

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Morals and Religion

ONE of the queer things about Carlyle's "forked radish" is his distorted sense of values. Probably owing to a very limited power of analysis, the unimportant and the important, the trivial and the vital, the casual and the causal are placed on the same level. Owing to this the priest is able to get away with his confusion of what is necessary to life, and what is no more than a scientifically outworn view of nature, the astrologer flourishes with his fortune-telling, the casual happenings of unrelated things are bound together in the strictest terms of causation. We have witnessed—through the medium of our sensation hunting press—the gathering of thousands of people in a state of hysteria to welcome the arrival of an American film star, or the return to its "home-town" of a victorious football team. If London was visited by an eminent scientist of the rank of Pavlov or Einstein he would be received at the station by a mere handful of brother scientists, while the rest of the population would live up to their idea of a scientist as a harmless sort of an individual, incapable of managing correctly the simplest of everyday occurrences, but who has done something really useful such as inventing the "movies" or giving us the "wireless."

In other directions we, as a people, show out appreciation of really great men by plastering London with monuments to great soldiers and sailors, a few kings and queens, and politicians, and very occasionally by finding room—in a not too prominent place—for an artist or a man of letters, or a prominent civilian. From another "angle," to use that curious phrase that has now become common, we are still paying the descendants of the Duke of Marlborough or of Lord Nelson, large sums of money—directly or indirectly—for having won their great victories, and it is certain that if someone suggested that the descendants of Faraday, or Darwin, or Lister should receive a State pension, the proposal would be laughed out of existence. To be quite fair it must be noted that for a limited number of eminent artists, writers or scientific workers we do give an allowance which may reach even the colossal sum of £250 annually, but that nearly always ends with their death. After all, we must stop the expenditure of public money somewhere.

Man and His Gods

This curious misvaluation of values may easily be illustrated by the organised campaign for the identification of religion with morals. Blended together they certainly have been for reasons that will be stated later, but actually and scientifically they are as much alike in origin, function and aim as are horse-chestnuts and chestnut horses. It

may be noted that no one has claimed that science and philosophy owe their origin to religion, or that religion has served to give either an impetus to their development. The most that has been said here is that many scientists and philosophers have been religious men. The same relation might be as forcefully urged on behalf of the inspiring value of whiskers or an oversized nose. There are plenty of religious legends that agriculture and architecture and language were taught to man by some "divine" visitor, but they are not now taken seriously. The special sciences of geometry, biology and astronomy were also of human origin, and by the Christian Churches were promptly denounced as inventions of Satan. It is true that to-day there are certain scientists who speak of the universe as the work of a divine mathematician, but that appears on examination to be no more than a compliment, much as the Zulus called their King the master of the earth beneath whose footsteps the world shakes. Calling God a mathematician is the last compliment paid to a dying God. It would seem that while there is no longer need to fear God it is good manners to flatter him. Disraeli had a great opinion of the value of flattery, and said that when it came to monarchy one could put it on with a trowel. Judging from Christian prayers it would seem that when dealing with gods an oversized steam-hopper would not be found too large.

If I may here cite from one of my own books:—

"It is generally admitted that man needs no supernatural illumination to discover the truths of astronomy or chemistry. Quite unaided, human industry, curiosity and intelligence have been able to unveil the mystery of the constitution of matter, to trace the action and reaction of chemical elements, to measure the size of the planets, to trace their orbits and to build up the stupendous edifice of modern science. All this man did, not merely without the aid of the gods, but often in the face of what was believed to be their direct prohibition. And yet when we come to the question of ordinary human conduct we find it held . . . that without supernatural aid man could never have made any advance along the road of moral development. He could discover everything else, but by himself he would never have found out that it was better to live peacefully with his fellows than for ever to be striving to cut their throats or have recognised the benefits of treating others with consideration."

And that I think is actually the most wonderful proposition that any man could have placed before him.

Man and Morals

Without dealing with the beginnings of morality in the higher animal world, from which beginnings man takes his start as a rational being just as surely as he inherits an animal structure, we commence with the solid fact that

in matters of conduct practice precedes theory. That is another way of repeating what has been said so often in these columns, that morality is implicit in fact long before it is explicit in theory. For man is essentially a social animal, and his conduct must, merely to exist, be related to group life. But in group life, before we reach a definitely human stage there are in operation two forms of adaptation, first, the adaptation of the individual organism to the conditions necessary to secure mere existence, and, second, the adaptation of the nature of man to his fellows. Honesty in thought and theory and speech belongs to this second phase of life. They are the unwritten laws of the herd, and they are carried into the human group. But in the human group we have the increased development of an understanding and an appreciation of the importance of different lines of conduct. Take any one of the fundamental moral qualities and they will be found to have their significance and value in group life. Honesty, kindness, truthfulness, affection, etc., have no meaning, no significance apart from social life. Let anyone try and think of the value of any moral quality if he were living alone, with no possible relation to any other human being, and then see how empty of all meaning and value moral quality becomes. All moral teaching implies the group, it implies its beginning in group life and its practice, long before its significance and value is understood.

In other words, as the conditions of living must be complied with in order for any animal, including man, merely to live, so those forms of behaviour that gradually gain recognition as moral have their beginning in the same unconscious process. Man becomes an ethical animal not because he consciously obeys commands, or because he appreciates the need for "higher" forms of conduct, but because he reacts to the unconscious pressure of associated life. Man is moral in practice before he is able to frame theories why certain actions persist. To think of man as being taught, or having revealed to him the need for moral action, is only one shade less ridiculous than to think of him as having to understand physiology before he can breathe.

