

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Religious Fraud

AT what point may one by speaking, writing or teaching lay himself open to a criminal charge? Well, there is a general law that forbids writing in such a way as to injure a man's reputation, even when what is said concerning him may be true, unless the statement is made in the interests of the public. There is a Statute law against blasphemy dating from the last quarter of the 17th century that is of so ferocious a character that it has never been put into operation, although that does not prevent the Houses of Parliament refusing to abolish it. Probably they think it may prove serviceable if things take, for them, a bad turn. There is also a common law of blasphemy—that comes into operation every now and again—the function of which is to protect the feelings of Christians from being "outraged" by unbelievers; and as, by the connivance of God, the juries are always made up of Christians, prosecution is usually successful.

Spiritualism is permitted, but every now and again prosecutions take place for "faking" communications with the dead—a practice that Spiritualists are as ready to denounce as anyone. It will be noted that when a Christian Church fakes miracles for the capture of the foolish—and the profit of the cunning—the law is not applied. Christianity is a chartered libertine in this matter. To be just, it should be stated that there are legal restrictions preventing even the Church carrying out Bible customs. Human sacrifice, for example, has its place in the Bible, but to practice it nowadays would lead to a charge of manslaughter or murder. And although the New Testament plainly gives as a method of curing the sick the advice to call in a priest who shall lay hands on the sick, "and the Lord shall raise him up," in the case of death the Christian might find himself in prison for not having called in a qualified doctor. Generally speaking, one may—following the practice of the Churches and also the teaching of Paul concerning the serviceability of lies for the greater glory of God—lie; yet if these lies take the form of slander the practitioner may find himself in serious trouble.

A Real Miracle

But none of these cases quite cover what we have in mind. It may be remembered that some time ago we called attention to the Roman Catholic "Fatima miracle." It was the greatest religious ramp of modern times, and has received the fullest sanction of the highest Catholic authorities. Fatima is a village in Portugal, and on May 13, 1917, the Virgin Mary made her appearance before three witnesses. It is true the witnesses were children; the youngest was seven years of age, but the other two had reached the mature age of nine and ten.

That, to a good Roman Catholic, makes the miracle unquestionable, and it adds to the value of the miracle. The face of the Virgin is described by the little children as of "indescribable beauty, flooded with heavenly light"; full description of the dress, etc., was given. Several times the Virgin appeared to the children, and later to numbers of other people. The children took back to their homes, as evidence, a branch on which the "vision" had rested her foot, and which gave out a "perfume" of a kind unknown. Economically, that seems to be a mistake. If that perfume had been analysed, patented and bottled and commercialised, it would have brought the Church millions. After all, we have "holy water"; and there should be nothing astonishing in holy smells. The "Queen of Heaven" made her appearance several times. The later exhibition was made to growing numbers until, as a last exhibition, staged with all the pomp of a last appearance of a fashionable prima donna, the Virgin gave a stunner of a "last show." First, she showed the oldest of the three children a vision of hell. Then because, as she explained to the same child, she wanted "the consecration throughout the world to my immaculate heart," she staged the most remarkable show ever witnessed or dreamed about. There were 70,000 people waiting, and they had two sights shown them. One was a vision of the Holy family with Jesus as a baby, and then "Our Lord grown up." That guaranteed the reality of the story. It was not Jesus playing the part of a man and someone else taking that of a child; he was both grown up and a child at the same time. Nothing else could have been so convincing; although it was forestalled by an American showman who exhibited two skulls of Washington: one when he was a boy and one after death. Then came the most conclusive scene of all. "The sun suddenly began to spin round and round just like a wheel of flour, casting in every direction an enormous beam of light—green, red, blue and violet, and after four minutes the sun stood still, only to repeat the same whirling dance." That is very convincing in itself; but the most convincing thing of all is that all astronomers were not struck dumb in the face of such god-like events. Never has the sun acted in such a wayward manner as it did in Portugal to these three little children. And no other part of the solar system appears to have been affected by the behaviour of the sun.

The Power of Faith.

But we have to call attention to an exhibition of religious lying that beats even the Fatima ramp. Christianity runs high in Ireland, both North and South. It is in the South a stronghold of Roman Catholics, and in the North we have a very highly developed religious feeling on behalf of both Catholicism and Protestantism. Each side appears to believe the worst of the other, with the result that each gets very extravagant in their exhibitions

of religious fervour. We must also bear in mind, as we have often pointed out, that the Roman Catholic Press, as it appears in strong Roman Catholic centres, is very different in its form in different places. In Southern Ireland and in Australia there are newspapers published retailing the wonders worked by the saints in securing better jobs, better terms for sales of property, and innumerable cures for this or that complaint such as are never shown to the English public. We have given examples of this traffic several times, and need say no more now except that, while these weekly and daily miracles confirm the faith of multitudes, the cash income to the Church must be very great.

But the most important imposture that we have come across lately is contained in a Belfast paper, "The Irish News," for November 18—a journal that has a large circulation among the devout. It contains a detailed account of what befel Therese Neumann of Konesreuth, Bavaria, as narrated by a distinguished Carmelite of Dublin, Father Hayes, in St. Mary's Hall, Belfast. Her experience, says Father Hayes, is "a challenge to an unbelieving world that is rapidly growing Godless, and specially to those learned professors of science, philosophy, history and medicine who are held in the paralysing grip of materialism." We will let this reverend speaker tell the tale himself. That will be the best way of exhibiting both the speaker and his followers. Therese, we may point out, was born in 1898. She was thoroughly healthy until she reached the age of 14. Then, as a result of a fire on a farm, she "received injuries to her spine which confined her to bed for six years; she became completely blind, and paralysed to such an extent that her legs were drawn up and twisted under her. Her whole body became a mass of running sores; her throat became so paralysed that she could eat and drink only with the utmost difficulty. She prayed constantly to the "Little Flower."

