

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and Society

DIPPING into my volumes of Emerson's "Essays and Lectures," I was set wondering how many read him to-day? Very few, I am afraid, even among the "educated" sections of society. Yet in the time of our youth Emerson stood as a force among thoughtful people, and if he had no complete and nicely rounded doctrine to hand over so that people could mistake shoddy for good broad-cloth, what he did offer contained much wisdom and evidenced the sincerity of a shrewd student of life. It may be remembered by some that Charles Bradlaugh, at a time when his purse sternly denied avoidable expenditure, copied out Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance." One can indeed imagine the direct appeal it made to Bradlaugh. Such passages as these must have influenced him, or shall we say appealed to a mind in which analogous ideals were lying dormant?

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance, that imitation is suicide . . . ; that no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. . . . Who so would be a man must be a Non-conformist. . . . A foolish consistency is the hog-goblin of little minds. . . . Speak what you think in hard words to-day, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks even though it contradict everything you said to-day. . . . Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

One can imagine the appeal made to the active, searching mind of the young Bradlaugh—at all events it expressed a principle to which he remained true to the end.

But the passage that especially caught my eye with all the pleasure with which one meets an absent friend, was: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." There is a truth here that never was more urgent than it is to-day. Since Emerson's day we have gained much, but so have we lost much. The freedom of the individual is now challenged openly; the attack is advertised with a recklessness that is almost new in its widespread publicity. Our political parties promise protection at the price of the sacrifice of individuality. Each party, religious and political, offers rewards to its followers on the same terms—obedience. A man caught bribing a voter might be heavily fined or sent to prison, but the faithful sheep-like follower of a successful political party may receive his reward in an office which brings him social distinction and a substantial salary. More than a century ago one of the wits of the day pointed out that while it was a crime to steal a goose from the common, there was nothing criminal in stealing a common from the goose. And if by chance there occurs now a determination to restore the commons to the goose, be sure the public will be called upon to pay heavily for the recovery of its property.

Emerson wrote when too much attention was paid to the individual, as such, and not enough to the individual as a member of a group. The two are, of course, inseparable, or one might say that the individual and the group are two sides of the same thing. The individual is what he is because of the human group to which he belongs, and from which he receives the cultural benefits by and on which he lives. But in return he gives to his group the activity of his own individuality. It is idle to spend time arguing as to which is the most important—one cannot exist without the other. They are two sides of the same fact. Behind the building of a modern ship there lies the hundreds of thousands of years that have elapsed since a very, very primitive human found that he could get down a river by sitting on a floating tree-trunk, but it led to the great modern ship. The plays of Shakespeare are a product of the folklore, the customs, the slow development of language, the simple tales of simple mankind, the stored-up culture of myriads of cultural developments and discoveries. There is no scientific *first* in human history. The developments may be slow or rapid—it depends upon the "push" that is behind. "Beginning" is an agreed starting-point for convenience.

But there comes a time—not a recent one—in human history when the social environment becomes intolerant as well as useful, when what *is* becomes the foundation of "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." And the most powerful factor in this is religion. Please do not let the reader encourage the feeling that I am obsessed with the evils of religion. I stress the power of religion because for a fourth of human history it has been at least one of the dominating factors of man's conscious life. For the much larger portion of its history, religion moved in line with man's understanding—or misunderstanding—of nature. After that it serves as a drag on development. Use the term "culture" as concerned with matters that could be made the subjects of experiment and demonstration, and religion as concerned with matters that have to do with gods and a future life, and one will have a serviceable use of terms. Mix them and you will become as mentally crooked as an archbishop preaching before a meeting of a scientific association. In a civilised society religion transforms leading into misleading.

Consider how far religious organisations are from the canons laid down by Emerson. Limiting ourselves to modern times, one cannot avoid recognising the note of evasion, subterfuge, insincerity and dishonesty that runs right through contemporary religious life. It is almost painfully evident that large numbers of the clergy do not, cannot, believe the doctrines they should preach. They camouflage themselves by giving moral or semi-social discourses which serve only to make the hypocrisy more evident to the intelligent onlooker. It was not to secure better houses, higher wages, fewer hours of labour, and more

honest dealings between nations that the Jerusalem drama was performed. Preachers dare not tell their congregations the truth about religion and, what is worse, the congregations do not expect their preachers to tell them the truth.

Is it to be marvelled at that dishonesty in the pulpit has extended to the pews, and in turn tends to poison all phases of life? The average congregation does not expect the clergy to tell the truth where religion is concerned, and the average parson knows that his congregation does not expect honesty from the pulpit. We have a thinly disguised form of petty persecution in action that lowers the intellectual level of the whole community. In place of the Emersonian teaching to tell the truth of to-day, regardless of whether it approves or disdains the teaching of yesterday, the established lie is kept in being. If you know that religion is a lie you must keep your knowledge to yourself, and if you wish to rise easily to power or politics or in the social scale, you must be a conformist concerning established institutions. Note also that it is not the rogue or liar or coward who suffers from these restrictions on honest speech. Even the Church at its strongest could not punish those who practise silence. It is part of the beauty of religious intolerance that it places a premium on cowardice and lying, and a tax on whoever acts with complete honesty to his neighbours.

These social reactions of religious intolerance on life have not generally met with adequate recognition. Too much attention has been given to the spectacular consequences of intolerance. But the evil goes deeper and further than the death of individuals. It becomes manifest in our laws, in our customs, and in the everyday intercourse of peoples. In the aggregate, it dulls that sense of responsibility which everyone should feel where truth and falsity are in question.

