

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

Vol. LXI.—No. 41

Sunday, October 12, 1941

Price Threepence

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Christian Dilemma

THE devout Christian of about two hundred years ago had, comparatively, a very easy time. There were many enemies of his creed about, but if he was not always able to disprove, even to his own satisfaction, the Freethinker's arguments, he could make himself quite at home with his opinions. True the sun no longer circled round the earth and the earth itself was no longer the centre of the universe, but these beliefs were associated with the Roman Church, and the "whore of Babylon" (a Protestant phrase) had to bear the responsibility for them. But the main Christian beliefs were still there, apparently not seriously affected by the Copernican revolution. The Bible was still the very word of very God, geologists had not then demonstrated the immense antiquity of the earth, scientific anthropology and evolution were unborn, or at least were only whispered here and there. The situation was not definite enough to banish the belief in spirits; Christians were quite confident about an eternal hell and a pantomimic heaven. Freethinkers were not unknown, but they were not known sufficiently to disturb the theory that they were unbelievers because they wanted an excuse for being scoundrels. At any rate, they were nearly all converted on their death-beds. The few exceptions died shrieking for Christ to save them. The situation was religiously healthy.

Then change after change took place. Presently, men of science were not expected to say that they found God in the course of their researches; it was enough if they professed to find him outside their laboratory door, and gave him a friendly nod of recognition.

Worst of all, the Freethinker who used religion as a cover for vile living became scarcer and scarcer. There were too many of them; they were too well known to be pictured as moral monsters. The ancient lie was not completely discarded—the late Bishop of London stuck to it to the end. To do the majority of Christians justice, they were still inclined to retail this ancient myth, but fewer people were ready to believe it. To be quite just, we must admit that an evangelist will usually refrain from telling a lie—when he finds that his listeners will not swallow it.

Death of a Myth

Divested of the ancient lie that Freethinking and evil living are interchangeable terms, the Christian is not quite stranded. The foolishly subtle ones

explain that the Freethinker is not so bad as might be because he has the good fortune to derive—mainly—from a Christian ancestry and is living in a society in which the Christian tradition still operates. One can only conclude that earlier generations of Christians were of much finer stuff than are their contemporary descendants, if their delayed moral influence is able to keep society tolerably sound. It seems a pity that these earlier generations of Christians ever died—or that their representatives were ever born. The modern Christian reminds one of potatoes, the better part of which is underground.

Candidly, this theory of Freethinkers living on the moral capital of their Christian ancestors can delude only fools. But we are greatly surprised at finding a corrective to this Christian foolery provided in the "Catholic Times," and by its editor. It may be that the correction gives him the opportunity of having a dig at Protestants, but, whatever be the cause, Mr. Michael de la Bedoyere in the issue of his paper for September 19, says:—

Reports from both the Army and Air Force appear to establish the fact that, with the exception of Catholics and a very small minority of non-Catholics, religion as a serious factor in life is dead among men and women between 20 and 30. And scarcely less disconcerting is the general impression that this generation, to all appearances, does quite well without religion . . . Yet no one would deny—despite the wartime lip-service that is paid to Christianity—that real belief in the dogmas and the moral teaching of revealed religion, probably even real belief in a personal God, has never been so weak.

One needs breathing time after that. We live in a Christian country, and one is not used to having an instalment of truth, where religion is concerned, scattered about in so reckless a manner. Of course, truth crushed to earth will rise again, but, for the sake of the peoples' nerves—already harassed by the war—it should not get up in such a devil of a hurry. I am quite sure that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and those bishops and parsons who perform before the B.B.C. microphone will view Mr. de la Bedoyere's statement with the greatest disapproval. And when they are in the midst of their "collar the kids" campaign, the chief plank of which is that without Christian teaching the young generation will grow up hooligans! Mr. de la Bedoyere does say that it is "disconcerting" to find that the younger generation is as well off without religion as they would be with it, but that "disconcerting" will not save him. He will be treated by other Christians as an Atheistic fifth columnist who has become editor of a religious newspaper.

This suspicion will be confirmed by the way in which Mr. de la Bedoyere "rubs it in." He rebukes his fellow Christians for the twenty years' lusty lying in which they have indulged with regard to Russia. He says:—

Because Russia is godless and bolshevik, Christians and others expected that she would crumble in any severe moral test. In fact she has not, and the conclusion is drawn that she could not have been as irreligious as she was

painted. But this does not follow. What we have to recognise rather is that the newly imposed morality in Russia does work in the sense that under it certain virtues are enabled to flourish in the supreme hour of trial.

He goes even further, and says that while this new generation does not accept religion, "they are capable of the great natural virtues of self-sacrifice, love of their neighbour, courage, charity, and so on." This was, of course, very wrong on the part of Russia, and I somehow feel that our Christian leaders will have a deeper dislike (it cannot be expressed during the war, but we must be prepared for it afterwards) for the better Russia than they had for the worse. The bad Russia was living up to the character the Churches, and others, had provided for it. It filled the Christian bill. But this Russia pictured by Mr. de la Bedoyere simply will not do. The great problem will be for Christian leaders, after the war, to revive the old state of mind. One may rest convinced that they will have a very hard try to do so, whether they succeed or not. Old habits and vested interests will work together for a revival of the Russia that the war has dissipated.

What Is Left?

So far Mr. de la Bedoyere might have been writing an article for the "Freethinker." He has said only what to a Freethinker is obvious. He is telling the truth in a way that in Christian literature is unprecedented and (Christianly) unwarranted. He must, even in lashing Protestants, reserve something for his own Church; but he touches Christian ground, not very convincingly, when he says that Christianity must deal with individual souls. But how? That is not clear, although it is plain that man is so much of a social animal that just as a desirable human individual can only be developed in a society, so society in turn is benefited by the individual. Actually in any scientific study of man the two are inseparable. Mr. de la Bedoyere tells us that for the last 50 years the Papacy has emphasised "the social, political and economic evils of secularism." And then what? Why, of course, we must believe in "the importance of a social return to Christianity." That is, Mr. de la Bedoyere longs, as a good Catholic, although an unusually truthful one, for a State that is submissive to the Church. But there was a time when the Roman Church did overrule the State, and it was the utter breakdown of that rule which led to what is called the Reformation. That in its turn had to give way to a sounder secular conception of life. That the Roman Church will plot and plan for a return of the power it once possessed we do not doubt, but that it will fail we are quite certain.

One must remind Mr. de la Bedoyere that the avalanche of lying and misrepresentation concerning Russia, which he has partly exposed, was powerfully backed up by the Papacy. Other forces were at work, of course, but it remains true that the public hostility towards Russia was largely due to the Churches, Protestant and Catholic. Mr. de la Bedoyere admits that all the civic virtues may be expressed without religion. What is the use, then, of insisting that the social forces must be under the control of the Church? That was tried for centuries, but the attempts at a revitalisation of human society have always been signalled by a weakening of religious influences. It was when the European world was brought back to the influence of Greek and Roman culture that the social and moral life of Europe improved. The Protestant Reformation marked another development of humanism, not on account of its religious aspects, but because the very divisions of the Christian hordes, and the at least

theoretical independence of the State, made for a further and larger freedom. The great French Revolution marked another step, and with that there was the significant feature that the great appeal was to Greek and Roman ideals, not to Christian ones.

We are afraid that Mr. de la Bedoyere is flogging a dead horse when he works for the return of the Church to absolute power. Modern society may end in demoralisation, but I am certain it will not seek social salvation by bowing before the Roman representative of, in essence, the most primitive of superstitions. The world has had a taste of freedom of thought, of speech, and of movement, and that memory is not likely to be forgotten. It is something to hear from a Roman Catholic that the young men and women of to-day have not lost their courage, their sense of right and wrong, their readiness for sacrifice in a cause they deem worthy of it, and that religion holds few attractions for them. We Freethinkers knew that this would be so, that it always has been so. It is cheering to find that the force of facts, in spite of the lying campaign of some of our own leaders of religion, is recognised by one who still holds to his church. I think that, for the present, we will let the matter rest at that.

CHAPMAN COHEN

THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF MANKIND

THE story of the evolution of anthropological science from its initial stages to its modern stature is replete with interest. With his highly instructive and suggestive volume, "The Discovery of Man" (Hamish Hamilton, 12s. 6d.), Mr. Stanley Casson has provided his readers with a fairly comprehensive survey of the vicissitudes and triumphs of archæology. Most of the pioneers and workers in this fertile field are passed under review. Still, one regrets the omission of all mention of the scientifically minded poet Lucretius, and the absence of any recognition of the contributions of Reid Moir to archæological science. But doubtless the exigencies of space have precluded a fuller acknowledgment of antiquarian accomplishment.

