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Views and Opinions

Agnosticism

A DISCUSSION of Agnosticism follows quite naturally on what I have had to say in recent issues concerning "Religion."* Indeed, Agnosticism was one of the words that led to my promising to write this series of articles. I was asked "Why not use the term Agnosticism when defining one's attitude towards the idea of God?" To that question my reply is:—

(1) "Agnosticism," which has a legitimate place in philosophy, has no relevance whatever to religion, and no meaning when applied to "God."

(2) Every attempt to state Agnosticism results in (a) stating Atheism, or (b) restating an attitude which has been common to religious and Christian writers for many centuries, and in any case shows a gross confusion of two distinct questions; (c) the word was coined, in connexion with the religious controversy, with an almost openly expressed desire to avoid the use of "Atheism," and (d) its use in controversy has been to induce indefiniteness of speech, haziness of thought, and has tended to strengthen the conviction of the Theist in the fundamental soundness of his belief.

Yet for more than two generations the word has been used by thousands as though it carried a definite and well-understood meaning with regard to the belief in God, and it has been, quite erroneously, assumed that it indicated a genuinely scientific attitude with regard to fundamental religious ideas. Timidity has taken shelter beneath the cloak of intellectual rectitude, and fear of offending the religious world has been disguised as concern for not breaking the canons of scientific righteousness.

* * *

Huxley and Agnosticism

Legitimate Agnosticism is a very old form of thought, and we shall touch upon it later. But the quite illegitimate Agnosticism which has been common for some time, established itself in this country

owing to the influence of Professor T. H. Huxley. He gives the following account of its origin:—

When I reached intellectual maturity and began to ask myself whether I was an Atheist, a Theist or a Pantheist, a Materialist, or an Idealist, a Christian, or a Freethinker, I found that the more I learned and reflected, the less ready was the answer; until at last I came to the conclusion that I had neither art nor part with any of these denominations except the last. The one thing in which most of these good people were agreed, was the one thing in which I differed from them. They were quite sure they had attained a certain "gnosis," and had more or less successfully solved the problem of existence.

When we add to this statement the testimony of Mr. R. H. Hutton, a personal friend of Huxley's, that in his hearing Huxley avowed that he had taken the suggestion of "Agnosticism" from St. Paul's mention of the altar, which he saw at Athens, to the "unknown God," an already sufficiently confused passage becomes almost hopeless.

For note: (1) the "unknown God" did not refer to an *unknowable* God—which was affirmed in Huxley's Agnosticism, but to any God, to whom acknowledgment had not been made—and an *unknown* God, is not an unknowable one. (2) "Unknowableness" is not a quality of anything conceivable. We cannot think the unknowable, only the unknown, but to have been sensible in making the statement would have made it ridiculous in the formulation. (3) The question of the existence of, or the belief in God, has no connexion whatever with the "problem of existence." That is a strictly philosophical question, with which we will deal in later articles. (4) The claim of the "Gnostics," to whom, as Huxley explained, his Agnosticism was antithetically opposed, was not concerned with existence, but with a knowledge of God, or of spiritual, powers derived from some kind of divine illumination. (5) Atheism makes no pretence whatever of solving the problem of existence; it is not even concerned with any kind of cosmical theory, although Bradlaugh, quite unnecessarily, usually accompanied his statement of Atheism with a statement of "existence" and "modes," and a theory of monism, with which Atheism, as such, is not at all concerned. Atheism, as such, is concerned solely with the validity of belief in God. The question of God belongs to theology, that of "existence" belongs to philosophy, and to that department known as epistemology. The two questions are to-day jumbled together for two purposes, first, it suits the theologian to claim whatever credit he may from mixing up the religious with the philosophic question. Second, it suits a certain type of mind to evade the unpleasantness of being thought to be opposed to the belief in God by allowing the confusion, and to even emphasize it by misstating Atheism.

* Previous articles in this series appeared in the *Freethinker* for March 4, 11, 25, and April 1.

But Huxley was not by nature a muddled thinker. He was, in general, a very clear thinker, and when on a quite "safe" subject such as a heresy in science, or the unscientific character of Genesis, he could be quite clear and precise. So that when one finds so great a confusion as exists in the passage cited, and with an ordinarily clear-minded man, one looks round for an explanation. I think this may be found in the following, which comes immediately after what has been cited:—

Most of my colleagues were —ists of one sort or another; and however kind and friendly they might be, I, the man without a rag of a label to cover himself with, could not fail to have the uneasy feeling which must have beset the historical fox when, after leaving the trap in which his tail remained, he presented himself to his normally elongated companions.

This is really illuminating, and Huxley's desire to have a tail, merely because other foxes had tails, easily falls into line with the strong dislike of most people to profess themselves as being without a religion of any kind. We may note, also, that if Huxley's sole desire was for a tail, this desire might have been gratified in one of two ways, either of which would have been legitimate. He might have adopted the old term "Sceptic"; but that, I suspect, having lost its old philosophical implications, and having become identified with a rejection of religion, lock, stock and barrel, would not have served. There was also "Atheism," then being made famous (I rather fancy Huxley would have said, infamous) by Bradlaugh; but that also was unsatisfactory, for there was really more in the matter than the desire for a mere tail. Huxley evidently desired to be sufficiently different from the pack as a whole to retain a sense of his own individuality, and at the same time, minimise the hostility of the pack to one of its members that showed a clearly marked divergence from the normal type. To have been merely bigger or stronger than the rest of the pack would not have served. It was a tail that was needed if peace was to be secured. A radically different tail would have acted as a badly fitting wig serves to accentuate what it is intended to conceal. It had to be a tail that was not substantially different from other tails, and it was all the more valuable if it helped to concentrate the ill-will of the pack on those who had no (religious) tail to wag.

To quit metaphor. The Agnostic could purchase peace and retain status only so far and so long as the Atheist was there to bear the brunt of religious animosity. Whether he knows it or not, and whether he likes it or not, the Agnostic is always sheltering behind the Atheist. The Atheist receives the kicks which the Agnostic would get if the Atheist were no longer there. The more logical thinker pays for the comfort enjoyed by the less logical one. It is not a pleasing analysis, and I do not wonder at an Agnostic not liking it, but it is true. I do not think that the Rev. F. Garvie was unfair when he said that Huxley invented Agnosticism as "a refuge from the dread of materialism."

* * *

A Welcome Ally

The passage I have cited proceeds:—

To my great satisfaction the term took, and when the "Spectator" stood godfather to it, any suspicion in the minds of respectable people . . . was, of course, completely lulled.

"Respectable" religious people would have been very ungrateful if they had not welcomed the new ally. Here was a very prominent scientist, a man whose power of exposition enabled him to reach those whom other scientists failed to reach, who had been generally suspected to be on the side of the wicked

Atheists, and who not merely avowed that he had no art or part with them, but that the proper attitude was to leave the question of "God" in the air. One ought not to say anything on the one side or the other. If the Theist could no longer suppress the Atheist, it was distinctly a gain to have a disbeliever in God who merely said that he could not make up his mind about it. That is never a very impressive attitude; and it did not take defenders of the faith long to use Huxley as a buttress for the shaky religious structure.

* * *

To This End—p

The attitude of Huxley is the more striking when one contrasts it with his remarks when he is face to face with a scientific generalization. He says:—

With a view to the progress of science, the materialistic terminology is in every way to be preferred. For it connects thought with the other phenomena of the universe . . . whereas the alternative, or spiritualistic terminology, is utterly barren. There can be little doubt that the further science advances, the more extensively and consistently will all the phenomena of nature be represented by materialistic formulæ and symbols.

So that, after dismissing Atheism, on the fictitious ground that it claims to offer a solution of the problem of existence which he finds it impossible to accept, and after coining a word which he imagines—quite wrongly—applies to the belief in God, he plainly sets it out that in his judgment the ultimate view of the universe will be one that is completely Atheistic, since it leaves God out. Was it worth while to engage in so much wriggling, and so much confusion to come at last to the conclusion that every representative Atheist had avowed?

There is a further confusion in Huxley's description of Atheism that must not be passed over. After saying that he is without the "gnosis" which others profess to have, he lays down the essence of Agnosticism, one that has been cited with great unction by professing Agnostics ever since. Huxley says:—

Agnosticism is not a creed, but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle. . . . Positively the principle may be expressed: in matters of the intellect, follow your reason so far as it can carry you without regard to other considerations. And negatively, in matters of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain that are not demonstrated or demonstrable.

A quite excellent rule. But why call it Agnosticism? It in no wise suggests the existence of invincible ignorance with regard to a specific question, and which we had been told was the essence of Agnosticism. It has no greater relevancy to the question of the existence of God than it has to the quality of a half-pound of butter that is handed to one over a counter. It is a rule of intellectual guidance, which nearly every one who has written on the subject of intellectual ethics has stressed. No one questions its value, and there is no need to affirm it with the air of a discoverer. It is as unsectarian as the multiplication table, and there was really no need to give it a party label. To make it the basis of a new *credo* is to act with the impertinence of a Christian who talks at large about the Christian virtue of honesty or truthfulness. It is as unjust to label rules of intellectual guidance Agnostic as it is to label human virtues "Christian." And all this confusion and misstatement, and misrepresentation, to avoid saying that when a man has no belief in a God he is without it! Finding himself among the other foxes, but without a tail, Huxley has to manufacture an artificial appendage; and then, apparently, alarmed lest it should be discovered that his

tail is a very artificial construction, he has to throw up a smoke screen to prevent its nature being clearly seen. What a poisonous sediment religion does leave behind it!

With some other defences of Agnosticism I will deal next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Morals of Marcus

"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius."—*Emerson*.

"Man is his own star."—*Fletcher*.

TIMES of war and stress are supposed, usually, to be fatal to philosophic calm, and it is curious that the *Meditations* of the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, that immortal book animated by high purpose and fortitude, should have been written largely at odd moments in a tent on the battlefield. Indeed, many of the most famous maxims in the *Meditations* were jotted down in the actual arena of the last great war—as, for instance, at Carnuntum, on the Danube, a few miles from Vienna.

