

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Men and Women

MARTIN LUTHER was a great man and a good Christian; which means, among other things, that he could be wide-awake to the foolishness of other people's religious beliefs, and quite blind to the absurdities of his own. He could write or orate with great shrewdness so long as he gave his native wit freedom of expression, and could drop into a mass of double-dyed religious foolishness worthy of a B.B.C. 7-55 a.m. preacher. He also could defend his religious enemies so long as he felt that a defence would do them greater damage than attack. Thus, someone had said that the Roman Church denied its followers the right to think. That, said Luther, is not true. He realised that no one but a fool would attempt to stop men thinking; all that can be done is to determine the direction and quality of their thought. A horse pulling water from a well moves, but he goes round and round without ever extending the circumference of his journey. It has freedom of movement, and that is all. So the Church gives its followers plenty of repetition, but there is no advance. The faithful move round and round the same circle. Luther's analogy will stand.

A somewhat similar expression was made by a very great man to whom I owed much in my youth. Herbert Spencer said that all knowledge is of value; the important thing is to determine what knowledge is of the greatest good. One may readily grant that the members of the B.B.C. Brains Trust are imparting knowledge—of a kind—but the value of it is small, and it serves mainly to divert attention from important matters. It evades rather than excites the desire for understanding.

But long before Spencer and Luther, long before the Christian religion existed—in its Roman Catholic form—the truth glimpsed by Luther and Spencer was a commonplace in old Rome. There was current the saying "Give the people bread and the circus." Keep the people busy with things that do not matter, and they forget those of importance. To order the people not to think of this or that is no way of protecting outworn ideas and institutions. That awakens suspicion and breeds discontent. Keep the people busy. What matters their wearing the skin of a donkey if they believe they are clad in the robe of the philosopher. Talk to them of the greatness of the "Christian tradition," but do not incite them to understand what it is; for it includes unlimited lying and forgery, the suppression of ancient science and philosophy, forgery on the greatest scale the world has ever witnessed, the reign of demonology and witch-hunting, miracle-working and the denial of civic rights to those who did not bow to the mythical Jesus Christ. It will keep them from realising that it took centuries of hard fighting partly to free the

civilised world from the damage and degradation of Church rule. The Church proclaimed that God was in his heaven, but the foundation of his ease was the ignorance and brutality that flourished on earth.

But the finest exhibition of the circulating horse of Luther and the Roman "bread and the circus" is the B.B.C. Brains Trust. To-day everyone can read and write, everyone reaching a certain age has a vote. We are all democrats—since the war began and until the war is over. From the hereditary king and our second chamber downward we are all equal—in our citizenship. But the lower branches of this newly discovered nation-wide democracy are getting restive. They want to know more in order to do more, and if they really do more, how are we to keep alive that servicable doctrine "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world"?

So far as we can see, the B.B.C. has come as near as possible to providing an instrument that promises to guard Society from the terror of a really drastic alteration in our social life. It has fallen back on the method of the Roman-cum-Christian policy. The people are not forbidden to ask questions, they are invited to do so. And as millions of questions are asked, only a very small quantity can be dealt with. Further, the selection is determined, apparently, by questions falling into line with the Roman-cum-Catholic prescription. There are, for example, two things of which the near future must take notice, nay, which are being noticed in the world outside Parliament and the B.B.C. These are Communism and Sovietism. They loom large to-day, but somehow the fact has never occurred to our monopolist broadcasters. They certainly have never reached the Brains Trust, and the picture of so many men and women blundering along discussing such important things as why women are cattish and how flies walk on ceilings, etc., does excite sympathy for someone. The more intelligent section of our community is really not at all interested in the personal opinions of the Brains Trust crew; they would prefer informed answers to sensible questions, particularly pressing religious and political questions, but these the B.B.C. is determined the public shall not have. Bread and the circus and the circular excursions of the harnessed horse holds the field.

We cannot say that the B.B.C. has been a failure; on the contrary, it seems to have been very fortunate in realising its aims. It is only from the point of view of a progressive community that it has been a decided failure, a long parade of educated foolishness. Its confessed policy with regard to religions is to take the most ignorant of religionists and use them as the level on which religion should be dealt with.

But one feature of the B.B.C. stands out very plainly. It is a first-rate advertising station. Men and women—able men and women—who would have remained comparatively unknown had it not been for the B.B.C. advertising bureau,

become semi-celebrities. On the other hand, men of a very middling type owe their status to an unskilled public hearing them through broadcasting. Their names are heard by millions. The bait is too tempting to be ignored. Informed men and women smiled; uneducated listeners believed they were being educated when they were only being fooled. Substitute "advertising" and "popularity" for "bread and the circus," and we have history repeating itself.

### On Women

We have written many criticisms of the B.B.C.—not without some results, so far as the general public is concerned. We were tempted to write again after listening to a question of the Brains Trust on the pressing and important subject of whether women are more "cattish" than men, and also some comments on the B.B.C. by Miss Ursula Bloom, who wields an effective pen. The question as set was "Why are women so 'cattish' to each other for no apparent reason?" Two ladies laughed and denied that women were more "catty" than men. The men dealt with it rather timidly; none of them seemed to realise that the question might be dealt with from an historical point of view, and so convert a foolish question into a useful one. It may be that this would have led to something displeasing to the Churches, so instead of seizing on an opportunity of reading listeners a lesson that might inform, it began with a laugh and ended with a series of giggles. The B.B.C. has its team well in hand.

Miss Bloom writes that the "average intelligent person would dismiss the subject without troubling to waste another moment." I do not agree with this, and am rather of the opinion that an interesting page of history might have been unfolded in dealing with the question. Miss Bloom adds: "Sometimes when I listen to the Brains Trust I wonder what oracle chose the postcards, and have often thought that the Brains Trust occasionally gets hold of the waste-paper basket in error." We agree with Miss Bloom, with the proviso that the choice is not haphazard. It is deliberate. Personally, we do not know of any quality, good or bad, that does not occur with *both* sexes. We agree with George Eliot when she made one of her characters retort that "God made women to suit the men." But that does not prevent women having some qualities more marked than men, and others less strongly developed. But that, I think, is about all. Women have been accused of an abnormal love of display of trivialities. I do not agree. Consider the number of autobiographies that are written by men, or for men. Consider the quantity of trivial matter that occurs in them. Then turn to the gossip of our newspapers, and its "catty" or semi-catty quality displayed. These things would not be printed if there was not a demand for them, and there is little to choose between men and women in the matter. If women have more domestic "catting" than men, the explanation surely is that women's interest has been directed thus by men, without their own exhibition of "catting" being less strong than that of women. The explanation of the position of women, and the strength or weakness of identical qualities, lies in history. But if that had been suggested, the B.B.C. would close the discussion sharply. In fairness to some of the speakers it should be said that if an awkward statement had been made during the session, it would probably

be cut out. For what the public gets is, in most cases an edited version of what is said from a prepared record. Indeed, Mr. Howard has explained in "Britain's Brains Trust" that one reason for having the luncheon with the real sitting was because it gave opportunities for "cuts" being made. It is the B.B.C. which has the last word in this matter.