The Land of the Nile yields the earliest evidence of the recognition of distinct human types; a recognition that became more marked as time sped on. For, as our author states, "on the reliefs of the Royal Tombs of the nineteenth Dynasty we encounter the first real classification of races. Here we find the four main racial types of mankind as the Egyptians themselves classified them. Semites, who are painted yellow and are supposed to represent the inhabitants of Asia; Negroes of Africa, painted black; Northerners or Europeans, shown white with blue eyes and fair beards; and the Egyptians themselves, who are painted red."

With all their advantages as traders and travellers, the Phœnicians apparently added nothing to the study of man. As in so many other fields, it was reserved to the Greeks to initiate serious inquiry concerning the various peoples whom they encountered. Herodotus appears as the real founder of anthropology, for he preserved and amplified the knowledge accumulated by the many unrecorded pioneers whose researches probably extended through two preceding centuries.

As Casson intimates, the Greeks were never menaced by religious dogma, as the later Christians were, and consequently there existed comparative freedom of thought. As early as the sixth century B.C. both Anaximander and Archelaus propounded evolutionary theories, as the appended passages prove. Anaximander opined that "Man was produced in the first instance from animals of a different sort . . . this is clear from the fact that the other animals soon get food for themselves while Man alone needs a long period of nursing. For this reason a creature of this sort could not possibly have survived." Archelaus contended that at a certain stage of the earth's history short-lived creatures subsisting on slime appeared. Subsequently, "inter-breeding occurred among them and men were separated off from the rest." This philosophical attitude is striking, and as Casson pertinently notes: "The emphasis on the fact that man is merely one of the animals implies

a freedom of thought and a depth of sincerity which was not equalled again until the nineteenth century A.D."

Detractors have termed Herodotus the father of lies rather than the father of history. Modern discovery has, however, vindicated the accuracy of most of his recorded observations. Above all, this illustrious Greek was a fine humanist. Indeed, Casson claims him as the first historian who told his contemporaries: "You may speak scornfully of the barbarians . . . for not possessing the culture that you have. The world is a mosaic of strange peoples. We are told that man emerged from the animals and became just a better kind of animal than most. But Greeks are not the only men in the world. There are some who have not yet wholly emerged from the animal stage." It is, therefore, necessary to study these backward peoples so that the Greeks themselves may progress further and not become eclipsed by some rapidly advancing race who might disdain the Greeks, as they now scornfully contemplate the uncouth Scythian and other uncivilised communities.

With the decline and conquest of Greece and the downfall in its turn of its Pagan Roman supplanter, scientific stagnation became practically complete. As ancient culture was disregarded more and more, and the triumph of barbarism and religion eclipsed all interest in science, men's minds became chiefly concerned with the marvels and mysteries of theology. In the first instance, science was not openly assailed by the Church Fathers, and they merely ignored the acquisitions of their Pagan predecessors. This attitude of frigid indifference to the study and interpretation of Nature deadened all desire to understand her laws. As our author observes: "It was like a kindly and persuasive censorship which said in effect, 'Don't worry about what these old and respected scientists say; we have a system and a hypothesis which is based on other considerations altogether.' It was the first appearance in history of that dangerous and seductive sentiment which appeals to intellectual indolence and encourages lethargy. Here were convenient slogans that explained the complexities of Nature. You need not worry over the controversies of science. Revelation is more important, and curiosity as to the material world distracts you from the contemplation of the divine."

But when, after 1,000 years of mental darkness, science once more raised its head, this contemptuous attitude was replaced by a bitterly persecuting spirit. The science of the Saracens in Spain and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, with the subsequent wanderings of Greek scholars throughout Western Europe, stimulated the revival of humane studies. The writings of the Pagan Galen were the main sources of medical science in Christian Europe until the fifteenth century. Leonardo da Vinci and other pioneers conducted anatomical inquiries, but to the Fleming, Vesalius, we owe the most pronounced progress in the study of man's framework. Migrating to Italy, Vesalius became demonstrator in anatomy at Padua. Published in 1542, his work, "On the Construction of the Human Body," was based on original investigation; it discredited traditional doctrines and constituted the greatest contribution to anatomical science that had been produced since the days of Imperial Rome.

But the enterprising anatomist was soon assailed by the clericals. The Inquisition charged him with the crime of having actually dissected a human corpse. Vesalius had indeed conducted anatomical researches on an aristocrat's body, with the consent and approval of the deceased's relatives. But this plea was ignored. As Casson comments: "For here was a scientist deliberately laying hands on God's handiwork in order to lay its secrets bare! Vesalius was condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to one of banishment to the Holy Land." But, shortly after the anatomist's arrival at Jerusalem, he received the tidings of a probable pardon. So he decided to return to Italy, but the ship in which he sailed was wrecked and Vesalius was drowned. When a fate such as this could befall so eminent a scientist, one may infer that many able men were compelled by religious intolerance to refrain from the risks that attended all those who sought to spread human enlightenment.

Yet, despite sacerdotal antagonism, men struggled in the cause of truth until, in the eighteenth century, the era of reason dawned. Both born in 1707, Linnæus and Buffon proved important pioneers in the progress of science. The

Scandinavian scientist's "Systema Naturæ" appeared in 1735, and this remarkable work was widely read. Also, its revolutionary teachings practically escaped the censures of hidebound orthodoxy. Linnæus frankly included man within the ranks of the animal domain. As Casson states: "In his first edition, Man appears among the quadrupeds together with the ape and the sloth. In the tenth edition, the Primates include Man, apes, lemurs and bats." Man himself is classified under six distinct headings: homo sapiens, homo asiaticus and others. "Here," continues Casson, "was a shock indeed to those who believed him to be a special creation, cast in the image of the godhead."

Buffon's celebrated work on animals was also naturalistic. Linnæus and he laid solid foundations for the future labours of Darwin. The Roman Church was, however, still potent in France, however impotent in Sweden, and Buffon, a man of high social standing, was compelled to publicly disavow his evolutionary teachings. So late as 1751 this distinguished scientist was forced by the Sorbonne, the citadel of French obscurantism, to utter the following words: "I declare that I had no intention of contradicting the text of Scripture; that I most firmly believe all therein related about the Creation, both in order of time and matter of fact." And this humiliation must have been inflicted by those who were well aware that the recantation was insincere. So much for clerical morality!

Many antiquaries seem to have surmised that man's residence on earth was of longer duration than orthodox chronologists would admit. Cave discoveries and evidences of human handiwork recovered from river gravels and other sites accumulated. Then Father MacEney's researches in Kent's Cavern, near Torquay, led to the establishment of man's antiquity in Devonshire beyond all reasonable doubt. With MacEney became associated William Pengelly, and these bold investigators remained undaunted by the scornful incredulity of their critics. An inquiry into their claims was held in 1846, and MacEney and Pengelly, as everyone now admits, proved their case completely. Pengelly noted that at that time: "The scientific world told us that our statements were impossible, and we responded with the remark that we had not said they were possible—only that they were true."

The flint implements of Palæolithic man have long since been accepted as authentic by all who are qualified to judge. But earlier and wider artefacts have since come to light—the Eoliths or Stones of the Dawn of pre-Palæolithic times. For their discovery we are indebted to the painstaking industry of a Kentish villager, who devoted nearly all the time he could spare from his local retailer's business to the study of the antiquities and natural history of his neighbourhood. This amateur scientist, Benjamin Harrison, included Lyell, Robert Chambers and Gilbert White among his favourite authors. "Paine's Age of Reason," we read, "was given him by his brother, but his mother succeeded in burning it before he could read it."

Some conservative archæologists regarded, and still regard these dawn stones as purely physical products. But most authorities now accepted them as human artefacts; as the earliest and rudest implements of primitive man, found as they were in pre-Palæolithic strata.

Harrison's services to science were recognised by the Royal Society, and he was granted a Civil List Pension by the State. The Royal Society also purchased him an annuity, and he lived to the ripe age of 83, when he passed away in 1921.

