

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Mixed Dish

I AM calling this a "Mixed Dish" because I wish to deal with several situations instead of one. First of all I desire to raise a protest against whoever it was divided lies into "Lies, damned lies, and statistics." I wish to add at least two more as a part claim for the power of the human mind. These are the political "word of honour" and "religious truth." To limit mankind to three forms of lying is an impeachment of the adaptability of the human mind. Science seems to get along with just plain truth, so do common folk in their normal life. But religion has as many varieties of truth as there are colours in the rainbow, or as is required for each "revelation." Thus the Mohammedan truth does not fit in with the Christian truth, and the other way about. And as each says that the other is a liar, we think our case goes without further pleading.

The other day the "Church Times" gave an account of a visit of the Archbishop of York to the annual meeting of the Christian Evidence Society. When I first met this society it was notable for the fact that it had no evidence for Christianity, but it had lots of proof—religious proof—of the villainy of Freethinkers, and in particular of those who lectured or wrote. The special sins of Freethought speakers and writers appeared to be drunkenness, running away with another man's wife, and death-bed conversion. What puzzled me most was how Freethought speakers, who were not paid, found enough cash to indulge in so expensive a dissipation as that of running away with someone's wife. It was this society that took a front place in discovering that Bradlaugh died raving for Jesus to forgive him. It also discovered that I ill-treated my wife—a month before I was married.

I am depending for my information upon the "Church Times"—quite a respectable organ in its way. Addressing the C.E.S., the Archbishop of York raised two points against Atheism and Materialism. Atheism, he said, was out of date. That reminds us of a story told of David Hume. Hume was in Paris, dining with some distinguished Frenchmen. In those days Agnosticism had not been invented, but Atheism, that ancient challenge to the Gods, was active. Said Hume to his hosts: "I do not think Atheists exist." "You are sitting with ten," was the prompt reply. So one might remind the Archbishop that Atheism was never so common as it is to-day. Perhaps we ought to be kind and suggest that he means Atheists were not common in his church, but I really believe that he said it in order to cheer up his listeners.

Consider, Atheism has always meant, it still means, without belief in a God. And really if there is a God, the Atheist is the best friend he has. For the Atheist never

bothers God and, above all, he never charges him, either by insinuation or by open speech, of permitting crimes to take place that he, as God, could have prevented. He might, for instance, with a streak of lightning, have demolished those who were responsible for the horrible tortures of men, women and children in the German prisons. Holyoake once said that Secularism was a creed that gave God no trouble. I think that might be said of all Atheists. They give God no trouble. His followers never give him any peace.

Now, in what sense or in what form is Atheism weaker than it was? There are no more believers in God than there were, and men are less timid than they were in saying they have no belief in God. The churches are better filled with empty seats than they were, and although that alone would not prove the existence of a greater number of Atheists, it does prove that a great many people are on the way. I can recall a time when people were very shy of labelling themselves Atheists, and that not because they were in doubt as to whether they believed in God or not, but because Christian malignity was more powerful than it is to-day, and did not hesitate to express itself.

But there is a stronger reason still for pointing to the growth of Atheism. Since 1870 anthropology has advanced with giant strides. Investigators have tracked the gods to their lair. They have proved—mark I say *proved*—that all gods were born of man's ignorance, and as education and intelligence have increased, so the gods have diminished in power and numbers. It is not true, as the Archbishop suggests, that Atheism is losing "face." It is gaining ground rapidly, and the Churches know it.

But the most impudent remark of the Archbishop was that Materialism had failed to end the war. Perhaps it might be remembered that Christianity had failed to prevent it, and that surely is the greater sin of the two. It might also be pointed out that Russia would not, could not, have done what it has done in the war had the Russians who broke the strength of Germany officially placed God in the foreground. If keener intelligence has done anything to win the war, then Atheism has certainly played its part in ending a war that was in effect developed from a people who have for many, many centuries been saturated in religious belief.

I may remind the Archbishop that Materialism as such has no connection whatever with religion. "Materialism" carries with it the sense or the significance of a certain scientific generalisation. If the Archbishop will either study the matter for himself or get a friend to study it for him, he will probably learn that it carries a scientific significance that, although Materialism, from sheer religious prejudice, is not loved by all, yet, as Professor Needham says, "Materialism is something which no one can do without." It lies at the base of all scientific enterprise and generalisations. On the other hand, religion is an intrusion

on scientific territory, and when it gets there, has not room to place its feet.

