

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Religious Origins

JUST over thirty years ago I wrote a book under the title of "Religion and Sex" with an explanatory sub-title of "Studies in the Pathology of Religious Development." The sub-title should have made the scope of the book quite plain to anyone interested in the subject. But we are a pure-minded Christian people for whom "sex"—on the inducement side—carries a strong inclination to fix an unhealthy significance on the word. The result is that too many "sex" closes their mental horizon to all other aspects of the term. It had been arranged that the book should be issued in the latter part of 1914, but the war broke out, and my publisher suggested that publication should be held over until peace came; I agreed, and the book saw the light towards the end of 1919. It was very favourably received by those who reviewed it, and among those who praised the work was Havelock Ellis. Others were apparently afraid of opening the minds of Christians to the real quality of their creed, particularly as the book linked up the customs of primitive peoples with those of a more recent cultural date. One American reviewer regretted that the book was not larger, but it already covered about 300 pages, and I have a natural dislike to bulky volumes; my natural inclination is to read and talk rather than to write, and a small book impels one to directness whereas a large one may owe its size to the love of the writer for something substantial—in weight. Finally, I have no desire to encourage people to keep their brains stagnant; besides, some of the most "violent" books have been brief ones.

The subject of "Religion and Sex," while not absolutely new in its substance, was quite fresh in its directness. The facts on which I built had all been noted by many writers; if I could legitimately claim any originality it lay in its close association of our religion with well-known states connected with a frustrated sexual life and a misunderstanding of abnormal condition of mind and body. It did not claim abnormality or sexuality as lying at the foundation of religious belief, only that it was among the factors that have kept religion alive in civilised centres. It is curious to note that while a great deal of the evidence I brought forward was gleaned from the writings of medical men, and although planned "religious revivals" are notable as supplying saved specimens not worth collecting, there has always been in this country a strong reticence to let the cat out of the bag. There are a very large number of people in this country who are not believers in religion, but they are afraid of it. Jones explains that he professes belief in Christianity merely to encourage Smith in decency, and Smith suggests that his profession of belief is made solely to induce better behaviour in Jones. In our country the philosopher apologises to the fool for his

own power of understanding, and the "honest" man explains religion to the rogue—merely to encourage him in decency—that he still believes in kind-of-a-sort-of-something that might be God. We can put millions of lions on the battlefield and place only a mere handful of intellectual heroes in our universe. It is a quite unconscious burst of honesty that leads us to say that there is such a thing as "Christian truth." It is recognised the "truth" of science has no relation with religious truth.

But in spite of all I have said I was a little surprised to find in a recent issue of the "Manchester Evening News" an article by a well-known Manchester Nonconformist minister in which it was said that my book belonged to that "class of books which considers that religion originates in sex-influence." But that is precisely *not* the aim of my book. Of course, there are books that have suggested this origin of religion, mainly because of the primitive ignorance of man with regard to the sexual life of man and woman; but apart from primitive religions, the Christian creed is saturated with it. But these suggestions of religion being derived from sexual life, so far as it had being, were removed from the scene by 1870, which marked the establishment of a completely scientific anthropology. Primitive man had to learn the nature of the sex-life, and we have in the birth of Jesus Christ an example of the extent to which primitive ideas treated the subject. But there is a world of difference between religion originating in "sex-life" and the primitive religion which misunderstands the functions of sex-life. In any case, I was not at all concerned with the theories that gathered round religion and the bare facts of sex itself. Where I touched on superstitions that were expressed through sex, it was to illustrate the debt religion in general, and the Christian Church in particular, owes to superstitions that gather round sex. It came into my book only so far as it provided material to prove my thesis with regard to the cause and perpetuation of religious ideas. "Religion and Sex" did not claim even to explain the origin of religion; it was concerned with giving an explanation why in "civilised" communities certain primitive ideas still persist.

Sex and Religion

"Religion and Sex" has been for some years out of print, and it would need some additions and elaborations to bring a new edition up to date. And there is the paper question that stands in the way. But it is gratifying to note that the advances made in a scientific appreciation of the origin, development, and the decay of gods do not call for any substantial alterations of what was written a full generation ago. For the reasons stated, some useful purpose may be served if I run over the main features of the book.

We may take it for granted that with all really scientific thinkers there is a general agreement as to the origin of

man, and that the age of man must be counted by millions of years rather than by the few centuries indicated in the Jewish and Christian Bibles. There is also the notable development and decay of gods, and the decline of religious belief all over the civilised world. That is one of the most striking features of our time. Less than a century ago it was common to find Freethinking advocates trying to prove they were as good—morally—as Christians. To-day it is Christians who try to prove that they are as good as unbelievers. It is also a point worth noting that it was at the beginning of the last century that a great effort was put forward by Christians to develop a world-wide missionary crusade aiming at the undeveloped races of the world. It was also the period when scientific developments were increasing, and it was getting plain that if Christianity was to exist on religiously satisfactory terms it must call in the undeveloped world to counter the more scientific and civilised one.

It is an established fact that in structure man is a member of the animal world. The human structure, in the days when Christians *were* Christians, was used as offering evidence of the wisdom of God and the skill of his handiwork; to-day has given way to the fact that man is an adapted animal with all the inconveniences that accompany makeshift structures. There is a story of one of the Spanish monarchs who remarked that had he been present at the creation he would have offered some suggestions to the Creator. That could easily have been done, and it might have made man secure from some of the dangers that he runs every hour of his existence.