Survival of the Unfit

The most mischievous punishments for heresy are not those that are legally enforced. For example, the King of England has a form of religious belief that was settled for him nearly three centuries before he was born. But no one would think the worse of him if he did not believe in it. In such circumstances an expression of belief becomes a mere formality. So when compulsion in this or that way is openly avowed, men may comply with law or custom with a minimum damage to character. Social custom is often a dire enemy to character. A legal enactment must be consciously and openly applied. A social tyranny may be applied in all sorts of disguised ways. With us it commences with the education—or mis-education—of children; it continues with the choosing of a "career" or the selection of a wife. This form of tyranny takes hold of a person in the cradle and continues to the grave. Legal restrictions would be defied by many who bow before the many-headed tyranny of social conformity. There is no question here of open and frank surrender. People do not say: "I must give way; I am tired of the struggle"; they proceed to find justification in a hundred different ways which dulls their own better nature and leaves them helpless in the presence of beliefs which they secretly hold in contempt. The moral effects of social coercion is far more destructive to character than any penalty that expressed law may impose.

It is not legal penalties for nonconformity that are to-day the greatest enemies of free-thinking in religion or in other matters. The last refuge of a detected falsehood is that of "common consent" openly expressed by action. But the time to call a lie by its proper name is whenever it is encountered, and not wait until there exists enough singers to make a respectably sized chorus. Delay is a real danger as much to one's self as it is to others. Excuses wait on inclination, and the truth is apt to look less alluring when seen through the media of a socially easeful conformity. We need to master the lesson that unbelief brings its obligations not less imperative than those which accompany established belief. There is no justification to-day for a Freethinker to go through life with his voice attuned to a minor key for fear of hurting the feelings of the believer in religion. A lie should not become "sacred" on account of its age.

We return to Emerson's "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." It cannot be otherwise, for society represents an established order, and so seeks to make secure its foundations lest it crumbles before new ideas and daring aspirations. Yet unbelief brings its responsibilities no less than belief, and there is no adequate justification for anyone going through life with closed lips, or to speak only in a minor key lest he should hurt the feelings of the believers in ancient doctrines. That policy has been followed too long, and its practical results are seen in the insincerity and moral cowardice of contemporary life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE MIRACLE MAN

WHILE it is true that one can never be quite certain whether George Bernard Shaw is leg-pulling, and that one needs to examine even apparently serious statements by him lest they should prove to be disguised nonsense, deliberately intended, it is equally true that there are times when he needs to be taken seriously, whether or not he pretends to be clowning, on account of disguised nonsense which is not deliberately intended.

Some men (perhaps even G.B.S. himself) are willing to allow their nonsense to stand as seriously-intended matter if it happens to be misunderstood; or will allow serious statements to be interpreted jestingly if they are misunderstood the other way. They are apt to leave both doors open to provide a double escape in case of attack. The "great man" in any walk of life seems much less a clown to his audience if his blunders can be turned into jokes (the stage comedian understands that technique), and he seems a greater man if a misunderstood piece of nonsense can be allowed to stand as a profundity.

But here (whatever G.B.S. may have intended) I want to take seriously some remarks he made in a symposium entitled "In Search of Faith," in which religion is discussed severally by Shaw, Joad, Acland and Samuel. While the others tended to play about with superficialities, it must be said to Shaw's credit that he was the only one to attempt fundamentals. It was perhaps because of this bold venture to "touch bottom," to find the "power behind life," that Shaw got out of his depth; and it will need quite a measure of clowning to rescue him from his absurdities.

Shorn of the trimmings, G.B.S.'s contribution revealed that, although he has a contempt for anthropomorphic gods, or man-like gods, he nevertheless

"perceives that there is at work in the universe an unexplained activity called life. There is also a providential force, which may be part of the phenomenon or may be a force working upon it, which continually strives to make life more intelligent and to increase its power over circumstances."

I am not sure that life may be regarded as "unexplained" when it is perceived that it is "activity." Surely this perceptible quality alone might explain much about life. But we will let that pass, for Shaw's "providential force" is more interesting. There appears to be no doubt in Shaw's mind about the providential force. It is not even "unexplained," for Shaw himself explains to us that it strives to make life more intelligent, and to increase its power over circumstances. But if we take for granted that such a "force" exists (which I personally do not), we still have to depend upon G.B.S. for the evidence that it is providential. He appears to find this in the fact that "human beings . . . are a great improvement on the long-since scrapped pterodactyl and dinosaur . . . but man may also be scrapped at any moment . . . for some abler creature."

Shaw seems to have overlooked the fact that in the Jurassic period the dinosaurs were very able creatures, and man would have been so completely "unable" in that environment that his chances of helping to make life more intelligent would have been about as good as those of the proverbial snowflake in hell. In any case, his phrase, "at the moment," is an unhappy one, and the word "scrapped" is no better, when we consider the lengthy periods necessary for the disappearance of species such as the dinosaurs; while the presence of the bat, a descendant of the pterodactyl species, in our midst at this day, is striking testimony to the absurdity of the idea of a power that can "scrap things at any moment." Incidentally, I feel I detect, in this "providential force," something of the anthropomorphic idea that Shaw is at pains to deride, for in what sense other than the human can we conceive of something providential? Man cannot get outside himself when thinking in terms denoting moral qualities.

