

THE FREETHINKER

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

Views and Opinions

Rome and Freedom

ONE would need to be very wise, or very foolish, to say exactly what is going to happen when the war is over. Up to the present we have run along with the "never again" cry of 1914-18. But it is fairly certain that if the settlement lies in the hands of the politicians who have had control of affairs that led up to the war, it will result in no more than another armistice. Unless we aim at creating an international understanding, in which all nations are concerned, a real peace will be next to impossible. So long as each nation is the supreme judge of what it shall do in relation to other nations, and covers its plots and counter-plots, its diplomatic idiocies and political chicaneries, with the cloak of duty to the State, European peace will be impossible. Above all we must see to it that when the war ends there are no secret treaties and no secret understandings. And in this work of creating a real peace it is the conquerors—if there are any conquerors in this war—who must lead the way. Above all, the foolish, almost criminal cry, with which we are being treated at present, that we must not criticize the Government, must be killed. A Government exists to be criticized, a people exists to criticize the Government. And a people who lack the readiness and the ability to criticize a Government, and a Government which tells it that we must trust and obey, are already in the position of a State in which the people have no real conception of what liberty means. One of the battle-cries of the last war was "open treaties, openly made." We have had since the armistice of 1918 more secret discussions, more private understandings, and a greater flouting of the public right to know what is being attempted, than we had before the war.

* * *

The Church and the World

I feel certain that one of the casualties of the war will be the Roman Catholic Church. I do not mean by this that it will be extinguished, for the Roman Church stands for a type of mind that cannot be des-

troyed in a generation. But "peace" will find it very badly damaged, with injuries that are greater than any it has suffered since the Protestant Reformation—that is, if we get a real peace. The injuries to the Church in the sixteenth century were not then so great as some of our historians would have us believe. In this connexion two important things have been overlooked. The first is that before the Protestant Reformation the Church had already been badly shaken by the intellectual revolution known generally as the Renaissance. An attack on the Church was in progress that might have made a much better job of it than did Protestantism. It would have weakened religion as a whole. The Protestant movement itself was an offshoot of this movement of liberation of the "spirit," and whatever freedom of thought came from Protestantism was incidental, not essential. Moreover the Roman Church has generally been able to hold its own against Protestantism. That of late years the Roman Church has lost heavily has nothing to do with Protestantism; it is a consequence of the disintegration of religious belief that has been going on everywhere, and which no Church, no form of religion, can altogether prevent.

The one force that neither Roman Catholicism nor any other form of religion can successfully and permanently withstand is the increasing pressure that comes from human development. In saying this I have not in my mind the cheap maxim that "Truth is mighty and will prevail." Truth will only prevail when and where the conditions of conflict are comparatively equal, or if the variations of the fortunes of war are calculated over a sufficiently lengthy period. In multitudes of cases truth does not prevail, but is forced to retire in silence like a parliamentary questioner before a ministerial answer. But the pressure of fact is persistent, and the tendencies of human growth cannot be forever silenced. One may put it that while *men* may be silenced, beaten and crushed, *Man* cannot be forever overcome. A consciousness of this would, I think, make Mr. Wells a little less pessimistic over the future of mankind than he has been of late. It is neither safe nor scientific to deal with questions of human evolution as though our knowledge enables us to foretell the future with the certainty with which we calculate a problem of mechanics.

* * *

A Die-Hard Religion

As often happens, I am letting my typewriter dictate what I shall say, and have been wandering a little, although it is surprising what this machine of mine will say when it gets its *tape* in its teeth. (I think that one of these days I might produce a rather interesting little book under the title of *Things My Typewriter has Told Me*. It seems to me to be full of things that are worthy of being made public). But what I set out to say, among other things, is that the

Roman Catholic Church must come badly out of the war because, more than any other of the Churches, it is a truly Christian survival. It is tied to the crudest of religious beliefs; it is bound down to stupid dogmas that other Churches are ashamed of and have worked hard to explain out of existence, while its claims to be under the direct patronage of the primitive Christian bogey-man give it an immobility which prevents a ready—if a dishonest—adaptation to modern scientific views. In addition it cannot, without turning its back on all its principles permit itself to become a department of the State, as Protestantism has done. Unlike the Protestant Church, Rome aims at making the State a department of the Church, or refusing the right of the State to rule various departments of social life. It must maintain its god-given right to control the family, education, morals and religion. It may submit to restrictions, but does so under protest. But the main purpose and aim of the Church remain.

Bearing in mind the strong hold that the Roman Church maintains over its followers there is something out of the common in the *Universe*, the principal Roman Catholic paper in this country, publishing a categorical statement of the position for which the papacy stands. It is in the form of an answer to an enquiry, although one may well believe that the question was of the kind which a Cabinet Minister is asked so that he may be able to make a statement in the form of an answer. There are twenty-one clauses in the *Universe* article, but I am concerned with only a few of them. Number one is that the Pope does not claim the right to inflict capital punishment. That is as true as the customary statement of Roman Catholics that the Church never burned a man to death for heresy. The Roman Church did not, and does not, itself inflict capital punishment for a religious offence, but it did insist on the civil power doing so, and it gave its blessing to those who did it. The Church found the man guilty, it was then left to the civil power to punish, and woe betide the ruler who sheltered a heretic from the anger of the Church. Number three is obviously intended to show that the Church is not inclined to bear hardly on those who dissent from its teaching. Thus:—

If the Church became supreme she would doubtless allow Protestants, Jews, etc., to practise their religion . . . if this is not harmful to the State or injurious to the faith of others.

But the Roman Catholics are preaching as hard as they can that not to hold the Roman Catholic religion is to undermine the State, and to strike at the roots of human well-being. The same paper that publishes this Christian truth has a continuous run of articles aiming at demonstrating it, and it is one of the constant themes of the very, very truthful *Hilaire Belloc*. When did any Christian body hold that a neglect of religion was not harmful to the State?

Numbers 4, 5, and 6 run on the same lines. When the Catholic Church is supreme:—

Freethinkers and Atheists would be tolerated as individuals, but they would not be allowed to spread their views. Non-Catholics would presumably be given equal treatment in the appointment to public offices, except in the case where Catholic belief was obviously desirable. . . . A wise freedom would doubtless be extended to the press.

I believe these rules are already in force in Germany. The Hitler gang of criminals tolerates anti-Nazis—so long as their opinions are not known. But if they express them, then there is trouble. Hitler will also appoint non-Nazis to office, except where it is not desirable they should be appointed. And a "wise" freedom is given to the press by Goebbels and Goering. There is not a sentence that is laid down by

the *Universe* as part of the aims of the Roman Church that is not embodied in the actual rule of Fascism in Germany.

Numbers seven and twenty-two concern women, and there is a certain sly humour in the remark that "women would doubtless be free to choose their own occupation. It would be dangerous and rash to attempt otherwise." Even Catholic women may hit back at their lords. But "It is not necessary that women should have a say in determining legislation affecting them, at least so far as matters of divine and Church Law are concerned." (This would cover marriage with non-Catholics, the training of children, preaching in public, divorce, and morals). The faithful "are not consulted about the laws that are made for their benefit by ecclesiastical authority, and this applies to both sexes." The Nazi rule covers a wider sphere, but not very much wider.

There is no need to deal with the remaining clauses. They are taken up with questions such as wearing a hat in church, Cæsarian operations, confession and such like. But we have in what has been cited a picture of what society would be like if the Roman Church had its way. It would not be quite so openly brutal as German Fascism, but it would be on all fours with it in denying freedom of thought and speech, and consequently civic freedom to non-Catholics. We should all be walking about under the rule of the priest, as men and women in Germany walk about under the rule of Swastika.

It will not do, however, to assume that this programme of the Roman Catholic Church is one that is non-Christian, or anti-Christian, or to assume with a number of sloppy-minded folk that there is a "pure Christianity," made up of a number of pleasant-sounding moral platitudes, of which doctrinal or dogmatic Christianity is a parody. In the whole of their history the Protestant Churches have, other things equal, shown themselves as ready to act upon the Hitlerian principles laid down by the *Universe*, and which represents the spirit of true Christianity. In this country it was the hard-shelled Protestants who opposed non-Christian citizens being placed on a level with Christians. Our Sabbatarian laws are Protestant in origin. Our present Blasphemy Laws owe their origin to Protestant opinion. And it was in a predominantly Protestant House of Commons that, less than two years ago, seventy Members of Parliament could be found to vote in favour of a Bill, the sole aim of which was to suppress a Conference of Freethinkers.

I agree that there has generally been more freedom in Protestant than in Roman Catholic countries. But that is, so far as Christianity is concerned, accidental. The multiplicity of Christian sects could not but make for a greater freedom of thought than could exist with a single sect. But with few of them did the demand for freedom of thought and speech extend to freedom for the Freethinker and the Atheist or even for Roman Catholics. Thanks to Protestantism the King of England mounts the throne under the degrading condition of having his religious belief decided for him. A disease whatever may be its form does not always appear with the maximum of malignity. It will be milder as certain other conditions operate. One must not expect that in every form of Christian belief the same degree of intolerance or the same intensity of anti-social effort will be manifested. One must measure the capacity for social evil that Christianity possesses by taking it when it can function with the minimum of opposition. For that reason one may thank the *Universe* and the Roman Catholic Church for keeping before all who have eyes to see the nature of "True Christianity."

Dethroning Shakespeare!

In every quarter of the globe to which civilized life has penetrated Shakespeare's power is recognized.

—Sidney Lee

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame.—Milton.

