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• EDITED *by* CHAPMAN COHEN •

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*Add Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

Society and the Church

THE *Freethinker* is continually falling into new hands. This is as it should be; and not the least interesting feature resulting from making these new acquaintances are the letters some of them write. Whether they praise or blame they are interesting, and perhaps more interesting when they blame than when they praise. In these letters the people who see no more in the *Freethinker* than a persistent attack on religion are well represented. They are fond of the comment that this paper has nothing that is educative or constructive. That criticism, I say without hesitation, indicates either timidity of character or dullness of understanding. There can be no criticism of any belief, religious, political, ethical, or economic, that is wholly destructive. One does not challenge a standing belief without to some extent giving other views in place of these to which objection is taken. Take for example the question of Christianity. No one has ever attacked Christianity with such bare statements as “I do not believe it”; or “It is not true.” The rejection is accompanied by statements why Christianity is not true, and I venture to say that a Christian who reads the *Freethinker* for a few weeks will at least come into contact with more positive information as to the nature of Christian mythology and the growth of the Christian religion than he will get in a religious newspaper in a lifetime. The distinction between positive and negative teaching is mainly rubbish.

Of the timid who fear, not the teachings of the *Freethinker*, but its outspokenness, I will now only say that no cause was ever greatly benefited by timid speech. Timidity of mind is most frequently accompanied by insincerity of action. The Christian does not really respect the timid *Freethinker* more than he does the outspoken one; he usually has a contempt for him. Timidity in the expression of opinion breeds condescension in the orthodox, hypocrisy in the heretic and muddles the intelligence of both.

One letter that reached me recently was from a reader of some months' standing, and is interesting because it expresses a not uncommon point of view. He asks:—

Why not work for a reform of the Churches instead of for their destruction? No one will deny that the Churches are centres of social, cultural and benevolent activities—in villages more than in towns and cities. Destroy these social activities and with what can we replace them? Has Atheism anything to replace them?

I concede the point that there is a truth here, but it is a truth so qualified by other considerations that it is robbed of nearly all its value. The truth is that religious organizations are frequently engaged in useful social work. That to the *Freethinker* need mean no more than that religion can never monopolize the whole of life. It must allow for the play of other factors that have no essential connexion with religion. The fallacy is that any part of this social work is dependent upon religious belief.

* * *

Man and the Church

We will commence by separating essentials from non-essentials. A Church has a twofold aspect. On the one side it represents a number of religious doctrines—the belief in a God, a future life, and so forth. But just as plainly, and even more importantly, a Church stands for a number of men and women who are brought together by a community of religious belief as a consequence of the fundamental fact of the need for human companionship. There may also be other elements acting, such as the desire to accomplish some special social or political purpose. In actual life these other aspects are not separated, usually they are not avowed, and it has always been the policy of the clergy to see that the independence of the social and political factors are not recognized. At any rate, it requires no very profound research to discover that the ordinary man's interest in religion is usually of a mixed character. But man is fundamentally a pragmatic animal. He begins to believe in gods, not because he is, as religious teachers would have it, searching for God—he is far more inclined to dodge them—but because the gods are there, and it is a very dangerous thing to awaken their anger. The earliest rules of life are first expressed under the influence of religious belief. It is in the absence of a sense of natural causation that the gods come to power. This is a fundamental social truth. It is also a truth of equal value that in proportion as the sense of natural causation develops the belief in gods weakens.

But while primitive man is deeply conscious of the activities of “spiritual” agencies, there is another factor that will not be denied, and which is of deeper social significance. The rule of the gods is checked and counterchecked by the necessities of life. In his

Psyche's Task, Sir James Frazer plays the part of devil's advocate on behalf of superstition and suggests that in an early stage of social life superstition played a beneficial part by encouraging a respect for social institutions which might otherwise have weakened. A similar belief was expressed by Walter Bagehot, many years ago, in his *Physics and Politics*—a work that will still well repay reading.

One does not care lightly to run against Frazer, but both he and Bagehot appear to have been impressed by the supposed need for the "breaking in" of natural man. The sociological truth here is that man was gregarious or social before he was completely human. And the earliest of human groups are tied down to custom in a degree that civilized man finds it difficult to conceive. The simplest of actions are performed under the imperative need of strictly following a set line. This fact is familiar to students of pre-human groups, and what man adds to this is an enforcement of custom in the most trivial of actions. Bagehot's mental picture of the process was that primitive man's first and greatest need was to be broken in to the social yoke. The second and more important need, he says, was for man to break the rules that had been formed. The truth that he and Frazer overlooked is that the yoke of group life was forged before the human emerged from the animal world. The earliest human of the group yoke was to add to the group rules and enforce them by the power of a superstition that man dared not question.

But both of these fruitful speculators, curiously enough, overlooked a very important fact. This is that in the history of human life however absurd, extravagant, or dangerous a custom may be, what one may call the principle of survival is always in operation. A very good example of this is found in the Christian teaching of celibacy. For the Church this was for many centuries the ideal life. But to have carried it out in completeness would have been impossible, or it would have been possible only so long as the period between practice and death. Complete celibacy would have been a speedy end to both teaching and practice. In the end, both in theory and practice, celibacy had to be confined to the spiritually minded few.

So with all matters that are fundamental to human welfare. Theory may create a new set of conditions, but ultimately it is the persistence of certain conditions that either modifies the fact or wipes it out. Man must subconsciously master the conditions that permit associated life to continue long before he is able to propound any theory of the situation. Practice precedes theory as surely as theory may make for an understanding of practice. A conception of sociality thus develops from mere animal gregariousness. The character in the French play who was astounded to discover, late in life, that he had always been speaking prose has wide and numerous manifestations. The beginnings of human intellectual life develops from the gregariousness of the semi-human horde.

Once clearly understood, what has been said resembles a series of truisms. And its bearing on the topic with which we started is obvious. Considered as a manifestation of social life certain lines of conduct are determined more by the necessities of existence than by theory. At any rate it is with the necessities of existence that theory has ultimately to deal. Institutions and teachings, whether religious or non-religious may militate against the development of social life, but either these teachings and these institutions stop at a certain point or the society in which they function die out. The parasite kills its host. The deterioration of European life under the control of the

Christian Church is evidence of one aspect of the process I have been describing. The curtailing of the power of that Church in the interests of human development represents the other half. Human society is what Spencer called a super-organism, and to the needs of an organism theory must yield, or the organism itself disappears.

The Church and the Future

The Christian is too given to the conviction there can be no more cakes and ale because he is virtuous. The picture of the Church standing as the centre of village life with the kindly priest or parson ministering to the needs of his parishioners is like the snowy Christmases of the Christmas card. They may have existed, but for one example there were scores of exceptions. Nonconformists have dwelt upon the repressive influence of the parson where there was no influence to check his power. The parson has in turn insisted upon the narrowness and bigotry developed by the conventicle. There were, in terms of the situation, many a good squire and many a good parson, but few will deny that a better peasantry would have existed had neither the squire nor the parson possessed the control of life that law and custom gave them. One of Ruskin's correspondents wrote him that in scores of villages the clergyman was the poor man's only friend. In reply Ruskin properly said:—

Alas! I know it too well. What can be said of more ghastly and deadly blame than that they are the poor man's only friends? Have they then—in their preaching to the rich so smoothed their words, and so sold their authority that, after twelve hundred years' entrusting the Gospel to them, there is no man in England (this is their chief plea for themselves, forsooth!) who will have mercy on the poor but they?

Ruskin's reply was complete, and it was overwhelming. If the clergy were the only, or even the chief friends of the poor, it was the Church that taught "blessed be ye poor" and it was against Christians of the Churches own breeding that the poor had to be protected. And even to-day in town and village it is not as centres of culture and independent thought that the Church or chapel hall is opened. It is rather as centres of control, a form of guard against that wider culture and greater independence of mind which would spell the death of all the churches.

I hope I have now answered the question of my correspondent fully and frankly. There is good associated with the Churches, but that good is not of them. The gregarious nature of man has not diminished with the decline of Christianity it has, on the contrary, deepened and strengthened. There is not an association of any kind—cultural, philanthropic, literary, or social—that cannot be found outside the Churches. The desire for human companionship, the love of culture, did not begin with the Churches and has not been strengthened by their patronage. It says little for the value of Church influence on the life of the people that for centuries there were few centres of communal intercourse beyond the control of the Church. The Church prevented development here as it prevented development elsewhere. Hitler to-day might boast with equal truth that there are no cultural institutions, no clubs or friendly associations outside the sphere of Nazism. In the case of charities the Church profited far more than did the poor, and even in our time the fight of the Churches to control charities and other movements has a very marked selfish purpose. Some few years ago, Charles Booth in his survey of life in London said that Church and Chapel fought for the control of charities as commercial

travellers fought for orders for their respective firms. I do not think that anyone may fear what will happen when the control of the Churches decline and disappear. Their weakening will mean here as elsewhere, greater opportunities for a more human and reasonable society.