Therese remained completely blind for four years. Then "on the day of the Little Flower's beatification" her sight was completely restored. "Her other maladies grew worse." On May 17, 1925, the date of the Little Flower's canonisation, the saint appeared to Therese and restored her to health. . . . She assured Therese that she had still much to suffer. All that Therese said was she "desired to do God's will in all things."

Then things began to happen. "In March, 1926, on a Friday, Therese suddenly found herself miraculously in Gethsemane. (She seems to have gone back in time and space.) She saw Our Lord in his dreadful agony. . . . On the following Friday she witnessed the whole drama of the Passion and Death of Our Lord on the Cross. Her eyes shed tears of blood. The Stigmata appeared on her hands and feet and side, from which flowed blood every Friday. No ointment or salve affected the wounds, which heal of themselves every Friday."

"Since August, 1926, not a crumb of food, not a drop of liquid passed Therese's lips. Yet she lives the life of a normal young woman. The Holy Eucharist alone sustains her through the power of God. This fact is testified by a committee of nuns." No one could ask for more unimpeachable witnesses.

"Eminent medical and neuropathic specialists have confessed themselves unable to account for the extraordinary phenomena that Therese presents to the world."

Of course, it may be that the time taken by the celestial army for the working of all these high-power miracles may account for the saints not being able to prevent a bomb falling on Vatican City, and also explains why the Pope has had removed many valuables to "safe quarters" out of the way of Allied or German bombs. The saints must have their periods of rest.

We agree that this is the most remarkable miracle of modern times. It even beats the sun breaking loose for the gratification of a mob of Portuguese Roman Catholics. In the Bible, God sent birds to bring food for his prophets and sent a rain of Manna to feed his chosen people. When the Christian Church arrived he encouraged his most noted followers, the monks, and saw to it people gave them food—not much at a time, because visions of God and his son and his angels are seen with greater clarity when the material body is weakened by insufficient food; and in heaven we may assume that there is never a call to dinner. When angels meet each other there is no reason for believing their adjourn for a friendly drink or a sociable meal. His greatest followers used fasting as a method of securing visions, and with success. As Tylor suggested, an open, well-stocked cupboard would have prevented many of the followers of God getting on companionable terms with his angels.

But in the case of Therese Neumann of Konesreuth, Bavaria, the fasting was complete. For 17 years she never touched any kind of food or liquid. It is this which stands out, and Priest Hayes says should convince the world. No room for doubt was possible. The evidence is complete. Medical men are cited, but the priest does not rely upon their testimony. He takes far higher, holier and more dependable witnesses—a body of nuns who testify that in all those years she neither ate nor drank. The case beats Fatima; it eclipses the resurrection. It enables those who think to form a very solid opinion concerning the Roman Catholic Church. Even the newspaper in which the speech of Father Hayes is reported is struck dumb in the face of such evidence. It makes no comment. It dare not. Probably the editor is a Roman Catholic.

There is one other aspect of this miracle. God works in a mysterious way, but he achieves his purpose if we will wait long enough, even in those cases where he appears to be running risks by loitering on the way; yet if we have faith enough and wait long enough, either in our own person or in that of our descendants, God will get his way in the end. If not in this world, then in the next. And this miracle of Therese has been made public at a critical moment in the history of his Church in this country. The Government is plotting to give the Churches a very substantial measure of control of the State schools. It has encouraged the Roman Catholic Church to demand that they shall have openly the control of the teachers, and shall also have a large part of the expense of building and maintaining their schools paid for by the State. The miracle of Fatima, and that of Therese, gives the people of this country a taste of the quality and nature of the education that will be given.

Heil Therese—also Therese's Church! Likewise our Minister of Education!

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE CHURCH AND THE INSANE

THE history of the maltreatment of the mentally afflicted is one of the most poignant in Christian annals. For while sacerdotalism was predominant and, even after the cleavage occasioned by the Reformation, Popish priest and Protestant pastor alike remained immersed in the slough of superstition.

The universal savage belief that diseases are due to the machinations of evil spirits had been largely outgrown in pagan times, although Socrates and Plato apparently retained an animistic attitude. Five centuries before the Christian era, the great Greek physician, Hippocrates, proclaimed the truth that insanity results from brain disease, a view shared by most enlightened pagans for a millenium.

In the first century A.D., Artaeus developed this doctrine and, in the second century, Galen still further extended scientific studies of mental pathology till research terminated in the seventh century with the studies of Paul of Aegina. This humane inquirer conducted his researches under the protection of the Caliph Omar and, indeed, nearly all the studies of this period were prosecuted under Moslem or Jewish inspiration. These advances were now frustrated by the Christian dogma of demoniacal possession which the Church derived from the Bible, and this served to perpetuate savage superstition. This blot on Christendom lasted for more than a thousand years.