SINCE poor, mad Delia Bacon fumbled around the graves at Stratford-on-Avon, searching for proofs that Sir Walter Raleigh had written the works of Shakespeare, what a number of "literary" people have used their apparently ample leisure by following in that unfortunate lunatic's footsteps, and for the same silly purpose. That Miss Bacon afterwards substituted the name of Francis Bacon for that of Raleigh, probably because it was her own surname, does not deter these persevering iconoclasts. They are so determined to dethrone Shakespeare that any name will answer their sorry crusade. The only thing that has stopped these enthusiastic hunters from including Dickens, Thackeray, Mrs. Henry Wood, and Marie Corelli, in their list of claimants is the chronological absurdity of the situation.

Who are the people who attack Shakespeare in this fashion? The insane Miss Bacon was just an amiable bookworm. As for the rest, the names of Gallup, Donnelly, Durning-Lawrence and Mrs. Pott, convey nothing whatever. Delia Bacon had her pathetic excuse, but these other people were just out for unadulterated self-advertisement. They could not attract attention by their own "masterpieces," so they attacked a very great man; just as a rising politician will attack a political leader in order to attract attention to himself.

What is the alleged reason given for doubting Shakespeare's claim to his own writings? Apart from the irresponsible lunacy of Miss Bacon, and the faked "cryptogram" of Donnelly, it is, in the last analysis, just a simple piece of sheer snobbery. It is urged that Shakespeare was a country lad, a mere "provincial." Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Ninety-nine-per-cent of men and women of talent and genius are provincial and country-bred. And what of it? If Shakespeare were a country lad, he grew up, which is more than can be said for his detractors. His plays prove this point. Love of the country is recorded on hundreds of magic pages of his writings, which carry the very scent of the flowers of his native Warwickshire. A book has even been written on *The Insects of Shakespeare*, demonstrating beyond all cavil and dispute his close knowledge of rural sights and sounds. Country lad, indeed! Robert Burns was another country lad, and a labourer, but it never prevented his becoming the national poet, and idol, of Scotland. Shakespeare came to London, stayed for years, became one of the Queen's players, saw the Court and the aristocracy at as close quarters as the players he worked with, thus completing his knowledge of society. Yet these snobbish critics pretend that this greatest of great writers was only a country bumpkin, who never looked over the hedges of his native fields.

Shakespeare had a Grammar School education, than which there is none better, and his friend, Ben Jonson, who knew him well, testified as to his knowledge of Latin and Greek. And Jonson was a bit of a pedant himself, and would have a far higher standard of judgment than ordinary men. Culture was readily accessible at that time. The winds of the Great Renaissance were still blowing, and there were English translations of the Greek and Roman Classical Authors. Shakespeare had access to them. He "guttled" Plutarch's Lives, and his indebtedness to Montaigne has been recorded in a volume devoted to

the one subject by no less a scholar than J.M. Robertson.

Shakespeare's father was not a tramp, but a man of some consequence. His mother must have been a rare woman to have had so rare a son. During Shakespeare's younger and not impressionable years his parents were prosperous, and his home life must have included some of the luxuries as well as the necessities of life. That he was high-spirited, that he kissed the girls, that he "heard the chimneys at midnight," were defects of his qualities. When he became a London actor-manager he proved himself shrewd, successful and business-like. Withal a modest and a gentle man, he played small theatrical parts himself, and let Richard Burbage take the chief parts, and rant out the beautiful and sonorous lines which are now part and parcel of the English language he so enlarged and adorned.

Why should not such a man write "Hamlet," "Othello," and "King Lear," and a score of other plays? He was not a mere nobody. His theatrical company was popular, and he must have been as well known in London as Irving or Tree to a later generation. The famous plays were produced on the stage as his work; they were licensed for publication as his work; they were four times collected in a single volume, with portrait and complimentary verses, as his work. For over two hundred years after his death no one doubted his authorship, and then the query came from a lady with a "bee in her bonnet," followed by a few busybodies with little axes to grind of their own.

Shakespeare is entitled to the ordinary decencies of life. Shakespeare is not only a great name in English literature, but a very great name in world-culture. Carlyle, always chary of praise, said that we could better afford to part with our great Indian Empire than to part with the works of Shakespeare. And this is the man these scribblers seek to dethrone from his proud position. In their eagerness they have selected several Elizabethan writers as likely successors to the throne of Shakespeare, but the favourite seems to be Francis Bacon of all men.

Now, Bacon was a great man, but he simply could not have written the thirty-six plays and the poems of Shakespeare. In the first place, he was a shocking poet. His paraphrases of the "Psalms" show this beyond question, and no man, not a lunatic, would sign such indifferent verse with his own name and leave Shakespeare's magnificent poetry unidentified. Moreover, Bacon had not got the time to write Shakespeare's works as well as his own. The standard edition of Bacon's works runs to sixteen volumes, and includes a *Digest of the Laws of England*, the *Novum Organum*, the *Essays*, the *New Atlantis*, a *History of England*, and other learned works, many in Latin, which must have necessitated very hard writing. Recall also the quintessential thought in the immortal "Essays." Such work could not be dashed off like a leading article for a newspaper. In addition, Bacon had a very busy career as a Member of Parliament, lawyer, statesman, and scientist. He had climbed laboriously from the lowest to the highest position in his arduous profession. If he had worked twenty-four hours daily it would still have been impossible for him to have written the works of Shakespeare as well as his own. For "Othello" and "The Tempest" are not "peuny novelettes," or similar hasty and superficial pieces of work, but masterpieces among masterpieces. And if Bacon's claim, which is the strongest, can be so easily disposed of, what is to be said for the other names so lightly chosen by the disputants?

The comic spirit comes to our aid, and instantly the burden of the accusation falls from our shoulders.

Shakespeare's humour is one manifestation of his veracity; and who that looks honestly at this saucy world can help seeing its absurdities? Shakespeare saw them, as he saw so much else, but he could scarce have imagined that anyone would have thought that he was a poor artist bewildered by his ambitions, and ruined by his greed. It is far too amazing. It is Lucifer, star of the morning, hurled from heaven, and nuzzling with ignoble and superb stupidity among the litter and abominations of the gutter. Ben Jonson knew both Bacon and Shakespeare, and he never doubted the sincerity of Shakespeare, whom he loved "this side idolatry." He would have regarded the theories of Gallup, Potts, and the rest, as mere midsummer madness.

MIMNERMUS

Heredity and Mind

WITH the well-established facts of physical inheritance in mind, it should not surprise us to learn that each individual inherits also a mental structure. Training may get the best out of what is there, injury may impair its efficiency or even induce defects, but we must accept the hereditary transmission of mental qualities unless we are prepared to defend some fantastic philosophical doctrine of a divinely implanted soul, owing nothing to the ancestral stock from which it derives a body.

The knowledge available regarding all parts of mental deficiency is of first importance to the eugenicist. E. B. Ford, Lecturer in Genetics at Oxford, contends that "the constant recurrence of feeble-mindedness in the same families, even when their members may be brought up in widely differing environments, leaves no room for doubt that the condition is inherited, often on quite simple lines. The marriage of two feeble-minded persons produces with great frequency a family of feeble-minded children." (*The Study of Heredity*, 1938).

According to A. M. Carr-Saunders (*Eugenics*), "Careful investigations into the family histories of mentally defective persons have shown that in as many as 80 per cent of the cases a neuropathic ancestry can be traced. . . . It is difficult to make these investigations exhaustive, and it is probable that in less than 20 per cent of the cases the mentality deficient condition is wholly acquired"—e.g., by lesions of the brain during a difficult delivery or by post-natal injury, or by brain injuries through poisoning or even scarlet fever and whooping-cough, or again through such diseases as encephalitis lethargica and sleepy sickness.

"If," says Carr-Saunders, "we assume that feeble-mindedness is inherited as a simple recessive factor, and that it is distributed at random, we should expect to find that only 5.5 per cent of the parents of the feeble-minded were themselves feeble-minded. Actually we find that from 25 to 50 per cent of the parents of the feeble-minded are themselves feeble-minded, and from this we are entitled to deduce that the defect is not distributed at random, but is concentrated in certain stocks." (*Ibid*). In this connexion Haldane quotes (*Heredity and Politics*) a Birmingham report (1933) on 345 children whose parents attended a school for mental defectives. Only 25, or 7.5 per cent, were defective. Moreover, of 13 cases where both parents were defective there was only one M.D.

Starting from the children's end, an East Suffolk investigation on 158 defectives showed that 6 per cent

had parents unable to earn a living, and 25 per cent had parents educationally M.D.

In forming an opinion the Freethinker will be on his guard against riveting his attention on such evidence as seems to fit in with his emotional reaction. Haldane professes a liking for defectives, and is on the whole antagonistic to eugenic reform, at least at present, save for certain tentative measures. He considers we do not yet know enough to deprive people of any of their rights on the sole basis of ancestry. Carr-Saunders, on the other hand, concludes that "mental deficiency is thus in the main an inherited and not an acquired condition," and proceeds to eugenic measures forthwith.

Sterilization of M.D.'s would cut them down in the first filial generation by from 5 to 30 per cent (Haldane estimates 10 per cent). He is more concerned with finding what can be accomplished by persuading people not to interbreed, and quotes a case from an eastern county of 63 children whose Intelligence Quotient (chronological age compared with mental age) was less than 80 per cent: 25 were from parents of the same village. On the other hand, 30 scholarship winners showed only 2 cases of parents from the same village.

The danger of inbreeding, of course, is that it gives a much greater chance of hidden (recessive) defects coinciding in the genetic constitution, in which case the latent weakness of the family stock become manifest.

