

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

VOL. LXI.—No. 16

SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 1941

PRICE THREEPENCE

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Etc., etc.

Views and Opinions

Shy or Sly

SEVERAL months ago I was asked if I would hold a discussion with a Christian clergyman. I replied I would, provided the clergyman could command a Christian audience. My reason for this was that it was very unlikely I should convert my opponent, and I felt quite sure he would not convert me. Both of us ought to know each other's case, or we ought not to debate. I have never gone about challenging all and sundry to a discussion. I was on the platform for a purpose, and not for amusement. Also I did not want to argue against Christianity before an audience of Freethinkers. I had no objection to it being made up entirely of Christians, for I am conceited enough to believe that many Christians would be less certain of the truth of their religion after the discussion than they were before it started.

I also said, in reply to the question, that I doubted whether any clergyman worth debating with could be got to make the venture. Protected by the editor of a newspaper there are plenty of clergymen who will defend their creed and attack that of others; but it is a different thing to stand on a platform where the Freethinker meets the Christian on equal terms. I put it that a clergyman who has nowadays intelligence enough to make out a good case, has enough intelligence to know that he has no good case to put forward. The safe place for him is the B.B.C., or a newspaper where the editor will watch to see that the Freethinker is adequately muzzled, or may be trusted not to say anything very drastic.

My expectations were realized. Two well-known men were approached, and the reply from both was identical—"No useful purpose could be served." The identity of opinion was striking, unless it was the result of a conference. One of the two, however, added that he came to his conclusion after studying my "controversial methods in the *Freethinker*." I hope I shall not be considered conceited if I say that I took this reason for not debating with me as a compliment. For if I may summarize my method, when I am dealing with a serious argument, I work mainly by the way of explanation, not by mere rejection. I take up the position that the fact of my opponent dealing with the same facts as I may be dealing with, but yet drawing a different conclusion calls for explanation. For example, I have never questioned—of course setting aside mere liars—that monks and nuns have had heavenly visions, that others believe they have felt the influence of God, or that some poor creatures believe, as the Archbishop of York argued recently, that morality has no basis and small justifi-

cation, without God. These and similar phenomena may be due to pure delusion, to misunderstanding, or they may be sheer cases of trading on the ignorance of the general public. But delusions, I have always argued, need as much explaining as does the normal.

In short I like to examine my opponent's opinion, as a doctor the complaints of his patients. It is the patients' job to describe their symptoms. That being done, the rest lies with the doctor. He must decide whether certain feelings belong to the region of the normal or the abnormal, or the pathological. And I have always aimed, when the patient did not call for other treatment, to do what I could to explain the Christian out of existence.

I admit that this is a "controversial method"—with listeners that the professional religionist does not like. It effects a cure, and it is not a cure that clergymen are after. They wish to make people cure-proof. They wish the Christian to fall on his knees when the Freethinker tells him to stand up. The parson tells his followers to look for comfort and the Freethinker offers understanding. The Christian reacts to a new truth as a man who dotes on whisky neat does when given stale gingerbeer. The Freethinker is accused of robbing a man of his God with all the passion that one may expect from an historic house that may lose its family ghost. The Christian loves to hug his delusions and wonder how on earth he can get on without them. The Freethinker is accused of flippancy because he tells Christians to smile when the clergyman wishes him to maintain a melancholy solemnity. He is taught to lose himself in what he calls ecstasy and resents as an insult the suggestion that he is indulging in a form of auto-intoxication.

* * *

Loss and Gain

One may well ask, Why should a clergyman engage in a discussion with one who is not concerned with which is the right religion, but who denies the truth or utility of any religion from A to Z? One must not assume that the clergy are averse to discussions on religion—within limits. Ever since Christians came before the world with their revelation from God they have been avid for discussion—with other religionists. I have on my shelves a set of 24 volumes of the Ante-Nicene library, made up of the writings of Christians up to about the middle of the fourth century. A very large part of these writings consist of nothing but arguments with other Christians as to what their divine revelation really means. I have also a collection of many volumes which contain the arguments between Protestants and Catholics—with the Catholics very poorly represented—running up to the early part of the seventeenth century. Christians have always been avid for arguments with other Christians. But the clergy do not welcome a discussion with Atheists on equal terms. We have also had the Archbishops of York and Canterbury using the machinery of the B.B.C. for the purpose of discussing Atheism and unbelief generally, but, again, not on equal terms. So it cannot be said that the Christian clergy avoid discussion. They fight shy of discussion only when the discussion is a genuine one. They act as would a pugilist who will only fight when the other man has one hand tied behind his back; and if he has also lost a leg he would be the more delighted.

If we deal with the cut and thrust of debate as a method of ascertaining truth—a method at least as old as Socrates—the clergy obviously have everything to lose and nothing to gain, as clergymen. Every discussion implies the possibility of his religious opinions being wrong, and how can a clergyman venture to make this admission? The most he can do is to question whether certain interpretations of God's revelation are correct. But tacitly to admit that the whole of Christianity may be one of humanity's major blunders! There are great difficulties about a religion that is revealed to man by a God who lacked the ability to make his meaning clear. Every revision of the meaning of the revelation raises new doubts of what remains. A *natural* religion may grow; a revealed religion reaps discredit with every reinterpretation. Nor must one neglect the fact that the social and financial position achieved by a successful clergyman leads to his fighting shy of anything that may threaten exposure of his creed. Even a curacy in a village offers attractions to men of very moderate ability who could never hope to gain distinction in any other walk of life. All things considered, the last thing that any clergyman dare do is to take part in a discussion with a well-equipped Freethinker. The training of a parson does not favour his success in such a situation. He is taught everything in favour of his religion and hears nothing of what may be said against it. There have, of course, been cases where clergymen of ability and knowledge have rushed into discussions with Freethinkers, but they are very few, and get scarcer. They have found the game too costly.

I recall a two night's debate I had in Derby with a well-known clergyman about forty years ago. The chairman, a well-known business man in the town, and a churchwarden, at the end of the second night invited me to take supper with him. I accepted the invitation and over supper we discussed the religious and Freethinking positions. At last my host said, "Well I am not a theologian, but I do see one thing very clearly. It is your side that gets all the profits." I changed the subject. A shrewd man, he saw that the arguments on the religious side would have no influence on an educated unbeliever. On the other hand, the better educated the Christian the more likely his appreciation of the Freethought case.

If then I may expand a little the reply to the two clergymen who were invited to meet me in discussion. I agree that no purpose useful to Christianity would be served by such a debate. *Christian* truth cannot stand the strain. With truth as it is understood in science the position is different.

Ye are My Sheep

In an excellent anthology by Mr. J. C. Wedgwood and Allan Nevins, *Forever Freedom* (one of the latest contributions to the Penguin series), there are some interesting remarks in the preface, which have a bearing on what I have said:—

How should we estimate the success of leaders of Church and State? Is it to be measured by the degree in which they have increased the power, or the privilege, or the wealth, of their Church or State? Is it that they have increased their influence in other lands? Is it that they have kept their people safe in their own pigeon hole, while others have swept to ruin. . . . We ask our leaders to measure their success not by these, but by this: how far have they made themselves unnecessary? How far have they increased the self-respect, self-reliance and self-sacrifice of their people?

I do not like the religious twang which accompanies this passage. It is too Christian in its implication that in "self-sacrifice" man is *giving* something he would rather retain when he performs an act which benefits others, whereas he gains by generosity and loses by meanness. But I very cordially echo the

counsel that the test of a teacher and a teaching is how far, as a result of either or both, the pupil has learned to stand alone. Every good teacher aims at this and every good influence strengthens it. The greatest compliment that can be paid a teacher is that his teaching has enabled the pupil to soar higher than he did and to see farther than his leader. From the time when a mother observes the recurring "miracle" of her infant tottering independently across the hearth-rug education should have independence for one of its principal aims. If education, whether it be religious, political or other lacks this, it lacks everything.