We are certain that man originates as a development from a gregarious ape-like group. A further development leads us to sociality, a quality that lies at the root of man's superiority in kind. He does not, as is the case with gregarious animals, repeat the life of previous generations; he commences, or may commence, where the previous generations left off. His power is cumulative, whereas that of the animal is merely repetitive, dependent upon the slower evolutionary method.

But we are concerned with the gods, and the certain thing is that of the million or more years that man has existed, somewhere about two-thirds of the time passed with the gods conspicuous by their absence. Gods are born of speculation and, as is very common right through human history, first guesses are not always accurate ones. But the sure thing is that gods, wherever found, are made in the likeness of man. There is simply no exception to this. The Biblical statement that God made man in his own image is a clear reversion of the fact. Gods are always fashioned in the likeness of man. They have human virtues and human vices. They are good or bad, wise or stupid, kind or cruel. Never did a god exist who was not fashioned in the likeness of man. For better or for worse, man makes God in his own image. He improves as man improves, but only as man improves. Eliminate from God all his alleged qualities and the believer will soon discover that he is facing—just nothing. There was one battalion of Christian devotees who called themselves, or were called, "The Apes of God." Whoever it was who coined the phrase, they would have been nearer the truth if gods had been called the apes of man, for in all their characteristics, gods do nothing but imitate their alleged followers. It was not God

who ordered that men should not be put to death for not worshipping him; the order came from man. It was God who created a hell for those who offended him; it was man who put the flames out. It was God who placed a curse upon women in childbirth; it was medical skill and an improved science which did what it could to abolish God's curse. There is something highly significant in the fact that men approach their gods on their knees with hands clasped and eyes closed. It is the attitude of submission, the mark of the slave. When man stands erect and opens his eyes he discovers that the image to which he has been bowing is nothing but his own fears and follies.

Taking what I have said as a starting point, I wrote "Religion and Sex"; except, incidentally, I was not concerned with *how* religion came into existence. It was enough for my purpose that it existed. But there was another aspect of religion which I felt had not been sufficiently handled. Of course, medical men had pointed out the manner in which visions and hallucinations could be paralleled with the visions experienced by the saints, and so forth. But, after all, religion was a fact, and an illusion is a fact even though it must be placed in a division by itself. Whether we believe in religion or not, it is there, a fact, just as the queer visions of the opium-eater are facts. A difference in category in no wise affects what we have said. To a scientific psychologist, illusions are as much facts as are the everyday scenes of normal men and women. Of course, deliberate fraud had played, and still plays, a part in the history of religion; but it is not possible to put all religion in that category. It seemed to me that what was required was a bringing together of what had been discovered by a study of both normal and abnormal psychology, and would lead to an understanding of not merely the origin of religious beliefs, but also what seemed to me more important, an understanding of those situations which would account for the perpetuation of religion, side by side with a developing scientific culture.

We Freethinkers, particularly, have to explain what are the conditions which bring to a certain type of character what they consider evidence in support of the supernatural. It is good in controversy not to merely show that those on the "other side" are wrong, but to be able to show *why* and where they are wrong.

That was what I had in mind when I wrote "Religion and Sex." Had conditions been normal we should before now have reissued the book after it had been brought up to date. But conditions are not normal. I have so many things in hand that I do not know when I should have the time to re-write with adequate additions. There are, I am glad to say, very few statements that need withdrawing. So I intend to add a couple of articles which will cover the ground of the book, and leave it to others to enlarge when the time comes for doing so.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued.)

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians. Edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Passages cited are under headings: BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS, BIBLE ATROCITIES, BIBLE IMMORALITIES, INDECENCIES AND OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

THE STORY OF THE NEW DEAL

THE catastrophic American crash in the late twenties was perhaps the worst monetary disaster the States have ever experienced. "In retrospect," writes Professor R. B. Mowat in his informative volume, "The American Venture" (Dakars, 1942) "the domestic administration of President Hoover looks like a nightmare owing to the prevailing spectres of economic insecurity, unemployment and bankruptcy." The banks were everywhere collapsing, but in 1932 a few survived as a result of long bank holidays in all States of the Union.

In 1929, mortgages on farms exceeded more than nine thousand million dollars, while agricultural revenues declined 57 per cent. between 1929-1932. There was so little faith in the solvency of the banks (encumbered as they were with frozen assets), that depositors rushed to withdraw their deposits.

Amidst the widespread misery, Hoover sought re-election as President, but in the November elections of 1932 the Republicans were routed and Franklin Roosevelt secured a majority of over seven million popular votes over his opponent, Herbert Hoover. Thus Roosevelt became President, a position he has held ever since.

Faced by the appalling conditions occasioned by the financial crisis the newly-elected President determined to make a strenuous effort to restore confidence as a prelude to returning prosperity. In his inaugural address in 1933 he said: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror." He trounced the money magnates and charged them with responsibility for the misery and impoverishment of the preceding years. These afflictions, the President declared, were the outcome of their pig-headed incompetence and demonstrated their incapacity as "rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods."

The breakdown of the banking system Roosevelt strove to rectify by closing all the banks, although this general closure was discontinued after a few days had elapsed (March 9-13, 1933). But the Post Office Savings Bank remained open throughout, while under Emergency Banking Acts, Congress empowered the President to re-open State and National banks and to require depositors to return hoarded money to their bankers or incur the penalty of fine or imprisonment, or both. "Money," states Mowat, "flowed back to the re-opened banks of which by the end of May there were 12,787; confidence had been restored."