But we cannot restrain from pointing out that if "Materialism" is used in a moral sense, as something that is mean and miserable, then I must remind the Archbishop that it was not a Materialist but one of the greatest Christian teachers who said that "If there be no future life, then let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." Moral feeling could hardly touch a lower level. Yet it is the philosophy of the Archbishop of York. Mind, I do not say that he sinks so low as that text would imply. It is his good fortune that he breathes an atmosphere that has been made less poisonous by the development of human nature and the growth of Freethought. But all the same, the Archbishop appears to have felt quite at home with the Christian Evidence Society.

God and Dr. Little

We do not read "Hansard" regularly, and we are indebted to the "Tribune" for an account of a very fine outburst of religious fanaticism from Dr. Little, Member for County Down. Here it is:—

Dr. Little: "We are living in God's world, and despite everything that has happened the best is yet to be. . . ."

Mr. Cove: "We are living in God's world?"

Dr. Little: "Yes."

Mr. Cove: "What a God."

Dr. Little: "God has triumphed throughout the ages, and He is triumphing again, and I stand by that four-square. What a wonderful God He is. I praise His name."

The Deputy Chairman: "I am afraid we cannot discuss that particular question now."

For an outbreak of fanatical religion this outdoes anything we can remember in the House of Commons. Dr. Little is, of course, fully entitled to be as silly and as fanatical as his religion can make him, but his closing burst outdoes the earlier part:—

"Let us," he said, "as a nation never forget the goodness and mercy of God, and let us walk humbly before Him and carry out the advice of St. Paul to work with both our hands and 'to live soberly, righteously, godly.' That will meet both the spiritual and economic problems of the coming days. . . ."

The "Tribune's" comment is:—

"No one outside Parliament can really believe that such a man as Dr. Little exists."

Unfortunately, men of Dr. Little's type are common, although many of them have a sufficient amount of decency not to air their foolishness in an assembly such as the House of Commons. One can easily judge what would be his attitude in other circumstances towards those who differ from him in religion. Being a "Democracy," of a very peculiar type, we must put up with this religious blather, but we suspect there are plenty of Dr. Little's kind left.

One other point. Dr. Little is not alone with these bursts of religious fervour. In expectation of the end of the European War, our Prime Minister asked all places of worship to hold services when peace is proclaimed and to thank God for our victory. It may be that he hoped it would lessen the crowds in the street, but in that case

why not say so plainly and honestly without asking those who have lost husbands or wives, or children or friends, to thank God for what he has done for *them*? It smacks somewhat of sending thanks to Himmler for not killing or torturing as many as he might have done. If I were foolish enough to thank God, who can for over five years patiently watch the world's disasters, I hope I should have enough common sense not to praise God for having at last got tired of the slaughter of so many of his children.

There is one sentence on which I can, as an Atheist, join hands with Dr. Little. He asked the members to note of his Deity "What a wonderful God He is." We agree. He is. The ancient pagans believed in Gods, but they had a less insulting theory about them. They had gods of war, gods of peace, gods who sent rain, gods who cured and those who killed. They were not stupid enough to say that there was only one God and he did everything. That would have struck them as little short of imbecility. Our godites have not got more intelligible with the passing of the years. They have just got more confused.

The Church and the People

Most people are familiar with a story told of one of our Prime Ministers in the reign of Queen Victoria. Addressing his Cabinet, he said: "Gentlemen, it does not matter very much what lies we tell, but it is essential that we should all tell the same lie." Unfortunately, that is not the rule with Christian leaders. They are not particular whether they contradict each other or not, in fact they flaunt their contradictions as though they were something to be proud of. The Roman Church insists that there are various kinds of hell for non-Catholics to visit. Other Christians say there is only one sort of hell reserved for all who do not attend a particular place of worship, while others, under pressure from the better-minded, insist that there is no hell for anybody; it is just a foolish fancy. We have quoted those who believe that when this war ends the Churches will get renewed strength. On the other hand, here is the Bishop of Worcester, who takes anything but a rosy view of the future so far as the Christian Churches are concerned. He says:—

"There is at present a serious gulf between the Church and the nation, which seems to be widening as the war continues. If we imagine that the end of the fighting will make things easier we are living in a fool's paradise. We shall carry into the peace the evils let loose in the war. The dragon's teeth will only be extracted by new moral and spiritual openings throughout the land."

We do not know how to induce the Bishop to take part in a wager, although there is scriptural authority for casting lots, but we would wager a bound volume of "The Freethinker" that the ground will not be regained.