Monarchs have rarely been philosophers. Frederick the Great delighted in the society of Freethinkers, and attracted some of the best brains of Europe to his court. Catherine of Russia befriended Denis Diderot and other French Freethinkers, and Marguerite of Valois, to her lasting credit, held out her hands to the reformers of her day, at a time when heresy was a matter of life or death. Once only, however, has a philosopher sat on the world's throne, and realized the dream of wise old Plato, who sighed for the fulfilment of his ideal of a philosopher-King.

Marcus Aurelius died in the camp, surrounded by the soldiers he led. "Why weep for me?" were his last words, so characteristic of the noblest Roman of them all. His legacy to posterity was not his generalship, but his book of *Meditations*, which was simply a note-book never intended for publication, and in which he recorded his private convictions on life and death. Burdened with the trappings of royalty, harrassed with the weight of empire, he penned such words as these—not to be read at the distance of twenty centuries without an accession of pride and strength:—

Every moment think steadily as a Roman and a man to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity.

And again:—

Do every action of thy life as if it were thy last.

This life, he tells us, is all that concerns mankind:—

Though you were destined to live three thousand, or, if you please, thirty thousand years, yet remember that no man can lose any other life than that which he lives now, and neither is he possessed of any other than that which he loses.

Epicurus bade men depart from life as a satisfied guest from a banquet. Marcus Aurelius, in sterner language, bids us leave life's stage as an actor who has performed his part. It is this perfectly sane view of things which caused Ernest Renan, a consummate critic, to describe the *Meditations* as the most perfect expression of "the gospel of those who do not believe in the supernatural." It is this same wise Secularism which has caused the golden book of the *Meditations* to become one of the most prized of volumes, and which takes tired people back to Marcus Aurelius when all religions and superstitions have failed them. What a book might be written of the great men who came to the *Meditations* in the bad moments when

fame and fortune, and honour, seemed as unreal as the fabric of dreams. For this austere wearer of the imperial purple has become one of the consolers of men, and his literary treasure is one of the most precious heritages handed down the centuries by the masters of the world. It is a most splendid achievement, this power over so many ages, races, and alien sympathies. Small wonder that writers of distinction and rare critics have spoken of the *Meditations* in terms of almost unmixed eulogy.

These maxims, be it remembered, were never intended for publication, and were written for the author's own eyes alone. They are simply the Emperor's commonplace book, where he entered, from time to time, his reflections, often quite unconnected, on life and death, and the questions that knock at every thoughtful man's mind. Learned critics talk easily of the old Greeks as being the teachers of Marcus Aurelius. It is true up to a point, but the golden book of the *Meditations* could only have been written by a Roman. The strength, the tenderness, the humanity, the resignation, these are the prerogatives, not of scholars, but of the supermen, the masters of the world.

Matthew Arnold, a sensitive critic, has pointed out that the *Meditations* are counsels of perfection. They do not claim to be any other than self-communications, a book of confessions. The maxims should be read, as they were written, one at a time. Marcus Aurelius himself addressed them, not to any reader, but to himself, as the sentinels and supports of a conduct of life. The present time is one in which such high-minded advice is priceless, for in all the world's literature there is no other book so full of perfect sanity and wise Secularism. It is because the *Meditations* are a bracing tonic in a time of moral slackness, and the most rampant commercialism, that the book ranks among the permanent assets of morality. Writing for his own eyes alone, he has taken his place, unwillingly, as a great classic. It is well, for he had a great and notable message to deliver, nowhere more needed than when the pursuit of wealth is so reckless as at present. The pomp and majesty of ancient Rome has long faded, "like snow upon the desert's face," but the wise words of Marcus Aurelius remain a most precious legacy, because he saw life steadily and saw it whole. Marcus Aurelius knew Paganism, and he also knew Christianity, and he saw, quite clearly, that the secular solution was the best of all. The grandeur that was Rome, was enhanced by his invincible sanity.

MIMNERMUS.

Fables Founded on Fact

"OUR HOPE FOR YEARS TO COME"

ONCE upon a time all the nations of the world had a Great and Bloody War. And since they couldn't each be fighting all the rest, they found it most convenient to form two groups. One group called itself the Allied Powers and the other called itself the Powers in Alliance. In order to avoid confusion, therefore, we will call one group the A.P. and the other the P.A. Not that it matters in the least whether we are confused or not.

Well, after this Great War had been going on for a long time, and a whole lot of people had been killed and wounded in various ways, both the A.P. and the P.A. thought it was about time to stop. "All good things must come to an end," said the politicians, profiteers and priests. So they temporarily abandoned their noble patriotism, profits and propaganda, and they decided to bargain with their enemies.

At first there was considerable difficulty in deter-

mining whether the A.P. or the P.A. had got the better of the fight. In the end they had to toss up, and the P.A. won the toss. "Right-oh," they said, "we'll tell the world we lost." So, to make things look all right for the common people, they surrendered their fleet and sank it after the surrender. They also agreed to pay a huge indemnity, which they first of all borrowed from the A.P.

To cut a long story short, it was a Great and Glorious Peace. Everybody's honour was vindicated. Millions of medals were distributed and subsequently pawned. Billions of money had been spent in useless time and energy. But at least the common people had the satisfaction of knowing that they had helped in the high cause of a "War to end War," or "War to make Democracy safe," or "War for the Rights of Man," or "War for God and Justice," or War for Something or Other. Nobody quite knew which it was, but that didn't matter. You paid your money and took your choice. Anyway, even if you didn't take your choice, you paid your money. And the money that everyone paid went at once into the pockets of the various Governments who, with that marvellous wisdom and foresight with which all Governments are endowed, promptly set about preparing for the next war.

"After all," said the politicians, "wars have always existed and so obviously they will always exist. Why bother about peace?" "After all," said the profiteers, "to ensure peace we must prepare for war. So why stop making munitions?" "After all," said the priests, "man is innately sinful, so he must prefer war to peace. Besides, what did Jesus say? 'I came not to send peace, but a sword.' In any case, even if we do kill each other off now, it will only hasten us to the hereafter where everything will be O.K.—at least for us." So they all went on in the same old way preaching "King and Country," or "God and the King," or "God's own Empire," or something just as abstract.

Meanwhile, much to their surprise, all the Governments discovered that they were nearly broke. You see, if you buy a twopenny packet of seed and then plant the seed and look after it, the chances are that beans or lettuces or something will grow up. You can then eat some yourself and sell the rest for more than twopenny. But if you spend a shilling on a packet of ammunition, it simply won't grow into turnips or anything. It is *most* annoying—but there it is. Of course, if you buy a gun to fit the ammunition, you can always kill a man with it—provided you are a good shot and aim first. On the other hand, you might be unlucky; and then what?

Well, anyway, the Governments suddenly had a brilliant idea. "Let's make fewer armaments," they said. So one of them sent a politician to all the others to discuss the matter. And each Emperor, King, President or what not, welcomed our dove of peace with open arms. And each of them said exactly the same thing: "If all the other nations stop arming, so will we. We represent the most peaceful nation in the world. The fact is obvious."

Needless to say, our dove was no end pleased with himself. It had been banquets, banquets all the way. So when he returned to his native country he had to ask for a short holiday in order to recuperate from the arduous task which he had just completed. This being granted, he took an expensive holiday cruise round the world at the taxpayer's expense, and came back fatter than ever. In the meantime the various armies, navies, air-forces, civil guards, storm troops, etc., had increased in numbers by about fifty per cent, while the guns, battleships, tanks, bombers, etc., had increased in size by about a hundred and fifty per cent. And, of course, every

Government was more broke than ever, while the ordinary people were—well, just ordinary people.

"We don't seem to be getting anywhere, do we?" asked the politician apropos of nothing in particular. And since no one answered his question he decided to do something about it. So he called together all the high and mighty persons he had previously interviewed, and he said to them: "What about it?" And they said: "What about what?" And he said: "What about stopping this race in armaments?" And they said: "Well, what about it?" And he said: "You all promised to stop if the others would stop, and—er—vice versa. What is to prevent us all stopping together—now—this very minute?"

Well, you should have seen their faces! Madame Tussaud's isn't a patch on it! It was a perfect circus. But at last one of them got up and said: "If we stop now, then Frogland will be miles ahead of us. We can't allow that." And another said: "If we don't build fifteen more cruisers, what will happen to us when Sunland attacks us?" And a third said: "Although we have a bigger airforce than any two nations combined, what is to prevent three of them combining against us?" And to cap the whole proceedings a fourth remarked: "Even if we were all to scrap every kind of armament at this very minute, the population of Pushland outnumbered ours by five to one. What is to prevent them swarming over our borders armed with spades, shovels, and pickaxes—not to mention hair-pins, drawing-pins and other lethal weapons?"

So our politician returned home a sadder and a wiser man. And he gave orders for a hundred more battleships, a million more aeroplanes, and a billion more tanks. He also formed a conscript army of the whole population—except himself and his colleagues, the politicians, profiteers and priests.

* * *

Is that the end of the story? you may ask. Well, not quite. You see, every nation did the same thing. And the tension became so great that at last it burst. But it didn't burst in the direction that the politicians had expected, or the profiteers had hoped, or the priests had prophesied. On the contrary. Since all the common people were armed, and since all the politicians, profiteers and priests were unarmed, it was a simple matter for the former to get hold of the latter and cart the lot off to the lunatic asylums. And now, as you will be able to hear quite easily outside the walls, the inmates all sing the same sort of hymn together. I think it begins with the words, "O God our help in ages past"!

C. S. FRASER.

Is Science Popular?

WITH Churchmen? So far as the Church is concerned, the answer appears to depend on whether the verdicts of science are favourable or otherwise.