T. F. PALMER

ST. LAZARUS AND THE LEPERS

THE other day I found myself in a group discussing the history of medicine. It was agreed that it was largely a history of religious obstructions to medical progress. Christian concepts of sin and disease, of pain and pestilence, as part of a divine plan with which it was heresy to interfere, had blocked the development of medicine and surgery initiated by Hippocrates until the hold of Christianity itself began to weaken in the nineteenth century. And even since then the rise of medicine to the status of a science has been opposed and frustrated by zealous Christians.

Among us was a liberal Christian, who admitted the truth of this judgment, but felt that Christians and scientists would collaborate for the general good in the future.

Besides, Christian influence on the prevention of disease had not been altogether evil in the past. Leprosy afforded an example. The monasteries stamped out leprosy from medieval Europe, and Christian effort is still mainly responsible for the control of this scourge of semi-civilisation.

The point is a good one for Freethinkers to examine. In 1313, Philip the Fair, a radical Eugenist, ordered the burning of all the lepers in France. The smell of roasting meat was eventually wafted up to heaven, and Christ and St. Lazarus stepped in to save the remaining lepers from the stake. The monasteries of the Saint who was once a beggar were set aside for their segregation. In them "Christ's poor," as the lepers were called, were virtually entombed alive, the burial service being read over them to solemnise their departure from the world of men. Occasionally they were allowed to creep out from these grim lazarettos to beg, but, in addition to wearing masks and distinguishing clothes, they had to carry a bell or rattle to give warning of their approach. The calculated savagery of these methods was effective. It freed western Europe from leprosy in three centuries. It also gave us an attitude indicated by the abusive connotations of the word "leper."

The traditional control of the leper problem by the Churches has continued, but ruthlessness has given way to benevolence. It provides moving stories of devotion and self-sacrifice, but hinders a radical and humane attack on the disease. In 1929 the Oswaldo Cruz Institute of Rio de Janeiro published a monumental survey of leprosy in 40 countries, by Dr. H. de Souza-Aranjo, which makes this abundantly clear, and for a typical example we can see how the system works in India. The avowed objects of the Leper Mission there are (1) to preach the gospel to lepers, (2) to soften their sufferings, and (3) to provide for their needs. The reward for these ministrations is suggested by Mr. F. Oldrieve in a book on "India's Lepers." He is "sure that Our Lord will smile upon such devotion to the needy ones for whom He cares so much." Sometimes Our Lord is so appreciative that he does more than smile. Mr. Oldrieve knows, for instance, one leprosarium where, medical aid being inadequate, "for many years progress of disease was stayed in answer to prayer."

What are the results of this approach? The leper population of India, reliably estimated at a million, has increased fourfold since 1921, though this period is noteworthy for the fruition of outstanding researches on leprosy, especially those by Sir Leonard Rogers and Sir F. Muir. Adequate segregation of this population is so far beyond the competency of the Leper Mission that only about 1 per cent. of it can be accommodated in the available leprosaria. The rest swell the ranks of India's 15,000,000 vagrants. Yet the sponsors of this pitiful charity will not tolerate anything so unchristian as sterilisation, which, with proper treatment and improvements in living conditions, would soon relieve India of this social liability.

The importance of sterilisation is implicitly recognised by the missions in their approval of segregation of the sexes, but as they must not interfere with those whom God has joined together, married lepers are allowed to propagate "on the express understanding that any children born to them shall be separated from their infected parents at the earliest possible age." Anxious on the one hand to control reproduction through celibacy, and on the other to avoid interference with the divinely united, it does not occur to them that the suppression of sexual needs can only increase the misery they want to alleviate, while the permission of marital relations without sterilisation sends up the incidence of the disease. Children do not inherit the disease, it is true, but they are more susceptible to it than adults. Sexual segregation would, therefore, be a defective measure even if all the lepers were under control. It is a ridiculous compromise with the hope offered by sterilisation when 99 per cent. of the lepers are free and sexually promiscuous.

This is the irony of missionary effort at its best. It enlarges the problem it seeks to alleviate. The good it does obscures the kind of work that should be done. Encouraged or "tactfully treated" by officials indifferent to their responsibilities, it stifles healthy criticism. It helps the Government to cover up a natural disposition to neglect the material ills of the people by expressing a hypocritical regard for their spiritual welfare. And a problem calling for the best efforts of a wise social system is left to the

intercession of St. Lazarus and the piety of old ladies addicted to good works. In short, the history of leprosy gives us an excellent illustration of the reactionary nature of Christian ameliorative agencies. The good they do blinds us to the evils that are left untouched. We Freethinkers should concern ourselves more with this fact.

CEDRIC DOVER

PUNISHMENT

CORPORAL punishment, to some children and adults, may be a necessity.

All the higher appeals having failed, physical pain—the lowest appeal that can be made—is often resorted to. Its effect, physiologically and mentally, is said to sanction its use.

Primitive peoples, children and dogs, when under mental treatment, respond in a very satisfactory way, but when subjected to corporal punishment, which lowers their characters, a similar result cannot be claimed. Yet they alike prefer corporal punishment—meaning to them the payment of a debt. After suffering payment of it, they feel free to transgress again. Mental treatment is disliked by all of them because of its interference with their way of living—their habits.

How much religion (superstition included) has had to do with fostering these deep-rooted habits who can tell us?

The part played by God in his early days, recorded in his more or less holy book, the Bible—a valuable book of reference—illustrates the ignominious part he played when instructing his peculiar people how to punish each other by a series of punishments, made to fit their many crimes.

Punishment is a vile thing, associated with a low phase of human development. That it was so closely associated with the God of a printed book—the Bible—need, however, create no surprise. With this God all things printable were possible! Punishment, in his day, was punishment pure and simple—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exod. xxi, 24). Nothing reformatory about it.

Out of many forms of punishment recorded in the Jewish Encyclopædia, I have selected the following 14:—

1. Unbelief: punishment for not hearkening unto, and for despising, God's statutes. (See Lev. xxvi., v. 14 to 39—"Oh thou art pitiless!")
2. Imprisonment: This was not always considered a punishment. Prisoners were put in ward, till the Lord declared the kind of punishment they had to undergo (Lev. xxiv. 12-14, and Num. xv. 34-35).
3. Hanging: Sometimes men were hung up alive and sometimes their dead carcasses were hung up (Josh. viii. 29; 2 Sam. xxi. 12).
4. Stoning: Putting to death by casting stones was very much in use among the Hebrews. It was inflicted for incest, bestiality, idolatry, blasphemy, or for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day (Num. xv. 36).
5. Fire: Inflicted for adultery (Gen. xxxviii. 24) and for the daughters of priests who waxed wanton (Lev. xxi. 9), or for a man who should marry a mother and her daughter (Lev. xx. 14).
6. The Sword, or Beheading: Decapitations seem plentiful (Gen. xl. 19; Judges ix. 5; 2 Kings x. 7; Matt. xiv. 10).
7. The Precipice, or throwing headlong from a rock: (2 Chron. xxv. 12).
8. To be torn to pieces by thorns, or under rows of sledges of iron (Judges viii. 16; 2 Sam. xii. 31).
9. The Saw, to be cut through the middle, to be sawn asunder (Heb. xi. 37).
10. To pluck out the eyes (Exod. xxi. 24; Judges xvi. 21; 2 Kings xxv. 7).
11. Witchcraft: Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live (Exod. xxii. 18).
12. To be put in prison and loaded with fetters (Gen. xxxix. 20; Judges xvi. 21).
13. Cutting off the hair of the guilty person (Neh. xiii. 25).
14. Cutting off the extremities of the feet and hands (Judges i. 5, 6, 7; 2 Sam. iv. 12).

That a God, made in the image of the savages he ruled, should have advocated the above forms of punishment is not at all remarkable.

But whether the foundation of all the horrors that have beset man for so many centuries can be credited to God or man, or not, there can be no denying that foundation to have been well and truly laid by religion.

Into whatsoever period of history we choose to enter we find punishments excessive if religion is well established. Even in modern times, e.g.: Two hundred offences for which a man might be hanged; for stealing 5s. the bodies of men were left for hours on the gallows as a warning; for stealing a pheasant, or a pocket handkerchief, seven years' transportation; landowners had spring-guns and man-traps in use; flogging of women and death on the gallows for shoplifting to the value of 5s.; under the gibbet law of Halifax a felon caught with cloth, or other goods to the value of 1s. 1½d., was taken to the gibbet and had his head struck off from his body; at Jedburgh, Scotland, they improved on Halifax, prisoners being hung before being tried—Jeddart justice!

England, during the above expression (not two centuries ago) of her humaneness, we are told, "remained intensely religious."