In spite of his caution Haldane fully recognizes the evidence seeming to point to the inheritance of mental calibre. He instances a Northumberland case of mental tests applied to the children of hand-workers and brain-workers respectively. A characteristic result was that of 1,722 children of brain-workers, 3.4 per cent achieved Grade A (grades are from A to E), while of 10,849 children of hand workers, only 0.73 per cent achieved the top grade. As he says, examples could be multiplied. American tests by Pressey and Ralston were on children classified according to the father's occupation, in four groups, Professional, Executive, Artisan and Labourer. Five age groups, 10 to 14, were tested, and 20 averages, five for each of the four occupation groups, were arrived at. They show in every case a gradual decline in the order named, the net proportion being, Professional, 85 per cent of children above the medium; Executive 68; Artisan 41 and Labourer 39.

Attempts have also been made to prove the inheritance of the tendency to crime, but here an attitude of even greater reserve is probably advisable. Dr. Goring discovered that while only one per cent of the general population is mentally defective, 52.9 per cent of a number of stack-firers, 16.7 per cent of a number convicted of arson, 12.8 per cent of frauds, and 5 per cent in the case of manslaughter, were M.D.

It should not be overlooked, however, that crime is a wide category, and while lack of intelligence may conceivably lead to stack firing (inability to appreciate the farmer's viewpoint), yet intelligence itself may also facilitate crime, such as embezzlement and the more skilful kinds of fraud.

A useful feature of Goring's work was his attempt to measure the association of crime with a variety of environmental conditions such as illiteracy, parental neglect, lack of employment, poverty, size of family, etc. He found no definite relationship whatever between environment and crime, but what he did find was a correlation between parent and offspring to the extent of .6, which is high.

There is here the danger of regarding the parent as one thing and the environment as another. The criminal parent, as a matter of fact, is an environment

in himself, and this seems to cast some doubt not as to the accuracy, but as to the validity, of Goring's figures. According to him, "that parental example could play any part of importance in the perpetuation, by their offspring, of crimes such as arson and wilful damage to property, and particularly of sexual offences, *is not reasonably to be supposed*" (italics mine). Why should parental example be restricted to the moulding of professional burglars? It needs no stretch of the imagination to see how parental behaviour may set the "pattern-response" for wilful damage to property, nor is sex excluded if Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* contains some reflection of fact.

Dr. Goring's findings are that the parental correlation for sexual crimes, and also for wilful damage, is .45 to .5, for stealing .48 to .58, and he concludes that the intensity of the inherited factor is .45 to .5, and puts criminal contagion (the environmental factor) as low as .05 to .1. If, however, there is some degree of relevance in the criticism I have just passed, then perhaps he is merely "messing about with statistics," whose validity is questionable. Clarence Darrow has perhaps gone to the other extreme in his rather intemperate *Crime; its Causes and Treatment* (1922), and laid everything at the feet of a god called Social Conditions. But then, Darrow was not a geneticist. Goring argues that if social and economic conditions predispose towards crime, they might be expected to predispose towards particular kinds of crime (e.g., poverty towards theft rather than to sexual offence) and he finds this is not so.

What particular hereditary genes render a man more likely to become a criminal, is not known. Goring suggests that emotional instability means that the sufferer is so constituted as to feel less responsibility towards his fellow-men. He vaguely explains this by "the inheritance of certain qualities," yet, in his defence, it must be said that it is not unscientific to accept facts before knowing their explanations.

The mental ability of the offspring is correlated to a significant degree with that of the parents, and secondly, characteristic defects are more or less clearly traceable. With these conclusions in mind we hope next to turn to the question of procreation.

G. H. TAYLOR

Letters to a Christian Friend

(18) JESUS AND ECONOMICS

MY DEAR CHARLES,

As I understand your position, you, like most other people, recognize that the world to-day is in a sorry plight (even apart from this war business); you are warmly sympathetic towards those less fortunate than yourself, and anxious to do what you can towards making it a better world for them and for the generations to come; and, as a modernist Christian of sorts, you believe that the teachings of Jesus contain all the essential and the best elements for building that better world.

On the first two of these points I am, of course, at one with you. Why, then, do I not also believe with you that Jesus can be regarded as the world's No. 1 social reformer, the greatest social teacher the world has ever known, and so on and so forth; or that our brave new world can be based on his teachings? The answer to that question should have emerged plainly

from this series of letters in which we have carefully examined those teachings, and here it is in summary. (I am dealing, remember, with what Jesus taught according to the Gospels, and not merely with what you say he taught!)

Firstly, then, we must consider the teachings as a whole, not in conveniently isolated and emasculated texts. What is the first obvious feature that strikes us about Jesus's teachings as a system? The first inescapable fact is that it is a religious, and not a social system. Its primary concern is not with the individual as an earthly being, but with the individual's "soul" as a potential resident in Heaven, sharing eternal bliss with God.

Whatever other claims Jesus may make for himself as the Son of God or the promised Messiah, he certainly does not proclaim himself as a social leader, nor make any proclamation of a social programme or of the social rights of man; on the contrary, he issues not a call to social reform but a call to individual repentance, and proclaims the spiritual kingdom of heaven. He decries individual faults and demerits in people, but does not declaim against the social evils and inequalities and oppressions of his time, or suggest a better social or economic basis; on the contrary, he urges people to put up gladly with their trials and sufferings on earth because of the greater spiritual compensation they will receive in heaven. He accepts and acquiesces in the political and economic institutions of his day, good or bad, even to the Roman tribute imposed on the Jews; and bids men not to worry about such trivial earthly things, but to turn their eyes heavenwards to the blessings to come. He continually warns his hearers against the spiritual dangers of riches and material comforts, and advises the wealthy to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor—not apparently because he thinks the poor are to be pitied in their poverty (there is much about having too much wealth, but little about having too little!) but primarily so that the giver shall be rid of his dangerous riches and shall have "treasure in heaven." The virtues he preaches are virtues in an individual rather than in a social sense. His first and foremost concern is not so much a man's relationship to his fellow-men, but his relationship to God. His system is theo-centred in heaven (and hell) rather than in earth and human society; it is based on an other-worldly valuation compared with which the trials and sufferings and shortcomings of this life are rated as of little importance, to be gladly borne; it is supported by a scale of heavenly rewards and hellish punishments to which the individual is persuaded to attach more worth than to the actual merits to which he is commended; and its dominating motif is that the Christian should concern himself with these rewards rather than with the joys and comforts of human life or with putting the world to rights socially.

Now, it does not necessarily follow that a system need be bad socially simply because it has a religious basis or motivation; but it will be obvious that if the analysis I have just given of the outlines of Jesus's teachings be substantially correct, this is just the very wrong kind of system on which to try to base any social reformation or reconstruction. If we are to receive ample, even abundant, compensation on the much more important spiritual plane, for the sufferings we have to endure on earth, why should we really worry about those small discomforts of a short life? We should be glad to suffer so that we may reap the reward. The more that the sufferings and evils of this life are belittled and held of little importance compared with the joys to come, as in Jesus's teachings, the more will men be encouraged to endure evils

that could be prevented or remedied, and the less inclined to right the wrongs of themselves and others.

That this is no untrue or exaggerated consequence of such teachings is proved over and over again throughout the history of Christianity right up to to-day. The traditional conscience of the Christian is concerned with the other world, not with this one. The "social conscience" now so popular among Christians is a comparatively recent growth, and a growth rather of humanist than of Christian development. To take a 1939 example of this other-worldly preoccupation inherent in Christian teaching and belief, here is Miss Rosalind Murray, Christian-turned daughter of a famous "Pagan" father; in her book, *The Good Pagan's Failure*, in which she defends her transfer of allegiance to the Christian faith, she says:—

The Christian strikes the Pagan as indifferent to justice; he often takes less trouble to right abuses, he is apt to show less indignation at oppression or cruelty, he does not bother enough about putting the world to rights, and this is deeply shocking to the Pagan, to whom all these things stand for love of justice. Yet the Christian, too, would claim that he loved justice, he would perhaps claim that he loved it more, but justice for him would consist in different things. He would not say that cruelty and oppression did not matter, but he would say that they were not ultimate; he would say that how you endured or faced an evil was more important than the evil itself, that the sum of all material evil was of less matter than one venial sin, that the final value was not here or now.

That this attitude again is in keeping with, and a consequence of, the teachings of Jesus, you can confirm for yourself by reference to those teachings in the Gospels. "Jesus," says the Christian Dr. Lofthouse, "was not interested in the social state at all. He left no directions for transforming it"; and again, "It is useless to attempt to draw from the New Testament any direct guidance as to Christian citizenship, or the Christian's relation to the State" (*Christianity in the Social State*).

In his book on *Christianity and Economics*, published this year, that eminent economist and Christian, Lord Stamp, reviews the whole subject, and in his "preliminary conclusions" has to admit:—

1. Christ's teaching had primarily a spiritual and not an economic bearing. Its economics, so far as they went, were directed to the conditions of His own time, which were quite different from those of to-day. This alone makes it difficult to transfer it literally to the world of to-day.
2. Attempts made to derive direct guidance in economic affairs from the letter of Scripture have generally failed.
3. The Christian Scripture does not present or favour any particular form of economic or political society, or any plan of economic life.
4. The Christian impetus behind the moral betterment of the world and its standards has been enormous. It is certain that Western civilization has been largely conditioned by its doctrines of pity, justice, and the separate rights of the individual soul.

With this fourth conclusion, I cannot agree, holding it to be almost the reverse of the truth—we may get a chance to examine it later. But with the first three conclusions there can be little quarrel; the Gospels and history are their witnesses.