At the British Association of 1927, for instance, Prof. Keith delivered a Presidential Address, which aroused a good deal of hostile comment. He said, among other things, that science could not countenance the possibility of personal survival. Immediately the Bishop of Ripon declared this was going too far, that science was losing a sense of proportion, and that it should therefore take a ten year's holiday. Apparently his Reverence hoped that in ten years all the scientific data collected during the last century would be forgotten, making the world once more a safe place for bishops.

Since then, however, we have had Jeans' conception of the universe as a great Thought in the mind of a

great Thinker. Did he, like Keith, meet with a battery of religious protest, on the same grounds—that he was overstepping his limits? Not so. One after another—the latest is the Rev. H. R. Sheppard—religionists have taken with gratitude the sop thrown to them, much as a drowning man might clutch at a straw. It matters not that a few centuries ago Jeans would have been burned at the stake. Suffice it that his theory is non-materialistic, and, to vary a Biblical expression, he that is not directly opposed to us is for our part.

In one of his plays (*The Great Adventure*), Arnold Bennett depicted the body-snatching custom of the Christian. The body of a famous painter was at stake, a prize corpse, as it were, not to be missed. "Was he a Catholic?" asks the priest. "He was not a Catholic," is the answer, a fairly definite answer, too, to a mere mortal. But not to a religious expert in body-snatching, and in two minutes the painter is duly enrolled as a conscientious Catholic, and afterwards buried accordingly.

Likewise, Is Jeans' conception that of doctrinal Christianity? It is not. Does it even approximate to a benevolent Theism? It does not. As between the Christian and the Materialist, Jeans is in no-man's land. But his theory has been snatched in support of Christian doctrines, and when Jeans dies, it is quite evident that his body will go the same way.

In snatching, accommodating and appropriating the hypotheses of certain scientists, men like the Rev. Sheppard are never very keen on going into details about such theories. Indeed, it would be amusing to picture the Rev. "Dick" Sheppard, who finds difficulty in appreciating the significance of an extra nought or two as between 20, 200 and 2,000, when recording letters of protest with which he does not agree, applying his intellect to the Jeansian conception of God as the square root of minus one.

It is not science that is popular with the churchmen, but scientists who have palatable theories to offer. The unpopularity of science itself is not hard to understand. Science does not encourage the Christian scheme of things. It does not promise to discover a universe made for man, and kind to his desires. It does not search for the supernatural. It does not proceed on the assumption of an immortal soul, whose destiny is heaven or hell. It cannot guarantee a world harmonious with cherished hopes and fears. Without any premeditated attack, science cuts right across the articles of the Faith. Popularity does not await it.

But what of the laymen? As applied to the trades, science seldom fails to make the average layman sit up and take notice. He is also ready, on Sunday afternoon, to wallow in the mysteries of a Jeansian God or some astronomical phenomenon, provided it has first of all, by journalists, been popularized, *i. e.*, deformed. But certain aspects of science are the source of mistrust. There is a vague fear of the machine, for instance, the fear that fallible human hands will not be able to compete with the speed, reliability and precision of the machine, the fear that those hands will not be wanted.

There is also the inevitable conflict of science with "common sense." The man enters the room. Rather simple and clear, just that way. But look at it through the eye of the physicist. Hanging, head outwards into space, suspended from a planet travelling 20 miles per second round the sun, which is on the move at 12 miles per second round the galactic system, which bears us at 250 miles per second amid the spiral nebulae, he pushes forward and lands on a plank composed mainly of emptiness, dotted sparsely here and there with electrons and protons—like stepping on a swarm of flies; he does this with a wind of ether

blowing through his body, and is obstructed by an atmosphere pressing 14 lb. on every square inch of his body.

Much less is the layman prepared to appreciate the possibility of analysing the human mind.

In view of the undeniable benefits derived from science, it is a remarkable testimony to religious influence that it should there meet with disparagement, fear and mistrust. It is the same science that has given us the material benefits we enjoy, and made possible the communication of the arts. Science demands recognition, and it deserves respect.

It has always had it—from the great Freethought movement of this country.

G. H. TAYLOR.

The Mist of Mysticism

ALLEGORY is of necessity an advanced stage in the evolution of religion, and particularly is this the case with astrological allegory. To conceive the numerous forms and stories in connexion with the various groups of stars demands a degree of abstraction and imagination. Few, if any, of the stars seen on a clear night would convey to the observer in these modern times anything like the forms which Egyptian and other astrologers have ascribed to them.

Nevertheless, this form of stellar myth-making, whilst a fairly advanced stage in religious development, is thousands of years old. The vast mass of supernatural speculations designated religion contains the elements of astrology, just as it contains the phallic, the vegetative, and other elements. Factors exist in the Christian sacred documents, as indeed in many others, which call for some knowledge of astrological lore for their interpretation.

The Holy Ghost, for instance, fills a place in the Christian mythology which seems quite in keeping with the astronomical order of things. Just as Christ is born on the twenty-fifth of December, so his conception will take place nine months beforehand. The twenty-fifth of March marks the date given over by the Church to the feast of the "annunciation" of the Virgin. Considered biologically or astronomically, whether the Jesus Christ of alleged history or the sun-god of antiquity, one cannot fail to see here the significance of the date at which the Holy Ghost enters into the scheme of things.

Astronomically, March is the period of the year when the winds or gusts do become manifest. The sun is commencing to strengthen, and the rising of the warmer air brings about the winds traditionally associated with March. One is tempted to draw attention to the similarity of these words gust and ghost, and also to the words helios, the sun, and holy. The fact that the helio gusts enter into the order of nature at the same time of the year as the Holy Ghost enters into theology is surely a remarkable coincidence, but in both cases it is necessary if the Son or sun is to be born on December the twenty-fifth.

If a map of the heavens be cast for midnight on the twenty-fourth of March, two thousand years ago, it is interesting to see the result. The observer under such conditions would see as the most noticeable star in mid-sky "Spica," the bright star in the constellation of the Virgin. Surely chance, if chance it be, could not have placed a more appropriate group of stars in such a position. Here, at the commencement of the feast of the Virgin, is an astronomical lay-out, coupled with the seasonal advent of winds or "gusts," and plus the fact that it is exactly nine months before the birth of the son, which might certainly give ground for myth-making.

Note also the combination available for the "idea" of a trinity. The mathematical nonsense that three ones are one becomes a symbolic truth. The Sun, the "Father of all life," gives rise to the "helio-gusts" at the spring of the year, as a consequence of which the "Son" or Sun, which is also himself the one and only sun in the solar system, is born on December the twenty-fifth.

The stars of the Virgin are at mid-sky on the occasion of the annunciation, which announces the fable. The same stars rise in the east on the night of the twenty-fourth of December; the bright star in this constellation becomes the star in the east, which the three wise men follow, and fades in the morning with the rise of the new-born sun.

A story of the yearly cycle of life, not without beauty, becomes in the hands of the charlatanry of a later age a dogmatic curse to mankind. Modernism attempts to see in it an ethical founder; various shades of opinion would lead those who seek biblical justification to interpret Jesus as one holding their views, but the Free-thinker sees only in the story the speculations and creations of man, no greater and no better than the condition of knowledge existing.

JOHN V. SHORTT.

Acid Drops

We have recently been dealing with the various definitions given of religion, and dwelling upon their meaningless or their misleading character. Here is one which certainly deserves a place in any collection. Religion is,

Obedience and enthusiasm toward the Best in nature without and human nature within.

As "religion" is given without any qualification, it must mean *all* religion, high and low, primitive and advanced. And it is certainly interesting to find such religions as Voodooism, and Thuggism, and the religious rite of cannibalism, up to the system of vicarious sacrifice and the doctrine of eternal torment of the Christian religion stand for man's enthusiasm for what is Best (with a capital letter) in nature without and human nature within. Religion, as a matter of fact, has, and does, sanctify some of the lowest and worst passions of human nature, and its laudation of the better social qualities has been brought about by non-religious forces.

Religion is concerned with the "Best." That is delightfully clear and so convincing. For my Best may differ from another's Best, and if enthusiasm for what each man regards as "Best" constitutes religion, then we all have a religion, and if we all have a religion, how can it be differentiated from non-religion? And if it cannot be differentiated from non-religion, how do we know that it is religion, seeing that the very essence of recognition consists in establishing a distinction of some kind? After all, if we are all alike there is no difference to stress, and if there is a difference between people how can one arrive at it by pointing out that they are all alike?

Of course, the underlying truth in all this gibberish of religion consisting in enthusiasm for the "Best," is that in order to keep in being the religions of the world have been compelled to express the *social* qualities of human nature in religious terms. Religion has lived by an exploitation of the social qualities of man, and this exploitation has consisted in denying the social origin of human characteristics. But one of the main tasks of a scientific sociology—as it is one of the main tasks of science in general—is to separate the essential from the non-essential, the causal from the casual. The blather of a reformer expressing his social aspirations in religious terms, is on the same level as the convictions of some of the religious leaders of the world, that their self-imposed bodily and mental tortures have brought them into contact with a "spiritual" world from which normal men are excluded. Enthusiasm may exist for anything, and anything for which enthusiasm exists may well be described, in relation to those who feel that enthusiasm as the "Best." The duty of the scientific thinker, if he wishes to give "Best" an objective character for which ordinary men and women may work, is to get rid of narcotic phrases and question-begging words.

"You cannot separate the sacred from the secular without destroying religion," said Rev. J. Waddington in the *Streatham News*. This clergyman confirms what we

have been saying for years. We want to destroy religion, not to give it a new lease of life by pretending it means "morality touched with emotion," as Arnold wanted people to believe. Ruskin was far more sensible when he said, "Your morality must be poised like the sun in vacant heaven." So long as the "heaven" is really "vacant" there would be no morality, but Ruskin meant that morality to be genuine must not be mixed up with religion. Ruskin pushed home his point by adding: "A rogue's religion is always the rottenest thing about him."