Severity of punishment did not prevent crime, but the religious world remained unconvinced. Their plea that God had placed in the breast of every man his oracle—a conscience—the which if followed he could do no wrong, and that the only way to awaken his sleeping conscience was by severity of punishment.

But, fortunately, God occasionally sleeps, goes a-hunting, etc. Then men appear: Sir Samuel Romilly Macintosh, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and others showed how by secular reform criminals could be made fellow citizens and brothers. That human fellowship could work miracles.

They realised that our absurd social conditions created our criminals. That property and drink accounted for nine-tenths of present-day crime. That one of the very first and most practical things to do, is to turn our prisons into industrial asylums, for cures merely. The whole idea of retributive punishment must be given up, and society must only seclude the criminal for a time, fitting him for a healthy industrial life as a citizen.

Briefly, I have stated a case which I think shows, if any progress is to be made, that religion and revenge must be repudiated and quickly replaced by Secularism and Sanity.

GEORGE WALLACE

ACID DROPS

WE do not know who the Rev. W. P. Witcutt is, but if his parents had reversed the two syllables which make up his name it would fit the man. For his wit (we are using this last syllable in the Elizabethan sense of wisdom) has been cut very fine. He has discovered that the modern Atheist is a parasite on Christianity. To begin with, he decides that had the Atheist not had Christian ancestors he would be a different man. That somehow sounds self-evident. If we had each been born elsewhere than where we were born, and our parents other than the two who were responsible for our being here, it strikes us that we should all have been different from what we are. It is even true of Mr. Witcutt. With different parents he would not be what he is. That is, he might have been better than he is. We do not wish to cast any aspersion on his parents. It may be that they deserved the kind of son they have, or that fate was hard on them. We do not know.

So Mr. Witcutt discovers that "had it not been for his Christian ancestors your Atheist would be a different man." But while we agree with him in the saying, we are afraid neither he nor the "Catholic Herald," in which he writes, will thank us for the agreement. For we have noticed that many Atheists still carry about with them mental habits which play the same part in mental life that rudimentary structures play in animal and human organisms. They are reminiscent of an earlier, a less developed, stage of social life. We recognise these as lapses from modern thought, adulterations of the better mentality of to-day. That does make us regret that we are all descended from religious forefathers. But we have to make the best of the situation, and shoulder with courage the burden the religious past has placed upon us. We are afraid that

Mr. Witcutt will hardly appreciate this philosophy, but we have done our best to make it plain.

What we really object to is the word "parasite." That is, of course, taking the situation into consideration, insolence, and it is intended to be insolence, for when ignorance and self-interest combine, insolence is a natural product. A more intelligent man, and a less crafty one, would have been so conscious of the inevitable retort that he would have refrained putting a weapon in the hands of his opponent.

For the truthful retort is that the parasitism is all on the other side. The Christianity of to-day is not the Christianity of a century ago, that of a century ago is not that of a century before that. Even the Roman Church, which comes before the world with the lying declaration that it is the same yesterday and for ever, is compelled to change both its tone and its teaching. To-day, the Churches—all of them—are forced to modify their doctrines. It is true that the Roman Church has not surrendered many of the brutal and the more foolish of its teachings, but it has toned them down when dealing with non-Catholics.

To put the matter in a nutshell, the Churches have become partly civilised in spite of themselves. The modern educated Christian, if he were faced with the Christianity of, say, two or three generations ago, would repudiate it without the slightest hesitation. But the Christianity of to-day is one that has had to go through the fire of modern thought and more civilised feeling, with the result that the Christianity he is offered is not that of his forefathers. It has been purified by the fires of science and freethinking. The Christian is actually a parasite on Freethought. We thank Mr. Witcutt for the word. But if his wit had not been cut to such a frightful extent, we suspect that he would have had the wit to cut that word "parasite" out of his article. But perhaps he knows the audience for which he is writing. At any rate, ignorant vindictiveness brings its own Nemesis.

Oh, the impudence of it! A resolution was carried at a meeting of the Conservative Central Council, asking the Government to "include in every school such religious training as shall be acceptable to all denominations." That is a very modest request, but the only plan with which all denominations would be satisfied would be a blank form with the freedom of each denomination to fill it as it suited each of them. And if that were done, the religious lesson would easily take up the whole of the day.

But it is the reason given for it that is most striking. Religious instruction is to be given "so that future citizens whose characters have been firmly moulded in principles of truth and justice may help to build a new and better world." Of course, the introduction of the word "help" does faintly suggest that those whose characters have not been moulded by religion may play a part. But the impudent connection of religion contributing to truth and justice stands well out. Whatever truth and justice is associated with, modern religion has been forced on it after a devil of a fight.

Undismayed by the disasters that have followed our days of national prayer, the Archbishop of Canterbury has arranged—this time openly on his own—October 26 a day of prayer among Church people for the promotion of religious education. The "Collar-the-Kids" campaign cannot be going as well as the parsonry calculated.

That very Christian man, Lord Reith, who, when in charge of the B.B.C., asked each applicant for a post whether they believed in Jesus Christ, believes, according to Dr. J. F. Norris, that "this war is a judgment of God." Now we understand why each day of prayer has been followed by some disaster. The war is not caused by Hitler—God is just using Hitler! The war comes from God! Lord Reith believes it is that. What a man to place in a position of prominence! ! And what good pals he must have in high places!

Can nothing be done to stop the B.B.C. putting before the microphone the man who makes the closing address to the children's hour? He usually gives a closing sermonette to the children; and that is very often an outrage on decency. One evening we listened to him asking children to confess to God any "sins" they had committed and to give them help not to sin again. Another evening he told them the story of the birth of Jesus, how he came down from heaven to be born in a stable "with oxen standing around," etc., all as though it was an occurrence as certain as the certified report of a modern law case. The speaker knows better, and is taking advantage of the assumed inability of children to detect the imposture. We wonder whether it ever dawns upon this speaker that adult listeners may regard him as just an ordinary exploiter of the inability of his listeners to criticise him. Surely he might find a more honourable method of getting a living.

Now, we call this kind of thing an outrage, because to teach children that they have "sinned" and are unable to stop themselves "sinning," is the vilest kind of teaching that can be given to anyone. It robs them of moral energy and initiative. And to repeat the Jesus legend as though it were literal history, a certified report of proceedings that could be submitted to a test as to its veracity, is little better than a deliberate lie. Something should be done to stop this exploiting of young children in the interests of the children. It is a mean and contemptible occupation. One can hardly be surprised that when the revolutionary Russian Government came to power they felt it imperative to prevent the sabotaging of children by ignorant priests. They would have listened with pleasure to the closing words of the B.B.C. children's hour. Perhaps they do.

The Rev. D. A. Bartlett sees a revival of religion in the East End of London. We congratulate him. He is the only one we have heard of who has discovered such a phenomenon. He is surprised at the courage of the cockney, etc., etc. If that is the basis of which Mr. Bartlett builds his belief in a revival of religion, he must have had a poor understanding of the East-Enders. If he had not been a happy-go-lucky, good-natured animal, with any amount of fundamental courage in facing adversity, he would have been in a constant state of revolt. Anyway, the only piece of evidence Mr. Bartlett produces (in the "Star" for September 25) is that in one dug-out, during a raid, the people sang very heartily, "Jesus Lover of My Soul." They would have responded just as well to "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road."

There are several interesting paragraphs in the Allerton Parish Church magazine for September. One is that Allerton Church people are well informed and there is no need to tell them that the Church is not in any way maintained by the State. Putting on one side the large sums of money that have been voted by Parliament (not of late years) for the benefit of the Church, one would think that freedom from rates and taxes is a very substantial gift by the State to the Church. It would at least be counted as such if the same favour were shown to others, for the rates and taxes which the Church does not pay must be paid by the rest of the community. And we presume that either a tithe is collected by the Church, or it has been commuted out of the public funds. In either case, it is the State that pays.

We get a little tired of this discovery that the East-Enders is quite human, and has a full stock of human responses to a given situation. It savours too much of the condescending attitude of ill-educated and unintelligent members of "Society." Perhaps it is due to the working man indulging in what is called "looking up to his betters." The condition of "looking down on" anyone is that one shall "look up." To look up to ethical or intellectual superiority does credit to the intelligence of both. To make the looking-up depend upon social status or wealth is the sign of a man asking for a kick and who deserves what he gets.