The President next approached the problem arising from the heavy deficit in the Federal Budget which, in the financial year 1931-32, attained the staggering total of 2,885,400,000 dollars. So the President followed the example set by Great Britain and Australia and reduced the salaries of all Government officials by 15 per cent. This reduction (1933-34), applied both to Senators and Congressmen and was widely adopted by municipal bodies and the Universities. Consequently, one million dollars was saved on the National expenditure. Still, the Budget remained unbalanced so more taxation was imposed. Then, with the repeal of the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution which, in theory if not in practice, had prohibited the consumption of alcoholic beverages, a welcome revenue flowed in from the excise.

The budgetary deficit, however, continued, for an enormous expenditure was incurred in restoring to work the many millions of unemployed. To regain normalcy the President established 31 new, strongly staffed Boards which disbursed stupendous sums of money. The initials alone of these newly created bodies, such as the W.P.A. (Works Progress Association) cover "nearly all the letters of the alphabet."

When accepting nomination as candidate for the Presidency, Franklin Roosevelt declared: "I pledge you," (the Democratic National Convention); "I pledge myself to a 'new deal' to the American people." On another occasion he stated that his intention was to champion the cause of "the forgotten man." These promises he has striven to redeem and Acts of Congress were speedily passed to facilitate the coming of the New Deal.

Possibly the most important of these measures was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. Dr. Mowat notes that this Act "authorised the President to approve of codes of fair competition drafted by representatives of a trade or groups of trades (for instance, electrical industry, motor industry). These codes were to embody conditions as to the maximum hours of work and minimum rates of pay and also should ensure protection for consumers, that is, in effect, price fixing . . . In general, the maximum hours authorised in the codes were 40 per week, and the minimum rates 15 dollars weekly (12 dollars in the country)." Section 7 of N.R.A. established the right of employees "to organise and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing."

By reducing hours of labour and raising wages it was thought that N.R.A. would speed up production and stabilise prices. By these means it was anticipated that both output and consumption would increase.

Largely as the result of the poor prices commanded by agricultural products husbandry in America had become very unremunerative and supplies were far greater than the demand. So the Agricultural Adjustment Act was deliberately designed to diminish production and thus raise prices. If the exchange value of the products of the soil could be increased, this would enable farmers to purchase all the agricultural implements and other commodities they needed.

It was a reasonable assumption that the restoration of agrarian prices to the level of those that prevailed between 1909-1914 would initiate a prosperous period. Under the Adjustment Act agriculturists were to be compensated for any loss they might suffer in its working. Also, the crops controlled by legislation were to be confined to wheat, corn (maize), cotton, rice, tobacco. The production of milk and the number of pigs was likewise restricted. Then loans were to be granted through the Federal Banks to enable farmers to refinance their mortgages at a lower rate of interest than had been customary.

The various expedients adopted were fruitful in result, although their benefits were not immediate. Hundreds of millions of dollars were devoted to public assistance especially in indigent urban areas. Much of this money—about 100 million dollars—was expended in purchasing food, fuel and clothing for the distressed population.

"After fighting against it for years," states Dr. Mowat, "the United States Government had to resort to the 'dole.' An average number of about 4,000,000 families received direct relief throughout the spring and early summer of 1933. In summer the number declined, owing to opportunities of seasonal employment, and by autumn a vast system of public works was in progress to give the destitute unemployed paid work." The Public Works Administration carried out constructional operations such as the creation of parks and playgrounds, the reclamation of waste land, drainage, road building and the transmission of electrical power.

Farmers were saved from ruin who had been threatened by foreclosure of their unredeemed mortgages, while a Home Owners' Loan Association aided families who were unable to preserve their dwellings. The President urged all in dire distress to telegraph immediately for help from the Loan Association, and the Emergency Housing Corporation was furnished with 100 million dollars to finance house building and slum clearance while municipalities and kindred bodies undertook the work itself.

Dr. Mowat is unstinting in his praise of the President's policy which he acclaims as one of the noblest aspirations and achievements of any statesman that has ever lived. The orthodox political economy so long accepted as immutable, he adapted to contemporary conditions. Our historian intimates that Roosevelt "undertook a nation-wide energetic policy of internal development, within the framework of the existing constitution without shock to the existing social and economic system, without

ACID DROPS

REV. DR. JOHN WHITE is described by a newspaper in front of us as "the famous Scotch Divine." We do not know what he is famous for, for the fact of finding a man who is intellectually famous in the pulpit may rank very small in the intellectual world. But the sample that lies before us is not very promising, for he informs the world that "The Church remains the one and only institution in the whole world that has a message for mankind," and that is sheer impudent rubbish. There are scores of movements and theories belonging to all sorts of religious and non-religious bodies that make just what Dr. White claims. Modesty and the desire to be accurate—to say nothing of being truthful—might have led to a more reasonable speech.

Our readers will remember that we have more than once said that the "Atlantic Charter" was little more than a string of words that might mean anything or nothing. It was then taken that it was a document drawn up by Churchill and Roosevelt and solemnly signed by both. Now we discover that it never existed. It was no more than numerous notes signed by the President and the Prime Minister. The latter has said nothing, but Roosevelt has said that it has no legal existence. So ends one war romance.

We pointed out that even on the assumption of finality it meant nothing. Such phrases as the two countries seek no aggrandisement—they never have, but that has not prevented them grabbing plenty. They respect the desire for all peoples to govern themselves—so long as it does not interfere with the two. They will give equal access to all the world to the raw materials of the world—so long as the free-entrance does not interfere with existing obligations, etc. Words, words, and yet more words. The real means of preventing war by abolishing private armies is just ignored. The Churchill expression "What we have we hold" is the real world dominating rule. That spells, and always has spelt, the desire to hold more, and the sequel to that is war.

