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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

More About Witchcraft

NEVER until the launching of the Hitlerite crusade for the extermination of the Jews, was there anything witnessed quite so savage as that which, in America and Europe, is known as the Witch Mania. Its victims came from the highest and the lowest in the land. Neither age nor sex was any guard against brutal torture and death. The number of victims equalled that of a plague. The Christian God had spoken, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and not one of his commandments were obeyed so loyally. The belief in witches has weakened, but it is still with us. Every parson in the Established Church may exercise the power of exorcism, and the Roman Church has power to cast out devils. In high heaven the Christian God must reflect with pride how loyally his followers once executed his commands.

Let us also note that the instigation and the maintenance of the outbreak of witch-hunting went side by side with the development of modern science. It was as though the witch mania was the reply of the Church to its enemies. Of course, there were bursts of witch-hunting before the period we are considering. It is also true that some of the indictments for witchcraft may have covered other than religious ends. The indictment of Christianity is not removed by that plea. The reality of the superstition had to live beforehand. The belief in witchcraft, if not original with the Churches, was adopted by them, and by the plain command of their God. We may sum up the facts by quoting from

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.

Lecky's "Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe," and though the excerpt may be lengthy, it will take less space than separate statements:—

"For more than 1,500 years it was universally believed that the Bible established, in the clearest manner, the reality of the crime and the amount of evidence . . . attested its continuance and its prevalence. The clergy demanded (the death penalty for witchcraft) with all the emphasis of authority. The legislators of every land enacted laws for its punishment. . . . Tens of thousands of victims perished by the most agonising and the most protracted torments. . . . Nations that were completely separated by interests and by character, on this one question were united. . . . The persecution raged with a fearful intensity. . . . Seven thousand victims are said to have been burned at Treves, 6,000 by a single Bishop in Bamberg, and 900 in one year in the bishopric of Wurzburg. In France decrees were passed on the subject by the Parliaments of Paris, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Rheims, Dijon and Rennes, and they were all followed by a harvest of blood. At Toulouse, the seat of the Inquisition, 400 persons perished for sorcery. . . . Reiny, a Judge of Nancy, boasted that he had put to death 800 witches in 18 years [in Spain]. The persecution spread to the smallest towns, and the belief was so deeply rooted in the popular mind that a sorcerer was burnt as late as 1780. In Flanders, the persecution of witches raged through the whole of the 16th and the greater part of the 17th centuries. . . . In Italy 1,000 persons were executed in a single year in the province of Como. The same scenes were enacted in the wild valleys of Switzerland and of Savoy. In Geneva, which was then ruled by a Bishop, 500 were executed in three months. . . . The Church of Rome proclaimed in every way that was in her power, the reality . . . of the crime. . . . She taught by all her organs that to spare a witch was a direct insult to the Almighty."

In England, under Protestant influence, the killing of witches went on as merrily, as religiously, as it did in Roman Catholic countries. From 1603 to 1680 it has been calculated that 70,000 people were tortured and killed for this imaginary offence. Grey, the editor of the famous "Hudibras," says that he himself saw a list of 3,000 that were put to death during the existence of the Long Parliament. The celebrated witch-finder, Matthew Hopkins, was responsible for the death of 60 persons in the county of Suffolk. In Scotland, for 39 years, when the witch-hunt was at its fiercest, the number killed annually averaged about 200.

In Wurzburg, 1629, 162 burnings were staged, and T. Wright, in his "History of Sorcery and Magic," gives

the following account of eleven of these executions, with the number of children and their ages:—

Burning	No.	Children
7th	7	One girl aged twelve
13th	4	One girl aged ten
15th	2	One boy aged twelve
18th	6	Two boys of ten, girl of fourteen
19th	6	Two boys aged ten and twelve
20th	6	Two boys
23rd	9	Three boys, nine, ten, fourteen
24th	7	Two boys, brought from hospital
26th	6	Little boy and girl
27th	7	Two boys aged eight and nine
28th	6	Blind girl and infant

When one hears from clerical and lay pulpits to-day of the great good done by the Christian religion, one might give a little thought to another aspect of Christian rule.

In Scotland, the witch-hunt was more savagely maintained than in England. Those who are able to consult Dalyell's very scarce "Darker Superstitions of Scotland," an authoritative work published in Glasgow and London in 1835, may read an almost unbelievable story of foolish religious beliefs and Christian brutality.

Witchcraft was declared by the Scotch Parliament of 1563 to be punishable by death. A few years later the Church Assemblies were ordering its presbyteries to proceed "in all severity" against such magistrates as liberated convicted witches. Evidently the civic powers were not brutal enough to satisfy the Church authorities. Boxes were placed in the churches to receive the names of persons who were suspected of witchcraft. When arrested, they were subject to all the brutal tortures of the day, and orders were given that the parents who were suspected of sorcery should have their children subjected to torture in their presence. Dalyell also notes the existence of a practice which became common, that of the property of anyone found guilty of sorcery being given to those who were responsible for their detection. Thus, much property was granted to William Johnstone, baron, "bailie of the regalitie and barronie of Broughton." We are not surprised to find Johnstone's convictions grew in numbers. As in England, a body of professionals sprang up whose sole duty it was to discover witches and wizards—and pocket the reward for so doing. Ministers preached from their pulpits the Christian duty of hounding down witches, and boxes were placed in the Church to receive anonymous accusations.

It was not necessary to inflict injury to be charged with witchcraft. Right through the history of the Christian Churches, one ran risks of accusation of sorcery if what he did was beneficial or true. The important point was that it was not regular. Sorcery was the charge against such men as Roger Bacon, and doctors who cured sickness without the help of the priest was running grave risks. Pitcairn, in his "Criminal Trials," cites the case of Thomas Grieve, who cured many sicknesses "by sorcery and witchcraft." He was brought to trial, found guilty and hanged on Castle Hill, Edinburgh.

The following bill of costs for burning two women in Aberdeen has its interest. The expense was incurred for the burning of Jane Wischert and Isabel Cocker:—

Item	£	s.	d.
Item for 20 loads of peatts	2	0	0
" " Ane boll of colles	1	4	0
" " Four tar barrels	0	6	8
" " Fir and win barrels	0	16	8
" " A staike and dressing of it	0	16	0
" " Four fathoms of towis	4	0	0
To Jon Justice for thier execution	0	13	4
	£9	3	4

The Scotch clergy were before Hitler in torturing people to a desired confession. The difference in what was aimed at is immaterial. Dalyell cites the orders given in the case of one, William Spence, that his gaolers were "not to suffer him to sleep by night or by day and for that end to use all effectual means for keeping him awake. One suspect was kept awake for five days and nights by continuous pricking." If a prisoner confessed there was plain proof of guilt; if there was no confession that was also proof that the devil had sustained him or her. We are not surprised that "the minister and the baillies were well pleased." A favourite instrument of torture appears to have been, in both Scotland and England, the thumbscrew, an instrument which gradually compressed the thumbs to pulp. As in the continental cases, young children were often among those who were tortured.

Torture appeared to be commonly used in Scotland until the end of the 17th century, and there is on record (as cited by Dalyell) a woman burnt in the soles of the feet to extort a confession of sorcery. In Scotland, as in other parts of Christendom, the majority of the people tortured and burnt were women. This fell into line with the Christian tradition that, as evidenced by the fall of Eve, Satan was always on more familiar terms with woman than he was with man. One visitor to Scotland, noted by Dalyell, says that in 1664, he saw nine burnt at one time in Leith Links. That crowned fool, James I., actually had a woman burned for sailing from Leith to Berwick in a sieve.