But independence of mind is the one thing that religion never inculcates, and it is a quality the clergy dare not encourage. Even so far as the maudlin and deliberately lying quality of the B.B.C. Christian propaganda has been criticized by numbers of the clergy, it has been on the ground that to listen while sitting by one's own fireside to a religious service is not enough. There is no pretence that the religious service so given is of a poorer quality than the one gets in a Church; it is that it induces people to stay from Church. The clergy say they must have collective services—conducted by themselves. They are afraid that if the sheep are encouraged to bleat separately they may cease to bleat altogether. The sheep (asuggestive New Testament word) must all bleat together to the accompaniment of music and stereotyped architecture; they must bleat in a form of speech that no one uses in everyday life; and the whole must have the cachet of fashion and narcotising influence of custom. You may read an essay on philosophy or a treatise on some branch of science, with a pipe in your mouth and your feet across a second chair. But religion cannot be cultivated in this way. It must be drenched in soporifics; the mind must be lulled into inactivity by stereotyped phrases and positions and the careful avoidance of "lawless" thinking. The very essence of Christianity is in the New Testament "Ye are my sheep." The whole of the struggle of the clergy for the control of the schools turns upon the same point. For the past three generations the teachers of the country have sinned in the eyes of the clergy by doing their job too well. They have turned out their pupils with minds that are too independent, they have encouraged boys and girls to think for themselves. I agree with Mr. Wedgwood that the test of a teacher is the extent to which he makes his pupils independent of him. The aim of the clergy of all denominations is to make each member of his flock (please note that word also) completely dependent upon him for his ministrations.

So I agree, without the slightest reservation, with the two Christian leaders who were invited to hold a public discussion with me, that no useful purpose would be served their religion by so doing. I think more of their intelligence for refusing than I should have done had they accepted. Particularly do I appreciate the wisdom of the one who refused after studying my controversial methods. His bump of caution must be well developed. He pays me the compliment of understanding the weight of my objections to Christianity, and to my method of stating them. And when Mr. Wedgwood asks the question whether the clergy have so developed pupils as to make themselves unnecessary, the answer is, Why should they? It is not the practice of bootmakers to advertise the advantage of walking with naked feet. And cripples must have crutches.

CHAPMAN COHEN

We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education. What we call root-and-branch reforms of slavery, war, gambling, intemperance, is only medicating the symptoms. We must begin higher up, namely, in education.—*Emerson*.

The Annals of Mournful Moscovy

WITH his *History of Russia*, now in its revised third edition (Jonathan Cape), Professor Bernard Pares has provided the thoughtful reader with an unbiased and comprehensive survey of Moscovy's chequered career. This work will probably rank as a standard authority. Equipped with first-hand knowledge of the remarkable country and people he describes, Dr. Pares impresses his readers with his freedom from sectarian and political partisanship. This, indeed, is much to be thankful for when we recall that so many volumes have appeared on Russia, both from the extreme right and extreme left, that were little better than propagandist productions. And, this above all in relation to the 1917 Revolution and its sequel.

Pares' work opens with the earliest records of Russian life, and concludes with an informative chapter on Soviet rule from 1917 to 1928. In this, the shortcomings of the Revolutionists are fairly presented, while full acknowledgment is made of the striking successes which their educational, industrial and economic experiments have secured. These achievements, however, coincided in the main with the adoption of a Soviet policy directed towards the establishment of a self-sufficing State, with the aid of foreign capital and credit and the utilization of technical experts in industry from abroad.

Under Stalin, the educational system which crammed the child's mind with political catchwords was abandoned. As Pares intimates: "By a series of decrees which followed was re-established the old system of teaching of history and geography, with its emphasis on facts, events and personalities—in a word, on the concrete. On December 29, 1935, a decree of the first importance swept away all class restrictions of birth in admission to the universities. . . . Family ties were to be strengthened and a measure of delay was introduced into the procedure of divorce. Even in the army the old ranks, except that of General were restored."

The Russian historian, Klyuchevsky, assigns insignificant influence to prominent personalities or philosophical thought in shaping the destiny of his country. Pares, however, makes full allowance for these factors, while stressing the necessity for an interpretation of the economic and geographical factors which so extensively determine a nation's history.

The civil commotions and conflicts, the Tartar depredations, official corruption, the avarice of the estate owners, foreign wars and the revolting treatment of the peasantry upon whose labour the welfare of an agricultural country of necessity depended, make the annals of Russia mournful reading. As the Russian State slowly emerges from chaos, powerful rulers appear. Ivan the Terrible, or John the Dread, as Pares terms him, prepared the way for the far more solid achievements of Peter the Great, who was one of the most remarkable men that ever wore a crown. He caused the erection of St. Petersburg, his Window to the West; he valued science, and he fully realized the need of education for his illiterate and uncouth subjects. Pares considers that "there was no department in which he did not make the beginnings of Russia's new civilization. He himself corrected and simplified the Russian alphabet. He was himself the editor of the first public newspaper in Russia." Until his death in 1721, he was incessantly engaged, in one way or another, in his endeavour to Europeanize his isolated and undeveloped country. All the conservative instincts of his people were arrayed against him, but throughout the reigns of his immediately incompetent successors his work remained. As Pares observes, "the structure of the State as he left it was in substance to remain until the Revolution of 1917."

Another eminent ruler who reigned from 1762 to 1796 was Catherine II. Of German nationality, and the widow of her deposed and murdered predecessor, Paul III, Catherine soon displayed signs of signal ability. A child of her time, she was permanently influenced by French Rationalism. Her first intellectual guide was the versatile Voltaire, who gave her her earliest impulse for serious thought. Buffon's *Natural History* and Blackstone's famous *Commentaries* became great favourites. Despite all her strenuous labours as an administrator, and her later machinations when securing the shameless partition of Poland—in which her duplicity at least equalled that of Frederick the Great—she retained her keen interest in the intellectual life until her death.

Catherine's extensive correspondence while elucidating the period of her reign, displays an intellect of a high order. She frequently corresponded with Joseph II, Frederick the Great, Voltaire, D'Alembert, as well as with the celebrated Grimm. Nor was her brilliance restricted to her letters, for according to those well qualified to judge, her powers of conversation captivated her intimates.

Her personal wants were almost austere in domestic life, and she usually worked fifteen hours a day at her administrative duties. She never allowed her secretaries and other officials to rust. Like Peter, Catherine travelled extensively throughout her vast dominions, and each journey became the occasion of self-instruction. Like that of our own Elizabeth, her court was brilliant, and although she was surrounded by eminent men of letters, diplomatists, and a long list of lovers, she apparently outshone them all.

Yet, Catherine's reign is blurred with plots and risings against her rule. She had no legitimate right to the throne, and this in a community where hereditary descent was deemed indispensable. During her whole reign her own son Paul was the rightful ruler. For centuries Russia had been the scene of assassination and the appearance of pretenders to the crown of the most fraudulent character. These impostors were sometimes encouraged by disaffected aristocrats who helped to bemuse the populace with promises of a speedy millenium for the downtrodden peasants and serfs.

Many were the claimants of sovereignty, but, as a rule, their insurrections were soon suppressed, and their instigators sent to Siberia. Then there was trouble with the Church, whose revenues had been diverted to secular uses by Peter II. Catherine was requested to remedy this grievance, but she merely confirmed it. Thereupon, the Archbishop of Rostov denounced his sovereign in unmeasured language. The priest was tried by the Synod, and it is reported that Catherine, who was present, stopped her ears at his unbridled abuse. Pares notes that "He was unfrocked and sent to a monastery. . . . Tried again in 1767, he was removed to a prison in Reval, where he lived cut off from all human intercourse under the name which Catherine gave him—Andrew the Babler." Still, the prelate continued to deny her right to the throne, and this, and other complaints, heralded Pugachev's rebellion.