You will agree with me probably that of all our social ills to-day the worst, and the one most urgently calling for remedy, is the poverty and insecurity of

the masses of the people (just as it was among the Jewish masses of Jesus's day)—yet it is in this very direction that the teaching of Jesus has least to offer as a social instrument. "Possessions are assumed as a social process without condemnation (Mark iii. 27; Matt. xii. 29; Luke xi. 21-22)," says Lord Stamp in the course of a thorough survey of Jesus's sayings on social and economic questions. "But Christ went a long way towards suggesting that poverty in the things of this world might receive comparative adjustment in the things of the next (Luke xvi. 19-31; Matt. v. 6), or in *spiritual* counterweight now (Luke vi. 20; John xii. 3). . . . There was no suggestion that poverty was *socially* curable (Luke vi. 20; John xii. 3), though much of the intention in references to the poor seems to be more consistent with poverty of *spirit*. . . . The clearest fact that emerges from this survey is that Christ did not condemn the institutions and relationships of His day; He accepted them with a rather astonishing acquiescence—the priestly taxation and Roman yoke." Yet these last two, the religious dues demanded by the priests and the civil tribute-money exacted by the Romans, have been estimated on very broad lines as totalling 40 per cent or even more of income among the population of Palestine, which "having regard to the standard of life, was very oppressive."

"For those who like to make large claims for Christ's teaching as a ready-made guide, with easy application to the economic life of His own age, and even of the present, all this must be candidly admitted to be meagre and unsatisfying," adds Lord Stamp after his survey, "for it is clear that

1. He was so pre-occupied with the spirit of man that He accepted the rather indefensible economic conditions of His day, and taught the importance of spiritual compensations in place of the temporal revolutions that they would rather have heard advocated;
2. He did not outline an ideal social system for His own day; still less did He prescribe one for that day, and even less for to-day. Nor can one be directly inferred from His teaching and His dicta. This fact is almost universally agreed upon by serious students to-day, but in isolated pulpits the theory dies hard;
3. Those who hold that Christ's teaching was revolutionary in a social sense are driven to force a great deal from individual texts such as "He hath put down the mighty from their seat," quoted by some as the most catastrophic in its effects. The plain fact is that the early Christians did not agitate against social evils, or reform the world, or rebel or conspire. They were obedient citizens or subjects, without sedition; they did not protest against slavery. But these early Christians lived a hidden life, in and for another world;
4. The idea of *social* progress was as unfamiliar to the men of the first century as was the theory of evolution. Social reconstruction in the modern sense was inconceivable. . . .

Jesus, we must always bear in mind, spoke in the language and against the background of his own time, and much of the confusion about his teachings arises from a failure to recognize or allow for the differences between the conditions, knowledge and ideas of his day and those of the present time. To quote Dr. Lofthouse again, "to picture Jesus as a social leader in any modern sense is to betray a complete ignorance of the social conditions of the remote provinces of the Roman Empire in the days of Tiberius."

And so for the present—

Affectionately,

R. H. S. STANDEAST

A Last Word

ACKNOWLEDGE Mr. Cohen's right to the last word in the argument between us. If I trespass again on his, and his readers', patience, it is not because I think some of his reasoning fallacious. It is because I have something positive to say. (We are both anxious to arrive at the truth, and this is only possible by discussion.)

Quoting my definition of religion he says that this definition "may take in every serious belief that a man has." But this statement of my opponent's won't do. Not every serious belief is held with emotion. Not every serious belief is one's ultimate standard of values beyond one's life.

Then he goes on: "In that case religion equals everything and anything." But it doesn't. Everything is not "a serious belief." Nor is anything.

Surely with every respect to Mr. Cohen, he falls here into loose and slipshod reasoning. It is upon such reasoning as this that he reaches his conclusions, and asks readers to accept them.

Again, when I use the word "belief" in its *secondary* meaning of "a Faith," Mr. Cohen takes this word "belief" up and gives to it its *primary* meaning of a mere intellectual apprehension of a state of facts. Again, he makes the term "Christian" so narrow that it includes only those who accept the full traditional "Catholic" creed of Incarnation, Resurrection, Immaculate Conception and Godhead. But surely, if a man refused to accept any of these miraculous and supernatural stories about Christ and denied utterly Christ's Godhead, but took up this position: "I believe Christ was a mere man who existed once and promulgated certain teaching, and I run my life according to that example and that teaching," I may call that man a Christian or Christ-follower. Would Mr. Cohen deny my right to be called a Shakespearean because I denied all the legends about Shakespeare, and interested myself only in the poet's works? Surely not. Mr. Cohen's definition of "Christian" is too narrow.

Our disagreement on fundamental definitions makes me agree with Mr. Cohen that it is difficult for us to wrestle together in discussion. The best we can do in such circumstances is to set out our views and let the reader decide between us.

When Mr. Cohen objects to people saying: "I think a Freethinker may be as good as a Christian" and goes on to say: "I think a man is a very poor kind of a Freethinker who is not better than a Christian," he is surely showing intolerance and partizanship and prejudice. I prefer to say: "I think either Christian or Freethinker may be as good (or bad or indifferent) as the other. I know both are human; and humanity is infinite." Is this not nearer the Truth?

With regard to Agnosticism, I have now read Mr. Cohen's book, which he very kindly and courteously sent to me, and that certainly helps me to understand Mr. Cohen's views. He does not offend me by saying I talk nonsense if he thinks so. But let me try to persuade him that my "nonsense" is sense. At the word "God," Mr. Cohen shies like a frightened horse. Therefore let us call it an Unknown Cancer-bacillus. Surely I can have the three states of mind about that—(1) it exists, (2) it doesn't, (3) it may exist or not. Do I need to have the faintest conception of what it looks like—whether it has legs, or tail, or is like any known bacillus? Why can't the bacteriologist hunting the cause of cancer be in that state? May he not, in the end, discover a cause which is neither a filter-passing virus nor a bacillus nor anything else that bacteriology has hitherto known? Before the first "vitamin" was found, no one had the least idea of what such a thing was like. People doubted the existence of vitamins at all. Yet this Unknown was sought for—and found! Before "wireless" was discovered, this Unknown existed—indeed from time immemorial—and every sensible Mr. Cohen would have strenuously denied the possibility of its existence.

Can we not postulate a non-anthropomorphic God unlike any of the "Gods" hitherto imagined? An Unknown, unlike anything known as was a vitamin or the wireless.

Take another illustration. Men have said that man

consists of body, mind and spirit; Mr. Cohen, I know, would dogmatically say body and mind only. But I am not so sure. I have something within me that governs my mind—the "I"—for I can force my mind to do what "I" make it. I can apply my mind to this or to that. What is this "I"? Mr. Cohen would say: "a part of the mind itself," I suppose. I venture to think otherwise. I think it is a Governor to which the mind can be, and should be, mere servant—and the word "soul" is necessary. That "I" exists. People call it soul, spirit, ego, personality, or the God-within or something else; but most people are conscious of the existence of that governing inner "soul"—as distinct from the mind (or intellect).

Mr. Cohen is fortunate in that he can find a mental haven in positive, dogmatic, clear-cut ideas which he believes are the only Truth and in that he can anchor all his thoughts and feelings to the rock of Atheism. Deists are similarly happy. To other minds (the Hamlets and doubting Thomases) the ocean of thought is not so simple and constricted as that.

Just as we can't simplify the complex and intimate causes of the present war into "All one Man's Fault—it's that Hitler," so many of us find it impossible to answer the Greatest Question of all with a firm Yes or No but find it necessary to go on asking and thinking and discussing and speculating—perhaps until we die! "Wrong no doubt," as Disraeli said; but some of our minds are like that. The Deists suspect us of Atheism; the Atheists of Deism, and some of us, finally, go to one side or the other. But perhaps others of us never resolve the dilemma—sometimes I think most minds live and die in that state, Mercutio who might say "A plague on both your houses" to Atheists and Deists alike—if logic did not prevent. For either Atheism or Deism must be true.

(I appreciate all Mr. Cohen says about the *Freethinker* journal. But cannot it be a commercial success as well? There *must* be potential advertisers who could be got. This is 1939, not the Dark Ages. Is there no enterprising Advertising Agent who would take it up and provide it with a revenue from advertisements, and a circulation amongst non-Freethinkers?)

C. G. L. DU CANN

[Mr. Cohen has written a note to this in "Sugar Plums."]

Acid Drops

We congratulate all those concerned in forcing the Government to withdraw proposals for enlarging its arbitrary powers under cover of war-time emergency. The proposed regulations gave the Government power over individual speech and criticism to which no people with any pretence of freedom should submit. It was panic legislation at its highest, or a governmental attempt to muzzle the people at its lowest. In war time, liberties are bound to be restricted more or less, and this Government has certainly done its best to persuade people to submit to anything and everything without protest. We have warned our readers all the time that the propaganda of fear that has been carried on, together with the constant warning, "Don't talk to your neighbours or your friends about the war, for fear a spy may be listening," could mean only one thing—that the people should be reduced to sheep—and one of the aims in rearing sheep is to shear them.

At the same time it must be pointed out that the tendency of political life for many years has been to diminish the sense of individual independence, and the freedom of individual criticism to a minimum. The cry of the Government, "you must obey the authorities," has been the cry of political parties—from Communists to hard-shell Conservatives. Trades Unionism has by its discipline worked along the same lines. In every case the lesson has been, "Follow your leader," and don't act independently. All this has developed a tendency to obey anything and anyone clothed with authority that was comparatively absent from the majority of those interested in social reform when we were young.

We hope we shall not receive in consequence of what has been said a number of letters explaining to us that discipline is necessary in every party or organization. We admit it. We are only anxious to stress the point that the basis of national liberty must always be dependent upon a strong sense of individual independence. Once that is sacrificed, I know of no power that will prevent the rise of a Government that will not practise tyranny. And it must always be borne in mind that it is the comparatively few who will keep this spirit alive. The majority are only too ready to hand their thinking over to others. We hope the spirit which was shown in the House of Commons revolt will flourish. Otherwise we may emerge from the war having lost the one vital thing for which we profess to be fighting.