Speaking of the power which the Scotch Church exerted over the private life of people at the close of the 16th century, H. C. Lea says:—

"The Kirk Sessions were the principal promoters of the fearful prosecutions for witchcraft, which were perhaps worse in Scotland than in any other country. They paid the 'Prickers' who tortured miserable old women to obtain proof, and they voted supplies of firewood for the resulting *auto-da-fé*. While they rigorously prohibited funerals and marriages on the Sabbath as a profanation of the sacredness of the day, witch-burnings were deemed a good work allowable on the Lord's Day, and committees of ministers attended them officially. Zealous ministers, indeed, sometimes did not content themselves with simply directing these proceedings. In 1650, Mr. John Aird, minister of Stow, reported to his kirk-session his success in personally convicting a witch by pricking her."

This from Lea's "Studies in Church History," and in his "Superstition and Force" the same author says of the witch persecutions:—

"Scotland rivalled the worst excesses of the Inquisition in Italy and Spain; it was carried to a pitch of

frightful cruelty which far transcended the limits assigned to it elsewhere. Thus the vigil, which we have seen consisted simply in keeping the accused awake for 40 hours by the simplest modes, in Scotland were fearfully aggravated by a witch-bridle, a band of iron fastened round the face with four diverging points thrust into the mouth. With this the accused was secured immovably against the wall, and cases are on record in which this torment was prolonged for five and even for nine days. In other cases an enormous weight of iron hoops and chains, amounting to 25 or 30 stone, would be accumulated on the body of the patient."

Lecky was correct when he said that "Scotch witchcraft was but the result of Scotch puritanism," and it faithfully reflected the character of its parent.

We have still to deal with other phases of this witch mania. But it is well for readers to bear in mind the fact that these beastly cruelties and obscenities were raised to the height they achieved by their faith in the Christian religion. They were carrying out the plainest of God's commands: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and it is, this Church, still relatively where it was in relation to human progress, that would have us believe, not merely that we owe the major part of the world's progress, but is also demanding substantial control of the rising situation. We are not surprised that that bulwark of a dying creed and upholder of outworn ideas, the British Broadcasting Corporation, should take such care that no element of real Freethought reaches the ears of the people.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

LEONARDO DA VINCI AND HIS TIMES

THE persecuting power of the Catholic Church, so long and so pitilessly exercised in medieval Europe, became slightly restrained by the gradual re-emergence of science. Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon and William of Ockam rendered important service in the emancipation of Christendom. In his "History of Science," Sir William Dampier observes that "the flight of Ockam from a papal prison to Louis of Bavaria marks a significant revolt against the power of the Church, or a setting up of the rights of nationalities against the universalistic tradition of ecclesiastical authority."

This intellectual unrest first appeared in Italy, where an imposing array of humanists heralded the approaching splendours of the Renaissance. Petrarch, its earliest literary protagonist, restored the study of the ancient classics with their claim for the exercise of independent thought.

With the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, many Greek refugees sought asylum in Italy, who proffered their services as instructors and interpreters of the old manuscripts they brought with them. Then the monastic and church libraries were searched for long-forgotten writings, and the collection of ancient documents became a fashionable hobby. The literature of pagan times was thus in some measure preserved for European scholars for the first time in nearly 1,000 years. It is true that some acquaintance with the past had already been made possible through Arabic translations of Aristotle and others, but the manuscripts now available were transcriptions of the original texts.

From Italy humanism spread beyond the Alps, and it is interesting to note that Dr. Dampier gives pride of place in the Northern Renaissance to the great Dutch liberator, Desiderius

Erasmus. "To him," he writes, "humanism was chiefly the means of bringing the civilising influences of knowledge to combat the chief evils of the day: monastic illiteracy, Church abuses, scholastic pedantry and low standards of public and private morality."

In the 13th century paper manufacture was introduced from China, and the later use of movable type in printing superseded manual writing on parchment and printed tomes became common. Geographical discovery helped to enlarge men's minds. Prince Henry the Navigator's pious desire to convert the African heathen to his own true faith, coincided with his ambition to discover a route to India and the East, which might enable the Portuguese to trade there without hindrance from their Moslem competitors. Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape and arrived in India in 1497. The old Greek belief in the sphericity of our globe was revived. Columbus accepted this view and, after many impediments had been overcome, this renowned navigator sailed at last and reached the Bahamas in 1492. The memorable voyage of Magellan, in which that intrepid mariner circumnavigated the earth, was undertaken nearly a quarter of a century later and provided proof positive of the sphericity of our planet.

European intercourse with foreign peoples followed these voyages of discovery and trade and industry were greatly stimulated. The immense stores of the precious metals plundered and exploited from the treasuries of Mexico and Peru by the pious and merciless Spaniards greatly increased metallic currencies and expanded credit. Yet, many factors were involved in the stupendous transformation experienced in Western Europe, and one of the most far-reaching was the decline in religious orthodoxy. Heaven, with the advance of astronomy, vanished in space, while hell retreated more and more from men's minds. The long dominant religious spirit receded as secular concerns played an ever increasing part in the world's affairs. Thus, Europe awoke from the slothful slumber of earlier centuries.

Professor Colvin acclaimed Leonardo da Vinci as the supreme intellect of the Italian Renaissance, and his opinion has been completely confirmed by Edward McCarthy's publication of his "Leonardo da Vinci's Note Books Arranged and Rendered into English," 1906. As an illustrious artist, Leonardo has ever been famous, and now, as Sir William Dampier eloquently affirms, it is obvious that this versatile Italian displayed "a power of mind and force of character which took all knowledge for its study and all art for its expression. A painter, sculptor, engineer, architect, physicist, biologist and philosopher was Leonardo, and in each rôle he was supreme. Perhaps no man in the history of the world shows such a record. His performance, extraordinary as it was, must be reckoned as small compared with the ground he opened up, the grasp of fundamental principles he displayed and the insight with which he seized upon the true methods of investigation in each branch of inquiry. . . . To him observation of nature and experiment were the only true methods of science. Knowledge of the ancient writers, useful as a starting point, could never be conclusive."

Verily, Leonardo possessed an essentially modern mind. He completely disregarded all theological assumptions, and when he condescended to notice the current cult he frankly condemned the ecclesiastical absurdities and anomalies which had become integral parts of the Catholic system. His own philosophy was apparently pantheistic, and he encouraged a comprehensive religion which would permit freedom of thought and expression, and this seemed possible at the time. For a brief interval the Papacy itself was pervaded with a semi-pagan humanism and a peaceful reform of the Church appeared not unlikely. But the pitiless storm resulting from the uncompromising conduct of Luther and his associates shattered the dream of pacific accommodation and, half a century later, a man of Leonardo's enlightened

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WAS THERE A CRUCIFIXION?

II.

ALTHOUGH, according to the Gospels, Jesus was brought before Pilate on a charge of blasphemy—an impossible “crime” if the accounts are “inspired”—Pilate found him entirely innocent yet guilty on another charge—that of sedition; hence the ironical “King of the Jews” on the cross, though Jesus was never the King of the Jews, and as far as my memory goes he never claimed to be.