After all, the Bishop is only saying, in a grand oratorical manner that the Christian Churches can only regain lost ground by recapturing it. We can agree with this, with the proviso that when once people see the real nature of the established Churches, that knowledge remains, the only way in which a recovery might be effected is by the Hitlerite method. Critics have said that if Hitler contented himself with developing Germany alone, his system might have perpetuated itself. But that is a very

short-sighted view. Years ago we pointed out that Nazism was compelled to world war because the greater the contacts made, the larger the circle established, the greater the area contacted, the more the opposition offered. Success meant world control, and world control is impossible.

The Bishop seems to appreciate this, because he says that "many good people do not go to Church because the whole trend of life runs that way." Agreed; but what is that but saying that to succeed the Churches must turn back the clock, and while that may be possible, it is highly improbable. As we have often said, you cannot unpull a man's nose. Once pulled, it remains pulled. You cannot place a wall round believers in religion in such a way as to prevent contact with forces against religion.

The Bishop gives a number of reasons why people do not attend Church—Sunday gardening, cinemas, the language of the Prayer Book, and so forth. None of the phases mentioned really meet the case. The glaring fact is that the Churches are found out, and Lincoln's dictum that while you can fool all the people some of the time, you cannot fool all the people all the time, holds good. The Churches are being found out.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

REASON AND EMOTION

REASON is that quality of human nature which, amongst other things, causes its owner to think with deliberation and judge with exactitude. Emotion (except in a perfect mind—a human impossibility) is its enemy in the sense that it has desires contrary to reason. Between them there exists a constant duel. But above reason and emotion there towers the mind: the two former existing components of the latter; each fighting his duel with the purpose of gaining mastery of the mind. When reason has been quelled, the mind, and therefore the actions of the individual, are governed by emotions. When ruthless reasoning has subjugated emotion, reason takes over. One can beat the other into a state of comparative inactivity, but extermination of either is impossible.

The above, in short, are the fundamental principles upon which the statistics of propaganda are based and adhered to by the most benevolent politicians. The ideal mind of course is one in which these two factors (reason and emotion) are in such proportions as to render unjustifiable (not wrong) conduct an impossibility. But this ideal, like all others, is more of aspiration than realisation.

But apart from the above brief exposition there is a difference of importance yet to be defined. I refer to the persistence of reason as compared with the short but violent period of emotion's supremacy. It is possible to listen to music of aesthetic qualities with profound emotions, but it will be short and sweet; it will be an appeal to the emotions. If one has the knack of remembering music, memory can recall the harmonious order of sound-sensations, and the emotions of the first hearing can be repeated by a second performance, but slowly and surely, the former flush of joy will gradually diminish into mere indifference.

Now reason works a contrary effect. A process of reasoning such as the inconceivability of a first cause or the conception of the universe as self-existent, may be repeated again and again, but the results will always be the same.

It is because of this persistence that reason has been able to influence human conduct. And if reason is to influence conduct, she must influence emotion. Emotion in the mind of the child is the absolute ruler of conduct; in the mind of the undisciplined adult a factor of major importance; and in most persons the work of the emotions bears considerable moment. For the good

of the individual, then, reason must influence emotion and by so doing imbue emotion with its own judiciousness and power of judgment. Having achieved that, the individual is then fit to form his own views and opinions.

It is of interest to note the alliance of emotions and prejudices as opposed to reason. This could not be otherwise. As the emotions stoop to constitute prejudices, their selfish tendencies increase. To speak of emotions as basically physical is only partially correct; entirely mental weaknesses and perversions being too obvious. While again to speak of cultivated or intellectual prejudices is equally absurd; an intellect or a cultivated mind being the results of sound education and sound education tending, if anywhere, towards toleration. Here the induction is, that unless emotions and the appeals to them come under the moderating influence of reason, selfish views, opinions, and later actions, are the results.

In this brief revision which the writer doubts to be more than mere reiteration, it is worth noting the bond between reason and science and the even stronger bond between emotion and religion.

The reason of reason's alliance with science is obvious. The knowledge of science consisting of inferences drawn from the observation of phenomena, and the exacter the science the more indisputable its data, surely here if anywhere the application of reason is of ultimate importance.

But the bond between emotion and religion is of far more complex character. To the appeal to the emotions as it goes on throughout religion may be attributed a singular uniformity. The sanctity which surrounds the teachings of the Nazarene may be found throughout all fields of radical theology. To speak of this sanctity as an appeal to the emotions does not somehow hit the exact mark. Rather is the similarity in the inflexion of tone representative of a strong masochistic tendency.