The wickedness of woman has ever been the favourite topic of Christian Fathers and teachers. The *Methodist Times* does not really improve matters by claiming (as a sort of afterthought, or countervailing sop) that woman at her best is better than man at his best (sometimes). Here is the latest Methodist misogynist indictment of woman:—

In the French Revolution, where the movement was cruel, woman was the most cruel, where devilish she was the most devilish, where most coldly pursued she was the most calculating. Remember the story of Charlotte Corday. No man of her education, reserve and temperament could have done what that child did, when she bought the butcher's knife and coolly drove it into the back of Marat.

Society has been leavened and sweetened by the purity, the modesty and the graciousness of woman, because men asked that of her. If the new morality destroys those ideals, she will prove more immodest and less pure than man. In the extravagances of the nude cult of last summer the women in my town were the flagrant examples, not the men.

Jael, "the wife of Heber the Kenite," was a Bible heroine, beloved of God and praised by His Prophets for a vile crime which had none of Charlotte Corday's excuse. But who would look to our pious contemporary for historical accuracy? No fact in history is more certain than that men have had greater opportunities for cruelty and oppression, and have also been the greater offenders.

It was not to be expected that Easter should pass without the publication of one of those wonderful articles which proved incontestably that "Christ had risen." The *Sunday Dispatch* had one from the Rev. Viscount Mountmorres, full of the usual kind of religious rubbish. The Rev. Viscount undoubtedly believes in the Resurrection, but how he can imagine his article can have any effect either for or against, is almost as much a mystery as the reasons he gives for his belief in the world's greatest fairy-tale. He starts by making a statement which all believers will think true, and all unbelievers know is not true—to put it mildly. "Even sceptics," he tells us, "admit that we must, in the main accept as substantially true the Gospel record of events." No names, of course, are given, and the obvious answer is that far from admitting "the Gospel record of events," the modern sceptic maintains that practically the whole Gospel story is pure mythology.

Then the Rev. Viscount, after columns of "arguments," tells us that "the evidence for the Resurrection of Our Lord has been sifted and examined with a minuteness, and a mercilessness and a thoroughness such as have not characterized the examination of the evidence for any other historical event on earth." Well, where the examiners have been Christians they have believed "the evidence," and where they have not been Christians, they have pulverized "the evidence." The Rev. Viscount wants us to believe that "the evidence" has come through the fire of criticism scathless, but if he knew anything whatever of the Free-thought case, he would know that no other supposed event has been so mercilessly kicked out of the realm of the possible as has the Resurrection. Why it is that no representative Christian can be found to defend it against the Free-thought attack?

The editors of Catholic papers—if they wish to maintain their circulations—are forced to pooh-pooh Free-thought; so every now and then, and obviously against

their wish, they are bound to recognize the existence of Freethought works. One of these gentlemen, in replying to a correspondent tells him, "We are surprised that any thinking person could be satisfied with such vapid nonsense," and advises the poor, deluded enquirer to read some Catholic Truth pamphlets, such as *The Existence of God, Facts for Freethinkers, Evolution and Catholicity* and others from the same mint, full of similar "facts." "When you have read these," the editor concludes, "you will find that reason is really on the side of the Catholic Church, and not on the side of foolish and unthinking Atheists." This is most unkind—as we admit the Catholic Church has "reason" on her side; only it is the kind of "reason" often most violently opposed to truth and logic. Apart from this, it would be interesting to meet anybody, except Catholics, being convinced by the pamphlets in question.

Sometimes, these editors get enquiries from Catholic feminists who are ready to swallow everything Catholic, except that God is purely masculine. These people are met with this kind of "reply":—

God is referred to as "He" and not as "She," because, if we must choose between them (and we must, for it would be out of the question to speak of God as "It"), "He" is more suitable, inasmuch as the feminine sex is, or is supposed to be, the weaker. There is no danger of any one thinking that sex is really present in God.

If this satisfies the feminist, we ask him or her to reason out how God can be the Father of Jesus, or Jesus the Son of God, without sex? But in any case why are not Catholic feminists content with "Our Lady," who must have come first, as she is the Mother of God? and who certainly holds first place in the affection and devotion of Catholic priests. But we do pity the poor Editor!

Another recent convert to Roman Catholicism, "Lawrence Oliver" (a pen-name, by the way), has written an "apologetic" work, *Tadpole and God*, in which he is supposed to show "how far more modern and stimulating is the wisdom of the Catholic Church than the Modernism which has been substituted for it." He is said also to have savagely attacked in scathing terms, "the idols of the day." We have no doubt whatever that Mr. Oliver will have found many things to attack in our modern life, but it seems a pity that he does not come right out in the open with a tilt at *Freethought*. We have a case, intellectual, moral, and historical, against Roman Catholicism, and it seems extraordinary that so many of these wonderful converts, ready to smash all sorts of "idols," run away directly *Freethought* is mentioned. Why?

Newspapers and journals in Germany have either been suppressed or have, "voluntarily" suspended publication—with a vengeance! In 1932 there were 2,703 daily newspapers; now only 1,128. Only 217 weeklies out of 348 remain; out of 183 monthlies, 100 only are now published. In 1932, we find there were 19,200 editors; now only 5,437. Over 40 political and 32 religious journals have been suppressed. We don't know whether to commiserate with the Germans or to hail with rapture the disappearance of so much "journalism." In a free country, the cessation of many high-class journals must mean some disaster to the intellectual life of its citizens. In modern Germany, the dailies, weeklies and monthlies which remain are so obviously mere mouthpieces of Hitler and his gang, that one must feel genuinely sorry for a country which once was so high in science, literature, art and philosophy. How great is Germany's fall!

There is a fruity flavour in the *British Weekly's* editorial remark that, "It is a great mystery how our Lord's most private thoughts were conveyed to us." Surely this is the least of all the mysteries of Scriptural revelation. "We are permitted in the Gospels to share these thoughts," says the editor, who, without any special claims to miraculous power enables us to share what he is pleased to call his thoughts. Anybody can tell any-

body what his own thoughts are. One of the many mysteries of Scripture is to know how a stranger knew what "Mary kept to herself and pondered in her heart," what people "privately said to Pilate," what "the Centurion thought," what a certain woman "said within herself," and who was the shorthand reporter who was present at a private chat between Salome and her Mother. The *British Weekly* may not know it, but this "great mystery" has a well-understood name: it is what we call FICTION.

The "Group" movement continues to be "news." Rev. Norman Hatton, of Streatham, wants local preachers generally to "get together and accept Team guidance." Sermons could not possibly be worse than they are: we suggest handing them all over to a local football "team." Many of the Group absurdities are getting beyond the toleration even of the Group members. For instance—the doctrine of "Guidance." Mr. E. R. Micklem could endure a lot of it so long as the "Guidance" was "revealed" through him. But he found himself being "guided" (in a direction he disliked) by other people's "guidances." Rev. Frank Raynor complains of "the most devastating effects of the false use of Guidance." The "Group" has invented a remedy: every "Guidance" of one person must now be "checked." If God reveals His "Guidance" to one person only, it doesn't count. Even God Himself has to be checked nowadays. As a religious writer aptly says, "it is becoming a kind of spiritual Yo-yo, or a game of crystal-gazing without a crystal."

We may expect a recrudescence of the Christian Missions to China. The Bishop of Hankow (Dr. Roots) encourages an invasion of the Oxford Group Movement. The fact that a number of Chinese provinces are now definitely Communist and anti-religious is quite sufficient to induce wealthy Christians to subscribe more funds "to convert China." To the outsider it seems unlikely that Dr. Buchman and his queer mountebanks, rushing from hotel to drawing-room, and from luxurious steamship cabins to trains de luxe, will make any impression upon Chinese peasants and workmen. Dr. Buchman has not yet been to China, but he has telephoned across the ocean that "the purpose of the Group is to establish a spiritual telephony with God." We imagine that anybody silly enough to ring-up God will never get anything but a "wrong number."

How graphic the pen of the pious reporter: Mr. Wiseman, President of the Methodists, went to preach at Bradford. The *Recorder* grows eloquent, rapturous, lyrical even. Listen to his rhapsody: "And what a remarkable sermon! How Mr. Wiseman made the story of feet-washing live: the whole sermon was followed with breathless interest." "The audience was thrilled" . . . "then came Dr. Hughes as fresh as ever. He got his text from the words, 'If you take off your coat God will make bare His Arm.'" Nothing was said about bare legs, or bare backs, but it was all pretty bare-faced! It is man who has to take off his coat before you get to "God's" naked limb.

At Locksfields Chapel, London, Anniversary Services, the platform presented a scene at the bottom of the sea, with rocks and fishes, divers, and beautiful (and other) mermaids combing their hair. Three hundred people were present at the prayer-meeting in the same hall—which immediately preceded the hunting for the birthday cake—found at last inside a big cave.

News at last. The *Adelphi* oracle has spoken. God is about to be born. We were sure Mr. Middleton Murry would be the first to hear such news as this. This is from his April number. Mr. W. Brown breaks the news in these words: "In this period of stagnation, misery, and hopeless waiting for better times, a new soul is being born, a newer God is being made, new morals, ethics and religion are in the making. . . . Out of the feelings of the masses, out of the soul of the majority comes the new God and Heaven, a new spirit-land—for a new spirit-

uality has been born." Quite a new recipe for manufacturing a dummy god. We like the *Adelphi's* insistence that only the majority's soul will be used. A truly democratic God that will be. But more than materials will be needed for a satisfactory dish. Mixing a lot of feelings together will be some task, and we should like to know the name of the compounder as well as that of the cook. Is Marx to be the cook? Mr. Murry is always a bit mixed, so we can guess his part in the production of the new—we beg pardon, newer—God.

"Our Bewildered Lord" is not our phrase—it is a headline in the *Methodist Recorder*. It relates to the amusing story of Jesus promptly running away when offered the crown of a Kingdom not just then in existence. Jesus must have been about as bewildered as a relative of the Tsar would feel to-day if offered the throne of Russia.

