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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity in Action

It is not easy for anyone to appreciate the fact that the sense of pain has no relation to the quantity of sufferers. Twenty men suffering from a diseased tooth do not present us with more pain than if the toothache is confined to one. There are merely twenty different people feeling pain. In this connection, quantity has no relation to quality. Pain must always be personal. Perhaps when we come to realise this and to deal with it in scientific terms, we shall be less careless in inflicting pain, and more ready to end it if it lies within our power.

For this reason I am not stressing the number of people who were tortured and eventually burned to gratify the bigotry that was so carefully fostered by the Christian Churches. One might fill chapters in showing that everywhere, and so soon as the Christian Church was able to exert its will, either alone or through the secular power, a system of persecution arose such as the world had never before seen. And when one has done with the Roman Church, he could follow on with the Protestant Churches. What marks the persecution of the Roman Church as distinct from others is the sheer brutality of its methods. In this it was wholly Christian. One reason why the Church created the Inquisition was because it had no legal machinery to guide its conduct. The pagan, Roman, trial was open and public. The accused was properly indicted; he knew beforehand what he was charged with; he could employ counsel and could cite witnesses. But the Church not merely permitted anonymous accusations, it invited them. Through the confessional, it made the child a spy on its parents, the wife on the husband. It arrested without notice, it tried men and women in secret, usually it did not permit witnesses for the defence—that would have been

This series of notes is in reply to a question: "What is Christianity?" There are so many forms of Christianity, we declined the task of answering. But Christianity is an historic religion based upon the Bible. The clergy are crying: "Back to the Bible." We take them at their word, and give the essentials of Christianity as presented in the Bible.

too risky, for even to have sympathised with a prisoner of the Church was to run a great risk. The accused man or woman was condemned without knowing who were his accusers, without an opportunity of facing those who had brought the accusation. To be suspected was to be robbed of legal rights. To be found guilty was, if fortunate, to be outlawed, one's property confiscated, one's children declared incapable of civil rights, while to defend a heretic was to run the risk of being suspected of heresy.

The lands of a temporal lord who neglected to clear them of heresy might find his property declared forfeit by the Church, and might be passed over either to the Church or to a nominee of the Church. Every inducement to lying, to malice, to cupidity that could be given, the Church gave. No such systematic demoralisation of whole peoples had ever before taken place; nor did the Church have a competitor until the rise of Hitlerism.

Above all, there was the wholesale practice of torture. To lie for months in a cell, with scanty food, little air and no light was only the preliminary. There was the torture of the pulley, in which the prisoner's hands were tied behind his back and he was repeatedly lifted by them and dropped suddenly to the floor. There was the water torture in which a man was tied to a ladder in a strained position and water allowed to trickle down his throat. There was the rack which gradually loosened every joint; the garrot for compressing the skull; the red-hot irons for branding parts of the body; trampling on the limbs which had been bound to a grated surface.

Those who wish to follow these tortures to fuller accounts, and even these omit many bestialities, may find the evidence in H. C. Lea's seven huge volumes on the "History of the Inquisition" and the "History of the Inquisition in Spain," books the reliability of which not even the Roman Church has managed to challenge successfully. Never in the world's history was torture applied on such a scale. And, to add hypocrisy to villainy, when a confession had been wrung from the sufferer, he was made to sign a statement that the confession was given voluntarily.

The final stage added hypocrisy to villainy. The heretic was handed over to the civil power with the proviso that there should be no shedding of blood. It is this that has enabled the "great lying Church" to say that it was not the Church that burned the heretic; it was the State. The best comment on that is that the Church granted an indulgence to anyone who contributed wood to the burning. The burning of heretics was turned into a festival. It was called an *auto-da-fé*—an act of faith; that was the sign manual of the Church.

We have been dealing with persecution under the Roman Church. But that Church had good pupils in the Protestant Churches. That the persecutions under Protestantism were not so numerous as those under Roman Catholicism was mainly due to the fact that the divisions in the Church made inevitably for fewer opportunities. But so far as it

was possible, the Protestant Churches followed the example set. "Never," says the historian Green, referring to the Puritans, "had the doctrine of persecution been urged with such a blind reckless ferocity." The Pilgrims who left England for America could persecute as heartily as did Rome. And in the seventeenth century we were still cropping men's ears for heresy, and right up to the twentieth imprisonments for blasphemy were taking place. The poison of the historic Churches had sunk deep. It is not eradicated, even to-day.

What We Owe to the Churches

There is very much more that might be said on this aspect of Biblical threats to those who disobeyed the command of God concerning worshipping "other gods," but there is another phase of the subject that has met with comparative neglect, and it is with that we wish to deal. The effects of this "sacred" fury of the Christian Churches had its effect on the moulding of criminal law, as some few writers have noted, but the evil that was naturalised by the Christian Churches did not begin or end with the transference of brutality from the religious to the field of civil law. The genetical influence was wider, deeper and more prolonged. And from that point of view the social scientist is far more concerned with the type of character that lives on, rather than with the number that are killed off. Very much is being said concerning the task that lies before the non-Fascist world in the shape of remoulding the younger generation of Germans who have been brought up from childhood under Hitlerian rule. But the world has had before it for many generations the problem of wiping out the brutality and non-recognition of the social rights of individuals that resulted from, and still results from, the long reign of the Christian Churches.

In the case of persecution, whether it be the threat of criminal prosecution or the likelihood of social or political boycott, who is it that will be mainly affected? It will not be the constitutional liar, the rogue, the coward, the place-seeker, or the man whose sole aim in life is to pass through the world in slippered ease. It is the man of courage, of intellectual integrity, who will place truth before all things, and will brand a lie as a lie no matter what the consequences will be, who will be affected by laws against freedom of thought and speech. To the coward, the humbug, the hypocrite, the place-seeker, laws against freedom of thought and speech simply do not exist. They threaten the man of high character only.

From the standpoint of scientific sociology, there is another important thing to be borne in mind. There is no question to-day that man develops from a gregarious animal; but his development marks the transition from gregariousness to a social state. And this involves a great change in the human environment. An animal comes into the world with all its stock-in-trade in being. All that is to follow here is, so to speak, personal development. Man begins life with very few "instincts" (that word ought to have a hundred years' holiday—applied to man it confuses only); he has to acquire everything of use. And this acquisition is from his environment. His beliefs and his reactions to what exist around, plus his own capacity for using the tools, mental and otherwise, provided for him, open the way to endless development.

I have summarised in a few lines matter that would well have covered pages. The important thing to remember is

that human conduct will fashion itself either as a passive reaction to existing ideas and customs, or it may be expressed in healthy revolt that will lead to a wider and better view of life. Unfortunately, the control of opinion fell into the hands of the Church, and the conduct of the Church was determined by the texts we have quoted—the repressive ideas of a primitive people which were accepted as the commands of God. For many centuries the Christian Church created an environment which could not but favour the survival of the worst. The Church practised a moderation, killed off the best and encouraged the survival of the worst. Knavery and stupidity were fostered in the interests of religion, strength of thought and honesty in the expression of opinion was discouraged. We talk a deal in these days of the survival of the fittest; the policy of the Christian Churches has for over fifteen centuries encouraged the survival of the worst.

It will be noted that we have dealt mainly with the period covered by the Roman Catholic Church. But it must never be forgotten that the Protestant Churches—allowing for the development that has taken place in other directions, and which has affected life all round—have done what they could to perpetuate conditions that make for mental dishonesty and cowardice. All the Churches have discouraged independence of opinion to the best of their opportunities. In politics, candidates for election find that they run a risk when they are known to be without religion. In business, shopkeepers find that it pays, particularly in small communities, to belong to one of the local churches. Newsagents and booksellers find they run a risk of losing customers if they display freethought papers and books. Public halls are, in many places, closed to freethought meetings. In the Houses of Parliament there has never lacked a majority in favour of those relics of the dark ages, the blasphemy laws. The general rule still is that if you wish to prosper quickly and easily, make a profession of religious belief. The unwritten law is to-day: If you wish to get on easily, profess a belief in *some* religion to that end, and the way of promotion shall be made easy. But be firm in your thought and plain in your speech, and whatever Christianity can do to make it hard in business or in public life shall be given with liberal measure.