The Marquis of Crewe informs the world that "a happy example of a constitutional monarchy is the best safeguard of a stable democracy." We are not sure that this is not an attempt at humour, for he admits that will not do for Spain, Italy, and other European bodies, which resolves the matter into "A constitutional monarchy is good when it is not bad." Many have gone down in the past years and the people are, on the whole, better for it. In this country we have a monarchy which was appointed over 200 years ago, and that is just about as undemocratic as one could get. Our safeguard does not lie in the presence of a monarch for the simple reason that he is a mere figure-head. Lord Crewe further regrets that there is nothing between a monarchy and a republic. Which is not the case. A monarch might be appointed for life by a democracy, but no democracy has, or should have, the power to appoint a line of kings for ever. That denies the people of the future the right to change their monarch—which has been done more than once in defiance of the hereditary principle.

The Minister of Wellington Church, Glasgow, says there are 4,300 congregations in Glasgow, and most of them are ministering to a handful of people. He also thinks the Church can learn much from the public-houses in the direction of filling their churches. We do not doubt it. Suppose a pint of beer was sent round to the congregation every fifteen minutes; we feel sure the churches would be crowded, and the selected sermons would be very long ones.

The Roman Church naturally pays great attention to children. It is understood that if the child is lost there is small hope of capturing the youth, and almost impossible to get hold of the adult. Other subjects may wait for maturity. Religion in general, and the Roman Church in particular, must get hold of a child before it has reached the age when it may understand what is being done with it. The quality of the method employed is well exposed by a small pamphlet for young girls entitled, "First Prayers for the Little Ones," and one may well

ask: What is it expected to do? Here are two samples, each taking up a whole page in very large letters. Number one: "When I am big you will give me your body to feed my soul. I long for you to come, dear Jesus." Number two, when the child is a little older: "Dear Jesus . . . Come soon to feed my soul with your holy body and blood." We would wager that this was written by some nun who should have been the mother of a family.

The Government of Northern Ireland has followed the example by "improving" its educational system. And, as bad examples are more easily followed than good ones, Northern Ireland has followed the English example—only more so. The new plan makes compulsory an act of worship—of the Belfast kind—in all primary and secondary schools, and the clergy—of the Protestant kind—will have the right to visit schools for the purpose of seeing that the religion taught is of the right kind. And the Lord help the teacher who tries to be honest to himself and to his pupils. It has followed the English plan of providing that if the teacher does not wish to teach religion he may be relieved. But nothing is said of what will happen if the teacher so acts. The plan, both in England and Ireland, tends to make humbugs of teachers and leave a lot for pupils to unlearn after their school years are finished.

Miss Rebecca West is one who should be above using misleading phrases, particularly when the use of religious terms is concerned. For these are used in so great a number of differing meanings that their use is almost certain to deceive. Here, for instance, is a sentence that will be read by people with a different meaning; it occurs in the opening words of an article in the "Sunday Chronicle." It runs: "I believe in the Christian conception of man and the French Revolution's interpretation of his political necessities." How are we to interpret this confession of faith? The French Revolution formula, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," looks clear enough, and yet that extremely clever and interesting criticism by so careful a writer as James Fitzjames Stephen, as far back as 1873, showed that it was open to more than one interpretation. Of course, the common man or woman loves a nice-sounding phrase or sentence, but those who really wish to instruct others should always be on their guard against phrases that satisfy only to mislead.

Leaving the French formula, one may ask Miss West just what does she believe is implied by "The Christian conception of man"? Man, according to historic Christianity, is a fallen being groaning under the curse of God, and can only be saved from damnation through belief in Jesus Christ. Take away this supernatural aspect of Christianity and there is nothing distinctive in it. The expressed belief that mankind may be regarded as some kind of a brotherhood is probably as old as articulate language. The existence of the family, the tribe, the nation, are all phases of these conceptions, and internationalism as its final place. But it is not these phases that Christianity has either created or protected. On the contrary, the historic attitude of the Christian Churches is that man is powerless to save himself without a religious miracle.

Miss West is obviously led away by those "up-to-date" preachers who are ready to adapt Christianity to anything that comes along. The apology for this is that Christianity must move with the times and adapt itself to new frames of thought. That is quite a good rule for any ordinary system that is framed by mere man who must use for his tools whatever society supplies. But Christianity claims to be a "divine" system direct from God. And one cannot have at the same time a direct revelation from "God" and deal with it as though it was the creation of an ordinary human being. If Miss West will go carefully through the New Testament noting how many aspects of social life—education, science and social life—all of which were dealt with by Greeks, Romans and others, she will recognise—or she ought to recognise—"The Christian conception of man" is something that the world is rapidly outgrowing.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. STEPHENSON.—We note what you say about the authorship of the "Vestiges of Creation." Chambers adopted the precaution of having his MSS. rewritten by a friend. You will note that Conway merely reports what someone else said, he does not directly adopt it. In any case, you will find the real authorship of the "Vestiges" given in later editions of the work. Thanks for good wishes and appreciation of our work.

C. MORRIS.—H. C. Lea's "History of Sacerdotal Celibacy" has been out of print for some time. You would have to depend upon picking up a secondhand copy. The work is completely dependable.

R. F. HILL (Australia).—Thanks for MSS. Shall be used in due course.

C. McCALL.—We hope to soon have the sketch on Paine on sale. Conway's edition of Paine, six volumes in all, is the authoritative work on the subject. It is not likely to be superseded. Best wishes.