Religion and Society

Morality, then, is derived from the unconscious side of life; the teaching of morality belongs to a later stage of social existence. But religion has a different origin. That arises in the conscious side of life. We are not able to point dogmatically and say it is at this point that morality begins, but we can say with much greater certainty the stage of human existence at which religion begins. I do not mean by this that even here we can say that at one point in social evolution man sits down and elaborates religious beliefs, as a modern scientist collects a group of facts and then tries to elaborate a theory that will cover and explain them. All I mean is that religion begins at that stage of mental development where man is capable of wondering why things happen, and finds an answer, mainly in the language of fear. The answer is wrong, as nearly all the first answers that man gives to his "how" or "why," are wrong, but it is that answer which gives us the real nature of religion. Essentially religion consists in an animation of nature. But, again, it must not be taken that the primitive mind proceeds by the careful consideration of

a definitely stated problem. Until one gets rid of that idea one is not on the right track for an understanding of the origin of religion. Repeated experiences give rise to vague ideas with all men, and it is only after some time we discover that we have convictions on the subject before us. With primitive mankind this process must have been much more evident.

The next step in religious development lies in the formation of an embryonic priesthood—certain people who are believed to have knowledge of these mysterious or personified forces, and who may, in a semi-magical way, control them. This priesthood is not, no priesthood ever has been vitally concerned with morals.

But while religion, as such, is not concerned with morals, it is concerned with its own preservation. This is something that religion has in common with every institution and with every established interest. It is also concerned with the preservation of a social order, just as every form of Government from democracy to Fascism is concerned in the maintenance of a social order that is favourable to itself. From a gang of pirates to a society of philosophers this rule holds good. All are interested in the maintenance of a given social order because it is only in and by a social order that it can continue in existence. There is in the case of religion a further corrective and moralising force. Life preserving conduct, whether it be the life of the individual or the life of society is operative before its nature is consciously recognised. Cannibalism, for example, may be practised as a special form of dissipation or as a religious ceremony—as in the eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the god, of which the Christian eucharist is a survival—but neither can become a general and continuous practice. If that were attempted group life would be impossible. Religion develops out of social life, but it is social life that in turn places a limit on religious activities. We have seen that in our own time in the toning down of Christian doctrines that were during the lifetime of our grandparents considered essential to Christianity. The doctrine of hell, of the inerrancy of Bible teaching, of the suppression of heresy and disbelief, etc., all were but a few generations ago regarded as indispensable parts of Christianity. These doctrines are still upheld by that unashamed museum of savage beliefs and customs the Roman Catholic Church, and by the less intellectual bodies of Protestants, but with the general civilised communities they are put forward shamefacedly and with hesitation instead of being expressed loudly and authoritatively.

It is then, not the case that religion moralises life. The truth is that always everywhere morality humanises religion. If Germany were to conquer the whole world, it would in the long run, have to behave much as history shows religion to have behaved. Starting with authoritative control Fascism would be compelled to come to terms with socialised human nature, the more certainly as pressure from without ceased to operate as a coercive factor. So with religion. It is distinct from morality in both origin and aim. But it has to keep in touch with social life and moral rules just as a pickpocket has to keep in a workable proximity to the man whose purse he intends stealing. A predatory animal must live in the neighbourhood of its prey or it would starve to death.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ITALY'S STRUGGLE FOR UNITY

FOR fifty years Italian Freethinkers and patriots fought for a United Italy. The peninsula had been for centuries little more than a geographical expression. The Austrians occupied Lombardy and Venetia until they were expelled by the united efforts of the Risorgimento and Napoleon III.

The Italians sought the assistance of Prussia in securing possession of the Tyrol and Trentino, but after Prussia's defeat of Austria in 1866, Bismarck permitted Vienna to retain both. This gave Austria a frontier which dominated the entire boundary line of Alpine Italy.

With the restoration of Venetia, however, the vexed Roman problem was still unsolved. The Vatican was determined to maintain the Temporal Power and a force of 13,000 men, largely recruited from foreign Catholic countries, was formed to guard the Papal possessions.

This development was utterly repugnant to Garibaldi and his supporters. But the Italian politicians strove to solve the difficulty by means of compromise. The Premier, Ricasoli, while he realised that Rome was the inevitable capital of Italy, offered the Vatican generous terms. In a Bill he submitted to the Chamber he advised the separation of Church and State, but the Papacy was to possess an independence such as was not allowed in any other Catholic State in Europe. As Dr. A. J. Whyte avers in his excellent "Evolution of Modern Italy" (Blackwell, Oxford, 1944; 18s.): "The policy of surrender infuriated the anti-clericals as much as the separation of the Church and State offended the Vatican."

The Bill was rejected and Ricasoli induced the King to dissolve Parliament. Garibaldi took a prominent part in the election campaign, but the extremely narrow franchise and other anomalies led to the return of a Chamber of Deputies as intransigent as before. Ricasoli then resigned and subsequent ministers proved equally unsuccessful, as the Government was menaced by both Garibaldi and Mazzini who were prepared to act on their own initiative.