Another item is a warning that one must not contrast good pagans with bad Christians, but "the finest Christians are in a class by themselves." That is an evasion of the real issue, which is whether there is any good action performed that cannot, or is not, performed by non-Christians? And then comes the very old tale that non-Christians are affected by the "Christian tradition." That should mean a tradition that is peculiar to Christianity. So far as that refers to non-Christians, we hope the statement is not true that they follow the Christian tradition.

Finally, people are asked whether they are satisfied "with the state of affairs produced by enlightened paganism." That is mainly verbiage. But if enlightened paganism means non-Christian views of life, then we say without hesitation that there is not a vital social reform that does not have its roots outside Christianity. The Church Magazine from which we are quoting is itself evidence of the pressure on the Churches that is effected by what is called enlightened paganism. It is a pity we cannot use in reply such a phrase as "enlightened Christianity." In sober truth, there is no such thing, for a Christian becomes enlightened only in proportion as he gets rid of this Christianity.

We knew it would come. Now that Lourdes is more or less closed to pilgrims, the other "shrines" to which pilgrims can go are vying with each other in attempts to find "cures" which would also surpass those of Lourdes. The cure now reported was at Loreto and, of course, was instantaneous. It is also guaranteed by the Vatican radio. The case is that of a girl who had had spinal trouble for two years, and who had twice visited Lourdes without success. One dip at Loreto settled the matter, and Lourdes should now go permanently out of business. It won't, however. In the matter of miraculous cures, Lourdes still leads, and with new and easily procurable other cures, it will always hold its own.

South Africa is also in this war to secure liberty. As a contribution to this, the Rev. J. de Vos is reported in the East London "Daily Dispatch" for August 18 as wishing to make attendance at church services compulsory. He says it is in the interests of the State to prevent people forgetting God. Really, nothing seems so easily lost as gods. Why do the Churches not have painted in large letters, "Whoever has lost a god will find him here. This is a repository for lost gods"? But Mr. de Vos is really liberty loving at heart, for he would allow people to go to whatever Church they please. Presumably, everyone would be provided with a card that has to be stamped by the preacher. Otherwise people might not go regularly. As Macbeth might have said: "If it be done, let it be done thoroughly."

The "Church Times" recently "went for" the B.B.C., but its ground of complaint was not that of its one-sidedness in religious matters. Apparently it is quite content with the monopoly of the microphone for popularising the Christian religion, and the careful exclusion of any criticism of its teachings and doctrine. What it finds fault with is the Church "washing its dirty linen in public." We need not say that the "washing" did not display any of the genuinely dirty linen, but very mild rebukes which pass off with certain unthinking people as an exhibition of fairness. The aims of the "Church Times" are quite plainly stated. The B.B.C. should confine itself to familiarising the people "with the truth of God as it is in Jesus embodied in the worship and life in the Church of England." The impudence of it is superb.

Meanwhile, the scandal of a national instrument being monopolised by one form of religion, with the boycott and the censorship, continues. It will do so until men whose names are well-known to the world publicly decline to take any part in such an imposture. Some have already shown their disgust by refusing to appear for the B.B.C., but their protest is not always made public. Their names should be compiled and kept before the public. The boycott and the censorship would soon be so plain that some sort of reform would have to be attempted.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. T. BRIGHTON.—Your communication came to hand too late for insertion in last week's issue. We congratulate you on the work you are doing, and the way in which you are doing it.

T. M. MONTAGUE.—"Take more rest" is advice much easier given than it is to act on. But we are taking all the care we can. We appreciate the good feeling, anyway.

F. J. CORINA.—Next week.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Mrs. H. Little, 3s.; M. Leendertz (South Africa), £1 3s.; N. S. Mundy (India), 20s.; F. S. B. Lawes, 6s. 6d.

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

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

TO-DAY (October 12) Mr. Cohen will visit Leicester and will speak on the subject, "Danger Ahead." He will deal with the present situation and offer some suggestion concerning the post-war period. The meeting will be held in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate. It is an afternoon meeting and the chair will be taken at 3 o'clock.

The West London Branch N.S.S. has decided to hold a series of indoor meetings during the winter months. The meetings are being held at 57, Warrington Crescent, W.9. at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on October 12, time for most visitors to get home before darkness sets in. The West London Branch has not permitted the war seriously to restrict its activities. Subject: "Religion in Soviet Russia."

Can we not revise our vocabulary when we are dealing with Russia? We have reached the point of discovering that even Russian Bolsheviks can be quite human and worthy of respect. It is quite true that not many of the clergy have reached that stage, but others have. One can hardly expect the more than twenty years' campaign of the Churches against "Atheistic Russia" completely to break down in four months. Even now the chief ground of many for recognising that Russia is a great nation is the usual one—the Russians can fight well. But the Russians, we believe, have a conviction that the worst use to which mankind can put his energies is that of going to war. In this they resemble the Chinese.

But what we have in mind is the constant repetition of such expressions as "We will give Russia every assistance," "We will make sacrifices for Russia," as though we should be doing what we are if we were not threatened by the same enemy as threatens Russia. So we suggest that we revise our language to the extent of making it quite plain that we are joining in a fight with a common enemy, and we have as much grounds for thanking Russia for their "sacrifice" for us as they have for thanking us for sacrifice for them. War-time does not encourage truth in any direction, but in this case we might make a stand for the realistic facing of the war situation. Russia, of course, did not desire to help us any more than we desired to help her. All the same, let us be as honest as we can in a situation where some degree of honesty is possible. Meanwhile, we may note the low level which looks upon doing what is necessary to secure decency of life a "sacrifice."

Mr. Shelton Schofield, who writes in the "Yorkshire Evening News" for September 17, says that he has, during the present Russian régime, "attended Easter services both at the Old and New Cathedral in Moscow, amid crowds bearing tapers and crying, 'Christ is Risen!' And when I was living in a flat in the Arbat quarter I saw the church in my street crammed to the doors of SS. Peter and Paul. The police did not interfere with them, though a few young Communists jeered. It was clear that even then anyone who wished could worship." But this was the Russia that the Christian papers and the Christian preachers presented to a gullible public as having closed all the Churches, murdered the priests and forbidden religious worship! That story was enough to make one believe that this really is a Christian country, instead of just a country in which Christians are in power.

Rev. (Lieut.-Colonel) Preece has returned to his native place, Manchester, after many years of adventurous travel. For two years he fought with the White Army against the Bolsheviks, and is full of admiration for the Russians. He has a very high opinion of Bolshevik efficiency, and, of the women of Russia, he says, as reported in the "Manchester Evening News" for September 29, "they are the most magnificent I have ever met." He says also:—

"Russia is not, and has never been, a Godless country. They are deeply religious, and their churches are crowded every Sunday."

Well, no one but fools ever considered the Russian people as non-religious. One hundred and sixty millions of people, the overwhelming majority of which were unable to read or write, and were plunged in the grossest superstitions, would hardly become suddenly avowed Atheists with a change of government. In this respect some non-religious folk in this country lost their heads and spoke as wildly as any Christian evangelist on the warpath.

But the one thing that is worth noting is that, in the main, the movement that has rescued Russia from the barbarity of the rule of Czardom and of the admittedly corrupt priesthood was overwhelmingly Freethinking in character. One is therefore justified in saying that, whatever be the faults the Freethinking rulers of Russia have created in the course of a single generation, an improvement on the then existing conditions that no other country in the world has yet equalled. That is really its great offence in the eyes of our own Churches.

SOME WAR BOOKS

"For What Do We Fight?" (Norman Angell, 1939; Hamish Hamilton).

ONE can only read Angell against the background of his masterpiece, "The Great Illusion." A host of his admirers will claim that the case he put forward, namely, that under modern conditions, war and territorial expansion do not compensate the victor, has never been satisfactorily answered. In the light of current events he maintains, in the book now under notice, that those who have been pacifists must reconsider their case. Non-resistance (e.g., by Jews, Czechs and Danes) is no guarantee against aggression. Non-resisters, he says, have simply been trampled on. The war he regards as justified on our part, not because our defeat would do Germany any good, but because a Nazi victory would make conditions worse for all mankind. To come to terms with Hitler, he contends, is useless; first, because his signature is worthless and, secondly, because the return of German colonies would not prevent war: at least, it did not prevent war in 1914, when Germany had them. Angell's advice is that, given the victory, we should not again let retaliation swamp common sense; and we should not leave the conditions for a third world war. He sees the sources of Hitler's power as (1) the political incapacity of his followers, and (2) the failure of his political opponents to form a common front. He suggests that the Empire should be used as a nucleus for a community of peoples, and that neutrals should be attracted into it on an equal footing.