It would be foolish to believe that women, bearing in mind their function in life, and what is more, their social history, had not certain qualities more marked than the same qualities in man. And, in any reasonable judgment of women, it would be impossible to deal profitably with the situation of woman and leave religion out. This, of course, would not be permitted by the B.B.C. The result is Miss Bloom's suggestion that the Brains Trust questions may be drawn from the waste-paper basket. But in the instance with which we are dealing, it was really the "unawareness" of the question that prevented exploring the fact that it is only very recently that women have been placed almost on the same level as men. It is within little more than a century that married women were allowed to hold property in their own right. We have only to go back to find a state when "society" looked down upon female authors—consider the Brontes and "George Eliot." Female authorship was indecent, although history has always furnished brilliant women writers. It is true that women have now the vote, but this was after a ferocious struggle and because they had played a great part in the first World War. Woman, the child bearer, had to qualify by her ability to kill. I rather fancy that if this had occurred in Germany Lord Vansittart would have said something.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### THE TRIBUNE OF THE REVOLUTION

THE most powerful personality who appeared in the French Revolution was its statesman and orator, Mirabeau. The son of an aristocrat, the Marquis Mirabeau, he was constantly in trouble in his youth. His father was a sadistic disciplinarian who regarded his children as slaves to paternal tyranny. The old noble had many repellent qualities and was ever at bitter variance with his wife. No marvel then that their son, apart from his transcendent ability, inherited some of the vices of his parents and that his spendthrift proclivities and erotic disposition led to extravagances and scandals which in later days his envious rivals and enemies never forgot to throw at him.

An excellent account of Mirabeau's career is that of Evarts S. Scudder, "Mirabeau" (Barker, 1935). Although of unprepossessing appearance our hero's magnetic powers overcame most obstacles. As his biographer attests: "He dominates the opening act of the Revolution, yet he is the greatest political might-have-been in history . . . He died at a moment when the Revolution might have been checked and controlled, when the very real victories that he had won might have been turned to account without twenty years of war and the deaths of over four millions of his countrymen. And he was the one man living with a political vision great enough to understand such a crisis."

When, as an adolescent, Mirabeau flouted the conventions, his inflexible father obtained a *lettre de cachet* which not only secured his son from his importunate creditors while he was in prison, but deprived him of all civil rights. Thus the younger Mirabeau's experiences, both as prisoner and refugee,

strengthened his love of liberty, a passion that prevailed until his untimely death.

After visiting Frederick the Great in Berlin to whom he submitted his services, and voyaging to England, he returned to Paris just before the outbreak of the Revolution. Mirabeau made the acquaintance of Talleyrand and other leading men. He soon became immersed in politics and sought a ministerial secretaryship without success, but this failure left him free to act when the first rumblings of the Revolution sounded.

France was on the verge of insolvency and the Government was bent on balancing the budget by means of loans and speculation in securities. Mirabeau sponsored a pamphlet in which he denounced in pitiless terms this scheme of State gambling. His essay created a sensation and made him famous. "Speculation," he asserted, "produces effects that bewilder the imagination. What compensation does it offer when its one result, its last product, is a mad gamble?" This onslaught was deeply resented and Talleyrand warned Mirabeau that a *lettre de cachet* had been issued for his arrest. Therefore to avoid imprisonment he prudently left Paris.

When at last the Estates General were summoned to consider the crisis that had arisen, Mirabeau exclaimed: "The country has gone forward a century in twenty-four hours." He now determined to play a prominent part in the Estates' deliberations. "The elections," records Scudder, "were tumultuous. The temper of the people was not helped by a year of terrible weather. Droughts followed by destroying floods had damaged vast sections of the harvest, and the winter which followed was more severe than usual. The Seine was frozen, the cold fell to 30 degrees of frost . . . Nature herself seemed to be conspiring with men's spirit to prepare a revolution that would call up the genius of despair to sweep away the old order of things."

By his attacks on aristocratic immunities and privileges, Mirabeau incensed the nobles and clergy. But this made him popular with the people who were struggling for emancipation. Riots occurred in Aix and elsewhere which Mirabeau assisted in overcoming. He was elected for Aix as well as Marseilles, but decided to sit for the former constituency.

The Estates General were opened by the King in May, 1789, at Versailles, and Mirabeau became a relentless critic of the Ministry. A paper in which he and his friends proposed to print the Estates' proceedings was proscribed and suppressed. Mirabeau published another and attacked the enemies of the freedom of the Press. He won widespread support and his paper remained unmolested.

The soundness of Mirabeau's views on liberty is shown clearly in his statement that: "The existence of an authority which has the power to tolerate it, has also the power not to do so."

Despite his opposition to the Government Mirabeau strove to secure a peaceful revolution in which the Crown could take the lead. He believed in law and order and was as greatly adverse to anarchy as to despotism. But the king's incapacity and the sullen antagonism of the Court made a pacific solution impossible.

Mirabeau desired an administration of a character similar to that of England. But the King's Speech was obscurantist. It retained all the privileges of the nobles and clergy and refused the claim of the Commons to meet with the nobles in a single chamber. Moreover, the decisions of the Third Estate were declared null and void and they were called upon to disperse.

This constituted a declaration of absolutism and the Grand Master of the Ceremonies soon appeared before the still seated popular representatives—the nobles and clergy having departed with the King—to witness their dispersal. Scudder dramatically states: "Centuries of hope, of courage, of defeat, of humiliation crowded into that room at that moment of time. Bailly was unequal to the occasion but Mirabeau leaped to his feet and

striding forward to the astonished de Brézé (the Master of the Ceremonies thundered; 'Yes, Monsieur, we have heard the intentions which have been suggested to His Majesty. But you who should not be his mouthpiece to the National Assembly, you who have here neither place, nor voice, no right to speak, you who have no right to recall to us his discourse, go and say to your master that we are here by the will of the people, and that we will not be put out except by the force of bayonets.'"

The President, Bailly, then said he could not adjourn the Assembly until it had deliberated. Brézé was disconcerted but courteous in his withdrawal from the Assembly while Mirabeau had attained both name and fame.

The King and Court were alarmed and two squadrons of the *Gardes de corps* were prepared for action, but the more progressive aristocrats, Lafayette and others, prevented bloodshed, and many nobles and clergy rejoined the Commons. Yet, the position remained precarious. So an Address was presented to the King requesting the removal of the troops from Paris, when it was asserted that they were only there to preserve order. Nevertheless, a Court plot existed which, according to the American Morris "was to reduce Paris to famine and take 200 members of the National Assembly prisoners."

Again Mirabeau predominated and when the Assembly was about to dispatch another deputation, he conjured them to "tell Louis XVI. that the stranger hordes (foreign mercenaries) that surround us have received the visits of the princes, princesses and favourites of the Court, and their caresses, exortations and presents. Tell him that all night long these foreign satellites gorged with gold and wine, have predicted in their impious songs the slavery of France . . . Tell him that even in his palace the prostitutes have mixed their dances with the barbarous music, and that such was the scene that heralded St. Bartholomew."

The great protagonist tirelessly pursued his Titanic struggle against tyranny on the one side and mob violence on the other. He constantly proffered sage counsel to the Crown which was always disregarded. This, had it been taken, would have created a constitutional monarchy and thus preserved France from judicial murder and civil war. But Louis XVI. proved incapable, while his queen, far from wishing to concede even a modicum of reform, was stubbornly determined to restore the *ancien régime* with all its manifold evils and imperfections.

Mirabeau's death at the early age of 42 proved fatal to a sanely conducted Revolution. As Scudder states, his departure made the arrival of Napoleon inevitable.

When the Titan was known to be mortally stricken vast crowds gathered round his house. It was universally realised that his death would herald a tragedy that his presence might have prevented. "On April 4," writes Scudder, "the whole of the Assembly and three hundred thousand people attended Mirabeau's funeral. It was a vast tribute to his genius. All France was united for a moment in sorrow. Ministers, judges, national guards, Jacobins, aristocrats, artizans, workmen, all walked in the cortège." But Marat stayed away.

T. F. PALMER.

### IS GOD DEAD ?

Mr. H. M. Walton, about whom we know nothing at all, has written a book entitled "God is not dead." We haven't seen the book, and may never see it. But we agree with Mr. Walton that God is not dead. But the first requisite for dying is to have lived. And that vital fact has not yet been established. Mr. Walton seems to have started at the wrong end. At any rate, we should never dream of entering into a discussion of whether God is still living until someone can prove that he—or It—was once alive. And if Mr. Walton can prove that, we can then move to the next question of whether he is still alive.