It is, of course, the custom to dilate upon the conduct of the Jews at the trial, and particularly that of the Jewish priests as being almost too foul to comment upon, the idea being to get in the usual kick at the unhappy face. Yet nearly every detail given in the Gospels was contrary to the Jewish laws at the time. As an example, the Sanhedrim were expressly instructed to see that one of the judges must defend the prisoner—and Jesus had no defender before this court. “If none of the judges,” declares Maimonides, “defend the culprit, i.e., all pronounce him guilty, having no defender in court, the verdict of guilty was invalid and the sentence of death could not be executed.” In case this is objected to as coming from a Jew, let us take the admission of Dr. Geikie in his “Life of Christ,” a most orthodox and Fundamentalist production. He writes:—

“The accused was in all cases to be held innocent till proved guilty. It was an axiom that ‘the Sanhedrim was to save, not to destroy life.’ . . . When a person accused was brought before the court, it was the duty of the president at the outset to admonish the witnesses to remember the value of human life, and to take care that they forgot nothing that would tell in the prisoner’s favour. Nor was he left undefended; a Baal-Rib or counsel was appointed to see that all possible was done for his acquittal . . . the votes of the youngest of the judges were taken first that they might not be influenced by their seniors . . . while the verdict of acquittal could be given at once, that of guilty could only be pronounced the next day. Hence, capital trials could not begin on the day preceding the Sabbath or public feast . . . the judges who condemned anyone to death had to fast all the day before, and no one could be executed on the same day on which the sentence was pronounced.”

It is obvious from this that the final writers or editors of our Gospels knew very little, if anything at all, of the way in which a trial for a capital offence was conducted by the Sanhedrim and, if they were inspired, it looks as if God Almighty knew even less.

Moreover, crucifixion was not a Jewish punishment; nor was it, I believe, a Roman punishment for anyone who called himself a king in a Roman-conquered country. Actually the New Testament writers seem quite confused on this point. Twice Peter says in Acts that Jesus was *hanged* on a tree—and Christians, who will not under any account give up the cross and the Crucifixion, with great pains have to point out that in the Bible, to be hanged on a tree means to be crucified on a cross. Some Christian writers are, however a little more honest. They recognise that the Roman cross upon which criminals were executed was not the shape shown in our pictures of the Crucifixion but nearly always a simple stake. Still, this is not quite as picturesque, so it is best to stick to tradition, however untrue; and besides, we must give it to the Jews both hot and strong. The picture of Jesus on a stake would never arouse the same feelings against them that the crucifix does.

It appears also from Matthew and Mark that the Sanhedrim spit in the face of Jesus and buffeted him and even hit him. Whatever may be said about Jews, everybody in the least

acquainted with the history of their courts of law knows this to be absolutely untrue. It was just as impossible for the Sanhedrim to treat an accused person in this way as for an English judge. The whole account is obviously designed in a spirit of hatred against the Jews; but in all probability it was also based on a play, as John M. Robertson so ably demonstrated. Even the villain of the piece has to carry the hated name for evermore—Judas. It seems hardly possible that anybody could take this tragic figure seriously; he is so obviously designed to be hissed much in the same way as villains were in Victorian melodrama.

In reading the accounts of the Crucifixion, one is so often carried away by the extremely well written narratives that all sorts of significant details are hardly noticed. Luke, for instance, says that the result of Pilate’s sending Jesus to Herod brought about their subsequent friendship. All we know of their history shows the contrary. Herod always hated Pilate and was continually plotting against him.

Notice also how often John disagrees with the other writers. If Luke says that the trial of Jesus took place in the presence of his accusers, John says it did not. If Luke claims that Pilate did not go out of the judgment hall to consult with the accusers of Jesus, John says he did. If Luke says that Peter sat down when he entered the Palace, John says he stood up. If Matthew says that Peter was accused (the second time) of being the friend of Jesus when he went out into the porch, John says it was when he stood in front of the fire and warmed himself. If Matthew and Mark say that Jesus was scourged before he was executed, John says it was before the end of the trial. If Matthew says the colour of the robe he was dressed in was scarlet, John says it was purple. If Mark says that Jesus was struck by a servant, John says it was by an officer; and if Matthew says that Pilate delivered Jesus to his own soldiers to be crucified, John says it was to the Jews.

Remember that it is always insisted that the New Testament writers are inspired—that is, they wrote under the direction of God Almighty himself, though we admit the Lord in this connection is sometimes called the Holy Ghost.

Yet in very few places are they in agreement in describing a trial, every detail of which should show absolute harmony. Even on such a point as carrying the cross, the Synoptics say it was carried by Simon; John, of course, saying it was not, but by Jesus himself. And naturally, if Matthew and Mark say that the women of Galilee stood “afar off” from the execution, John says they “stood by the cross.” Matthew, Mark and Luke all say that the mother of Jesus was *not* present; John says she was. Luke and Mark say that the body was not embalmed before being laid in the sepulchre; John says it was. Disagreeing with nearly everything that the Synoptics say, we need not be surprised to find that John does not agree that Jesus was crucified on a Friday—the “day of preparation.” He says it was on a Thursday. Some more modern writers disagree with both, saying it was on a Wednesday. The Greek word used, however, is still the name for Friday in Greece.

The last supper, according to the Synoptics, was the meal taken by Jews the evening before the Passover; according to John, this is not the case, it was not the Paschal meal. And much controversy has always taken place about this, without anybody being able to decide which of the inspired writers is correct. Nobody knows, and nowadays nobody cares, the Church finally deciding that Friday is right and John is wrong. Or, in other words, it may be that the Church had to conform with Jewish and pagan customs as it did in so many other things. It is not just mere coincidence that the death and crucifixion of Jesus should take place at the vernal equinox. The whole story was deliberately designed for this end.

H. CUTNER.

EVOLUTION AND ETHICS

I.

THE late T. H. Huxley in 1893 delivered a lecture under this title which created no little stir in its time. It was hailed by certain Christian apologists quite unjustifiably as a sort of recantation on Huxley's part—an admission that, while evolution could account for most things in life, it could not account for man's moral sense.

What Huxley actually said was very different. His thesis in this lecture may be summed up thus: Man is largely indebted for his survival in evolution to qualities which he shares with the ape and tiger—in particular, to cunning and to ruthless ferocity. Within the social group, however, these qualities are drawbacks, and the more so in proportion as the group becomes more advanced. "The ape and tiger methods of the struggle for existence are not reconcilable with sound ethical principles." Huxley has "little doubt" (probably, in fact, he had no doubt at all) that moral sentiments, like other natural phenomena, originated by a process of evolution. But, however it originated, "social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process," or, in other words, the substitution of co-operation for competition—a process already at work in a beehive or a society of birds or mammals. Man has progressed by combating the cosmic process and building up an artificial world within the cosmos, a "state of art" in opposition to the "state of nature."

There is here no repudiation of evolution, but an insistence that two phases of evolution, the "cosmic" and the "social," are antagonistic. "If the conclusion," says Huxley in the "Prolegomena" prefixed to this lecture in his published works, "that the two are antagonistic is logically absurd, I am sorry for logic because, as we have seen, the fact is so." As a matter of fact, the position is logically absurd only if we use a logic which insists that like must produce like. That, of course, is the pet logic of Christian apologists, who never tire of telling us that a lifeless world could never have evolved life, nor a mindless world mind, nor an irrational universe reason, nor an immoral nature morality, and of using these alleged impossibilities as arguments for the existence of God. The same sort of apologist naturally fastened on Huxley's lecture as a surrender of the case for the evolutionary origin of human society, despite his rejection of any such inference.