Nor was their determination unjustified. The squalor, despotism and wholesale corruption of the Papal possessions, with their centre in the Eternal City almost stagger belief. Then, in 1864, Pius IX published his encyclical, a pronouncement of the most reactionary character. Dr. Whyte, a man of very moderate views, admits that: "Into the furnace of her condemnation the Church threw Socialism, Communism, Bible Societies, freedom of conscience and cult, religious toleration, state education, and the whole prospectus of the Liberal Catholic movement in Europe which sought to reconcile religion with the State. Accepted in Europe as an attack on Free Government in Italy it was interpreted as a declaration of war." Again, "it confirmed the anti-clericals in their belief that there could be no compromise with Rome, and hardened them in their determination to assert the supremacy of the State over the claims of the Church."

Mazzini, the idealist, demanded an Italian Republic with its centre in Rome. But Garibaldi, the realist, contended that the consent and assistance of the Savoy monarchy was essential for the establishment of the Secular State in the city by the Tiber's side. "The urge of the day," he averred, "is to ruin the Papal Government. Let us both work together to that end."

Meanwhile, the Government considered the practicability of the dissolution of monasteries and the sale of Church property. Volunteers who were prepared to follow Garibaldi to the death were ready to assemble. The Italian authorities wavered, so Garibaldi sent a letter to his astute lieutenant, Crispi, which was apparently passed on to Rattazzi, Ricasoli's successor, in

which it was stated: "I see but one way to satisfy the nation. To invade Rome and with the Italian army at once. I will pardon the misery of Italy but not its degradation, and to-day not only the army but the nation seems outraged." Let Rattazzi consider this, he proceeded, and a few days would see the Eternal City released from "the nest of vipers" that misruled it. If there were threats from foreign states, Garibaldi urged, that would merely harden the determination of all true Italians to overthrow Papal misgovernment.

The French Emperor, however, intervened and Rattazzi resigned. With the connivance of the officials, Garibaldi escaped from nominal custody and proceeded to Florence. He was firmly bent on the capture of Rome and the efforts of Crispi and other adherents proved powerless to restrain him. Had the Romans risen when Garibaldi and his volunteers arrived in 1867, the city would have capitulated. But, unlike the Piedmontese and other insurgent Italians, the Roman populace were so habituated to clerical control that they remained acquiescent. As Dr. Whyte observes: "Their interests, their amusements and recreations were based on ecclesiastical functions, and they loved the pomp and circumstance of Catholic ritual. Their gossip centred round the intrigues of the Papal court, their scandal was ripe with the reputed peccadilloes of Canons and Cardinals. The Church amused them, employed and fed them, and to her they looked alike for consolation in trouble and material help in times of stress."

No wonder then that Garibaldi and his small following failed to rouse the Romans. In consequence of his defeat, Garibaldi was arrested and sent back to Caprera. But outside Rome, Italian feeling became intensely bitter when the Roman fiasco became known, while French opposition added to the sense of humiliation.

But United Italy was imminent when, in 1870, France and Prussia were preparing for war. Swayed by his priestridden wife and the Jesuits, the French Emperor refused Italy's offer to join a Triple Alliance if he would give Italy a free hand in Rome. This refusal negated every prospect of Italian co-operation with France in the impending conflict with Prussia and when war was declared, the Italians announced their neutrality.

With the successive disasters that soon overtook the French armies and the sensational surrender of Napoleon at Sedan, the Gallic garrison safeguarding the Papacy was withdrawn. A Republic was proclaimed in Paris and Lanza, the new head of the Italian Government, was free to act. He circularised the European Powers to the effect that Rome was indispensable to Italian unity and he guaranteed the independence of the Vatican. All the Powers agreed that the ending of the Temporal Authority of the Papacy was inevitable and that the Eternal City must become the capital of the State. But the Pope sullenly refused all compromise and would surrender only if forcibly compelled.

The conditions imposed on the Papacy were generous. Apart from an annual grant of £129,000, to the Pope: "He retained free of all taxation and governmental interference, the Vatican, S. John Lateran and his villa at Castel Gandolfo and the buildings hitherto reserved for Councils and Conclaves. Only his summer residence in Rome the Quirinale, was excepted, for it was chosen as the Residence of the King."

Although the liberation of Rome was actually effected by the Secular Government, it was due to the long and magnificent struggle conducted by patriots such as Manin, Crispi, Mazzini, Garibaldi and their devoted adherents. These men made its incorporation in the Italian State possible. Still the time was destined to come when a people then rightly struggling to be free, were driven to endure a Fascist despotism not yet ended in the northern regions of the Italian Peninsula.

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

POLAND was a stronghold of Roman Catholicism, hence the Vatican being supported by a pro-war Polish government that was completely Fascist. Spain has also a Fascist government of a more objectionable kind than that of Poland. But it was a stronghold of Roman Catholicism, so, again the Vatican could see no wrong in Franco, and again gave this friend of Hitler its blessing. But there have been some accounts in our papers that in Spain Franco's government have been suppressing some Protestant preachers and churches, and even imprisoning people for religious offences. So far Franco has managed "to get away with it." He has many avowed friends in this country and many others that keep quiet, although they sit in high places.

The Catholic papers in this country are strangely unacquainted with anything like intolerance in Catholic Spain. Of course this over-cautiousness may be to repeat the blunder—openly—that it made with regard to the Russian revolution when it served as a mouthpiece for all the filthy and lying tales concerning the new Russia. To-day, the situation is changed; the enormous benefits the revolution brought to the Russian people cannot be denied, and the help given to the Allies in the fight against Fascist Germany must be admitted. So with all the innocence of lambs the "Catholic Herald" prints some quotation from a Spanish paper issued with the approval of Franco, in which it denies that anything objectionable has occurred with regard to Protestants. In fact, it says, there are "scarcely any Protestants in Spain," so how can persecution have taken place.