"Why We Fight; Labour's Case" (Arthur Greenwood, 1940; Routledge).

Written before the French capitulation, some of the contentions of this book look rather silly. That France, as a democratic country, could come to terms with Germany against Russia he regards as fantastic and impossible. We have here that stupidly complacent reliance on outward democratic form and appearance. Again, Greenwood gives firm support to Finland in its war against Russia, and speaks of the "perfidy of Stalin." He supports Finland because, he says, it is democratic. At about the same time, the Communist Party and the Russia To-day Society were contending that Finland was semi-Fascist—and how right they have proved in the light of subsequent events. We see in Finland to-day a State given over to Nazi control, and this without the excuse of geographical compulsion, with Mannerheim to be classed with Franco and Petain. Communist literature (e.g., the pamphlet "Finland—the Facts," 1940) presented us with a much more reliable picture of Finland, but perhaps Mr. Greenwood, being only a Cabinet Minister, should not be expected to analyse things properly. There is no attempt at analysis in his book. He simply traces the rise of Hitlerism, drawing on Miss Lorimer's "What Hitler Wants" for the facts, points out some reforms which his Labour Party has effected, including, I imagine, some which he hopes they have effected, and some which he hopes are reforms, and presents us with a wordy tirade against Hitler, the man and his methods. Mr. Greenwood is extremely annoyed with Hitler, and makes this very clear. I close the book much impressed with the wickedness of Hitler and with the honesty and incompetence of Mr. Greenwood. We should rid ourselves of any notion that complacent ineffectiveness was a characteristic only of the Tories who surrounded Chamberlain, "the best man for the job," as Mr. Ernest Thurtle, Labour's Rationalist M.P., called him, to our eternal merriment.

"War by Revolution" (F. Williams, 1940; Routledge).

The author sees the war, not as nation versus nation, but as Nazism versus the oppressed, and he hopes that the springs of revolution can be set going over all Europe. While not discounting this possibility—nay, probability—it will appear to many of us that such a movement could best be set going by some important and tangible success gained by Britain and Russia.

"School for Barbarians" (Erika Mann, 1939; Lindsey Drummond).

Erika Mann is the daughter of Thomas Mann, the exiled German anti-Nazi, author of "The Coming Victory for Democracy" (1938), etc. Her book abounds with first-hand personal experiences of Nazi-controlled education, including the reproduction of a school time-table, in which every subject is infused with Nazi propaganda. The German youth of 13 or 14 has never known anything other than Nazi teaching, and is taught to pass it on to his parents, and to betray them to his teachers if they do not accept it, for he belongs first to the State—as, in fact, does every German. The following story seems worth reproducing:—

The head of the German family comes home, but there is no one in. But there is a note on the table, which reads, "Am gone to a meeting of the National Socialist Women's Union. Will be home late.—Mother." He writes on another note: "Going to a party meeting. Will be back late.—Father." The next in is the son, who leaves a further note: "Night target-practice, Hitler Youth. Heil Hitler!—Fritz." Finally, Hilda, the daughter, arrives, and writes: "Must go to a meeting of the League of German Girls. Heil Hitler!—Hilda."

At two in the morning the family return to their apartment, which has been bared considerably, everything movable having been stolen.

There is, however, a fifth note on the table: "We thank our Fuehrer. Heil Hitler!—The Gang."

G. H. TAYLOR

THE "BEAUTY" OF NATURE

THE vicar leaned forward in his railway seat and remarked, "A lovely day, young man, and one which makes you realise the infinite goodness of God." I smilingly assented to the first part of his observation, but ventured to suggest that, although the countryside was looking at its best, I

did not see how it proved the goodness of God, as there was another side of Nature which was as savage as the side which we were admiring was beautiful. Out of curiosity I asked him if he had ever read the books "God and My Neighbour" and "The Churches and Modern Thought," in which the respective authors have chapters devoted to showing how Nature is cruel as well as lovely. "No," he replied, "I have not time to read out-of-date, blasphemous books, which have been refuted by modern knowledge."

At this juncture of our conversation I reached my destination, and left him to his contemplations, and would have forgotten him if the same night I had not happened to have come across a chapter in a new book by the well-known naturalist, Fraser Darling, entitled "Wild Country." This book cannot be condemned as either out-of-date or blasphemous by the most bigoted cleric, and part of it bears out what Blatchford and Phelps were writing years ago.

The relevant passages are of such interest that they deserve repetition:—

"One of the grimmest facts in Nature is the toll taken during their first winter of many young creatures which delighted us when they were babies. What guess would you make of the percentage of first-year mortality in many of the wild creatures with which we are familiar in Britain? Could you bring yourself to say 50 per cent.? I have studied the populations of several wild species, and for the slower-breeding ones this is the figure I estimate conservatively. The red deer of the Highland forests lose half their young each year. Colonies of gulls breeding in May, June and July lose more than half their young by the end of August. Small birds such as thrushes, blackbirds, tits and warblers lose many more than half their young; and animals low in the scale of life rear but a minute fraction of the numbers of eggs they lay."

Fraser Darling continues to tell of bodies he has found indescribably pestered by external parasites, and with masses of internal parasites inside their bodies, and describes the sight as "heart-breaking." He tells of the numbers of wild geese he has rescued when they are nearly dead from exhaustion, after struggling against the elements, and says: "These birds would be dead if I had not found them in time." This sentence reminds one of Blatchford's oft-quoted words, "Only Man tries to save."

The author states that this terrible loss of animal and bird life is less tragic because it removes weakly specimens from the struggle for existence. This is such a common statement that it merits consideration. God has been constantly represented as caring for even such humble members of his created family as the sparrows and lilies, and yet this care is not in evidence when the reproductive system he devised is examined. If a builder constructed a house with such little thought that when completed the building was found to have too many bricks in one part, and the only remedy was for the superfluous bricks to be removed and cast on a scrap-heap, then the builder would rightly be condemned for having done a bad piece of work, and not treated to an effusion of praise and thanks. If the builder would be treated thus, it is surely unfair to release the reputed Builder of this Earth from his responsibility in so devising the scheme of production that more creatures were made than necessary.

Just as behind the best parts of cities there are to be found dwellings full of squalor and distress, so Nature hides behind a superficially delightful front a rear of cruelty on a colossal scale. This is no new thought, for it was the theme of the sage who observed:—

"How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him,
And kite on both; and how the fish-hawk robbed
The fish-tiger of that which it had seized;
The shrike chasing the bulbul, which did hunt
The jewelled butterflies; till everywhere
Each slew a slayer, and in turn was slain,
Life living upon death. So the fair show
Veiled one vast, savage, grim conspiracy
Of mutual murder, from the worm to man,
Who himself kills his fellow."

This rising scale of murder would never have been necessary if God had devised a scheme of digestion which would have enabled these creatures to live on vegetation, instead of on the flesh of their lower brothers. The snake cannot

cat grass like the cow in the meadow; he is forced by circumstances to live by killing.

Mathew Arnold wrote in similar vein:—

"Nature is cruel; man is sick of blood:

Nature is stubborn; man would fain adore:

Nature is fickle; man hath need of rest:

Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;

Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest."

If the clergy would only read more "blasphemous" and fewer eulogistic works, perhaps, although it seems too much to hope, they would realise the uselessness of holding on to positions which have been so successfully attacked by the armies of Free-thought that they crumbled to dust many years ago.