The Empress was at heart a sincere reformer, but she was at the mercy of the serf-owning aristocracy, whose good will was essential to her sovereignty. Consequently, the peasantry became, in some respects, more dependent than ever. The Government made elaborate preparations for the redress of grievances. Administrative and other improvements were seriously projected, but although Catherine abolished torture, the gentry with very rare exceptions opposed every effort to alleviate the lot of the serfs. Again, the superstitions and credulity of both the urban and rural populace were exploited by the reactionaries. Discontent proved contagious and led to a sanguinary

revolt in nearly all eastern and south-eastern Russia. Appalling cruelties were inflicted, and there was great slaughter before the insurrection, which was supported by the Old Believers of the Greek Church, was suppressed. After nearly two years of civil war, Pugachev was captured and put to death in 1775. It is to her credit that Catherine strictly prohibited any form of torture during Pugachev's trial.

This revolt had become a peasant's war. As a result, Catherine's intended reforms received their death-blow in the reaction that ensued. In vain she condemned the barbarous treatment the serfs endured. As Pares observes: "Her able and honest administrator Sievers never ceased to press for measures of reform, especially for the fixing of the peasants' obligation in rent and in work; he declared that the payment of dues passed all belief." Throughout the whole tragic course of Russian history the sufferings of the peasants have been the perpetual badge of their tribe. It seems doubtful, even now, whether their lot is en- viable.

T. F. PALMER

Who Was Paul?

(Continued from page 176)

II.—THE REAL PAUL AND HIS FALSIFIERS

MR. RYLANDS identifies Paul with the writer of Romans i, 18-ii; vi, 2-13; 16-vii, 4; viii, 3-6, 9, 12-28 and 38-39; and of 1 Cor. 1-5; ii, 1-15; xii, 4-28; xiv, 1-9 and 23-25. The author of these passages dwells on the failure of mankind to fulfil the moral law, and preaches moral regeneration through union with Christ in baptism. By such union, he says, men inherit eternal life, and all things work together for their good; they become one body, possessed by one spirit; nothing can harm them any more. In short, Paul preaches a new mystery religion, whose saviour-god is "Christ Jesus."

The Jesus of Paul, it is hardly necessary to say, is a wholly ideal and imaginary being. Mr. Rylands accepts the myth theory of Christian origins in its entirety; but whether we do or do not, we can agree with him here. Nothing that can possibly have occurred in Judæa under the procuratorship of Pilate (whom Paul never mentions) has anything to do with this "Christ Jesus." The Messianic idea among the Jews took many forms. To the populace of Palestine the Messiah was the anointed king who would overthrow their Roman exploiters and usher in a golden age. The anointed king might be born of woman, or he might be some legendary hero come again (Joshua for instance), or he might be a wholly supernatural being from heaven: it was all one, so long as he delivered his people. But to educated Jews in touch with Greek culture this revolutionary hope made no appeal. They looked for the redemption of the world, not by violence, but by individual regeneration through *knowledge* of the true God (*gnosis*). The Messiah, or Christ, for them was the Son of God who revealed that knowledge to men. Some of these Gnostics identified this being with the Joshua, or Jesus, expected by popular Messianists. Hence "Christ Jesus."

Paul was one of these Jewish Gnostics. The statement in Philippians that he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (i.e., a Palestinian Jew) and a Pharisee must be rejected. Competent Jews are of opinion that the Epistles could not have been written by anyone with a rabbinical training. Moreover, quotations from the Old Testament in the Epistles are made from

the Greek version, even where it differs from the Hebrew.¹ Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew; and there is nothing in the parts of the Epistles accepted by Mr. Rylands as authentic to show that he had any close contact with Palestine.

In the previous article we provisionally accepted the tradition, common to the Acts and Epistles, that Paul had persecuted the Church and been converted at Damascus. But Mr. Rylands adduces reasons for doubting this. Those passages in the Epistles which refer to it were added in the second century. The Acts are an untrustworthy authority. Moreover, the Clementine *Recognitions*, a Jewish-Christian romance of the second century, give an account of the early Church at Jerusalem somewhat similar to that in the Acts, but ignore the martyrdom of Stephen and attribute the persecution, not to Paul, but to an unnamed agent of the priests. It is strange, too, that Paul should have been "unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa" (Gal. 1, 22) if he had lately been their persecutor. Mr. Rylands makes the suggestion that Saul, the persecutor, and Paul, the apostle, were two different men, whom the author of the Acts has fused into one. In that case, all that we know of Paul is that he was a missionary preacher of "Christ Jesus," who travelled from place to place in the Mediterranean as described by the diarist of Acts xvi, xx-xxi, and xxvii-xxviii, and of whose writings we possess a few fragments, mixed up with later matter, in certain of the Epistles that pass under his name.

Paul was not the only Jewish Gnostic who preached this cult. Apollos, the Jew of Alexandria, "mighty in the scriptures," of whom we read in Acts xviii, was another, and seems to have been independent of Paul. As we saw, Mr. Rylands is inclined to attribute to Apollos most of Romans ix-xi, and fragments of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Christianity, however, cannot be wholly traced to Gnostic origins. The Jewish populace had no use for an ideal son of God who would regenerate men by his spirit. They expected a visible Messiah who would destroy their oppressors—a Joshua, a son of David, a revolutionary hero.² Sooner or later the Christ of the Gnostics and the Christ of the oppressed people were bound to collide. There is evidence of such a clash in Romans xiii, which warns Christians to submit to the Roman Empire and pay tribute. Such a warning seems redundant to those who are accustomed to think of early Christians as invariably non-resisters; but to popular Messianists it must have seemed treason to the cause. Mr. Rylands assigns this part of the Epistle to a writer who, though not Paul himself, shared his general attitude and wrote before the catastrophe of 70 A.D. had crushed revolutionary hopes for decades to come.

Through active revolt was crushed, hatred of Rome and expectation of a visible Messianic kingdom remained, not only in Palestine, but in every ghetto in the Roman world. With it went bitter resentment against those who inculcated abandonment of national hopes and submission to Rome, and a bitter feud, therefore, between popular Messianists and Gnostics. It was about this time (after 70 A.D.) that there began to be circulated, first in Aramaic and then in Greek, the alleged sayings and doings of Jeshu han-nosri—Jesus the Nazorean—supposed to have been crucified by Pilate about forty years before. The Nazoreans or Nazarenes were a sect of poor Jews whose name, connected with the Hebrew verb "to guard," was probably given them on account of the strictness of their observances. Paul never men-

¹ Mr. Rylands holds that Paul, as a true Gnostic, would not have quoted the Old Testament, and rejects all such quotations as interpolated. Is not this rather a *priori*?

² Mr. Rylands, as a hundred per cent mythicist, postulates an underground Joshua-cult. I have never been able to convince myself that this existed.

tions them, and not having been a Palestinian Jew, may not have known they existed. Whether Jesus the Nazorean ever lived, or whether he merely symbolized the popular wish for a new Joshua, I am content to leave an open question." (The name Jehoshua, Joshua, Jeshua, or Jeshu was a common one and meant, not, as some think, "saviour," but "Jahveh is deliverance.") The "oracles" of Jesus the Nazorean, which proclaimed blessing to the poor, woe to the rich, and the return of Jesus in the immediate future to set up the kingdom of God on earth, made an appeal in the underworld of the Mediterranean with which the Gnostics could not hope to compete. To ram home the attack, the Nazoreans alleged that Jesus had appointed twelve apostles and no more, and that Paul was therefore a liar in claiming to be an apostle of Christ.