The power of casting out devils was urged by theologians as one of the most cogent proofs of Christ's divinity. Yet, while the mild and merciful treatment of mental disease under paganism still influenced opinion, the revolting cruelty that characterised the Church in later times had not yet arisen. But as ecclesiasticism grew more powerful with the doctrine that the insane were possessed by Satan and his imps, all the admonitions and humane offices of pagan and Moslem physicians were disregarded, and the idea prevailed that the punishment of the lunatics was really inflicted on the demons residing within them. A few Churchmen and laymen ventured to suggest the restoration of a more scientific attitude, but the forces of reaction, supported by popular superstition, silenced all opposition.

In his "Warfare of Science with Theology," Professor A. D. White records: "There had, indeed, come into the Middle Ages an inheritance of scientific thought. The ideas of Hippocrates, Aurelianus, Galen and their disciples were from time to time revived; the Arabian physicians, the School of Salerno . . . and even some of the religious orders did something to keep scientific ideas alive, but the tide of theological thought was too strong; it seemed dangerous even to name possible limits to diabolical power. To deny Satan was Atheism; and possibly nothing did so much to fasten the epithet "Atheist" upon the medical profession as the suspicion that it did not fully acknowledge diabolical interference in mental disease." Belief in Satanic agency was constantly cited from Scriptural texts and these, in common with the command: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," served to stimulate the later witch mania with all the terrible tortures and agonising deaths which countless thousands endured when accused of the imaginary crime of trafficking with the Evil One.

What provision was made for the insane was due to Moslem example. The Turks and Arabians retained the rationalistic pagan procedure, and countries adjoining the Moslem territories such as Northern Spain and the Italian peninsula slightly improved their treatment of the mentally deranged. But unfortunately, these Christian asylums usually degenerated into mad-houses where the inmates were superciliously treated, and from whose bodies the malignant spirits were from time to time expelled with violence.

As Satan's pronounced characteristic was pride, it was deemed advisable to humiliate him as much as possible, as his indomitable pride had made him a rebel and led to his expulsion from

heaven itself. So the demon possessing the madman was pelted with scornful and disgusting epithets (mostly unprintable) when the priestly Catholic exorcist strove to cast him out. Among the mildest terms addressed to Satan cited by Dr. White from contemporary documents are "lousy swineherd," "thou bestial and foolish drunkard," "thou lean sow, famine-stricken and most impure," and "envious crocodile." Dr. White avers that: "The treatises on the subject simply astounded one by their wealth of blasphemous and obscene epithets which it was allowable for the exorcist to use when casting out devils." When words failed, abominable stenchies were employed to eject the demons and pictures of Satan were spat upon, stamped under foot or drenched with urine, smeared with ordure and other disgusting substances.

The lying legends of the Church were amplified with tales of marvellous successes of the exorcist's art. So successful was a Bishop of Beauvais that five devils gave up possession of a sufferer and signed their names. In 1583 the Jesuits claimed that in a contest with the Devil at Vienna they had expelled 12,652 malignant demons, and this stupendous achievement was one only among many.

Another method adopted to expel evil spirits was the scourging of the patient, a plan commended by the "saintly" Sir Thomas More. Even in the 16th century it was widely considered that the demons' expulsion might be more readily secured by flogging.

This revolting superstition was for a time intensified by the Reformation, and Catholic and Protestant alike appealed, as proof of the truth of their rival creeds, to their power in casting out demons. But while the Romanists used holy water and wax, the Protestants relied on the citation of Scriptural texts and the efficacy of prayer in their alleged achievements. Each contending party loudly denied all success to its adversary's efforts and attributed any seeming success to the collusion of his Satanic Majesty.

Yet, doubt arose and slowly developed, despite the rancorous opposition of the Churches. Flade lost his life and Cornelius Agrippa his liberty, and several other humanists made great sacrifices in championing the opinion that insanity is due to natural causes. Still, the scepticism suggested by Montaigne impressed intellectual Frenchmen, and others in France followed in his footsteps. French Courts now began to annul decrees sentencing sorcerers, and Judges ordered self-accused necromancers to the madhouse.

The death penalty was delayed, and under Colbert, the great Minister of Louis XIV., trials relating to sorcery were discouraged and Colbert ordered that prisoners convicted of wizardry must be treated as victims of insanity.

In England Locke stood for rationalism, while the later Wesley, bemused as he was by the literal interpretation of the Bible, strongly supported the view that a denial of the truth of witchcraft was an impious flying in the face of Scripture.

Partly discredited as it was, the champions of wizardry clung to their treasured belief, and a bitter fight was waged in Paritan America and much life was sacrificed before superstition succumbed. Meanwhile, the humane French physician Pinel put into successful practice the dictum that insanity is a bodily disease and paved the way for the ultimate triumph of medical treatment. Contemporaneously, Tuke began a similar undertaking in England, but received no help or encouragement from the clergy, and so late as 1815 "a member of Parliament stigmatised the insane asylums of England as the shame of the nation." But rationalism had triumphed, and thus rendered another of its priceless services to humanity. T. F. PALMER.

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ACID DROPS

ONCE again we are on the topic of education. We must protest against the assumption that parents are the proper persons to decide what is a good education. That may be true of many parents, but we are quite certain that it is not, and never has been, the case with all. Probably with the majority, the main reason for them to send children to school is that there is an Act of Parliament compelling it. And it is obviously not true that parents, as a body, are qualified to say what is the best education a child ought to receive. It is a gross and stupid superstition that because most parents do love their children that therefore they are the best equipped to answer the question: "What is a good education?" Those who believe the contrary would do well to reflect on the quality of how many parents of their knowing would fill the bill.