CHAPMAN COHEN

The Wonder of Wilde

Poor splendid wings so frayed and soiled and torn!
 Poor kind wild eyes so dashed with light quick tears!
 Poor perfect voice, most blithe when most forlorn.
 That rings athwart the sea whence no man steers
 Like joy-bells crossed with death-bells in our ears.

Swinburne

OSCAR WILDE is one of the very select band of English writers who have secured enduring European reputations. This is curious, for he was neither an original author nor a deep thinker. He had, however, unusual gifts of freshness of expression, and he absorbed other men's thoughts like a sponge. The device of all his plays is actually commonplace and threadbare, and it is the brilliant and witty conversation which help so materially their success. Wilde owed a great debt to his predecessors, from Sheridan to Sardou. In *Salome* he was fortunate enough to add a play to the repertoire of Europe, an achievement far beyond the reach of most dramatists.

In early manhood Wilde was a very unusual figure, all compact of insincerity. He posed so much that he almost forgot how to be himself. He paraded all sorts of follies, flaunting peacock's feathers, wearing his hair long, bedecking himself with velvet and jewels. His early poems achieved the glory of a fifth edition, and he became the curled, perfumed darling of society satirized by Gilbert:—

The greenery-vallery
 Grosvenor Gallery
 Foot-in-the-grave young man.

Always a clever talker, Wilde put all his goods in the shop-window, and, as time went on, he must have surprised himself. For he became most effective when most personal, and he learned in sorrow what he taught in literature. For this reason, *De Profundis* and *A Ballad of Reading Gaol* must always command readers who have scant sympathy with his other work. Wilde himself always considered his personality far more remarkable than anything he had written. It was an amazing and a truthful criticism to come from a man who was a Piccadilly Hero.

It was the terrible tragedy of Wilde's own life that gave permanence to his writings. It is true that his plays received a warmer welcome in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna than in London, and his sparkling essays and his *Picture of Dorian Gray* ran into editions after editions. His earlier work was, in the last analysis, but the outcome of a brilliant intellect. It was suffering that added depth and the necessary human note. In *De Profundis* and *A Ballad of Reading Gaol*, he wrote straight from the heart, and often with eyes full of tears. *The Ballad* is not only full of a haunting beauty of expression, but it is also a criticism of our penal system. Listen to these lines upon a prisoner condemned to death:—

I never saw a man who looked
 With such a wistful eye
 Upon that little tent of blue
 Which prisoners call the sky
 And at every drifting cloud that went
 With sails of silver by.

Then read this uncanny passage:—

It is good to dance to violins
 When love and life are fair,
 To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes
 So delicate and rare;
 But it is not sweet with nimble feet
 To dance upon the air.

Stanza after stanza has its haunting music:—

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
 By each let this be heard,
 Some do it with a bitter look,
 Some with a flattering word,
 The coward does it with a kiss
 The brave man with a sword.

The same mastery of language is apparent in *The Harlot's House*:—

Then suddenly the tune went false,
 The dancers wearied of the waltz,
 The shadows ceased to wheel and whirl,
 And down the long and silent street,
 The dawn with silver-sandalled feet,
 Crept like a frightened girl.

De Profundis was actually written in prison. The book is pathetic from the first page to the last, but some passages are unforgettable:—

To those who are in prison tears are a part of every day's experience. A day in prison on which one does not weep is a day on which one's heart is hard, not a day on which one's heart is happy.

This pathos comes so unexpectedly from a society butterfly, whose earlier language was a craft as much as an art, and related to carpets and wallpapers, and not to real life itself with its burdens of sorrow and death. When he was young, in the glory of his vanity, he had scoffed at Goethe's lines, his mother's favourite quotation:—

Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
 Who never spent the midnight hours
 Weeping and waiting for the morrow,
 He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.

Wilde had been a lotus-eater. The great river of life had flowed quietly past the poet while he languidly watched its ripples, and repeated: "Experience, the name we give to our mistakes," or "Sleep, like all wholesome things, is a habit," or "Merely to look at the world will always be lovely." How little did he then realize that one day he would be struggling for sheer existence in the same river, and that art and aesthetics are but sorry substitutes for human love and sympathy. He was like poor Heinrich Heine, who dragged his paralysed limbs to the Louvre to see once more the Venus de Milo before sinking helpless on his mattress-grave, and falling at her feet, seemed to hear her say that she could not lift him up because she had no arms. The apostle of pleasure and artistic beauty was doomed to eat the bitter bread of banishment and sorrow. It was during this sad period that he thought his deepest thoughts and did his best work. *De Profundis* tells of his experiences during this terrible time. It and *A Ballad of Reading Gaol* overshadow all his other work. They are as strange in literature as the haunting ballads of Francois Villon, for few writers, gifted as these two men were, had such sad experiences to record.

MIMNERMUS

The use of reading is to aid us in thinking.—Gibbon.

"Christ versus Christianity"

IN England to-day it is a difficult task to defend Jesus Christ. Apart from many highly-convincing attacks upon his ideas (delivered in his name) by such folk as the Dean of St. Paul's, the twin Anglican Archbishops and Cardinal Hinsley, one cannot help realizing that Christ must have been a quite impossible person in war-time. For he seems to have spent most of his time and energy in creating "alarm and despondency" within the meaning of the Defence of the Realm regulations; and our zealous Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson (my Aunt Caroline's favourite politician) would, I fear, have regarded him as no case for a remission of sentence.

Nevertheless although most Christians in England are strongly opposed to Christ's teaching, I feel that Christianity ought not to give Christ up entirely. I would earnestly plead with Christians to retain him even in war-time, when we have to give up (and are all delighted, as the Press tell us, to give up) so much.

You can always improve upon what Christ said to suit modern minds and modern conditions. That is what Churches and theological schools are established for. That is why the clergy take a text of five words and utter a 50,000 word sermon upon it.

Take one part of Christ's teaching: Love your enemy and turn the other cheek. Christian clergy, full of patriotic zeal for Britain, nowadays are busily engaged in explaining that doctrine away; and I should like to assist their good work. Ignorant and simple folk may fall into the strange error of supposing that Christ meant what he said. Nothing of the kind. First, he did not mean German or Italian or Japanese or Russian enemies, because he never knew such horrible folk: if he had, he would have excepted them in war-time. Second, Christ must have meant your personal enemy and not Government enemies like Fascists, Communists and the like. For he never said "Love your country's enemy."

Remember that Jesus, unfortunately, never went to a public-school or University, and was not the intellectual equal of our Romish or Anglican clergy of to-day. He never got on in life; he never occupied either the chair of St. Peter at Rome or even the chair of St. Augustine at Canterbury. As Son of God, he has his claim upon us Christians, of course (as Aunt Caroline says); but do not let us, as educated English folk forget that he was only a Jew and a working-class person at that. We cannot doubt that he would have been immensely impressed by the Pope's views; by the slightly different views of Cardinal Hinsley; and by the urgent representations of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York (especially as these would be endorsed by the Governments of all Christian and civilized States) that "Love your enemy" will hardly do as an expression of high State policy in war-time.

But if Jesus Christ is rather out-moded and a trifle mistaken, and while I cannot defend his exact words, I repeat that Christians need not give him up entirely. He only needs bringing up-to-date with a few immaterial alterations such as: "Love your enemy with Bron guns, bombs, bullets, bayonets, tanks, submarines, battleships and aeroplanes." Such instruments of love, it is true, were not invented in those barbarous days of Jesus. But I am sure that, with his ready facility for quoting and adapting Old Testament texts, Christ would have remembered the following: "Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and throweth them against the stones," and made that doctrine more modern—while retaining the bright and brotherly character of the original—by amending it to:

Blessed shall he be that droppeth bombs on the babies and maketh many another Holy Innocents' Day.

Since a number of unpleasant people are only too ready to be criticizing the English clergy (as my Aunt Caroline has noticed) I should like to praise their judicious Christ-editing on one point. Some of these excellent men have pointed out that you can fight and kill your enemy without hating him. Thus your Christian duty, it appears, is to kill your enemy but not hate him. Merely love him and kill him. It must be a great comfort to a dead man's relatives to know that it all happened in pure love; and he is just as dead anyway as if you hated him.