## MURDER, MR. SHAW, AND US

"Come along, gentlemen of the jury, and help me to hang a few of these rascals before lunch."—The late Lord Braxfield (a famous Scottish judge).

"There is no regenerating felons (e.g. thieves) in this life and so for their own sakes as well as society's it is always best to hang them . . . You do seem to be Briton-bred but I thought I had hanged all the men in that parish long ago."—The late Mr. Justice Heath (contemporarily described as learned and humane).

WHEN you can write as well as Bernard Shaw even "The Times" will give your views pride of place—provided you are also at least a septuagenarian, as Thomas Hardy was when "The Times" began to print verses from his pen. Unpopular opinions only become disinfected in English eyes when the holder is very old and very distinguished.

So we have a letter in that newspaper in which Mr. Shaw gives his views on the proposed hanging of that infant-in-law, Elizabeth Marina Jones, the would-be "gunman's moll." Now Free-thinkers might well do a little free-thinking on this subject since there is much hide-bound thinking about it, and the pseudo-Christianity of our day attempts to justify hanging in general and this proposed hanging in particular.

Even the "Hanging's Too Good for Them" school of Christian thought realises to-day that the scaffold, the rope, and the drop, nauseate decent civilised folk. Shaw suggests substituting "euthanasia"; some decent, easy painless death. This certainly would be better. But the question is: "Ought the law to kill at all as a punishment?"

I think not. Voltaire has put the case against it with inimitable precision and conciseness: "A hanged man is good for nothing." (And of course a murderer may be good for many things.) That murderer Napoleon made excellent roads and the excellent Code Napoleon which still benefit France; that murderer Julius Cæsar wrote a good book, his Commentaries; and my friend the murderer, Sir Hiram Maxim, was a decent fellow in all other respects and gave me some useful advice which I rejected. When the enterprising murderer's not a-murdering, his capacity for innocent work equals yours or mine.

(I pass by the point that in a mad world of a million murders like this, one murder like the Hulthen-Jones affair is not much. We have agreed to make much of this one, so it must be dealt with).

But, objects Shaw, the alternative to State-killing is wrong; it involves the wasting of lives in looking after the imprisoned. Well, so does minor crime, so does sickness, so does infancy, so does lunacy. And the warders do not "waste" their lives; they use them as effectively as if they worked in a ghastly State factory, and much more enjoyably. Ask them. This argument is unsound. It is the argument of a theorist who has not investigated the reality.

But I entirely agree with Shaw that penal servitude for life, or for very long periods, is too cruel for endurance, either by the victims or by civilised spectators.

What then is the remedy for murder? Well, I think that in the case of juveniles we have discovered it—and that the same remedy can be successfully applied with safeguards to older people. A young murderer whom I defended at the Old Bailey was found guilty and, being convicted, was sent to—school! "Kept in custody until His Majesty's pleasure be known," was, I think, the phrase used. But in fact he went to school. He is now free even from school after a very few years, and I understand doing very well in the world, his early misadventure with a gun being almost forgotten by the world and himself.

Shocking? Not nearly so shocking as if a State-murder had

been added to the child-murder. The unchanged boy is good for something.

It is true that we have to learn the technique of re-educating murderers, as indeed of other criminals. But we are beginning to blunder into learning it. And it would be a pity if Mr. Shaw had been allowed to practise "euthanasia" on my child-murderer. An "euthanised" boy is good for nothing. Voltaire, I think, is dead right.

By the way, Mr. Shaw (like most of the British public) makes the mistake of thinking hanging is the legal punishment for murder only. It is not. Treason, piracy, and setting fire to any one of the King's dockyards, are hanging offences in peace time as well, and in war time we have added others, such as looting and forcing-a-safeguard, to the hanging list by mere Order in Council. But Mr. Shaw and the British Parliament and public have never read the Emergency Powers Act and the Defence Regulations (that is why these ordinances exist!) and I can hardly blame them, for who would, if he were not professionally compelled, indulge in such indigestible reading!

It is too much for me to expect that I can re-educate my better Mr. Shaw at the age of over 88 and my inferior the British public at the age of over 800. Still, they both may be slightly moved, perhaps, to realise that neither is so right as well may fancy. If they had seen that very ordinary poor little wretch, Mrs. Jones, aged 18, in the dock as I did, I do not think that Mr. Shaw would be willing to "euthanise" her himself, nor would any "hanging" ordinary member of the British public be willing to swing her with his own hands. It would be a better world, as Tolstoy points out with some force, if people would only not want others to commit the evils for them they are not willing to commit themselves.

If you think that I am wrong, you probably think hanging or euthanasia is necessary "as a deterrent." Well, in the reign of King George III., admirable judges like Mr. Justice Heath and Mr. Justice Buller (and others) thought it was the only way to keep a man from stealing a sheep—and said so! It wasn't; it isn't. Nor is either hanging or euthanasia the way to prevent murder now. Mr. Shaw and most of the public have never met a murderer in their lives, and so they imagine they know how to treat them. But they are both wrong, and in 100 years' time everyone will know they were wrong, as I do to-day, thanks to Voltaire and to having known murderers at first-hand.

The hanged Hulthen is now good for nothing; he could write sensibly, unaffectedly, and in a good clerky hand, as I have seen, when alive, and I am assured by a famous person who saw much of him and whose opinion I, and the general world, respect, that he was "really a very decent fellow." Well, Betty Jones is still good for something. Reflect that Cain, the first murderer, was your ancestor, and I expect that the greatest benefactors of the human race have several murderers in their ancestry. If all murderers had been inevitably hanged you and I might not be here—just consider what the world would have lost then!

C. G. L. Du CANN.

## RELIGION IN THE SCHOOLS?

CRITICS of the Northern Ireland government's White Paper on Education are not satisfied with the terms of the proposed Act. They want power given to the Regional Committees and, through them, to the clergy, to compel practically all teachers (with the minimum of exceptions to prove the rule), to give religious instruction on the basis of the Bible as the revealed Word of God. They argue that to put teeth in the Act to make such compulsion effective will not infringe on the teacher's freedom of contract or of conscience.

In his speech in the Senate on January 30, 1945, Professor R. Corkey (as reported in "The Northern Whig" the next morning) said:—

"I wish to make it clear that neither I, nor the representatives of the churches, have any sympathy with any policy that would mean or imply the coercion in the matter of any teacher who might have conscientious scruples about it."

Again (in the same speech):—

"The view of the churches, and also of the Regional Committees, was that since it was a duty of these Committees to provide Bible instruction in transferred and provided schools, they should logically and properly be given the right, when appointing a teacher, to make inquiry as to his willingness to give the instruction, and to enter into a definite contract with him that he would in fact faithfully and regularly give it.

This did not mean that any teacher would be compelled to enter into such an agreement whether he had conscientious objections or not. Provided that the Regional Committee was empowered to appoint, in all schools where parents wished Bible instruction, an adequate number of teachers to give it, there was no reason why other appointments should not be made without such undertaking being required."

That is to say that after "an adequate number" of religiously inclined (or religiously acquiescent?) teachers had been appointed, then men and women of contrary intellectual convictions and with the character and moral courage to declare them, might be appointed to any jobs still vacant.

This, then, is Professor Corkey's conception of providing an effective guarantee of individual freedom?

In the second section (which appeared on January 26, 1945) of a very long letter in "The Northern Whig," Dr. Corkey had already said:—

"A teacher who is appointed to give such instruction (including religious instruction) and accepts the appointment, can have no complaint that violence has in any way been done to his conscience by requiring him to give instruction he has beforehand undertaken to give."