And, again, let us never forget that this cultivation of the lowest has been going on not for a few generations; it has been in action ever since Christianity became a powerful influence in social life. To-day we boast that every man may express whatever religious opinion he wishes; that is true, but it is not the kind of truth which we should establish if we are to justify our claim that we are a liberty-loving people. There should be established, not merely the legal right, but the social right to say what one feels ought to be said *against* religion. That right we have not yet achieved. The non-believer in religion must still pay some price if he speaks out plainly and honestly about religion. But God, the Bible God, said—

Thou shalt have no other God before me. And if thy brother, or thy son, or thy friend, shall entice thee, saying, let us go and serve other gods, thou shalt not spare him, neither shalt thou conceal him, but thou shalt kill him.

The Churches have always done their best to carry out that command. And if God, at the day of judgment, charges the Christian that he did not always carry out the law, the Christian can surely reply: "O God, I have done my best. We did kill when we could; we tortured when we could; we ostracised when we could; but, O God, thine enemies are many, and we could do no more than we have done."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

THE VERNAL SEASON OF NEW ENGLAND LETTERS

VAN WYCK BROOKS' "Life of Emerson" and his critical study, "The Ordeal of Mark Twain" preceded other pleasurable products of his pen. With his "Flowering of New England, 1815-1865" (Dent, 1936), he has presented the opening volume of a series in which he aspires to garner the literary harvest of the United States.

The Puritan incubus weighed heavily on the Western World at the opening of the 19th century, and it still exercises considerable sway. But the brighter spirits of the time were, even then, seeking emancipation from its thralldom, and Boston became the progressive centre of the States. Our author avers that: "Boston was another Edinburgh, with marked variation of its own. It resembled Edinburgh in many ways, as New England resembled Scotland. The bitter climate and the hard soil, the ice, the granite and Calvinism, yielding to more gracious forms of faith, the common schools, the thrifty farmer-folk, the coastline, with its ports and sailors' customs, the abundant lakes and mountains, the geological aspects of the region, all suggested the land of Walter Scott, as well as the adjacent land of Wordsworth."

The well-to-do Bostonians were well read, and nearly all the standard English authors—Shakespeare, Gibbon, Hume and the rest, were in request—while a mild and merciful Unitarianism became known as the Boston cult. Its adherents rejected the Trinity, predestination and other Calvinist doctrines, while retaining a personal deity and the Scriptural miracles. Still, Boston was advancing and Sheridan's "School for Scandal" was performed and approved as a moral guide.

Harvard College was founded in the American Cambridge, and it dates to the days when Calvinism was supreme. Later, it was reconstructed on Unitarian lines and was then regarded as "dangerously lax and liberal," while its professors and students were said to be puffed up with profane learning. Still, wealthy Bostonians gave the college financial support and sent their sons there for instruction. Dr. Kirkland, its president, made allowance for the infirmities of youth. For Brooks notes that when the president heard "that the flip at the Porter House had proved to be too attractive to the students, he dropped in to see the proprietor. 'And so, Mr. Porter,' he said, 'the young gentlemen come to drink your flip, do they?' 'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Porter, 'sometimes.' 'Well, I should think they would,' the president said, 'Good day, Mr. Porter.'"

Along the coast and in rural regions the inhabitants vegetated. Tales of the Revolution, legends of earlier affrays with the Indians and home-spun ballads composed the staple of their cultural life. Yet, all the maritime towns had their celebrities, including the eminent mathematician of Salem, Nathaniel Bowditch, the author of the "Practical Navigator." This work soon superseded all others on the subject, for Bowditch was a seasoned sailor, and it is said to have "saved countless lives and had made American ships the fastest that had ever sailed."

A dismal theology was still entrenched in rural areas, and their inhabitants wrangled and jangled over free will and

predestination, while little children wailed over their real or imaginary sins. These depressing phenomena might give way to happier thoughts in the summer sunshine. "But when the snow began to fall," records Brooks, when a youth "sat brooding beside the stove over his calfskin Bible . . . then, as he coned the mystical Revelations and the savage mythology of the ancient Jews, visions of blood atonement swept his brain. Among the native ballads of the Vermontors, bloodshed was an omnipotent theme. They felt the presence of the God of Vengeance." But, as the years passed by, a schism appeared in orthodoxy. Various conflicting sects arose and a wide choice of creeds was available to dissentients from true blue Calvinism. "As for the question of punishment after death, one could choose between No Punishment, Eternal Punishment—good for most of one's neighbours—or a strictly limited punishment that stopped after the first million years."

In 1815, two budding Bostonians, George Ticknor and Edward Everett, visited Germany to determine the truth of the rumours concerning the prodigious strides of Teutonic scholarship. Their travels abroad made them acquainted with the works of Goethe, Dante and other Old World illuminati, and on their return to America they scattered the seeds of later New England's enthusiasm for European literature. Ticknor's Harvard lectures presented a picture of the achievements of Humboldt, Schlegel and other pioneers, and aroused a spirit of emulation in his listeners, who were destined to adorn the realm of letters in America itself, when they later put pen to paper.

The orator and statesman, Daniel Webster, and Dr. Channing, the ethical teacher, were perhaps the outstanding men of the time. While European Unitarians had produced eminent reformers, the Boston fraternity, as a whole, were little moved by progressive sentiments. Channing, however, was anxious to alleviate the lives of the poor and oppressed. He deplored the evils of unrestricted competition and he was an Abolitionist whose independence of opinion received little encouragement from other opponents of slavery. As Brooks observes, "he could not please his parishioners, who began to cut him in the street." Still, the rising generation was constrained to admit that Channing was a fine humanist who had done more to direct attention to the better aspects of human nature, which Calvinist austerity had so harshly judged, than any of his religious contemporaries.

Boston's "Monthly Anthology" preceded the appearance of "The North American Review." This organ noted the advent of Washington Irving, Cooper, Bryant and other writers recently arisen. Yet the "Review" proved indifferent to the forms of expression in philosophy and letters that were to dominate the coming era. Europe had already produced a brilliant galaxy of historians, and their influence was apparent in Irving when he initiated the Transatlantic school of historical studies. It is significant that famous American historians such as Prescott, Parkman and Motley were all men of means, for their works proved costly to produce, as so much of the documentary material had to be sought for abroad. But by 1859, however, American collections had increased so greatly as to rival or even eclipse European libraries. It became fashionable for wealthy men to collect rare and choice volumes on an elaborate scale, a practice that still persists.

Bancroft's "History of the United States" began to appear in 1834, and this fine work was planned on the scale of Gibbon's masterpiece. As Brooks reminds us: "After 40 years, he was still alert for any new material that he could use in any fresh revision of his work. The hardy old man at 85, still rose in the night, lighted his fires and candles and read his Gibbon, and sometimes toiled for 14 hours on end."

Other chroniclers were active who attracted but tepid attention, but Prescott's "Ferdinand and Isabella" found him famous when this study appeared in 1837. The result of ten years' toil

of a half-blind scholar, this very notable achievement came as a complete surprise to all save one trustworthy friend. Brooks intimates that: "The book was a universal triumph, one that even grew, as the years advanced, as the progress of historical research proved that Prescott's skill and documentation had left him master of his field." A pronounced departure in American historical composition, it forecasted the appearance of the subsequent classics on the conquests of Mexico and Peru.