The Rev. Albert Belden, B.D., explains the Sunday School "International Lesson" for Sunday, April 8. Most of us suffered unutterable boredom at Sunday School, but few of us had the good luck to find our "Lesson" as obviously ridiculous as Mr. Belden makes it. He tells the discredited legend that Peter begged permission to be crucified head-downward. You can take it or leave it, it may not be true, but, says Mr. Belden: "Whether the legend is true or not, it bears testimony to the strength of the man." Flat nonsense of this character is hard to beat. Of course, anything any witness says is "testimony"—it is something testified. But false testimony is mere perjury, and proves only that the witness is lying. Mr. Belden is a good judge of Christian testimony.

A Southampton reader of the *Daily Herald* avers that "The world is only just coming to understand the true meaning of Christianity." From this it would seem that the teaching of Jesus is anything but so plain and simple as it is so often declared to be nowadays. For it has required nineteen hundred years to get itself understood! How curious it is that a vitally important message from God to Man should have been so obscurely stated that millions of believers in it have failed to understand it properly during those nineteen centuries, and that its true meaning has only just emerged. This suggests that the All-Wise was either a very poor author or else a very indifferent student of human mentality.

Another *Herald* reader declares that "the plain truth is that the economic and political implications of Christ's teaching have never been worked out into a programme. Christianity is like the late Lord Oxford's Liberalism—'no hard and fast creed, but capable of infinite expansion.'" It would appear more nearly the plain truth to say that Christianity is capable of infinite manipulation. Its outstanding characteristic is its pliability. It is a piece of wax that can be, and has been, manipulated to fit almost any particular theory the believer may give his allegiance to. But perhaps this is a proof of its divine origin! The wit of man could hardly have invented so accommodating a creed.

The Holy Roman Church believes in making the most of her opportunities for money-making. The Holy Year is to be extended until Easter Sunday of 1935, and the faithful will still be able to obtain Holy Year "indulgences" during the extension, by making twelve visits to four churches designated by the bishops of their dioceses, and reciting the prayers prescribed for the occasion. Such prayers are to be specially directed "for the return of dissidents to the unity of the fold of Christ and for reparation against the injury to the Divine Majesty by militant Atheists." It is pleasing to note that the Roman Church admits that damage has been done by militant Atheists. In Britain Christian newspapers and writers like to keep up the pretence that militant Atheism is practically dead, and that its influence is negligible. If it is "dead" or dying, how odd it is that so much Christian energy should be directed towards suppressing or counter-acting it!

The Apostle Paul once talking glibly as usual about the "Holy Ghost" received a "shocking" rebuke at Ephesus. Asking the crowd, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" the crowd unanimously cried out, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." A monthly magazine called *Spiritual Life*, has been established mainly to "emphasize the Personality and Work of the Holy Spirit." With so many living "personalities" unemployed it seems a pity to give work to a ghost. The April issue of *Spiritual Life*, after declaring that we are living in the Pentecostal Age (whatever that is), assures us that "The Apostles lived in its dawn; we live in its noon-tide or perhaps in its evening." It seems strange that Revelation cannot even tell us whether it is dinner time or supper time in the "Pentecostal Age." It is evidently time to say Good-night to it!

The Vicar of St. Luke's, Norwood, condemns the ignorance of his congregation. "It is a scandal," he says in his Parish Magazine. "If we were better informed we should know what our religion teaches." Naturally we might have imagined this was a preface to a sincere recommendation to his flock to read the *Freethinker*, and some good sensible "infidel" books. The Vicar is not so anxious as that! Still, truth will out even in a Parish Magazine. The Vicar's conclusion is almost wholly admirable:—

I am convinced that what we need supremely is instruction. At the root of nearly all the indifference and credulity in our midst is ignorance. Many do not know what the Church stands for.

We must not despair of imparting the "instruction" needed, as to "what the Church stands for." There will then be no church, no vicar, and no lack of "information" about more important subjects than what the churches meant . . . once upon a time.

The Rev. Thomas Tiplady writes in the *Methodist Recorder* protesting against all licensing of Cinema films except in so far as inflammable films are concerned. His plea for non-censorship of "non-flam films, the medium for education," and suggesting a determined resistance to police interference is well put: "The licence for inflammable films is necessary because of the danger of fire. It has nothing to do with morals." As usual a religious protest against censorship has a "tag" to it. Mr. Tiplady puts it in its most offensive form by coupling indecency or blasphemy together and demanding most indecently that the police should "rigorously" suppress both! Mr. Tiplady probably is unconscious of his offence. He might understand his own attitude better if we said we wanted the police to prosecute brothel-keepers and Methodist ministers.

Fifty Years Ago

UNFORTUNATELY there are a few Freethinkers who have not yet got rid of their old prejudices. They are almost as bad as Christians themselves in their talk about "outrage." Let them learn that the advocacy of Freethought is not to be determined by the wishes of its enemies. We do not propose to consult them in the smallest degree. While we asperse no man's private character, we intend to maintain the principle that ideas are no man's property. We have a right to hate them or love them, accept them or reject them, promote them or attack them, just as they happen to affect us. And people who fancy they have a sort of vested interest in ideas, no matter whether they are true or false, must be taught the error of their assumption. Compromise and respectability are the bane of modern thought; they blunt our emotions and emasculate our intelligence. Let every lover of Truth, every striver for Freedom, every worker for Progress, speak out his absolute thought, careless of all consequence. He will find that Sincerity is the most useful, as it is the most noble policy, and he will feel a most calm courage lifting him far above all the cowardly reticences and timid futilities of meaner men.

The "Freethinker," April 13, 1884.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL:

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4
Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412

TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. COORLEGH.—Quite a good letter. It is well to let some people know what others think of them, but the matter is too ridiculous for our notice.

H.I.—Many thanks. We are not inclined to lose hope. We realize (1) how difficult it is for many to see the application of a principle apart from their own feelings, (2) the readiness of many to forget principle when they imagine an advantage is to be gained, and (3) when things are the same they cannot be different. We have often emphasized this latter point, and it seems to strike many as a revelation.

F. J. DUNSTONE.—See reply to M. Coorlegh.

E. LECHMERE.—Thanks for copy of letter to the B.B.C. We do not know who is the "Rationalist" who will be permitted to say what Sir John Reith will permit the public to hear on "Rationalism." But we have a pretty shrewd idea of what will *not* be said.

H.I.—Hardly worth bothering about. Mr. Cohen speaks on behalf of and represents the National Secular Society only, and is not concerned with the character or propaganda of any other organization. And our emphasis with regard to the B.B.C. and its censorship was on the scandal of *public and representative* men and women submitting to the dictatorship of a man such as Sir John Reith.

J. BARTON.—We already had a note written on the Mountmorres article, although it was almost too stupid for comment. Some of these men offer pitiable spectacles in mental degeneration.

**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

H. IRVING—AND OTHERS.—You must excuse us not printing praise of ourselves, unless there is some special purpose to serve by doing so. As you say, it should be obvious that the principle of dictatorship cannot be altered by the end aimed at. And each dictatorship pleads exactly the same kind of justification, and imagines that by wearing a different kind of shirt, or shouting a different kind of war-cry that the thing itself is altered. It all reminds one of the religionist with his cry, "Our God is the true God, and we may do what is bad if the worshippers of false gods do it." Sorry to hear you have been unwell. What about getting to Bolton?

B. MAY.—Thanks, but we have no reason to fear that our statement of Freethought will not meet with the approval of all who bear in mind that "Freethought" is a compound word, and means thought that is *free*, and is not at all concerned with whether it is advocating what is true or false, right or wrong.

J. MCINTYRE.—We really have not the space to print lengthy letters which merely repeat what has already been said. You must realize that, to a Freethinker, the fact of a number of people having convinced themselves that some things are right and other things wrong, offers no justification whatever for them suppressing opposite opinions. The *Freethinker* has on many occasions stood up for the right to freedom of speech for Christians as well as for *A*theists.

B. O'CONNELL.—You will find a brief account of Lincoln's opinions on religion in Mr. Cohen's *Christianity, Slavery and Labour*. Lincoln probably had some vague theistic beliefs, but there is ample testimony that he had no belief in orthodox Christian doctrines. Lamon's *Life of Lincoln* is emphatic on this point. There have been several recent lives of Lincoln published lately. His law partner, Herndon, said that Lincoln went further in his talk against Christianity of any man he knew. Thomas Hardy, may have had some shadowy form of theism, but certainly he was not Christian. We do not know that he ever called himself a Freethinker.

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

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.

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press," and crossed "Midland Bank, Ltd., Clerkenwell Branch."

Sugar Plums

There is little more than a month to the Annual Conference of the N.S.S., which this year will be held in Bolton. For various reasons, we should like to have as large and as wide a representation as possible, both of individual members and of Branches. Bolton is very central, and it is very many years since there was a Conference in the town. Visitors and delegates who require accommodation for the week-end should write the General Secretary without delay, stating their exact requirements.

The Manchester Branch of the N.S.S. will hold its Annual Meeting in the Clarion Cafe, Market Street, Manchester, on Saturday, April 21, at 3.0 p.m. We hope members will make a special point of attending in good numbers. The work done by the Manchester Branch during the past year has been excellent, and the hard-working President, Secretary and Committee must be congratulated on the excellent meetings they so ably organized. The support of all Freethinkers in Manchester—even the unattached ones—should help to further the good work this year.

From the *Manchester Evening News*:—

THE CHURCHES' TASK.

Those who are sympathetic towards orthodox religion, for reasons of unbringing or acquired faith, but also sympathetic towards the trend of modern ideas, are precisely those who wish the Churches would face the problems which science and rationalism are continually propounding. Faith need not be static. Somehow it must be squared with views like those so ably expressed in *Letters to a Country Vicar*, by Chapman Cohen.

He does not beat about the bush. He denies that man is a religious animal. The case is too involved to be argued here. It could be argued on the lines of persistence in history and from the mystical point of view. But this is the task of the Churches. At any rate, it is a stimulating book.

