for note. But we have several times called attention to the Roman Catholic position as illustrated by the Liverpool leaders that they would prefer children to run the risk of being bombed at home, rather than seek safety in places where they would be open to Protestant influence. In Liverpool, at least, that is the official position.
- MRS. C. MATTHEWS AND E. ARUNDEL SMITH.—Sorry we have not space for reopening the correspondence. Repetition—by either or both sides—adds nothing to what has already been stated.
- MRS. WINIFRED SMITH.—It is stupid for anyone to say that the churches are "moribund." They are weakened but still powerful. As to finding comfort in Christian teaching, that argument applies to all kinds of teachings and to every sort of habit. It is as true of whiskey-drinking as it is of Christianity. It is certainly true of Freethought.
- G. B. LISSENDEN.—Received with thanks. Shall appear soon.
- MRS. C. M. TAILING.—Pleased to learn that the paragraph was of so much use, and led to such pleasing results.

The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.

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Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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Whenever you come into contact with any book, person, or opinion of which you absolutely comprehend nothing, declare that book, person or opinion to be immoral. Bepatter it, vituperate against it, strongly insist that any man or woman harbouring it is a fool or a knave, or both. Carefully abstain from studying it. Do all that in you lies to annihilate that book, person or opinion.—*Olive Schreiner* ("Story of an African Farm.")

Sugar Plums

There was a good audience at the St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, on Sunday last. Mr. Cohen's lecture was well received and the replies to opposition brought forward loud applause. But it was a mistake, we think, to have altered the time of the meeting from afternoon till evening. The "blackout" and the rain combined kept many from attending who would certainly have been present had the meeting been held at 3 o'clock. The dinner, the seventh annual function of that kind, was again a complete success. The speeches were to the point and the entertainers deserved the thanks they received.

We are not sure whether we ought to apologise for Mr. Cohen's book, *Almost an Autobiography*, that he hoped to have finished before the end of 1939, not having yet made its appearance. But so many new things have turned up requiring attention that the finishing of the book had to be set aside. Mr. Cohen's week is always such a full one with his weekly article, paragraphs, attention to correspondence, Society business, the affairs of the Pioneer Press, and three days in many weeks travelling and lecturing, that unforeseen tasks become formidable obstacles to planned work. War conditions also have raised many things that had to be done. However, it is hoped to have the book printed this side of Whitsuntide. It will extend to between 250 and 300 pages, and will contain several plates. We hope that those who have written will be content with this explanation or apology.

We regret to learn that another of our friends, Mr. Bayard Simmens, has been on the sick list. He writes that he is slowly recovering, and hopes soon to be back to normal. He expects to be present at the Manchester Conference. He says, "I follow, with concern, your setbacks, and I envy you your resiliency." We appreciate the good feeling displayed, but our "resilience" in the face of many difficulties is based on the conviction that we have the full confidence of our readers, and, really, no paper ever had more loyal support than has been given this one. We leave it for others to say whether we have earned that support and confidence.

We have marked quite a number of new publications for notice, and one of the most charming of these is *My Friends the Baboons*, by E. N. Marais (Methuen 5s.). It is a small book (in size) of little more than 120 pages, but what there is is delightful. The author holds the quite sound opinion that the way to study baboons is to do so while they are living in their natural conditions, although he has also studied them in friendly captivity. The result is a book that is both informative and interesting. In one thing Mr. Marais illustrates a truth brought out by a study of primitive human existence, namely, that worry does not only belong to civilization. The life of the baboon is full of anxiety and fears, and is encompassed with dangers.

The most touching chapter, if one may use the expression, in the book is the last "Death among Baboons." The hut in which Mr. Marais and his friends lived was close to the herding place of a tribe of baboons with whom he was on quite friendly terms. One night he found a number of baboons sitting outside the hut. They appeared to be in some kind of trouble, and it was decided to visit their sleeping place—a cave. The tribe was found sitting in the usual manner, in a "tight bunch," the females on the inside, males on the outside, and infants in the middle. The tribe sat in perfect silence, and after some time the men returned to their hut puzzled, but unenlightened as to the meaning of the behaviour of the baboons.

The next day just before daybreak, they were awakened by a "terrible, blood-freezing cry of woe from the baboons—persistent and heart-rending." Another visit was paid to the baboons, and they discovered the bodies of eight infant baboons that had died during the night.