There is a strong light thrown on the methods of the Government in the help it gives to industry, by a letter which appears in the *Manchester Guardian* for November 4. Mr. J. C. Smith writes as one of a firm of paper makers, that for some time they had been storing-up paper-making material as a protection against shortage. The paper control has served the company with notice that the whole of their stock of paper-making material is taken over at pre-war prices, and that as much of the stock that is allotted them may be re-purchased at pre-war prices, plus 60 per cent. Of course we quite understand that all these controls—many of which are now admittedly useless must find jobs for a number, but this transaction—minus physical and mental brutality—is not a bad imitation of Hitlerian confiscation, anyway it helps to explain the rising cost of paper and why there is such a mania for controlling everything. And now that the blackout is causing us all to appreciate the value of light, why not revise the old window tax?

We have mentioned the paper control, but there is hardly a single direction in which this mania for controlling this, that, and the other might not be brought to illustrate the same features. We see it stated that Margarine stocks were taken over by the Government at £26 per ton and resold to the trade at £41 per ton. We have used the word "muddle," but is it quite clear that it was a muddle? To us it is plain that, as we have often pointed out, since just before Munich there has been going on a campaign of fear—that and a slogan, such as never before been attempted in this country, "Don't criticize the Government." But fear will have one of two effects. It will rouse a people to almost insane action or to submission more or less complete. In our own case it has so far led to submission—not a submission based upon an intelligent appreciation of a situation, but a submission that we must submit to whatever a Government orders. Let this continue long enough and we may see the British public bowing before an official with all the outward signs of veneration that would please a true-blue dictator. But for the fear-campaign the disaster of Munich might never have occurred, and Hitlerism might have been more obviously on its last legs than it is now. For fear has also played its part in the creation of Hitlerism. The Fascist leaders have built up their power on the carefully developed feeling that Germany had to fear the nations around it. Fear is one of the greatest evils that can overtake a people. The strength of the Roman Church is built upon fear; German Fascism depended on fear, and we fancy our own Government has certainly not been blind to its power.

Commandant King-Hall's Supplement to his *News Letter* finds Sir N. Henderson's report on Hitler "interesting not only as a record of the mentality of Hitler, but also as revelation of the point of view of its author on the Nazi regime." But the following criticism of the mentality of our Berlin Ambassador is worth also noting: "In paragraph 5, Sir Neville refers to 'the great achievement of Hitler who restored to the German nation its self-respect and its disciplined orderliness,' and in the next sentence writes: 'The tyrannical methods which were employed within Germany itself to obtain this result were detestable, but were Germany's own concern.'"

This does not make sense. How can it be a "great achievement" to restore "disciplined orderliness" by detestable tyrannical methods? How can "self-respect" be restored by detestable tyranny? How can anyone pretend that the creation by this same tyranny of the international refugee problem was "Germany's own concern" Sir Neville continues: "Many of Herr Hitler's social reforms, in spite of their complete disregard of personal liberty of thought, word, or deed, were on highly advanced democratic lines." Many contradictions are packed into these few words." It must obviously have been very hard for Sir Neville to find that after all Hitler, as a champion of advanced democracy, in the end over-stepped the mark. What a hero he would have been to the Ambassador if only Hitler had confined his "advanced" ideas to such trifles as the monstrous persecution of the Jews, or the horrors of a concentration camp.

The Bishop of Bradford may be remembered by some as the individual who initiated the attack on Edward VIII., and so enabled the Archbishop of Canterbury and Baldwin to engineer his abdication, comes to the fore again with a customary mixture of religious cant and general stupidity. Referring to the war he says that by "God's mercy we have been called to fight for right against might. . . . However little we deserve it we are on God's side in this war." The crass stupidity of this could hardly be beaten. God has called on us to help. But we pray to God to help us. So if we can do nothing without God, God can do nothing without us. There is, then, no greater need for us to go on our knees and ask God to help us, than there is for him to implore us to help him. Honours are equal. God cannot continue without man. Neither can a number of other things. But man finds many substitutes and goes on. Once man ceases to believe in God he disappears altogether. God is completely dependent on man for his existence. Man is not completely dependent upon God. It is left for wisdom to come from the mouths of fools.

God told an Oxford woman, of 55 years, to fast. She died after four months. The verdict ran "that she starved herself to death while the balance of her mind was disturbed." All the same this direct revelation of God ran true to type. It was a revelation to the one who received it, but to no one else. Just in the same way was it revealed to Joseph that Jesus was the Son of God.

Fifty Years Ago

PROBABLY one of the most interesting of the lost books of the Bible is that of the Wars of the Lord. I allude not so much to any curiosity as to an explanation of the obscure passage about what the Lord did in the Red Sea and other places, as to the certainty that the book was an ancient one, probably throwing much light upon the early religion of the Jews. The title in itself is significant, and indicates the probable nature of the contents. The book may plausibly be conjectured to have been a collection of barbaric chants celebrating the victories achieved by the Israelites under the command of Jahveh.

The book of the Wars of the Lord must have been a bulky volume if it chronicled all the marauding expeditions and sanguinary massacres perpetrated by the Lord's banditti. And these atrocities, according to the Bible, were perpetrated by the direct command of the Lord. He swore that he would have war with Amalek from generation to generation (Exodus xvii. 16). He ordered that they should make war against the nations of Canaan, and "utterly destroy them" (Deut. xvi. 2). The Jews had no claim to the land of Canaan. The wars were simply wars of conquest; theft accomplished by murder. And Jahveh was not only virtual commander, he took an active share in the fighting, stopping the sun and casting down great stones from heaven to the confusion of the enemies of Israel.

The Freethinker, November 10, 1889

To get a New Subscriber is to make a New Friend

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTÉ

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

P. M. TOVEY.—Pleased to welcome a new reader who shows so great an interest in this journal.

G. H. TAYLOR.—It is as you say the worst time to make an appeal for financial help, and we appreciate the more what has been done. But a burden is the lighter by its being shared.

J. G. LUPTON.—Genuinely advanced movements which hold out no promise of immediate material gain naturally appeal to its kind and engage in a constant struggle. It would hardly be an advanced movement were it otherwise.

G. WILLIAMS.—We are taking things as easily as we can, but with extra work at home and travelling about the country we find little time for leisure.

A. FORBES.—Regret oversight. See list.

G. MATTLAND.—Sorry your letter has been overlooked. Our only excuse is that our correspondence has grown so much of late, that what with travelling, which often spoils three days of the week, with a weekly paper demanding articles, paragraphs, and general supervision, we are often surprised that more things are not overlooked.

SIDNEY NEWTON.—We hope to find room for your interesting letter in an early issue.

H. K. IRVING.—We agree with what you say, but—it takes all sorts to make a world, and the "all-sorts" are not always what we would desire.

L. MARTIN.—We have no recollection of such a series of articles appearing in these columns, although the matter may be as you state. Could you give us an approximate date? Remember there are 58 complete volumes of the *Freethinker*.

C. WHITE.—We will certainly adopt your suggestion and devote one of the *Pamphlets for the People* to the subject of Agnosticism. There seems much confusion about.

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

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

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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.

Twenty Five Years Ago

If the present war is "God's operation," if it is proceeding in accordance with his omnipotent will, why not allow him to bring it to an end in his own way and time? Surely it is not possible to be guilty of more egregious disrespect towards him than by "praying with all our might for a speedy victory." The holding of intercessory services is an act of overt impiety. If Christians took Dr. Orchard's dictum to heart, that "God does not burn Europe to roast a pig," not another prayer-meeting would be held. Mr. Hutton clearly agrees with the new minister of the King's Weigh House Church, for he says that "one of the great discoveries which the good men in the Bible made is that a dark and heavy time, if we meet it properly, will soften and deepen and enlarge our soul." God has brought this War upon us for our good. And yet these very men of God lead their people in petitioning their Master that this bitter cup of European War may pass away from us before we have drunk it to the dregs. Here we have the quintessence of inconsistency.

"Jubilee Freethinker Fund"

THREE day's absence from London makes a big hole in a week that is at present more crowded with work than usual, and this must be my justification for making no more than a general acknowledgment of the many letters received in connection with "Jubilee Freethinker Fund." To those who have already subscribed, I must content myself with a mere "thank you." To those who ask why close the Fund so soon, I can only reply that I do not care for long-standing appeals, and by the end of this month all will have had the opportunity of helping. And there is no reason why the total should not reach a level £500. As to the future—about which many have enquired, I am not inclined to prophesy, save to say I think we shall be there when it arrives. Difficulties will be met as they arise. And difficulties are as certain as death; we need never be in a hurry for them, nor should we be dismayed at their approach.

Previously acknowledged (Revised), £353 7s. 6d.; A. Cohen, £1 10s.; W. B. C., 2s. 6d.; N. R. Hawker, 2s. 6d.; G. Jones, 2s. 6d.; G. H. Taylor, £1; P. M. Tovey, £1; J. G. Lupton, 10s.; G. E. T., 5s.; Old Age Pensioner (3rd Sub.), 1s.; J. B. Middleton, £1; H. Blair, 12s. 6d.; W. Kent, 5s.; A. W. Swarbrick, 5s.; A. Forbes, £1; S. King, 2s.; E. Pariente, 10s.; 24833 (2nd Sub.), 6d.; V. Ray, 10s. M. Ray, 10s.; Mrs. Shiel, 5s.; W. Walters, 2s. 6d.; A. H. Millward, 10s.; A. M. Neilson, 5s.; A. C. Rosetti, 10s.; James Stirling, Senr., 5s.; James Stirling, Junr., 5s.; W. C. Bishop, 10s.; J. E. Magness, 5s.; H. de Montmorency, 10s.; B. Dupree, 10s. 6d.; Ishmaelite, 1s. 6d.; J. O'Connor, £1; L. Lewis, £2; Old Age Pensioner (40 year's reader), 1s.; S. Baron, £1; C. J. Harrison, 10s.; A. Williams, 1s.; W. Turner, 1s.; J. Settle, 1s.; 17 year's reader, 1s. 6d.; G. S., £2 2s.; Rosicrucian, 10s. 6d.; J. G. Cartwright, £2; W. J. Pringle, 10s. 6d.; T. Bayard Simmons, 9s. 6d. Total, £377 3s. 6d.