The "Universe" solemnly handles the question—"Why did God pick out this world for the sacrifice of his son instead of the innumerable other worlds?" by replying that it does not know. We seem better informed than the "Universe," for we are told by our spiritual sense that the sacrifice of God's son on this planet was only the beginning of a series of executions. Ever since the resurrection Jesus has been visiting the numerous other worlds, being sacrificed in each to save the inhabitants. We are also informed that when Jesus told his disciples that he would come again, he meant when he had finished his visits to other planets. We do not know why this has been kept secret by the Churches.

If one wishes to get a good understanding of a teaching or a position, it is not at all a bad plan to take note of asides, or what are thought to be of very little consequence. It is then that the inner guardian is, so to speak, off guard. A well-to-do may be very generous with pounds, but very mean with coppers. The explanation is that the pound is impressive and calls "high heaven" to witness the generosity of the giver. But pence attract little attention, and so do not pay in the shape of an advertisement either private or public. There is an old saying "Look after the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves." We might much more serviceably say "Watch the way in which a man gives away pennies." It will tell you more of his real character than when he gives away pounds.

Here is an example taken from the "Methodist Recorder." Referring to the Government plot with the Churches over the schools, comes the enlightening sentence: "Much as we all deplore the divisions in the English Church, we all deplore the attempts to conceal their existence from the children." But one of the points against having religion in the schools is that whereas the schools should cultivate a fellowship of feeling, with a due recognition of the right to differ in taste and otherwise, children are separated into artificially made groups of Protestants and Catholics, Christians and Jews, etc. And it is a difference that is not a mere diversion of opinion, but one which is, or should be, irremovable. That is one reason why we say: If you wish to see the real character of things or men, watch the small things. The large ones may often deceive.

Canon Marriot, of Finchley Parish, says: "The Church to-day is much concerned with problems of social reform." That is not correct. The passage should read: "The Church is much concerned to find some plan by which it can turn the movement for social reform into one for the reinstatement of the old theological control." The Church cared mighty little for social reform until "reform" and non-Christian became almost synonymous terms.

Mr. Van Collier, of a South African Bible Society, says, through the "Johannesburg Star," "Can we wonder that soldiers, sailors and airmen are clamouring for the 'Word of God.'" We can't. Our energy is exhausted marvelling at the indefatigable lying of these professional advertisers of the Bible. When they get to the Christian heaven they will surely be greeted with, "Well done, thou good and faithful liar."

The Glasgow "Daily Express" reports that a new seaman's life raft carries playing cards, cigarettes, etc., and a Bible. Each Bible contains the advice—"Read Psalm ciii., which praises God and thanks him for his mercy." The sarcasm is excellent, but we Britishers can beat it. At the burial of a number of little children who had been killed by a German bomb, the hymn, "There's a friend for little children," was sung. That keeps first place for sarcasm.

It is very fortunate for the Army padres that few of their followers are blessed, or cursed, with a logical mind, and so are able to swallow contradictory attitudes and methods with little trouble. Thus, the Rev. J. Sweetman, who at one moment is prepared to send home reports—public ones—praising the high Christian spirit of soldiers, can at another time complain that the men in the forces "reveal an appalling ignorance of the Christian faith," and have "a vaguely fundamentalist conception of the Bible." That seems at first glance to take away the value of much that has been sent home—for general consumption—as to the very Christian quality of our men. Ignorance and misunderstanding are the two qualities that impressed Mr. Sweetman.

But perhaps there is more in it than catches the eye. For example, a fundamentalist conception of the Bible means that conception of the Bible that was taught by the Churches until the growth of knowledge and the development of common sense made Christian preachers ashamed of their creed. It is less than a century since the Colenso trial, when a Bishop was charged with criticising this same fundamentalist conception. These men in the forces are really enabling the preachers to see Christianity as it was, and they don't like the picture.

"Ignorance of the Christian faith" is another example of the same thing. What men like the Archbishop of Canterbury give us in popular speeches is not Christianity at all. It may be badly phrased lessons on ethics, knock-kneed essays in economics, very stale platitudes about the commonest of moral practices, and so forth. "The men in the forces," who have no particular personal interest in misunderstanding and misrepresentation, take historic Christianity as it was. They show the padre what official Christianity was, and all he can reply is that their view is out of date. So much for the value of historic Christianity.

The (Roman Catholic) "Universe" is very sceptical about the miraculous cure of a tumour in a boy's head by an Anglican Bishop. In return, the Anglican Bishop will not accept the "goings on" in Fatima, when the Virgin Mary came down from heaven, and made the sun twist and turn about to delight a number of Portuguese louts. We are of a more liberal mind. We have as much faith in the one miracle as in the other. We place both the organisers of Fatima and the miraculous curing of a tumour in the same category. And we would remind the "Universe" that these are not the days when one can pick and choose miracles. We suggest that the Catholic father and the Anglican Bishop should pool miracles and share the profits. Big combines is the order of the day in commerce; why not try it in the field of religious lying?