The baboons raised no objection to the men handling the bodies of the dead ones, although they would have resented the live ones being touched. The bodies were removed to the hut. The baboons understood at least the fact of death.

Only one unfortunate young mother followed almost on our heels with all kinds of begging sounds, and here we discovered something wonderful. It was not for the return of her child that she was begging, for when we placed all the bodies on the ground in front of her, she touched her own child in a most moving way with her lips. But it was only for a few seconds. She did not try to pick up the babe or take away the body. And then almost at once she sat with her arms stretched out to us continuously and continued her begging. What did she want? Obviously not the return of her dead infant. But she did want something which to her dim intelligence we alone were able to give her. . . . (She) wanted from us the revival of her child, wanted to have changed that huge and remorseless condition which in her environment she had learnt to know as death. Somewhere in her spirit the belief must have arisen that these magicians she had learnt to know would perhaps be able to give back life to her child.

That is the most touching bit of prehuman history I have read for a long time. Only a Christian could claim a heaven for himself and provide none for the mother of that infant baboon.

The Portsmouth Branch N.S.S. invites friends and sympathizers to a general discussion at the Kit Cat Café, opposite the King's Theatre, Albert Road, Southsea, on Wednesday, April 10, at 8 p.m. The Branch is anxious to make headway and to secure the co-operation of friends of the movement in the area.

The great success of the West London Branch Social held last Saturday has prompted, at the request of all those present, a "repeat performance" on April 27. Further details will appear in the *Freethinker* in due course. Particulars can be had from the Secretary, Mrs. Buxton, 18, Cambridge Gardens, N.W.6.

Levy's Philosophy

In his widely-read *Philosophy for a Modern Man* (1938), Prof. H. Levy presents his dialectical materialism in more systematic fashion than hitherto.

His great lasting contribution to modern thought lies in his exposition of isolates, basic to his philosophy, and probably essential in any comprehensive refutation of indeterminism. A refutation along these lines appeared in his *Universe of Science*, and is reflected in later polemic by other scientists against Eddington, usually without the use of Levy's terminology. Eddington's public utterances in defence of indeterminism have never got to grips with Levy's attack, and until they do the loss is to Eddington's, not Levy's, reputation.

While fully effective so far as it goes, it may be that the theory of isolates is incomplete as the foundation of a philosophy. A short resumé of the elements of Levy's system will preface our reasons for thinking so.

* * *

In the changing entity which is the universe matter is prior to living and thinking, mind being a quality of matter. "To inquire how the mind makes the brain work is as sensible as inquiring how sight makes the eye see. Functions are engendered in virtue of the motion which characterizes existence itself!" Thus there is no need of a Prime Mover, or of extraneous forces to sweep each phenomenon into being.

An isolate is a group or collection of events which may for practical purposes be considered a unified system, the external environment being considered as neutral to (not affecting) its behaviour. There are levels of isolates and at each level new qualities are manifested. As a group atomic particles manifest solidity, which is a statistical isolate composed of atomic units, themselves porous. (The atom is mostly composed of space. Solidity arises from a vast colony of them.) Each statistical isolate in its turn may be taken up with others so as to form a new statistical isolate, in relation to which it becomes itself an atomic isolate.

Each isolate, therefore, is statistical in relation to its parts and atomic in relation to a larger whole. Thus a tree is a statistical isolate from its parts, e.g., branches, and an atomic isolate when reckoned as part of a forest. We are always interested in a bit, an isolate, of a wider situation, itself a bit of the universe in its turn. Motion, shape, colour—these are isolates; and so are waves, isolates, not from particles, but from groups of them. Space and time are isolates from motion. An isolate is any part of the universe subject to an examination. It can doubtless be said that every noun or noun-phrase is the name of some isolate. Isolates are recognized by qualities, so that levels of qualities correspond to levels of isolates, with a group quality corresponding to a group isolate. Qualities are evinced through behaviour, bringing changing features in changing situations.