In the 1840's, Carlyle exercised a potent sway over American letters, but this was lessened when the Sage of Chelsea was superseded by the Sage of Concord. Ralph Waldo Emerson relinquished his Unitarian ministry and, once free, his expressed opinions shocked the ultra-pious. When someone declared that Emerson's destiny was damnation, a sympathiser retorted that if so, he would sweeten Satan's residence. Even some who plumed themselves on their enlightenment found Emerson sadly astray. As our author notifies: "Although he had his followers in Boston, he was anathema to the pundits there. Everett sneered at Emerson's 'conceited, laborious nonsense.' John Quincy Adams and Andrews Norton thought him an Atheist and worse. The Cambridge theologians reviled him: he was a pantheist and a German mystic, and his style was a kind of neo-Platonic moonshine." But, both as a poet and as an essayist, Emerson still ranks high among American men of letters, and, perhaps in an even greater degree as a humanist, he has made his name immortal.

Brooks' studies of Longfellow, Dana, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Lowell and other celebrities contain discerning critical appreciation. Lowell's blemishes and abilities are searchingly, if sympathetically revealed. He portrays Thoreau's detachment less censoriously than Dr. Toynebee who, in the sixth volume of his "Study of History," asserts that: "One may carry this game to the length of a pose, as it was carried by Diogenes in his tub and by Thoreau in his wigwam."

The son of a father who subscribed to the harrowing doctrines of Jonathan Edwards, Oliver Wendell Holmes liberated with his laughter many erstwhile obscurantists. And when the genial Autocrat at the Breakfast Table sent his shafts against the "Old Hoss Shay of Calvinism," there were many approving smiles in Boston. But in less enlightened circles the Doctor's prescriptions proved unpalatable. We gather that: "The religious weeklies and monthlies began to throw brickbats at him. The Autocrat was imperturbable. One cannot turn over any old falsehood without a terrible squirming and scattering of the unpleasant little population that dwells under it. Nor can anyone say anything to make his neighbours wiser or better without being abused for doing so; and if there is one thing that people detest, it is to have their little mistakes made fun of."

It is gratifying to note Brooks' appreciation of the scholar scientist, Dr. G. P. Marsh. In addition to his charming work, "The Camel," and other writings, and his pioneer labours in tracing the evolutionary development of the horse, Marsh's classic, "The Earth as Modified by Human Action," constitutes a permanent contribution to science. In this work Marsh powerfully protests against man's reckless destruction of what it is to his interest to carefully preserve.

Brooks pays a merited tribute to Motley, the brilliant historian of the Dutch Republic. For many laborious years Motley pored over documents, many almost undecipherable through neglect, at The Hague, in Brussels and elsewhere, thousands of which had never been perused by any Dutch scholar. It is urged, however, that great as Motley's histories are, his "Rise of the Dutch Republic," his "United Netherlands" and "Barneveld" portray the leading figures of the period only, while the mass of the people remain unseen. Still, his vivid descriptions of the outstanding characters and events make Motley's writings intensely and abidingly interesting to all true lovers of historical literature.

T. F. PALMER.

LEIGH HUNT

"Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."

JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT (1784-1859) is probably only known to most people to-day by his short narrative poem, "About Ben Adhem." This is unfortunate in many respects, but at the same time the poem would seem to contain his simple yet profound philosophy of life, and no line could typify a man better than the one I have prefixed to this article. For Leigh Hunt was truly a humanitarian Freethinker!

It was almost inevitable that this genial philanthropist should take a subsidiary place in English literature because he associated with so many of the very greatest in the same fields as himself. The galaxy of masters with whom he became friendly included the great poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, and the great essayists Lamb and Hazlitt, not to mention many others. Most of these, it must be admitted, were his superiors as poets or essayists, but there is a certain delightful benevolence about his work that has an irresistible appeal. In addition, he had a very wide range of subjects, and his knowledge and appreciation of literature is amazing, as evidenced in his prose work. Perhaps his finest attribute, however, was his style. He had the rare gift of writing naturally, as he must have spoken, and, as J. B. Priestley has said, his essays seem to be "actual talk captured in print."

Comprehensive as his works are—he is equally at home whether discussing books or bricklayers—his free and searching, yet sympathetic mind may be relied on to treat the subject truthfully and thoughtfully. Whilst not a fanatical extremist in anything, he was far from orthodox, and his "Examiner" was a paper of pronounced Radical views. It was in this journal that the satirical article on the Prince Regent appeared, which led to Hunt being fined £500 and suffering two years' imprisonment. He continued to write in prison, however, and also to edit the "Examiner," through the pages of which the public first made the acquaintance of Shelley and Keats.

Shelley became Leigh Hunt's great friend, and many affectionate letters passed between them. Shelley also dedicated his dramatic masterpiece, "The Cenci," to Hunt, saying:—

"Had I known a person more highly endowed than yourself with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had solicited for this work the ornament of his name. One more gentle, honourable, innocent and brave . . . one of simpler and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and manners I never knew: and I had already been fortunate in friendships when your name was added to the list."

Tribute such as that from Shelley is sufficient to interest any Freethinker in Hunt's writings.

His religious opinions were set forward in "The Religion of the Heart." This repudiates orthodoxy, though it includes belief in a god of nature or goodness, and—for those who desire them—daily and weekly services are provided. Hunt says, however: "Never think it necessary to the belief in a God, to retain all the attributes given him by less informed ages," and he finds the doctrine of punishment after death revolting. The book is actually a code of life for this world or, as the sub-title states, "A Manual of Faith and Duty." The means and ends of social endeavour as set forth in "The Religion of the Heart" are mainly secular, and the essence of its teaching is contained in the three maxims: "Be peaceable. Be cheerful. Be true."

Hunt hated all forms of fanaticism, and he was particularly derisive of the "Methodist" brand of Christianity and its Sabbath! He often treated "sacred" subjects in a profane manner, and "A Treatise on Devils" and "A Few Words on Angels" are two of his most charming essays. Pointing out the origin of the word "Angel" from the Greek, meaning "a

messenger," he remarks that a ticket porter might write on his card "Thomas Jones, Angel." He also makes mirth at the expense of divines by refusing to discuss with them how long it takes angels to come down from the eighth heaven, reckoning at the rate of 1,000 miles an hour, or how many of them could dance on the point of a needle.

These passages reveal the light-hearted manner in which Leigh Hunt treated such topics, but his sincere humanism can better be found in such essays as "Deaths of Little Children" and "Advice to the Melancholy," the former, particularly, displaying splendid human insight! But perhaps his finest Freethought essay is "On Death and Burial."

Generally speaking, if a writer holds logical opinions on death he will hold them on life also. Leigh Hunt is no exception. This lovely essay should be read by all Freethinkers. I will not ruin it by quoting from it, but I will recommend it as a sensible yet sympathetic treatment of the subject, so typical of Leigh Hunt.

Hunt's thoughts on orthodox religion are probably best expressed in his sonnet "To Shelley on the Degrading Notions of Deity," which contains the following:—

"What wonder, Percy, that with jealous rage
Men should defame the kindly and the wise,
When in the midst of the all-beauteous skies,
They seat a phantom, swelled into grim size
Out of their own passions and bigotries,
And then, for fear proclaim it meek and sage.
And this they call a light and a revealing!
Wise as the clown, who plodding home at night
In autumn, turns at call of fancied elf
And sees upon the fog, with ghastly feeling,
A giant shadow in its imminent might,
Which his own lanthorn throws up from himself."

These lines reveal Hunt's understanding of the subject with which he is dealing, a characteristic of all he wrote.

Leigh Hunt deserves a higher place in English literature than he holds to-day. By Freethinkers he should—and I think will—always be remembered. A real lover of liberty and a superb humanist, he is dear to those who know him through his work. He truly loved his fellow-men, yet he hated their follies. He gave good advice and guidance in all his writings, and in his poem "The Nile" he says:—

"... and then we wake,
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along
Twixt villages, and think how we shall take
Our own calm journey on for human sake."