But this does not trouble G.B.S. Closing his eyes to the very human character of the word providential, he goes on to describe his force as the Life Force, or the Evolutionary Appetite. He says this is for want of better terms, but I am inclined to think it is because he has reached the asylum of ignorance, where it is not better terms we need, but rather better knowledge on the question. This is self-evident when Shaw says that his Evolutionary Appetite has "neither body nor parts, neither hand nor brain; but it has purpose . . . and can create brains and hands, muscles and minds, to achieve its purposes."

Did ever a believer in the honest-to-goodness anthropomorphic type of god make a greater claim for his god than Shaw claims here for his Evolutionary Appetite God? A god without being, yet which has purpose! Was ever the "something out of nothing" nonsense better exemplified than in this cannibalistic-sounding god, believed in by the man who derides the gods of other believers?

Shaw's god—beg pardon, Evolutionary Appetite—is indeed so anthropomorphic that it makes (says Shaw) "frequent mistakes," a very human characteristic that even G.B.S. shares when he uses evolution instead of Paradise as the workshop of his god.

"But it has to stand by its frequent mistakes: once it has created a species and found it to be a mischievous failure it cannot control or get rid of it by any other processes than by creating a new species capable of destroying it. What is called the problem of evil is not a proof of divine malignancy, but of getting rid of failures created with the best intentions."

What a purpose it must be! What intentions, even at best! What an idea, anyhow, more than sixty years after Darwin's death! But G.B.S. goes on, critical of others, unrepentant, very superior in the strength of his newly-found god, his Universal Appetite.

"All the established religions to-day are so deeply adulterated with . . . savagery that none of them is entirely credible by thoughtful, educated persons. Therefore, I do not profess any of the institutional religions. I should describe myself as a Creative Evolutionist."

Equally is it true that all the established sciences to-day are also adulterated with savagery—the savagery which taints even godsmashing evolutionary science with its mental barbarism; the savagery that indicates the vestigial remains in the human mind of socially inherited religious belief; the savagery that can cause even the brain of G.B.S., while scoffing at the primitive miracles of religion in the raw, to advance the idea of a greater miracle than all the rest together—a force with neither body nor parts, neither hand nor brain, but which has purpose, and can create brains and hands, and muscles and minds, to achieve its purpose! G.B.S. might be jesting—yet I fear that even he, with this Universal Appetite to back him, might swallow anything.

What providential force was it that threw up George Bernard Shaw to out-miracle Rome itself, to shame Fatima into insignificance, and to wash away Lourdes in its own waters? Truly he is the greatest of the Miracle Men. F. J. CORINA.

THE DEAD JESUS

Dead, his crown of thorns beside him,
In his sepulchre he slumbers—
Dust to dust, ashes to ashes,
Never can he wake again!

Yet the lies his folly fathered
Live and multiply above him:
Lie the first! A life hereafter
Shall redeem the wrongs of this.

Lie the second! Love thy neighbour
As thyself! The dream, the fancy!
Were it true, each soul's existence
Would be proved by self-negation.

Lie the third! About the morrow
Take no heed—sufficient ever
Is the evil of the moment—
Take no trouble to redress it!

Lie the fourth! Lord God the father
Loves his children and redeems them;
He?—the loveless, pulseless, deathless,
Impotent Omnipotence!

Well, he staked his life and lost it!
Flock on flock of sheep have followed
The bell-wether of the masses
Into darkness and despair!

Love each other, help each other,
Juggle not with dreams and phrases—
Make ephemeral existence
Beautiful, in spite of God!

—ROBERT BUCHANAN.

ACID DROPS

SOME of the papers made what was substantially a notice that another day of prayer for the purpose of persuading God to win the war was being organised. It was also stated that the Government was discussing the details with the heads of the Churches as to dates, etc. As a result, the Archbishop of Canterbury—artful beggar—has advised the Churches to be in readiness to have a day of prayer at an “appropriate moment.” We suggest that two prayers should be given—one telling God that we are not spiritually worthy of victory (in case things go wrong), the other demanding victory as a reward for people sticking to God when he is losing so many one-time supporters.

The Bishop of Rochester, Dr. Chavasse, says that no true Christian could be a hater of (the Jews) “the blood brethren of the Lord.” When one reflects on the constancy with which the Jews were persecuted by Christians, it would seem that there were very few Christians about at any time. Dr. Chavasse is playing the usual game. When acts are good, that is the result of Christian influence. When the said Christians are brutal and persecute with glee, that is because they are not faithful followers of Jesus. What we should like to know is what would have happened to the Christian religion if the Jews had not crucified Jesus? In that case, the plan of salvation would not have been worked out—Jesus would have returned to heaven empty-handed, and God would have had to conduct matters on more humane lines, or die for want of worshippers.

It is noticeable that the “Universe,” which treated the persecution of Polish Jews in the Polish Army in Britain as a mere plot of ill-wishers to Poland, has been quite silent since the ill-treatment has been proven up to the hilt. Common decency would demand that the “Universe” should apologise for—shall we say—its misunderstanding, to say the least, of the situation. But the Catholic Church has never apologised for telling a lie in the interests of the Church. At most, it puts the lie in cold storage until it can be used with comparative safety.