C. McLACHLAN.—Letter received. If you will send your full address, Mr. Cohen will write. He appreciates what you say. He hopes he deserves some of the good things you write.

BENEVOLENT FUND.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society, Mr. and Mrs. S. Miller, £5 5s.; H. A. Walker, £1; S. G. Merrifield, 10s. 8d.; Mrs. A. Cross, £2; H. Beck, 10s.; Florence P. Walter, in memory of George William Foote, £1.

M. McALMONT.—Order safely to hand and literature sent overseas as requested.

For "THE FREETHINKER."—"To the memory of Edward Payne," 10s.; W. Angus, 7s.; W. A. Gourmand, 6s. 6d.; V. Collins, £5; Mrs. C. M. Tarling, 10s.; J. Shippis, 10s.

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.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WE were pleased to see the following letter in the "Daily Express." It was given a special place in the middle of the page:—

RELIGION IN THE FORCES

"Complaints still crop up about men and women of the Forces being persuaded on enlistment to register under some religious denomination. Recently a recruit was refused his wish to be registered as an 'Atheist,' and on showing his justifiable indignation was told he was making a fuss about nothing.

"One can imagine the reaction of a Christian if told he must describe himself as an Atheist!

"It is the legal right of anyone in the Forces to demand to be registered as 'Atheist,' 'Freethinker,' 'No religion,' or any other description desired. To enforce an Atheist to sign his record as belonging to C. of E. or any other denomination is to force him to start Army life with a lie."

Woodford Green.

RUBY TAYLOR.

It is strange that in the midst of a war, which is said to be on behalf of freedom, that there should be any difficulty at all in men and women in the Forces exercising their legal rights. The N.S.S. has dealt with scores of cases since the war commenced.

Among the many forgeries for which the Christian Church is responsible is a letter written by Publius Lentulus to the Emperor Tiberius describing the appearance and execution of Jesus Christ, with various other details. Every student of Christianity knows this impudent forgery, but we hardly expected it to reappear in the columns of the "Daily Mirror." But there it was, in full, and with not the slightest indication of its real character. All we can say is that evidently the editor of the "Mirror" ranks the intelligence of his readers lower than we do.

But we daresay there are other letters which could be shown if required. There was a letter written by Elijah, and written in heaven; there was also a letter written by the Holy Trinity about the 14th century and directed to St. Vincent Ferrier. We suggest to the "Daily Mirror" that it follows up the letter from Lentulus with other miraculously written documents. It would be a pity to stop short with one document when there are so many on hand. It could finish with a facsimile of the battle of the darkness that overcame Egypt. Might as well go the whole hog.

There is one thing that Christians completely overlook and multitudes of Freethinkers do not sufficiently bear in mind. This is, that right or wrong, disbelief in the existence of God is a product of some amount of independent thinking. In the case of the Godite, his belief in God has required no intellectual struggle, it has involved no research, he simply finds himself laden with a belief that has come out of nothing, with the result that it leads to its original starting point. The Atheist must fight for every step he takes, and his fighting is in effect a process of intellectual purification. Nothing can rob him of that.

Cardiff Freethinkers willing to help form a local branch of the N.S.S. are asked to communicate in the first place with Mrs. Strange, 56, Woodville Road, Cardiff.

Two pieces of advice reach us from a Christian reader of "The Freethinker." First he tells us that our approach to God is a bad one. But we do not approach God. We have no need to. In any case, it is he who ought to approach us. We—every "We" that exists—can, if he will, get along without God. On the confession of Christians the vast majority of people get along without God. And putting alongside those who get on without God and those who believe God helps them, there does not seem any great distinction between the two groups.

The next thing we are told is that we should consider God as we see him in Christ. But we do not see God in Christ. We see a very common specimen of wandering preachers who were once very common in the world and are far from scarce now. We only have the word of these wandering preachers that they have come from God or are in touch with God. We find nothing in these people that is either wise or stupid, good or bad, that is not to be found in ordinary human beings.

The third piece of advice is that we must honour Christ as he is honoured in heaven. But we do not know that he is honoured in heaven, and we are not sure that there is any heaven in which he could be honoured. Really, all this talk is quite unnecessary to make one admire the good and decline the bad. Most decent people admire a man who is good, but the honour is based on the kind of actions he is noted for. All the tomfoolery of God coming from heaven to tell men and women to behave themselves is just words, words, and yet again words. Still, our Christian friend reads "The Freethinker," so he is not beyond hope.

In a recent broadcast the Pope said "Democracy must give the citizen freedom of speech." Bravo! But what sort of freedom of speech has the Papacy ever given, or does give to-day, when it is in a position to silence heretics?

A REVOLUTIONARY ATHEIST

THE well known epigram: "Religion is the Opium of the People" has nearly always been attributed to Karl Marx; and it must have come as a great surprise to many readers to find it had been said by Charles Kingsley years before it was used by Marx, as was shown recently in these columns by Mr. W. Kent. Yet in much the same form it really originated from the famous (or infamous) Marquis de Sade.

De Sade can claim to be one of the most extraordinary men who has ever lived. Generally speaking, his name is omitted from most popular encyclopedias and reference books as if its mere mention would soil their pages for ever with the vilest infamy. Merely to hint that you have read his works was, for a century at least, to put you out of the pale of decent society. They were rigorously prohibited and destroyed in every country with such ferocity that it was, and is, almost impossible to procure them even at fantastic prices. I think it is safe to say that no other writer in the world has been attacked with such hatred and obloquy, and that it may be centuries yet before his books will be available for study by the average reader.