Leigh Hunt's journey was certainly not in vain!

C. McCALL.

THE ART OF BAMBOOZLING

"Blessed be ye poor" and "Woe unto you rich" are texts with which the Church has bamboozled the multitude in the interests of the privileged classes. The disinherited sons of the earth were promised all sorts of fine compensations in Kingdom-Come; meanwhile, kings, aristocrats, priests and all the rest of the juggling and appropriating tribe battered on the fruits of other men's labour. The poor were like the dog crossing the stream and seizing the big shadow of his piece of meat in the water. "Seize the shadow!" the priest cried. The poor did so. But the substance was not lost. It was snapped up and shared by priestcraft and privilege.

G. W. FOOTE.

ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of York has discovered that "Compared to the simplicity of the preaching and the fellowship of the first disciples, Christianity as presented to-day seems strangely complicated and difficult." But if the Archbishop really appreciated the difference of the environment when the first Christians lived and the environment of to-day, he would find no difficulty in understanding the situation. Taking the case as presented by Christians, the early disciples of Christians found no difficulty in believing in gods coming to earth or in humans being taken up to heaven. They could believe in miracles such as the feeding of thousands of people with two fishes and five loaves and then having "hashings" of grub left over, of men rising from the dead, of devils being driven out of lunatics. It was a simple thing to believe in miracles because of the scientific ignorance of the people.

But to-day the conditions are changed. Who to-day would believe any of these yarns? Certainly not men of intelligence and understanding. If a child is born to-day without a known father, no one has any doubt that there is a father somewhere or the other. If any man was found to-day with, say, a huge supply of food in his possession—without a medical certificate—drinking three or four pints of milk, would the authorities be satisfied if they were told the Lord supplied these things? There is not a magistrate in the country, even though he was a confirmed Roman Catholic, or any official as religiously credulous as Lord Halifax, who would believe the story. When the father of Jesus—that is the husband of Mary—wanted a plank to be longer, Jesus pulled the plank to the required length. Who would believe that happened to-day?

Naturally, the Archbishop of York and all the other members of the "spiritual" circus find a very different state of things than did the clergy of, say, a thousand years ago. Then the clergy and the mass of the people moved on a common foundation of ignorance and superstition. To-day the intellectual part of our environment shrieks that religious beliefs have no living connection with the best knowledge of to-day. And that is why the clergy are uniting to try and breed believers through the medium of the nation's schools. And the worst of it is that we have so many of our political leaders who are afraid to speak what they know to be the truth.

In reply to a correspondent who asks for "an authoritative scientific work answering the evolution school," the Roman Catholic "Universe" replies that "it is not easy" to name one. Of course it is not. The choice is between some form of evolution and the stupid and almost inconceivable Christian doctrine of special and miraculous creation. There has for several generations been no question about the truth of evolution, there has been only discussions as to the factors at work. But the "Universe" might have added that all the Christian Churches originally opposed evolution as being entirely anti-Christian and equal to a denial of God. And, of course, the orthodox creed was, and is, that of the Bible—"And God said let there be—" and all animals obediently began to be. A foolish, meaningless situation, but quite Christian.

The world is full of strange things and surprising people. For example, most of our readers will be acquainted with the name of the Rev. W. H. Elliott. He appears to be running a page in the "Sunday Graphic," and in a recent issue someone inquires of him "Why did God let evil exist?" He replies that he "would rather leave these matters wrapped in mystery. ... It is my very ignorance that makes me wonder and worship." There appears to be a deal of common sense in this—religious common sense. Not to know, but to enjoy a mystery, and then thank God—who is part of the mystery—for not letting you know what is the meaning of the mystery, is true religion, at least it is the only kind of religion that will live for a time.

The much boomed, religiously useful C. S. Lewis has discovered that "Science has come into line in one respect with Christianity

that nobody foresaw a few decades ago. The physical universe had a beginning and it will have an end, whereas all the classical systems of materialism supposed the eternity of matter, and therefore could easily believe that it was self-existing and the ultimate reality." We quite appreciate the fact that there is a decided difference between the dissolution of planets and suns, as such, and the "Universe" as a totality of existence, but if this almost miracle could be worked, Mr. Lewis's religious value would be gone for ever. As it is he appears to charm the pious and please the scientifically ignorant.

For in sober truth modern science has never believed or asserted that the physical universe is indestructible. Quite the contrary, the theory of its origin and development involved the possibility of its dissipation. New worlds come into existence and old ones disappear. Change is the one thing that is eternal. That has been taken for granted by materialists ever since the days of Democritus. But Mr. Lewis uses "Universe" in two senses, and so makes both senses misleading, even ridiculous. We do not say that he does this knowingly, for he appears to be of the type that confuses others because he in the first place so completely confuses himself. We would send Mr. Lewis a copy of the editor's "Materialism Restated," but we are afraid it would be a waste of time and paper.

Roman Catholics, especially their priests and bishops, are getting angrier than ever at the suggestion that if they want to run their own schools entirely by themselves, they should pay for the privilege. Bishop Marshall, for example, is especially indignant at any such suggestion. He repudiates with equal scorn the idea that the Roman Church "should erect its own schools and bring them up to the required building standard with, of course, assistance from public funds." This would mean, he indignantly declares, that his own diocese would have to provide at least a million pounds! What he wants and what his Church obviously intend having is the million pounds from the English people, most of whom do not believe in Roman Catholicism; and at the same time the schools must be run entirely in the interests of the Church, brooking no interference whatever from anybody. Still, Bishop Marshall's demands are quite orthodox—"You pay, we pray."

In her book of reminiscences, "Girlhood in the Pacific," Mrs. Shane Leslie complains that while living in Spain she "incurred the stigma of being a Protestant." But she came to England, has become Catholic, and now complains that she has to bear "the almost equal stigma of being a Catholic." We are not surprised. Christians love one another, but mostly when they can indulge in a common hatred of others. But one has not to dig very deeply into the constitution of Christian love to find that the real animating quality is hatred of other people. It is only the common danger that is threatening all the Christian sects that has driven Roman Catholics and Protestants together for limited aims in this country. Historically, the most vicious persecutors have been those who were full of love of Jesus.

Christian truth is a very queer thing. Perhaps that is why it is distinguished from other "truth" by putting "Christian truth" as distinguished from the truth that ambles along without a sectarian label. Here is an example of Christian, or sectarian, truth. Fr. Burns, S.J., is annoyed at the number of delinquent youths that come from Christian homes. He complains that children are labelled R.C. even if they are not obeying the teachings of the Church. As every Church in existence teaches the elementary social virtues, it would seem that, according to Fr. Burns, whenever a believer commits an offence he must not be counted as a Christian. Heads the Churches win, tails the non-religious lose. But the non-religious also teach the elementary social virtues, so by the rule expressed above, the delinquents do not belong to the social group at all, which raises the question "Who the devil do they belong to?" A very artful person is Fr. Burns, S.J. But who is to blame for his slender hold on truth and the obvious leaning towards its opposite? We can assure him that Roman Catholics in prison (who are enjoying the shelter for which every Atheist in the kingdom pays his share) are very firm believers in the faith.