Those Christians who (like my dear Auntie Caroline) are a little uneasy over Jesus Christ's failure to recognize that war is war; that lying propaganda is necessary in war-time; and that nothing matters compared to "victory" over the enemy, should note that on one patriotic point (perhaps the most important of all), Christ's views were sound. I allude, of course, to the all-important topic of War Finance. For, as we all know, it is money, not men, that is going to do our fighting for us; the ideas in the soldiers' head and the lack of ideas in his general's, count for nothing in modern warfare. Well, Christ's views on finance were those of our Mr. Montague Norman our *Financial News* and our much respected Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Kingsley Wood. Can higher praise be given? Christ said "Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's," which means (I take it) in these days, when the Government has declared that it has the right to "take all," that you should put everything, even your very shirt, into War Bonds. No fault can be found with that—except that it is rather a pity that Jesus made the mistake of mentioning a beastly Italian, even an ancient and a dead one. Perhaps he thought Italy might come in on our side (like my Aunt Caroline). I feel sure that if he had realized what wops and cowards Italians are nowadays, and how they *always* stab in the back when they are on the wrong side—and what a cad Mussolini proved to be, not at first when he gave Communists castor-oil, but in the long run! You know what I mean, I feel sure. In war-time all we English think alike; and on the right lines too.

Going back to Jesus Christ (how Salvation-Army that sounds, but I do not intend to be vulgar, I assure you) we must note that he was rather in favour of Dictatorship by his Father. He was also a sound Royalist proclaiming himself a King and quite in favour of the Kingdom, not the Republic, of Heaven. I feel sure (as my Aunt says) that our dear King George would have appealed to him (especially in uniform) and that he would have preferred the Duke of Windsor to be Governor of the Bermudas, Bahamas or whatnot. I mean, we all feel like that, don't we, as my Aunt says?

Of course if Christ had lived to-day and known our splendid Bishops and Peers of the Realm and above all our perfectly wonderful House of Commons, he would have recalled with disgust the beastly Jewish Sanhedrin that he knew, and realized that the world has progressed since his time, even if not much; and that there may be something in democracy, especially in the English form of democracy, run by the "best people," after all. Also Committees and Limited Companies would have made a special appeal to him for they often become "as little children" (as he desired people to be). Further, instead of denouncing Pharisees and Saducees and high priests and scribes and warning them of "wrath to come" he would have advised them to form a Limited Liability Company (subscrib-

ing a one-pound share each) so as to avoid personal responsibility. Or as they were Jews, he would have advised each of them to put his immortal soul in his wife's name so that they would be all right on the Day of Judgment.

Of course it is impossible to deal with all of Christ's teachings in this short article. He said so much; he was no member of Britain's Silent Column; but then our splendid Mr. Duff-Cooper had not thought of that then. In fact Christ was rather a talkative man; but though he said many depressing things he was not always defeatist. He stood up to the people he didn't like. He never apologized. He never withdrew. And he anticipated the Probation System of our British Courts by letting the penitent thief off when it was safe to do so. If you think about it really (as my Aunt often says) he was far more of an Englishman than a Jew (if you don't much like some Jews, I mean), but he had absolutely nothing in common with a German or Italian.

One or two other things. When he said "Blessed are the Peacemakers," it should be explained that he meant "except in war-time"; and we can't help blaming him a little for not saying so, for how offensive a "peace-offensive" is in war-time, to all of us. Again in denouncing "hireling shepherds" he ought to have drawn a careful distinction between the stipends of our excellent Bishops and clergy and what he meant—whatever he did mean. For, otherwise, his words were not in very good taste, and might be seriously misunderstood by the modern English flock.

But with all his many faults—such as healing people without being a properly qualified medical man, and indulging in what the Law of England very properly reprobates such as "insulting words" and the like—I do feel that (even in these days) there is still something to be said in favour of Jesus Christ. No doubt he sometimes failed to express himself in a statesman-like way, and with a due regard to the difficulties of Europe in 1940. No doubt, too, he often did surprising and unconventional things, which, we can be sure, he would wisely refrain from doing to-day—especially now when Britain cannot allow the freedom and laxity of peace-time. But, after all, as Lord Halifax so emphatically has said, we are fighting for Christianity—he has not dared to say for Christ—and though no one in his senses would suggest that Christianity and its Christians has anything in common with Jesus Christ, Christians do use the trade-name, and lots of people have heard of Christ.

Therefore, I urge Christians to defend Jesus Christ, his words and works (so far as that may properly be done in England in war-time, without breaking the law or hurting other people's patriotic feelings). Difficult as this may appear, it is by no means impossible as this article proves. You can always whitewash what is black and black-lead what is white; and it is my humble opinion that the man who shrinks from this duty in the cause of Religion or Patriotism is utterly unworthy of the name of Briton and is, indeed, no true man at all. As my Aunt Caroline and Members of the Houses of Parliament are fond of adding to their remarks: "Especially in war-time."

One last word, inspired by that beautiful Departmental poster showing a flaming cross above the Union Jack and urging us to join "the Crusade" by investing in War Bonds. When Jesus urged us not to lay up treasure "where moth and dust do corrupt, and where thieves break in and steal," his omniscient mind must have seen clearly to the future of this great Financial Crusade, and we may be sure that he meant us to get a safe 3½ per cent interest. Therefore it

is our Christian duty to back up our gallant soldiers, sailors and airmen by getting 3½ per cent until the Government brings out a financial issue offering 4 or 5 per cent, and my Aunt Caroline says this is the patriotic course which—advised by her bank and stockbrokers—she intends to follow.

C. G. L. DU CANN

Man

To the poet, man was:—

A being darkly wise, and rudely great.
In doubt to deem himself a god or beast.
The glory, jest and riddle of the world;

And because of the above characteristics, and many others given in his *Essays on Man*, Pope was of opinion that:—

The proper study of mankind is man.

Charles Darwin made an extensive study of man—*The Descent of Man*—in which he tells us that man has been studied more than any other animal.

Many of Darwin's conclusions were challenged. He thought that the races of man should not be treated as distinct species, because they graduated into each other. And, therefore, that man should be classed as a single species. But, he instances thirteen, more or less, scientific men who disagreed not only with him, but with themselves. Their numbers of distinct species being—2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 23, 61 and 63.

No two men seem, in this "proper study," able to avoid coming to improper conclusions.

Urged by Pope's line:—

Laugh where we must, be candid where we can.

the following few brief notes have taken shape.

Our Scriptures give three species, though God made man in his own image (Gen. i. 27). The serpent played the devil with Eve, by begetting Cain—the progenitor of the wicked. The angels by intercrossing (Gen. vi. 2), checked the devil by providing the progenitors of the righteous. And Adam founded the respectable middle classes. The scriptures thus give three distinct species. (1) The wicked—children of the devil (Job xv. 16). (2) The Middle class—The children of Adam (Ps. viii. 5.) (3) Philosophers, poets, the righteous, etc.—Children of Angels. (John xv. 16.)

Henry Fielding, the novelist gives one, only:—

The gods made men to laugh at them.

Shakespeare gives two:—

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport.

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in appreciation how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" (Hamlet.)

Browning gave none:—

Man is not man as yet.

But, if you want want to hear news of home, go abroad! Dr. Charles H. Mayo, of Rochester, U.S.A., views man from a purely utilitarian point of view. Man he says is worth exactly half a dollar. That is his intrinsic market value. He gives us an analysis of man's elements and compounds as follows:—

Iron=enough to make into a fairly large nail.

Fat=seven pieces of soap.

Sugar=Sufficient to seventeen half a dozen apple fritters.

Lime=enough to whitewash a hencoop.

Phosphorous=enough to provide heads for 2,200 Matches.

Magnesium=to a dose of salts.

Sulphur=enough to rid a dog of its fleas.

Potassium=enough to supply the nitre to discharge a toy cannon.

And M. Soyer, in *The Modern Housewife*, tells us that this insignificant little creature, in the course of his lifetime, devours 30 oxen, 200 sheep, 100 calves, 200 lambs, 50 pigs, 1,200 fowls, 300 turkeys, 263 pigeons, 120 turbot, 140 salmon, 30,000 oysters, 5,475 lbs. weight of vegetables, 243¾ lbs. of butter, 24,000 eggs, 4½ tons of bread, besides fruit and sweetmeats, 49 hogsheads of wine, 584 gallons of spirits, and about 3,000 gallons of tea and coffee. This is a mere outline of what a modern epicure would consume. A man, with a good appetite, M. Soyer estimates, for 60 years consumption, would require some 40 tons of meat, farinaceous food and vegetables.

M. Soyer (1809-1858) was a famous French chef. His figures may be correct, but I think his 50 pigs to be a high figure, of course it all depends about their average weight, and his figure for eggs seems low. Eggs, in cakes, to breakfast, etc., an average of two per day seems reasonable. That quantity consumed for say sixty years gives 43,800, so that M. Soyer's 24,000 eggs does not seem at all unreasonable.

Soyer's epicure, evidently was a man of an irreligious character. Bald locusts, beetles, and grasshoppers do not figure in the above list, though he is advised to eat them in Lev. xi. 22.

Man's a strange animal, and makes strange uses (Byron)—Forbidden to eat snails (Lev. xi. 30,) snail-eating was common, for many centuries in Italy and France. In Pliny's time, the Barbary snail was the paragon of animals, those of Sicily ranked second. Snail culture was a great industry in the Tyrol. Four million snails were annually exported from Ulm, in "cags" of ten thousand, fetching twenty-five to forty florins a cag. Snails were fattened on meal and new wine.