The Marquis de Sade was born in 1740 and died in 1814. He spent a great part of his life in captivity and—perhaps for this reason—fought for liberty with a power and an intensity I think, unequalled in literature.

Liberty for him did not mean just what it meant, say, to Rousseau or Voltaire. He soared high above them, and insisted on complete liberty to do what he liked, how he liked, and when he liked. It was because of this passionate love for liberty, a love which carried him far beyond the bounds of licence that he had to pay so terribly with many years in prison, and that he is still regarded as a "monster." After his death, French writers could hardly find epithets foul enough wherewith to besmirch him. A typical example is Jules Janin:—

"This atrocious and bloody blasphemer, this obscene historian of the most terrible dreams which have ever agitated the fever of demons, the Marquis de Sade . . . believe me whoever you are, never touch these books, they will for ever kill your sleep . . ."

The two best known works, or rather I should say, the two which have in spite of suppression been the most widely circulated, are "Justine" and "Juliette," and they are described by William Beckford, the famous author of "Vathek," as "the most blasphemous and obscene ever painted and which came hot from hell." I dislike writing about books I have never read and so cannot give any reasoned opinion on these two works—though I have, of course, read summaries and extracts from both. But it is only fair to point out that the twentieth century (with a few rare souls earlier like Swinburne) showed a marked change in attitude towards de Sade.

"This man, who appeared to count for nothing," wrote Guillaume Apollinaire, in 1909, in a short introduction to a volume of extracts from the work of the "infamous" Marquis, "during the nineteenth century, may well dominate the twentieth . . . the freest spirit who has ever lived . . ."

Swinburne called him "That illustrious and ill-requited benefactor of humanity . . ." The poet thinker and man of the world from whom the theology of my poem ("Charenton") is derived was a greater than Byron. He indeed, fatalist or not, saw to the bottom of gods and men."

De Sade was an Atheist, a Materialist, an Unbeliever, without any reservations. He was deeply read in philosophy and owed a great deal to that indomitable Atheist, La Mettrie, the author of "Man a Machine." Passages in his books which I have read against religion and against the idea of God are utterly without restraint, but logical to an almost superb degree. I think it is because of this Atheism more than because de Sade

refused to allow any brake on his erotic imaginings that so many of his religious critics (like Desmond MacCarthy, for example) love to please themselves to write that he died insane. Napoleon shut up the Marquis in a lunatic asylum, but all the investigation into the circumstances of this detention proves that de Sade was not and never was insane. The letter, which is still extant, which he left giving directions on how he must be buried, proves him to be as sane as any man—but indeed there can be no doubt whatever from his work that he was in deadly earnest and never more so than when he was most extravagant.

Throughout all his work he constantly returns to the problem of God. In "The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade" by Geoffrey Gorer, an extremely able examination and analysis of the chief writings of this extraordinary man, published in 1934 by Wishart and Co., the author devotes a chapter to this question. He says:—

"From this time (1782) onwards de Sade cannot leave God and religion—particularly the Catholic Church—alone. By comparison he showed a certain amount of respect and toleration to Protestantism. I do not think there are fifty pages in any of his works in which the subject is not mentioned. His knowledge of the literature concerned with it is encyclopædic. He would seem to know the Bible almost by heart; he quotes and deals with Christian apologists from the early Fathers to Scott, Fenelon, Pascal and even more recent theologians; he mentions the Koran and Confucius; he deals in theological quibbles of the greatest niceness and subtlety; he is aware of the distinctions of the heresies which have at different times rent the Church; he discusses at length every one of its central dogmas. All this learning is employed in an attack on God and the Church which for length and intensity can seldom have been equalled; he attacks them with reason, with ridicule, with imprecations, with blasphemy; he attacks them from the philosophical, the economic, the political, the ideal and the pragmatic angle . . ."

And so it is not altogether surprising that de Sade forestalled Marx—or Kingsley—in the matter of the world-famous epigram. His character, Juliette, the lady who veritably thrives on crime, says to Ferdinand of Naples: "You keep the people in ignorance and superstition . . . because you fear them if they are enlightened; you drug them with opium . . . so that they shall not realise the way you oppress them."

Though an aristocrat, de Sade was at first left alone and free during the French Revolution. Before this world-shattering event he had been imprisoned in the Bastille where he read and wrote unceasingly. He tried more than once to escape and as luck would have it was transferred, just before the populace took the prison, to Charenton, leaving nearly all his manuscripts behind him. It was the supreme tragedy of his life that the mob destroyed them when the Bastille was stormed and taken—a loss also to the world at large.

Though "Justine" and "Juliette" reek with blood and horrors, de Sade was actually against the death penalty, revolted over the butcheries of the Red Terror, and was promptly arrested and very nearly guillotined. He, like Thomas Paine, was lucky to escape this fate, but afterwards found it difficult to earn a living. He wrote many plays and managed to get his books published openly; but when later he published in 1800, "Zoloe et ses deux Acolytes" an attack on Napoleon and Josephine and some of their friends, making them look ridiculous, he sacrificed his freedom for ever. Napoleon shut him up in the asylum at Charenton for the rest of his life—the most terrible of all fates for such a lover of liberty.

And when he died this "passionate Atheist" as Mr. Gorer calls him, was actually given "Christian burial with a stone cross over him."

In addition to the work I have named, Dr. Iwan Bloch's book in German, "Der Marquis de Sade und Seine Zeit" (1901), in French, "Le Marquis de Sade et son Temps," together with Bloch's later work, "Neue Forschungen über den Marquis de Sade," will give any reader who wants more detailed information a very good idea of a man who was an Atheist, a Revolutionary, and perhaps the greatest of all sex-psychologists. The reader will be then able to judge if Bloch is right about de Sade—"One of the most remarkable men of the eighteenth century, even of humanity in general."