In an article on "What Does Dissent Believe and Teach?" an Anglo-Catholic in the "Church Times" talks about the "evolution" of religion from "a problematical Abraham and a shadowy Moses." It is not at all clear whether the writer himself, or "Dissenters," or both, are now wondering whether it is not time it was admitted that Abraham is, after all, just as mythical as Adam or Methuselah, and whether it will be very long before Moses joins the ghostly crew. But the Anglo-Catholic does give us some of "Dissent's" latest heresies. It appears that Dr. Cadoux, who is a good Protestant and a Professor of History, thinks dubious such one-time historical truths as the Virgin Birth, the omniscience of Christ, the "nature" miracles, the pre-existence of Jesus, the Johannine discourses, the empty tomb, and the physical ascension. This seems rather a hefty amount of disbelief even for a Dissenter, but Dr. Cadoux has many supporters. As an example, there is the Rev. C. J. Wright, another college professor who, whenever he uses the word miracle, puts it in inverted commas, and who thinks that the Gospels are a mixture of fact and legend. It looks as though we are nearing a drastic treatment for the New Testament.

It is often difficult to take Christian preachers seriously, sometimes even that they are not talking with their tongue in their cheek. Here, for example, is a Rev. Hopkinson, Vicar of Battersea, who gives us this dose of clotted nonsense:—

"The comradeship in action, which is the glory of Russia, was first set out by the Russian Church." Mr. Hopkinson must be joking, for no one could be so foolish, deliberately foolish, to believe that "comradeship in action" was first learned from the Russian Church. One could only believe that Mr. Hopkinson really means what he says by crediting him with an almost unbelievable ignorance.

For surely Mr. Hopkinson knows that comradeship in action belongs to the animal world, the difference being that with man the comradeship becomes a conscious effort. A herd of apes work together and defend each other against a common enemy. The poorest tribe of men bring to bear on life a consciousness of comradeship. And yet Mr. Hopkinson pulls the legs of the readers of the "Daily Mirror" by telling them that it is only since the Russian Church was established that the Russian people had the Christian Church—and what a Church!—planted in Russia.

But let us be fair, even to such a person as the Vicar of Battersea. For he, after all, is only repeating in more candid language the teaching of men like the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Rev. Professor Whale, both of whom say substantially that morality, ordinary morality, the morality that is made of kindness, honesty, affection, loyalty to the group, has no foundation if one does not believe in God, and of all gods, the Christian God, a deity who hardly knows what he wants or how to get what he wants, and who is ready to punish human beings because they are not better than he made them. The Rev. Mr. Hopkinson is only saying, quite plainly, and illustrating it by common facts, what the Archbishop drapes in pseudo-philosophic language. There are many odd ways of getting a living, but surely the oddest, if not the most damnable, is that of being a professional preacher. Poor devils!

We learn from the "School Child" for March that the clergy are placing before teachers documents for signature in favour of certain proposals giving the clergy powers that involve the practical control of the schools. The "School Child" remarks in a leading article:—

"It is not surprising to hear that many teachers have signed the petition. Indeed, it will not be very easy for some of them to refuse to sign on the dotted line when a document is placed before them by the parish clergyman. It is one of the glaring evils of the dual system that so many school teachers find their freedom circumscribed by being placed under pastors who are also their masters."

We have said many times that if teachers will stand up and say openly what the majority of teachers are thinking, they could exert an influence that would halt the plot that is now coming to assume a practical shape. But will they do it?

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SUGAR PLUMS

THERE was a full house in Glasgow last Sunday to listen to Mr. Cohen's lecture on "Rocks Ahead." The subject was followed with that keenness of appreciation which, whether favourable to the speaker or not, may always be expected from a Scottish audience.

Mr. Joseph E. Davies, for some years United States Ambassador to Russia, tells an interesting story in the course of an article in the "Yorkshire Evening Post." He says, "I am neither Communist, Socialist, nor parlour pink. But if I had been born in Russia, instead of in the U.S.A., I should have probably been a Bolshevik." And he illustrates this with a conversation with one of the Russian Generals.

Marshal Voroshilov proved that to me. He and I were sitting at a table debating Soviet policies over a lot of wine and a lot of vodka. We talked for hours—very, very, very frank and honest with each other, and I told him just what I thought—namely, that they were doing it the wrong way; that they are bound to fail; that we were doing a better job.

And then he described to me how he lived in a little hut in childhood, never wore shoes until he was 18, lived in a rural district where he never had a chance, as he said, to get out of the ploughshare rut. He lived, he said, under conditions where his people were being "milked" by the clergy, being drained of whatever they could make, and with their womenfolk subject to the whims and caprices of the noblesse—a bullet or knout answer to the protest of husband, sweetheart or brother.

Voroshilov pictured in detail the life he knew in Russia 25 years ago, and concluded by saying to me: "If you had lived in Russia and lived as I did, you, too, would have been a Bolshevik."

And I said, "Marshal, touche."

I would have been a Bolshevik.

I recount that experience, not as an apology for the Soviet—the magnificent Russian people need no apology—but to illustrate that there is room for us to understand their political background as well as to appreciate their heroic war achievements.

There has been nothing but praise for the Russians since they came into the war. And that is worth noting, for the clergy in this country were falling over each other in holding Russia up as a country with which the less we had to do with, the better. Now, many of them fall over each other in the opposite direction. But not one of them has the decency to express their sorrow at having misled the people. So we wait with calmness to hear what they will say when the war is over, and religious feeling against Russia is renewed.

We in England are lovers of freedom, but there are limits to the strength of our attachment. The Sunday laws, the blasphemy laws, and the weapon of boycott are instances. In New Zealand are also lovers of freedom, but they, too, have limits in their devotion. For example, a little time back a very useful pamphlet was compiled in London—a very useful and timely booklet by Miss Edith Moore, with the title "No Friend of Democracy." The book consisted of a lengthy, but important, collection of utterances from many sources of expressions of opinion from people showing their sympathy with Fascist Movement and the encouragement given to Hitlerism. Roman Catholics had more than their quantitative share of this useful document, and it is well in framing our new world that this manifestation of opinion should be placed on record. The public needs this reminder.

As we have said, the publication was useful, and there appears to have been a good sale, considering the unofficial ban that was placed on it, and against which every advanced cause has to fight. But some of these pamphlets were ordered from London by the Rationalist Association and Sunday League. These were duly delivered for some time—then quite suddenly the parcels were opened and on two occasions the copies of Miss Moore's booklet were abstracted and retained. Why? No explanation was offered, and it was plainly stated that none would be given. There the matter stands for the present. But it remains to be seen why, if the book could be circulated in Britain, why could it not be circulated in New Zealand? Was it because many of the examples of pro-Fascism were Roman Catholics in high places? One should remember that Cardinal Hinsley declared that "if Italian Fascism goes under, God's cause goes with it." What sort of freedom is it we are fighting for?

The hostility of the Roman Catholic Church to birth control is well known. The tenet of the Roman Church is more and more children, never mind the quality, so long as they swell the numbers of those who belong to the Church. For in days when votes count, that of a fool and that of a philosopher have exactly the same weight. And the more children, the greater the power of the Church.

Here in this country the Roman Church has to be a little more careful than where it is able to bring stronger pressure to bear. And as birth-control has now so many advocates in "respectable" places in this country, we have the opposition weakened. Elsewhere, where conditions are different, the tactics are different. For example, here is a passage worth noticing:—

"Ten leading citizens of Massachusetts, including the Richardson, Professor of Obstetrics at Harvard Medical School, the director of the Massachusetts General Hospital, and John C. Rock, M.D., of the Free Hospital for Women, had sought to bring about amendments in the existing legislation regarding birth control. These eminent medical authorities suggested that such prohibitive statutes 'which relate to the prevention of pregnancy and the prevention of conception shall not apply to treatment or prescription given to married persons for protection of life or health by or under the direction of registered physicians; nor to teaching in chartered medical schools; nor to publication or sale of medical treatises or journals.'

"The Roman Catholic Church immediately took up the challenge, and the medical men were defeated in the State election by 691,000 votes against 505,000. The methods adopted by the prurient in their propaganda campaign are worth noting. The Most Rev. James E. Cassidy, Bishop of Fall River, issued a letter read at all masses in his diocese. This letter was not only a gross distortion of the humanitarian purpose of the medical men's motion, it even descended to a gross and somewhat disgusting distortion of the Scriptures, concluding with the following misquotation: 'Suffer little children to come unto me and prevent them not.'