Levy illustrates pictorially how new patterns arise from combinations of the old; similarly H₂O comes naturally from the two factors, hydrogen and oxygen, without the need for supposing a teleological creativeness. "To assert that there is a purposiveness at work among inanimate objects in their mutual behaviour is to transfer to one set of circumstances a quality that comes into play only at another. . . . It transfers to a stone the hatred of an enemy and converts a meteorological storm into the wrath of a God." "Changing nature is, then, to be interpreted in terms of changing statistical isolates and their formation or disruption, and the interconnectedness of nature in terms of these binding but changing qualities."

At certain "nodal points" come changes of phase. Many examples are given; e.g., some drugs, up to a point beneficial, suddenly become lethal; or a stick may be bent till breaking point is reached. Causal agency in change is "dialectic" when it is aroused internally. At the dialectical point comes the transformation of quantity into a newly manifested quality, developing from an internal contradiction. The transformation of the quality Q into q indicates that the breaking point is reached, bringing state S to T. If Q represents the bending of a stick q is the point at which it snaps in two, bringing state S (a stick) to T (two pieces.) Phase after phase is reached by such internal developments. A and B give C, which, interacting with D, yields E, from which, by the opposition of F, G is reached, and so on. Conservative qualities may be brought out by the growth of Q, tending to keep the phase intact, or delaying the breaking point: Levy calls them "mechanical fascisms."

Because the new qualities arise from *within* the system, a merely mechanical external determinism is inadequate for the scientific account of the change. [We must here reserve judgment as to whether this accurately represents the non-dialectical materialist view; that is, as to whether materialism which is not Dialectical is incapable of recognizing the deterministic growth of internal changes. If this is so then materialism has seldom been sponsored since La Mettrie. If not, then the Dialectics are writing their own version of other people's philosophy.]

As against idealism, Levy contends that we are certainly part of the universe, and so it is not entirely independent of us, yet we "slip into idealism" in treating logical causality as a self-constituted, independent, disembodied mental necessity, instead of the reflection of the active quality of change in our mental habits.

* * *

Levy's contention that every isolate must be statistical may, we think, be doubted. "Every isolate," he says, "is simultaneously both atomic and statistical. It is atomic with respect to wider isolates with which it links through relational qualities, and every isolate is somehow linked in this way, while it is statistical with regard to the atomic elements into which it can be decomposed." Again, "the basic isolate with which we must commence is the collection, a statistical isolate with individual members, objects of any kind."

But, we ask, cannot we analyse down to a fundamental isolate-type which is self-existent; that is, which does not depend for its existence on any sub-isolate; which does not fall to pieces by being susceptible to analysis? If the statistical is only compounded out of the atomic and owes its nature as statistical to its atomic parts, then we are using the concept of an atomic isolate as something preceding the statistical, and if there is no ultimate atomic isolate, itself not statistical, we seem to lack the very bricks with which to build statistical isolates at all.

Even should existence always involve existence within a group this does not dispense with the possibility, nay the need, of the conceptual isolation of the first atomic constituent in order to think about groups in the first place. The assertion that every isolate must be statistical seems to turn the process of nature upside down by asserting that the atomic gains its status by reason of a mother-body. Thus the determination always to find sub-isolates as matter how simple and unitary the isolate under examination, would be to make the statistical the *parent* of the scattered atomic parts.

That this is not what Levy intends is obvious from his contention that matter is prior to mind, that the simple is prior to the complex. Now according to this, the *raison d'être* of the statistical isolate should be a colony of sub-isolates. Thus the atomic is systematically prior to the statistical. We thus note that they are related in such a way that we cannot think the statistical without the atomic, yet we *can* think the atomic without the statistical in the sense that the *discovery* that it is atomic (i.e., part of a statistical order) does not prejudice its original examination, and need not be made at all.

In speaking of the universe we are positing one ultimate statistical isolate (unless we care to speak of a number of universes, in which case we carry the ultimate isolate a stage further, to the "multiverse.") Why, then, should we not speak of ultimate, or foundational, atomic isolates at the other end of the scale? Then, when we have recognized motion to be inherent to nature's "building bricks," we have disposed of the Aquinate Prime Mover without embarking on the equally unintelligible recession to infinity.

G. H. TAYLOR

To place anything in God, or to derive anything from God, is nothing more than to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as indubitable, unassailable, sacred without rendering an account *why*. Hence self-delusion, if not wicked, insidious design, is at the root of all efforts to establish morality on theology. Where we are in earnest about the right, we need no incitement or support from above.—Feuerbach.