It is of necessity here to give examples, so listen to the Chinese philosopher when he says: "There are three things which I prize and hold, the first is gentle kindness, the second is economy, and the third is humility." And now again to Plato who says: "And may, being of sound mind, do to others as I would that they should do to me." The parallel, known familiarly as the golden rule, is: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*

Without great effort one could continue giving examples of this kind. But the thing which stands out conspicuously is that the similarity between religions should be so great and yet their unity so feeble. Indeed, to speak of their unity as feeble is putting it mildly. Out of nothing in the world has there resulted so much intolerance, cruelty, and fanaticism as has out of religion. The inquisition, the persecution of the Huguenots, and the constant torture of Protestants by Catholics and Catholics by Protestants, not to mention the war between Islam and Christianity, after all these crimes against humanity, after these examples of brotherly love, religion to-day is fighting harder than ever to regain her old supremacy! Surely man's primary need in the world to come is to emancipate his mind from this accursed yoke, this quelling of reason and distorting of the emotions? Understanding of the human mind will one day sound the knell of religion's death. Until then, I fear, Rousseau's words, yea, even in the twentieth century, will retain a flavour of their original hundred-per-cent truth: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."

S. WOLF.

* "The Miracle of Man," Harold Wheeler.

Speaking for Myself

By Lady (ROBERT) SIMON

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ACID DROPS

It has come before, and it will come again, for stupidity clings to its like. The "Glasgow Evening News," under the heading of "News of the Churches," prints an account of a soldier who was struck with a piece of shrapnel, which would, of course, have killed him had he not been carrying a copy of the Bible. The missile failed to get through it. We are inclined to agree with the "not getting through." There are myriads of people who cannot get through the Bible, but we imagine that a copy of our "Bible Handbook" would have been quite as efficacious.

There may be something spiritual in the fact that in the first batch of followers that Jesus could muster was Ananias, noted as a liar. Taking the history of Christianity, his descendants are always well represented where religion is on the carpet.

One of our religious papers casually remarks that if Jesus came again to earth we should make it a day of praise and worship. We are afraid the day of rejoicing would be rather flat if the "pubs" were all closed. Of course, if it was properly advertised, with "Supported by the Prime Minister" and a few other attractions there might be a good house.

The greatest fact of our time, thinks a pious weekly, is the emergence of Jesus in the thought and life of the world. Our friend adds that, whatever may be said of the decline of organised Christianity, there is a widespread and cumulative interest taken in the ideals incorporated in the gospel of the founder of Christianity. As proof of this, one is invited to note that the great newspapers find that discussions on topics such as "If Christ Came to London," not only interest their readers, but increase circulations. This, we are told, proves that whatever is happening to the Churches, "Jesus is tightening his grip upon the minds of men." Our contemporary appears to be clutching at straws, in default of something more substantial. These pious newspaper discussions are merely stunts pandering to the taste of religious readers. The average man is still indifferent. If that were not the fact, if he had really become interested in religion, he would soon make his way to the churches for first-hand information about Jesus. But we have yet to hear of a marked increase in church attendance. Parsons are still bewailing the falling off of clients, are still racking their brains for schemes to entice the "outsider" into the Lord's praying-sheds.

Commander Campbell assures the public that all the answers given in the B.B.C. Brains Trust are spontaneous. We take it that this revelation will be used as a kind of apology for the commonplace answers that are given.

Commander Campbell also says that 500 people ask each week "Is there a God?" But, he says, "we are not allowed to discuss it." But one has to add the much larger number of questions dealing with religion are tabooed. The B.B.C. will not permit them going before the public. Which proves that one can tell a thumping lie without opening one's mouth.

We were rather taken the other day by reading a sermon. The preacher, after indulging in the usual commonplace nonsense that marks off a sermon from a lecture, assured his hearers that "In God's good time peace will return to the world." That is a very safe prophecy. The world war must stop some day—if only to permit nations to invent new methods of killing, and to do honour to the saying "In times of peace prepare for war." Wars do not begin with declarations of war. That is only a phase. Besides, we—that is anybody—must have some period of "peace" to get ready for a scrap. Wars are made in times of peace. We do not in periods of peace turn swords into ploughshares, but we count how many ploughshares we have that can be turned into swords.