The Gnostics tried to meet this propaganda by circulating in Paul's name new Epistles, or new editions of existing Epistles, exalting his authority and disparaging Peter, James and the others (2 Cor. x-xii,¹ and Gal. i-ii, show the line taken). They found, however, that this did not answer. As a last resort, the Pauline party had somehow to rope in the Messianists of the ghettos, while compromising themselves as little as possible with political Messianism. So they accepted a Messiah of flesh and blood, and amalgamated their Son of God with the Nazorean crucified by Pilate. The subversive oracles were edited, interpolated, and finally incorporated in our Gospels. The Pauline Epistles, on their side, were re-edited by our old friend God Forbid. It is he who introduces the repulsive doctrines of predestination, vicarious atonement, and justification by faith, prohibits resort to the law-courts, asserts the right of Christian ministers to live on their congregations, introduces the story of the institution of the eucharist, and enjoins women to be silent in church (Rom. ii-v; viii, 29-37; ix, 14-26; 1 Cor. vi; ix; xi, 22-29; xiv, 34-36). His motive seems to be to discipline discordant elements in the Church by fear, to exalt the power of the elders, and to cow initiative.

The amalgamation produced the Catholic Church of history, and the New Testament as we know it. Those on either side who refused the compromise—Gnostics who rejected a human Messiah, and Nazoreans, or Ebionites, who rejected the Pauline mystery cult—were left outside as heretics, and died out in the course of centuries.

I have followed Mr. Rylands in his general conclusions, though not in every particular. Those who wish to know more of the reasoning which led to those conclusions are recommended to study his book. It will show them at least what critical analysis can be.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

By the substitution of a semicolon for a hyphen I am made, in the issue of April 13, to refer to Acts "xx, 4; xxi, 18" as part of the travel diary incorporated in the book. The reference should be to the whole section xx, 4—xxi, 18.—A.R.

¹ The question is immaterial to the study of Pauline Christianity. On the historicity issue in the strict sense, I incline to Dr. Eisler rather than Mr. Rylands.

² Mr. Rylands holds that these chapters refer not to Palestinian Messianists, but to ultra-Gnostics. I think it fair to mention his view.

Do not confound the sacred name of honour with that ferocious prejudice which places all virtues at the point of the sword, or at the mouth of the pistol, and is only calculated to make brave villains—*Rousseau*.

Men are more inclined to be angry with their friends than with those who are not so; for they think that they ought to be treated well, not ill, by their friends.

Aristotle.

Acid Drops

Our readers may remember that for some years after the Russian Revolution the religious press of this country, and those politicians who were notorious for the fervent Christianity did what they could to convince the people of this country that Russia was a land of Atheists who made it an unforgivable offence for anyone to either teach or profess Christianity. The agitation was so far successful that we once heard a speaker, not a Christian, refer to Russia as a land of one hundred and fifty million Atheists. The statement was, of course, ridiculous. Religion had been disestablished in Russia, and the State did what it could to increase the number of Atheists. But we think that at any time the number of genuine Atheists could never have been more than twenty millions. Atheists are not made in a day. And the abolition of a State religion while making for disbelief in Christianity, cannot perform miracles.

To-day we are all anxious to be on the best of terms with Russia. So we have a different policy with the religious press. The picture of Russia as a land swarming with Atheistic criminals is dropped, and we get the information that the attempt to convert the people to Atheism has been a miserable failure. Thus the *Catholic Herald*, in its issue for March 28, informs us that "among industrial workers the return to the faith has assumed such proportions that Party officials are compelled to close their eyes to their religious practices." In the army there has been "a steady growth of religion." "Churches become crowded." (It will be remembered that all the churches had been destroyed.) The itinerant priest is a customary feature of Soviet Russia," etc., etc. There has been no apology for previous lying, and we do not expect any apology for these exaggerations when the political situation changes. But so long as it is advisable to have Russia either with us or neutral, it is evident that there has been placed a check on this religious lying—to be revived if ever we are on bad terms with the Soviet.

Our very artful Archbishop (Canterbury) writes to the *Times* saying that even when the Government is compelled to have work done on Sunday, the morning hours should be kept free for "rest and worship." In plain English, whatever other interests are served, the professional interests of the clergy must not be neglected. "Rest and worship" for Sunday mornings. Now we wonder what the Archbishop would say if those concerned made it a rule to spend Sunday morning in bed, and not come to Church. In that case we suspect he would find it quite proper that men should work on Sundays as on other days.

Lord Selborne is also disturbed at the Government keeping men at work on Good Friday, and suggests in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, that the day should have been Easter Monday. Well we know which the men themselves would prefer, and Lord Selborne is just impertinent when he places his own religious views in front of the wishes of the men.

After boasting that Vichy has at last abrogated many of the anti-clerical laws of pre-war France, the *Universe* has sorrowfully to admit that "the law of January 6, 1941, on the teaching of religion in French schools, has been altered." Religion was by this law allowed to be taught in schools to children living some distance away from churches; but this permission has now been withdrawn. In addition, lectures by priests or nuns are not allowed in schools. The French clerical paper *Le Croix* is highly indignant, and hopes "that these modifications of the law will not be followed by other retrograde manifestations." The word retrograde is quite humorous in this connexion for there are quite a number of people who are certain that the Vichy Government is itself completely retrograde when it touches religion, though it is heart and soul Catholic.

In Eire, German propaganda is doing its utmost to show Hitler as a "devout Roman Catholic—and indeed a daily communicant"—according to the *London Evening News*. This, the journal points out, is "magnificent effrontery." We fail to see why. After all Hitler is a Catholic, and will remain one until he publicly disavows

the religion in which he was nurtured, and that he has not so far done. He has not been excommunicated by the Pope either, and he hardly ever opens his mouth without thanking God for the way in which that Deity is helping Germany on to fresh victories, and looking after Hitler in particular. The *Evening News* thinks "it is rather hard for the Roman Catholic Church to have Hitler forced upon it." It isn't harder than for the Protestant Church to have had the ex-Kaiser forced upon it in the last war. Both Hitler and William are Christians—though they may not be quite the shining examples our Bishops like to think are the results of a thorough belief in that religion.

The *Church Times* evidently thinks there is some danger in attributing too much to a Day of Prayer. It says, "It would be dangerously near the border of superstition to contend, as some commentators seem disposed to do, that recent successes are the direct result of the Day of Prayer." We commend the caution, but prefer the simple honesty of the true believer. His position is that if good follows the prayer it is clearly an answer from God. If good does not follow then we have not prayed enough, and we should do some more grovelling, for God loves to see his followers on their knees with their eyes closed. "Blessed are they that grovel" should be in the prayer book. It is there actually, but the English is not impeccable.

But one would like to ask the *Church Times*—not with the least hope of getting an answer—how are we to tell whether God does respond to prayer, if not in the way the *Church Times* criticizes. We agree that the attitude of these folk is very foolish, but how otherwise are they to tell whether God pays attention to prayers or not? The trouble is that no one has at any time ever got Christians to abide by a test that might decide the issue. And what would the *Church Times* have said if President Roosevelt had promised us their prayers?

In so far as the Vatican radio attacks, or is allowed to attack Hitler, it does so in the main only from a religious point of view. It would welcome Hitler and all he stands for if that lunatic would "submit" to Roman Catholicism in Germany as above—or at least equal—to Nazism. At the moment, the Vatican radio is attacking what it is pleased to call "the Nazi plot to destroy Christianity"—when actually all it is endeavouring to do is to prevent Roman Catholicism from being top dog in the Reich. If Hitler and his gang went all out to destroy Lutherism, would the Vatican object? Not on your life, especially if he left the Roman Church severely alone.

In view of what has been published concerning the pro-German proclivities of the Buchmanites (the Oxford Group) in the United States, and the amount of money that is being sent by them to check the effort of helping this country, one would like to know on what grounds the whole of the Oxford Group were scheduled as "reserved"—i.e., freed from military service. Buchman, while he was in England, had hosts of friends in high places.

It is reported that Mr. J. B. Priestley is considering giving up broadcasting. Mr. Priestley, in our opinion, would be doing a greater public service if, instead of bowing to the censorship and either submitting to cuts and alterations—even though they were made by himself before submission—he publicly announced that he declined to broadcast as long as the present humiliating and dishonest conditions are in force. The glaring impudence of the B.B.C. in its censorship is only equalled by its loud-mouthed denunciations of German censorship and intolerance. A censorship that is open and avowed is bad enough, but is something that is unutterably mean and cowardly when it works in the dark.