The Myth of Racial Superiority

ONE observes with considerable amusement, not unmixed with a measure of disgust, the intellectual gyrations indulged in by certain individuals as they desperately seek to maintain the myth of racial superiority. The extravagant ideas so dogmatically advanced by these persons, especially when advanced in the name of science, stand as a warning of the tendency of human emotions and sentiment to betray the critical faculties and run away with reason. It becomes increasingly obvious that these quasi-thinkers believe the statements they make *not* because of any convincing array of scientific evidence, but because they *want* to believe them. Having convinced themselves of the innate truth of their thesis by a neat process of wish-fulfilment uniquely their own, they follow up this conviction by uncovering what they consider, in their wishful state of mind, to be "evidence" to support it. This process is, of course, known very well to all of us as "rationalizing." It is one of the most universal of human traits; so much so, that even scientists, trained in the principles of logical analysis are prone to succumb to it unless they are constantly on guard against it. And because it is largely unconscious, it is all the more insidious and dangerous.

The race problem is the despair of social science. It is shot through with passion and bias; it suffers from a dangerous lack of tested facts; it is infested with dogmatic opinions; it is the victim of jugglery and confusion of terms. Can anyone think of a more effective combination of hindrances to the solution of a human problem? And yet we must face it. It will not down. Bias must be met with calm reason; absence of facts must yield to real knowledge; vague terminology must be banished and a clear-cut set of ideas substituted. It is either this or chaos—chaos in thought and action.

For eighty-six years, since the publication in 1854 of Count Gobineau's four-volume, *Essay on the Inequality of the Races*, a growing body of pseudo-scientific literature has appeared in Europe and America in defence of two theses: first, that the tall, fair-headed, blue-eyed, long-headed peoples commonly called "Nordics," are the worlds' superior creatures; second, that they are dying out as a race, and that there is a grave danger that the "brunettes" of Europe (for example, the Alpines and Mediterraneans), and the yellow, brown, and black races of Africa and Asia will outnumber and outmultiply them and will shortly submerge and destroy them.

Assuming the existence of a definite "Nordic group," the sensational writers (see for example in America, Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Colour against White World Supremacy*, and Madison Grant's, *The Passing of the Great Race*), ascribe to it the spectacular success of the past thousand years in developing modern national states, languages, and literatures; physical measuring instruments; the higher mathematics; the scientific method of thought; and the power-driven machines which were invented during the Industrial Revolution. Such writers give it credit also for the remarkable development of modern architecture, art, theatre, and music which accompanied the other achievements.

To ascribe all these achievements to the portion of the European peoples called Nordic is, of course, ridiculous, for that point of view overlooks the tremendous contributions of the Latin and Slavic peoples and the creative genius of other continents. The defenders of the Nordics went too far in counting black, brown, and yellow noses and *assuming* that the heads behind the dark-skinned noses were less capable than those behind the white ones. In every decade

after Gobineau's time, alleged savants wrote about the superiority of the Nordic race. Although much of the published material was absurd, the discussion continued. In the 1880's and 1890's even the scientific facts concerning heredity and selection built up by such workers as Sir Francis Galton were used by the scare-mongers of the race controversy.

In the meantime, however, groups of careful students knew the value and fine quality of the Chinese mind, and the creative ability of the people of India, of those of the Near East, and of other peoples. They also knew that culturally the Western Nordic had *stood on the shoulders of those inventive peoples*, and had been helped to produce his new civilization by a remarkable combination of circumstances. But, although known to scientifically-minded students, the importance of the cultures produced by non-Nordics has never been given world-wide popular circulation.

Slowly as the decades passed, the problem of the comparative abilities of races was subjected to a more scientific study. For example, anthropologists measured the physical traits of different peoples and gathered similar objective data. As a result of these studies, one fact was agreed upon by all—namely, that the peoples of the earth exhibit great differences in physical traits and in cultural achievements. They vary widely in height, weight, physical strength, shape of head, features of the face, skin colour, hair colour and texture, and the like. Their economic, political, and social ways of living vary enormously also, as do their agriculture, crafts industry, government, family organization, and other institutions. Their arts are different; their standards of values differ as well as their economic standards of living. Thus, the fact of variation has been definitely established. Nobody doubts it.