But "In God's good time." That is a fine religious phrase, it is religiously true. God created the universe and manages it. God knows, said Jesus, how many sparrows fall to the ground, and he must surely have known when this world war

began; he cannot have passed unnoticed the world war. And that it is God who makes and unmakes wars—and other things—is patent from the burst of religious zeal by Mr. Churchill—and there is a General Election in the distance—who asked all churches to be open when the European war ceases, and to thank God for giving us victory. So, from the religious point of view, the parson is right; the war will end when "in God's good time." He thinks we have had enough. All that we have to add is that some preacher should explain why, in the name of all that is sensible, did God not prevent the war commencing?

One of our Catholic papers is asked by a reader why there are more miraculous cures in Lourdes than there are in England. We like to give help when we can, so we suggest that there are not so many out-of-the-way places for angels to appear, particularly as there are not so many priests on hand. To produce a miracle the soil must be prepared. People who see miracles must expect them, and angels are very particular in not coming where they are not wanted. Angels will not perform where people have no belief in them. Even Jesus could not perform a miracle where faith was not strong. In such matters we see what we expect to see. We would wage a substantial wager that not even the Pope could stage a miracle in "The Freethinker" Office while we are arranging a copy of the "one and only."

Here is another example of pious tomfoolery. Solemn Mass was offered at the Westminster Cathedral for the victims who suffered in the German concentration camps. In the name of all that is stupid, what is that expected to do? Have they not sufficient faith in their god to trust him to look after his children without having his memory jogged? It is like giving a "tip" to a bully to prevent him ill-treating a child. If we believed in a God, we should really not advertise the fact that he needs his memory jogging in such circumstances. Such a reminder would be an insult to an ordinary human. But gods are like that. They must be prayed to to prevent our being drowned by rain, or die for want of it.

We have from time to time stressed the need for careful examining of statements by Christian authorities when they are in favour of Christianity. Here is an example. Most people will be familiar with St. Paul's statement that when in Athens he saw an inscription "To the unknown God." The idea was to prove that the Greeks were looking for the real God, and were discontented with the Gods at hand. It must be remembered also that the early Christians did not deny the reality of the pagan Gods. All they said was that they were devils. It was not until the 16th century that it was declared that the pagan Gods never existed. But here is the statement that the New Testament gives as stated. Our authority for it is from no less a scholar than Erasmus (16th century): "St. Paul himself minces and mangles some citations. Thus, when the apostle saw at Athens the inscription of an altar, he draws from it an argument for the proof of the Christian religion; but leaving out the sentence, which perhaps if fully recited might have prejudiced his cause, he mentions only the last two words, 'To the Unknown God,' and this, too, not without alteration; for the whole inscription runs thus: 'To the Gods of Asia, Europe and Africa, and to all foreign and unknown Gods.'"

The "Catholic Herald" informs the world that the victories of the Allies were due to the "Grace of God." Of course, we cannot say this is not the case, but we have our doubts. But it does add that the defeat of Germany could not have taken place until we had devised means of landing an army on the Continent—which, being interpreted, means that God will always work miracles at the point at which man can manage things on his own. One would be inclined to wonder as to what kind of fool is it who thanks God for doing something which is done only when it could be done without. Of course, the answer is "a religious fool," or to be more accurate, we should say "fools, and those who in joy of what is done immediately act like fools." Otherwise we should have to say a man like Field Marshal Montgomery does not deserve the honours that are showered down on him.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

London, E.C.4.

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. J. YEWER.—Sorry to hear of your illness, and pleased to have been of service.

S. H. MORTIMER.—Your suggestion is a good one, but it must wait an opportunity.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Arrangements for the N.S.S. Conference, which takes place to-day (May 20) at the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1, are now complete. Members are asked to produce their membership cards and the proceedings will commence at 10.30 a.m. sharp. Lunch can be had at 1.30 p.m. (price 3s.) for members and visitors at Akama's Restaurant, opposite the Holborn Hall. The afternoon session is from 2.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. The evening demonstration will take place in the same building, the chair being taken at 6.30 p.m. by Mr. Chapman Cohen and he will be supported by many speakers. Members and friends will be welcomed at the office of the N.S.S. by the President and Secretary on Saturday, May 19 until 7 p.m.

We have already given some comments on a new book on Thomas Paine. The following letter appeared in the "Liverpool Echo":—

"It seems worthy of note, considering the array of noble things that can be placed to the credit of Thomas Paine, that the reviewer of a book on his life should choose for the most part to emphasise those calumnies by which his enemies savagely sought to besmirch his name. No mention is made of the fact that Paine was imprisoned by the French Revolutionary Committee, of which he was a member, because of his humane effort to save the life of Louis XVI. (and what Christian will say that Paine's 'miraculous' escape from death was not due to the intervention of the Deity, in whom he so ardently believed?)