"The Catholic owner of a little Italian newspaper got himself into serious trouble because he printed the views of

the Mothers' Health Committee, who were in favour of the referendum. He received a protest signed by no less than eleven priests. Another notable exception to the campaign of lies, distortion and humbug was the 'Catholic Messenger,' which ran the advertisements issued by the Mothers' Health Committee and the Physicians' Committee for the Defence of Medical Rights.

"The lesson of this organised opposition by the vested interest of the Church deserves attention in view of the obstructionism from this quarter now displayed to reforms such as the Beveridge Report."

THE B.B.C.'s "UNBELIEVER"

A NOTABLE and characteristic discovery by the B.B.C. is the "unbeliever" brought forward in many of its religious talks as an off-set to the priest or parson who wants the world to know how to deal with these very simple infidels—or, to put it another way, how to wipe them up in a "frank" discussion.

I am not quite sure who thought of this brilliant idea first, but it was exploited with great effect by Canon Cockin a year or so ago. The procedure was and is quite easy. He brought forward some very earnest people, among them, of course, the inevitable "worker," who all had some strong objections to Christianity. Everything looked square and above board. The "unbelievers" were allowed to deal with the Canon's address openly and frankly, and he gave his reply in the same open and frank way—proving, without a shadow of doubt, that their objections were quite unfounded, and that if they only knew Christianity as well as he did, they would come over with both alacrity and enthusiasm. The only point which the good Canon did not at once divulge was that he himself wrote up both the orthodox address, the "infidel" objections and the triumphant answers. It was a wonderful victory.

This policy is pursued in other ways and with other subjects, but in none has it such devastating force as in the question of religion. The way in which a parson or a priest or a padre can annihilate the strongest unbeliever, and make him "want to hear more" is most striking; and no doubt the average listener imagines that it would be the same in real life—or, at least, that is what the B.B.C. wants him to imagine. If he can think at all, however, he must realise that the world of make-believe can be presented almost as well on the radio as on the pictures. The "unbeliever," reading from a script objections written for him by a priest so that they can easily be replied to, is really taking part in a fairy tale, and the public is not going to be fooled every time.

The most amusing example of this technique is one at the moment in a series designed "to make you think."

Here we have some soldiers in a camp discussing the Bible and Christianity with a padre. Some of the soldiers come along with the kind of objections to both, which the padre (who probably wrote them himself) imagines prevents the unbeliever from accepting his brand of religion. A soldier will say that the Bible is out of date, or nobody reads it, or his mother used to make him read it and therefore he's fed up with it, or what does it matter what the Bible says, and so on. Never is the slightest hint given that the objector has read any work at any time dealing with the Bible, or that he has ever heard of one. Never would the B.B.C. allow any suggestion that such a work as the Encyclopædia Biblica, or Hasting's Dictionary, both of which make mincemeat of the padre's presentation of the Bible, is in existence—or for that matter any Christian work which might hint a heresy or two. I have listened with great attention to these discussions, and have never heard any book quoted except the utmost fundamental ones with a point of view dating from the first century.

The padre's method is delightful. He always listens with great courtesy, and then replies in that bluff, warm-hearted manner so well known to those of us who have attended "bright" evangelical meetings on Sunday afternoons, when the Bible and Christianity are proved to be literally from God, and where we get grown men and women in an intellectual stage that might pass in an infant school but not elsewhere. In a discussion the other evening the padre, with a cheery laugh, showed how the Bible, far from being out of date, literally overwhelms any criticism by proving how it dealt with Hitler. All you have to do is to take one of the passages in which God goes for the Philistines or any other of Israel's enemies, change the name of the country to Germany, and the name of the king God doesn't like to Hitler—and there you have the Bible completely up to date. The padre did this, and the result so staggered the "unbelieving" soldiers that they eagerly wanted to hear more—the Bible being, of course, far greater and more wonderful than they had ever imagined.

This terrific victory emboldened the padre. Again with an open-hearted laugh, he confidently declared that in his opinion Hitler was sent by God to scourge an unbelieving world. Only such a tragedy as was being enacted now could move the scoffer in God's goodness to throw himself on God's mercy. We in England were suffering because we had imagined we could do without God, and such an attitude was hateful to the Lord who wants complete, undivided adoration. If his people will not give him this, then they must be prepared for hell—and the proof that the jolly old padre is right is shown in the way God—and presumably Jesus—has plunged us into this war. Hitler is God's Instrument, though I admit feeling a little shaky when I read what our authorities say they are going to do to the Divine Instrument when we win.

I am not at all certain that the way in which we Freethinkers are kow-towing to the "enemy" is not a little responsible for the vigorous campaign which the Churches are now conducting. It seems extraordinary how some of us, in speech and with the pen, will not under any circumstances give up faith in Jesus. Years ago, John M. Robertson insisted that his task in conversion had been so difficult that he had not succeeded in obtaining 20 per cent. of the Freethought Party with him on the historicity of Jesus problem. He could have gone further, and said that even now, you will find scores of "unbelievers" praise up Jesus in a way that would have made Renan blush.

Jesus is equated with Lucretius and Plato—though if you find that a bit too strong, then the Jesus meant is a "dereligionised" one—whatever this means. Somebody else will implore you to ignore the Churches' representation and pin all your devotion and adoration on to the "real" Jesus. Still another writer pathetically will contrast the poor despised Nazarene without a roof above his head with the £15,000-a-year Bishops, all of whom we are left to infer, are humbugs, while the Nazarene always went about doing good. To a simple layman like myself, the fact that Jesus was kept, clothed and fed while on this task by sundry people, seems to show that, in any case, he was getting much the same value as the Bishops, for they get precious little else.

The Churches must rub their hands with glee—if this is possible—when they read how "our Lord" is advertised in this way. Even a gentle criticism, they will argue, is better than a boycott—so long as Jesus is kept before Freethinkers as an ideal, it really does not matter what kind of a Jesus. Tell me what your ideal is, cries the priest—and there is Jesus. Poet, peasant, vegetarian, meat-eater, Socialist, Individualist, Anarchist—Jesus is everything and far better at it than anybody else.

I am not surprised that, though Freethinkers are increasing every day, our progress has been so slow. A great deal of hard thinking and instruction has yet to be done before we really get the religious forces on the run.

H. CUTNER.

THE MEANING AND MISSION OF "RATIONALISM"

II.

IN the light of our foregoing analysis none can claim possession of some abstract, absolute Reason as the credential of a specious belief, contention, position. This bears on one interpretation associated, among others, with Kant:—

"Apart from the general use of the term [rationalism] for a particular attitude towards religion, two more technical uses require notice: (1) The purely philosophical, (2) the theological. Philosophical rationalism is that theory of knowledge which maintains that reason is in and by itself a source of knowledge, and that knowledge so derived has superior authority over knowledge acquired through sensation. This view is opposed to the various systems which regard the mind as a *tabula rasa* (blank tablet), in which the outside world, as it were, imprints itself through the senses. The opposition between rationalism and sensationalism is however rarely so simple and direct, inasmuch as many thinkers (e.g., Locke) have admitted both sensation and reflection. Such philosophers are called rationalist or sensationalist, according as they lay emphasis specially on the function of reason or that of the senses. More generally philosophic rationalism is opposed to empirical theories of knowledge inasmuch as it regards all true knowledge as deriving deductively from fundamental elementary concepts. This attitude may be studied in Descartes, Leibnitz and Wolff.*"

Much of the above pertains to the logomachies immanent in "philosophical" disquisition. If it refers to ultimate cosmic notions concerning creation, God, metaphysic, or the mystic's faith in the Inward Light, then all such notions are the subject of endless controversy and dialectic.† Regarded objectively, there is no evidence of "fundamental elementary concepts" entering into the mass of confused intellection that make up opinion on such themes. As to "empirical theories of knowledge," all natural knowledge, or science, is empirical and subject to constant modes of verification and review. Into every involved investigation or exploration of nature, or material concern, the whole psychic content and process is operative in due proportion; collation of data, observation, hypothesis, experiment, inductive and deductive reasoning as the final arbiter; and the accuracy of the judgment reached herein turns on the exact co-ordination of these factors. Be it the investigation of some disease as influenza, plant and animal disorders, insect pests, improved fertility of the soil, mechanical invention in industry, meteorology, the origins of religious beliefs, the dubious lore we call history, characteristics of the human species and its races, biology, the solar system, the Milky Way, and "exploding stars"—they come into a similar line of approach. And imply that reactions of such objective phenomena on the subject create the same impressions among normal persons.