ANDREW GLENCOE

HALF-WAY HOUSE

PERHAPS at the age of 44, it is reasonable for a man to call an intellectual halt, take some sort of census of his own philosophy, lest he leaves it too late. With a normal anticipation of life, there should be a considerable number of years left in which to mature and modify his slowly crystallising personal illusions, or shake himself still looser on to the boundless and restless sea of modern thought, as the case may be. Let it be admitted, then, that at the above age I find myself drawn irresistibly, though often with many regrets, to the utter reasonableness of what is known as the materialistic point of view. With many jars and jolts, I have had to admit that on most abstract and many concrete subjects one is more likely to find in the pages of "The Freethinker," or the "Literary Guide," an acceptable exposition of controversial issues than in any other available source. Time and again have I searched libraries and intellectual journals, only to find what I have sought resolved and rounded off in one or other of these two journals in a manner which left me, if not fully satisfied, at least conscious of the fact that it was useless to continue further. And yet it is not enough. Whatever it is which prevents me from proclaiming myself a Rationalist and, still more, an *Atheist*, leaves me with the conviction that the most penetrating and convincing materialists leave far too much unsaid, and the mind still "in vacuo" on issues outside the realm of the purest reason:

I am well aware of the subtle subconscious influence of a traditional upbringing, and of the utterly unreliable evidence of intuition or unreasoned convictions. And had it been only in respect of these things, I might have already found it possible to accept modern materialism. But it is not only this. Materialism of the Chapman Cohen brand, though superbly reasonable, leaves many identifiable mysteries totally unsolved. It seems to me that a materialism based on the most modern science, stands condemned by science itself. If one accepts, for instance, the monism of body and mind—and this now seems almost irrefutable—one can only accept it on the basis of "material" known to physicists only by function or "pointer readings," as Eddington put it. This leaves the whole question of underlying reality untouched, and a wide-open door to speculation in any direction suggested by evidence as worthy of further study. Herein, it seems, lies the danger—for instance—of refusing complete investigation to the few—very few—genuine, unexplained psychic phenomena.

It is also admitted that we as yet know nothing regarding the true nature of Time. Is it, therefore, intellectually permissible to reject any evidence by which it might be shown that popular conceptions of time and its relation to consciousness are not what they at first appear.

Although a Freethinker at the time (1937), I myself spent many months disproving the amazing allegations of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, at Versailles ("The Mystery of Versailles"—Rider), rather than dismiss the whole story as impossible. An out-of-hand denial of such well-attested evidence would have been presumptuous in the light of Relativity.

I have never, for instance, read or heard of any satisfactory materialistic explanation of the capacity to write poetry or compose music, which seem to embody something in Nature quite beyond physics or the sciences of acoustics and rhythm.

I think also that the reluctance on the part of so many

writers to call themselves *Atheists* is not purely based on prejudice. Though it must be clear to all reasonable people that the personal God of the many current religions cannot possibly exist, it is as reasonable to assume that at some remote time in the past, a Creator gave the Universe an initial start, as that it sprang into being spontaneously. I admit this only shifts the mystery one unit backwards, and still leaves it a mystery, but to some minds it is rather less of an impossible mystery in that form than the former, which is at least something gained. But such reasoning is a far cry from the mentality of anyone who could ever be foolish enough to kneel down and pray for rain!

Thus, at the age of 44, I find myself an uncompromising Freethinker, though I would hesitate to adopt the term Rationalist, in view of its nineteenth century implications. Whilst "Atheist" is too dogmatic unless used in the special sense of the denial of traditional Gods.

J. R. STURGE-WHITING

LUCKY DOGS

THERE is nothing original in what is commonly termed human nature. Our vices and our virtues are not human in origin. They begin and operate in the animal kingdom, and the human race has inherited and developed them.

Some members of *Homo Sapiens*, and most intelligent animals, would, no doubt, feel indignant with the assertion, from their respective viewpoints, but the judgment from evolution is against both.

Visiting a dogs' home recently I received a very unfriendly greeting from a little black, wire-haired bitch in one of the cages. She barked at me viciously, snarled, and showed her teeth. I was annoyed at such a bad-tempered display, and felt it was perhaps best for both that a partition separated us. Glancing to a far corner of the cage I saw three very small, young pups. The explanation of the unfriendly greeting instantly became clear, and my annoyance gave way to real affection for that grand little mother guarding her precious litter. Humanity did not teach her that act of devotion, nor was the human race the first to practice such acts. Lucky little dog defending her pups. She would escape the threat of one sinister danger common to the human parent. There are no canine priests, plotting and planning the capture of puppy brains and scheming for an easy tithe of bones and biscuits in exchange for the promise of countless lamp-posts in a canine heaven—after the final visit to the vet.

Whilst human parents are ever alert and eager to protect their young from dangers, real and imagined, they appear to be innocent or indifferent to a real danger threatening their young. In spite of the black record of Christianity and the Churches, the havoc wrought in social and intellectual life and upon individual character, with some exceptions, parents are quite willing to surrender their children to the priest and his religion, and lend their support for extending the power of both. The moral welfare of the child is the bait prepared by the clergy, but the bait conceals a priestly hook calculated to land more customers into the sales department of the Churches.

The Churches show small concern for the moral welfare of children withdrawn from religious instruction in the nation's schools, or of those not sent to Sunday schools. When schools were closed owing to air raids and tens of thousands of children were without education, the Churches were only nery about the loss of religious instruction. In the nineteenth century there were schools in this country in which, to quote one instance, 25 children were packed into a room of 15ft. by 7ft., without seats, and a floor which was wet and dirty. In another instance a room with a capacity for 23, contained 82 boys and girls of different ages; there were no seats, books or apparatus, the teacher was an aged man whose chief item in his syllabus was a cane. Other instances might be quoted, but such conditions were not only possible but were permitted in a land infested with Churches and clergymen. The Church's interest in education was epitomised by the Archbishop of York, who, in 1920, wrote that it was useless to attempt to settle the education difficulty in the schools unless local education authorities were willing to show they were not less, but more concerned with the teaching of religion in the schools than with the teaching of secular education. So long as children can be made to believe that Jesus died for them,

and to realise they must not commit adultery, or covet their neighbour's wife, nothing else in education matters much to the Churches.

Unfortunately, 21 years after the Archbishop's comment, there are signs that some local education authorities are ready to surrender to the Church's dictates. Hitherto, religious instruction in the nation's schools has been given by the teachers, the clergy being kept on the street side of the doorstep with little prospect of getting closer. But a ghastly war, with parents and children separated, domestic life disorganised, social life on a war footing, the education system out of gear, and the energy of the country conscripted for the war machine, was too good an opportunity for dirty work for the Church to miss. A rush campaign for religious control in the schools was organised, with few exceptions the Press of the country is backing the plot, some members of Parliament have already testified their willingness to help, others will follow if it becomes safe, a number of local educational authorities are agreeable, many teachers are submissive, but many more would resist the clergy if doing so did not jeopardise promotion in their profession. The parents are not consulted, and the children do not count; so, under the disguise of the moral welfare of the children, the Churches are leaving nothing to chance, in the hope that a piece of shameless Christian infamy shall be the first brick in building a new clerical-controlled Britain after the war.

R. H. ROSETTI

SPEECH

UNTIL the day before yesterday, comparatively speaking, we believed—because we were taught to believe—that speech was a gift from God, and that a confusion of tongues occurred at the Tower of Babel precisely as recorded in Genesis. But to-day we know better. We know better because science has established beyond any shadow of doubt that speech, like everything else on this planet, began in a crude sort of way a very long time ago and has reached its present stage of development—imperfect though it is even now—through ages of trial and error. It has evolved, in other words, during very many centuries.

The machinery, so to speak, whereby this development took place is very well explained by Mark Graubard in his "Man the Slave and Master." After explaining the process of evolution and the coming of man, he says: "The fore-brain, or cerebrum, which reaches its highest development in man, is concerned chiefly with memory, control of all conscious movements, reception of sensations and relaying of responses: it is the seat of thought, emotion, intelligence and learning."

"From the point of view of behaviour, the associative areas of the forebrain are its most interesting and significant parts. Ordinarily, incoming nerve fibres do not directly connect in the brain with outgoing motor fibres. Such connection does indeed exist in lower animals, but in higher mammals, especially man, this is not the case. In the middle of the forebrain is a large area which produces no motor responses nor elicits sensations, but consists entirely of associative areas and is filled with neurons acting as connective fibres or bridges between sensory and motor nerves. This region, associated with what we call intelligence, memory and learning, is large in animals that possess these attributes. It forms the plastic part of the nervous system, the raw material for the formation of habits, behaviour patterns and psychological responses. Experience leaves its traces upon it, education moulds it."

"Whatever an individual's capacities, the association area is a blank at birth. Intercepted environmental events—that is, experience—carve paths through it and fashion it with repetition. On the other hand, habit seems to harden the routes once they are laid down."

And Joseph McCabe, in an illuminating paragraph (in his "Inferiority Complex Eliminated") tells us what happened when this machinery, as we have called it, got going. He says: "Primitive man remained what we may call a hand-and-eye animal during millions of years. His cortex enabled him to blend the different aspects of an object (sight, touch, smile, sound and taste) in a percept of the object as a whole; but he had, like the very lowest animals to-day, no abstract ideas. He perceived and reacted to things and to the images (in the psychological meaning of

the word) of things that were registered in his brain. With the development of a large social life, which seems, from the remains, to have been about 50,000 years ago, he slowly developed speech and made more rapid advance. His language would be like the language of the lowest races to-day, a collection of concrete names of things and of simple acts or movements, but the pressure of social life and the advance of intelligence steadily improved it."