How cogent, how verbally logical, how legally unassailable is Professor Corkey! But there is just one material element entering into conditions of such a contract about which he has been most conveniently silent. It is something much more fundamental than either verbal logic or legal responsibilities. It is the economic element. The economic relationship subsisting between the two parties to a contract is a fundamental determining condition. A man must eat, even if he be a teacher. Therefore, the problem posed to a teacher needing work, but having conscientious or intellectual scruples against teaching traditional religion, is this: "To eat, or not to eat?" Where, then, is the alleged "freedom" of conscience, and where the alleged "freedom" of contract? They don't exist! Without economic freedom it is hypocrisy to speak of any other sort of freedom. Dr. Corkey and his fellow traditionalists are fully aware of this. They know well that not one teacher in a hundred, if that, is economically free to refuse practically every proffered appointment. To possess a conscience or an intellect at all depends on maintaining oneself alive. To keep alive is basic. Threaten, not necessarily in words, but in material fact, to deprive a man of his means of life and it becomes a cynical mockery to speak of his intellectual freedom. Economic necessity is the very heart of the power of compulsion that Dr. Corkey and his ilk wish to exploit. How then can he have the effrontery to claim that "no violence" is done to the teacher's conscience when, in fact, it is proposed to exercise economic violence? In economic violence, not personally imposed—that is unnecessary—but permitted to operate through the "law" of supply and demand (by no means

a natural law) we find the essence of the coercion they verbally disown.

To tell us, as Dr. Corkey does, that "this does not mean that every teacher would be compelled to enter into an agreement" to give religious instruction, is an assurance that carries no conviction because of the other overwhelming elements in the situation. If, under the conditions proposed by Dr. Corkey, one per cent. of teachers actually appointed got their jobs without toeing the religious line, it would be an even greater miracle than that Jericho one to which he referred in his Senate speech.

As far as the broader issues are concerned: no man who values intellectual freedom has the slightest objection to children being made acquainted with the Bible literature; provided always that they are also inducted, and at the same time, into the pathways of study that lead to the vast store of scientific knowledge, and to the immense and important literature of critical and philosophic thought, and are encouraged to estimate the value and to assign the place of the Bible writings in the light of our more recent knowledge. Let our children be taught to "prove all things" and then, as a sequel, to "cling to that which is good."

Are Dr. Corkey and those who agree with him in demanding compulsory Bible instruction willing to reveal to the pupils of our schools the trend of even such Biblical criticism as has emanated from within the churches—say from Bishop Cosenso downward? If not, why not?

The alternative for our educationalists is to impose, in certain vital regions of thought, a permanent mental black-out. Is it intellectually or spiritually desirable that Ulster should become a second South Carolina—a fortress of Fundamentalism? Let us remember that our capital city, Belfast, was once (even if we have to look back a century-and-a-half) a centre of liberal and progressive thought. Let us rather strive to make it so again.

There is something very sinister about the present campaign, conducted by those in positions of economic privilege, to obscure the minds of the rising generation by implanting the conception of a universe controlled by a whimsied Power superior to natural law—a universe in which the scientific, genetic, causational approach to problems would prove unreliable and unfruitful; and in which the social desires and ambitions of the masses of men could be safely side-tracked from the field of effective action into the nebulous and innocuous region of piety and prayer.

It is amusing, however, to observe that the clergy themselves are not leaving the future to God. On the contrary they reveal to us their real, private belief in a causational universe by themselves taking determinative action in the educational field to ensure that the children of the masses shall grow up with acquiescent, uncritical, and submissive minds. They profess deep anxiety for spiritual values, whilst manoeuvring to protect quite material ones. But they move in a mysterious way their wonders to perform!

Nevertheless, this campaign to hobble education by tying it to primitive concepts is much more than a merely clerical one for the defence of the clergy's own caste and power. It has behind it all of the more long-headed members of the privileged classes who see, however dimly, that the younger generation of the under-privileged, if convinced that this is, in fact, a universe in which causation rules, may, instead of leaving it all to the Deity, take positive, determinative action to make such social changes as would be most unwelcome to the privileged at present in power.

So the exploiter and the parson combine to continue and intensify the mental obfuscation of the young, by distorting education, by perpetuating myths, and thus fitting, as it were, little tin hoods on the heads of our children, as the Chinese used to put tin shoes on the feet of their female babies to prevent their normal growth.

EDWYN KIRKBY.

## ACID DROPS

Despite the mixed reception of the suggestion—from authoritative quarters—that the Pope should take part in the Peace Conference that is to follow the end of the war, it is still being advertised. But the value of the Roman Church in securing the freedom—real freedom—of the European peoples may be gauged by an order that has gone forth in Ireland. Archbishop McQuaid has commanded that Catholic students must not attend Trinity College, Dublin, as it is not a Catholic institution. It must be borne in mind that an announcement of this kind is not a suggestion, it is an order, and it is in line with Roman Catholic procedure.

One reason given by the Roman Catholic Church is that "the church can and would keep holdy before statesmen the inflexible principles of right and wrong." Now we know why and how the Church helped Franco in Spain, refrained from excommunicating the Nazi leaders, and did so profitably a deal with Mussolini. It is really about time that our political leaders said something definite about these matters.

Dr. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, says that the problem confronting Christianity is not the presence of modern thought, but its absence. In support of this he says that "the amount of thinking these days by intelligent people is comparatively small compared with what it used to be." But that is just nonsense. We see no reason for boasting of the intelligence of the people of to-day, but it is not a fact that they are less intelligent than they were. Muddled thinking is still common—we might cite Dr. Matthews in evidence—but it is not as common as it was. There is a much larger proportion of the people who may fairly claim to be more intelligent in their reasoning than were our forbears. The fact that Dr. Matthews does not seem to have grasped is that in the development of a people there is a mass movement in which the distinction between high and low continues on a higher level but exhibits the same differences of division. The fool will remain a fool, but his folly be less foolish than it was. The religious mind, for example, is still with us, but it is not quite so foolish as it was. Dr. Matthews is still preaching a stupid creed, but it pays greater homage to scientific thinking than it did.

Dr. Matthews has a few words about the belief in God. He takes pride in being able to say that "two of the greatest philosophers of the age, Bergson and Whitehead," believe in God. One might well demur that with Dewey and Santayana—not to mention others—this is a rather rash statement, but Dr. Matthews would not care to advertise two men such as those mentioned. The certain thing about Bergson and Whitehead is that even a century ago both would have run the risk of being called Atheists, and with justice. For a "god" who is little better than a mere symbol of force is not a god at all. A Christian god is not a symbol, he is a person, a personage that can be either pleased or angry, good or bad. One would like to get from Dr. Matthews a plain, straightforward description of what he means by God, and in what way a man is bettered by believing in him. Our columns are open.

The Archbishop of York, describing his visit to Holland, told the House of Lords that there was great feeling against the "war criminals." He said that punishment was demanded, "not for revenge, but for something much deeper." But his Lord and Master said his followers should turn one cheek when the other was smitten, and that they should love those who did them wrong. The Archbishop appears to have caught Jesus winking.

Ordinary folk ask for punishment in the hope it will act as a deterrent to others. And so it may for some. But one must be a born fool—or a servant of God, and often the two are not very far apart—not to realise that man will, to gratify his appetite, face every danger and run any risk. Courage is not harnessed to uprightness, nor is uprightness tied to courage. Every burglar runs the risk of imprisonment, but they still "burgle." There is a penalty threatened for wrong doing and a reward—of various kinds—for right doing, and that is all we can say.