Neither was it stated that this one-time Foreign Secretary of the American Congress was voted for his great services some thousands of dollars and a home and farm of 277 acres by Congress, the Pennsylvania Assembly and New York State. It is probably true to say that Paine's 'Rights of Man,' 'Common Sense,' and his 'Age of Reason' have done more to loosen the shackles that bind mankind than any other literary product in the whole catalogue of human liberation. The statements that Paine, at the last, expressed a wish to be buried in hallowed ground, and the motives ascribed to Cobbett for recovering his bones, appear to be in the category of half-truths, which are invariably more damaging than lying. If the review of this book is not regarded as expressing a shocking indifference to fairplay and truth, it certainly runs the risk of being considered tendentious and even malicious.—JOHN McMANUS, 84, Holt Road, Liverpool 7."

It may be said that all the notices we have seen in the Press agree that the book is not what it ought to have been.

The outlook must be very black when the "Catholic Herald" (May 4) reports "a very experienced chaplain" saying that the position among the troops is "an extremely small group of fervent believers, but their faith is not very profound. There was a small minority of Atheists, who followed out logically their lack of belief, while the vast majority were liable to fall away at the first difficulty." The situation must be very black indeed when one of our leading Catholic papers publishes the above.

The "Universe" strikes what it hopes will counteract a little the present (religious) situation by publishing the news that the first soldier to cross the Rhine was a Roman Catholic. We have been under the impression that there was more than one soldier engaged in crossing the Rhine, but we must submit to the suggestion that it was a one-man job, and he was a Catholic. Anyway, it does offer further evidence of the truth of the Roman Catholic creed.

It may be taken as evidence of the value of starting life as a good Christian to note that both Hitler and Mussolini were baptised Roman Catholics. If they had both started life as Atheists there would be a great moral to consider. As it is, we must leave the matter in the hands of God. But it is not true that Hitler persecuted Roman Catholics because they were members of that Church. He persecuted them and others because they were not in agreement with his social plans. As a child of the Church, there were religious offences on which the Vatican could have acted, but that would have involved a definite attack on Fascism, and that is part of the Roman Catholic structure.

A few days before he was killed, Mussolini called upon Cardinal Schuster who looked upon his visitor, he told a Reuter correspondent, "as a soul to save." Unfortunately Mussolini was "unrepentant," says the Cardinal. "He was too dejected and far from religious belief." Exactly what this proves is not very clear, but Mussolini's henchman Farinacci, who was summarily executed, received the Sacraments before he died as a fully-believing Catholic. "The Universe" records this with as much pride as it does when a Catholic wins the V.C.

THE GOD HITLER

THE "Sunday Chronicle" recently reported:—

"In a prison camp for Germans, near Oldham, a 23-year-old Nazi was asked to give evidence and to take the oath on the Bible." Then in large print: "This he declined to do, throwing the Bible aside and declaring with emphasis there was only one God, and that was Hitler."

We were not told whether the Court accepted his evidence without the oath of conformity, or asked him to stand down.

He could have been taken at his word and allowed to indulge the oath at his own valuation of and belief in Hitler as the only true God, concluding the "nomy" with the German equivalent of "SwelpmeHitler" in place of the usual "Swelpmegod."

Much as we abominate the cretin mentality of Nazi (and other) fanatics, the dread "SwelpmeHitler" of a Nazi moron would most likely prove a more effective deterrent against falsehood in evidence than the "Swelpmegod" droned in our Law Courts with century-long, wearisome iteration—and, nowadays at least, with religious indifference by the great majority who conform to the procedure.

They are not concerned about any penalties the utterance of the "Swelpme," etc., may incur from God in the event of falsehood, "implied," or direct, so long as they can steer clear of Man's penalties for perjury.

The oath of a "fanatical Nazi" taken on Hitler as his God could be depended on equally as much as that of any other fanatical believer in any other absurdity as his God.

If the Nazi lied in Court under such an oath on Hitler he wouldn't be a "fanatical Nazi." He would be a humbugging hypocrite; like many other "professing" believers of other crazy cults.