But there is no such agreement on the question of whether one type of culture is "better" or "higher" than another. Indeed, there is a great difference of judgment among students. Who is to say that the painting, sculpture, interior decoration, or household crafts of the Western Nordics are "superior" to those produced by the Chinese hundreds of years ago? Recall that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Chinese objects of art were imported into European imperial courts as models to be copied by European craftsmen! Must not students grant the possibility that the development of philosophy 2,300 years ago by such leaders as Lao-tse, Mencius, and Confucius was as great a racial achievement as the development of the philosophy of modern Europeans and Americans? Was not great intelligence required to invent the "Arabic" number system of the Near East, upon which all of the science and engineering of the Nordics is built to-day?

These are but casual reminders from much illustrative evidence on hand that the question of racial superiority is very far from being settled. In fact, it is now being demonstrated by modern anthropologists and comparative psychologists that the races of man have about the same capacity to develop civilization. New measuring tests are being applied to Europeans, North and South Americans, Asiatics, Indians, and Africans. As a result there is a growing body of knowledge that is, assuredly, more scientific than was that of Gobineau, Grant, Stoddard and Co.

No one who faces the matter frankly, denies the fact of diversity among individuals and groups, or the fact of their growing mobility and contact in modern life. It is when we begin to ask *which* diversities or differences are significant, and what our attitude toward greater contact is to be, that opinions and judgments clash. There are obvious differences, of physical appearance, of manner of behaviour, of cultural inherit-

ance between the Chinaman, the Central African Negro, and the North European white man. But because there are these differences on the surface, we must not infer that they are necessarily the expression of deep-rooted and ineradicable differences in native capacity or ability, and we must not necessarily draw the tempting conclusion that the greater the divergence from the white type, the nearer to the lower or animal type. For in some physical characteristics, such as the larger size of the brain, the small face, and high nose, the European race is farther removed: in other characteristics like the degree of hairiness, it is nearer to the probable animal ancestor of man than the other races. The few investigations that have been made of the relation between the size and shape of head and intelligence, notably by Karl Pearson and Manourier, have been altogether negative. Intelligence does not seem to depend upon size or shape of the head. There are big heads with little intelligence and little heads with big intelligence. Nor does it appear that there exists a very close relation between size of brain and intelligence. One investigator found the cranial capacity of a group of eminent men well above the average, but he also found the cranial capacity of a group of illiterate day labourers well above the average. It is possible that the smaller brain of other races may do the same work as the large brain of the white race. Even between the size of the brain and the number of cells and fibres in the brain the correlation is weak. There are, then, diversities among individuals of various races, of size and shape of head, of stature and weight, of colour of hair, pigmentation, etc., but these do not necessarily indicate inferiority or superiority.

Modern anthropological science has cast strong doubt even upon the oft-repeated assertion that the so-called simpler or primitive peoples, like the Australians, the Eskimos, the Indians, are inferior in native capacity to the more civilized peoples. Primitive man is not incapable of self-control, nor of a high degree of sustained attention; nor does he lack the power of original thought. The difference seems to lie rather in the occasions on which his group expects him to show self-control, in the different things and activities on which his social setting prompts him to concentrate his attention, and on the degree of originality permitted within the group.

If, then, diversity in physical characteristics is not significant, and diversity in mental characteristics is not as glaring as a superficial and uncritical judgment would lead us to believe, what of the cultural or civilizational diversities? For here again, no one would deny that they exist. The social inheritance of the Bushmen or of the Plains Indian is certainly different from that of the Medieval European or the twentieth century white American. The difference between these groups would seem to be rather a difference of richness and breadth and inclusiveness of their social tradition or civilizational background. It is the difference between a culturally starved group and one that is the fortunate inheritor of a treasure-house of civilization. It is, to use the language of the sociologist, a difference in the degree of social evolution and social progress.

In view of the foregoing observations, it should be apparent to anyone making the slightest pretension to a degree of scientific understanding, that the *desire* to establish the idea of racial superiority as an uncontroversial fact is one thing; the *fulfilment* of that "fond" hope is yet another. It is, indeed, deplorable that so many individuals mistake the hope for the realization. Sadder still, is the fact that this hope exists at all.

NATHAN SIMONS

Long Island City, New York, U.S.A.