Corrections.—Mrs. Clara Bartram, should read £2; Herbert Anthony, 10s.; and J. Bryan, 5s.; these corrections have been allowed for in revised total.

The above represent sums received up to and including November 6. We shall be obliged if errors either in names or amounts are pointed out.

CHAPMAN COHEN

CIVILIZED ATROCITIES

The abyss which always yawns open before the feet of human beings who are taking the broad road towards Civilization is continually revealed in abnormal accidents like shipwrecks and fires, which usually evoke exhibitions of astonishing demoralization as well as astonishing heroism; and the depth of this moral abyss is still deeper when the abnormal ordeal is not a natural accident, but a social malady such as a war or a revolution. In the history of Man's attempt at civilization hitherto there has never been any society whose progress in civilization has gone so far that, in tones of revolution or war, its members could be relied upon not to commit atrocities. To confine ourselves to the history of our own society in our own generation we can cite the behaviour of the German Army in Belgium in 1914, and the British "Black and Tans" in Ireland in 1920, and the French Army in Syria in 1925-6, and the German National Storm Troops at home in 1933, and the Italian Blackshirts at Addis Ababa in February, 1937, as proof positive that, in certain conditions of abnormality, and under a certain degree of strain, atrocities will be committed by most members of the least uncivilized societies that have yet existed.—*A Study of History*, by Arnold Toynbee, Vol. IV., pp. 128-9.

Sugar Plums

This is not exactly a "Sugar Plum," but we have no space elsewhere for an interesting bit of news, particularly for those who intend subscribing towards the *Freethinker* Fund. We have just received notice from one paper maker that further delivery of paper will be exactly twice the cost of two months ago. It has not yet reached the price it was towards the end of the last war, but it is marching in that direction. It looks as though the home front is likely to be more exciting than it is in France.

There was a good audience for Mr. Cohen at Liverpool on Sunday last, although it was not quite up to the usual so far as numbers were concerned, but that was accounted for by the difficulties of train service from a distance and the absence of many local supporters owing to war conditions. But the lecture was listened to with obvious interest, and Mr. Harrison made a very capable chairman.

Across the river, at Birkenhead, Mr. Rosetti also had a very successful meeting, and some useful questions followed the lecture. The Birkenhead Branch is holding evening meetings, and as the "blackout" simply shuts off people from any distance, we may take the success of the meeting as evidence that the Branch is receiving a fair amount of local support.

We have a number of letters which we are unable to get in this week's issue. We hope to clear them all up in our next issue, but we are afraid that we shall have to cut some of them down a little, we hope without distortion of the point of view of the writers. But unless we decline them altogether, we are compelled to use the editorial pencil, an instrument which we very much dislike using.

In another part of this issue will be found a brief article by Mr. Du Cann replying to our criticism of himself. We saw no desire to push the controversy further, and we write now merely to thank him for the superb way in which he exposes the weakness of his own position—as an Agnostic—and that of others on the same point. He says, instead of using the word "God," let us talk of an unknown cause of cancer. Do we need to have the faintest conception of what it is like? We yield a certain qualified agreement to this. But when we speak of a "cause" of cancer, or anything else, we ought to mean no more than the conditions from which an "effect" emerges. But scientific causation is an unending chain of sequential occurrences. If "Agnosticism" means no more than this, there is no need for the term. If "Agnosticism" is to be of any value with regard to "God," then it is more than a mere question of universal causation, it must carry a "reference" to the conception of "God" as it has come down to us. We cannot know what the completely unknown cause of anything is like. *If we did it would not be completely inconceivable.* The "Agnostic," when he says I do not know whether God exists or not, is saying, "I do not know that something of which I know nothing, and cannot form the slightest conception does not exist, and that this may not be the cause of everything, without itself being caused by anything." This last clause is essential to the Agnostic position. Unless "Agnosticism" is related to the idea of God it is of no value at all in this controversy. Now, if Mr. Du Cann will re-examine his position he will find he has as fine a specimen of clotted nonsense as anyone could desire. But if we are to take it that Mr. Du Cann, and others, are merely trying to tell us that there is much that we do not know, and that the causation of many things is unknown, then a statement is being made that no one in his senses will dispute. But, then, what has this to do with the question of God?

We are pleased to report that the war has brought us a number of new subscribers to the *Freethinker*. We have

to thank those who have helped in doing this and hope they will take this note of appreciation of benefits received as illustrating the old saw that gratitude is the expression of favours to come. We have a hard fight in front of us, but we shall come through all right if all give a hand.

The North London Branch are carrying on bravely, despite the bad conditions, and are having a deserved success. On Sunday, Mr. Archibald Robertson will speak on "Four Holidays in Russia," and his address will be worthy of an attentive hearing. Meetings are held at the Cricketers' Arms, Inverness Street, near Camden Town Station, and commence at 7.30 p.m.

Mr. H. Cutner is lecturing at the Leicester Secular Society, Humberstone Gate, to-day (November 12), at 3 p.m. He has chosen for his subject, "Communism, Fascism and Freethought," which should be provocative enough to attract a good attendance and plenty of discussion.

Those who are interested in accounts of experiences in Spiritualism will be interested in *Fifty Years of Psychological Research*, by Mr. Harry Price (Longmans, 10s. 6d.). Mr. Price has devoted 30 years to the study of Spiritualism, and has spent a "fortune" on his enterprise. Readers will find here an outline of many of his experiments, and also of his exposures. But the whole leaves him with the assurance that while he has witnessed certain abnormal phenomena which he is unable to explain, he is left with the conviction that "the Spiritualists have not proved their case." There is also an interesting sketch of the history of Spiritualism, and a useful appendix giving an account of the state of the law with regard to Spiritualism and proposed amendments of the law as it stands. A number of plates illustrating some of the experiences, and experiments that have been experienced add to the interest of the volume.

Mr. Price remains unconvinced that anything he has seen can be said to prove survival after death. But that is the very essence of Spiritualism, and is the feature that attracts Spiritualists. There is not one Spiritualist in a thousand that is in the least degree interested in what Mr. Price calls the scientific aspect of what he has seen, and his expression of conviction that some of these things cannot be explained by "laws" known to science gives no help whatever to the belief in a future life. To assume, granting the genuineness of some of the things that Mr. Price witnessed, that the unknown is to be explained in terms of "spiritual" agency is to revert to the crudest and most primitive forms of human reasoning. Very many things that Spiritualists have taken, and still take, as evidence of communication with the dead are now explainable in terms of both normal and abnormal psychology, as Mr. Price well knows. But if we put the Spiritualistic hypothesis on one side, all we have left are unexplained happenings, and we would agree with Mr. Price that these call for careful investigation, always bearing in mind that not being able to see how a thing occurs, gives no solid ground for assuming that what is taken to be genuine, even so far as Mr. Price, goes provides the right to name a cause.

One final word. We have often said that those people who go hunting after one "spirit" manifestation after another are among the best friends that Spiritualism has. That kind of thing requires no closer study of what is going on, and no knowledge of such branches of science as throw light on the subject. We have ourselves seen many years ago what Spiritualists present proclaimed as spirit manifestations which to us became no more than illustrations of abnormal psychological situations. The theory put forward by Spiritualists, and tacitly accepted by "fraud-hunters," "either Spirit action, or fraud" has been among the best kind of help given to Spiritualism. That theory seldom injures Spiritualism, but it does lead many to fall into the Spiritualist trap. The man who goes round exposing Spiritualistic frauds finds he has an easy job. It requires no study of branches of science that would throw light on the matter, and leaves the real question substantially where he found it.

Mr. Price, it should be added, does not mince his words when dealing with Spiritualism as a movement. He says:—

If there is no money in psychical research, there is plenty in Spiritualism. Most of the big societies are prosperous, and the smaller ones keep going year after year. The major societies can afford large and expensive premises, well furnished, and well paid secretaries to look after their interests. Their incomes are derived from membership subscriptions, the "rake-off" they obtain from the fees of mediums whom they engage for their members; fees from attending seances, lectures and social events (such as afternoon tea meetings) for delivering messages to the audience from spirits, articles such as trumpets, ouija boards, crystals, etc. The revenue from services and lectures must be considerable. Some of the largest halls in London are booked for propagandist work, and are usually well-filled. Well-known spiritualist lecturers are engaged, often together with a trance medium or clairvoyant, who deliver messages to the audience from the spirits alleged to be seen or heard.

We are fairly certain that not five per cent of the supporters of Spiritualism are motivated by a scientific desire to discover whether Spiritualism is true or not. They wish to find evidence that the dead still live, and to confine themselves to talking or writing about frauds is like pouring water on a duck's back. Spiritualists cheerfully admit fraud. It is the misunderstanding of situations that can for the most part be at least tentatively explained in other ways, and the probable explanation of the residue that is left is not very important. Witchcraft and a belief in demoniacal agency were not killed by the cheap method of exposing frauds, but by creating a change in the mental atmosphere, and, by an enlargement of knowledge, making clear the states of mind that were responsible for that particular delusion.