A. G.

MIRABEAU AND THE BIBLE

FOR most of us the name of Mirabeau conjures up his magnificent fight for a new France in the early days of the French Revolution—a fight, alas, which came to a premature end when he died just at the moment his country needed him most. Mirabeau, the orator and politician, has left an imperishable name in world history, and perhaps that is how he would have liked posterity to judge him; but in his early days, those he spent in the Bastille, for example, sent there by his bully of a father, he became quite famous as the writer of a number of books written to amuse himself and for a limited public.

They were certainly not books which could be handed around a girl's school, for even in an age which produced the Marquis de Sade, and works like Louvet's "Faublas" or the "Liaisons Dangereuses" of Laclos, Mirabeau was considered far too licentious to be read anywhere except in the strictest privacy. And it is not altogether surprising that one of his books was on the Bible. It is called "Erotika Biblion," written in 1780, and it deals very fully indeed with that side of the "sacred" text which Foote and Ball in their "Bible Handbook" were not allowed to quote. They could only give the references.

Mirabeau had been reading hard while in prison; he read everything he could about the Bible in huge commentaries many of which were written in Latin; and he seems to have enjoyed nothing more than the solemn way in which the patient old theologians dealt with the most scabrous matters. His main object was to discuss the question as to whether the people of antiquity, and particularly the Jews, were more, or less, moral than his own contemporaries. And his discussion of sexual perversions, especially those mentioned so freely in the Bible, was so free that the first printed edition was suppressed by the police who managed to get hold of nearly all the copies. Another edition, which appeared in 1792, after the death of Mirabeau, was also suppressed, though a few copies managed to get smuggled out of the country.

Naturally the book was put on the Index at Rome (in 1794). It was described in a contemporary journal as "a new book, the title alone of which is frightening. Its objective is to prove that in spite of the licentiousness of our own times the ancients were far more corrupt, and the author methodically demonstrates this, beginning with the Jews and establishing his position with citations from their sacred books, by no means very edifying. With this he shows an immense erudition, and paints the pictures of the time he deals with in exceptionally strong colours. . . they are packed with scholarly research and infinitely curious to read. . . In addition, the author, besides knowing dead languages perfectly, knows how to write his own, with that light touch of irony which reminds one of Voltaire. Even when he deals with outrageous things he uses the simplest and most modest expressions. . ."

Mirabeau was a complete unbeliever. In dealing with the Creation story, he attacks the absurdity of the narrative and with fearless criticism he exposes the fabulous nonsense of the theologians setting out gravely to explain the beginnings of the human race on the lines of Genesis.

He had nothing but scorn for "the jugglers, the charlatans, the soothsayers, and the medical and political quacks." The best kind of science and philosophy no doubt made some people realise their credulity, but these were always in a minority.

Soothsayers (prophets) played a prominent part in the Bible history; rarely, if ever at all, do we there meet with a philosopher. How Mirabeau laughed at the crass superstition of the ancient Jews! Just as in Egypt everything seemed to be a god so in Palestine everything had to bow to the authority of its prophets. The Jews had their good and bad prophets, and they managed also to rake up some singular meals for them, and these

made them truly inspired; and they were always ready to admit that other countries also had true and false prophets. But the astonishing progress of science, even in the days of Mirabeau, was enough to make belief at least in evil spirits decline he claimed, and the value of prophets drop to nothing at all.

It is, however, in his examination of the sexual laws in the Bible that Mirabeau allows himself full play, and it is here that I cannot, in these columns, follow him. With biting wit and superb irony he analyses and criticises in a way which makes such a word as blasphemy innocent child's play. Nothing whatever is sacred, neither words, actions, nor anything else. I can quite understand that even in a France, liberated in no small degree from the thralldom of the Church by the French Revolution, such a work as "Erotika Biblion" had to be suppressed. I can find no record of its being translated in English until early this century; and whether any copies have come over here I do not know. But the original French version is (or was before the war) now allowed freely to circulate.

Needless to say, a man with such liberal ideas as Mirabeau championed women as against the Bible, and insisted that with the same education and advantages enjoyed by man, woman would be able to take an equal share in the rights and pleasures of civil life. He himself wrote very freely to his friend, the Marquise de Monnier, and it was in the same spirit she answered; but though a good deal of his other correspondence has been published, most of this side of it has been discreetly omitted. He sent her the MS. of "Erotika Biblion" with the following note:—

"I am sending you to-day a new and rather singular manuscript written by your indefatigable friend. . . It will amuse you as the subject is at least pleasant yet treated with seriousness and without fun—in short, quite decently. Would you really believe that it is possible to conduct researches in the Bible on sexual perversions, etc., make them very readable, and full of quite philosophic ideas. . ."