"Speak that I may know thee," is a saying attributed to Socrates. We wonder whether he would have thought of that sentence if his ghost had been present during the discussion on the opening of theatres. He would certainly have found an illustration of it in the speech of Colonel Wedgwood (Newcastle-under-Lyne). Colonel Wedgwood said the opening of theatres was not wanted, and "soldiers had told him that when they were in France they had quite enough 'leg displays.'" We can

assure Colonel Wedgwood that the vast majority do not go to theatres to see "leg displays," not even if the men are in uniform. Other things take place in theatres than that. Perhaps if Colonel Wedgwood addressed a meeting of soldiers and suggested this he would learn that a "leg-display" was not that for which soldiers would attend a theatre. Surely the ghost of Socrates must have whispered into the ears of Wedgwood, "Speak that I may know thee," and one can imagine the great Greek saying, as he faded away, "Thou hast spoken, and I know thee better than thou knowest thyself."

A petition was put up in the Stock Exchange for the "House" to be closed on Good-Friday. We remember a saying that the reason why Christians should all shut their shops on Sundays is because the Lord wished to have one day in the week in which the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal" received attention from his followers.

It seems, according to the *Financial Times*, that many of those who signed the above petition were of opinion that the volume of business would not repay opening. We have no means of telling whether this judgment is sound or not. But it is certain that a nice interesting Good Friday service, quite free from the distractions of a crowded House, might provide opportunities for working out new schemes for "spoofing" the public. They would respond heartily to the parson's "Brothers; now let us pray."

There is a complaint that among the Scottish clergy that service in the Home Guard often gets in the way of members attending Church. They are asking that drills and exercises be fixed at such hours that the men may attend Church. Whatever happens, war or peace, the professional interests of the clergy are always well to the front.

The *Tablet*, one of our leading religious papers, is indignant at the Russian Commissariat inviting teachers to send in suggestions for improvement in anti-religious work. We should be justified in expressing our disagreement with this governmental policy, because we do not believe in Governments either advocating or suppressing religion. But what right has the *Tablet* to raise an objection? It believes that there should be an established religion, it believes that particular religion should be forced on the King, under pain of forfeiture of the post if he objects, and it believes in taking part of an agitation to see how much more religion can be forced into the schools at the general expense. What is the difference in principle between our Government helping religion and the Russian Government hindering it?

There is a constant complaint in the religious press, particularly in the Roman Catholic section, that the Nazis are telling the young that Christianity is a myth. We take this as evidence of the truth of what we have so often said, that no care is great enough to prevent even an habitual liar speaking the truth sometimes. Moreover, the chief feature of the Nazi movement is that it is fundamentally and uncontrollably religious.

The religious habit of forcing children to tread the steps of their parents is little more than an example of the extent to which parental egotism and narrowness may make for harm in the child. It is bad enough in ordinary matters when the parent camouflages his egoistic tyranny with the common remark "when my child is old enough he may take his own course." If the child were alert enough he might reply, "Thank you for nothing. When I am old enough you cannot prevent my taking my own course." But by that time the capacity for making up one's mind is weakened in the matter of taking an independent road. The child, so far as religion is concerned, follows in its parent's footsteps, and in the majority of cases, develops little more than a watered-down version of parental superstitions. Christian praise of the attractiveness of a religious service to a child, even when it exists, is beside the point. It ignores the real objection to using the child as sermon fodder for the parson. But, as we have said, this campaign against the intellectual freedom of the child is well organized and is cunningly stated.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. F. VINAY.—It is difficult to get some non-Christians to understand Atheism as it is with Christians. Our two latest pamphlets on Agnosticism and Atheism, ought to clear the situation, and for the present we must let it rest there. Grant Allen's statement that to analyse the origin of a concept does not invalidate the belief it enshrines, is true so far as it goes, but it has no bearing whatever on the validity of the belief in God. For when the concept is proven to owe its existence to a complete misunderstanding of known facts, and when the basic facts are explainable in terms other than those originally used, the concept is thrown on one side as proven useless and false. Grant Allen should have realized that in tracing the history of "God" we are tracing the history of an illusion. If his own work on God did not prove that then it proved nothing at all.

For Distributing and Advertising the *Freethinker*.—H. Bedford, 2s. 6d.

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

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Sugar Plums

In the opposite column will be found an important judicial decision concerning the question of those joining any of the armed forces and the right of affirmation. The case was one in which we were interested at the time. We have only to add now the advice that recruits should insist upon their legal rights—and they will get them.

We have said so much of the newspaper and Church plot for turning our schools into breeding-pens for the turning out of material for the benefit of Church and Chapel, that it is pleasing to find a little of the truth in *The Bury Free Press* for March 29. In a leading article it is pointed out, "There is no doubt that organized Christianity in recent years has been losing hold upon the population. All the Churches have suffered loss in membership and in Church attendance." That is a very unpleasant truth for the Churches to face, particularly when it is running the lying campaign that the people want more religion in the schools. And here is a passage which in its summing up of the position of the clergy to-day has been stated over and over again in these columns:—

The argument of some who are seeking these changes seems to be something like the following: The nation is at present fighting the battle of Christianity against Nazi paganism. The totalitarian regime of Germany has imposed its neo-paganism upon the German people through its educational system. It is therefore argued that England ought to copy German methods and utilize its State system of education for impressing Christian views upon English children.

No one can argue that this statement is unfair to Christian leaders. They did not like the German organization and methods directed against this, but there is little doubt that they would welcome the same methods imposed on Britain in the interests of the Christian Churches. It is what they are striving for, and there are many members of even the present Government who would help the effort to impose more Christianity upon the rising generation. There is not a single feature of Nazism that is not to be found in the Christian Church. The extent to which these aspects have been expressed has depended upon circumstances.

We feel sure that most of our readers will be pleased to learn that our business manager informs us that there has been a very fair increase in the number of new subscribers on our books during the past year. We take the occasion

to thank all of our friends who have contributed to this result by introducing the paper to their friends. And we ask all to remember that there is a possible new subscriber round every corner.

The Army and the Oath

WE have many times advised those joining the Army, Navy, or Air Force, that they should insist on their legal right to take the Oath, and to be registered as Atheist, Freethinker, or anything else they choose. But they must resist any attempt to induce them to take a religious oath. If they are refused legal rights in the matter, they should refuse to sign anything. If their attestation is refused that may legally be counted as a rejection from the Army, Navy, or Air Force.

We have stated this much often, and we reprint below a verbatim report of a judgment in the High Court in support of what we have said. The person involved was one of our regular readers, who not only claimed his right, but succeeded in getting them honoured. On account of the recruiting officer refusing the affirmation in place of the religious oath, the High Court decided that the man had been rejected and the Army had no further claim upon him. Here is the case as stated:—

October 25, 1916

(Before LORD READING, C.J., RIDLEY and LOW, JJ.)

CASE stated by Justices for Middlesex

1. At the Highgate Police Court on 10th May, 1916, the appellant, Ralph Richard Towler, was charged on a complaint preferred against him by the respondent, Captain Manners Sutton, for that he, being amenable to Sect. 15 of the Reserve Forces Act, 1882, did absent himself without leave lawfully granted, when called on permanent service. The justices convicted the appellant, but inflicted no penalty.

2. The following facts were proved or admitted:—

(a) The appellant was a sorter in the Post Office and lived at 8 North Hill Avenue, Highgate, in the county of Middlesex. He was a single man, thirty-five years of age.

(b) Having been duly registered under the National Registration Act, 1915, the appellant presented himself at the Harringay recruiting office in December, 1915, for the purpose of enlisting under the Derby scheme.

(c) Having duly filled and signed the necessary forms, the appellant was examined and passed as fit by the army doctor, and he proceeded to the Harringay Hall to complete his enlistment by attesting.