But how does this fit in with the religion of the Archbishop of York, and for the preaching of which he is so well paid and so highly placed? Suppose all the "war criminals" are arrested, tried and punished. How will that undo what has been done? We are not concerned with the sufferings of the dead. They are gone, and they are beyond suffering. It is the people who are alive that we have to consider—the parents who have lost their children, the children who have lost their parents, the husbands who have lost their wives, the wives who have lost their husbands, the friends who have lost their friends. Probably the Archbishop may reply—as per schedule—that these will be waiting for each other in the next world. That merely adds stupidity to a lie.

Take fifty or a hundred people who have lost relatives or friends in this war. Can one separate on sight those who believe in a future life and those who do not? One might as well try to find an answer by noting the colour of people's hair. If this world is God's world he is a damnedly bad caretaker. We daresay quite a number of professed believers may have the same feeling. But gods and kings value soft-soaping more than do common folk.

One must always be careful how one takes the statements of clergymen when the matter is connected with religion—their religion. For example: Mr. W. R. Brown, Edinburgh, Chaplain to the Forces, reported that there was "a deplorable ignorance of the most elementary facts of the religious life among thousands of young men in the Armed Forces." We strongly suspect that this should read "thousands of young men have no belief in religion." But, of course, if a man is of no use to the parsonage, "deplorable ignorance" is the official rendering of the situation.

Here is another example to the same end. A letter in the "Birmingham Post" asks: "What will the country be like in years to come when God has been pushed almost entirely into the background." Well, seeing what the world is like saturated with God, it looks as though the situation could not be worse than it has become without him, or her, or it. And it is worth noting that, with God at the front, wars have been constant. They were not so bloody as this one, but we should not blame our ancestors for that. They killed as many as they could, and used the most deadly weapons they could get hold of. Our Christian ancestors did their best.

The "Press and Journal" (Aberdeen) cites Director of Religious Education in Aberdeen as saying that "Aberdeen (religiously) like any other place in Scotland." Farther south, Bishop Poskitt, of Leeds, complains, for Roman Catholics, that their people are seriously threatened by a growing immorality around them. We are suspicious that the "growing immorality" is another way of saying that the priests are losing their hold on even their own people. "Immorality" in the mouth of the Roman Catholic priests means that the Church is losing its grip. But for actual immorality our Catholic population has always been able to hold its own. Finally, we have the Church of England speaking through the mouth of Dr. Matthews and complaining that the growing generation, a considerable part of the population, "does not believe in God." Truth will out, and even from the lips of the priest it dribbles. The poor, poor parsons!

The Bishop of Liverpool says that, being a parson, he has to help people. He has to be a bit of a lawyer, a bit of a doctor, and a bit of a teacher, etc. We see no reason why he should not be, but we fail to see why he is due for praise for thus doing his bit towards his fellows. One need only open one's eyes to see that kind of "work" being done by multitudes of men and women in every kind of community. But these people do not get about claiming that they have done something that deserves special notice. They do their job and there is an end to it; and when it is done, the average "doer" thinks no more about it. In fact, most people who can give a helping hand would be ashamed if they let the opportunity pass. They don't advertise it. We are not all parsons.

“THE FREETHINKER”

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

C.D.W.—Thanks. Will appear as early as possible, but we are very much overloaded with “copy” at the moment.  
 J. H. JENSON.—Thanks for papers. They are set aside for use when applicable.  
 C. H. MORTIMER.—The essay on Paine will be on sale very shortly, but printers are so hard pressed just now that one has to exert considerable patience.  
 BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of £2 from Mrs. Alice Heal to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

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

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SUGAR PLUMS

It is not common nowadays for any unpleasantness in the administration of the Bradlaugh Oaths Act which gave to any person the right to affirm in place of the religious oath. Following a raid by the police on the premises of the Freedom Press, several men came before a London magistrate, Mr. Ivan Snell. There was an adjournment and the magistrate asked for sureties from two men of £500 each. Two men offered sureties which were accepted—until an affirmation was asked for. That seems to have upset Mr. Snell who declared that he would not rely on any man who would not swear an oath, and then refused bail. Prompt action was taken and an order of a judge in Chambers wiped out the magistrate’s nonsensical decision. The surety was accepted with a bail of £500. It looks as though the matter should be taken up by the Lord Chancellor. Magistrates and judges who will not accept the administration of the law should resign.

Lady Maud Simon will be well known to all readers of this journal as a frequent contributor to these pages. She has now gathered together a selected number of her articles—enough to cover more than one hundred pages—which have appeared in “The Saturday Review,” “The Times,” “The Spectator,” “The Literary Guide,” and, of course, “The Freethinker.” The articles make a very readable little volume, and we wish that many of them had been more fully developed. But nearly every page has a provocative quality that will make many wish they had been further elaborated. It is a pocket volume that is full of suggestions. The book is published by the Pioneer Press, price 2s. 6d., postage 2d.

One of our readers has asked us what is the position of an English-born person in England with regard to the State Church? As the question is of some importance, and as a great many people may not be aware of their position with regard to the English Church, we answer it here instead of sending a brief note to our correspondent.

Every English-born subject—we assume it applies also to those who are English subjects by adoption—is a member of the Church of England, no matter whether he believes in the Church doctrines or not. He is subject to all the amenities of the Church. He may attend all religious services, and may be buried in a churchyard, although his next of kin may object to the burial service, if he pleases. The Church and the churchyard are public, and every citizen has equal rights concerning them. But if a religious ceremony takes place after death, it must be a Church of England service. On the other hand, the next of kin has the right to order a silent funeral.

Distinct from the provisions for the burial of the dead are public ceremonies. Here a service may be held without religion. The only provision is that there must be no attack on any religion. There should be no objection to this. Death comes to all alike, and a graveyard is not a fitting place for the discussion of religious differences. There may, of course, be a plain statement that the deceased was without religion of any kind, or even that he was a professed Atheist.

The only other information of use is that due notice must be given to the priest in charge of the Church that there is to be no religious service. We do not recall any case of the wishes of those responsible being ignored.

On Monday, April 2, Mr. J. T. Brighton and Mr. B. Carter will discuss the question: “Is the Belief in Spiritualism Reasonable?” The debate will be held in the School Hall, High Clare, Chester-le-Street, at 6 p.m. Mr. B. Carter is connected with the Spiritualist Church, Halifax, and Mr. Brighton’s platform ability is sufficiently well known on his home front, and that is the best of recommendations for attending.

We have often said that those who do not occasionally look over the back numbers of the “Freethinker” lose many good things. Here is a sample, it is taken from the “Manchester Guardian”—a paper that is not what it was. It is dated August 8, 1928:—

“A minister of religion has written to the ‘Œuvre’ about a curious burial that has just taken place at Marseilles. It was of the four victims, three men and a woman, of a recent motor-car accident, reported in all the newspapers, on the road to Biarritz. Their car turned over on them and took fire, so that in a few minutes they were all reduced to an indistinguishable mass of calcined bones. These were collected, he writes, ‘by a pious hand,’ put into a common coffin, and sent to Marseilles for burial.

Now, it so happened that the four victims belonged each to a different religion. One of the men was a Roman Catholic, the second a Protestant, the third a Jew, while the woman was a Greek Orthodox. Naturally the respective families desired a religious ceremony according to the victim’s faith, but here a difficulty arose, for the clergy of the four various denominations refused to meet simultaneously.

The Roman Catholic clergy of the parish declined to officiate at the cemetery and went instead to meet the coffin at the station, where absolution was pronounced. The Protestant pastor, the Jewish Rabbi, and the Orthodox priest went to the graveside, but a sort of timetable had to be arranged for the various ceremonies and to prevent contact.

At this the writer of the letter is scandalised. Prayers said in common, he suggests, would have been much more becoming in such a unique case.