From the Glasgow “Daily Record” of May 15 we learn that the Poles in Scotland have put up Jew-baiting bills—in Polish—outside churches under the pretences that they were religious notices. But the Roman Catholic papers have proclaimed that there is no Jew-baiting among the Poles. There must be some mistake.

Despite the silence of the Government—until speech was enforced—and the denials of the Roman Catholic Press that no persecution of Jews in the Polish Army existed, the ugly truth can no longer be denied. Those who know the facts concerning Fascist Poland will not be surprised. But now it appears that religious tyranny includes not merely the Jews, but also non-Catholic Christians. Some followers of the Greek Orthodox Church escaped to London and, as Polish subjects, were placed with the Polish Government here. Some came from South America, and were similarly placed with the Poles in England. Now there is found that the same religious “urge” that led to the ill-treatment of the Jews has also led to the ill-treatment of the members of the Greek Church. Christianity is a beautiful religion—when it can have a free run and disclose its deepest qualities. The God of the Christian created a hell for unbelievers after they were dead, and the Christian Church copied its leader—giving the unorthodox a taste of hell while they were alive.

Dr. Arthur Dakin, at the Baptist Union Annual Conference, made the following comment: “As life has become more and more concerned with trivialities like the cinema, so the idea of God has become shrunken and dwarfed.” He added that we needed a conception of God with a punch in it. All of which is quite true, except that the cinema is no triviality. The cinema to-day is an integral part of civilised and social life, and whatever its faults—and they are numerous—the fact remains that it broadens the outlook and extends the knowledge of people, willy nilly. And broadening the outlook and increasing knowledge certainly does shrink and dwarf the idea of God. As for the punch, God will need a very big punch to compete with the modern cinema as an attraction for human beings.

Certainly not! A deputation of billiard room proprietors appealed to the Falkirk Town Council for permission to open their rooms for games on Sunday. The request was refused. We should say so! It is difficult enough for the clergy to make headway against cinemas and Sunday excursions. Add billiard rooms, to be followed by other things, and the churches would be closed. There is, however, no truth in the report that the clergy are planning to have billiard tables set up in church for use while the minister is preaching.

There is not the slightest doubt that if the Roman Church had to choose between the triumph of Hitlerism and that of “Bolshevism” it would plump for the former. For with Nazism it could come to terms of a sort. With Atheistic Russia it could come to no such terms. The right to worship their God in their own way would not suit Catholicism. It must have control of the child, and in Russia that is as impossible as any conceivable situation can be. The “Catholic Herald” for May 12 says of the Church in Germany: “It is quite evident that at this stage of the war the bishops have a very real fear that Germany may be overrun by the advancing Russian forces,” and the Bishop of Munster says: “I need not emphasise once again that we hope and pray that the arms of Almighty God may strengthen our soldiers to repel the massed onslaught of Bolshevism.” This language is not uncommon, and it has received no rebuke from the Vatican. We need not wonder at this. The Church that did so much to make complete the wreck of Greek and Roman culture is not likely to act differently to-day.

In the United States we find the same significant utterances, although, of course, not quite so blunt in expression. The leaders warn their followers that England and Russia may hold a dominating influence on the Continent of Europe, and that means that the Roman Church will lose its power as a consequence. Finally, there is the action of the two European Roman Catholic States—Spain and Portugal. Spain has openly done all it can to help Nazism, and has had the Papal blessing as a reward. And Portugal has trodden in the same direction as far as it may with safety.

Bishop Yu Pin, a Chinese convert to Romanism, is quite certain that China's 400,000,000 people will rush to embrace his brand of Christianity after the war, though in order to achieve this “a vast army of missionaries will be needed.” We should like to suggest that the greater part of Catholics in this country should be detailed for the job, beginning with Archbishop Griffin. We can confidently assert that he might find the Chinese far easier to convert than the stupid and obstinate Protestants in this country, and his departure with most of his flock would simplify his side of the religious education problem in this country. Anyway, we note that the Church is ready to take a more “sympathetic” view of “deep-rooted Chinese customs” than before. This seems to us to be about the last word in sheer impudence.

The Catholics in this country are still sore over the broadcasting of Edgar Allan Poe's famous story “The Pit and the Pendulum.” One of them, writing in the “Universe,” called it “bureaucratic stupidity plus inherited hostility plus semi-State immunity plus subconscious enmity.” We have an idea that Romanist gentlemen of his kidney would have long ago consigned Poe's complete works to the stake—and Poe also if he had been alive. What a pretty picture of freedom and tolerance we get from Catholics whenever they can show their fangs!

At the beginning of a sitting in the House of Commons there are offered prayers, and the officiating parson receives a good salary. But there are seldom more than a dozen present. At each prayer God is asked to endow members with wisdom and a sense of justice. No one has yet quoted the result as proof that prayers are answered. Per contra, if the wisdom of the members is intensified by supernatural help, what would the members be like in the raw?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. WRALINS.—We are not immediately concerned in the belief of a future life or otherwise, although if we had to spend eternity with many Christians we have known, the reply would be: "We hope it is not true." But our main concern is whether the belief is true or not. And those who know how that belief began, and how it developed, know that it is not true.

T. V.—There is nothing new in what you say. On June 20, 1917, eighteen little children were bombed to death in a school in East London. And when the children were buried, all in one grave, if our memory serves us right, some fat-headed fool was responsible for singing over the grave, "There's a friend for little children, loving shepherd of thy sheep." We felt like kicking the fool at the time—now we can only smile at the folly on which religion lives.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.—Next week.