A "Carmelite," knowing how Catholics love their rosary, asks in a R.C. journal for a simple method of saying it. It is complained that some find it tedious, and others difficult. Well, the remedy was found for the rosary kind of humbug by some religious Chinese many centuries ago. They also found a repetition of prayers tedious, so they invented a praying wheel. They placed a written prayer inside the wheel and then turned it as many times as they wished. And we defy any Catholic to show that they will not get just as many replies by the one method as they would by the other. We have, indeed, a suspicion that the celestial chronicler no longer listens to the prayers in detail. The prayers may be already numbered from one to one hundred. And all the recorders have to do is to place fifty-six or ninety-four to the credit of Smith, Brown or Robinson, and there let the matter rest.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

ATHOS ZENOO.—Pleased to hear from you and to know you are quite well. Article shall appear as early as possible.

J. CARTWRIGHT AND W. LAURENCE.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

J. KIRTON.—Sorry to hear of your bad health. The greater thanks for what you do. If each one did what he could, our work would be very much easier than it is. Some of the cuttings, though out of date, serve as useful reminders.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Mr. A. L. Jones, £1 10s.; Mr. H. Spence, £1.

The anonymous donor of a parcel of books for the N.S.S. is thanked for the useful and appreciated gift.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WE are pleased to learn that there was a record sale of literature at Mr. Cohen's recent lecture in Glasgow. Large as it was, it would have been larger but for a delay in delivering books and pamphlets.

Since printing the notice of the death of Thomas Birtley in last week's issue, we have received a very eloquent and deserved praise of Birtley from J. T. Brighton, our very successful representative in the North of England. To this we wish to add our own testimony to one whom we have known nearly 50 years as a devoted servant of our great cause. We are not surprised to hear from Mr. Brighton that right to the end Thomas Birtley's interest in Freethought was as keen as ever. Quiet, unassuming, always ready to do what he could for the cause, such men stand as a rebuke to those leaders of the Churches who stress the weakness of man without God. The North of England has furnished some "honny" workers for the cause of Freethought, but none better deserved recognition. Mr. Brighton, at the graveside, paid an eloquent testimony to so unselfish a warrior.

The following is a fine piece of Freethinking, worthy of John Stuart Mill in his dissertations on Liberty:—

"There is an excellent idea behind this film, which is that all personality has a sacredness of its own, and it is a sin crying to heaven for vengeance for any human being to impose his or her way of living on another, no matter how close the relationship may be."

But Mill did not write this; it was, in fact, the comment of a woman writer in a Catholic newspaper. We are delighted, of course, to find Freethought sentiments being echoed by Catholic

journalists, but we are not very hopeful that such precepts will be practised by them, especially as they are fighting very hard just now for the "right" of parents (or is it the "right" of the Church?) to impose the Roman Catholic way of living upon the sacred personality of the child. We can put up with plain Catholic humbug by just grinning at it, but it is a little nauseating to find such Freethinking sentiments appearing alongside the "Collar the Kids" campaign, in which every argument is a negation of the idea expressed in the above quotation.

The B.B.C. fifteen minutes' talk by Professor Julian Huxley aroused wide interest, partly because large numbers were interested in what he would say as a scientist concerning his relation to religion, partly because of the surprise that the B.B.C. should have acknowledged an address outside "the Christian tradition." That was a public weakening of its avowed policy, and for this gap in the enemies' Christian policy of misrepresentation and bigotry we think we may claim credit. Ever since the beginning of the reign of Reith we have kept up the attack, mostly in these columns, partly by other means and methods. But it is part of the tradition of the real Freethought movement in this country to attack, again attack, always attack, without apology, without asking for or giving quarter where a principle is at stake.

There are to be two more talks, one by Professor Murray, a non-believer in God, with, of course, a wind-up by a professional Christian. On the whole it will therefore be better to review the three "talks" when the course is finished. Some of the cross-headings of Professor Huxley's speech, as they appear in "The Listener," may owe their existence to the editor, such as "Development of the idea God," when scientifically the history of Gods is a history of retrogressions. "Gods" cover everything in their beginnings, and finish with doing nothing. There is not a single piece of evidence in the other direction. But the other cross-heading—"A Religious Attitude to Life"—is quite in line with Huxley's own remark that "the Humanist, however scientific, can still have a religious attitude," which in the light of his own beliefs, is just verbal nonsense. No one would denounce more heartily than Huxley the use of misleading terms, but the one we are criticising is, to-day, a gem of its kind. It would be interesting to discover how many Atheists are in the employ of the B.B.C. We could name a few, but we are sure that there are many who save their face by pleading that they can still be "religious." So might Hitler plead that he may still be a humanitarian, and Goebbels that he is a lover of the truth. And we feel sure that the Archbishop of York would say that he was both a Rationalist and a Humanitarian. An analysis of the three talks promises to be interesting.

Somehow we think that in the present state of affairs the following might be considered by all of us as a method of helping towards a safe judgment of things. It is taken from a sketch of Abraham, which we hope to deal with at length later. It is a quotation from Mark Twain:—

"To my mind, the bulk of any nation's opinion about its President, or its King, or its Emperor, or its politics, or its religion, is without value, and not worth weighing or considering or examining. There is nothing mental in it; it is all feeling, and procured at second-hand and without any assistance from the proprietors' reasoning powers.

An effort is being made to form a branch of the N.S.S. at Keighley, Yorkshire, and local Freethinkers willing to help in any way are asked to communicate with Mr. A. E. Dent at 16, Oak Street, Haworth, Keighley, Yorks. The Churches, with the ready assistance of the big mediums of publicity, are planning for a come-back in religion. It will not convert Freethinkers, but it is an excellent opportunity for us to take advantage of the Churches' efforts to revive an interest in religion. The Bradford Branch, N.S.S., is doing good work, and a younger brother near at hand should be helpful to both.