H. CUTNER.

CORRESPONDENCE

AN ERROR—IN FORM.

Sir,—In the Editorial in "The Freethinker" of December 10, 1944, on Thanksgiving Day I discovered an error.

Thanksgiving Day was not in celebration of the release from British rule, but was to give thanks for the good crops which the Puritans had after a hard and bitter winter.

It became a National Holiday during President Lincoln's administration, and since that time is declared a holiday by Presidential proclamation. It usually is the last Thursday of November, but a few years ago, in order to help businesses which start their Christmas sales after Thanksgiving, it was set forward one week. For a couple of years we had two Thanksgivings, some would celebrate one and some the other.

With best regards of the season.—Yours, etc.,

CLARE D. WATTS.

DE PROFUNDIS.

Sir,—Two thousand million years ago the earth sprang from the sun as a result of a cosmic accident. It carried with it into cooling space the chemical constituents of life which, in time, issued from the protoplasm. The hammer and anvil of evolution, operated by nature, introduced true man to the planet one million years ago. Then the "upward" climb to civilisation via the "Stone" and other ages to the torturings of the Holy Inquisition, to our feudal England, to King Henry the 8th, with his "refinements" and wives, to the stocks and stake-burnings in the name of God. Up to the "civilisation" of to-day. And so—the great war for the four freedoms and a brave new world.

Its shape can be seen in the requirements and prohibitions imposed upon Italy, Belgium, Greece. And at this season the spoof of mirage and make-believe that is Christmas—annual filip to the ignorance and superstition that are perpetrated by unenlightened Churchism; a basis necessary to the existing system of society with its caste, privilege, parasitism and the permanent black market called Capitalism. And the boasted Balkan Knights, and the sainted Franco of Spain—all are necessary props.

There must not be too much enlightenment, hence "pie in the sky" and the recent Education Bill with its extension of "religion" in the schools so complacently accepted by Labour saviours who theoretically welcome Socialism a thousand years from now.

Voltaire said "If there isn't a God, it will be necessary to invent one." Let us not invent. Let us welcome and accept the one infallible god of scientific truth. There lie righteous government, honest diplomacy, morality, ethics and justice.—Yours, etc.,

A. D. HUNTER.

PROFESSOR JOAD'S RADIOBATICIS.

Sir,—Despite Professor Joad's intellectual acrobatics, which, after years of "agnosticism," led him to the astonishing discovery of a god of some sort or other, many Freethinkers held this leading Brains Trustee in reasonable esteem, regarding him as a diligent agent in the difficult work of getting people to think.

But Joad must have dealt his own intellectual reputation a shattering blow by his recent radiobatic gallery play on the Boxing Day Brains Trust, when he made the unwarranted statement that "Plato's times were very similar to our own times, when people had lost their religious faith and had neither ideals to live by nor principles to live for."

What possesses a man like Joad to utter such fallacies and falsities, knowing that they will go forth "on the air" perhaps to millions of listeners? Religious gallery play is the only answer I can think of—and such behaviour must lose for the man who practises it the respect of all who honestly strive to interpret life according to the facts.

It is obvious that people have lost their religious faith. Some of us said that long before Joad said it, making it easier for him to repeat it now, when it is less risky. But to imply that as a result people have neither ideals nor principles is as untrue and as intellectually dishonest as any similar statement that ever fell from the lips of a professional god-monger.

One might forgive a sucking curate, or even a wily Archbishop—but a self-styled philosopher! Ye gods!—Yours, etc.,

F. J. CORINA.

OBITUARY

It is with the deepest regret that I have to record the death of Francis William Reitz Silke, member of the Cape Town Bar, at the early age of 52. For the last twelve months of his life he was in a Cape Town nursing home, suffering much and regarding approaching death as one would welcome a friend. Indeed, his chief lament was that the law forbade the ending of a life that could bring nothing but pain. He wrote us several times during his illness, and his letters indicated the unbroken spirit of an intellectually brave man.

He was unmarried, mainly because he did not believe that his income warranted his marrying, a feeling that over-sensitive men are apt to experience, but some months before he died he wrote to a friend: "I am now sorry that I could not have a family. I should have brought them up as good Atheists. They might have done some good in the world." He had seen plainly enough how much harm Christianity could do in Africa.

He had been a reader of "The Freethinker" for twenty-five years, and his letters to us expressed the highest opinion of its value. His letters, too, were indicative of a very high character. They would have inspired one to further efforts in our great cause if inspiration were needed. We never met, save through the post, but we recognised in his letters a man of high character and, what is rarer, a fine brain animated by a desire to make the world a little better living place than it is. We feel we have lost a friend.

C. C.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "The Law of Moses and Code of Hammurabi (2)."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Rev. Father JARRETT KERR: "Interpreting the World."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. JOHN GRANT: "Materialism Old and New."

Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

Leeds (Philosophical Hall (Museum) Park Row, Leeds).—Saturday, January 13, 7 p.m., a debate: "Does God Exist?" Aff. Mr. E. TERRY, Neg. Mr. LUKE STRAIGHT.

"THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF SEX PRACTICE." A most exhaustive study. 800 pages, 32 coloured plates. As new. Published at 30s.; 15s. post free.—C. S., 405, Shadwell Lane, Leeds.

YOU CAN'T BLASPHEME

(Continued from page 10)

ASK the bemused prayer shooters. Ask the evidence of your senses, your experiences, and those of others.