T. H. BINGERS.—Have read letter with interest. Don't be downhearted, the world is growing better even though fools are still plentiful.

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.

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.

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

SUGAR PLUMS

OWING to difficulties of printing and the Bank Holiday, and the fact that "The Freethinker" has to be given out to be printed, we are unable to get into this week's number the N.S.S. Executive's Annual Report and the Report of the proceedings of the Conference. They will appear in our next issue.

We have only space at the moment for an account of the evening demonstration. The Holborn Hall last Sunday was filled with an enthusiastic audience of members and friends—no small tribute to their attachment to the cause, as the temptation to take advantage of the beautiful weather must have been great. Led by the Chairman, Mr. Chapman Cohen, who gave a most interesting resumé of the history of Secularism, the succeeding speakers reached as high a level of excellence as had ever been heard at any similar demonstration of Freethought. Mr. Clayton dealt with the high percentage of delinquency among juveniles brought up by the Roman Catholic Church; Mr. Ebury made a vigorous attack on the Education Bill; Mr. Corina took up the challenge of the Education Bill with a counter attack from scientific teaching; Mr. Brighton brought in some apt and humorous illustrations of the way we all submit to religious and other ceremonies; Mr. McCall, dealing with the two attitudes to life, Freethought and Faith, plumped for the former; Mr. Rosetti cleverly contrasted the attitude of the Church in this and the last war; and finally the Chairman, taking up the threads of these finely contrasting speeches, pronounced his "benediction." The applause which followed was a fitting climax to a most successful day.

A word must be said in praise of the admirable arrangements made by the General Secretary for the smooth working of the Conference—no mean task these days. The war-time lunch was a good one, and there was the usual "reunion" of friends and members glad to meet each other again in such difficult times as we are going through. Young and old, it is good to put on record the enthusiasm everybody felt for Freethought at the Conference. It is still, as George Meredith said, "the best of all causes."

Here are some pregnant words of that genius who died only too soon—William Kingdom Clifford: "A revival of sacerdotal Christianity would be a matter of practice and not a matter of theory. The system which sapped the foundations of patriotism in the old world; which well-nigh eradicated the sense of intellectual honesty, and seriously weakened the habit of truth-speaking, which lowered man's reverence for the marriage bond by placing its sanctums in a realm outside of nature instead of in the common life of men, and by the institution of monasticism and a celibate clergy; which stunted the moral sense of the nations by putting a priest between every man and his conscience; this system, if it should ever return to power, must be expected to produce worse evils than those which it has worked in the past. The house which it once made desolate has been partly garnished and swept by the free play gained for the natural goodness of men. It would come back accompanied by social diseases perhaps worse than itself, and the wreck of civilised Europe would be darker than the darkest of past ages."

Watts and Company have added two good books to their "Thinkers' Library"—"Progress and Archaeology," by V. Gordon Childe, and "Magic and Religion," by Sir James Frazer. Both writers are authorities on their subject, and both fit into each other. Professor Childe tells the story of human development in a way that interests from the first page to the last. "Magic and Religion" is a small section of Frazer's great work "The Golden Bough," and forms the most debatable of his contributions on the origin and development of religious ideas. Price 2s. 6d. each.

Stand, Scotland where it did? We are pleased to answer in the negative. Take the following from the "Glasgow Herald," which gives the comment of the General Assembly of the Free Churches:—

In our great cities to-day concerts, usually blatantly secular in character, and containing sometimes items which on any day of the seven would have been far from elevating in their tendency, have become a regular feature of our Sabbath evenings. There is a vast amount of A.R.P. activity and of Home Guard drilling all over the country on the Sabbath which seems to be quite uncalled for. Those who engage in such exercises seem, too often, to be making a convenience of the Sabbath.

And this is a land when to laugh in public on Sunday was a religious offence!

The Archbishop of Canterbury, artful beggar, has asked that all places of worship should be opened for prayer when the opening of the Second Front begins. He is running no risk. If the new front is not opened, he saves annoying God by asking for his help when there was nothing to help. Secondly, if it opens badly the Churches can wait until things improve. If it opens well there will be an immediate answer to prayer. The Archbishop reduces danger to a minimum. But the real question we should like him to answer is: Why does God have to be prayed to to do what he ought to do without any wholesale grovelling beforehand?

Cardinal O'Connell (U.S.A.) has asked for prayers all over the world for the Pope. *For the Pope.* But if God cannot be trusted to look after the Pope without having his memory jolted, things must be very bad in heaven. It is true that, judging by events, God does not seem always to distinguish between his friends and his enemies, but humans to jolt his memory where the *Pope* is concerned—well, it should even make Christians think a little.

A NOTE ON THOMAS PAINE

SHAKESPEARE'S famous aphorism, "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges," has never been better exemplified than in the case of Thomas Paine, who is now slowly but surely receiving the recognition he ought to have received during the past century as one of the greatest democrats of all time.

As Freethinkers more than most people know well, Paine has, at the hands of Christians, been foully libelled, covered with obloquy, and held up to scorn and derision; and his name, as far as possible, has been boycotted from works which should have given him a place of honour. A case in point is Professor Saintsbury's "Short History of English Literature," which, while devoting much space to writers not fit to tie his shoes, simply says: "And the vulgar vigour of Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a great influence directly on popular thought, and a greater through his disciple Cobbett, must at least be mentioned." Not even the titles of his political work are given and, of course, the word "vulgar"—quite untrue anyway—has to be got in somehow.