THE BISHOP MAKES IT CLEAR

TALKING nonsense seems to be a special line of Bishops. I suppose this is because they are accustomed, as a class, to speaking to docile audiences in places where the right to challenge by question or discussion has never existed.

The apostolic atrocities, which they utter go unchallenged time after time until their brains, atrophied by lack of criticism, begin to work almost automatically, on the principle that anything that is said by a Bishop about religion must be true because it is never contradicted—except by vulgar Atheists.

I have noticed this characteristic very markedly in the Anglican Bishop of Bradford, who, owing to his activity outside the strictly religious sphere, affords a contrast that demonstrates the point. Dr. Blunt, on religion, talks like any other Bishop because his remarks go free from criticism. But when he ventures (as he often does) into the broader sphere of economics and social questions, he often talks good, sound sense. No doubt the difference is due to the Bishop's awareness that in such spheres he is open to, and receives, sharp criticism, which creates an alertness of thought and a respect for logic that cannot be found in theological pronouncements.

But I am wandering. The Bishop I had in mind when I began to write was Catholic Bishop Marshall, of Salford, who seems to have a marked aptitude for opening his mouth and putting his foot in it. Recently a number of Catholic clergy have had to come out into the open to take part in the "Our Schools" controversy; and with the odour of sanctity blown off them they make a pretty bad show as controversialists. One wonders, indeed, what some of their more intelligent followers are thinking about their perambulations outside the pulpit where, exposed to the revealing sunlight of the secular world, their lies and stupidities become obvious even to some Catholics.

This Saint from Salford must have given many of his Catholic followers a shock when he recently declared:—

"If the schools of England had had religious teaching during the last 70 years, if they had built up the character of the children, there would be no need for sex instruction on biological grounds, such as was suggested . . . by the Board of Education in a patent remedy called 'Sex instruction in schools.'"

The lie stands out a mile, even to Catholics who think a little. *If we had had religious teaching!*

With God as my witness, I declare that in Roman Catholic and Anglican schools during the last 70 years there has been little else but religious teaching. For God alone knows how many millions of times the Catechism has been taught and chanted, how many pæans of praise have been sent up to him, how many millions of cubic feet of "Catholic atmosphere" have been used up, in these schools.

And God knows, too, how much Catholic people are still in need of sex education, not only in the schools but also in the homes, for in that Big Book of his (where everything that happens is written down) how many, many times must be recorded that heartbreaking cry of uninstructed Catholic mothers: "My God! I'm caught again!"

Celibate Bishop Marshall may honestly believe that sex instruction is neither necessary nor desired by Catholics, but if so he is being fooled by his flock. I only wish he could spend a few days with me, in a Catholic quarter that I know, divested of that idiotic raiment which strikes fear and mental dumbness among his followers. We could talk, in plain clothes, to some of his Catholic womenfolk as men of the world—real men, not sky pilots—and he would soon learn a few home truths.

Perhaps a certain pregnant lady would repeat to him the remark she made to me the other day: "The Church likes you to have 'em, but the b— Church won't keep 'em when they come."

Bishop Marshall says Catholics "believe in purity, the value of modesty and shame, that certain things are indelicate." Purity and modesty seem to be very rare products of Catholic teaching, within my experience, indelicacy is almost an attribute of it, and I only wish the Church itself would benefit from the value of a sense of shame and do something to remedy the wrongs it has committed against society.

But the most inane (though probably the most socially dangerous) statement of this Bishop is his remark that, "We will not have an agreed syllabus, nor will we have our children taught biological purity—farmyard purity."

I can well imagine this to be the case. To teach "biological purity" means that children will be taught to be sexually moral, without the help of God, by understanding the sex process and its relationship to human society. And that will never do—for the Church. Far better theological impurity than biological purity. Better the "modest and delicate" story of Mary's act of adultery with a nocturnal visitor, quite unknown to her, but who was allowed to "breathe" on her, nevertheless, than a plain understanding of the facts of life—facts which must inevitably either refute the fable of Mary and the baby, or stamp the Catholic goddess as an indiscriminating prostitute.

Yes, one can well understand Bishop Marshall's anxiety, and that of the Church, in this matter. How often we have been told there is no quarrel between science and religion; yet how obvious that biology and theology are implacable enemies.

Bishop Marshall makes it clear.

F. J. CORINA.

SINCERITY

Sincerity is a duty no less plain than important.

—KNOX.

Sincerity!

Thou first of virtues, let no mortal leave
Thy onward path.

—HOME.

WILLIAM GODWIN, the "Amiable Anarchist" and author of the remarkable treatise, "Political Justice," held that the quality of sincerity should have pride of place of all the virtues. Certainly, the world would be a wonderful place to live in if everyone spoke without simulation, hypocrisy, disguise and false pretences. Sincerity betokens honesty of mind and purpose. Some people are able to resist the irksome demands and repressive influences of the social conventions and are dubbed eccentric and odd for their pains. The "common rules" of respectability, custom and tradition cannot be flouted without punishment; and then, to most people, the idea of speaking without regard to the consequences is terrifying in its implications. Godwin maintained that cowardice in censure and correction is the chief reason of the perpetuation of abuses. Doubtless, everyone would like to choose for a motto, "I am nothing if not sincere," were it not for the fact that everyone is what it has "paid" him to be, and, because everyone does what it has "paid" him to do. It is interesting to speculate on the possible turn of events if everyone spoke without fear or favour, for then we should experience that wish of Burns, "To see ourselves as others see us."