It does, however, admit that there is a Protestant paper in Spain, and we read of a number of Protestant churches being closed. But it is clear that if there are hardly any Protestants, churches would be useless. And as a further proof of the innocence of the Catholic Church in Spain, the statement is made that "Many Protestant chapels are open for worship in Madrid and the provinces." So everything is as it should be—in Catholic Spain. There are scarcely any Protestants in Spain, but for these non-existent Protestants, chapels are built and papers are issued. What could one ask for more? We suggest the editor of the "Catholic Herald" gives us his opinion of the recently published "An Interlude in Spain."

But the one dose that the Roman Catholic Church cannot swallow is that Atheistic Russia shall not merely be regarded as an Ally during the war, but that it is almost certain that it will take a prominent, if not a leading part in the affairs of the world when the war is over. We pointed out some time ago the frantic way in which it dealt when Churchill, in spite of his having previously tried hard while in office to do what he could to crush the Soviet Government, hailed Russia as an Ally in the war, and a co-helper in the restoring of Europe. The "Universe" insisted that Russia was not an Ally, she was merely co-operating with us as an associate until the Germans had been beaten. The Vatican, it must be remembered, has never broken relationship with Hitler and his Germany, and it encouraged Mussolini to his building of an Italian Empire.

Now the "Universe" in its issue for January 19, in passing judgment on Churchill thinks that history may comment on his "shabby betrayal of Poland." This is because Churchill showed practical agreement in arrangements which promise to give the godless Russia a great influence on the Polish. And it will be worth bearing in mind that if trouble does occur it will certainly be because the Vatican, with its religious followers in that unhappy country are active. Poland, it must not be forgotten was a Fascist country with Roman Catholicism as the greatest religious power therein. This is well worth noting. But the Vatican must feel the pinch badly to speak so honestly.

So the "Universe" concludes that looking back at the events of the last four years the verdict will be that Mr. Churchill, brilliant in pledging our military help to Russia in 1941, was tragically wrong in converting the co-belligerency into an alliance. This is worth noting. For it means that the Roman Church with its skill for underhand plotting will do what it can to disturb relations between Russia and other countries. The alliance, it concludes, is a "disastrous policy."

Now that there is a likelihood of our having a general election in the near future it is curious to note the growing number of well known politicians who make their appearance in the churches. We do not mean that they are there to be merely counted as members of the congregation, but as taking part in Church proceedings. Sir Stafford Cripps is one who is making great play in this matter, and whatever the subject he takes in hand we find sooner or later an appeal to "Christian principles," appeals to "follow Christ faithfully," etc., etc. It is well for Sir Stafford that non-Christians wink the other eye at these professions of faith in Christianity or he would lose votes instead of gaining them.

Meanwhile we suggest to Sir Stafford that his constituency is made up of very mixed people so far as religion is concerned. There are Christians, Jews, Atheists and what not, and a candidate for Parliament should keep to politics and have done with it. He might even remember that Germany has as much right to be called a Christian country as we have, and if the Christian religion has not kept Germany on the right road why should we imagine Christianity will have a better influence on other people? Surely politics has already a sufficiency of humbug with misleading statements, double dealing and downright lying without bringing in the religious factor.

The Rev. George Pollard, Superintendent of the Queens Hall Methodist Mission, says he knows a factory where a preacher of the Gospel can draw a larger audience than any E.N.S.A. concert. It is not for us to contradict a Methodist Superintendent; we can only suggest as an explanation that the concert must be mighty poor or the preacher very amusing.

The Catholic "Universe" continues to show dissatisfaction over the fact that while the Roman Church holds that the only valid marriage is the one conducted by a Catholic priest, the law of this country insists that the only legal marriage is that performed by one who holds an appointment from the Secular State and the question of religion does not arise. If a couple want in addition to have another mock service they may do so and be married every week if they are so inclined. But the law of this country says emphatically that no marriage is valid unless it is performed by one authorised to officiate. This applies to the Church of England. Marriage in the eye of the English State is a civil contract. All the rest is pantomime.

The founder of the Church Army, Probendary Carlile, is described by a reviewer of his biography as one of the greatest men of his time. Well, there is no law preventing a writer saying that, but it is damned hard on people of real merit.

There is a feeling in the air that the war is nearing its end. Well, it is certain that it is nearer the end than it was, but we decline to shoulder the responsibility of giving even an approximate date. If the churches are right about the goodness and wisdom of God it never ought to have been permitted to occur. It is a principle of English law that if one saw a man committing a felony and could with ease have prevented it, he would be then charged as an accomplice to the act. And surely if there is a God worth bothering about he should have prevented this war taking place. It is nonsense talking by way of defending God that we are reaping the consequence of our acts. The vast majority of the people are no more guilty of causing the war than they can be considered guilty of an earthquake. Children in arms, boys and girls just reaching maturity, married couples looking forward to a life of happiness, aged men and women who are nearing their end and might reasonably expect to have a few remaining months in peace, what have all these done, to say nothing of the brutalising that all war brings, that God should not have prevented the war occurring? He did nothing. The World War without God would be bad enough, but a World War with God sitting aloft and watching the slaughter of the last five years and then asking us to pray to him is an insult to decency.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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FOR "THE FREETHINKER."—C. F. Simpson, £2 2s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

WE are pleased to say that so far as our movement is concerned the New Year has opened well. First, the demand for our literature is greater than ever, and the sales could be quadrupled if only we could get a sufficiency of paper. Those who can lend a hand in finding printers who will undertake production—finding paper is indispensable—will help by sending the information as soon as possible. Meanwhile we have the gratification of knowing that we have made many friends who promise to be useful in many ways.