Huxley would undoubtedly have strengthened his case if he had paid more attention to its logical aspect. Three-quarters of a century before Huxley's lecture Hegel had given the world a logic which should have disposed for ever of the dogma that like must produce like. Every phenomenon contains the germ of its own negation; reality is a union of contradictories. There is nothing more impossible in the lifeless evolving life, the mindless mind, the irrational reason, and the immoral morality, than in water freezing into ice or the acorn growing into the oak. From what I have read of Huxley I do not gather that he had studied Hegel; but the dialectic would have been a powerful weapon in his hand. The conclusion of the lecture on "Evolution and Ethics," that man progresses by combating the cosmic process, reminds us strikingly of the standpoint of Hegel's greatest follower, Karl Marx (with whom Huxley would have been amazed to find himself in agreement!) in his "Theses on Feuerbach": "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

A defect in Huxley's lecture is the unduly static treatment of ethics. For him, ethical principles, once they emerge out of the welter of evolution, are fixed; progress is simply a matter of their wider and more successful application. This treatment of ethics is a pre-Darwinian survival, not "of the fittest." The moral ideas of a social group are part of its evolutionary equip-

ment in the struggle for existence, just as its tools and social organisation are; and each are subject to modification by changing conditions. The taboos of the primitive clan or tribe give place to the priestly wisdom of ancient civilisations, the private judgment of developing capitalism, the power-politics of modern big business, and the solidarity of the modern working class movement. Each of these ideologies is different from the others, and on its first emergence appears as a new mutation, a "revaluation of the values" of its predecessors. The investigation of moral ideas in relation to their changing background is a necessary part of evolutionary science; and, as I shall show in further articles, the failure to allow for their development is a pitfall in which even the most distinguished evolutionist, when he ventures off the beaten track of his special science, may be disastrously caught.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

ACID DRÖPS

THE new Speaker of the House of Commons, Colonel Clifton Brown, according to the "Glasgow Herald," has said: "I should regard it as a great occasion if it fell to my lot to lead the House of Commons into the church across the road at the end of the war." We think that the Speaker would have acted wisely if he had left such an aspiration unspoken, and, better still, if he never felt it. His function is not a religious one, and he may easily be called upon to hold the scale level between religious and non-religious speakers. He may have what religion he pleases—as Colonel Brown. As Speaker, he should beware of expressing preferences—save the desire to act fairly to all. The motive for members marching to the "church across the road" need not be a very lofty one. So far as the march is concerned, some would certainly be humbugs.

The Principal of Sheffield Training College says that only three per cent. of children—in Sheffield, we presume—attend a place of worship. Well, what of that? For our part, it is evidence only that present-day children have a happier and better childhood than earlier generations had. But the Principal's discovery helps folks to understand why the leaders of the Churches are anxious to see that children have forced religious lessons in schools. The statement made will help. They know the parents are really not burning to have their children taught religion, in spite of the "faked" letters sent to the papers, and the old maids who write such tearful letters to local papers asking that their children should have a dogmatic religious education.

A picture in a recent issue of the "Daily Sketch" depicts a soldier kneeling in church with one hand apparently clutching his eyebrows, with the descriptive line, "A picture that symbolises the nation's dedication to a righteous cause." In that case, we can only say that it depicts a lie. For the nation is not cultivating that position either in or out of the Church. Numbers may be so acting, but then numbers are carrying charms ranging from a rabbit's foot to a Roman Catholic medal to protect their lives during the war. There are many millions who do not pray and who have no intention of praying. Our Christian leaders know this and say this. Why then go on circulating the lie that a man on his knees holding on to his eyebrows symbolises Britain? No general would think of selecting men for a tough job by the method of finding out which of his men pray most; and we feel sure that if the men go into a fierce battle, what is on their lips with regard to what they are doing is anything but a prayer.

A suggestion to newspaper editors—with no expectation of it being adopted: If editors of newspapers wish really to test the position of vast numbers of people in this country, let them open their pages to a genuine discussion of the present position of Christianity. That would mean an increase in circulation and a manifestation of honesty by the British Press which has not yet been seen. But, my, what an outcry there would be from the Churches if such a thing were to happen. A British newspaper acting with absolute fairness with regard to religion! No, No! Miracles died out long ago.

The strength of Christian preachers lies in their readiness to contradict to-morrow what they say to-day; and a guarantee of their security lies in the ability of a certain section of the public not remembering to-day what they were told 24 hours earlier. For example: We have had of late, in the Press, a number of puffs of the religious quality of our Air Force, and if many of them are influenced by the imbecilities of the travelling padre who performs weekly on the B.B.C. platform, that story might be true. But true or false, the main consideration with religious propaganda is, "Does it pay?" So we are having the soldiers depicted as very religious, while for another part of Church propaganda the schools are being attacked for turning out pupils who are destitute of religious belief.

We were led to the above by turning up a copy of the "Southport Guardian" for September 9, 1942. There is therein a report of an Evangelical Conference, and the speakers, including a Squadron-Leader (Rev. O. C. Gould), were all alarmed at the heathenish condition of the flying men. He said there are "thousands in the Service who are pagan in everything but name. Splendid young people, but going to the devil." Other speakers followed in the same vein. Among them the Rector of Rusholme, Manchester, said there was "a general apostacy with regard to Christianity." There you have Christian propaganda in a nutshell. It is probable there were more Christians in the Army in 1942 than was said, and it is quite true that there are less Christians in the Fighting Forces than the preachers now claim. Persistence in the same lie is not essential to Christian propaganda. It never was. The great thing was to be ready with a misstatement to suit the occasion. "The Lord loveth a lusty liar"—we think that is a misquotation, but it displays greater truth than the original.

The Wigtown Town Council is daring, but cautious. It recently resolved to permit Sunday tennis in its open spaces. It is to be confined to members of the Forces. But the Bible is emphatic. It says that the Sabbath day must be kept holy; it does not say "by all except the Armed Forces." Is there any reason that justifies soldiers and airmen playing games on Sunday that will not justify civilians joining in? We remind the "unco' guid" that the Lord is not to be fooled by these shallow devices.

The Rev. J. Braizes Green says, "You can stand on the steps of St. John's Methodist Church, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, and count 13 licensed houses." We are not sure as to how this happens; perhaps the sermons in St. John's are unusually dry. Anyway, it would be more awesome if, standing on the steps of a "pub," one could see 13 churches. It would drive him back whence he had come.

The "Glasgow Herald" reports the case of a man who, "at the end of a religious service in Drury Street, Glasgow, went round and took up a collection." He was fined £1 at the Central Police Court. Such resourcefulness deserves recognition of a different kind.

A City of London Society, the Fellowship of the Vacant Chair, recently held a meeting. Sir George Aylwen, partner of a large stockbroking firm, said: "We must in future think not what they can take out of the common pool, but what they can put in." It looks like a race between Prayer and "Preyer." It's odds on the last.

Everything that will encourage religion in the Army is now being done. We now see that "the military authorities"—which we imagine means only particular officers in command—have arranged to give those desiring it a four-day course preparing them for confirmation. That will mean, we take it, so long as fighting is not going on, four days' respite from routine labours. The men are to give their "undivided" attention to their souls. We wonder how many will get saved for the sake of the four days' relief. Also what would happen if at the end of the course, the student was to settle down to a regular reading of "The Freethinker"?