(d) On arrival at the hall the appellant was handed a Testament by the recruiting officer, on which to take the oath of allegiance and so complete his enlistment.

(e) The appellant then declared himself to be an Atheist, and informed the recruiting officer that he claimed the right to affirm. The recruiting officer again asked the appellant whether he would take the oath, and the appellant refused on the ground that it would mean nothing to him, and requested to be allowed to affirm. The recruiting officer then said, "Well, we cannot attest you, then." The appellant's registration card was then handed back to him, and he was requested to leave the hall. The recruiting officer said that the appellant would be able to say that he was not properly enlisted if he did not take the oath. The recruiting officer refused to permit the appellant to affirm, and refused to proceed with attestation without the appellant taking the oath.

(f) On the 8th March, 1916, the appellant received a notice, dated the 6th March, 1916, calling him to the colours on the 22nd March, 1916.

(g) On the 4th May, 1916, the appellant was arrested as an absentee and was released on bail till the hearing of the charge of being an absentee, and the hearing took place on the 10th May, 1916.

3. It was contended for the appellant:—

(a) That having objected to being sworn, and having stated the ground of his objection to be that he was an Atheist, he was, in virtue of the Oaths Act, 1888, entitled to claim the right to make an affirmation instead of taking an oath.

(b) That, as he had been denied such right by the military authorities when he presented himself for enlistment, and as such authorities had refused to attest him, he had been rejected within the meaning of clause 6 of sched. 1 to the Military Service Act, 1916, and therefore was exempt from service.

4. It was contended for the respondent that the refusal of the military authorities to allow the appellant to affirm instead of taking the oath did not amount to a rejection within the meaning of the said clause.

5. The justices were of opinion that the refusal of the military authorities to allow the appellant to affirm did not amount to a rejection within the meaning of the said clause.

6. The question of law for the court was whether the appellant was rejected within the meaning of the exception contained in clause 6 of sched. 1 to the Military Service Act, 1916, and therefore was not liable for military service under the said Act. If the appellant came within the said exception, the case was to be remitted to the justices with the opinion of the court thereon. If, however, he did not come within the said exception and was liable to be called up for military service under the said Act, the conviction was to stand.

W. ALLEN, for the appellant: The conviction of the appellant as an absentee from the army was wrong, as he is protected by the exception contained in clause 6 of the first schedule to the Military Service Act, 1916. He had offered himself for enlistment, but had been rejected since the 14th August, 1915. The tribunal refused to attest him and this was in fact a rejection. (He was stopped by the court).

BRANSON for the respondent: "Rejected" means rejected for medical reasons. This appears from sect. 3 (2) of the Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2); and by sect. 17 (1) of the latter Act. The two Acts are to be read together.

LORD READING, C.J.: The appellant in 1915 offered himself to a recruiting officer for enlistment. The recruiting officer tendered to him a Testament upon which the appellant was required to take the oath of allegiance. The appellant informed the recruiting officer that he was an Atheist and objected to being sworn, and claim the right to affirm. He was clearly entitled in law to do this, but the recruiting officer appears to have thought that unless the appellant took the oath the attestation would not be valid, and therefore would not permit him to affirm and refused to accept his offer to enlist, and thus, as it seems to me, rejected the appellant who was at that time desirous of serving the country in the army. In January, 1916, subsequent to the appellant offering himself for enlistment, the Military Service Act, 1916, was passed, and under that Act there were certain exceptions to compulsory military service which the Act imposed upon persons coming within it. One of these exceptions ran as follows: "Men who . . . have offered themselves for enlistment and have been rejected since the 14th August, 1915." The only question is, Has the appellant, who offered himself for enlistment, been rejected? That he offered himself for enlistment is without dispute. But the contention for the Crown is that he was not "rejected," and the justices upon the facts came to the conclusion that the refusal of the

military authorities to allow the appellant to affirm did not amount to a rejection within the meaning of the exception to which I have referred. At first sight, according to the meaning ordinarily attributed to the words used, it appears to me that there can be no doubt that the appellant had offered himself for enlistment and had been rejected. The only argument to the contrary is based on sect. 3 (2) of the Military Service Act, 1916 (Session 2), which provides: "Paragraph six of the first schedule to the principal Act shall, on the first day of September nineteen hundred and sixteen, cease to apply to a man who has offered himself for enlistment and been rejected since the fourteenth day of August nineteen hundred and fifteen, if the Army Council are satisfied that he should again present himself for medical examination, and sent him written notice to that effect, before the first-mentioned date."

The argument presented on behalf of the Crown was that, looking at that sub-section and remembering that by virtue of Sect. 17 (1) of the second Act these two Acts are to be read together, we must construe the word "rejected" in clause 6 of the first schedule to the earlier Act as meaning "rejected" on medical grounds. I am quite unable to accept that contention. There is nothing to justify us in giving the word that limited meaning. To do so would, if the English language is to be interpreted according to its ordinary meaning, be contrary to the intention of Parliament, which was to make an exception in favour of persons who would otherwise come within the Act if they had already offered themselves for enlistment and been rejected. What was meant was that a man who had volunteered and had not been accepted, through the action of the military authorities, would not be a compulsory recruit. The later Act has not in any way restricted the meaning of the word "rejected." All it has done is to say that, if a man has been rejected on medical grounds, he may in certain circumstance be required to present himself again for medical examination.

I cannot take any other view than that, through a mistake of the recruiting officer, the services of the appellant have been lost to the Crown. As the appellant comes within the exception, the justices were wrong and the appeal must be allowed with costs.

RIDLEY, J.: I agree. It must be understood that the appellant did not claim exemption on the ground that he was an Atheist. In effect, however, the army authorities themselves have given him exemption on that ground.

LOW, J.: I am of the same opinion. It is important that it should be observed that the appellant did not put forward any claim to exemption at all. On the contrary, he did all he could to join the service of the King, but because he asked to go through a certain form of attestation, i.e., to make affirmation instead of taking the oath, the military authorities took it upon themselves to reject him altogether, though they had no right to do so. The consequence is that the country has lost his services, but it would be in the highest degree unjust to treat him as an absentee when that result was brought about by the mistake of the military authorities.

APPEAL ALLOWED AND CONVICTION QUASHED.

Solicitors for the appellant,

H. B. WEDLAKE, SAINT & Co.

Solicitor for the respondent,

Solicitor to the Treasury.

(Continued from page 189)

it would not be at all of the type to which we are accustomed, that type which is the outcome of a purblind pietism seeing in natural objects only pretty and pleasing phenomena specially sent to delight the eye of MAN, the Lord of Creation. T. H. ELSTON

A Nasty Piece of Work

SPRING is upon us again, and those who wish to enthuse about the fresh green shoot issuing from the rich brown earth are given their opportunity. It is true enough that there is much that is pleasing to observe; there is much that is beautiful, and the element of surprise is inexhaustible. "God" is indeed good to send us so many delights. Many there are who rhapsodize over God's primrose; the delicate green frock that God, the Great Milliner, gives the upright larch; the apple, almond, and cherry blossom; the shy violet; the fresh leaves on the ivy green. But in this, as ever, we pick and choose our samples. Some of God's gifts are plainly overlooked. An ode to the stinging nettle written in terms of manifest delight may have been written some time or other, but, if so, it has escaped immortality. There is a pretty early wild orchid to be found in southern copses, which, in my opinion, might well have justified a few verses. I remember plucking a bunch of these flowers and taking them back to my lodgings during the first year of the last big war. I was looking forward to seeing them in all their purple glory the next morning at breakfast-time, so as to have an added delight to the joys of the table. But, when the eggs and bacon appeared, alas, the bouquet was not there! I spoke to my landlady rather shortly as to its disappearance. She frowned. And then she spoke. She informed me that she had that morning wasted half an hour of her precious time peering closely into the four corners of the room and under every piece of furniture in order to provide the evidence for the fact that her Persian cat, a very dependable creature, had misbehaved himself. At last, when almost in despair at her failure, her nostrils had guided her correctly to the offending flowers. It was God's creation that was the culprit. Pussy had been the victim of an unjust suspicion; it was but the whim of the Great Horticulturalist. One wonders what the reaction of a poet would be who in the dewy eve writes an ode to the Vernal Orchid based on the pleasure it gives his eye, only to be assailed later in the neighbourhood of his nose. Would he supplement his lines? Would he revise them? Would he rewrite them? We surmise that he would tear them up. When it comes to æsthetic rapture, the eye has not absolute dictatorship. The nose has a contribution to make and cannot be brushed aside. And, likewise, the other senses! To pluck an ivy leaf and find one's fingers stained by the life juices of scores of black lice attached to the stem of the leaf is no rapturous experience. Even the pious would then slow up the tempo of their hymn of praise, for they believe that God it is who has sent the pleasant things for their delight and, when the phenomena are the reverse of delightful, they suspect that once again the old Devil has outwitted Omnipotence.