Polonius, in concluding his advice to his son, said: "To thine own self be true; and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." To Godwin the subjugation of self to the welfare of humanity was the acme of sincerity and the essence of philosophic anarchism, of which he was the prime exponent in England.

Tillotson said that "sincerity is an excellent instrument for the speedy dispatch of business." To the purist this statement may be open to question until the nature of the business is disclosed. Godwin believed that it was lack of sincerity which was the

cause of so much misery, misunderstanding and warfare; and it was George Eliot who said that there is a power in the direct glance of a sincere person which will do more to dissipate prejudice than the most elaborate arguments.

Sincerity! thou first of virtues.

S. GORDON HOGG.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. GALLAGHER . . . AND OTHERS.

SIR,—I thought that the fact that I had dared to search a Communist pamphlet for examples of loose thinking would probably cause a certain amount of wrath among the orthodoxy of the Left, but I never dreamed that my poor creed would be regarded by the Communist Party as having sufficient importance for our tame Communist M.P., Mr. Gallagher, to be put up to reply to it. I have no desire to exchange "terms of abuse" with him—after all, I was doing war work when he was denouncing this as an imperialist war in almost identical terms to those now used by the people he wrongly condemns as "Trotskyites."

I was merely attempting to point out that among those who have been in earnest about this war from the time when Germany and the U.S.S.R. joined hands with touching fidelity in that pact which made the outbreak of war in 1939 certain, it is important to define our terms. I am not (in spite of Mr. Robertson) talking in a political vacuum; I am working long hours at my job of helping the war effort, and am a part-time member of a rescue party in my scanty spare time. But I will not admit that any political party—most of all the party with such a to-and-fro record as the Communist Party—can tell me what I must think, what is right and what is wrong. In fact, I will not exchange an infallible Pope for an infallible Lenin or Stalin—and that is what Mr. Gallagher has done. His letter criticising my article is one of the most religious documents that I have read for a long time.

I am not animated by any special animosity against the Communists as such. I might just as easily taken for my theme a pamphlet of the Tory Reform Committee or the Liberal Party. What I was concerned about was to show that, if we are to hope for a better world after this war, we have to think clearly about our objectives. No rigidly-toed party line will avail. Only clear thought will do it—and, judging by his contribution to your columns, that is something of which Mr. Gallagher is curiously incapable.

S. H.

THE BIBLE AND EXCAVATION.

SIR,—Referring to this subject, it is interesting to note that R. A. S. Macalister, formerly Director of Excavation, Palestine Exploration Fund, says—in his book "A Century of Excavation in Palestine (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1925):—

1. Chapter V., page 266: "The Biblical record, like any other literary document, must stand or fall on its own merits. It cannot be either authenticated or disproved, as a whole, by excavation."

2. Chapter III., page 178: "David, Joab, Absalom, Nathan, Gad, and all the other worthies and unworthies of the time, are known to us only from the Biblical record. Neither inside or outside the confines of their ancient land has any other reference to them or to their doings been discovered," etc.

Macalister's book is honestly written. It affords no comfort whatever to those who are determined, willy-nilly, to prove the truth of the Bible, and who have no idea of seeking for truth, and yet try to bolster up the Biblical narrative by archæology.—Yours, etc.,

"ALERT."

FIFTY MILLION BOOKS

SIR,—With regard to Mr. Kent's letter, it is fair to point out that the salvage book drives have been of educational value, and the idea of just weighing the books has not been generally followed. Usually a "target" number has been fixed, say two per head of population. In a town in which I took part in a book drive a few short of 320,000 were given, of which 80 per cent. was fit only for waste. Much of this consisted of old

magazines, obsolete works of all kinds, and books in very bad condition. It was surprising that such a quantity should have so long escaped its proper destiny. Nearly 47,000 books were selected for the Forces, which consisted of works of fiction, poetry, drama, essays and classics of all kinds. About 5,000 volumes of a rare class and books of reference were retained for the town public libraries. Librarians and volunteers assisted in the scrutiny and classification. It was a big task but worth doing, and the spirit of "tonnage" was entirely absent.

I would respectfully advise all Freethinkers who may possess waste books to give them to the refuse collectors. It is believed there is still a large potential supply of paper in the form of unwanted or unused books or magazines, which if made available for pulping would provide raw material badly needed for the national effort. Service men and women, especially those in ships and overseas, welcome books and magazines which are in a presentable condition and no longer required by their owners, and these, including Freethought literature, can be handed over the post office counters.—Yours, etc.,

A. D. CORRICK.

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LONDON—INDOOR

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W.C.1)—Sunday, 11 a.m. S. K. RATCLIFFE: "Justice and
Mercy."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Burnley (Barden Club, Burnley).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Mr. J.
CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—
Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. E. LAWSON: "Eugenics and Social Reform."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday,
6-30 p.m. Mr. BERNARD MILETT: "Let My People Go."

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ELECTRIC TRIFLES

HAVE you seen Tom Parker's new house?

Yes. I was there one night last week. Very fine.

It is. All electric; lighting, heating and domestic appliances.