Robert May, in his cookery book, published 1660, gives directions for cooking them:—

Stew in claret, vinegar, and spice, with some hard-boiled eggs, serve on bread, with slices of lemon, fry in butter with onions or eels; or, after being shelled, salted and scoured—boil with rosemary, parsley, thyme, and salad oil, put back in shells, set over the fire, and serve hot from the gridiron.

Gipses were very fond of them. One old Woman is recorded to have fed herself and family all through one winter on snails she had salted down in a barrel.

But something too much of this! So, as a snail that melteth, I will now pass away (Ps. xviii. 8). The speed of my passing may be reckoned from that of the "forest snail," who travels at the rate of a mile in forty-four hours!

Finally: "A thought for Christian readers! The snail season, August-October, is now with us. Let us, therefore joyfully raise our voices fervently:—

My table thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes!

GEORGE WALLACE

My business and my art is to live.—Montaigne.

Welsh Comedy

I SEE the National Eisteddfod has not awarded the prize for a Welsh drama.

Why not?

None good enough, I presume. The Welsh genius does not seem to run to drama.

Rather surprising!

It is, seeing the Welsh are naturally dramatic, though unconsciously so.

Yes. Even their preachers behave as on the centre of the stage—with God occupying a side box.

Maybe. Really they're crowd dramatic, communally pantomimic, collectively exhibitionist; in short, tribal. Such cannot be staged, not formally, not on the orthodox stage.

Very apposite. Yet no country I should say contains so much material for drama as Wales, especially for comedy.

Then why no award at the Eisteddfod?

The wrong people judging the scripts sent in, and the wrong people writing them.

You think the Bards have no dramatic sense.

No. The Bards have too much dignity and national pride. I think I see what you're driving at.

I'm sure you do. There's material in Wales for a magnificent comedy, but it will have to be a satiric one.

The Welsh themselves would be shocked at it.

Horribly. It will cause a riot.

Specify.

Nationalism is itself comic. Yet tragic too. A waste of human thought and energy. Out-of-date, and unworkable in the modern world. Cannot the Welsh leaders see what an appalling mess Nationalism has made of Europe?

Leaders never see anything.

Don't be cynical.

I'll leave that to you.

Very well. It's enough to make any dog bark and bite—or laugh. I suppose the items could be dealt with in a play.

Yes. There's nothing exclusive to modern drama; no taboos.

Then seriatim: Wales has no natural boundary eastward. Communication with England is easier than between North and South Wales. Shrewsbury's the geographical capital of Wales. Welsh industry's financed by outside money. Nearly all its products are exported—except scenery, and that needs English visitors. English and Scottish—and Jewish—experts run Welsh industries all but agriculture, and that requires a vigorous stirring-up.

Not to mention that there must be more Welsh living out of Wales than in it.

Emphatically so. London's the Mecca of all young Welsh.

I've found that. The drapery and dairy trades swarm with them.

And they won't go back; would not under National rule, no more than the Irish will.

It's queer.

Perhaps not. Self-government often means a heavier tyranny than foreign dominance.

Oh, yes. A common occurrence.

Consider other aspects of Wales and you'll see it would be so.

Expound them. Remember they're supposed to be dramatic.

And comic.

Presumably they could be made both, but I'd like to hear them.

You shall. Nonconformity. If the Welsh brands

of dismal religiosity and gloomy Sabbatarianism aren't comic I don't know what is.

To outsiders.

Exactly. That was my case about a real Welsh comedy being unpopular in Wales, disturbing and provocative.

You suggest the local dictators are produced by Calvinism.

The same spirit. Look at the intolerance of Welsh temperance.

A hit! a palpable hit. Welsh temperance bigotry's grotesque.

More meat for the great comedy.

You think Chesterton's line applicable, "A great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod."

He must have had Wales in mind. The great big black teetotaller covers many things. Imagine such with its own Parliament and bureaucracy. We should have a new eye-opener in Puritanism. I've lived in Wales, so I know what sectarianism and sour-mindedness can be, though properly treated the Welsh might be a gay and free-hearted race. But exclusive Nationalism's not going to make them so. Wales needs emancipation from its cranks and eccentrics, from its traditions of recent centuries, from those who think trammeling a people the ideal. Breadth and development are necessary to Wales. The Welsh spirit, at present repressed, could soar like a bird.

I thought you were sketching the outlines of a comedy!

I am, but not farce. It will be strong drama, leading to a crusade.

Be careful.

Why?

You're heading for another form of Nationalism.

Perhaps I am, and rightly so. Hitherto Nationalism has been the excuse for suppression, mean grudging denial of human liberties, attempts to bind shackles on everyone like the mentally cramped self-chosen leaders burden themselves with. My idea of Nationalism's expansion, offering to other nations the best of its own and asking in exchange the best of theirs, so that the world gets permeated by ideals which can be tested in a wider area. Nationalism should be experimental.

In short, Nationalism should be international.

Well said.

I was afraid at one part of your exposition the comedy would deteriorate into one long sneer.

Nothing was farther from my thoughts. Witty; yes. Satire can be a noble instrument, though it may have to be used in painful operations to excise or excoriate the false.

You can be sure there would be outcries of protest. Especially from those who had something personal to lose.

Yes. There are other vested interests beside financial ones.

They'll have to be knocked, though it means toppling more than one idol off its pedestal.

Sketchy so far, but full of meat. What about further details?

You asked for outlines. Already I've given you enough for half-a-dozen plays on Welsh Nationalism and the Welsh spirit. I nearly put versus between them.

Beware! An important point: I take it the comedy will be in English.

Yes. It could be translated, but the English version would have a wider appeal.

Eh?

Certainly. Monolingual Welsh are few and dwindling, and doubtful theatre goers.

I suppose you're right.

I am. English is the future language of Wales.

Somebody ought to tell the truth about the use of Cymric.

Do so.

I will. It's lapsing into a scattered dialect; localized dialects in practice. It's not modern; has few terms for up-to-date usage, as engineering and other technicalities. Those who speak it have a small vocabulary of common words. Many of them mingle it with English, often adding Welsh inflections as well as accent. With some it's largely a pose. Put a Welsh classic before them and they're puzzled.

I believe it's sometimes convenient not to know English.

True. Any lawyer or official could enlighten you on that.

Tell me: Do the Welsh swear; in the vernacular I mean?

Why?

Because I read one prominent Welshman reported as saying they didn't unless they'd been contaminated by contact with the English.

He must have left Wales a long time; long enough to forget. You should hear an aggrieved Welshman begin with diawl or Duw anwyl or Jesus Crist and work his way up through flights of commination.

Real eloquence.

A lesson in constructive cursing, like an extempore prayer. That reminds me of the native literature, which contains too many sermons, and poems of hidebound structure.

And too much archeological and antiquarian content.

Excessively. As Welsh music consists too much of hymn tunes.

Is there any other Welsh music?

Oh, yes. On that I wish to sound a note of approval. Those who criticize Wales for having no orchestras or solo pianists or violinists don't know anything at all about it.

They overlook the harp.

Better; the voice. I can do nothing but praise the Welsh for developing that greatest instrument, the human voice, both sung and spoken. That they should stick to. It can be wonderful, more flexible and thrilling than any instrumentalism. And it's democratic. There the crowd, tribalism as you called it, can have full emotional sway. Welsh choral singing always moves me. It's so spontaneous. That Wales must retain.

Then why not a native opera?

Quite feasible, but it's outside my province.

Are you going to discuss Welsh art generally?

No. Its graphic and plastic arts and architecture are not peculiar to itself. Nothing on a national scale. What interests me is the great Welsh satiric comedy which must be written.

Write it yourself.

I wish I could. I will consider it.

A.R.W.

The Mystery

WHEN life ebbs low, and eyes grow dim,
And I have passed beyond the rim
Of this dark world, into a darker realm unknown,
Perchance, I shall not stand alone
On that vast shore, but with silent tread
Pass thro' the host of countless dead.
Perhaps a hundred years from now,
Some broad farmer with his plough
My clay shall turn, and feed
The rich brown earth with richer seed.
For who can solve the mystery
Of what we are when we cease to be?

EDITH B. DRISCOLL

Acid Drops

That exercise in banality, the Saturday sermon, is, in the *Daily Telegraph*, now in the hands of the Rev. L. B. Ashley. With an obvious view to the Day of Prayer on the 8th, that gentleman writes on September 7 that those who pray must do so with the firm conviction that God is, and that we "diligently seek Him." That is, of course, part of the usual rigmarole. If your prayers are to be answered you must believe first of all. On the other hand we are told that if we pray for belief in God we shall get it. The plan works both ways. Pray long enough and you will get an answer in belief. But if your prayers are to be answered you must believe. That is a good sound theological proposition. That it is a formula devised by knaves to impose on fools robs it of none of its religious value.