Financially we have also to report good news. It was mentioned some time ago that one of our regular readers, A. D. Chapman, resident in India, has left in his will the whole of his estate valued at £10,000 as follows: Two-thirds to the N.S.S. and one-third to the R.P.A. The bequest was contested by the next of kin, and there followed a long drawn—unnaturally so—litigation. We are pleased to state that the courts in India have upheld the will. How much will be left of the £10,000 we cannot say, but the costs are to come out of the estate, and they will be heavy.

A much larger bequest has fallen to the Secular Society Ltd., although we cannot give the exact amount at the present. This comes from Mr. George Cowan, an old reader of "The Freethinker," who has left the whole of his estate, after certain legacies, to the S.S.L. The estate is almost entirely in property and the only condition of the will is that the income of the estate will be shared between the widow and the Secular Society Ltd. As we have said we cannot give the exact sum and the tax will also be heavy.

Number three is a very humble but a sincere one. It takes the shape of a sum of £246 to the G. W. Footo Publishing Company. This was from Mr. W. C. Harrison, a very ardent admirer of the "one and only." That sum will be put to good use.

One other gift, from Australia, comes direct to the Editor. He will swallow this gift because it takes the shape of a very fine cake. We say this because Mrs. Editor says it is a good one and she is no petty judge in such matters, and also because we tasted it and found it very toothsome. We apologise for acknowledging the cake in these columns but no name or address accompanied the cake.

All we want now to make us completely happy is paper, more paper and yet again paper.

We are pleased to see that an attempt is being made in Belfast to organise local Freethinkers with a view to carry on regular propaganda. Freethought propaganda has really been going on for a long time, both in the Press, so far as it could be done in that medium, and by personal efforts in many directions. A Society now has been formed with the intention of becoming a Branch of the N.S.S. We think our friends may rely upon the N.S.S. giving whatever help that is possible. We have some very pleasant memories of lecturing in Belfast and of the quality of the people who attended the meetings.

We have the pleasure in announcing that there is in the Press a sketch of the life of Thomas Paine by Chapman Cohen. Needless to say it will stress those features of Paine's writings that are either sketched over very lightly or completely ignored. We imagine that a great many Freethinkers will find something new in the essay. It is time that the man who forestalled the Beveridge Plan a century and a half ago, who fought so well for the independence of the U.S.A., and was, indeed, the first to suggest "The United States of America," should be recognised as one of the greatest of reformers of his age. The price of the booklet will probably be one shilling.

The Editor of "The Two Worlds," Mr. E. W. Oaten, and Mr. R. H. Rosetti will meet for a debate in the Municipal Hall, Keighley, to-day (February 4). The question for debate is: "Does Man Live Beyond the Grave?" It begins at 2.30 p.m. Mr. H. Wall, of Keighley, will be in the chair. There are reserved seats at one shilling each and a full house is anticipated.

We are asked to remind Glasgow friends that Mr. F. J. Corina's lecture is to-day (February 4) in the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, at 2.30 p.m., his subject is "The Moral Landslide."

We are glad to know that Mr. R. H. Rosetti had a good meeting at Birmingham. The weather was bad but the attendance was good and the branch officials seemed to be well pleased.

A Christian reader—a casual one—writes asking why we should complain when a new view of Christian teaching is suggested? We complain because it is not honestly possible. We can revise a theory in science; we can alter our opinions from day to day and be the wiser and the better for it. For scientific knowledge is given us as the best we have, and it is given with the provision that if further experience proves our conclusions to be wrong we must take the newer and the better views. But Christianity is a revealed religion and how can one revise God? If we can trust the Christian tradition, God went to a great deal of trouble to bring his revelation to man. Then come along those who declare their own discoveries proving that God's statements do not agree with the facts. That being so it seems the right policy would be to dismiss God's revelation and let your acquired knowledge run its course. Instead of that our theologians proceed to revise God's revelation in order to bring it up to date. On the same principle we might argue that both Copernicus and Ptolemy were right. It is true that one said the earth went round the sun, and the other that the sun went round the earth. But as they agreed that one thing went round another, the adjustment was a mere detail, it was of no importance at all.

The situation was well expressed by Bertrand Russell in his "The Scientific Outlook": "In order to meet the assaults of Atheistic reasoning, theology has, during the last hundred years, aimed more and more at appealing to sentiment. It has tried to catch men in their more relaxed moods, and from a strait jacket it has become a mere dressing gown. Theologians have grown grateful for small mercies; they do not care what sort of a God-the-man science gives them, so long as it gives them one."

It seems almost impossible for the Papacy to touch any subject of consequence without suggesting or stating an absolute lie. For example, the Pope recently granted an audience to 800 members of Saint Luke's Association of Catholic Medical Practitioners. The opportunity for telling a thumping lie could not be withstood. Dealing with Birth Control the Pope said: "Any act tending directly to destroy an innocent human life is forbidden." But what one would like to know is how anyone can destroy a human life that has never existed? Or if it can be done what are we to say of the multitude of Roman Catholic priests and Nuns who refrain—or are supposed to refrain—from bringing children into the world? Does a man and woman who will not have a child differ from monks and nuns who refrain from becoming fathers and mothers? As a matter of fact Roman Catholics do refrain from parentage in a very large number of cases, and the Pope knows it. Every priest knows it. But a lie more or less by open statement or by suggestion has never checked "the lie on the lip of the priest."