It is exactly our opinion that the Churches ought to reply to Mr. Cohen's criticism. But we do not think that any of their representatives whom Mr. Cohen would care to meet, are likely to volunteer for the task. If we are wrong, our columns are open to them.

The B.B.C. is, like Joe Bagstock, "Sly, Sir, Devilish Sly!" To a recent letter sent by one of our readers concerning the censorship it replies:—

Neither the B.B.C. nor the *Listener* censors wireless talks in the way you suggest.

The italics are ours. But as it does not deny that it cuts passages out of speeches, and as recent revelations proves, it sticks passages in speeches, we wonder what is the form of censorship to which it pleads guilty? The plain and the degrading thing is that speakers must submit to a censorship. "In the way you suggest" is a contemptible evasion characteristic of Sir John Reith, and his naval and military associates. The pity is that public men should submit to the censorship against which Mr. Ferrie so effectively protested. We see no justification for those who do submit to it protesting against Fascistic methods.

Here is an excerpt from a new reader, from which old ones may draw a moral:—

Some few months ago I came across a copy of the *Freethinker* by chance. I was surprised to find such a paper in this pious country, but delighted to see that it expressed my own views in a far more brilliant fashion than I could. It is more deserving of a wide circulation than any journal I have so far met with, and if you care to send me some back numbers I will see that they are duly "planted."

We are quite sure that there are thousands of possible subscribers to this journal who only require it to be brought to their notice in order for them to become regular readers. We suggest that every one of our readers who are interested enough, should make an effort to bring the light into dark places. They can either take an extra copy themselves for distribution, or send along names and addresses to us, with stamps for postage, and we will see that copies are duly sent.

We hear from Mr. Joseph Lewis, of New York, that the American Senate has passed a resolution providing a site in Washington for a statue to Ingersoll. The resolution now goes to the President for signature, and the signature is expected at an early date. The sculptor, Mr. Gutson Borgium, is now working on the final model of the statue. We are not surprised to hear that all the money required for the statue has not yet been collected. It is unfortunate that the Centenary should have coincided with the acute financial depression, but we have every confidence that the money required will be raised. Subscriptions should be sent to Mr. J. Lewis, who is acting as Secretary for the Ingersoll Committee. Address, 317 East 34th Street, New York. It is hoped to announce shortly the date of the unveiling of the statue.

Professor H. Levy will deliver the Twenty-fifth Conway Memorial Lecture on Wednesday, April 25, at 7 p.m., at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1, his subject being "Science in an Irrational Society." Admission will be free.

Mr. Vivian Phelps has just published a sequel to his well-known and widely circulated *The Churches and Modern Thought*, the first edition of which came out nearly thirty years ago. It was a particularly useful statement of the case for Freethought, and the author has seen little reason for altering any of the conclusions he formulated then, in the successive editions. In the new work which is entitled *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs* (Watts 1s. net), Mr. Phelps has returned to the attack armed with the pronouncements of some of the most famous apologists of the day. Those scientific men who—though almost as far from genuine Christianity as the average militant Freethinker—profess belief in "something" as well as many famous churchmen, are all called upon for material which the author handles in a satisfactory manner.

Nowadays the Christian apologist is particularly fond of talking about "indeterminism," "relativity" and "emergent evolution" and, by learnedly quoting the archaeologists and their supposed discoveries of evidence for the Flood or the fate of the walls of Jericho, he calmly wishes the public to believe that the Bible "in all essentials," is true. Mr. Phelps has gathered a harvest of quotations from the works of Dean Inge, Bishop Barnes, Canon Streeter, Dr. Glover, and many other Christians, as well as from scientific men like Sir James Jeans, Bertrand Russell, Sir A. Eddington, Prof. A. N. Whitehead, and many others, and he proves that modern pronouncements in favour of religion, only strengthen the case against religion he so ably outlined in his first book. *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs* should be put side by side with Mr. Phelps's previous book on every Freethinker's shelf.

All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility.—*John Stuart Mill.*

Woman's Place in Many Lands

CRAWLEY, Westermarck and other observers have stressed the sense of doubt and misgiving, which seems to shroud women in savage life. The menstrual flow and child-bearing are assigned as the main causes of this uneasy feeling which is certainly not confined to uncivilized races, but appears among barbarous and cultured peoples alike.

Instead of the superior position of women serving as an index of civilization, we meet with the apparent paradox that women are frequently treated with greater consideration in many of the more primitive societies than amongst those that have reached a higher grade of culture. The exalted or depressed status of women is consequently no criterion of the stage of development in any social structure.

The Australian native women have been described as the abject slaves of their male masters without rights of any kind. Yet, if the husband murders his wife without just cause her kindred avenge the wrong. Moreover, before punishing his spouse for her misdeeds the consent of the tribe is sometimes essential. Furthermore, when a husband is charged by his wife with adultery the culprit is sometimes punished. Those painstaking observers, Spencer and Gillen, assure us that in Central Australia the native women are not commonly treated "with anything which could be called excessive harshness," and many native instances have been recorded where venerable couples have ended their days in wedded tranquillity.

The Plains Indians of America are said to exercise absolute authority over their squaws, and to treat them worse than the Negro slaves were treated before emancipation. Yet Dodge, who states this, elsewhere admits that native custom allows every married woman in the various tribes "the absolute right to leave her husband and become the wife of any other man, the sole condition being that the new husband must have the means to pay for her."

That savage women are mere drudges has been noted and deplored on many occasions, while the truth that division of labour is generally customary among savages has been disregarded. Westermarck's criticism of the popular view is very cogent. "In early society," he urges, "each sex has its own pursuits. The man is responsible for the protection of his family and, ultimately, for its support. His occupations are such as to require strength and agility—fighting, hunting, fishing, the construction of implements for the chase and war, and frequently the cutting of trees and the building of lodges." Thus, the men are no mere idlers, and if the women bear burdens when travelling and perform all domestic duties, they cannot therefore be regarded as down-trodden slaves. Although the women till the soil, the care of the cattle largely devolves on the men. Again, a man who undertook the tasks allotted to the women would become the target of general ridicule.

Female unfaithfulness frequently procures divorce, but some lowly tribes will not allow a husband to repudiate his spouse for adultery. On the other hand, divorce is occasionally granted for quite trivial causes. We read that with certain tribes of Eastern Central Africa "the wife may divorce a husband who omits to sew her clothes. Among the Shans of Burma, should the husband take to drink or otherwise misconduct himself, the wife has the right to turn him adrift, and to retain all the goods and money of the partnership."

The woman occupies a position in China far inferior to that of many savage peoples, while under the Taiho code of Japan the wife could be divorced at her lord's bidding under any trumpery pretext. Yet the woman had no legal right for divorce from her husband however grievous his sins.

In Homeric Greece women were held in greater honour and exercised a far wider influence than they were granted in the later classical era. During the historic period woman's position had declined to that of a domestic drudge. So long as she kept the house in order, and gave due heed to her lord and master's commands while remaining silent and secluded, she was deemed a fit and proper wife. The average Greek considered his spouse an intellectual weakling, fit only to serve as the mother of his offspring, and to minister to his relaxations. "There was also a general notion," states Westermarck, "that she is naturally more vicious, more addicted to envy, discontent, evil-speaking, and wantonness than the man. Plato classes women together with children and servants, and states that in all the pursuits of mankind the female sex is inferior to the male." Nor would Aristotle's opinion of the wedded woman's proper position commend itself to modern champions of female enfranchisement and liberty. That great Greek philosopher declared that: "A good and perfect wife ought to be mistress of everything within the house. But the well-ordered wife will justly consider the behaviour of her husband as a model of her own life and a law to herself, invested with a divine sanction by means of the marriage tie and the community of life. The wife ought to show herself even more obedient to the rein than if she had entered the house as a purchased slave."

In the early days of Rome the father exercised sovereign sway over his daughters, and his despotic powers passed to the husband at marriage. This rigour was slowly softened as the years rolled on, until, under the Empire, the husband possessed little or no authority over his wife.

The liberty and ability of the Roman matron have long been celebrated by historians and poets, but this beatitude was of brief duration. With the advent of Christianity woman was soon relegated to an inferior position. She soon became the weaker vessel, for the Church declared that man was not divinely created for the woman, but the woman for the man. Christ is the head of the Church, therefore the husband is the head of the wife. Years since, the eminent clerical scholar, Principal Donaldson, admitted that during the first three centuries of Christianity he "had not been able to see that this religion had any favourable effect on the position of women, but, on the contrary that it tended to lower their character, and contract the range of their activity." Another leading authority, Sir Henry Maine, asserts that the systems "which are least indulgent to married women are invariably those which followed the Canon Law exclusively, or those which, from the lateness of their contact with European civilization, have never had their archaisms weeded out."

In old Israel women were disdained as very inferior mortals. In the legend of Genesis, Eve's transgression is the beginning of all our woes, and this idle tale passed as a matter of course to the Christian Church. Paul's contemptuous attitude towards the female sex was shared by all the leading Christian fathers. Tertullian, for example, insists that women should wear dowdy dress, and cultivate a mournful and repentant cast of countenance, in order to cleanse themselves from the wickedness they had inherited from disobedient Eve. "Do you not know," he thunders, "that you are each an Eve? . . . You are the Devil's gateway; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die."

To crown all these accusations of the fair sex, towards the close of the sixth century, at the Council

of Mâcon, one of the assembled bishops boldly queried woman's very title to rank as a human being. But the majority of the Council decided that even when all her countless sins were reckoned, Scripture admitted her as a member of the human species. Some of the Fathers, who conceded to women the claim to humanity, nevertheless asserted that her womanhood was restricted to this world only, and that on the day of resurrection, females will be transformed into sexless, and presumably, less deceitful creatures.

T. F. PALMER.

Religion and the Down and Out

It is an extraordinary fact that Christianity seems to have attracted not only some of the greatest intellects in history, but also the most credulous of illiterates. In this, of course, it is not different from any other religion, but it certainly can boast of having captured all sorts and conditions of men and women. Above all, however, Christianity in the past seems to have had a wonderful attraction for the weak—in spirit and mind—the poverty and malady-stricken, and nearly always the down and outs. Hence Marx's biting sarcasm that religion is the opium of the people.