But the immediate consideration of the matter is the praying orgy of the 8th. And this does really offer a problem which we would like Mr. Ashley to solve—although we are quite certain he will not attempt to do so. There will be large numbers of people gathered together in prayer, just as they would gather to see an execution or a popular film star. Some of these will believe strongly, some weakly, and the larger part of the people will not pray at all. Now if the people who pray get what they ask for with regard to the war, the people who do not believe will also share in the consequences. In which case those who do not pray will be just as well-off as those who do. If the people who do not pray have to endure a longer period of war they will not get what they pray for, and they might just as well have stayed at home and played darts or some other game. We really should like to see Mr. Ashley tackle this problem. We give it up.

The *Daily Telegraph* itself romps in with a religious "thumper." It says that the king (really his religious advisers) would no more order a day of prayer in his own behalf than he would or could declare war) has summoned his people to prayer, and "the English-speaking peoples throughout the world will be united in a solemn act of acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God." But there will be many, many millions who will not pray, and the larger part of British subjects will certainly not pray to the Christian God at all and who do not recognise his sovereignty. A day of prayer provides humbug enough in any case, but is it absolutely necessary for its advocates to lie, and lie and lie again?

If prayer is of such avail, will the government order that all those engaged in war-work shall cease their labours for one hour to tell God all about it, and to advise him how he can help? This will give the men a rest, and, if it shortens the war, will be as good as bombs.

Someone who signs himself "Lay Churchman" writes to one of the religious journals complaining that one National Day of Prayer is not enough. He thinks that there should be a fast accompanying the prayer. Well, applied to certain persons, or to a certain type of person, we think the proposal a good one, and we would suggest that a fast of, say, six weeks, should be attempted.

After all, fasting has played a great part in religious history in general and in Christian history in particular. Among primitive people, fasting is the regular preparation for those who wish to enter into communication with the tribal spirits. Christianity followed this early method as it did other primitive practices. Jesus fasted frequently, and endorsed this common preparation for visions of and intercourse with the supernatural. The saints of the Christian Church were great fasters, and were rewarded with heavenly visions. In the New Testament we are told that Jesus fasted forty days before his encounter with Satan. Tylor is right when he says that "So long as fasting is continued as a religious rite, so long the consequences in morbid mental exaltation will continue, the old savage doctrine that morbid fantasy is supernatural experience." And, of course, one may find in that museum of primitive beliefs and practices, the Roman Catholic Church, numerous illustrations of the perpetuation of this method of de-

ranging the mind in order to produce the hallucination of contact with a spiritual world. And, case for case, it is questionable whether the state of exaltation that results from over-indulgence in alcohol has produced anything like the evil that the torture of the mind and nervous system generally in the interests of religion has done.

Letters in the *Church Times* on religion in the Army are by no means as enthusiastic as that journal would like. It appears that quite a deal of opposition is given to many parsons' well-meant efforts to provide "Holy Communion" for the troops. Not all officers are very religious and many applications by local parsons to hold religious services are quietly ignored. Those very religious soldiers who would like the religious services extended write extremely disgruntled letters at the lack of encouragement they encounter; and altogether it looks as if religion in the Army depends more on a very pious commanding officer than on the "padre."

The real difficulty is to alter that formidable compilation called "King's Regulations." Individual soldiers who do not want religion thrust down their throats find it difficult to protest because King's Regulations insist on Church Parade. They cannot be ignored even by an unbelieving C.O. The problem has to be attacked at its very base and the whole question to be revised there. Whether that is possible when a war is in full swing is another matter. But if Freethinkers in the Army insist upon it being known that they do not believe in religion, it must be a very poor triumph for an Army chaplain to compel them to go to church; and that is bound to be the thin edge of the wedge.

The *Times* continue to publish letters from those who wish to keep alive during the war the movement for more completely sectarianising our elementary and secondary schools. The declared aim is to get the schools staffed by teachers who have training in religious instruction and believe what they teach. That is one way of saying that Freethinking teachers, who are honest enough to let their opinions be known, are to be excluded probably from the schools, and certainly barred from promotion.

As an example, presumably of Christian liberality, Sir Archibald Sinclair says in *Revielle* for August 31st, that "Atheists and Agnostics will not be barred from the Services." That is very gracious, but he then proceeds to explain that "Men in those categories are linking themselves with us in the fight for the survival of Christianity." We desire to say quite plainly that this last statement is a plain lie and an impudent lie, and we hope that all Freethinkers in the Services and out of it will not forget it. There is not a single Atheist or Agnostic in the Services—to say nothing of those huge number of men who belong to non-Christians—who is fighting for the survival of Christianity. We challenge Sir Archibald to substantiate his statement. And we invite the attention of Freethinkers in his constituency to so slanderous a statement.

We hope, also, that those who try to call Sir Archibald to book will not be put off with the readiness of Freethinkers to claim for Christianity the right to survive, if it can, by fair means. But Sir Archibald himself is evidence that it is not very likely to survive under these conditions. Historically the Christian Church was built up by fraud, lying, and persecution. It is not likely to survive more than a few generations if it has to meet the opposition of modern thought on absolutely equal terms.

We are pleased to see that Manchester City Council has done, as we said last week it should do, with regard to the action of the Watch Committee in sending back for reconsideration the resolution in favour of Sunday Cinemas. The City Council declined the impertinent action of the Watch Committee and reaffirmed its original decision. We do not know the exact powers of the Watch Committee, we know it is largely made up of police power. But we would rather the Cinema proprietors took our advice and challenged the working of a piece of religious racketeering by adopting the plan of free admission with a charge for reserved seats.

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FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. T. Jones—Very pleased to hear from one who has read the "Freethinker" since 1883, and is of opinion that it grows better with age. The whole of our staff of writers will be pleased with this testimony. Your letter is a tribute to their work.

R. B. Brown—We are pleased to hear that your insistence on having your description of yourself as "Atheist" when joining the army was insisted on, and that your appeal to a superior officer, soon cleared the stupidity and foolish opposition of the N.C.O. One would think that any intelligent officer would much rather have with him men with a sense of intellectual integrity than those who have no prejudices in that direction.

L. Woodhead, J. Cannon—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for a period.

F. C. Holden.—Many thanks for your kind letter, good wishes heartily reciprocated, and the paper has been sent as requested to all the addresses named.

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

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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When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Sugar Plums

This copy of the *Freethinker* has been produced under unique and almost paralyzing conditions. We are writing this on Tuesday—our Press day—and the eight to ten hours' bombing per day has disorganised what are officially called the "essential services." We have not even the time for much of the paper to be carefully read, but we can safely rely upon the intelligence and good nature of our readers in that respect. Even the daily papers, with their immense resources, have not yet been issued (ten o'clock a.m.). The great thing is to get the paper out complete and on time. We have done this but the delivery over the country must depend on train and other services.

Writing from the Foreign Office, we presume on Foreign Office note-paper, Lord Halifax expressed to the Secretary of the International Missionary Council his "regret if the responsibility which Christian people rightly feel towards the special needs and charities that press upon us in war time" should lead to neglect of support of the missionary movement. We suggest that as Lord Halifax seems determined to misuse his office in this manner he should resign his post and devote himself to missionary labour. A man

SPECIAL

WITH a view to meeting circumstances that may arise with a prolongation of the war, we should be greatly helped if each subscriber to the *Freethinker* would be good enough to send us his, or her, name and address. We refer only to those who procure their copies through newsagents. Those who order direct from the office have their addresses already on our books.

The circumstances we have in view may never arise, but it is well to be prepared for all kinds of difficulties. We have, so well as we can, guarded the future of the paper in many directions, and this suggestion represents the last contingency of which we can think—at the moment.

All that is required is just a name and an address on a postcard or in a letter. We shall know to what it refers. Our readers have assisted us so willingly, and in so many directions, that we do not hesitate to ask this further help.

CHAPMAN COHEN

who cannot separate his own private convictions concerning religion from his obligations as a Minister of the Crown would be more legitimately employed in carrying round the collecting plate at a missionary meeting. We hope that a great many people will not overlook the significant fact that one of the first consequences of strong Christian prejudices is the distortion of a sense of ethical values, and an abuse of position in the interests of religion.

There has been a wide-spread dissatisfaction with Lord Halifax's use of an official broadcast to the world for the purpose of advocating prayer-circles as a means of winning the war. This dissatisfaction is not confined to militant Freethinkers, it exists with others, including Christians of the better type, who recognise the incongruity of that portion of the broadcast. No speech could have been made by anyone better calculated to divide the people of the Empire into warring groups when it is of paramount importance to secure unity. Lord Halifax should follow the advice given by Lloyd George to Mr. Chamberlain that he can still do the country the signal service of resigning. Mr. Chamberlain acted on that advice. Will Lord Halifax follow this excellent example?