THINK — IF YOU DARE

A MYSTERIOUS bulbous formation is to be found at the upper end of man's spinal column. It is known as the brain. Just what is its proper use is a matter of bewilderment to many and of grave concern to some. Unabashed scientists declare that man's brain was intended for thinking. This subversive idea is vigorously opposed by certain interests who, for very private reasons, regard thinking as a sin—for the people. Consequently, schools, creeds, censorships and advertising campaigns are instituted to inform the people what they must, or must not, believe, which, of course, is something very different from teaching them to think.

Thus, never having been permitted to do any thinking, and always finding an ample supply of lawful opinions provided for them, the people are expected to content themselves with the more humble rôle of defending the authorised doctrines handed down from overhead, and even of dying for them if necessary. (They will be informed with due formalities as to when it is necessary.) And, since the people must not think for themselves, it logically becomes the moral obligation of their "keepers" to perform this service for them. With surprisingly little effort they convince themselves that the heavenly Potentate has quite obviously chosen certain men, classes, and nations to manage the affairs of the rest of mankind, or even to decide whether the rest shall have any affairs to be managed.

The whole business has been greatly facilitated by a certain college president who once wrote a book on how to make up other people's minds for them. This is an ancient and modern art. In early times it employed black magic and the even more persuasive red-hot irons. To-day it calls psychology to its aid. Artistically it has been streamlined to perfection. Morally it is still on a par with necromancy, pulling rabbits out of silk hats, and chamber of commerce publicity.

Although thinking requires effort, it is not necessarily unpleasant effort. It can be exploratory, full of the spirit of adventure—unless it is the mild sort of mental callisthenics taught in those higher institutions of learning where the only hazards regarded as heroic are those that redound to the greater glory of alma mater in terms of fractured skulls and broken backs on the gridiron. Safe "thinking," it must be sadly acknowledged, is not very enticing to the uncatechised minds of young people above the moron level, and it requires an expertly planned and vigorously imposed system of rewards and punishments to induce them to suffer its stupefying sedatives.

Real thinking is like the effort of the athlete; it is exhilarating. Worrying over a matter will wear a person down more than any amount of thinking about it. There is, perhaps, one exception, in which excessive thinking may bring on a breakdown. It is the case of the fellow whose job it is to think up ways to keep other people from thinking. His is certainly a strenuous business. But it is also very lucrative. Consider the amounts of money spent on publicity managers, political campaigns, radio announcements, and missionary budgets. Consider also those newspapers who "serve" the public, not by publishing the news impartially, but by dealing out partial news in such a manner as to keep the readers from forming opinions unfavourable to the interests that support the newspapers. These publications elect no such humble task as that of reflecting public opinion; they manufacture public opinion. The kind of "public opinion" they are interested in is not the result of the public's thinking at all. It is a ready-made article, produced by private interests for public consumption. Their logic is convincing: you do not make your own shoes, why should you form your own opinions? You can have your daily opinion pasteurised, standardised and delivered at your door for a few cents a week, whereas the ancient Roman emperor had to travel miles to consult the oracle. Better still, you can simply reach out and turn on your favourite

radio station, which, of course, will assure you of its emasculated neutrality on any moral issue. If you can bear up under the agony of its "profuse strains of unpremeditated art," a disembodied voice will reward you with concentrated instalments of the divine illumination on everything from international relations to super-suds.

Once you begin really thinking on a problem, you cannot tell where it may lead you. You take the risk, but therein lies the adventure. However, if you have determined beforehand where you are coming out, you will be merely rationalising—that is, trying to substantiate your opinion, not trying to find out whether it is correct. Thinking also requires that you be honest with yourself—a virtue not included in the Ten Commandments.

HUGH ROBERT ORR.

(from Humanist Monographs).

(To be concluded)

THE CHRISTIAN FRONT

ONE of our readers sent an open letter to the Bishop of Coventry for insertion in the "Birmingham Evening Despatch," in reply to an article from the Bishop which recently appeared in that paper. The open letter was not inserted and the Bishop and his god should be grateful for the protecting hand of the editor. Space will not permit printing the open letter in full but the following are extracts:—

"My humble submission to your Lordship is that your very first quotation: 'Love God and love thy neighbour,' falls to the ground when faced with such hysteria as: 'We shall get at them' from the Archbishop of York, and demands for punishment, retribution and atonement from your own brethren . . . Will you explain, Sir, why one must be a Christian to make a job of his home, children and street . . . I would respectfully remind your Lordship that crime, immorality, adultery and beastliness are on the increase in this Christian (?) country, and that 99 per cent. of the evildoers call themselves Christians. It is here, Sir, where Christianity becomes bankrupt as a soul-saver and warrants its status as nothing more than a hide-out for hypocrisy—the father of moral cowardice . . . Few people will believe that the real purpose behind the building of a Cathedral (in a ruined town) is to form a common Christian Front. Indeed! Is a common Christian Front to be found in bricks and mortar at all? Will your Lordship kindly inform me what is meant by: 'In Coventry one parson is looking after 8,000 people.' Are you, Sir, suggesting that without the parson Coventry would go to pot, or will your Lordship agree that Coventry has already gone to pot with the efforts of the parsons . . . Your Lordship says: 'And Christian society has got to be created by Christian people.' But how are we to know who are the Christians? Where are they coming from? How many Christians are we likely to find in a Christianity engaged in 'blood, sweat and tears' within itself . . . Christians, my Lord, are not only praying to their god for victory over heathens; they are praying for victory (by the sword) over each other . . . If, my Lord, the Bible is the criterion and vortex of Christian philosophy (to be followed 'to the letter') why does it contain no exhortation, divine ordination, or even reference to the spending of millions of pounds annually for its own propagation, in the midst of millions of unemployed and poverty."