What was it in Christianity which so powerfully attracted the poor? Why did the poor, suffering untold misery, hopefully look to Christ to save them? Credulous as we know people to be, were they really content to submit to poverty of the worst kind, to all that we understand by penury and wretchedness because Christ would save them, or because a golden harp was promised them in heaven in the next life? We shall never, of course, really know what the "proletariat" were thinking about these things during that awful nightmare, the Christian Dark Ages. Perhaps, in spite of the one here and there that has protested, the masses were too ignorant and too depressed to think out matters for themselves.

I thought of these things, the other day, while reading *Down and Out in Paris and London*, by George Orwell. I do not remember ever having read an authentic description of genuine "Down and Outs" before, and this book horrified me. It is written calmly and dispassionately, and the author certainly does not rant or rail at society when describing the scenes he witnessed or took part in himself. He does, however, devote a couple of chapters to a calm analysis of the classes he deals with, and the relation of society to them, in the hope, perhaps, that some notice will be taken of his remarks by the proper authorities, or by society in general.

In Paris, he was a *plongeur*, that is, a dish-washer. I envy no one a job like that. It was by no means easy to get, but it did keep one alive if no more than alive. If what Mr. Orwell says is true, and the book bears the stamp of veracity, all I can say is I shall have to think twice before I ever dine in a Paris restaurant again.

The cooks and dish-washers worked in an atmosphere of indescribable filth and heat. The perspiration poured out of the poor workers and helped more often than not to swell the soups and the stews. Mr. Orwell gives a detailed description of the evolution of a favourite Parisian dish from the time of its inception, to the beautifully finished article appearing in the hands of the waiter ready to be put reverently before the diner. I simply cannot transcribe the details, but if half of what he says is true, I shall have to content myself with boiled eggs next time that I am lucky enough to go on the Continent.

As for the life of the poor beggars who do the work, I can only say that death seems to me far more prefer-

able. Low as the *plongeur* is in the scale of values, one would have thought that something might have been done for him by his own Government. What would happen in gay—not now *so* gay—Paris, if all the dishwashers in the city went on strike for a week? I have never been particularly in favour of strikes, but I think the poor *plongeurs* would have been thoroughly justified.

At all events, Mr. Orwell was unable to stand the life for long, and he managed to get back into England. Through no fault of his own he became practically destitute, and thus gained a first-hand knowledge of tramps, casual wards and religious meetings for the poor.

What a life! How do men and women live through it? They are not, as we only too well know, the cast-outs of the "proletariat." Men of refinement, with university degrees can be found sharing the hell in which the tramp finds himself. Sharing the foul discomforts, the brutal treatment of our "shelters," the horrible and monotonous food, the dreary tramping from town to town. It is no use railing at these people for getting drunk when they get a chance. Who wouldn't?

Mr. Orwell's descriptions of what the tramp has to go through in the various doss-houses and casual wards he is compelled to patronize must make the average man sick at heart at the hopeless horror of it all. As the author says, before considering what ought to be done, we must get rid of certain prejudices. "These prejudices are rooted in the idea that every tramp, *ipso facto*, is a blackguard . . . a repulsive, rather dangerous creature, who would die rather than work or wash, and wants nothing but to beg, drink and rob hen-houses. This tramp-monster is no truer to life than the sinister Chinaman of the magazine stories, but he is very hard to get rid of."

"A tramp tramps," declares Mr. Orwell, "not because he likes it, but . . . because there happens to be a law compelling him to do so. A destitute man, if he is not supported by the parish, can only get relief at the casual wards, and as each casual ward will only admit him for one night, he is automatically kept moving. He is a vagrant because, in the state of the law, it is that or starve."

Society has a great deal to answer for in its treatment of the poor, but for the way it treats the tramp and his like, there ought to be a heavy bill to pay one day. But the Church is comprised in the word "society," and it would be interesting to find out exactly what she has done for the completely destitute, the tramp, and the down and out. She protests, naturally, that her heart bleeds for the poor, and for what they suffer, and does manage to collect from the better-off some charitable doles, under the threat that if a little is not given more will be taken. Obviously, exhorting them to come to Jesus, assuring them that Jesus is the only one who will take up their cross, won't fill their bellies. They want food, shelter and work, and Jesus has never supplied any of these things.

Of course, there are always people who recognize that an ounce of practical help in this way, here and now, is worth tons of help in heaven, so they attempt to mix the two things, as far as possible. A striking example is the Salvation Army shelter.

"To my eye," says Mr. Orwell, "these, though clean, are far drearier than the worst of the common lodging-houses. . . . The charge for beds was eightpence each. . . . The tea appeared to be made with tea dust, which I fancy had been given to the Salvation Army in charity, though they sold it at three halfpence a cup. It was foul stuff."

These shelters were almost always run on semi-military lines, everybody standing up when a whistle

blew. (Something like the modern procedure at the B.B.C. headquarters). "In some of them there is even a compulsory religious service once or twice a week, which the lodgers must attend or leave the house. The fact is," comments Mr. Orwell, "that the Salvation Army are so in the habit of thinking themselves a charitable body, that they cannot even run a lodging-house without making it stink of charity." I am quite sure that most of the people who subscribe so generously to the Salvation Army funds have not read (and would not read) Mr. Orwell's scathing indictment of that magnificent religious and charitable organization.

The author's description of a "slumming-party" consisting of "three gentlepeople, sleekly dressed, holding a religious service" in the kitchen of a common lodging-house is delicious. "They were a grave and reverend signior in a frock coat, a lady sitting at a portable harmonium, and a chinless youth toying with a crucifix. They marched in and started to hold the service, without any invitation whatever."

The lodgers simply ignored them. No more notice was taken of the slummers than if they had not been there, and while the gentleman was preaching a sermon the lodgers drowned it with songs, oaths and the clattering of pans. They even commenced their meals and played cards within a yard of the harmonium. "Presently the slummers gave it up and cleared out, not insulted in any way but merely disregarded. . . . It is curious," Mr. Orwell points out, "how people take it for granted that they have a right to preach at you and pray over you as soon as your income falls below a certain level."

The tramps always make a point of collecting any free teas given by churches. On one occasion a hundred men were waiting outside one of these churches and were shepherded into a gallery at the top. "It was an evangelical church, gaunt and wilfully ugly, with texts about blood and fire blazoned on the walls, and a hymn-book containing twelve hundred and fifty-one hymns. . . . There was to be a service after tea."

Directly this was over, "a dozen tramps bolted to avoid the service; the rest stayed, less from gratitude than lacking the cheek to go."

But directly the service began, the men behaved outrageously; some "laughed, chattered, leaned over and flicked pellets of bread among the congregation . . . they treated the service as a purely comic spectacle. It was, indeed, a sufficiently ludicrous service—the kind where there are sudden yells of Hallelujah!—and endless extempore prayers, but their behaviour passed all bounds." Whenever a Brother stood up to pray, the tramps began to stamp as if in a theatre. The minister did his best, but when he threatened everybody with hell-fire, the tramps took out their cigarettes and "clattered down the stairs with a yell, many agreeing to come back for another free tea next week."

It is good to record that even among these unlucky "down and outs," there was retained just sufficient of a sense of humour to enable them to see the comic side of these ghastly religious services. But your evangelical Christian has the hide of a rhinoceros, and thousands of scenes similar to those so ably described by Mr. Orwell, will not make him see the hopeless fatuity of his absurd religion—especially for tramps.

I heartily commend *Down and Out in Paris and London*. It is a brave and necessary book.

H. CUTNER.

TOO OBVIOUS.

Nations who ask for a clean slate should qualify for it by showing clean hands.

A Critic of "The Biblical Style"

No book is more tiresome to read than the Bible—and no other book is so persistently hailed as an example of great literature.

The champions of the Bible are usually clergymen, and it is a well-known fact that advertisers invariably speak highly of their wares. If the subject matter is indefensible the clergymen critics always praise the biblical style. Because they have usually little knowledge of literature their task is rendered easier than it would be otherwise.

But what happens when an honest and capable literary critic approaches the Bible and judges it by the same standards that he would apply to a novel issued last week? The answer is afforded in Burton Rascoe's book, *Titans of Literature*. Published last year by Routledge, this book reviews the work of great writers from the legendary Homer to Marcel Proust.

In his chapter on Milton the author has some refreshing comments to make on the biblical style.

Paradise Lost and *Paradise Regained*, he says, are horrible examples of what may occur when a man with displeasing type of mind happens to be an expert versifying technician in what is loosely called the biblical style.

"It takes no special talent for irreverence," he states " (if one is true to one's real response to any stimulus and not so afraid of one's self as to try to disguise it) that the so-called biblical style, nine times in ten, propounds the dubious, the false, the untrue, the bombastic or the commonplace. Too frequently it has the specious solemnity of the *C Sharp Minor Prelude*, the puerile pensiveness of some of Mr. Smith's whimsies, or the maudlin bathos of *The Face on the Bar-room Floor*.

The Mr. Smith referred to, by the way, is Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith, and his "whimsies" mean his *Treasury of English Prose*.

"It soothes the fatuous ear," continues Mr. Rascoe, "but it speaks little to the mind. It is an opiate, an anodyne. It brings the comfort of the softness that is near to tears; it rests and tranquillizes; it achieves the inestimable duplicity of making the reader think he is thinking."

Then follows this denunciation:—

"To be able by mere arrangement of words to anesthetize a victim and lead him to believe that his vacuous mental wandering is cerebration is, true enough, a triumph. It is the business of the politician and the quack, and on the higher plane, it is the aim, the purpose and the achievement of many good poets and musicians. But it is not inevitably the metier of the man who, in the sight of God (or his own self-respect) wishes to put on record what he thinks, knows and feels."