Lurking behind many things of beauty are things that delight not. In these matters the pious may be unconsciously selective. The rhapsodist is consciously selective for he knows that to be otherwise would mean the drying up of his fount of inspiration. The devotees of Epicurus or Lucullus have sense enough to keep away from the kitchens in which their meals are cooked. It is equally sensible for those who write odes of praise to the apple tree to restrict the area of their survey. This can be cheerfully admitted. It is when enthusiasm takes the form of returning thanks to the Lord for all his works that their obtuseness becomes irritating.

It is one of Fabre's inimitable chapters on Natural History that has suggested these reflections. It is entitled "The Sense of Smell," and is in *The Life of the Caterpillar*. It was not Fabre's intention to be critical—very much the reverse—but this chapter shows the Great Designer in his most whimsical and most unlovely mood. It tells us all he knows about

the *Arum dracunculus*. We can conclude that Paley, of the Design Argument fame, never ran up against this ingenious evidence of Design. If he had, he too would have had a special chapter upon it. But then, again, he might not.

"Imagine a wide, lanceolate blade, of a clarety purple, half a yard long and rolled below into an ovid pouch the size of a hen's egg. Through the opening of this wallet rises a central column springing from the bottom, a long bright green club, encircled at its base by two bracelets, one of ovaries, the other of stamens." This is part of the description of God's flower, but it is far from being the important part.

Fabre goes on to tell us that the stench of this flower is worse than that of a dead and decomposing dog. It requires a brave man to be anywhere in its immediate neighbourhood. But scientists are rarely faint-hearted. Fabre braved the loathsome atmosphere and gave the flower close inspection. During the couple of days in which it gives off this odour it is visited by the type of insect that lives on small corpses such as those of toads, mice and moles. The reason for this is that its great leaf, which is vivid purple, looks like bad meat and smells like bad meat. God has done his work very completely. When the flying insects, to whom the stench is as *eau de Cologne*, reach the sesquipedalian blade they roll down the slope of the flower and reach the wallet. Given a few hours of blazing sunshine, the pouch will soon be filled.

It would be foolish now not to give Fabre's own words, or, rather, the words of his translator into English, De Mattos:—

Let us look inside through the narrow opening. No elsewhere could you see such a crowd. It is a mad whirl of backs and bellies, of wing-cases and legs, swarming, rolling over and over, amid the snap of interlocked joints, rising and falling, floating and sinking, seething and bubbling without end. It is a drunken revel, an epidemic of delirium tremens.

Some, few as yet, emerging from the mass, climb to the opening by means of the central pole or the walls of the enclosure. Will they take wing and make their escape? Not they! Standing on the brink of the chasm, almost free, they drop back into the whirlpool, in a fresh bout of intoxication. The bait is irresistible. Not one of them will quit the assembly until the evening or perhaps next morning, when the heady fumes have evaporated. Then the mass becomes disentangled; and the insects extricate themselves from one another's embraces and slowly, as it were regretfully, leave the place and fly away.

Is it not good of God to give these insects their hour of glorious life? Well, there's something in that—but let us read on:—

At the bottom of this devil's purse remains a heap of dead and dying, of severed limbs and disjointed wing-cases the inevitable result of the frenzied orgy. Soon, Woodlice Earwigs and Ants will arrive and devour the deceased.

Fabre emptied the floral pouch on one occasion and took a census of the bacchanalians enticed by the smell of a dead body—which *wasn't* a dead body. He found *four hundred* insects.

The four hundred consisted "entirely of two families, Dermestes and Saprini, small carnivorous beetles, both of whom are very busy in spring turning derelict corpses to account." But, as Fabre points out, there are a number of other genera which are as fond of dead bodies as the Dermestes and Saprini that are completely absent from the haul made by the *Arum dracunculus*. The dodge does not work with them; the *ersatz* corpse attracts them not at all. Why, God only knows! It is an amusing, but hardly god-like, game, this dodging of the dodger. It is the incessant theme of the natural Opera of Life.

One doesn't suggest that there is not the material for a poem in all this. There is—and a good one. But

(Continued on page 188)

About Sacraments

It is very strange that in the endless dispute about the existence of God, the question of "sacraments" has been left alone by both sides. If sacraments are what they are claimed to be, they are distinctly proof of the existence of God, and as they are available literally by the hundred thousand, one would think that the protagonists of God would have confidently put them forward and definitely submitted them for examination. On the other hand, if they are *not* what they claim to be (and, of course, they are not), then they are exceedingly vulnerable, and it is strange that they have not been pounced on.

A sacrament is an act performed by a priest in which by means of the correct patter it is asserted that a "divine element" is brought in. The papist church has seven of these sacraments, baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony. As an example of what happens take the case of baptism. In effect the priest says: "I take this child, I say the words, I sprinkle the water, and the divine element comes into the child." But in the many desperate efforts to "prove God" did you ever hear of them offering a baptized child and demonstrating the "divine element"? On the other hand, have you ever heard of the opposition pouncing on this claim, and issuing a challenge say something like this: "Come then, let us take six unbaptized children and half a dozen baptized ones, mix them well together, and then let us see if you can pick out which is which." A perfectly fair and reasonable challenge, we submit, and one which the sacramentarians ought not to refuse, in fact ought to meet eagerly—if there is anything in their claims.

There is one exception to these neglected sacraments—the eucharist, commonly known as the mass. This has been attacked, partly because the priests in this sacrament step up their claims to lunatic heights. They say that having spoken the correct patter over some biscuits, the entire substance of the biscuits is turned into the entire body of God, nay in every merest crumb there is the entire body of God. Their effrontery is really astounding. They say God comes down at the *command* of the priest; in fact at the appropriate patter God *cannot help himself*, he must come down. Well, *this* impudence has been challenged. The whole thing is a fraud, of course, a fraud which, one would think, would not impose on anybody. But it continues. They cannot show the slightest change in the biscuits; these can stand no test whatever. This is what one of the practitioners of the fraud said in "defence." "The action of God in the sacraments is not strictly definable. It moves on a plane and in a world of which science in the ordinary acceptance of the word knows nothing, and is not competent to speak . . . the thought of submitting the consecrated elements to physical tests is both irrelevant and irreverent . . . it leaves out of account all ranges of relevant phenomena of the emotions, movements of the soul, spiritual experiences, and perceptions, all of which obstinately refuse to conform to a merely intellectual analysis."

This rignarole starts off so many replies that one hardly knows which to say first. But first note that claims are made that there *are* certain phenomena in connexion with sacraments, and in effect he says that though ecclesiastics are capable of taking cognisance of them *scientists* are not! Which logically leads on to the corollary that scientists (and common or garden people) must needs take for the phenomena the ecclesiastical say-so. How's that for swelled head?