Highways and Byways in English History

IV.—THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

THE civil struggles of the seventeenth century still arouse passionate partisanship even among historians. Whig authorities of the school of Macaulay, Green and Gardiner see in the events of that period a straight fight between tyranny and the people. Mr. Belloc and Mr. Arthur Bryant see in them the subversion of a popular monarchy by a gang of selfish, unscrupulous and hypocritical rich men.

What are the facts? Clarendon, a contemporary, who knew his King and knew his Roundheads, and why he himself loved one and hated the other, makes it clear that the quarrel was primarily between the aristocracy, who had influence at court and used it to get monopolies and similar advantages, and the middle class, who grudged them that influence and those advantages. The Grand Remonstrance of 1641, voted by the House of Commons and published as a manifesto to the nation, complained among other things of "the most odious monopolies of soap, wine, salt, leather, sea-coal, and the rest, which had been granted from his majesty's first coming to the crown, and some of them before." The aristocracy by an overwhelming majority sided with Charles I.: of the whole House of Lords not a fifth remained at Westminster at the outbreak of the Civil War, and not more than three or four had their hearts in the struggle. The Commons, in their quarrel with the King, were supported by the City of London, most of the large towns, and the yeomen and tradesmen.

This class struggle was mixed up with religion, because it was a vital necessity to each side to control the pulpits. The sermons and extempore prayers of Puritan ministers were vehicles of political as well as religious propaganda, and were feared accordingly by the King's Government. From the point of view of the King and aristocracy, episcopacy was a necessity. The objection to Presbyterianism is thus stated in a petition presented to the House of Lords in 1641 by the gentry of Cheshire:—

We, who are now governed by the Canon and Civil Law dispensed by twenty-six ordinaries,¹ should become exposed to the mere arbitrary government of a numerous Presbytery, who, together with their ruling elders, will arise to near forty thousand Church governors. The consequences would prove the utter loss of learning and laws, which must necessarily produce an extermination of nobility, gentry, and order, if not of religion.

The objection to Independent congregations was, if possible, greater. For a hundred years yeomen and small tradesmen had been practising the art of thinking for themselves on the limited data provided for them in the English Bible. Some were Anabaptists, some Socinians, some—as we saw in a previous article—were even criticizing the Bible itself. But they agreed in denying the right of any earthly authority to prescribe their opinions, and in objecting to the payment of tithes for the support of any established church whatever. Their fathers had faced cruel persecution under Mary and Elizabeth; and they held, with John Milton, that "new presbyter is but old priest writ large." Such were the men who formed the rank and file of Cromwell's troops, and who, after defeating Charles, became a thorn in the side of Parliament and of Cromwell himself.

The breach between the well-to-do Parliamentarians and the rank and file became apparent in 1646, when two thousand persons in Bucks and Herts petitioned

the House of Commons for the abolition of tithes. Not a member supported them. Those, it was said, who wanted to be quit of tithes would soon want to be quit of rent. Moreover, of course, the Parliamentary leaders wanted, not to abolish tithes, but to put their own friends into the parsonages. The split soon extended to other issues, including the dissolution of trading monopolies,² political democracy, freedom from impressment, law reform, and liberty of conscience, and culminated in the remarkable agitation of John Lilburne and the Levellers in 1647 and the following years.

In this struggle, the aims of the contending parties may be summed up as follows. The chief leaders in both Houses of Parliament wished to arrive at a constitutional settlement by which the King would reign, while they, representing the substantial landed and moneyed interests, would govern. The establishment of Presbyterianism meant, from their point of view, that the pulpits would be in safe keeping. On the other hand the troopers and many of the officers of the Parliamentary army, drawn from the farming and trading classes, desired political and religious equality. Between the two parties were Cromwell, Ireton and other army "grandees," hating and fearing the Levellers, yet forced to swim with the stream in order eventually to divert and dam it. With this object the council of the army put forward compromise suggestions for a moderate extension of the franchise, and religious liberty for all except Roman Catholics. The Levellers countered with the "Agreement of the People," in which they demanded manhood suffrage, abolition of the King's and Lords' vetoes, and liberty of conscience for all, not excluding Catholics, as a native right of all Englishmen which no Parliament could diminish or take away. The sole supporter of this programme in Parliament was Henry Marten, a Freethinker and Republican, who united a complete indifference to all religions with a plucky advocacy of toleration for all.