What concerns us here is the field covered by "religion." This, too, calls for clarification. It embraces a wide range of

notions and doctrine arising out of man's attempt to explain the world and phenomena, and his relation thereto. That attempt reaches far back into primitive fantasy and superstition, leading by stages to the developed systems of doctrinal faiths. The subject may be regarded under three heads. One has reference to the atmosphere of cosmic supposition, which peoples phenomena with conscious spirits as the source of causality herein. Another embraces a number of practices and rituals, sometimes classed as "magic," which aims at bringing special phenomena under man's control and tending such to serve his well-being as he conceives it. A third leads to a higher kind of synthesis wherein a supreme power dominates the lesser hierarchy, and primarily responsible for creation itself.

There follows systematic theogonies and theologies—Christology. Manichæism, Islam, with related cosmologies as in the Hebrew Genesis, with its detailed stories of Creation. Then these cults and systems link with tribal customs and regulation in their more elaborated form with codes of sacred law and State deities. As an illustration of the Latin derivative of "religion" (*religo* = to bind), we have in Europe the great medieval institution, the *Ecclesia Romana* with its dogmatic Constitution, its unified polity of Church and State; a Canon Law regulating the relations of the faithful; a divinely ordained priesthood, conducting its ritual, dispensing absolution through auricular confession; a body of casuistry providing counsel and treatment for the most intimate private affairs, troubles, turpitude of the devotee.

All this ideation emanates from a time of nescience and represents speculation *in vacuo*. It stands for pseudo-science and pseudo-philosophising; its creators were in a way "thinkers"; unfortunately they started from fake premises with its baleful consequence. Remarks Sir J. Frazer of one of these phases: "Magic is a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art. . . . The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence. The various cases of sympathetic magic which have been passed in review are all mistaken applications of one or other of two great fundamental laws of thought, the association of ideas by similarity and the association of ideas by contiguity in space or time. . . . The principles of association are excellent in themselves and, indeed, absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied they yield science, illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science. It is therefore a truism, almost a tautology, to say that all magic is necessarily false and barren, for were it true and fruitful it would no longer be magic but science."‡

This judgment applies similarly to the pervading animism which persists often when some higher concept has taken its rise. The view of Creation itself is linked with specious stories in different faiths. The Christian Church, drawing its initial account of the world from Genesis, attached it to the Ptolemaic Cosmology at a time when sounder vistas of our Solar System had been gained in other quarters. When these were revived later with improved instruments of observation, the Institution was alarmed and proscribed such as heresy. So the Holy Office affirms in 1604 in condemning the theories of Galileo: "The doctrine attributed to Copernicus that the earth moves round the sun, and that the sun is stationary in the centre of the world and does not move from East to West, is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore cannot be defended or held. . . ."

This primal divagation of the human mind regarding problems of Life and living with its wide historic influence, thus presents a cosmic content and a mundane content, which leads to its bearing in the first instance on the principle and its emergence of relative rationality.

AUSTEN VERNEY.

* "Encyclopædia Britannica."

† The term "philosophy" itself is of varied dialectical significance. Applied to social problems, as social philosophy, it carries its strict derivative as the pursuit or attempt after wisdom! In connection with a particular theme, say the philosophy of music, it implies consideration of first principles. In relation to ultimate questionings on religious and cosmic interests, the nature of knowledge—it covers a wide range of debatable issues; and in the matter of "knowing" links with the basis of science—properly so-called. . . . A comprehensive term, without authoritative connotation, which rests on the sense in which it is employed.

‡ See "Chamber's Journal," September, 1942.

* "The Golden Bough."

THOMAS HARDY

I HAVE elected to speak to you to-day* about Thomas Hardy, and I propose to say something about him as a novelist first and then as the writer of that monster dramatic work, "The Dynasts." Between these two branches of Hardy's writings I shall endeavour to put forward a relation which may be of some general interest.

Most readers of Hardy's novels realise that he had an outlook on human life which was most depressing, most gloomy; and what is more, his attitude to the fate of humanity on this globe grew progressively more terrible as novel succeeded novel, and this attitude can be summed up in the lines from Shakespeare's "King Lear": "As flies to wanton boys, we are to the gods; they kill us for their sport."

In other words, Hardy was appalled at the seeming unequal conflict between Man and the Universe. All the forces of the Universe seemed pitted against Man—in himself a microscopic being. Coldly, distantly, malignantly, the monstrous powers of Time and Space and Chance go on their remorseless, predestined way—either regardless, or contemptuous, or hostile to humanity seemingly intruded into the scheme of things. Intruded, possibly, by the strange freak of his having acquired consciousness—the power to look before and after. Throughout the novels Hardy gives us picture after picture of human beings up against forces which ultimately crush them, in spite of every effort; and in the later novels, culminating in "Jude the Obscure," Hardy goes even further. He diminishes the strength and human importance of the men and women and exaggerates the blind forces, including their own ignorance, operating against them. The result is not only tragedy, but tragedy that carries the added bite of being futile. In Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" there is tragedy, but in so far as Coriolanus's death was due to the saving of Rome, the tragedy was not futile. The same is true of the tragedy of Samson, in Milton's drama.

Before I pass to a brief examination of some of the novels, I want to say a few words about Hardy's period which I think may help to account for the negative quality of his philosophy as far as the novels go. We do not always realise that Hardy's novels were written just at the time when 19th century science had reached the hitherto strongly entrenched Victorian philosophy. The result was a violent swing from the comfort of a definite mental outlook to the extreme discomfort of a conception of the universe so extended that all that seemed to matter in human life shrank to a contemptible speck—and so was regarded contemptuously by the Powers that were. What Hardy for the moment failed to realise was that if the Universe had expanded so grotesquely there were two great compensations: (1) That greater distance gives greater perspective; and (2) That small as Man was against the size of the Universe, he had a mind that could at least reach out and grasp something of the pattern. I say this intentionally because this point is the bridge between Hardy's attitude in the novels and his attitude in "The Dynasts."