Telling the Tale

OLD MACKINNON belonged to the fraternity that vend Cure Alls. His open-air oratory was invariably prefaced by the tag that he had stood in that market-place for the last twenty-four years. Really the number of years he had occupied the pitch was *eleven*, but the number was so respectable that it made twenty-four not a lie but a mere tarradiddle. Eleven years he knew to be quite a long time and, to the casual bystander, conveyed much the same impression as twenty-four. He contended, publicly, that this long period was in itself an evidence of his personal integrity, and also spoke well for the value of his commodity. His business was flourishing. He had three sons whom he supplied with his Pill, and they occupied other market-places and told the same tale with variations. They also did a roaring business. Mackinnon's Magic Remedy was what was known in the commercial world as a going concern.

William, the eldest son, sought his father one day. "I think you ought to know, Dad, that Cyril is going pi." "Pi," yelled our honest salesman, "What the Hell are you talking about?" "Well, he's talkin' about throwing his hand in." "What on earth for?" queried the old man. "The business was never better. Why Cyril's takings for the last year or two have been better than ever. Is the boy trying to squeeze more out of his old dad? Why the lad's a plain fool. There aint a chance of him makin' a tenth of wot he's gettin' now nowhere else. He's the only one of the three of yer who takes after his mother. If there's anyone in this world who should think himself lucky, it's Cyril."

"He knows all that, dad. In fact, in a manner of speaking, that's just his trouble. He's got what people call a conscience. He's the only Mackinnon

who's ever had one that I've run up against. It all started about a year ago, when you took him to your cabin—wot *you* calls your factory. He found out then that the cost of your lozenges is about a penny a hundred—all in. He found out also that they're all plain sugar—"

"Well, what about it?"

"He's got a conscience, I tell yer. He—"

"Conscience! Where on earth did he pick that up? I've trained him; looked after him since he was a little nipper; given him all the best advice; made a speaker of him, and he goes and develops a *conscience*. He didn't get it from his grandparents on either side; that I can vouch for. I've made a first-class salesman of him and this is my thanks."

"O! he's not high and mighty about it, but he's sick of it. He admits that telling the tale is a bit of a science *and* an art, but it's too darned easy. Not that he don't think as well that selling a dozen pills for a shilling isn't quite fair. Specially as they does no good."

"No good! Who told him that? Every b——post I get letters saying they have cured people of catarrh, bronchitis, asthma, consumption, kidney disease, ——"

"Yes, but they haven't done that really. How can they when they are just plain——?"

"If they think they've done them good, they *have* done them good. It's the customer that has to settle that little point, not an outsider. Don't you remember that big bug on the wireless—the head of the advertising world—putting this very point. They give the public something what they are clamouring for, give it to them cheap, so cheap that if they got it any cheaper they'd think it no good—and then it *would* do them no good. And the public is satisfied. *SATISFIED!* I tell them that if they don't do the trick I'll return them their money. Do I ever have to return any money? Once in a blue moon."

"Well, Cyril don't seem to think it's honest."

"Bah! What could be more honest? I sell them what they want. I sell them at a price sufficient to make them think they'll do the trick. I return their money if not satisfied. And they call me benefactor! What other business can you think of that's run on such fine lines?"

"He seems to think that you should sell them something that really does them good—not nibbles of sugar."

"I've told you that if they thinks it does them good, it *does* do them good. Besides they do get real benefit. The paper they're wrapped up in tells them that if they want the full benefit of the pills they should sleep with the windows open, take some physical exercise and lashings of fresh air; tells them not to eat too much and lots of other things——"

"Yes, but if they does these things it isn't the pill that does it, it's the——"

"Did I say it was the pill?"

"I suppose not—not quite."

"I don't say it at all. Are you takin' sides with this nit-witted, balmy, loony——"

"O no! I'm not likely to do that. I——"

"I should think not indeed. One lunatic in the family is enough. I'll speak to Cyril when I see him, but you can let him know that you've sounded the old man, and can tell him how the land lies. By the way, isn't Cyril wantin' to get married?"

"Well, he's walkin' out with a girl pretty reglar."

"Good. I daresay he'll see things a bit straighter when he's slept over it."

"Daresay."

"Right O, William! I know I can depend on you anyway. Never seen any wings sproutin' on you at any time. Here's your crate. And you can say

when youse putting it over, that they're just the thing to cure war depression, and for A.R.P. men and others fatigued with war work, they work miracles."

"Righto, guvnor."

Those who live by *putting it over* cannot afford to despise the stump salesman. He can give all our business men and professional gentlemen points. When he sees human weakness he trades on it. He is barefaced about it, whereas his big-scale imitators are shame-faced. And even the gentleman who purveys the Bread of Life often plays the same tricks. The claim for this commodity is that it is going to do you much good the day after you are dead. In his case, however, money is returned only in heaven. There are others in the market-place hawking the Bread of Life. They say it is Just as Good. Don't be put off with that nonsense. There is only one Bread of Life that is going to be any good to you the day after you are dead, and that is the brand boosted by the Holy Roman, or the Orthodox Greek, or the Plymouth Brother, or the Raeburn Pilgrim. There is only one Bread of Life by which Man may be saved, and that is the one served up by Lady Huntingdon's Connexion. All others are quacks. Codlin's the Friend, not Short.

And if the crowd get ill-mannered and ill-tempered and say vulgar things about their empty stomachs, reverend gentlemen assure them by the labels round the packing that the Bread of Life has something to do as well with the mundane appetite, and they label the package which contains the recipe for your soul's salvation with a few nice little maxims about Jesus the Carpenter's Son, and how in order to save your Soul it behoves you to work for the Eight Hour Day, the Endowment of Motherhood, Poor Children's Holidays, and No Profiteering.

They have stood on that Market Place for a couple of thousand years now and, believe me, they know most of the tricks of the trade.

T. H. ELSTON

Another "Oxford" Movement

It was cute of Mr. Cutner to head an article "On the Religion of Shakespeare Again," to lure us into reading something we might have passed carelessly, under its proper title. About half-way through his article he abandons the religion of Shakespeare with the observation that "he doesn't intend to prove his contention by extracts from the plays; they have so often been given." He then plunges into his real purpose, to give us the tip that Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, a dark horse, should carry our money in the Shakespeare Sell(ing) Race.

If Mr. Cutner only meant that Freethinkers should not be prone to swallowing accepted opinion like their fellow-Christians all would be well, but Mr. Cutner appears to be bitten by this aristocratic bug.

I have read most of Mr. Cutner's articles, and I can remember his contemptuous sniffs at the Christian evidences of the historicity of Jesus; yet I find him accepting another myth on grounds as flimsy as those he scornfully rejects. Mr. Cutner may say he does not accept definitely, but keeps an open mind, so let us qualify the statement by saying that he is "taken up" with the idea that Oxford was Shakespeare. Certainly Mr. Cutner dismisses William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon as the author because the real author was "an aristocrat to his finger tips, a classical

scholar thoroughly versed in court procedure and law." Oxford presumably had all these qualifications. Moreover Oxford was a bad husband, no plaster saint in morals, atheistic and these mixed attributes strengthen his claims, because whoever Shakespeare was, he couldn't have been Shakespeare without them.

That's the case m'Lud for Edward de Vere, aristocrat to his finger tips, thoroughly versed in court procedure, the law and the seamy side of life.

The cinematograph occasionally presents us with pictures of our ancient aristocracy. Their finger-tips at the table would not meet with such adoration as that of Mr. Cutner in a modern eating-house. I am sure Shakespeare, actor and dramatist, would not have lost face, as the Chinese say, in Elizabethan Court circles.

The fact facing Mr. Cutner, but lost sight of by him, is that Shakespeare was an artist to his finger-tips. Legal jargon from a grave-digger or a Dog-berry needed neither a Bacon nor a Buzfuz for its inspiration. Theatrical Court procedure was common working material to other dramatists besides Shakespeare, and what was possible in this direction to Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, great as he was, was not impossible to Mary Arden's son. But on the other hand courtier playwrights like Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, for all their association with the Throne and the Woolsack, could never coax their quills to sketch anything like the wonderful word-pictures that Shakespeare dashed off so prodigally.

And what has Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford to show in his own right that we should consider the claims of literary snobs that he is the author of the plays of Shakespeare?

Some few pieces of poetry middling in quality.

He is said to have excelled in comedy writing.

It is curious that what bears his name is so poor compared with the gems he allowed Shakespeare to pass off as his own. Isn't it more reasonable to assume that the poems and plays of Oxford the noble patron of the Theatre were "tittivated" by Shakespeare?

Even assuming this, we are met with the fact that Oxford's work is to-day dragged into the light. It does not shed its own lustre.

The man who was Shakespeare was thoroughly versed in life, which includes more things than court ceremonies and legal terms. His plays proclaim him as much a determinist as the Editor of the *Freethinker*.

But the theatre, not the platform, was the place where he could express this philosophy with the greatest dramatic power.

Shakespeare perfected his dramatic art by working on the stage as an actor, and by retouching the plays of other writers.

Nature had endowed him richly, but his incomparable gifts had to be adapted to the requirements of the stage. We must look to the theatre, not the court, to find the real Shakespeare. It may be noted that Ibsen, perhaps the greatest dramatist since Shakespeare, worked and mastered his job after a long apprenticeship in the theatre. Shakespeare was associated with many other fine dramatists. He owed something to Marlowe; but he left them all behind.

He was accused by Green of borrowing the feathers of the University wits, but where feathers were concerned the Swan of Avon presented a more dignified plumage than any of the University show pigeons.

Yet all the University wits were ahead of the amateur Oxford.