The Leveller movement was no hole-and-corner affair. "All men of estates," says a contemporary letter, "do fear lest the popular party in the Houses and the army should prevail." The army grandees defeated the movement partly by a resolute use of force, and partly by offering the Levellers the King's head instead of the liberty and equality for which they asked. That the Levellers did not lack support is shown by the fact that when Robert Lockyer, a young trooper, was shot for mutiny in 1649, thousands followed his funeral, and that when Lilburne was tried for his life in 1653, four regiments had to be moved to London to prevent a rescue, and the verdict of acquittal was received with acclamations audible a mile away.

The failure of the movement dragged down the Commonwealth. Cromwell won the support of London bankers and merchants by turning his back on the men who had followed him to victory at Marston Moor and Naseby. After his death, capital naturally turned to kingship as its surest safeguard. But the short-lived English Republic deserves not to be forgotten; and the part played by the forerunners of Freethought, and by actual Freethinkers, in that fight for liberty cannot be too often emphasized.³

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

(To be continued)

² The monopolies granted by the King to individuals had been abolished by Parliament. But trading corporations like the Merchant Adventurers, the Eastland Company, and the East India Company retained their charters. It was these which the small men now attacked.

³ Mr. Jack Lindsay's novel, *1649*, contains a masterly picture of the time, and can be recommended to all interested in studying the interplay of social forces and individual types in a revolutionary situation.

¹ Bishops.

Correspondence

THY SERVANT SAMUEL PEPYS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I have to thank you for printing my previous letter, but I regret that you and your correspondent, Mr. Donald Dale should think it worth while to continue treading on the tail of my very unimportant coat. It is in any case really impossible to deal with such profound issues by correspondence, nor do I think that the spirit in which you revise them is one out of which truth is very likely to emerge.

Human responsibility is an inescapable fact, and those who "follow God" must incur the consequences which fall, as I think quite logically, on communities within which they live, which have pursued the mistaken courses that lead to war. Moreover, it is unhappily the case that many who sincerely believe themselves to be "following God" have acquiesced in such courses owing to the prophetic failure of the Christian communions to which they belong. If you concentrate on discovering and (if you like) castigating such failures, I think your paper would do much more constructive work, as you would enjoy the satisfaction of showing up the Churches and Christian people generally for reasons which they would have no right to resent.

Mr. Dale begins his letter with a sentence so foolish that I hardly had patience to read what followed: "Prayer therefore (wherefore?) is and has by experience proved to be useless." By whose experience, and useless from what point of view? We have the "experience" of millions through the ages to show that prayer was not useless to them. Mr. Dale is entitled to say that his experience was some sort of subjective delusion (though with regard to anything experienced on this scale this would seem evidently improbable), but he cannot *prove* such a negative. He writes as if the efficacy of prayer (by strictly mundane tests) could be regarded as a means of establishing the existence of God, but of course prayer is impossible without faith in the reality of him to whom it is addressed. Where Dean Matthews has failed I shall not presume to attempt, and I do not know what evidence for the existence of God Mr. Dale has considered before issuing his "challenge" on the subject. If his letter gave me more confidence in the seriousness of his challenge, I should suggest that he read the essay by Professor A. E. Taylor on "The Vindication of Religion" in the compact volume *Essays Catholic and Critical* which he would be likely to find in any good library. But I don't believe he has read this—or that he will.

MAURICE B. RECKITT

(This reply of Mr. Reckitt must close the correspondence.—E.D.)

THE ARK

SIR,—With all due deference to Mr. Cutner and his authorities, the English word "ark" is derived from the Latin *arca*, a chest, and not from the Greek *arche*, beginning. The prefix "arch" in "archbishop" and similar words is cognate with *arche*, but has nothing to do with "ark." The "arc" of a circle comes from the Latin *arcus*, a bow—a different word again. *Arcanum*, mystery, means something hidden in an *arca*, chest, and so has an indirect connection with "ark." But *oraculum* has nothing to do with it, being derived from *orare*, to speak or pray, as also are "orator" and "oratory." All these may be verified from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

This is philosophy; to make remote things tangible, common things extensively useful, useful things extensively common, and to leave the least necessary for the last.—*Laudor*.

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