But since Saintsbury wrote that in 1898, much water has flowed down the Thames, and it is pleasant to look at the contrast in "A History of American Letters" (1936), by Dr. F. H. Taylor, where Paine takes his rightful place as a fine writer, as "one of the principal thinkers of the American Enlightenment," and where it is admitted that "his services to the colonial cause were invaluable." In addition, Dr. Taylor quotes V. L. Parrington, who claimed that Thomas Paine "was probably the greatest pamphleteer that the English race has produced, and one of its greatest idealists." That is fine praise, and it has the merit of being true.

Dr. Taylor calls "The Rights of Man" "a brilliant union of skillful propaganda and clear political theory." Here are some more extracts from the author's keen appreciation of one of the founders of the "United States" of America:—

"By one of the curious paradoxes of history, this man, whose whole life was spent so largely in storm centres of contention, was a constructive thinker whose philosophy emphasised a reign of harmonious law. Underlying Paine's thought, no less than Franklin's, was the world picture framed by scientific deism—the picture of a mechanically perfect universe, operating with admirable precision under the reign of immutable laws, and presided over by an all-wise benevolent Creator. . . . Paine wished to realise in human society, the regime of harmonious law which he observed in the physical world. . . . Uncompromisingly . . . Paine stood for a rule of the people unhampered by tyrants or by the restraints of precedents."

Dr. Taylor quotes approvingly the phrase taken from the Appendix to "Common Sense"—that great pamphlet which did so much to further the American cause—"We have it in our power to make the world over again." It is a thought as well as a direct urge for the peoples of the world now in 1944; and Paine was full of such thoughts.

"Paine's literary method," says Dr. Taylor, "was that of the practical agitator and popular journalist. He sought first of all to persuade his audience. To achieve this end he held that a writer should be candid, simple, clear and bold." Those who have read Paine know how true is this criticism; they know how, "with astonishing directness, with true common sense, he cut to the centre of every question." In addition, "With an acute sense for practical effect, he spoke in an idiom absolutely plain and clear."

And, of course, the author recognises how, because of all this, "because Paine was dangerously influential and, withal, because he was annoyingly irreverent and often tactless, he called forth a veritable avalanche of obloquy. He was stigmatised as 'the

filthy Tom Paine,' and 'the infidel Tom Paine.'" I am glad Dr. Taylor has put it so plainly; but he might have called attention to the fact that these attacks did not altogether come because of Paine's political views, but because he ventured to criticise Christianity in the "Age of Reason." And they were devout Christians who were in the forefront of the avalanches of lies and calumnies poured on the great reformer.

"A History of American Letters" gives a fine account of almost all the authors that part of the continent has produced, and some splendid appreciations of the great American writers. But the only reference to Ingersoll is nearly as bad as the way in which Paine has hitherto been treated. It occurs in the notice of Sinclair Lewis's "Elmer Gantry," who, we are told, plagiarised "a sermon from the writings of the infidel Bob Ingersoll." That is all, and it is manifestly unfair.

For the rest, the book has one other excellent feature. It has over 200 pages of bibliographical material and a very good and complete one of Thomas Paine. These bibliographies make the work very complete, and it would be a good thing if our own histories of English Literature could follow suit.

H. CUTNER.

"THREE A PENNY"

JAMES JOYCE once published a brief pamphlet of verses under the typically Joycean title of "Pomes Penyeach," but I have just read a book of poetry which is even better value, at any rate, in the amount of work proportionate to cost. This is "Rhyme and Reason" (Fore Publications; 1s.), which contains 34 poems, and which therefore provides the poetry lover with approximately three poems for a penny.

Its contributors are mainly drawn from the younger generation of poets—Jack Lindsay, Idris Davies, John Pudney, Randall Swingler, Francis Scarfe—but there is a magnificent poem by W. B. Yeats, which tends, as the editor, David Martin, suggests, to dwarf all the others. There are, however, many poems which will have special appeal to Freethinkers, as witness the following, entitled "Sixes and Sevens," and written by Roy McFadden:—

"Religion is distinct from politics."

(The crafty and the echoing fools applaud.)

The seventh days must never meet the six

And governments have no concern with God.

So we have builded separating walls

Between each room, and, labelling every door,

Have answered only known, awaited calls,

Oblivious to the rats beneath the floor.

That, to my mind, is a poem worthy of a place in the commonplace book of every Freethinker (if Freethinkers, in these busy days, keep such collections of jottings which appeal to them).

And so, I think, is an extract from "The Men of the Rocks," by Adam Drinan, which begins:—

Because I did not sit in church
And would not nibble with the herd
Nor mumble titles undeserved
The laird on my bad influence
Laid blame for all his discontents
And lied of me "in confidence."

There is no space, in these days of paper restrictions, to quote the whole poem, but I think that all readers of these columns will see from what I have quoted that this is a thoroughly good shillings-worth of verse.

The world of modern poetry is in some ways a sick world. The influence of T. S. Eliot, which has been good in encouraging people to indulge in verbal experiment, has been thoroughly bad in its ideological aspect, for it has made the beliefs of High Anglicanism appear intellectually respectable, instead of being the mixture of primitive superstition and absurd make-believe which they really are. For that reason this group of young poets deserve to be supported. Their collective effort appears under the aegis of a publisher who is not fashionable, and for that reason they may be overlooked by devotees of the popular tomes of Messrs. Faber. I hope that Freethinkers will tend to realise the value of independence in poetry as in other spheres, and will appreciate the work that is being done by this group, which owes allegiance to no one and is striking out a definite and clear-cut line of its own.