If we study our own upbringing we can satisfy ourselves as to the truth of all this. We know, for example, that that part of our brain which Mark Graubard calls the "association area" was, as he says, "blank at birth," and that "intercepted environmental events—that is, experience—carved paths through it and fashioned it with repetition." In other words, as new-born babes we knew nothing, but repeated experience carved paths in and through our nervous system to the "association area" of our brain until we know and say what we do as grown-up human beings. Early man had somewhat similar experiences—differing only by reason of the age in which he lived and his environment—with precisely the same results. He was what he was by virtue of his birth and upbringing—using that word in its widest possible sense—just as we are to-day. And between that very early period in man's history and this there has, naturally, been a very great deal of groping in the dark, resulting in education by experience and a gradual improvement in the art of verbal expression and communication.

We have only to examine our language to be assured of our dependence upon the past and those with whom we came into contact, especially during our early years when we were young and impressionable, to teach us what to say and how to say it. At first we were dependent upon our parents, from whom we received our first lessons. We gurgled and smiled, pursed our lips and made funny little noises, in an endeavour to say something, and we went on trying until at long last we succeeded in repeating what (say) our mother had been trying for so long to get us to say. Repetition did the trick and, finally, we "spoke!" And from then onwards, for the rest of our lives, though we scarcely noticed it, we went on imitating someone. During our childhood we continued to receive impressions from our parents and countless others, and we learned new words and tricks of speech from them; yes, we copied them far more exactly than we realised at the time—not only the words which they used, but often enough their very mannerisms as well—and we remain copyists all our lives. Even our violence of expression and our emotional reactions can, occasionally, be traced back to their original source. . . . The cave-man is not yet dead and buried, but lives on in and through us! A little quiet thought will soon convince us of this and, perhaps, cause us some confusion.

As any dictionary makes clear, our language is a mixture of many "foreign" languages—including French, German, Dutch and Scandinavian—and is a vital, living thing—a fact which it is desirable to remember. It makes for better understanding to bear in mind that the words which we employ are but symbols collected together from near and far, that many of them were invented centuries ago—long before science came to our aid—and not a few of them are now out of date, if not actual encumbrances.

If we use our imagination we can visualise what happened many thousands of years ago, even before speech was invented: first, there were merely grunts to indicate satisfaction (just as—let us be frank about it—just as we grunt to-day for the same purpose!), or there were growls of dissatisfaction (somewhat like our own!), and so on, and these crude noises were understood in a vague sort of way by the other animals who reacted—as we do, too!—to them. Whence come our grunts and growls and many other animal characteristics if not from our animal ancestry? They are not throw-backs, but hang-overs—evidences of our origin. But when the ape-man made his appearance and intelligence dawned, the eyes and the ears, the lips and the tongue of the slightly superior—that is, socially-improved—creature combined, and the noises emitted by his mouth had a more definite meaning; "words" of a kind were formed and used for the first time. We already know what happened after that: as the ape-man evolved into man, and man himself improved, so did his speech. As we have seen, it was perfectly natural that, as a result of his becoming a more intelligent and sensitive creature—sensitive, that is, to his

total environment—man's nervous system should respond more readily as time went on, until he became the thinking and communicative—i.e., talking—creature that he is to-day.

In a word: instead of speech being a gift of God, it is but an instrument—a means—of communication with his fellow-creatures which man has developed while he himself has evolved—quite unintentionally at first, but intentionally later—and it is still in the process of development and refinement.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN

CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—In "Radio Times," September 20, 1941, under the title of "We asked the Brain Trust," Prof. C. E. M. Joad is reported as having said: "I want to know, not so much how the Universe works, but why it works as it does—and that we simply do not know. It is precisely because the important truths are not known that the progress of science is accompanied by the retrogression of man." Incidentally, it may be noted in the article, as before the microphone, the professor is given the longest say. Also, how nicely his remarks fit in with the obscurantist policy of the B.B.C. in such matters. Surely the explanation given by scientists of how the Universe works should be sufficient without the *why*! As to the "slipping back" of mankind being in unison with the advance of science, Reith himself couldn't have said better.

Professor Haldane seems to have withdrawn from the "Trust." We wonder why. "Censoritis"?—Yours, etc.,
C. F. BUDGE.

[We believe that Professor Haldane is not a member of the "Brains Trust."—ED.]

THE FUTURE OF FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—Your contributor, "S. H.," suggests that critics of Freethought are not without reason in stating that the destruction of religious beliefs leaves a "mental vacuum," or, in other words, that most people have "religious leanings." "S. H." also says that the fact that no Freethinker "of the older school" smote him when he raised these points in a former article leads him to believe that the cause (of Freethought) is not in quite as healthy a condition as might, on the surface, seem to exist. But what is a Freethinker of the "older school"? Boy, fetch me a bow and arrow and let me hold the fort until the heavy guns move up! "S. H." takes everything for granted and bases his arguments on assumptions. What is this "natural or supernatural object" that the majority of men and women require, according to "S. H."? Does this object fill the mental vacuum? Perhaps this is what the American wag meant when he said, "There is no fun like work."

This may seem irrelevant, but surely the point is this: the man who emerges from the gloom of religious dogmas and beliefs, and sees the world in the light of Rationalism, has already everything he needs. Has he not built up a philosophy of life which he strengthens day by day in continued reading and thought? No mental vacuum can possibly exist for him. Very well, then. Those people who have religious leanings are in the chrysalis stage, and may not develop into anything useful, anyway. They may die through sheer mental inertia. Otherwise, if they should survive, and develop a mental vacuum, it is certain that Freethought won't fill it.—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

The votaries of Mahomet are more assured than himself of his miraculous gifts, and their confidence and credulity increase as they are further removed from the time and place of his spiritual exploits. They believe or affirm that trees went forth to meet him; that he was saluted by stones; that water gushed from his fingers; that he fed the hungry, cured the sick and raised the dead; that a beam groaned to him; that a camel complained to him; that a shoulder of mutton informed him of its being poisoned; and that both animate and inanimate nature were equally subject to the apostle of God.—GRIBBOX.

OBITUARY

ALWINA POLENA KRASTIN

It is with sorrow and regrets I have to report the death of another of our loyal friends.

Alwina Polena Krastin died on September 21 at Cleadon. She died very suddenly from a heart attack at the age of 57. She and her husband, who were born in Russia, will long be remembered for their services to our cause, and to humanity in general. Loyal and sincere, she made many friends, and to know her was to admire her. Always cheerful and ready to help in the difficulties of all who needed her assistance, she endeared herself to a large circle of friends. Prior to and during the great Russian Revolution, she successfully performed many very important tasks, which often were accompanied with grave dangers and risks. Her sound judgment and ability, however, brought her out with success and honour.

Always a Freethinker, she has done much to further our cause, both in Russia and in this country. Her cheerful smile was often an encouragement to me when I was speaking to difficult audiences in the North. At her request an address was delivered by the undersigned at the Newcastle Crematorium, where she was cremated on September 25.

Our sympathy goes out to her husband.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY Report of Executive Meeting Held September 28, 1941

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair.

Also present, Messrs. Bryant, Seibert, Ebury, Horowitz, Griffiths, Mrs. Grant, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary. Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Edinburgh, North Staffordshire, North London Branches and to the Parent Society. Permission was given for the formation of a branch of the Society to be known as the North Staffordshire Branch of the National Secular Society.

Under correspondence, lecture reports, reports of branch activities during the outdoor season and arrangements for winter work, financial items, the rights of Freethinkers joining the Armed Forces, and general routine matters were received and dealt with.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for October 26, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11-0, MR. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3-0, MR. L. EBURY.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit., "On Answering Questions."

West London N.S.S. (57, Warrington Crescent, W.9, nr. Warwick Avenue Tube Station. Nos. 6 and 12 Buses): 3-0, MR. G. J. JONES (Russia To-day Society).

COUNTRY

Outdoor

Kingston and District N.S.S. Branch (Market Place): 7-30, MR. J. W. BARKER.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (P.P.U. Rooms, 112, Morley Street): 7-0, a Lecture.

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