In the open-air performance of some of Shakespeare's plays this summer, "The Merchant of Venice" is to have a place. James Agate recently said of the characters in the play: "Portia is poseuse, a cheat and insufferably conceited, and all the characters, apart from Shylock, are the poorest lot ever assembled in one play." We agree that of the characters all are relatively weak, but that is partly because Shylock towers so much above the others, and even then not many critics dare to say what some of the better critics must have seen. This is that meanness and littleness seem to be stressed on many of the characters to stress the real lesson that Shakespeare may have had in mind.

It may be noticed that the worst in every character comes out in connection with religion. Outside that they are of ordinary decency. But while the worst feature of Shylock also comes out in connection with religion, the greatness of the character stands above it. The "Hath not a Jew" passage gives a keynote. He is made to say to the Christian in as plain a language as possible: "My virtues are my own, my vices I owe to you, and each have been strengthened by my Christian associations." It is one of the most subtle indictments of the evil influence of Christianity on character with which we are acquainted.

We have received a letter of protest against what the writer properly considers an insult to the inhabitants of a well-known Scottish town. The town had been bombed and, as in the case of so many other places, the people rallied round the sufferers and displayed that degree of mutual help that is common among the "lower classes" when real suffering is afoot. Those belonging to Churches, and those who did not, joined hands in helping others. That is a common feature of all cases of general distress.

But the ghouls of the Churches, representatives that boast of living on the misery and misfortune of people, saw a chance. A "Save-the-Home" mission was started—not a matter of rebuilding and refurbishing damaged homes, but what is called bringing people "Back to Christ," or to God, or to the rest of the heavenly crowd that sits up aloft seeing things happen. The main idea of the campaign is that people must come back to Church if homes are to be morally saved. It is part of the lying campaign initiated by the Archbishops and other Christian leaders, about the low moral tone of the people. Many thousands of homes are poor enough, are a disgrace to any country counting itself as civilised, but the situation is not to be mended by parades of upholders of an outworn superstition. We are not surprised that our correspondent is indignant at the insult offered to people whose chief offence is their misfortune.

At a recent meeting organised by the National Union of Teachers at Sutton, in support of a proposed new Education Bill, Catholics were not permitted to put an amendment "to ensure freedom and support for Catholic schools." This seems to have annoyed the Catholics, judging by the comments of the "Catholic Herald." But surely the attitude of the N.U.T. was not only logical, but just. As a body of teachers, the N.U.T. cannot be expected to burden itself with the propaganda problems of any religious body. Their object in holding the meeting was to further the educational welfare of children—all children—not to consider sectarian religious claims. To have accepted such an amendment would have been unjust to other religious bodies, and would have put upon the N.U.T. (by implication) the stigma that they were not equally interested in the education of children who happened to be Catholics. We feel sure the N.U.T. is interested in the education of all children, but the making of young Catholics is specifically a job for the priest, and not for honest teachers.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

For distributing "The Freethinker": C. Tarling, 10s.; J. Cronin, 10s.

C. H. CORBETT.—We are not surprised you find "The Freethinker" "full of blasphemy." There will always be plenty of it, but when you get over the shock you will, like many others, find the shock stimulating and healthy. And a belief that cannot stand a shock cannot be worth much to anybody.

R. P. TURNEY.—We note your warm appreciation of Mr. Du Cann's writings. We know it is shared by many of our readers. But Freethinkers will criticise when they think it necessary but, we hope, without losing their temper or their power to appreciate good writing when they see it.

S. MARINS.—We have decided on reprinting the articles on Christianity in book form, with additions and enlargements. The next step is to get over the printing problem. But the articles have attracted more notice than we anticipated.

E. L. W.—If you know when you will be in London, Mr. Cohen will try to fix a date for meeting you. Thanks for appreciation and good wishes.

W. J. FREEMAN.—It was good to get your letter printed. The absence of a reply may be but a testimony to you. He is a wise Christian who knows when to be silent. The B.B.C. shows a similar wisdom—it refuses to broadcast any criticisms on Christian doctrines.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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SUGAR PLUMS

DESPITE the very fine weather on Sunday last, the Chorlton Town Hall was crowded to listen to Chapman Cohen's address. It was pleasant to the speaker to see many familiar faces, and to know that there were very many newcomers in the audience. Mr. Monks occupied the chair with his usual ability and made a very earnest appeal for more active work by those who believe in the Freethought cause. We hope the appeal will bring good results. There are large numbers of Freethinkers in Manchester who are willing to help if contact can be made. Meanwhile, Freethinkers should bear in mind that the Churches are determined, with the assistance of our war-time, semi-Coalition Government, to gain a larger measure of control of the schools than they have at present; and our Minister of Education is busily playing the part of No. 1 advertiser to the value of religion.

The Annual Conference of the N.S.S. will be held in London on Whit-Sunday. Will those who are coming from the Provinces, Scotland and, we hope, Wales, and who wish to have accommodation secured, communicate with the General Secretary as early as possible with a full statement of their requirements. It is not an easy task at present to fix up visitors, but the best will be done. *Only write soon.*

Turning out some old papers we hit by sheer accident on a twelve-year-old copy of the "Church Times," and our eyes rested on the statement: "The truth is—and the sooner it is recognised the better—England is no longer a Christian country." Now we agree with this thoroughly. But we also note that in 1943 the "Church Times" is demanding that our schools shall be Christianised, and the most that can be done for non-Christians is to permit them to go without that religious instruction. Why this change? Of course, if this was really a Christian country—not in the sense that we have a King who, by virtue of a very old law must believe in a certain type of religion, or that we have a large number of Church officials paid mainly out of the public purse, but in the sense that the overwhelming number of people had deliberately chosen Christianity—then we could understand England being called a Christian country. But not otherwise. The vast majority of people do not attend Church, and they have no real belief in Christianity. *We need not prove this; the obvious facts prove it.*

Even our Archbishops admit this, for when the plot between them and the Government was announced to re-place the clergy in the schools, the express grounds for this change was that adults took little or no interest in religion, and children were growing up in complete ignorance of what constituted Christianity was. If by chance the Government gets a majority in the voting on the new Bill, then we may take another step towards making this a Christian country, and in that case the war will have brought something—for the Churches and the Conservative Party.

It is next to impossible for Christians to act fairly where the interests of their religion are in question. An example of this is found in the pleasure of the "Church Times" over the growing number of hours that is spent by the B.B.C. in broadcasting Christian propaganda. In other circumstances, and in relation to most other subjects, the "Church Times" would most probably say that the B.B.C. should be impartial to all shades of opinion. But where Christianity is concerned, fair play and common justice has no home. It requires little study of the development of mankind to realise that intolerance had its development—probably its origin—in belief in gods, and so long as it is a recognisable part of the human make-up, so long will intolerance persist.