Being deprived, my Lord, of the honour of replying through the appropriate channels to your episcopal authority, I submit with appropriate respect, what would have been the thesis of my answer.

ERNEST W. ASHFORD.

CHURCH - THIEF IN COURT

"A MAN was brought before the magistrate at Bow Street Police Court accused of stealing money out of the collection-plate in St. Martin's Church. The magistrate, however, after hearing the evidence, said the case was not proved beyond reasonable doubt and discharged the defendant."—Evening paper.

The parsons caught a fellow
Who stole in Martin's Church,
They said "We'll make him bellow
With taste of gaol or birch."

To Bow Street Court they brought him
And told the magistrate
How cleverly they caught him
At the collection-plate.

The magistrate said drily:
"Let's hear the other side;
He may have pilfered wily
Or not." The man replied:

"To Martin's Church this morning
I went, to God to kneel,
More useful projects scorning:
I did not go to steal.

These men of God, mistaking,
Falsely accuse me, as
The other famous faking
Before Caiaphas.

And should my holy betters
Who pray: 'Forgive our debt
As we forgive our debtors,'
Seek punishment? I bet

If I had been their Master,
Poor, needy, travel-stained
(Again the same disaster!)
They would not have refrained.

And if I were a thief, Sir—
Since even thieves must live—
I share our Lord's belief, Sir:
My brothers should forgive."

The magistrate replying:
"Mistake's a good defence
And if he should be lying,
At least he talks good sense.

In brief: the man may go free,
Unpunished. There's a doubt,
Who prosecutes must show me
The case is quite made out."

Lawyers are called unfeeling
And thieves both weak and bad;
Perhaps they are; but stealing
And judgment are less sad,

Than actions of the pious,
Those modern Pharisees,
Whose tender mercies try us—
Preserve us all from these!

C. G. L. DU CANN.

HANGING CHILDREN

SAMUEL ROGERS, the Poet Banker, tells how he once met "a cartload" of young girls in dresses of various colours, on their way to Tyburn. His friend, Greville, who was present at a trial where several boys, "to their own excessive amazement," were sentenced to be hanged, remarked, "Never did I see boys cry so much." In 1831, a boy of 13, John Bell by name, was hanged at Maidstone. Two years later, a boy of 9, named Nicholas White, pushed a stick through the broken glass of a London shop window and raked out a few pieces of children's painting colours, valued at twopence.

For this offence the unfortunate boy was dragged before Mr. Justice Bosanquet at the Old Bailey, and solemnly and seriously sentenced to be "hanged by the neck until he was dead."

All these ferocious sentences and their infliction even upon young children were strenuously defended by those in authority.

(From "Table Talk.")

CORRESPONDENCE

THE MARQUIS DE SADE.

SIR,—I am not altogether clear as to the purpose of the Rev. J. W. Wilkinson's letter unless it was to object to my dealing with de Sade's Atheism instead of his "Sadism" or to tell us that his "name" can be found in Larousse, Brockhaus and other encyclopaedias and his books in the British Museum. But surely Mr. Wilkinson knows most readers cannot consult these French and German works and the B.M. would never allow "Justine" and "Juliette" to be read? Whether Mr. Wilkinson "makes a present" to us or not of de Sade's works is quite irrelevant to the issue—which was to show the Marquis de Sade as an uncompromising Atheist.

H. CUTNER.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Dr. J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc.: "The Unconscious in Religion."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Building, Collego Square, Belfast).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., lecture and debate.

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (Kettledrum Cafe, West Street, Blackpool).—Thursday, February 8, 7.30 p.m., Miss J. HUDSON, M.A.: "Facing Up to the Truth."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. C. A. BROWN: "Experiences at Home and Abroad."

Burnley Branch N.S.S. (Barden Club).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: "Do People Matter?"

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA: "The Moral Landslide."

Keighley Branch N.S.S. (Municipal Hall).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., debate between Mr. E. W. OATEN, Editor of "The Two Worlds," and R. H. ROSETTI: "Does Man Live Beyond the Grave?"

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Miss FIDLER: "Poland: Past, Present and Future."

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT, by Chapman Cohen.
An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price
3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by
post 4d.

THE CRADLE OF CHRISTIANITY—3

LECKY explains that, long before the dawn of Christianity, the Stoics—referred to by him in the preceding article—taught that “all men are by nature equal,” and that “virtue alone establishes a difference between them.”

Surely a concept that compares with, if it doesn't surpass, anything taught by Christianity!

Says Lecky: “Ecclesiastical historians maintain—but not on very strong evidence—that the Church of Rome was founded by St. Peter A.D. 42 or 44, and that St. Paul came to Rome in A.D. 61.” Anyhow, Christianity became the religion of the Empire with the conversion of Constantine early in the fourth century.