The *Christian World*, in its issue for September 5, puts in a plea on behalf of Lord Halifax which does not excuse the action; rather it exaggerates its inopportune and irrelevant character. The *C.W.* admits that nine-tenths of the people of the Empire are not even nominally Christian, but says that it does put "into Christian terms" what all the Empire feels, and that

"all true-hearted British people mean precisely the same thing, that they will die rather than give in to the domination of brute force over reason, common-sense, justice and kindness."

This does not justify Lord Halifax's misuse of this office, it adds ignorance and impudence to the original offence. We are not to notice the bigotry of Lord Halifax because when he turned his office into a Christian missionary station, he was stating the essence of Christianity—justice, the domination of brute force over reason, etc. It is precisely that kind of Christian lying against which fair-minded men have always protested.

When have the Christian churches stood for justice? Justice means at least equal treatment for all. When has that operated? When have any of the branches of Christianity treated the unbeliever in the same way as the believer when religion was in question? Has the Catholic Church done so? Do the Protestant ones do so? How much of the failure to have Russia standing with us as an

ally in the present war is due to the bigotry of men like Halifax resisting a close alliance with a nation the government of which is avowedly atheistic? What of our Sunday laws, blasphemy laws and State subsidising of religion? If Christianity means justice, the dominance of reason over brute force, etc., why use the word Christian at all? There is a lie and an hypocrisy in the very act of using Christianity as an equivalent of justice, freedom and equality. One of these days perhaps some of the non-Christian members of Parliament, even some who hold office, may summon up enough courage publicly to protest against the policy of converting public office into a missionary platform.

The General Secretary of the N.S.S. acknowledges the receipt of a cheque for £1 10s. from Mrs. M. Vanstone, as a donation to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

The Two Voices

ONE of the most persistent Roman Catholic claims is that the Church speaks with one voice. To use Cardinal Manning's own words, it is "the same in every place," as well as "obedient to one head."

It would not be too difficult to show that, in spite of this pious pretention, there is absolutely no warrant for it. The Church has always been rocked with heresy, and kicking out the heretics does not prove the "one voice" theory at all. It merely proves that a quite blind majority in the Church is ready to accept anything on "faith." And, of course, the Church can always wriggle out of any impossible situation by declaring that even a faithful son is "mistaken," or speaking without due authority.

The other day I came across a very clear example of the "two voices" which are always so hotly repudiated by the true sheep; and as it deals with one of the most touching and sacred dogmas of Christianity, it will, I hope, prove interesting and instructive.

It is the question of the Virgin Birth. Most readers—I hope all—have read Thomas Paine's discussion of the famous "prophecy" in Isaiah, and the way in which he conclusively shows that the writer of Matthew completely misunderstood the passage he quotes. Paine proved his point so completely that Bishop Watson, in about the only reply to the *Age of Reason*, which has survived, *An Apology for the Bible*, runs away and leaves the victory to his Deistic opponent. He says:—

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one: I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it.

So that the very pious believer in Christianity in general, and the Virgin Birth in particular, tragically dismayed by Paine's smashing analysis of the "prophecy," and looking to the good Bishop—who has a lot to say about "the scurrilous abuse of Thomas Paine" in any case—for a complete vindication of Christian belief, finds that on the passage in Isaiah prophesying the Virgin Birth, surely one of the most important of all dogmas, Dr. Watson is "not concerned to explain it." And this *Apology* is still confidently recommended as an antidote to the *Age of Reason*!

But let us see how modern Catholics, who pride

themselves on their use of "reason," deal with the question.

We can begin with a little work entitled the *Question Box*, published at 2s. by a well known Catholic firm of publishers, and with the "imprimatur" of John B. Harney, C.S.P., Superior General, Arthur J. Scanlan, S.T.D., Censor Liborum, and Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop, New York. The old edition claims a circulation of over 225,000 copies, and this new one's "first printing" sold 57,000 copies. It contains very detailed replies to questions received on missions to non-Catholics, with an excellent Catholic bibliography. An attempt is made particularly to answer difficult questions put by even unbelievers, and there is considerable ingenuity shown in some of the replies.

The dogma of the Virgin Birth, it states, was "held unanimously by the Fathers of the Church from the very beginning, and taught explicitly in both the Old Testament and the New." And it adds, "the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of Jesus Christ from a Virgin Mother. He says, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel' (Isa. vii. 14). The word he uses for virgin, *almah*, is always equivalent to virgin in the Old Testament (Gen. xxiv. 43, etc.). The Jews in their Septuagint version of the Old Testament translated *almah* by *parthenos*, the Greek equivalent for an inviolate virgin." (I have omitted a few Biblical references.)

Here then is one of the true voices of the Church—attempting to prove that the prophecy in Isaiah was a true prophecy of the Virgin Birth. Incidentally, I ought to point out that the *Question Box* is just lying when it declares that the Hebrew word *almah* means an "inviolated" virgin, it does not, it simply means "young woman," and the Septuagint translator made a mistake in his translation. Actually the Hebrew word for an "inviolated" virgin is *bethulah*, and Jews have always pointed this out, needless to say, without making any impression on most Christian sheep.

And now let us turn to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, that monument of Christian learning. It is one thing to answer questions put in a question box by more or less ignorant non-Catholics, and quite another thing to "reason" with an intellectual public. If the word "faith" is all that is necessary to champion Roman Catholicism, then a Catholic encyclopedia is utterly irrelevant. The Pope need do nothing but make Papal decrees, and the faithful must not even question them.

Unfortunately, even the Catholic laity have a few thinking members who want intellectual reasons for their belief, and it has proved to be quite useless to fob them off with a "just believe and say nothing" decree. The writers in the C.E. must have had instructions to deal with their problems as far as possible from a scientific point of view, and to give reasonable explanations of everything possible. And this proved to be anything but easy for the priest who had to deal with the Virgin Birth. He found himself enquiring who it was that could have told Matthew and Luke that Jesus was born a virgin, and he obviously found it a little difficult to induce his readers to believe that it was either the Angel or Mary herself who told Matthew; and that Luke must have got his facts, not from an oral, but from a written source. Anyway "between these data there is a gap which cannot be filled from any expressed clue furnished either by Scripture or tradition." A very disconcerting admission.

And what does "modern theology"—by which I understand the priestly writer to mean modern *Catho-*

lic theology—say of the Virgin Birth and its “prophecies” in the Old Testament? It does not grant that Isaiah vii. 14, contains a real prophecy fulfilled in the virgin birth of Christ: it must maintain, therefore, that St. Matthew misunderstood the passage when he said: “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son,” etc.

And the same priest has eventually to concede that, as “modern theology” cannot admit of “any miraculous intervention” in the course of history, it cannot admit the historical actuality of the Virgin Birth.”

Here are then the “two voices”—one in the *Question Box*, guaranteeing the Virgin Birth by Cardinal Hayes (and Cardinal Gibbons also for that matter), and the other in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, not only showing that the “prophecy” was *misunderstood* by the divinely inspired St. Matthew, but admitting that “modern theology” has thrown overboard the Virgin Birth from the “historical” point of view.

And will these two voices have any influence on the beliefs of millions of Catholics? Not in the slightest. Intellectuals like Mr. Belloc or Fr. Knox and their partisans follow only one voice—that combining, in one religious whole, credulity, superstition, and fear.

H. CUTNER

Islam and Christendom

(Concluded from page 574)

ISLAM and Catholic Theocracy in their early stages have this resemblance. There is the main literal formulation of the Doctrine by the prophet and first interpreters; as with the Church of the first three centuries. There arise various questionings or heresies as thought develops on the credentials and rationale of the Faith; a dangerous quest usually confined to minorities.