The "Church Times" also notes that, owing to broadcasting, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, instead of being mythical figures, have gone right into the homes of millions of people. We agree. The B.B.C. is one of the greatest advertising agencies we have; and that should be another reason for impartiality. Nobodies are turned into somebodies; mediocre, would-be funny men become a "draw" in music-halls; shoddy thinkers are turned into philosophers; and second-rate writers find it to their interest to come out through the microphones if they wish to become "best-sellers." All this is quite obvious, and it provides additional reasons for fair play to all. We suggest to all who doubt what has been said to ask themselves how many men who are now public figures would have been thought of as such had the B.B.C. never existed? Of course, this—other things being equal—would be quite useful. But other things are not equal, for the persons selected are brought before the microphone mainly because they are "safe" and will obey orders and submit to restrictions. Consider the twaddle that is discussed by the Brains Trust, the way in which men and women are pulled up if they happen to venture on a "dangerous" road, the careful selection of questions that are of no consequence whatever, and the careful avoidance of anything that shall cast a doubt on religion. A few have come out and live in a cleaner and clearer atmosphere. But the bait of publicity appears to be too much for most of them.

HEART, HEAD, HAND

A heart to resolve, a head to contrive, and a hand to execute.
—EDWARD GIBBON.

"Can I go forward when my heart is here?"
—"ROMEO AND JULIET."

HEART, head and hand! Mighty triumvirate! Fortunate indeed is he who has these organs working together in complete co-ordination, and *playing* together in perfect harmony—not only to his own satisfaction and contentment, but for the welfare and happiness of others.

In a homily addressed to American business men many years ago a Dr. Crane said that it is far more important to get yourself liked than to try and prove something to another man's mind, and added: "Perhaps he has no mind to speak of, but we all have hearts!" If you want your appeal to the emotions to be successful, be careful to aim about two inches below the collar-bone, for the heart is the seat of the affections, the centre of the feelings, the home of charitable inclinations, the well of good resolutions and alas! the source of ill-nature and unhappiness.

Gibbon gives pride of place to the heart in his aphorism, for did he not learn his lessons—not by the head—but "by heart"? Again, when Cassius at the termination of his quarrel with Brutus, and as evidence of his peaceful intentions, said: "Give me your hand," Brutus, without hesitation, replied: "And my heart, too." How long this happy state of affairs might have lasted is a matter for conjecture, for both were killed a day or two afterwards.

On the other hand, it is recorded in the Bible how the Lord deliberately hardened Pharaoh's heart that he would not let the children of Israel go. In the "Tempest," Miranda is so overcome when speaking to her lover Ferdinand that not only does she give him her hand, but "with my heart in it," she said. But this giving away of hearts is not confined to the gentle sex (so called), for Byron sang:—

"Maid of Athens, ere we part,
Give, oh give me back my heart"

—whilst in another poem a lady had "her heart on her lips, and soul within her eyes." This circumstance is in accord with that of the hero of popular fiction who, in times of danger, proceeded always with his heart in his mouth! Sometimes in his boot!

Paradoxical as it may appear, hard-hearted people have not the heart for any feeling at all, for the supplicant in a moment of appeal to them will say, "Have a heart!" And yet it is a common occurrence for a man to lose his head in a moment of temptation or danger, and at the same time have his heart in the "right place." Again, the ardent lover considers that he is performing an act of magnanimity in giving his heart to his lady-love, whilst she, on her part, surrenders her heart to him after coyly refusing for as long as she is able. This process is known as an exchange of hearts, and must not be confused with a change of heart.

In a moment of perplexity or wonderment a man may be heard to exclaim, "Bless my heart!" (sometimes it is his soul, too). What does he mean? Probably he is merely repeating the words he heard when, as a baby, he lay in his cradle and gurgled with delight as some adoring female relative said, as she bent over him, "Bless his heart." Years later a drill sergeant may attempt to break his heart.

In the "Merchant of Venice" it was Bassanio who, in consideration for the non-payment of a loan, was prepared to forfeit not only his hands and head, but his heart also. There is a song which runs, "You are my heart's delight," and the singer may admit that he has a heartache for the object of his affections. It must be confessed that this expression is more appropriate than having a headache for her! The latter term is certain to

be misunderstood. That the heart is a garden with roses blooming in it has been known—to song-writers, at least—for many years. But care should be exercised in seeing that no worm enters the bud "to eat thy heart," as Spenser said.

The heart is symbolic of the feelings and may be either hard, soft, good or bad. Generally speaking, it is a mixture of many elements. But these elements may be so mixed in a fellow-being that we are able to echo Shakespeare's words, "and say to all the world, This was a man!"

There are some types of character of whom it is said, "he is ruled by his heart." In this instance George Eliot's remarks are recalled: "The secret of our emotions never lies in the bare object but in its subtle relations to our own past: no wonder the secret escapes the upsympathising observer, who might as well put on his spectacles to discern odours"; and again, "There are moments when by some strange impulse we contradict our past selves—fatal moments—when a fit of passion, like a lava stream, lays low the work of half our lives."

The heart resolves and the head contrives, said Gibbon. The implication is that of a continuous conflict between emotion and reason, the results of which very often are "the sorrows that spring from false ideas for which no man is culpable."

The elements of religion and emotion are so mixed up that it is difficult to discern which is the offspring and which is the mainspring. One of the causes which sets this crazy contraption into motion is the hand of fear. Burns summed up the position very well when he said:—

The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip
To haud the wretch in order!

—to which may be added Popo's couplet:—

The ruling passion be it what it will,
The ruling passion conquers reason still.

A little more use of the *head* and a little less use of the *heart* would have rendered the *hand* of religion much less harmful and acts of intolerance, far less hurtful.

S. GORDON HOGG

MATERIALISM OR SUPERNATURALISM?

MATERIALISM is dead. There is no doubt whatever about that. The clergy have officiated at the funeral; the register of burial has been signed by eminent scientists; and England's foremost philosopher has written its epitaph. Yes, materialism is as dead as a door-nail. No popular exposition of modern science, or guide to modern thought, written ostensibly for the enlightenment of an inquiring world, would be considered to be complete without at least a preliminary reference to the demise of materialism. It must be distinctly understood at the outset that materialism is dead, or nothing wonderful or mysterious could come of what the author is about to relate, and if there were nothing wonderful or mysterious to relate, what chance would there be of convincing anyone that science is no longer hostile to religion, and that it now gives new interpretations of the cosmic process which are congruous with Christian theism?

In the introduction to his work entitled "Contemporary Mind," J. W. N. Sullivan tells us that "it seems perfectly clear that a return to the naive materialism of the 19th century is impossible." This is the first part of the recognised procedure. Then later on, at page 67, he says: "We have now reached a deeper level of understanding of the universe, and at the same time the universe has become more mysterious." In other words, "the more we understand anything the less we know about it." This is the second part of the procedure. If this succeeds there is no limit to the amount of mystery and nonsense the bewildered reader is subsequently prepared to swallow. Sir James Jeans writes a book to which he gives the alluring title "The

Mysterious Universe." In his "Guide to Modern Thought," C. E. M. Joad, speaking of electronic jumps, says that "the jumping electron does not appear to pass over the intervening space between the orbit of departure and the orbit of arrival" (page 78), which reminds us of the edifying disquisitions of Martinus Scriblerus, who inquires "if angels pass from one extreme to another without going through the middle." These are only a few samples, picked up at random; of what we must be prepared to find in the class of works referred to, and after their perusal we are often left wondering whether we have really been reading expositions of science, or deliberate attempts at mystification in the interests of religion.