That bishop's high falutin' nonsense is simply an attempt to keep science and common sense off the ecclesiastical grass. They do not want nosey parkers

nor inconvenient critics. Let me give two cogent reasons why, if they were honest, they would be willing and eager to let their claims be tested. (1) On their theory we unbelievers are in danger of hell, and it is their duty, and should be their charitable desire, to convert us. With the "divine element" concentrated (say) into one small baby, nay, with God entire in one biscuit, they would have every opportunity of demonstrating God. Out of their charity they *ought* to do something. (2) A man who comes with a tale that he has converted a bit of biscuit into God entire is at once put down by plain and blunt common sense (to say nothing of science) as either a liar or a lunatic or both. Surely these ecclesiastics do not wish to be under the stigma of being considered liars or lunatics. They must see that for such a whopper of a claim their mere say-so is *not* sufficient. They should see that a demand for experimental proof is both inevitable and reasonable.

Take the claim for "movements of the soul." How can such a claim be made unless the claimant has felt or had cognisance somehow, of the "movement"? We suppose the "soul" is inside a man. If it makes a movement is there some slightest ripple of the chest, some smallest heave of the tummy, some least tickling under the ribs? In the case of infant baptism we suppose in about 50 per cent of the cases the infant responds with a yowl; is this a movement of its soul? In all the hundreds of thousands of sacraments performed, has the performing priest no evidence of the coming and the settling down of the "divine element"? Did you ever hear of a priest ever describing or giving definite particulars of "relevant phenomena"?

The fact is that the "relevant phenomena" are so footing as hardly worth the attention of science. A slight rise in temperature of the emotions is about the most these people can show. Any ordinary Spiritualist Church could provide more startling phenomena in one evening than these Catholics in a month of Sundays. And moreover they (the Spiritualists) do not attempt to keep enquirers off the grass—very much the reverse. They shout loudly for investigation "under the most rigorous test conditions." They may have weird ideas of the interpretation of their phenomena, but at any rate they *have* phenomena worth calling such, and they have the courage of their convictions and no flabby talk about searching investigation being irrelevant and irreverent. Talk about a biscuit being God entire is a lot more than irreverent, it is blasphemy.

Phenomena: what about the dancing dervishes who will get the divine afflatus (or whatever they call it), so much into them that knives can be driven into them without their minding, without even blood flowing; or that phenomenon of some other religious folk who walk barefoot and unharmed over red-hot stones; or hundreds more of which it might be said (what cannot be said of the footing things mentioned by Bishop Woods), some phenomena, what? Science's collection of phenomena is worth studying. The Catholic collection is *pour rire*. The bringing of the "divine element" into an act by means of patter is actually a claim by Catholic priests that they are magicians. But as magicians they are the poorest in the world. A ju-ju man in the jungle can beat them hollow. As magicians they are impostors. They are rarely confidence tricksters. They have only one thing in championship amount—the quantity of their patter, which as Dominic Sampson would say, is prodigious. Of course they need it, to cover up their total lack of genuine magic. Their "magic" is merely swindlers' say-so.

C. R. BOYD FREEMAN

James and his Epistle¹

The author begins his work as follows:—
James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion, greeting. (I, i.)

Before going further it is worth while to compare and contrast the present dedication with that in the First Epistle of Peter:—

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. (I, i.)

It is also well to note that whereas both our versions name the writer now under inquiry "James," the Greek text and all the Latin versions, and all the ecclesiastics who have referred to him in Greek or in Latin works name him respectively Jakobos or Jacobus; and that the difference is still more remarkable because our two versions, both in the Old and in the New Testament, give the patriarch Jacob his proper name, instead of calling him "James." As the matter stands thus, and as it is too late to alter a time-honoured abuse, I can only ask that whenever my readers meet in this article with a man named James, they will be good enough to remember that Jacob was his real name.

The Epistle before us, written by a Jew to certain members of his own race, evinces an intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew Scriptures, and some parts of the Apocrypha. It is very discursive, and occasionally rather confused. Iterations, interruptions, and resumptions frequently occur. Such defects are often signs of old age, and may be so in the present instance. The language is imaginative, and sometimes pathetic, as in the touching passage: "What is your life? For ye are a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (iv. 14). From his air of assurance, and his tone of authority, it is quite evidently that he must have been well and favourably known, either personally or by repute, to those whom he was addressing. The Epistle contains exhortation, comfort, and admonition. The latter sometimes passes into severe reproof. Here are a few of the things condemned.

I. The rich despised the poor, and even in the "synagogue" showed them contempt by making them stand, or take inferior seats; and all this in face of the fact that God has made those who are poor in goods to be "rich in faith," and "heirs" of his promised "Kingdom." Worse still, besides humiliating the poor, they oppressed them, and even dragged them before courts of justice, thus shaming the Holy Name whereby they were called. "The royal law" of Scripture says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." He that breaks the law in one point only is guilty against the whole law. He that refuses to show mercy shall find none (ii. 13.) Elsewhere (v. 1-6), he strongly condemns the rich as a social class, irrespectively of their religious profession; and does this much as the old Hebrew prophets, for whom it was an endless theme, were wont to do it.

II. The brethren exhibited great disputatiousness regarding doctrines, and supported their views with unseemly acerbity of language. The apostle Paul accuses his Corinthian converts of the same behaviour (1 Cor. iii. 3-5). Men, as everyone knows, are so apt to mistake love of their own opinions for love of truth, and candid opponents for personal enemies whom they must vanquish to save their own honour! James is fully aware of these dangers. He gives the injunction,

"Be not many teachers, my brethren," and graphically describes the evils of a tart tongue. "If any stumbleth not in word," then, according to him, "the same is a perfect man." This is a most unguarded statement, for caution of speech is a great help to the execution of wicked designs. It would appear that the disputants whom James had in mind were prone or perhaps accustomed to affirm their convictions with objurations, for he says: "But above all things, brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any oath."

C. CLAYTON DOVE

(To be continued)

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

FREEDOM IN ART

SIR,—In these days of totalitarianism, standardization, and regimentation your paper stands as a lighthouse in a seething sea of world chaos sending out a steady light of reason over the whirling waters of unrest. This mania for getting everybody card-indexed and documented is about the worst form of tyranny conceivable, for we are then at the mercy of petty-minded officials. The bureaucratic machine is a senseless robot with a gaping void fed on innumerable official forms. These run in cast-iron channels without any effort. If one of these forms be lost or remain undigested in the wretched machine it cannot function, and there is no known purge which has any apparent effect. The only thing to do is to give the handle another turn and hope for the best. Alternatively give the machine another form in the hope that it will pass through safely.

There has lately been an attempt to standardize building and architecture, but this is a retrograde movement. Art must remain free, and artists cannot work under restrictions or at the dictation of any autocrat. Censorship is fatal to art and its ordered evolution "The wind bloweth where it listeth." Man and art must have complete freedom to expand, for ideas rule, and thought like love cannot be quenched. If standardization had been applied to the great masters in the past in either painting, sculpture, architecture, music, or literature, the world's supreme masterpieces would have been strangled at birth, or never seen the light of day. No! art is a free movement. You may try to compress it, beat it down, even try to kill it, but like the true spark of civil liberty, if once kindled, it will burn. Human agency cannot extinguish it. Like the earth's central fire, it may be smothered for a time; oceans may overwhelm it; the mountains may press it down, but its inherent and unconquerable force will heave both the ocean and the land, and at some time or other, in some place or another, the volcano will break forth, and flame to heaven. You might as well try to cap Vesuvius, as keep this movement down, for in spite of all oppression, art will remain, as ever, revolutionary.

Finally, civil servants should remember that they have responsibilities as well as duties, and that the State is the servant and not the master of the public. True democracy is freedom for all, now and for ever.

J. E. RHIND, A.R.I.B.A., Dipl. Arch. (Aber.)

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¹ The Interlinear Bible, The Authorized Version, and the Revised Version. . . Cambridge . . . 1907. My references are to the Revised Version unless otherwise stated. Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine . . . curavit Eberhard Nestle, Stuttgart . . . 1912.

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