‘Unique case, indeed!’ comments ironically M. de la Fouchardière, in the columns of the same newspaper. ‘Such a peculiar case of conscience,’ he writes, ‘would have given delight to the fathers of the Church, and it might well have provided us with several supplementary volumes of St. Thomas Aquinas. . . . But none of the councils had even foreseen such a case, and indeed it does so much seem to bear the very marks of the Devil’s own claws that it might have been brought about expressly to plunge the ministers of these four holy religions into the most extreme embarrassment.’

The satanic scenario, adds M. de la Fouchardière, was not complete: ‘It only needed to add a Freethinker to the amalgam.’”

## SOPHISTICAL SOOTHING SYRUP

I HAVE previously drawn attention to the half-digested religious regurgitations that sometimes appear in the "Answers" column of "The Catholic Herald," those painfully puerile apologies for the Faith, offered to certain inquiring Catholics whose questions seem to show any glimmer of intelligence which, in the view of the Theological Editor who conducts the feature, may betoken a weakening of the faith that grips, and, therefore, must justify a dose of sophistical soothing syrup, sometimes subtle, sometimes ridiculously apparent, in an effort to stop the rot of clear thinking.

But the Theological Editor excelled himself in a recent issue in replying to the question: "Are there any Catholic scientists?" and I cannot refrain from clicking the typewriter keys in scornful challenge to his nonsense.

One would hardly expect the answer to such a question, in a Catholic journal, to be scrupulously honest by pointing out that the phrase, "Catholic scientist," is in itself an absurdity. I feel certain that it must be clear at least to the Theological Editor (however much he tries to muddle his readers) that, while there may be scientists who happen to be Catholics, to talk about Catholic scientists is just about as sensible as it would be to talk about Atheistic gods. But although we may pardon a certain amount of mental dishonesty, to the extent that the absurdity of the phrase would not be made clear to readers, one can hardly excuse the policy of trying to justify the phrase by suggesting that there is "a fair list of them (Catholic scientists) with their particular subjects."

The plain answer is, there is nothing of the kind. There are neither Catholic nor Protestant nor any other "godist scientists," though undoubtedly there are scientists who, when not behaving as scientists, are apt to delude themselves with religious notions almost as varied as the denominations are varied.

One might excuse the term, "Catholic journalist," or "Catholic teacher," or even that unjudicial expression, "Catholic judge," which the "Herald" used a short time ago in referring to a legal appointment. In such cases it is not only possible, but often the case, that the religious beliefs of the people concerned influence their professional activities. We know how some teachers have to impart a Catholic "atmosphere" to their teachings; the Theological Editor proves how a journalist may impart a Catholic flavour to his writings; and the notorious Judge North, a Catholic, who sentenced G. W. Foote for blasphemy with a viciousness which Foote cleverly said was "worthy of his creed," proved that even a judge might slip in religious twiddly bits when balancing the scales of justice.

But how on earth a scientist can behave as a scientist at the same time that he behaves as a Catholic is beyond my comprehension!

There may be a method that I do not know, of course. Some think like six experiments and a couple of Hail Marys, producing, lo! a religio-scientific fact, previously a subject of doubt; or perhaps a chemical formula, an extract from the Catechism, twelve experiments and a prayer, and behold! a new synthetic. Yes, it might just be my own ignorance of some aspects of the scientific method.

Perhaps these "Catholic scientists" have a private chapel attached to the laboratory, wherein work and perspiration (which are said to be the secrets of scientific achievement) are fortified by prayer and inspiration.

Now I come to think about it, perhaps I am wrong, for Dr. Halliday Sutherland, the doctor-cum-Catholic crusader, whose book, "Control of Life," I am at present reading, seems to have perfected the knack of blending Catholicism with social research work. He has a tricky style of popping the god-idea up and down his pages in most unexpected places, although up to now

I have not noticed that he has managed to squeeze God into any of his statistical tables, which rather diminishes the convincing effect. Then, again, it might be that it is this popping in and out of the god-idea that makes Dr. Sutherland's pages not wholly scientific—in which case my first contention would be correct, after all. However, more of Dr. Sutherland some other time.

Let's get back to the Theological Editor. Although our ardent sophist declares there is a "fair list" of Catholic scientists he fails to name a single example—but he goes on to betray the inner workings of his mind by saying: "To-day very few great scientists adhere to a childish atheism."

Now I am no psychologist, but I hazard a guess that this is just where the Theological Editor lays bare his Catholic soul. Nobody asked him anything about Atheists, childish or otherwise. The simple question was: "Are there any Catholic scientists?" And for him to round off his question-begging answer by sliding into a skid calculated to jostle off the scientific highway any damn- nuisance Atheists there may be there rather suggests to me awareness in his mind of the presence of such people in considerable numbers.

As for the "great" scientists, as distinct from the rest, we may take the literal context of his answer to indicate that he knows more than he dare tell his readers. "To-day very few great scientists adhere to a childish atheism." Admitted, for to-day (as always) there are only very few great scientists.

Moreover, if "childish" implies the honesty of purpose and sincerity of outlook expressed by the unprostituted minds of the young while still free from the deadening poison of religion, then the childish Atheism of great scientists is infinitely preferable to the adult ignorance, superstition and hypocrisy of those whose religious characteristics cause them to distort or hide truth in the idiotic attempt to be "Catholic scientists" or any other sort of godist-scientists.

The Theological Editor, however, provides his own undoing, supplies his own refutation, in another answer to another question in the same column, for here his plaint is that science does not tie up with religion. Answering a question relating to examinations for human infertility, with special reference to the Essex County Council system, he says: "If science were less preoccupied with the good ends in view, and more with inventing moral methods to obtain those ends, it would do an immense service."

In other words, if science were less concerned with truth, and more concerned with Christian religious ideas and taboos (now outworn and almost discarded) it would do an immense service towards reviving such ideas.

But he forgets one thing—hardly anybody wants a revival of those ideas. The very need to answer such questions in a Catholic newspaper shows that even Catholics are at last turning uneasily in their saint-soaked slumbers.

F. J. CORINA.

### Q.E.D.

"ALL right, I'll tell you a story . . . about a man who was in Paris very late one night. He lived a long way out of Paris in a suburb. Versailles, they call it . . . Oh, you know, do you? Well, this man couldn't find a taxi to take him home. At least it was ever such a long time before he got one. So when he saw another man with a sword and funny knee-breeches and a great ruffle round his neck . . . No, this man I'm telling you about didn't know what the other man was doing with a sword. He thought he'd been to a fancy-dress dance. So he raised his hat and said very politely he was going to Versailles, and he asked if he could give the man with a sword a lift somewhere. You see he thought that probably the other man wouldn't be able to find another taxi."



The child said: "It was the only thing he could do." "It was very nice!" the woman retorted, "but this man I'm telling you about was ever so surprised when the man with the sword said he wanted to go to Versailles himself, and when they got to Versailles the man with the sword asked if he could be put down at the Palace. The other man was ever so surprised because the Palace isn't a Palace any more but a museum. Well, the man with the sword thanked the other beautifully and walked into the Palace . . . Now don't you see, the man with the sword was—a ghost. It really was one of the old kings who used to live in the Palace."

"How silly!" the child exclaimed. "Why should a ghost want to ride in a taxi? Couldn't he just float to wherever he wanted to go?" "Don't you see," she cried eagerly, "it shows how 'they' keep in touch." "They?"—"Yes, the dead. Some people imagine the dead don't care what happens in this world, but the old king knew all about taxis." The child said: "I still call it silly."

Her cheeks were burning. "You can prove these things," she said. "There are people called mediums. They can communicate with the dead. My sister took me to a medium." "What happened?" the child asked breathlessly. "We went into a room and sat at a table. We held hands in the dark. Oh . . . as a matter of fact . . . nothing much happened. It wasn't a good night. Agnes said the vibrations were wrong. But . . . it got very hot. Agnes said that was because the medium's guide is an Indian. You see the guide is a spirit who helps the medium to get in contact with the dead. Agnes said this Indian guide always brings his own climate with him. Agnes said it is very wonderful."