S. H.

CORRESPONDENCE

THAT CHRISTIAN TRADITION.

SIR,—“Alert” is surprised that Gerald Massey’s booklet “The Historical Jews and the Mythical Christ” was not mentioned by me. I could not examine all the books on the mythicist hypothesis, so, barring a few historic names, I confined myself to the leading modern mythicists.

The title of Massey’s booklet, which I have seen, shows that he believed that there was an historical nucleus to the legend of Jesus; so he cannot be justly regarded as having sustained the thesis, “Jesus is a myth.” Massey was an Egyptologist of repute, but counts for little as a Biblical critic.—Yours, etc.,

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

A QUESTION AND A CHALLENGE.

SIR.—I noticed in the “Freethinker” (page 189) that the Archbishop of Canterbury says that “he is willing to answer any question on religion—on the radio.” This being so he can, if he will, subject to the B.B.C., answer a question concerning a point which, I think, is a subject of fair public comment.

There is little doubt that certain religious folk regularly peruse “The Freethinker,” if only to observe what progress our “sappers” are making towards the Citadel of Beliefs, and they can at their choice pass on to the Archbishop any item of interest. I would therefore, through the courtesy of your columns, ask him a plain matter-of-fact question: Referring to the Apostles’ Creed, what is meant by the words “I believe . . . (in) the life everlasting?”

Does this mean anything excepting that matter, as to its total content in some form or another, is indestructible? Surely that fact calls for no special reference by prayer. Or does it mean that a person’s individuality continues after his (or her) death? In this case, I would ask the Archbishop, subject to the B.B.C. allowing him a hearing, to say how, physiologically, or in any other comprehensible way, this seeming impossibility is possible.—Yours, etc.,

J. EDWARDS.

THE OATHS ACT—A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

SIR.—The articles in “The Freethinker,” May 14-21, on “I swear by Almighty God,” by F. J. Corina, relating to a witness taking the oath in our Courts of Justice, are apt and to the point, and deserve to be noted especially by Freethinkers when claiming their legal right to affirm.

Many years ago when in business I had an Ingersoll watch stolen by a porter at the local railway station. In due course I appeared at the Durham County Court. The local police sergeant who had the case in hand asked me to take the oath by “kissing the Book.” “No thank you,” I replied. “I am rather particular who or what I kiss, and I wish to affirm.” Presently the Clerk of the Court inquired: “Has Mr. Close been sworn?” “No,” replied the sergeant, “he wishes to affirm.” And that simple

statement, shortly after the Oaths Act had been passed into law, held up the Court for quite a good while. Neither the Clerk nor any solicitor present knew exactly how to act. After an interval the Clerk asked: “Why do you wish to affirm instead of taking the oath?” “Because,” I replied, “I have no religious belief, and I claim my lawful right under the Oaths Act of 1888.” The Clerk then said: “Hold up your right hand,” and I asked, “Why?” “To show that there is a God,” said the Clerk. “Well,” I retorted, “I might as well hold up my foot (Foote).” This little sally caused some tittering in Court, and to my great surprise I was allowed without further ado to give evidence regarding the stolen watch, and the case was decided in my favour with costs.

It seemed as if I was a thorn in the flesh, and their best plan was to get rid of me as soon as possible. Had I lost the case I would still have been quite satisfied for the opportunity of claiming my right to affirm. Now I think every Freethinker should be acquainted with Mr. Bradlaugh’s Oaths Act, so that if called upon as a witness in Court, or before a Coroner, he would know how to proceed in claiming his lawful right to affirm. On many occasions throughout his chequered career, Charles Bradlaugh was penalised in Court simply because the law was made by Christians, and he was an Atheist. What a remarkable feat the Oaths Act was! It is almost incredible. Charles Bradlaugh for six years struggled and fought the British Government to take his seat in Parliament as a duly elected member for Northampton. He proved victorious, and actually two years after taking his seat he brought in a Bill to make oath-taking optional throughout the British Empire, and it was carried by three to one. Charles Bradlaugh was a man of sterling character and principle. Let us then follow in his footsteps and remain “thorough” to the cause of Freethought, Free Speech and Liberty for which he did so much.—Yours, etc.,

JOSEPH CLOSE.

A CORRECTION.

SIR.—In your issue of May 21 you gave the hospitality of your columns to two sonnets from my pen. Unfortunately, a misprint has crept into the last line of the second poem, which may have puzzled some readers. I should therefore be obliged if you would print this brief word of correction. The last line should read:—

“The world is yours, if to the best you’re true.”

—Yours, etc.,

JOHN ROWLAND.

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: Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Messrs. WOOD, PAGE, and other speakers.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., J.L.D.; “The Future of Politics.”

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Various speakers.

Cliviger.—Wednesday, June 7, 7.30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m. Debate: “Does God Explain the Universe?” Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES.

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, June 2, 7.30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Messrs. F. SODEN and J. W. BARKER.