The suppression of all religions except Christianity—the murder of Hypatia at Alexandria by the monks of Cyril, and the closing by Justinian of the schools of Athens—mark the decisive overthrow of the previously prevailing intellectual freedom. “And a thousand years had rolled away,” commented Lecky, “before that freedom was in part restored.”

But even more devastating is Lecky in the many other extracts that might be given in this connection.

For example “Few persons who had contemplated Christianity as it existed in the first three centuries would have imagined it possible that it should completely supersede the Pagan worship around it; that its teachers should bend the mightiest monarchs to their will, stamp their influence on every page of legislation, and direct the whole course of civilisation for a thousand years; and yet that the period in which they were so supreme should have been one of the most contemptible in human history.”

A reminder by Lecky is that the population of Rome probably never exceeded a million and a half.

Already explained by him are the conditions that provoked resentment against the Christians in an Empire otherwise so tolerant of all religious beliefs. Ecclesiastical writers in later years are prone to dwell upon the Diocletian persecution. Lecky says that by a well-known process of calculation Gibbon has estimated the number of martyrs during that period at about 2,000. “This,” declares Lecky, “happens to be the number of persons burnt by the Spanish Inquisition during the presidency of Torquemada alone, and about one-twenty-fifth of the number who are said to have suffered for their religion in the Netherlands during the reign of Charles V.”

We may therefore take it that we need not look any further than to Spain itself for a very full set-off by Christians to all that was done by Pagans throughout the whole Roman Empire.

“It had been boldly predicted by some of the early Christians,” continued Lecky, “that the conversion of the world would lead to the establishment of perpetual peace. In looking back, with our present experience, we are driven to the melancholy conclusion that, instead of diminishing the number of wars, ecclesiastical influence has actually and very seriously increased it. We may look in vain for any period since Constantine in which the clergy as a body exerted themselves to repress the military spirit, or to prevent or bridge a particular war, with an energy at all comparable to that which they displayed in stimulating the fanaticism of the crusaders, in producing the atrocious massacre of the Albigenses, and in embittering the religious contests that followed the Reformation.”

Full credit is given by Lecky to the part played by Christians in the wiping out of the British Gladiatorial games.

Sympathetically, too, does he write of the tortures suffered by converts for their faith, adding: “No opinion we may form of the proceedings of priests in a later age should impair the reverence with which we bend before the martyr's tomb.” And he does this regardless of the fact that in the death they faced, the martyrs were encouraged on all sides by such assurances as that given by St. Cyprian: “We shall through eternity con-

template in their agonies—in a burning, scorching fire—those who for a short time contemplated us in tortures, and for the brief pleasure which the barbarity of our persecutors took in feasting their eyes upon an inhuman spectacle they will themselves be exposed as an eternal spectacle of agony.”

With the ascendancy of Christianity, heresy soon became a criminal offence, punishable by death.

“I have elsewhere noted,” says Lecky, “the odious hypocrisy of the inquisitors, who relegated the execution of the sentence to the civil power, with a prayer that the heretics should be punished ‘as mildly as possible and without the effusion of blood,’ which came to be interpreted—by the death of fire.”

In other words, to avoid the shedding of blood—a sin in their eyes—the Christians had the non-believer burnt. Thus, then, the origin of a barbarity that continued into very much later years—death at the stake. But in addition to disposing of heretics in this way, the time soon came when—in Lecky's words: “The Christian priests shed blood enough.”

Nor was it long before Christians began to evince a very keen interest in what was to be got out of this world side by side with the expectation of the joys in the life to come.

After referring to the luxury and ambition of the higher prelates and the passion for amusements of the inferior priests, Lecky goes on to say: “St. Jerome complained that the banquets of many bishops eclipsed in splendour those of the provincial governors; and the intrigues by which they obtained office—and the fierce partisanship of their supporters—appear in every page of ecclesiastical history.”

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

THE HOLY TERROR

WE English are profoundly tired of our Empire. Indeed we are. Tired and bored. Don't you realise that? The Empire has become public schoolmasters' cant and the boys know all the answers. It's being stripped and exposed; it's an empire of kraals and slums, loin-cloth villages and Bombay sweatshops; it has never educated, never released; it has no constructive vitality at all; it is nothing to be proud of. The intelligent boys are ashamed of it . . .

Look at the Archbishop of Canterbury all dressed up to kill cope and mitre and holy wigs and all the ancient spiritual gadgets; look at the Pope in his canonicals. B.C. all of it from start to finish. Do you believe any of these fellows are mentally straight? Who told them they were entitled to speak for that Galilean Radical? If they had lived in his time they would have been on the bench with Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. They think they can put up their bluff upon the masses and they aren't afraid of God looking at them—for a very good reason. Long ago they said in their hearts: “There is no God.” That is why they won't have these things talked about plainly. That is why they insist on reverence, sacred names and all that. A sacred thing is a protected thing, a thing in retreat. When you want to argue, they say “Hush! Reverence please. Lower your voices so that nobody can hear the awful things you are saying. Not so loud please, and above all, not so plain.”

These bishops and parsons with their beloved Christianity are like a man who has poisoned his wife and says that her body is too sacred for a post-mortem. Nowadays, by the light we have, any ecclesiastic must be born blind or an intellectual rascal. The world's had this apostolic succession of oily old humbugs from early Egypt onwards, trying to come it over the people. Antiquity is no excuse. A sham is no better for being six thousand years stale. Christianity is no more use to us than the Pyramids.

H. G. WELLS.