And—boldly ask the “godite officers” themselves; and were they to answer honestly, they would give the common answer: “Nothing!” In fact, they would be greatly surprised at any other result. They know you can't blaspheme Nothing.

Having achieved this miracle of honest admission from them, you might then (before you woke up) ask them why they were parties to the urging of such impotencies.

Still in your dream of miraculous honesty, they might, like Pooh Bah, slyly and with complacent winks, rattle a bag of cash in your sight and murmur unctuously: “It revolts me, but I do it—I do it.” Blasphemy?—Ha! ha!

After which it would be time for you to wake up. Sceptics and Atheists adown recent centuries have been shooting at a “target” which “godite officers” tell their wooden soldiers is there, but which is not.

The bulk of the “officers” know that, but for reasons of their own keep mum about it.

The “godite commanders” resented the sceptics' and Atheists' poaching inroads on their godite preserves, and in the past had particular “game laws” of their own framing; and also the power of enforcing them undeterred.

They used the illicit shooters mercilessly. The centuries reeked with blood, cruelty and oppression, but the “poachers” were ineradicable—as they always will be.

Their numbers increased; the godites' “game laws” were flouted, then relaxed, and now are largely rendered innocuous.

The sceptic-Atheist shooting (and aim) is now very deadly; for they have achieved, with their ammunition of reason, satire, ridicule, etc., etc., that at which the godite pop-gun prayer-shooters have utterly failed—they have hit the “target.”

Miracle of miracles! They have riddled with their bullets a “target” which wasn't there. And destroyed it. Oh, paradox of paradoxes!

A “target” which never was there and, obviously, never will be. Oh, mysterious fourth dimension!

And still the godite string-pullers chant monotonously to their dwindling wooden soldiers of the cross, “Attention! Load. Ready. Fire!” and off go their primitive 2,000 years old prayer-guns with no more effect than a smoke of damp squibs.

They haven't even the ingenuity to improve their (mentally Heath Robinson) prayer pop-guns.

So-called semi-civilised peoples have beat them hollow-back by inventing machine-guns for praying. And no blasphemy about it.

They assemble their prayer ammunition on a wheel. This they spin rapidly for a while, and fire off more wooden soldier munitions in a few minutes than our primitive “godite gun-men” can vociferate in a dozen weeks of prayer.

Come! come! Wake up! wake up! ye primitive praying minority of an Empire the sun never sets on.

Are these simples of the East for ever to beat you at the game? You've had near 2,000 years of practice and are still in a metaphorical Stone Age in your methods.

Herewith is offered you a suggestion to beat your Chinese, Hindoo, Afghan, Persian and all other Yogi competitors—you don't rave and splutter “Blasphemy!”

Construct, or have constructed, a jet-propelled rocket powered to penetrate vertically into the stratosphere, or even farther in the spatial abyss where Nothing is.

Tons of separate written prayers from the faithful could thus be hurtled upward daily and widely scattered in the outer regions of Space beyond the power of gravitation to drag them

back to earth—hitherto the fate of all prayers ever mumbled, chanted or groaned by the laity and their crafty Mumbo-Jumbos.

Mahomet's coffin, supposed by his faithful to be floating in Space, would be merely a toy balloon by comparison.

His followers would consider this comparison blasphemous.

The expenses of the jet-propelled praying rocket would be negligible against the colossal profits.

The faithful could be charged a stout fee by their priestly Medicine Men. This, of course, would be dictated by a Means Test, the length and urgency of the written prayer, and other conditions which the ingenuity of the priestly gun-firers would most certainly devise.

What a gold mine it would prove. Think of it in contrast with the modest silver threepenny on the collection plate!

The Popes of Rome's centuries-long stunt of Peter's Pence, and the sale of Indulgencies to the erring faithful, would be as a coster's barrow compared to a chain-stores combination. . . . Oh, blasphemy!

Unless—dark thought!—Rome got on to it simultaneously with the Medicine Men of the British and other empires.

Then what a Guy Fawkes' display there would be every day as the prayers rocketed outward to where Nothing reigns supreme.

But, then, Popish Rome, true to its traditional stupidity, probably would be centuries behind the rest of the enlightened (?) enterprising rocketers of other denominations; as they were centuries behind in allowing the earth to go round the sun.

Rome wouldn't have conceded that but the contempt and derision of intellectuals was such a growing crescendo that they feared it would become a “Lillibullers” that would laugh them off the throne; and the last of the Popes and the last of the Stuart kings go down to history as the Lillibulleroed Twins.

ARTHUR GODFREY.

ASCENT

The rotund Bishop climbed
The heavily-gilded pulpit,
And turned to speak
To faces peaked
With cold and hunger,
Yet faces eager for the Word
Which fell from fattened lips,
Text: “Woe unto ye that are full.”

ELWYN AMBROSE.

THE STORY OF THE NEW DEAL

(Concluded from page 15)

sacrifice of liberty or liberties, and without losing sight of the common man or, rather, primarily with the common man and woman in view.” “Moreover, if one series of experiments failed, said the President, “another must be tried and by means of experience gained through trial and error, solve the difficulty at last.”

By these and other means the trials and tribulations of the American public were alleviated. But in a vast and varied territory such as the United States, with its diversities of soil, climate, occupation and interests, no permanent panacea could be provided. Still, Franklin Roosevelt's bold and enterprising policy proved a far-reaching success, and the procedure adopted in the States may well serve as a guide to other statesmen who will be called upon to solve difficulties already in evidence, which are almost certain to be intensified when this protracted World War is at long last brought to an end. T. F. PALMER.