Suddenly her excitement left her. She said: "It's time I got your bath ready." He watched her move over slowly to the stove. She looked very old. "Let me lift the kettle," he said. "I'll take it upstairs." She turned and her eyes shone. "Won't it be too heavy for you?" she asked. He took it in his hands and carefully weighed it. Then he handed it back to her. "Yes," he said.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

### "WHAT'S THE ODDS"

WHAT exactly is "chance"—and can its incidence be calculated?

For the type dealt with by insurance the odds are based upon statistics—the record of actual past events—and they work naturally to the advantage of the underwriter who shrewdly shortens the calculated odds very considerably before quoting a premium, but they do work and the assumption involved that events will occur in the future with much the same frequency as they have occurred in the past appears to have a certain pragmatic justification, but only so long as conditions remain much the same, and nobody would suggest that such odds represent any natural law—the risks of fire in Hamburg, for instance, must have increased out of all proportion to past experience since the R.A.F. took to paying frequent visits with thousands of incendiaries.

Another type of "chance" is quite incapable of calculation because of the number of variable factors involved: Who shall fix the true odds against any particular horse winning the "Derby" immediately after publication of the entries?

The third type of "chance" is that popularly supposed to be governed by the "Laws of Probability." Probability, however, is a misnomer here because all the calculus does is to ascertain the number of Possibilities and the resulting "odds" involve the assumption that real events do in fact occur in the ratio of objective possibility, but do they?—those who should know seem to be in considerable doubt about it.

Thus Sir James Jeans in "The Mysterious Universe" states:—

" . . . if we throw up a million tons of halfpence we know there will be 500,000 tons of heads and 500,000 tons of tails. The experiment may be repeated time after time and will always give the same result . . . it is an instance of the purely mathematical laws of chance."

and for him the numbers of heads and tails will always be equal, or nearly, so as not to affect a result expressed in tons of halfpence, whilst such a result as 499,000 tons heads and 501,000 tons tails will never happen, though how Jeans is able to dogmatise about an experiment that never has, and probably never will be tried even once, let alone "time after time" is quite beyond me.

The late Professor Eddington takes an intermediate view and in "The Nature of the Physical World" tells us that when we put a kettle of water on the fire, anything may happen—it may boil or freeze, according to what the individual molecules happen to do, one arrangement entailing the freezing of the water in spite of the fire. However, this "would never occur in reality, not because it is impossible but because it is too improbable"; the "odds" against requiring more than all the books in the world only to write down in ordinary notation.

Professor J. B. S. Haldane in his "Fact and Faith" expresses the opposite view:—

" . . . in the course of eternity any event with a finite probability must occur an infinite number of times."

So, if we ask whether Jeans' million tons of halfpence will ever turn up all heads:—

Jeans: Would say they could not.

Eddington: That they would not because too improbable.

Haldane: That they must sooner or later.

Even cogent reasoners like Chapman Cohen and J. M. Robertson with minds wider in scope and free from the fetish of formulae, still go astray when dealing with "chance."

In "Materialism Restated," one of his most instructive works, Mr. Chapman Cohen (referring to a penny) writes:—

" . . . toss it up a score of times and we may have 16 heads and 4 tails, or even a greater disproportion, but the greater the number (of tosses) the nearer we shall get to an equality of heads and tails."

whilst Robertson, criticising Mr. Proctor's views on "chance," writes:—

" . . . but when he adds that . . . even after a sequence of 10 or 12 heads, heads actually did come as often as tails, he was in effect asserting that in the given experiments runs of 13 were exactly as common as runs of 12, and if his argument were coherent he was committed to arguing that runs of 14 were as common as runs of 13 and so on indefinitely."

Of course Proctor was not in effect asserting that runs of 13 were as common as runs of 12, but that they were half as common. If after the last toss there were 2 runs of 13 and 2 of 12 there must previously have been 4 runs of 12 of which 2 terminated there and two went on to 13.

J. M. Robertson's remark occurs in his "Letters on Reasoning" and provides a beautiful example of what he himself would term a palpable paralogism.

Mr. Chapman Cohen says that "in 20 tosses we may well get 16 heads and 4 tails," and if I understand him rightly he implies that with a larger number of tosses—say 2 million and 20 of which 100,016 heads and 100,004 tails, this difference would be reduced. But this is to confuse the number 12 (the difference between the numbers of heads and tails) with 12 represented as a ratio or percentage of the total number of tosses.

If on the other hand he means that the "chances" of equality become greater the larger the number of tosses, he is still in the wrong. On the contrary, the larger the number, the greater is the discrepancy between the numbers of either face likely (on the theory) to become.

If a coin be tossed up 4 times there are 16 possible results:—

- All heads—one way only.
- 3 heads, 1 tail—4 different ways.
- 2 heads, 2 tails—6 different ways.
- 1 head, 3 tails—4 different ways.
- All tails—one way only.

and considering only the difference between the numbers of either face we see at once that out of 16 possibilities, 8 or half of them give 3 of one kind to one of the other against 6 only giving equal numbers.

On Mr. Cohen's example of 20 coins the total possibilities are 1,048,576, out of which 251,940 will a discrepancy of 4, against only 184,756 giving equality, and the greater the number of tosses the greater is the discrepancy likely to be.

For Jeans' million tons of halfpence the numbers become unwieldy, but at a venture I would say that discrepancies of the order of 80,000 to 120,000, which would give a total difference of about one ton in the result, might on the theory be expected at least as frequently as absolute equality.

The above remarks relate to "group odds" that is odds against one out of a group of possible events actually occurring. These are the only ones that really need concern us, but we must just mention individual events if only to show that they are not to our purpose.

Many millions of bridge hands may be dealt, but the odds for any particular hand specified card for card are exactly the same and they are against predicting beforehand which hand will turn up and not against the hand itself occurring, otherwise we should find ourselves in a punters' paradise where a millions-to-one chance came off every time.

The distinction, however, is often lost sight of as for instance when Professor Momerie in his book on "The Belief in God," says:—

"... when only 11 planets were known De Morgan showed that the odds against their moving in one direction round the sun with a slight inclination of the plane of their orbits, had chance determined the movement, would have been 20,000,000,000 to 1."

They would of course have been exactly the same for any other possible arrangement, and as Professor Momerie omits to show that God indicated beforehand which arrangement would happen, his argument is entirely without significance.

And now, what conclusions shall we draw?

Reverting to coin tossing for the sake of clarity, let us ask ourselves if we are bound eventually to get, say, one thousand million heads on the run, if we go on long enough?

In spite of Professor Haldane most of us, I imagine, would say no, we may get them, but we are not bound to, that is, there is no logical necessity that we should.

Yet, working backwards, coin by coin, we must also say that we are not bound to get 2 heads on the run although we may.

In practice of course we know that we shall get 2 heads on the run, and even more, if we go on long enough, but still logically there seems to be no necessity for it.

Whilst this would appear a reasonable view to take, it involves a denial of any necessary correspondence between calculated possibility and real events, and hence any real rational basis in logic for the "Laws" of Probability and the "Statistical Laws" based thereon, which loom so large in much modern scientific theory.

Obviously seeing that the calculus takes account of every possibility, each real event must correspond with it at some point, but this correspondence may be purely fortuitous and quite useless as a means of calculating the probability of any real happening.

In other words the calculus of probability is simply a complicated method of expressing our ignorance, and if the result of any toss of a coin is quite independent of the result of any previous toss or series of tosses, it only means, as J. M. Robertson has well said, that we are no wiser after tossing 50 or 500 times than we were before we started.