If you pick up scientific works written in the early 19th century—books on geology, biology and so on—you will be struck by the care with which the authors attempt in their introduction to make their facts square with the generally accepted Biblical view of the history of the Earth and Mankind. It was indeed a bold man who neglected this attempt at harmony. The creation of the earth was fixed at 4004 B.C.—note the apparent accuracy of the final 4—and the creation of Man six days later. But as the 19th century progressed, two sciences in particular made very great strides—geology and biology; and two epoch-making books appeared respectively in

1844 and 1859: Chambers' "Geology" and Darwin's "Origin of Species." The first of these books showed by evidence from the rocks that the age of the earth was almost incredibly greater than was supposed. In 5,000 years nature could achieve very little geologically. Then on top of this came Darwin, who brought evidence that indicated that life and even human life had existed for a very long time. Bishop Ussher's 4004 B.C. was blown to atoms; and with this catastrophe came what can be a catastrophe in human minds—the sudden loss of fixed points of thought—the loss of mental security which can be far more upsetting than the loss of economic or social security. And Hardy's novels fall in the generation following these expanding views of life. For it takes a generation or so for the views of innovators in thought to permeate even the upper layers of intelligent folk. Hardy's novels were all written by 1896. In general the view of life before the 1870's was comfortable. Man seemed to be attaining a happy balance between stability and progress. The general scheme of things was stable: progress could take place in detail. Such a date as 4004 was symbolic. It was long enough ago to make men feel they had a good deal of experience behind them. It was at the same time sufficiently small and concrete to seem real. You can grasp 4000 mentally—you cannot so grasp 400,000 million. In a small and tidy universe which could be grasped by the human mind and—mark it—therefore grasped by the mind of a man-made God—such things as pain and evil and bad luck and so on could be understood in some measure as the immediate responsibility of a god human in his outlook even if inhuman in his power.

But when the Universe violently expands in Time and Space—when the creation, if any, becomes an imaginary point—when God bolts so far away from the earth and is moreover preoccupied with other worlds and universes—then human suffering, evil, pain, all chances, tragedy and death assume an importance in themselves. The gods are either careless, malign or ignorant. Man is an excrescence in the scheme of things.

That I suggest as the rationalisation of Thomas Hardy's attitude to life in the novels. Man at war with the universe and suffering in vain. Let us see the development of this attitude very briefly in the series of novels: "Under the Greenwood Tree," "Far From the Madding Crowd," "The Mayor of Casterbridge," "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," "Jude the Obscure."

(To be continued.)

OYEZ! OYEZ!

AT a recent meeting of the Publicity Club of London, certain clergymen strongly approved advertising religion, and it was suggested that posters, press, films and shop windows could play a valuable part. The suggestion is very late; those channels of advertising religion have been exploited for many years, with the added advantage that most of it has been free from advertising rates. At this moment a tremendous amount of free newspaper space is given to the Churches for their well-organised mass attack upon schoolchildren and the nation's schools. The percentage of microphone time given to religion by the B.B.C. is free advertising, although the actual value to the Churches may be questionable. For although the ears of every listener may be plugged with religion from all angles, that in itself is a useful lesson in what Christian character will do in twisting a public-supported institution, over which it has control, into a sectarian monopoly.

On underground railways the merits of Oxo and the blood of Jesus make their respective appeals in allocated spaces. Catch-phrases advertising church wares appear on the notice boards of

* Address given to the Rationalist Luncheon Club, New Zealand, by Mr. R. C. Bull.

many churches, and the happy band of spiritual guerillas, lying for the glory of God are ever welcomed advertising agents for Christian wares. If advertising helped in finding Jesus, he would have been discovered a very long time ago.

Increased advertising holds no solution for Church troubles. Most people already have heard something about Jesus, Christianity, Churches and preachers. I wonder if it has ever occurred to a bright fellow in holy orders that the sheer necessity for advertising God may have something to do with dwindling congregations. An omnipotence and omniscience depending on clerical advertising is not very convincing, whether the advertisers are reverend, very reverend, or not very reverend. If omnipotence and omniscience are features of the God of Christianity, surely it is rank blasphemy to even suggest the need for advertising, let alone mixing the advertisements of God with those for pickles, marmalade and gin.

If only one of the thousands of gods on tap really existed, and did a god's job regularly, organised religion would disappear; and, of course, a real god would be his own M.C. Any god needing medicine men, clergymen or mediums forfeits all claims to omnipotence and omniscience. For instance, no god with an ounce of character or dignity would clock in with the political and ecclesiastical trickery now going on to double-cross school-children; nor encourage and help both sides in a ghastly war, or divert a bullet from Bill Smith and do nothing to help a struggling heap of human beings crushing and suffocating in a shelter. The characters of all the gods are damned by those who serve them. If the gods were left entirely alone, not only would their characters improve, but a broad highway to human stupidity would be closed. The gods never interfere with us, and we should return the compliment.

By all means advertise religion, but in its true bearing upon humanity. Make known as widely as possible the awful price humanity has paid for its gods, its religions and its priesthoods. Freethought has been doing that with some measure of success, and one mark of that success is the greater toleration in public life for differing opinions. But the danger of religious influence is still formidable. Against the growing consciousness for international unity is the separating influence of religion.

The major religious sects are jockeying for advantage, and the minor ones hope for profit. Religions are still rivals. Empire soldiers are organised into one army, but only for fighting. There is no taboo on weapons, ammunition, strategy. They will share all the fortunes and misfortunes of campaigning, but only for fighting in a cause they believe to be good. They will not be religious together. Could one have a better example of the influence of religion on its victims?

Our Empire soldiers and Allies are united and loyal for fighting; comrades on the battlefield but rivals in their holy places, suspicious and ready for a religious scrap for any interference. Segregation has to be enforced to avoid sectarian conflicts. Even rations must be sectarian—sectarian in nature and in preparation. Religious prescriptions and taboos dictate the menus. What one caste may eat another must avoid. The Wallaboloos would be cursed if they didn't eat curry; the Mullagatorneys would be damned if they did. The unholy breath or shadow of a stranger would make food too dangerous for consumption.

All this tomfoolery, nonsense and other priestly jiggery-poke to please the gods and discourage them from killing us for their sport. The stupidity of religious ritual contains its own negation of the gods as intelligent beings. They do not exist. The existence of gods, differing in nationality, privately owned by local institutions drawing royalties from the ownership, is not a matter for seriously discussing proof or evidence. Such gods do not exist, and no volume of increased advertising will do more among intelligent people than provide yet another proof of the hopelessly stupid conceptions disguised as a God.

R. H. ROSETTI.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held on March 28, 1943.

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

Also present Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, Bryant, Seibert, Ebury, Horowitz, Griffiths, Mrs. Quinton, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Bradford, North London Branches and the Parent Society. Correspondence with the Air Ministry concerning a Freethinker and religion in the Air Force, from India, Bradford and London areas, was dealt with and instructions given.

The Annual Conference for 1943 will be held in London. Details in connection with the Agenda and general arrangements were submitted, discussed and agreements reached. Items for discussion at the Conference must reach the General Secretary not later than April 29. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, April 29, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI.

General Secretary.

OBITUARY

JOHN HEWITT

An energetic fighter for freedom of thought and expression passed away in John Hewitt, of St. Helens, Lancashire, on March 26, in his 81th year. A member of the National Secular Society and reader of THE FREETHINKER for many years, he won the respect of all those worth troubling about with whom he came in controversial contact by his unflinching devotion to sturdy principles. His economic struggles began at an early age, and the going was hard, but he won his way through by his tenacity of honourable character. His home was always the Mecca for the local intellectuals, and cosmopolitan topics were discussed. The assembly of relatives and large number of friends at the St. Helens, Denton Green Cemetery, on March 31 bore ample testimony to the esteem in which he was held. A Secular Service was conducted at the graveside by the General Secretary of the N.S.S. Our sympathy is with the surviving members of the family and the intellectual life of St. Helens in their loss.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. Ebury.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11 a.m., Dr. C. JOSE, M.A., D.Litt—"The Idea of Progress After the War."

West London Branch N.S.S. (57, Warrington Crescent, Maida Hill, W. 9, near Warwick Road Tube Station): Saturday, April 10, Annual General Meeting. Reception 6 p.m. Business 6-30 p.m.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate, 6-30 p.m.

Clayton-le-Moors (Assembly Rooms, Mercer Street): Wednesday, April 14, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON—"Spiritualism."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Kingston and District Branch N.S.S. (Church Street): Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Bigg Market): Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.

Padiham (near Tennis Courts): Sunday, 6-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

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