There was a schism in Islam at the outset over the rightful succession to the Caliphate or headship of the order after Mohammed. One party, known as *Shias*, held the true succession to be in the House of the Prophet in the person of his Cousin Ali. The other and predominant party believed in succession by election or agreement, known as *Sunnis*, or supporters of tradition; a division which has continued throughout; much like the dispute between the Roman and Greek Church over the Chair of St. Peter. Then we have the appearance of inquirers among the critical minded over matters left vague or unsettled in the primary canons of the faith; the *Motazileh*, which broadly means “dissenter” or “belonging to a sect”:

The history of *Saracen* culture is the history of the attainment of saner ideas and a higher plane of thought. Within a century of the *Hejra* there had arisen some rational skepticism in the Moslem schools, as apart from the chronic schisms and strifes of the faithful. A school of theology had been founded by Hasan-al-Basri at Bassorah, and one of his disciples, Wasil ibn Attâ following some previous heretics . . . rejected the predestination doctrine of the Koran as inconsistent with the future judgment; arguing for free will and at the same time for the humane provision of a purgatory. From this beginning dates the *Motazileh*—the philosophic reformers and moderate freethinkers of Islam. . . . The *Motazilites*, once started, divided gradually into a score of sects all more or less given to rationalizing within the limits of monotheism. The first stock were named *Kadarites*, because insisting on

man's power (*Kadar*) over his acts. Against them were promptly ranged the *Jabarites*, who affirmed that man's will was wholly under divine constraint (*Jabar*). Yet another sect, the *Sifatites*, opposed both of the others, some of them standing for a literal interpretation of the Koran, which is in part predestinationist, and in part assumes freewill; while the main body of orthodox, following the text, professed to respect as insoluble mystery the contradictions they found in it. The history of Islam in this matter is strikingly analogous to that of Christianity from the rise of the Pelagian heresy.¹²

All which affected the Muslim community from within. It is not until the contacts and ferment set up by the Crusades, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, that certain influences appear to have entered into the West. These may have been connected with popular sectarian movements in the Christian fold hostile to Rome, which eventuated later in the Reformation. The charge of heresy brought against the Order of Knights Templars (1307) was made a ground for its destruction from other motives. But the main effect of these reactions is found along the material plane in trade and industrial art. The “Latins” of that time came into association in the East with a higher level of material culture and amenity:—

By the side of these greater things it may seem little, and yet just because it is little it is all the more significant, that the Crusader should have familiarized Europe with new plants, new fruits, new manufactures, new colours, and new fashions in dress: Sugar and maize; lemons, apricots and melons; cotton, muslin and damask. Azure and gule are words derived from the Arabic, the use of powder, of glass mirrors, and also of the rosary itself—all these things came to Europe from the East as a result of the Crusades. To this day there are many Arabic words in the vocabulary of the languages of Western Europe—words relating to trade and seafaring like tariff and corvette. . . .

A different consequence however is presented in the field of scientific and philosophic interest. When Justinian closed the schools of philosophy at Athens in the sixth century, its exponents found a welcome at the Court of the Great King of Persia. What measure of science had been reached, as in medicine, was extended into other quarters. Some part of the work of Aristotle appears to have been cherished by heretical Christian sects for its value as dialectic in the presentation of their own doctrine. As these things came under the cognizance of the bolder spirits of Islam, a pseudo-Arabic philosophy arose which aimed to harmonize Muslim tenets with Greek speculation—or challenge them in their entirety. In the words of one who may rank as *Magisterius philosophicus*:—

The whole philosophy of the Arabians was only a form of Aristotelianism, tempered more or less with Neo-Platonic conceptions. The medical and physical science of the Greeks and Greek philosophy became known to the Arabs especially under the rule of the *Abassides* (from A.D. 750 on), when medical, and afterward (from the time of the reign of *Almamum*, in the first half of the ninth century) philosophical works were translated from Greek into Syriac and Arabic by Syriac Christians. The tradition of Greek philosophy was associated with that combination of Platonism and Aristotelianism which prevailed among the last philosophers of antiquity, and with the study by Christian theologians of the Aristotelian logic as a formal organon of dogmatics; but in view of the rigid monotheism of the Mohammedan religion it was necessary that the Aristotelian metaphysics, and especially the Aristotelian theology,

¹² “J.M.R.” *History of Freethought*.

¹³ *Ency. Brit.*

should be more fully adopted among the Arabs than among the Neo-Platonists and Christians, and that in consequence of the union among the former of philosophical with medical studies the works of Aristotle on natural science should be studied by them with special zeal. Of the Arabian philosophers in the East, the most important were Alkendi, who was still more renowned as a mathematician and astrologer, Alfarabi, who adopted the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation, Avicenna, the representative of a purer Aristotelianism and a man who for centuries, even among the Christian scholars of the later medieval centuries, stood in the highest consideration as a philosopher, and, still more, as a teacher of medicine, and finally Algazel, who maintained a philosophical skepticism in the interest of the theological orthodoxy. The most important Arabian philosophers in the West were Avempace (Ibn Badja) Abubacer (Ibn Tophail) and Averroës (Ibn Roschd. . . . Thus Aristotelianism gradually found entrance among the Mohammedans, notwithstanding that the Koran forbade all free investigation concerning religious doctrines, and consoled those who doubted only with the hope of a solution of their doubts at the judgment-day. Still, foreign philosophy remained always confined to a narrow circle of inquirers. . . .¹⁴

These studies had effect on what is known as Scholastic philosophy in Europe. "The introduction into Europe of Aristotle's metaphysics, physics, psychology and ethics, and of the partly Neo-Platonic, partly Aristotelian writings of Arabian and Jewish philosophers, led to a material extension and transformation of philosophical studies among the Christian Scholastics. . . . Their first acquaintance with these works was brought about through the Arabians, but not long afterward the Greek text was brought to the West (particularly from Constantinople) and translated directly into Latin. . . . The influence of Arabian science was felt sporadically in the early days of Christian Scholasticism. Constantinus Africanus, a monk who lived about A.D. 1050, and journeyed in the East, translated from the Arabic various, and particularly medical, works among which were the works of Galenus and Hippocrates. . . ."¹⁵

The outcome of these contacts on medieval thought was casual at the time; as the Church watched jealously all such developments and through its Inquisitorial power confined these excursions within defined limits. The most permanent influence proceeded by way of natural science. Beyond conserving existing knowledge the "Arabians" are credited with original work in various branches—mathematics, astronomy, medicine (wherein Jews collaborated) chemistry, mechanics; and in the industrial arts. A revived interest in science was also active in Europe contemporaneously, in so far as this was possible, and their work had wider reactions. But with them, as in Spain, it too was subject to the caprice and orthodoxy or frown of the reigning powers. In the last struggle of Catholic and Muslim Spain, Orthodoxy was in the ascendant, and Muslim fanaticism was outmatched by Catholic zeal. Neither did any further progress emerge under the Ottoman dominion—a purely militarist regime. In Europe, with the removal of the constrictive force of Rome through the convulsions of the Reformation, and other movements, from the seventeenth century on there has gone forward that steady advance in real knowledge which gives its character to our modern world. . . .

Of such is the upshot of this strange eventful history and relation; wherein events of to-day are now opening up a new chapter.

AUSTEN VERNY

¹⁴ F. Ueberweg:

¹⁵ F. Ueberweg.

Satyrs upon the Jesuits: written in the year 1679 by John Oldham

(An Extract from the *Prologuc*, contributed by Donald Dale)

In vain our Preaching Tribe attack the Foes,
In vain their weak Artillery oppose;
Mistaken honest men, who gravely blame,
And hope that gentle Doctrine should reclaim.
Are Texts, and such exploded trifles fit
T'impose, and sham upon a Jesuit?
Would they the dull old Fisher-men compare
With mighty Suarez, and great Escobar?
Such thred-bare proofs, and stale Authorities
May Us poor simple Hereticks suffice:
But to a sear'd Ignatian's Conscience,
Harden'd, as his own Face, with Impudence,
Whose Faith in contradiction bore, whose Lies,
Nor Nonsense, nor impossibilities,
Nor shame, nor death, nor damning can assail:
Not these mild fruitless methods will avail.

'Tis pointed Satyr, and the sharps of Wit
For such a prize are th' only Weapons fit:
Nor needs there Art, or Genius here to use,
Where Indignation can create a muse:
It is resolv'd: henceforth an endless War,
I and my Muse with them, and theirs declare;
Whom neither open Malice of the Foes,
Nor private Daggers, nor St. Omers Dose,
Nor all, that Godfrey felt, or Monarchs fear,
Shall from my vow'd, and sworn revenge deter.

Sooner (which is the great'st impossible)
Shall the vile Brood of Loyola, and Hell
Give o'er to Plot, be Villians, and Rebel:
Then I with utmost spite, and vengeance cease
To persecute, and plague their cursed race.

The malice of Religious angry Zeal,
And all, cashier'd resenting States-men feel:
All this urge on my rank envenom'd spleen,
And with keen Satyr edge my stabbing Pen:
That its each home-set thrust their blood may draw,
Each drop of Ink like Aquafortis gnaw.

Red hot with vengeance thus, I'll brand disgrace
So deep, no time shall e'er the marks deface:
Till my severe and exemplary doom
Spread wider than their guilt, till it become
More dreaded than the Bor, and frighten worse
Than damning Pope's Anathemas, and curse.

The appearance of Oldham's Satires at the time of the Popish Plot, was opportune, and they were read with avidity. In his Satires, Oldham assailed the whole system of the Jesuits with a fearlessness of invective scarcely paralleled in the language.

Suarez and Escobar were Spanish Jesuits who flourished in the sixteenth century. The former rendered himself particularly obnoxious in England by a book he wrote against the errors of the English Church. James I. answered his arguments by causing his work to be burned at St. Paul's. Escobar's *Moral Theology* was turned into ridicule by the great Pascal.

Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, the magistrate who took the depositions of Tonge and Oates, immediately afterwards disappeared. At the end of five days his body was found in a ditch near Primrose Hill, with his sword run through it, and a dark mark round his neck, as if he had been strangled. This mysterious murder was at once ascribed to the Roman Catholics. The impression made on the public mind by this incident was deepened by the disclosure that Godfrey had been unwilling to take Oates' deposition, and that he had no sooner done so than he expressed to his friends his apprehensions that he would be himself the first martyr.

DONALD DALE

More Faith

"By their deeds ye shall know them" is, probably only another version of "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the act of Christians in times of stress—in war time. The professed believers in the mercy of the Almighty—the British—naturally believe also in the security of the "dug-out" as compared with the Lord's Church. He has found out that German bombs

possess no discrimination and that, in practice (but not in propaganda) prayers avail very little.

It is curious that some of the most reasoned criticisms of religious practices seem to come from religious men. Of course, religions, even those which profess Christianity, are divided into numberless camps, and these critics never foul their own particular little nest, obviously, but they spare no others.

The following has been taken from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Inland Voyage*. R.L.S. was a Scot and a Protestant, probably a Presbyterian, although Scottish denominations are generally obscure. He visited the Church of Pont Sainte Maxence, and this is what he has to say of one old woman worshipper:—

"She went from chair to chair, from altar to altar, circumnavigating the church. To each shrine she dedicated an equal number of beads and an equal length of time. Like a prudent capitalist with a somewhat cynical view of the commercial prospect, she desired to place her supplication in a great variety of heavenly securities. She would risk nothing on the credit of any single intercessor. Out of the whole company of saints and angels, not one but was to suppose himself her champion elect against the Great Assizes! I could only think of it as a dull transparent jugglery, based on unconscious unbelief—and the best she could do with her mornings was to come up here into the cold church and to juggle for a slice of heaven."

How keen the criticism of the religion which did not happen to be the particular brand of R.L.S.! Did he ever make a practice of regularly attending a Scotch service? Although Scot by birth—and prejudices—he was a great wanderer on the face of the earth, and he may have been spared this ordeal, this lack of "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons." Had he been a frequenter of Scotch churches, and have applied the same meticulous analysis to the congregations, he might have found that Scotch church attendances were primarily bound up with social repute (so necessary to successful business in Scotland) the opportunity to wear the "Church best," so funereal and so uncomfortable, and all mixed up with outright indifference and a large sprinkling of downright intolerance.

Of course, the Catholic Church, with its usual gaudy and meretricious show—at least in France and Italy—is an easy butt for sarcasm, and when the downright ignorance of the average congregation—no wonder the pastor calls them "his flock"—coupled with the never-ceasing demand for "filthy lucre" is appreciated, the prevailing feeling of an intelligent person (a rarity in foreign churches) must be one of unqualified disgust. One knows all about "martyrs to religion," but one can also find Ripleys and Latimers to the gin and the whisky bottle, and it is difficult to regard the one or the other with any other feeling than one of pity. The degradation in both cases appears to about balance out. Both sacrifice their dignity and intelligence to a drug, although the one may be mental and the other physical. There is not much to choose between the two.

GOD AND NATURE

God is nowhere treated worse than by natural scientists who believe in him. Materialists simply explain the facts. . . . But what God has had to suffer at the hands of his defenders! In the history of modern natural science God is treated by his defenders as Frederick William III. was treated by his generals and officials in the campaign of Jena. One division of the army after another lowers its weapons, one fortress after another capitulates before the march of science, until at last the whole infinite realm of nature is conquered by science, and there is no place left in it for the Creator. Newton allowed him the "first impulse," but forbade him any further interference in his solar system. Father Secchi bows Him out of the solar system altogether . . . and only allows him a creative act as regards the primitive nebulae. . . . Finally Tyndall totally forbids Him entry unto nature and relegates Him to the world of emotional processes only admitting Him because, after all, there must be somebody who knows more about nature than J. Tyndall.

P. Engels, "Dialectics of Nature," pp. 176-7.

Correspondence

FREEDOM ON THE RADIO

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—In your August 18 issue you kindly printed a letter from me advocating a broadening of the scope of B.B.C. programmes, so that "orthodox clerics," while still having fair opportunities for talks, should not have (as now) virtually a monopoly, excluding other points of view. My letter asked people to write to me if they favoured a "Radio Freedom League" to try to remedy that grievance. I am glad to say several responses have come at once: but the more the merrier.

Meanwhile, here is a report from the daily papers for August 22, which seems to emphasize the justice of my plea:—

A cut in an Empire broadcast by the Rev. Henry Carter, the Free Church leader is explained by Mr. Duff Cooper, Minister of Information, in a written reply. The deleted sentences referred to working populations everywhere being very poor after the war. Mr. Duff Cooper states that the B.B.C. asked Mr. Carter to withdraw the sentences, as they gave an unbalanced view of the position in this country.

I have no complaint to make about Mr. Carter's having an "Empire" broadcast: though I have never heard of a Hindoo, Mohammedan, or other non-Christian speaker having such an opportunity, notwithstanding that, taking the Empire as a whole, they outnumber Christians. The point I would make is this: When an "orthodox cleric" has his broadcast "cut," it is made a matter for Parliament, although Freethinkers, Spiritualists, Jews, etc., are almost or totally banned from the Radio at all.

There does really seem something radically wrong in this state of affairs.

J. W. POYNTER.

A HUXLEY MYTH

SIR,—I was most interested in the story of Huxley you related in your issue of the 11th inst.

In my *Testament of a Victorian Youth*, reviewed by Mr. H. Cutner in your columns, there is the following passage:—

In 1902 the R.P.A. commenced to publish their cheap reprints, perhaps the greatest literary boons and blessings to men ever produced. I bought—for 4½d.—Huxley's *Essays*. I think I know why. I had heard a story, probably quite apocryphal, that at a public dinner he had sat next to Mr. Caine, and said he would give his right arm if he could believe as he did.

My allusion was to Mr. W. S. Caine, a Liberal M.P., who was pastor of Wheatshaf Mission Hall, South Lambeth, of which I was a member. One notices that when these stories are repeated details almost always vary.

You mention a Douglas Adam. There was a Rev. Douglas Adam, who many years ago, in the summer came from America to this country to occupy important metropolitan pulpits; I believe he once appeared at Wheatshaf Hall, and was a friend of the Caine family. If the Douglas Adam you refer to is still living, he is probably a son. It looks therefore as if the Huxley story was a family chestnut. I may add that a very old friend of mine was for some years private secretary to Mr. Caine. "When some years back the story was re-hashed I referred to him. He had never heard of it. It is not likely therefore that Mr. Caine claimed any connexion with it.

Charles Lamb referred to a man who retired upon £40 a year and one anecdote. Most parsons are better off in the former regard, but in respect of anecdotes of Freethinkers equally poverty-stricken. This may have been the case with the Rev. Douglas Adam. He probably worked the story well, and then left it to his children.

W. KENT

Obituary

WILLIAM RICHARDSON

THE remains of William Richardson were cremated in the City of London Crematorium, Manor Park, London, E., on Wednesday, September 4. He had been in indifferent health for a number of years and had reached his 82nd year. His end was accelerated by the shock of air raids and as the coffin was being carried into the Crematorium Chapel the sirens began to wail another warning.

A convinced Freethinker for many years, he retained those principles to the end, and left written instructions for the cremation of his body and a Secular Service. These instructions were loyally carried out by those responsible and before a gathering of members and relatives of the family the service was read by the General Secretary of the N.S.S.—R.H.R.

We regret to record the death of Mr. J. Mackinnon, of Edinburgh, at the age of 67. Mr. MacKinnon was an occasional contributor to this journal and his articles, and occasional poems, were welcome to us, and we know they were to our readers. A quiet, modest man by nature, his opinions were formed with care and expressed without fear. He leaves behind him a widow to whom we offer our sincere condolence. The memory of a long and happy married life will provide memories that will best enable her to withstand that sense of loss all must feel on such an occasion.

Freethinkers and the Forces

FREETHINKERS liable for services in H.M. Forces should clearly understand their rights with regard to religion.

They should insist upon their own statement of Atheist, Agnostic, Rationalist, or non-religious being accepted, without modification, and duly recorded on the official papers.

If the person recording—usually an N.C.O. is not aware of the recruit's rights and refuses to accept the recruit's own statement, he should insist upon the matter being referred to the officer in charge. If the recruit's legal right is not then admitted, information should be sent to the General Secretary N.S.S. without delay. In all cases hitherto reported by the Society to the Army, Navy and Air Force authorities a satisfactory reply has been received.

Finally, a man serving in any of the Forces has the right at any time to have the description of himself with regard to religion altered should any change of opinion on his part have taken place.

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Friends desiring to benefit the Society are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favour in their wills. The now historic decision of the House of Lords in *re Rowman and Others v. the Secular Society Limited*, in 1917, a verbatim report of which may be obtained from its publishers, the Pioneer Press, or from the Secretary, makes it quite impossible to set aside such bequests.

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