H. IRVING

Play

Glendower: "I can call spirits from the vasty deep."
Hotspur: "Why, so can I, or so can any man; but will they come when you do call for them?"
(*Hen. IV.* pt. 1)

THESE warriors evidently thought it possible to call spirits from the Vasty Deep. But Hotspur doubted whether they would come when called for. What barren lives both these braggarts must have lived to feel that spirits needed calling for! They come freely unto their own. It needs but

A sunset touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,
A chorus ending from Euripides
And that's enough

to summon them. Browning didn't need to call for them. He tells us how and why they came. To Byron, too, and other poets, they needed no calling for:—

A tone of music—Summer's eve—or Spring—a flower—the wind—the ocean—

something to strike "the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound." And ever and anon do such things call up our Spirits, and they always come, each of them, as they did when clothed in this "muddy vesture of decay," bringing joy or sorrow. So, the title of these ruminations—the simple word "Play"—calls forth spirits, e.g.,

Golden hair with which I used to play.

The lines are from Tennyson's *Guinevere*. And it recalls, to every sensitive soul, spirits . . . !

Even inanimate things have spirits:—

Loose as the breeze that plays along the downs,—

A living breeze that "kisses all it meets."
And who fails to sympathize with Wordsworth's unfortunate child? :—

Her infant babe
Hath from its mother caught the trick of grief,
And sigh'd among its playthings.

Or, who can ever forget the beetle that comes creeping out of Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, and, after meeting with irreparable disaster, is dismissed with the comment:—

And it was all play, and no one could tell
What it had lived and worked for.
A-striving and a-striving and an ending in nothing.

Endless quotations from Charles Lamb and others might be made, similar to the above.

Play is generally spoken of as recreation. I do not like the word. It seems to suggest re-creation—a bringing forth of something not already there. To *renew* is more definite, and expressive—to make new again; to renovate; to restore to the original state of freshness.

When people worked twelve to fourteen hours a day for six days a week, with no holidays except when they were made necessary by sickness, games were not so popular as they are to-day. The Puritans did much to deaden our national love of sport. They thought they could kill it, but they failed to do so.

"There comes a point," says Bertrand Russell, "at which men feel that amusement and ease are worth more than all other goods put together." True! And this accounts for the tremendous swing of the pendulum since the Puritan period. Work might seem to be an evil thing, now, and sport to be the end and aim of life. The Puritan period was anything but lively. Sleep seems to have been its predominant feature. And small wonder considering the number of moral writings published, and the preaching done. Says

Arthur Helps, "Perhaps the great triumph of all moral writings, including sermons, is that at least they have produced some sweet and innocent sleep." Which, on the face of it, seems true. Only, I question the sleep of the Puritan being "sweet and innocent."

The playing of out-door-games brings us into contact with sun and wind, two of the most invigorating forces making for physical, mental and moral health. The finer side of man is not being developed by work, to-day. Under the old craft guilds a worker was a creator. To-day he is a mechanical drudge—part of a machine—a cog in a wheel—his individuality suppressed. How then can his daily toil have anything but a demoralizing effect upon him? He enters into the field of sport as a free man. His mind and body are his own to develop, and his skill is instantly recognized. Sport means freedom. Work means slavery. And this rush to sport may be an instinctive effort to keep alive the better part of our nature—our love of the open air, and freedom. Only, we should all play if we can. To be a mere spectator of a game played by professional players may be interesting, but to become a player should be the aim of everyone. If exercise be needed, the legs are more useful in obtaining it than the tongue. For the making of the best persons we need the open air, life on the earth, or as Walt Whitman puts it—"to eat and sleep with the earth," and to "produce great persons and the rest follows."

Civilization, so far, has tended to individualize us too much. We are shut off from each other, like criminals, in little cubicles. We call these cubicles "Castles"—"Englishmen's homes"! They prevent us from having breadth of vision.

Let us go out and walk upon the road,
And quit for evermore the brick-built den,
The lock and key, the hidden, shy abode
That separates us from our fellow-men.

And by contagion of the sun we may
Catch at a spark of that primeval fire,
And learn that we are better than our clay,
And equal to the peaks of our desire.

(*Songs from the Clay*, James Stephens)

GEORGE WALLACE

Correspondence

AGNOSTICISM AND CREATION

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—A few more words on Agnosticism and creation, arising from the letters of Mr. Rowland and your rejoinder of October 29, may be useful. The subject, as you suggest, is of interest to many.

All power to your insistence that questions should be intelligibly framed and terms convey some definite meaning; yet—although no Agnostic myself—I feel the poor Agnostic may be too severely pressed in the good name of clarity. The Agnostic seems to say in effect that the universe of which human experience forms a small part may (or may not) be the creation of powers which do not entirely come within the compass of human experience, understanding or calculation, and therefore powers which cannot be adequately defined in terms of human experience—whereupon you seem to say in effect, that unless the Agnostic promptly defines in terms of human experience the powers which he says cannot by their very nature be defined in terms of human experience, even if they exist, then he is talking nonsense, and one needn't bother to answer him. Only if the Agnostic is prepared to start off by contradicting himself, and thus giving the verdict to the other side at the outset, will the other side condescend to consider the case he has already thrown away!

The Agnostic says that there may be aspects of the universe and its conditions which are beyond human experience; which I, for one, would hesitate to deny (infinite duration is beyond finite human experience). It seems hard on the Agnostic, then, as in your remarks on "creation," to present him with an ultimatum that if he tries to define extra-human aspects in terms entirely within human experience, they are not extra-human; and if he tries to define them in terms not within human experience, he is talking nonsense.

For example, to say that "the world (or universe) was created out of nothing," may be "a quite nonsensical statement"—in that it is out of sense with human experience, which has no knowledge of anything ever coming out of nothing, and which cannot conceive any "nothing" from which a "something" could come. But, from a "commonsense" point of view, on the ground of human experience and conceivability, is it not also quite nonsensical for me to say that the universe is eternal and self-sustaining, ever-changing, but without beginning or end (the only apparent alternative to a "something out of nothing" universe)? I may "accept" the idea of such a universe, and it may become familiar and even "obvious" to me; but does it not nevertheless remain just as much nonsense for me to say that something is eternal (since I cannot fully experience, conceive, or describe anything eternal or infinite, even though I may be part of it), as it would be for me to say that something once came out of nothing?

Is it not thus a fact that the question of creation or non-creation rests on a choice between two alternatives, one of which must be correct, yet both of which, to the limited human mind, are "inconceivable" and "nonsensical"?

The human mind, which itself experiences a definite beginning and end, and which sees or calculates a beginning and end to the form of everything around it, despite an underlying continuity, tends to be obsessed with this notion of finite duration, and to boggle at ideas of eternity and infinity, which it can never experience or comprehend, even though it necessarily "takes them for granted," in either religious or scientific form. It is this obsession and boggling which gives the theologians their great chance. This letter is already too long for me now to give my idea of the fallacies of the creationist's position or the entirely unnecessary concessions made to those fallacies by the Agnostic; but I would add the consideration that that finite human mind we have been discussing is still a very imperfect instrument for measuring the universe of which it forms so small a part, and human language an even less perfect instrument. I may have proved that in this letter, but in any case I hope it will draw from you one of your able rejoinders.

RONALD STANDFAST

DID SHAKESPEARE WRITE SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS?

SIR,—Mr. Cutner says (*Freethinker*, October 22), that he does not believe that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote a line of them, for he is perfectly convinced that whoever wrote them must have been a man of classical knowledge and learning, thoroughly versed in court procedure, in law, and an aristocrat to the finger-tips. And, he says, William Shakespeare was none of these. He goes on to say that "for a long time" the most learned man of his day was put forward as the rightful author, but "during the last few years the claims of that strange Elizabethan, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford have been urged more and more by a group of serious students," and appears to favour that view himself. But, as the reasons given above for this view are the same as those given by the Baconians I think the case may be considered covered by two books published in 1912 and 1913; Andrew Lang's *Shakespeare, Bacon and the Great Unknown*, and J. M. Robertson's *Baconian Heresy*, unless indeed the Oxfordians have found secret cyphers proving that Oxford was the writer, as Donnelly, Durning-Lawrence and others did for Bacon! There had been a great spate of Baconian propaganda in the previous ten or fifteen years, and Andrew Lang, and John M. Robertson were moved independently to take

up the cudgels on behalf of Will of Stratford. Both were extremely competent men, Lang a great classical scholar, and Robertson as deeply versed in Elizabethan literature as he was in the origins of Christianity. Both show that classical allusions and legal terminology were commonplaces of Elizabethan literature. They were in the air, so to speak, and Shakespeare's use of them was no more remarkable than that of Spencer, Drayton, Greene, Beaumont and Fletcher, or any other of the poets and playwrights of the time. Mr. Robertson stresses the point that the Baconians, as a whole, studied Bacon and Shakespeare in vacuo, as it were, and not in relation to their environment. Those who did venture promptly came to the conclusion that Bacon wrote the works of the other writers as well! Mr. Robertson devotes 140 odd pages to law and legal allusions, and nearly 200 to alleged classical scholarship in the plays, and shows by numerous quotations from other writers who had no more law or classical scholarship than he, that there is no need to bring a Lord Chancellor in to account for their presence in Shakespeare's or anybody else's plays.

Mr. Cutner says, "Even Mr. Robertson himself came nearer to losing his temper with the Shakespearean sceptic, etc," but I don't think this is justified. He may have come near to losing his patience, but that is a different matter.

In the same way, Mr. Lang shows that there were many accessible sources for a knowledge of "court procedure." "The whole convention as to how the great should speak and bear themselves was accessible in poetry and the drama. A man of genius naturally made his ladies and courtiers more witty, more 'conceited,' more eloquent than any human beings ever were, anywhere, in daily life."

A. W. DAVIS

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