W. A. GOURMAND

## WRITERS AND THE WAR

EVER since the outbreak of war in 1939 we have been periodically greeted by questions as to the reason for the apparent non-existence of war poets and war novelists. The vociferous publicists who produce these queries seem to have neglected several obvious answers, and it would appear to be worth while to set these on record, once and for all, since the atmosphere of the closing stages of the war may be difficult to recapture when once the "Cease Fire" in Europe has sounded.

There is one great reason why writers have not responded to the challenge of the war as might have been expected, and that is that the majority of the younger generation are so engulfed in it, either in the armed forces or in essential war work of one kind and another, that they have been fortunate if they are able to find time to produce more than an occasional short story or article. A few novelists and poets, it is true, have been given the opportunity of continuing their work along propagandist lines, securing posts with the Ministry of Information or the B.B.C., but the marked deterioration which has set in should be enough to show that State patronage of this kind is thoroughly bad for the development of the arts. Only H. E. Bates in "Fair Stood the Wind for Franco" (possibly the best novel to emerge from the European battle-fronts), has done anything in the same street, as they say, as his pre-war work.

Another important reason exists, however, for the non-existence of war poets or war novelists on a par with Rupert Brooke and A. P. Herbert (do you remember "The Secret Battle," A.P.H.'s very fine novel of the last war?) This, I am sure, has been pointed out already, but in an essay of this kind it cannot well be omitted. In the last war there was to be detected a strongly idealistic streak, manifested in such much-anthologised pieces as Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier." When the ordinary man asks for a war poem, he usually means either that type of verse, or the flag-wagging crudity of Kipling at his worst. This war was entered into by the majority of the people with no less determination than the last, and this applies to novelists and poets as much as to anyone else. But the idealism was lacking. We had seen stupid governments, in the years immediately before the war, staggering from one crisis to another, carrying out measures of the most shamelessly temporary expediency, and never trying, as far as one could see, to settle international troubles in a sensible way. (I am not referring merely to British governments, of course, though they have to take their responsibility with the rest). As a result of this the more perspicuous of the writers realised (to quote Day Lewis) that they are only "defending the bad against the worse." There is an immense amount of cynicism about the "brave new world" to emerge after the war. Few of the younger writers believe that there is any intention of meeting the glib promises that have been made. Even though they are too young to remember "Hang the Kaiser," "Homes for Heroes," and all the other cries of the vociferous politicians of 1918-1919, they have read their history, and they lived through the aftermath of those troublous days.

I am not trying now to provide a political analysis of the pre-war period or of to-day; there are more suitable places for that than here. But I do think that it is impossible to get any sort of perspective on the literary trends of the day without assessment of the political background which, rightly or wrongly, the younger writers have come to accept.

This is, of course, another point which cannot be neglected in considering the effect of the war on writing. The changes of atmosphere in this war have been so many and so sudden that it is exceedingly difficult for a writer to make a sustained effort and to maintain the same feeling throughout his work. We are all affected by news, good and bad. And if a book is started during a period when the Allies appear to be in the ascendant, but is not finished until a German advance seems threatening, it is by no means easy for the writer to make his work sound sincere. A really satisfactory novel (or poem) cannot be made of mixed pessimism and optimism. One outlook or the other, in that case, will not ring true.

There is consequently a tendency for writers to restrict themselves to shorter works, which can be finished in a comparatively brief period of time. This may be one reason why all the "little reviews" which have made their appearance in the last few years seem to contain such a high proportion of the worth-while writing of our time. In poetry and in prose this is so. Only one major work of poetry—T. S. Eliot's group of poems, now reissued under the title "Four Quartets"—has made its appearance during this period, and it is not at all clear how much of that was planned or written before the events of 1939. In prose I cannot recall one book which is really first-rate and vital, with the possible exception of Julian Green's "Memories of Happy Days," and that, since it is a backward-looking study of pre-war Paris, can scarcely rank as a book of this war.

And what of the future? Will the stifling of the younger writers, which the war has inevitably brought about, persist when the war is over? That, I think, depends entirely on the general complexion of the society which the post-war politicians build. If we have a regimented society on a near-Fascist model, which at the time of writing appears only too likely, then literature will not recover its old vitality for many a long year. It was Herbert Read who said that the artist required an atmosphere of *laissez-faire*, not in its usual sense, but in its literal sense of "let alone," if he was to be given the opportunity of doing his best work. And to be let alone to do one's job in the best way that one can is the last thing that our political pundits now appear to want to permit. If, on the other hand, freedom is allowed to exist in the post-war world, it may well be that we are on the verge of a literary renaissance, and that we shall find that the war has been a fine thing for the world of letters. As I have already said, this is not an essay in politics, and so I cannot pursue this train of thought very much further. I can merely say that it is to be hoped that English literature is not allowed to die of inanition. Some ideal at which to aim is the first necessity of the artist. The literature of disillusion (vide the early Aldous Huxley) is never very inspiring to reader or to writer, and only if the prevailing disillusion of the young is somehow dissipated is there any real hope for the world, either in the purely literary or in more practical spheres.

JOHN ROWLAND.

**HEAVENLY PLACE NAMES**

Our Farnham  
Which art in Heaven,  
Harrow be thy name.  
Thy Kingston come,  
Thy Wimbledon  
In Erith, as it is in Hendon,  
Give us this day our Leatherhead,  
And forgive us our By-passes,  
As we forgive them that By-pass against us.  
And lead us not into Thames Ditton,  
But deliver us from Ewell.  
For thine is the Kingston, the Purley and the Crawley,  
For Esher and Esher—Crouch End.

**REALITY**

A certain gentleman, the Rev. J. Tunncliffe, has discovered that God is "Reality." The discovery is not original, it has been made over and over again, but what it means is not quite clear. It has always appeared to us that "Reality" belongs to everything that is. A toothache is as "real" as an earthquake. A dream is as real as an aeroplane. "God" may manifest himself through man, but so do the visions of a dipsomaniac. A ghost is as real as a God. Believe in ghosts and you will very likely see one. Gods exist for those who believe in them, and as examples of the inconceivable and the impossible they are as good as anything else. Finally, a man may find comfort in believing in god, but so does a whisky-drinker find consolation in believing that "God" is with him. We know of men who swear that they are free from rheumatism because they carry a potato in their trousers pocket, and as everybody does not suffer from that vile complaint, there is the same evidence for the potato curing rheumatism as for the existence of God. It is very difficult to banish an illusion—unless one can get rid of the cause. And as that involves clear thinking and correct understanding, God is still in his heaven, and folly wears the gown of the philosopher.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**WE—AND OTHERS.**

SIR,—In reply to Mr. Seibert ("The Freethinker," page 103), neither a Fascist nor any other kind of State can be established by votes only; but votes contribute. The millions of Germans who voted for Hitler in 1930, 1932 and 1933 cannot evade responsibility for the unspeakable results.

I never denied that there were other Fascist countries in Europe. But Mussolini has gone, Horthy has gone, Petain has gone, and Franco's number is up. The Nazis remain.

Nor do I acquit British Tories of helping to create the conditions which made Hitlerism possible. The remedy for that is in our own hands.

I do not know what Mr. Seibert means by his remark about Mosley. Fascism is not "in being" here, or there would be no "Freethinker" for us to write letters to.

Meanwhile the job of destroying Fascism in Europe remains. One essential is to continue blasting Germany until she unconditionally surrenders. The next is to see that the great alliance of Britain, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. is made watertight against Munichers and isolationists, and that Fascists and Fascism are wiped off the face of the earth. That, too, is in our own hands.

Mr. Seibert's remark about "justice" and Freethought is as pointless as that about Mosley.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

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