There is little doubt that the following paragraph contains Mr. Rascoe's severest criticism. He writes:—

"The convention of the grandeur of the Old Testament style is, I think, a pernicious and stultifying one. 'Read the Bible' has become as staple an admonition to the literary aspirant as 'Don't watch the clock' is to the ambitious junior clerk. The grandeur of the Old Testament itself is truly unassailable, but it is a venerable grandeur arising from the needs and aspirations of a people. When the style of it is imitated (and it is easily imitated) it is more often than not, the tool of charlatans or of deluded persons who think in pompous platitudes. To the sensitive it is not always satisfying, even aesthetically, because too frequently it shrouds the debatable in oracular ceremonies."

Little imagination is required to apply Mr. Rascoe's attack on biblical style to the Bible itself.

Equally challenging is his opinion of Dante. He thinks that the "Divine Comedy" is no more worthy of admiration than a carved replica of the battleship "Maine" assembled inside a bottle.

In the *Paradiso*, he writes, even more than in the *Inferno*, Dante displays the unhealthy state of his mind, which is simply that of a weak voluptuary tortured by a medieval conscience. The 'testimony,' the spiritual experience of Dante, is, in character and spirit,

exactly like that of the derelicts of a Salvation Army mission, who achieve grace every Sunday night and fall out of it again on Monday."

Voltaire he considers the most lordly figure of his time, and he thinks that Anatole France and Remy de Gourmont—another ironic sceptic—the most emancipated intelligences the world has produced.

Mr. Burton Rascoe might not be a sceptic, but his book is a worthy addition to the literature of freedom.

D. STIRLING.

The Bradlaugh Centenary Fund

DONORS to the Bradlaugh Centenary Fund will be interested to hear how the money subscribed has been used by the Executive Committee. In the audited account now available it is stated that £1,065 10s. 8d. was received in donations, and that £288 3s. 6d. was received from the sale of the two publications. Those who obtained copies of *Champion of Liberty: Charles Bradlaugh*, and *Bradlaugh and To-day*, will readily understand that the cost of preparing and producing the volumes, especially in the case of the former one, was considerable. The sum spent on them, including advertising in the Press and by circulars, was actually £792 10s. 6d. In addition there was expended on lectures and the Centenary Dinner £147 4s. 2d., on salaries and clerical expenses £214 14s. 9d., and on sundries and postages £86 9s. 8d. After crediting the account with £19 7s. as the probable receipts from the sales of the remaining stock of the publications, there is left a balance of £132 2s. 1d. The Committee have decided to keep this in reserve in the hope that it may be utilized, in whole or in part, in arranging for a memorial in the House of Commons, should such an opportunity arise.

Cold Comfort Farm

HUMOROUS novels of real merit are so rare, that my first feeling on discovering a new one, is a desire to run out into the street, and "tell the world" all about it.

Miss Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm* has already been praised by many better-known and better qualified to write of it than I, but its publication in a cheap edition (Longmans, 3s. 6d.) will probably make it available for a wider public.

The book "debunks" so many things, from religious mania to the more highbrow cinema, and from what has been wittily called the "loam and love-child" novel to the county hunting-shooting-fishing people, that it is difficult to know where to begin.

Its plot is slender enough; merely a girl who has lived in literary circles in London, and who goes to stay with some cousins who have a farm in Sussex. The farmer is called Starkadder, and all the characters are carefully exaggerated specimens of those whom we have all met in the pages of Hardy, Mr. Phillpotts and others. So neatly is the burlesque done, however, that the reader is gently led into accepting it all.

The Church of the Quivering Brethren, where Amos Starkadder preaches movingly of hell-fire, and the wrath to come, will probably be the culmination of the whole gorgeous parody for most readers, but I can only say, for myself, that loud and frequent laughter was heard at intervals throughout the book, when I was reading it.

This is probably the funniest book for years: at any rate, if there has been a funnier, even from Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, I have not struck it.

And, which is better still, the fun is not unpleasant. We feel, somehow, in reading the book, that Miss Gibbons has appreciated the fact that parody is a real form of flattery, and, in thus parodying the masters, has expressed her great appreciation of them.

So, even though you are, as I am, a great admirer of Hardy or of Mr. Phillpotts, you will enjoy this book. Not for a very long time have I found anything which is at once so funny, and so stimulating.

JOHN ROWLAND.

Correspondence

CAN RELIGION CAUSE INSANITY?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. C. S. Fraser avers that he read my letter "carefully." In that case I have to assume that he excessively relied upon his memory, for he ascribes to me statements which I did not make, and, I may add, which are contrary to my convictions. He also avers that he does not think "there is any real disagreement between" his views and my own. I realize that persons may seem, through the terminology they employ, to be opposed as to matter of fact, and yet may be in substantial agreement; and that others may seem to agree and yet may widely disagree as to matter of fact. In this connexion may I quote what I wrote (in 1910) in my first book on hypnotism, *Rational Hypnotism*? I had occasion to deal with "the Will," and wrote: "To admit that a *character* is to any extent whatever transformable is tacitly to assume Causality in the realm of the Will. The fierce battle which has raged regarding the freedom or otherwise of the Will, like many another battle would never have occurred were not words compelled to take the place of ideas. 'First define your terms,' was Cicero's injunction; and that definitions are useful who can doubt? Still, one cannot define without introducing other words which, to be consistent, should also be defined, and so on, *ad infinitum*. An acute sophist, if so inclined, almost invariably has an opportunity of pretending to misunderstand, and a stupid person—of really misunderstanding. Add to this difficulty of preventing a false issue being raised, the fact that the using of words without attaching any *clear* signification to them is a frailty very common to humanity, and one is in a position to better understand the contentions of both sides."

As I, personally, believe—contrary to Mr. Fraser's declared opinion—that there exists a real disagreement between the views he expressed in his article, and my own views, I feel that the situation may be clarified if he will be so good as to define the following as employed by him: "Sanity," "Insanity," "Idea," "Emotion." I shall then have pleasure in returning, with the Editor's courtesy, to the matters in apparent dispute.

J. LOUIS ORTON.

REASON AND REASONING.

SIR,—I so often agree with what you write, and you so often clearly express ideas which I have; that it is with the nearest approach to timidity, possible to me, that I venture to criticize one point in your article in the *Freethinker* of April 1, 1934. That slight criticism is concerning the use of the words, "Rational," "Rationalist," and "Reason."

The Contrast between Mr. Belloc—or any other Apologist for Religion—and the "Rationalist," is not that the former forsakes reason, refuses to reason, or does not believe in reason, while the latter accepts, uses, or believes in reason. You make that quite clear. Still, it seems to me, that you posit the wrong antithesis when you make it; reason that is logical against reason that is illogical.

The real difference seems to be in the different way in which "reason" is used in the two cases. The contrast is the different *place* occupied by "reason" in the two sequences.

The overwhelming majority of men and women appear first, to "feel"; then, to "act" "will"; thirdly—if at all—to "reason." They only use "reason"—if at all—to justify that which they have already done, in response to some sensation or desire. That is what the psychoanalyst calls "rationalizing." It is the only kind of "reasoning" known to most men and women. I call it "self-justification." The old illustration is the man who "desires" to drink a pint of beer; then drinks it; and, *afterwards*, in order to justify himself, tells his teetotal friend that beer is necessary to him "to keep his bowels regular."

Much—perhaps not all—"reasoning" by Apologists for Religion is of this nature. I remember one of your Reverend antagonists, who debated in the *Freethinker*, writing that he had "tried" Atheism when he was young. His "reasoning" was—obviously—on a par with that of the anti-constipation beer-drinking gentleman, to whom I have referred. He desired to "believe" he "believed": *then* he "reasoned," to justify his belief.

The "Rationalist," on the other hand, says, first, "feel"; next, "reason"; and, then, "act." The "reasoning" is to precede and cause the "act." It is *not* to follow the "act," merely to justify it.

In each of the illustrative "judgments" which you give, this distinction is fairly evident. In all the "(a)"s, the "reasoning" would—probably—precede the "belief." In all the "(b)"s, the "belief" would—just as probably—exist first, and the "reasoning" come afterwards.

(a) "The barometer is falling and there will be rain." Here, there is "reasoning," *first*, that a falling column in the barometer signifies rain to come. The "belief" follows that rain will come. In the case of (b) "Prayers have been offered to God and rain will come"; there is, first, the "belief" that God sends rain. Then rain comes; and, after that, the believer "reasons," "God sent it."

Thus do paid official Christians "justify the ways of God to man." Like quack doctors, they enjoy good livings. Their "rationalizing" succeeds; because of the lack of "reasoning" amongst those whom they exploit—poor dupes. THERE, is the difference between the "reasoning" of the Rationalist and the "rationalizing" of the Apologist for Religion.

ATHOS ZENO.

'Tis a vain thing to talk of a heretic, for a man in his heart can think no otherwise than he does think.

John Selden.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.40, Mr. Paul Goldman.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. 3.30, Platform No. 1, Messrs. Bryant and Collins. Platform No. 2, Mr. B. A. Le Maine. 6.30, Messrs. Wood, Hyatt and others. Wednesday, 7.30, Mr. W. P. Campbell Eversden.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1): 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"The New Hero Worship."

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 68 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4): 8.0, Monday, April 16, Mr. A. Swarbrick—"The Emotions of a Methodist."

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Reggiori's Restaurant, 1 Euston Road, opposite King's Cross Station): 7.30, A Debate.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (The Market): 7.0, Mr. Jack Clayton—A Lecture.

INDOOR.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. Jack Clayton—"The Question of Design." S.D.F., St. James Hall, 11.0, Mr. H. P. Turner (Burnley)—"Christianity and Sunworship."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Gill Bridge Avenue, Sunderland): 7.30, Mr. A. Flanders.

The Secular Society, Ltd.

CHAIRMAN—CHAPMAN COHEN.

Company Limited by Guarantee.

Registered Office: 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Secretary: R. H. ROSETTI.

THIS Society was formed in 1893 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularization of the State, etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

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