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Bigg Market).—Sunday 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

NO COMPROMISE

IN his "History of Philosophy," George Henry Lewes stated clearly the two great divisions of thought. He called them "Faith" and "Reason," and he pointed out that reconciliation between them was an impossibility. "Philosophy," he said, "conceive it how you will, is entirely the offspring of Reason: it is the endeavour to explain by Reason the mysteries amidst which we 'move, live, and have our being.' Although it is legitimate to say, 'Reason is incapable of solving the problems proposed to it,' it is not legitimate to add, 'therefore we must call in the aid of Faith.' In Philosophy, Reason must either reign alone, or abdicate. No compromise is permissible." Unfortunately, very few writers have taken heed of Lewes's words, and books galore are written attempting to combine these two incompatible positions.

Even a scientific thinker like Bertrand Russell is guilty of this, for in one of his essays* he proposes that the coalescence of mysticism and logic should form the basis of philosophy. Indeed, he thinks that "the true union of the mystic and the man of science" is "the highest eminence . . . that it is possible to achieve in the world of thought." He describes mysticism as, "in essence, little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe," which is rather abstract and certainly milder than most definitions, but even so is sufficient to reveal what is, to my mind, an illogicality. "Feeling," whether deep or shallow, is surely out of place "in the world of thought." It is an impediment to thinking, and is incongruous in a "truly scientific philosophy" such as Professor Russell desires to achieve. Its true place is, I think, in the Arts.

In another essay in the same book, "On Scientific Method in Philosophy," Russell is more like his usual self, and he deserts his previous position, saying:—

"It is my belief that the ethical and religious motives in spite of the splendidly imaginative systems to which they have given rise, have been on the whole a hindrance to the progress of philosophy, and ought now to be consciously thrust aside by those who wish to discover philosophical truth. Science, originally, was entangled in similar motives, and was thereby hindered in its advances. It is, I maintain, from science, rather than from ethics and religion, that philosophy should draw its inspiration."

With this I have no quarrel, but it is hardly consistent with the following, again from the earlier essay:—

"In religion, and in every deeply serious view of the world and of human destiny, there is an element of submission, a realisation of the limits of human power, which is somewhat lacking in the modern world, with its quick material successes and its insolent belief in the boundless possibilities of progress. 'He that loveth his life shall lose it'; and there is danger lest, through a too confident love of life, life itself should lose much of what gives it its highest worth. The submission which religion inculcates in action is essentially the same in spirit as that which science teaches in thought; and the ethical neutrality by which its victories have been achieved is the outcome of that submission."

I do not agree that science teaches submission "in thought" essentially the same as that "which religion inculcates in action," for the essence of religious belief is blind submission to authority, which is unknown in science, where the only "submission" I am aware of is to *facts*. I confess, however, that I do not

* "Mysticism and Logic": first essay in book of same title, by Bertrand Russell (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London).

understand exactly what Professor Russell means in the last quotation, parts of which sound to me strangely like a parsonic sermon, even complete with the requisite biblical quotation! I should need to know *how* "there is a danger lest, through a too confident love of life, life itself should lose much of what gives it its highest worth," while I assert that the *possibilities* of progress *are* boundless, and can certainly see no harm nor insolence in mankind believing so! On the contrary, I submit that this is one of the principles upon which science works.

At this point, I wish to say that parts of "Mysticism and Logic" contain much that is valuable and provocative reading, such as we normally expect from Professor Russell, but the conclusion of the essay also has a rather religious flavour, viz.: "A truly scientific philosophy will be more humble (than Evolutionism), more piecemeal, more arduous, offering less glitter of outward mirage to flatter fallacious hopes, but more indifferent to fate, and more capable of accepting the world without the tyrannous imposition of our human and temporary demands." Dissenting once more, I suggest that humility, arduousness, or hopes are entirely irrelevant to a "truly scientific philosophy," which is concerned solely with truth and a factual basis. Unless this be so, philosophy may as well "abdicate," as Lewes says, and let theology reign instead.

Science, of course, cannot explain everything, but that is no reason why we should reject its principles when we come to the regions where our knowledge is incomplete. The scientific method holds good at all times; it is the foundation of logic; and in philosophy the ultimate choice rests between science or God! All attempts to unite the two have failed and must fail, for they are in direct opposition to each other. There is no need to quibble over names, for God, the Absolute, the Unknowable, Spirit, or Mind, are all the same in essence, and they are all hopelessly unscientific. Philosophers who fall back on these terms are all theists of one sort or another, searching for something outside or above nature: God may be pushed out at the front door, but he invariably re-enters at the rear.

The scientific philosopher, on the other hand, whether he calls himself materialist, naturalist or monist, affirms that the only way of obtaining knowledge is by the methods of science, and he knows of nothing outside nature. Nor can he see any purpose in nature as a whole: purpose exists only in the actions of living organisms, and everything is the result of a process of determinism. Creation out of nothing is an impossibility, so is the end of everything, and a truly scientific, evolutionary outlook necessitates the view that something always has been and always will be, though continuously changing its form, and the materialist calls it "matter," though the name is unimportant. The materialist says, in the words of Chapman Cohen: "Given existence, which is a datum everyone is bound to have, I will show you that everything results, or probably results, or will be found to result, from the interplay of natural forces." That is what George Henry Lewes was asking for, and that is what any really scientifically-thinking person wants. I cannot say whether it offers *more* or "*less* glitter of outward mirage to flatter fallacious hopes" for Professor Russell, but for me, it is the foundation of the "truly scientific philosophy" for which both of us are searching. C. McCALL.

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