The matter is carried a stage further by emphasising the limitations of science. Sir A. S. Eddington, in "The Nature of the Physical World," says: "Physical science has limited its scope so as to leave a background which we are at liberty to, or even invited to, fill with a reality of spiritual import." But if such a background exists, we are at liberty to fill it with anything apart from personal preference, why we should fill it with religion, which is evidently the reality of spiritual import implied, any more than with any other kind of superstitious belief. C. E. M. Joad, commenting on this passage from Eddington, says that "Science may have cleared the boards for religion, but it has no contribution to offer to the writing of the play." ("Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science," page 188.) Nor, he might have added, has it anything to say in the choice of the performers; and if the boards have been cleared in the interests of a particularly favoured brand of superstition we can hardly be surprised to find it accompanied by a crowd of its poor relations, and that in consequence the world of to-day is witnessing the revival of a system of beliefs and practices reminiscent of the Middle Ages.

"There is far more superstition now than when I was a young man. We thought that at any rate we had grown out of astrology; but it has come to life again. Astrology, necromancy, ghosts, prophecies, miracles, amulets, lucky and unlucky actions, second sight, quack medicine, the whole apparatus of barbarous tomfoolery and make-believe, flourish among us like a green bay-tree." (Dean Inge, "Evening Standard," February 25, 1943.)

Although "it seems perfectly clear that a return to the naive materialism of the 19th century is impossible," there appears to be no objection to a return to the superstitions of a period much more remote. We are deliberately told that the materialistic doctrine of the certainty and universality of law has disappeared from the scientist's world, and that the distinction between the natural and the supernatural has been abolished. Eddington admits that: "We can hardly deny the charge that in abolishing the criterion of causality we are opening the door to the savage's demons." ("The Nature of the Physical World," page 309.)

We are impressively informed of recent momentous revolutions in science, and are expected to believe that not only materialism, but also the greater part of the teaching of 19th century science, has had to be abandoned. This comes of confusing physics with the whole of science, and one or two of the more verbose physicists with the whole of physics. Planck admits that "There are parts of physics, among them the wide region of the phenomena of interference, where the classical theory has proved its validity in every detail, even when subjected to the most delicate measurements; while the quantum theory, at least in its present form, is in these respects completely useless." In "The Evolution of Physics," by Einstein and Infeld, we are reminded at every suitable opportunity that classical physics is valid for all ordinary occurrences with which we are immediately concerned. For instance, "every car driver can safely apply classical physics even if he increases his speed a hundred thousand times. We could only expect disagreement between

experiment and the classical transformation with velocities approaching that of light" (page 201); and "It would be just as ridiculous to apply the theory of relativity to the motion of cars, ships and trains as to use a calculating machine where a multiplication table would be sufficient" (page 202).

Relativity and quantum theory, concerned as they are exclusively with stellar phenomena on the one hand, and atomic phenomena on the other, have no practical bearing on the affairs of every-day life, and in this respect are anything but revolutionary when compared with the Copernican and Darwinian theories. The rejection of causality, based on Heisenberg's principle of Indeterminacy, is still a bone of contention, in connection with which Einstein tells us that "the last word has not yet been said."

Then there is the widespread belief that because matter may be resolved into energy or radiation it has therefore become less material. "Modern matter is something infinitely attenuated and elusive; it is a hump in space time, a 'mush' of electricity, a wave of probability undulating into nothingness." (C. E. M. Joad, "Guide to Modern Thought," page 17.) When matter passes from the solid to the liquid and gaseous states it becomes more and more attenuated, but no one would on that account think of saying that it was getting less and less material. Why should it, then, be considered less material when resolved into energy? "Every beam of light we receive from the sun carries with it definite weight, as real as the weight of a ton of coal." (Jeans: "The Universe Around Us.") According to the theory of relativity, there is no essential distinction between mass and energy. Energy has mass, and mass represents energy. We may regard matter as concentrated energy, or energy as diffused matter. There is nothing in this to support the statement that materialism is dead, nor to justify the extravagant language of those who specialise in the reconciliation of science and religion.

Although materialism is deemed to be dead, it is worthy of remark to note the virulence with which it is still attacked. These attacks are significant and arouse more than a suspicion that materialism is not so dead as some people would like it to be, nor as they would have others believe, and on investigation we find it to be still very much alive. The choice remains between materialism and supernaturalism—there is no middle course.

FRANK KENYON.

THE DIVINITY OF BLUNDERS

A Reputed Poem by Robert Burns

To gull the mob and keep them under
The ancients told their tales o' wonder;
A pious fraud, a holy blunder,
A rainbow sign,
An earthquake, or a blast o' thunder,
Were held divine.

By those who've faith to swallow doses,
A wondrous story nothing loses,
The dext'rous feats ascribed to Moses,
Are proof as plain
O' sleight o' hand, as Herman Bose's
Legerdemain.

Believe the stories o' tradition,
Let sense tak' place o' superstition,
The royal magic competition—
Oh! sacred fountain
Which can a midge, by faith's volition,
Swell to a mountain.

A God of mercy, just and good,
Held forth as in an angry mood,
Droonin' the world, dee in a flood,
To punish Hymen
And turnin' water into blood
Just like a demon.

The murdered thousands in a trice,
Made Egypt swarm wi' frogs and lice;
Had he made coos, and sheep, and rice,
His hungry hordes then
Might ilka yin hae got a slice
An' praise their Lord then.

Wi' hocus-pocus rod in hand,
Like Mother Goose's magic wand,
They could the elements command.
As legends run—
Divide the sea, or burn the land,
Or stop the Sun.

Their prodigies bombast surpasses,
Like dykes the ocean stood in masses,
They'd flying Prophets, speaking Asses
Besides a saut wife
They're am'rous ghosts o'ercome the lasses
Wha lived that life.

Their Samson's strength lay in his hair,
Their jealous waters sterling were
Showers o' fire can' thro' the air
Like brimstone danders;
Saints lived in fire, by virtue rare,
Like salamanders.

The Apostle Paul, by fancy's whim,
Soar'd up to heaven as in a dream,
An' Satan brought him back, 'twould seem,
So says himsel';
But how could Nick to heaven climb,
Wha's chained in hell?

This damn'd and wily serpent Nick
Was promised lang a mighty kick,
But turned the chase, and played the trick
Wi' God's first-born,
He got him scourg'd, nailed on a stick,
An' crowned wi' thorn.

First search the subject through the piece;
'Tis fraught wi' blunders such as these,
That rev'rend priests their flocks may fleece
Wi' wily conscience—
Teach human beings by degrees
To swallow nonsense.

The sovereign leaders of each faction,
Join hand in hand in close compaction,
To set God's kingdom up for auction—
A lumpin' bargain!
Drive silly mortals to destruction,
Wi' their damn'd jargon.

Yet mortal truth shall gain the day,
Illum'd by Nature's glorious ray,
Anathemas shall flee away,
Wi' priests and de'ils;
Sound reason shall her sceptre sway,
Hard at their heels.

LEONARDO DA VINCI AND HIS TIMES

(Continued from page 183)

and outspoken character would have perished in a dungeon or at a Protestant or Catholic stake.

Unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries who gave priority to speculation, Leonardo approached scientific problems from a practical standpoint. To perfect his paintings he studied optics and closely investigated the structure of the visual organs, the bodily framework and the problem of avian flight. Unverified statements he cast aside, and during his labours as civil, as well as military engineer, he experimentally probed the problems of mechanics, both static and dynamic.