Tom and his wife were both keen about that. Held forth at length on the convenience, trouble and labour saved, and the cleanliness. Latter appealed to Mrs. Parker. She says it makes the servantless house possible without overworking herself.

That I can well believe.

I agree with them on all the advantages. To my thinking there was one flaw.

What was that?

Did you notice the sitting-room fire?

Yes. What about it?

The actual heat came from a small member. The greater space was taken up by an imitation coal fire.

Mrs. Parker was enthusiastic over that.

She would be. Typical of a woman's taste. Won't realise the beauty of simplicity; the perfectness of fitting to function.

Try a little simplicity yourself, old man.

Very apt. I found it irritating; that moulded asbestos dyed to resemble coal, hiding a ruby lamp for glow and a tiny revolving wheel to produce artificial flicker.

Most people find it pleasingly reminiscent of a coal fire.

If they want a coal fire they should have one really. I like electric heating for its complete departure from coal and all other old methods.

The tradition of the cosy fire lingers, you know. People like to retain the illusion.

Essentially English. Tradition; illusion. Say hypocrisy.

Is it?

Largely. We're a conservative race, hating to scrap the old even if palpably outmoded. When we do adopt the new we try to link it up, pretend it's an adaptation or evolution from the ancient, with no break in the tradition. We're mentally antique-bound. No wonder foreigners regard us as supreme hypocrites.

How?

In a thousand ways, ranging from personal trifles to great affairs.

Specify.

Electric lights shaped like candles.

Harmless and amusing. Go elsewhere.

Make-up. I prefer a girl's complexion natural when clean, and her hair straight if she was born so. It suits her better.

Agreed. But we men interfere as much with nature by shaving and having our hair cut short.

Yes. Women have us beaten in attire. Except for high heels and comic hats they wear easier clothes. I remember them scrapping tight neck wrappings. We daren't.

What would you?

A blanket with the head pushed through a hole in the middle. Then people would make variations and add trimmings.

Meanwhile, men's clothes are an historical burden. Consider formal evening dress, stiff and sombre. Why retain buttons on sleeves when we no longer need cuffs to cover our hands when riding horseback, or two buttons behind a dress coat to hold up a swordbelt discarded over a century ago?

I admit there are lingering relics everywhere.

Relics! We're cluttered up with them. In mediæval days the scholar's gown served a useful purpose, enwrapping a hungry, threadbare student, sheltering him against our patchy climate. Now it's an outworn symbol.

Not the worst.

No. There are far too many specialised garbs and uniforms being worn. Our everyday clothes should be remodelled. The

waiſtcoat's ſuperfluous, or can be replaced by the more comfortable pullover when warmth's needed. High-necked preferred.

You wiſh to ſcrap the collar and tie.

Emphatically. If not a roll-coloured pullover, then a buttoned-up tunic. Beſt of all the blouſe, as in France and Ruſſia.

About that: notice the Army, long a traditional ſtronghold in attire, has adopted appropriate clothing.

Curious, isn't it? Forced upon it by neceſſity. A pity neceſſity doesn't aboliſh Judges' robes, lawyers' wigs, ſchool colours and a hoſt of other guy diſguiſes.

You ſeek a democracy of dreſs. You'll have to write another Sartor Reſartus to replace Carlyle's.

Nakedneſs is the ideal.

Eh?

It could be a ſtriking volume, devoted entirely to reforms, though many of them are minor ones.

Such as—?

Many details of education. There's an awful lot of hollow ceremonial in ſchools.

I remember that from my own.

Juſt ſo. There's danger of teachers deteriorating into conjurers or wizards, pretending mysteries and mumbling incantations which have long ceas'd to have meaning, much leſs effect.

I fancy the irreverent youthfulness of their pupils will prevent that: or eſcape from it.

Petty ſnobbery's the danger in education. This boaſting of one ſchool over another; of one form or courſe of inſtruction over another; the exalting of the dull degree man over the intelligent, non-university one.

I'm glad you mentioned that. Education can have the effect of fixing a man's prejudices, codifying his wrong attitude toward problems.

In ſhort, rationaliſing his irrationaliſm, teaching him to find reaſons for being unreaſonable.

You're going to get pedantic in an attempt to be epigrammatic. Try again.

Petty ſnobbery's our general curſe to-day. You know: fur coats which are really dyed rabbit ſkins; artificial ſilk; the suburban woman who carries home to her ſemi-detached "villa" a pound of wet fiſh with a pheasant's tail ſticking out of the baſket—ſhe pinned it there.

Ha! Ha! And a thouſand other examples not ſo funny.

As keeping an automobile when they can neither afford it nor have much uſe for it. The car runs very few miles; chiefly ſtands in front of the villa for neighbours to ſee.

You notice how new little pretentions habits ſpring up in addition to the traditional ones you ſtarted attacking.

Sincerity's very rare.

I wonder you haven't mentioned politics.

Too big and brazen to deal with in caſual converſation: Public life's diſguiſed ranks deep below maſking cuſtoms and obſolete traditions. One ſcarcely knows where to begin ſtripping off the veneers, the layers of paint—or whitewash. It involves all our inſtitutions: Royalty, Parliament, Law and the reſt.

True enough they all need a cleaning-off of cruſted accretions. For myſelf, I watch one thing. When I hear a public character talking about truth, juſtice, honour, national ſentiment and all that ſort of ſtuff I ſuſpect and diſtruſt him.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

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