Outstanding genius as he was, however, da Vinci did not stand in solitary grandeur. To forerunners and scientific contemporaries alike, he was indebted for information and assistance. Alberti, as Dr. Dampier points out, had preceded him in mathematical studies and physical inquiries. Toscanella, the astronomer, Vespucci and other Italian humanists were reading and interpreting the secrets of Nature, while Botticelli, Dürer and other distinguished artists were improving their technique. Our historian concludes that: "It is clear from Leonardo's notebooks and otherwise, that a century before the days of Galileo, a small circle of kindred spirits lived in Italy, more interested in things than in books, in experimental inquiry than in the opinions of Aristotle."

Still, Leonardo was grateful to obtain manuscript copies of the writings of Archimedes, for whose practical ability he expressed the highest admiration. Later, when a Latin version of Archimedes' works was published it was earnestly studied by Galileo, and it presumably aided him in his astounding discoveries. As for Leonardo, he evidently found in Archimedes an *alter ego*, in his deep devotion to experiment as the hall-mark of science.

Leonardo, unfortunately composed no treatise on scientific method, but his notebooks prove that he anticipated Francis Bacon's later exposition of this theme, and he utilised it successfully a century in advance of Galileo. "Those sciences are vain," Leonardo declares, "and full of errors which are not born from experiment, the mother of all certainty." Moreover, those who rely on practice, minus science, are as inefficient as sailors without compass or rudder.

Da Vinci's insight was astounding. He understood the principle of inertia which Galileo subsequently demonstrated. He was also aware that the velocity of a descending body increases greatly as it falls. He exploded the hypothesis that perpetual motion can be utilised as a source of power, and he reached several other sound conclusions by means of experiment in the physical domain which awaited rediscovery by his successors. The earth he regarded as a star which reflects light in a manner similar to that of the moon and, in marked contradistinction to the accepted Aristotelian concept of the Universe, he pictured the starry spaces as a celestial mechanism immutably subservient to cosmic law.

Another remarkable instance of the modernity of Leonardo's mind was his conviction that our earthly dwelling place is immensely old. Three centuries before Hutton and his disciple, Lyell, propounded the theory of uniformity in Nature's operations—a doctrine now universally accepted by geologists—and when fossils were explained as mere freaks, Leonardo advanced correct views. To cite Sir William Dampier's excellent summary: "Fossils now on high inland mountains were produced in sea-water and could not have reached their present position in the 40 days of the Noachian deluge; indeed, the whole waters of the world, clouds, rivers and ocean, could not cover the mountains of the earth. There must, he argued, have been changes in the crust of the earth, and mountains have raised themselves in fresh places. But no catastrophic action was needed: 'in time the

To will lay dry land in the Adriatic in the same way as it has already deposited a great part of Lombardy."

Dissection was sternly forbidden by the Church, but Leonardo carefully dissected several corpses, and not only are his anatomical drawings accurate, but they possess high merit as artistic achievements. In addition to his structural studies, Leonardo proved a pioneer in his researches into physiological function, and his descriptions suggest that he had grasped "the general principle of the circulation of the blood 100 years or more before it was rediscovered by Harvey." The fantasies of necromancy, astrology and alchemy he contemptuously dismissed for to him Nature's operations were uniformly directed by inexorable law.

Leonardo's extraordinary versatility was equalled by his industry. To our loss, he never obtained time to write the works he projected dealing with the many branches of science of which he made himself the master. Still, a highly respected philosopher who was intimate with rulers and statesmen, as well as the leading savants of his time, must have conveyed by word of mouth much of the knowledge he possessed to his princely patrons and literary and scientific contemporaries. Thus, many of his speculations and discoveries were probably preserved and handed down to later generations and served to enrich their intellectual heritage. In any event, one may cordially endorse the verdict of Sir William Dampier when he states that: "If we had to choose one figure to stand for all time as the incarnation of the true spirit of the Renaissance, we should point to the majestic figure of Leonardo da Vinci."

T. F. PALMER.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHOUGHT AND WAR

Sir.—Mr. Du Cann cries before he is hurt. I did but protest against his Pacifist propaganda in your columns (an opinion to which I am entitled and to which I adhere); and he drags in red herrings about "free expression," "tolerance" and what not. Anyone would think I had demanded his internment under Regulation 18 B.

He accuses me of bigotry. I plead guilty. I am a bigoted believer in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and having followed world events more intelligently than Mr. Du Cann, I know Fascism, whether represented by Mussolini, Hitler, Franco or Mosley, to be a malignant conspiracy to destroy those values. I therefore support the British, French, Russian and other peoples' war of defence against Fascism, and am not "put out" by irrelevant sneers at armament manufacturers or the British Empire. I have said as strong things about them as Mr. Du Cann at the proper time and place; but unlike him, I put the struggle against Fascism first.

Mr. Du Cann denies that he advocates non-resistance. Good! Then he should be in favour of the resistance of the invaded and occupied countries of Europe to the filthiest gang of thugs ever let loose on them since the Thirty Years' War; and he should be in favour of every effort we can make to come to their rescue, instead of disingenuously sneering at such efforts as "war-worship," and then, when he is criticised, squealing about "freedom."—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

THEATRE IN WAR-TIME.

Sir.—Perhaps you will be good enough to allow me space to correct one statement I made in my article, "The London Theatre in War-time" which appeared in a recent issue of "The Freethinker." In a cordial letter, Mr. J. B. Priestley has pointed out to me that his play "They Came to the City" did not tour because it could not find a West End theatre. He writes that he "asked specially that it should have about three months first in the Provinces so that, whatever happened to the play in London, at least a number of Provincial people would be able to see it performed with the original London cast."

I was not in possession of this fact, and regret the inaccuracy of my statement. When I was informed in the first instance that such a vital "message" could not find a London theatre, I accepted the information as a matter of course; it was, after all, I thought, consistent behaviour on the part of West End theatre managements to shun a play which said *something*, and said it both vigorously and persuasively. Consequently, the reflection was not upon the play, but upon prevailing conditions in theatreland.—Yours, etc.,

PETER NORTHCORE.

CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE

While there can be no doubt that much heroic self-devotion was shown in the efforts made to convert the new subjects of Spain [in the New World], it is equally unquestionable that a majority of the ecclesiastics who sought the colonies were men of evil character. The councils held in the various provinces deplore the bad example which they set to their newly-converted flocks, and the regulations which were issued time and again against their excesses show the impossibility of keeping them under control.

H. C. LEA.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held 29th April, 1943

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

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Ebury, Horowitz, Mrs. Quinton, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary. Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Newcastle, North Staffs Branches and to the Parent Society. Delegates to a conference for organising a campaign to combat anti-Semitism and Fascism reported and discussed. Correspondence from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham, North London, West London and the Air Ministry dealt with and instructions given.

Lecture reports were noted and future arrangements agreed upon. Details concerning the Annual Conference were discussed.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, May 27, 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): Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields. 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park): Sunday, 3-30 p.m., Mr. G. E. WOOD and supporting speakers. Thursday, 7 p.m., Mr. E. C. SAPHIN.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. E. G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D.—"Intellectual Totalitarianism."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

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

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place, Blackburn): Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORT—"Secular Education."

Burnley (Market): Sunday, 6-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound): Sunday, 7-30 p.m., Mr. A. COPLAND (Glasgow).

Higham: Friday, May 7, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

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

Padiham (near the Tennis Courts): Sunday, 3-15 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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