Whether the Marquise found the book "decently" treated depends on what is meant by "decent." As Guillaume Apollinaire says "Erotika Biblion" is "a monument of impiety." It is indeed blasphemous to the core, it treats the "sacred" book without a particle of reverence, and it has little difficulty in showing that the morals of the peoples of antiquity including those of the Jews were decidedly worse than those of France in 1780.

Here is a specimen of Mirabeau's philosophising on the soul:—

"The determinative part of our being, which differentiates us from brutes, is what we call the soul. Its origin, its nature, its destiny, and the place where it resides are an endless source of problems and opinions. Some annihilate it at death, others separate it from the whole, in order to unite it again by re-blending. Such ideas have been modified infinitely. The Pythagorists only admit this re-blending after transmigrations; the Platonists re-unite the pure souls and purify the others in new bodies. From this springs the two specimens of transformations which some philosophers profess. As to the discussions on the nature of the soul, they have proved vast fields of human folly—folly only intelligible to their own propagandists. Thales claims that the soul moves within itself; Pythagoras that it is a shadow invested with the faculty of moving within itself. Plato defines it as a spiritual substance moving through a harmonious number. Aristotle is in accord. Heraclitus thinks it an effluvium; Pythagoras, something detached from the air; Empedocles, a composition of elements; Democritus, Leucides, and Epicurus, something I do not know of air, or wind, or fire, or a fourth without a name. . . Be that as it may, these pieces of folly, even when ingenious, tell us nothing whatever, and never as much as experimental science properly directed."

"Erotika Biblion" is a very curious book and could only have been written by a Freethinker. It is good to think that Mirabeau did his utmost to put into practice those ideas of Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau which in the French Revolution convulsed the world.

H. CUTNER.

ROSA DARTELISM

"I have long had the suspicion that if, for a single year, the specialists in every field of thought would systematically doubt and challenge every one of their current generalisations, taking nothing for granted, there would be stirring times in the way of new truth."

IN this short but pregnant sentence J. M. Robertson sums up the methods and aims of Freethought, and when our godite friends trot out their ancient cliché about morals being dependent upon religion we almost automatically apply Robertson's principle:—

"Don't take things for granted because the parson tells you so," we say, "but look round upon nature for yourself: note how the females of even the most timid animals will face any enemy and fight to the death to protect their young. How in times of danger the bulls of the herd surround the cows and calves and in their defence boldly meet the attack of the most savage beast of prey. What are these but examples of mother-love, steadfastness, courage and self-sacrifice—morals without religion? Do you, a man, suggest that without the aid of God you would be incapable of conducting yourself with as much decency as a pole cat?"

The answer comes so pat that we are apt to forget just how startling it must appear to one still steeped in his godism, so much so indeed that most of them simply refuse to face the issue for fear of disturbing their cherished superstitions, but for the few bolder spirits even so simple a challenge to their current generalisations does in fact lead to "stirring times in the way of new truth"—for them.

Rosa Dartle you will remember was never quite satisfied with the explanations she got, she always "wanted to know" a little bit more, and her "Is it really though?" rarely failed to touch the spot. A dash of Rosa Dartelism is very stimulating especially in fields of thought where even Freethinkers are prone to take a great deal for granted.

Take the common phenomenon of "interference": two rays of light come together and produce darkness. The explanation we are given is that the trough of one set of waves coincides with the apex of the other so that they cancel out as it were.

But, "Do they really though?" really cancel out? Both rays represent energy, does that cancel out as well? If so what becomes of the conservation of energy—if not where does it go?

If heat be suggested as the solution we are not much forrader. Why the change from one wave length to another? Where does the heat go? Does it continue along the paths of the original rays, along that of the more intense, along neither but up, down or sideways? Like Rosa Dartle I only want to know.

Again, imagine a smooth sheet of ice on a calm day with a curling-stone at "A." We apply energy sufficient to propel it against friction and air-resistance through 30 yards from north to south. Then we apply more energy, this time enough to impel it 40 yards from west to east.

The stone will now have travelled, overcome friction and resistance through a total distance of 70 yards, along the legs of a right-angled triangle, ending up at point "B" exactly 50 yards from "A" along the hypotenuse.

Now, suppose both amounts of energy to have acted simultaneously and apply Mr. Newton's famous parallelogram of forces. The "resultant" will be the diagonal of a rectangle 30 yards by 40 and the stone will end up at point "B" exactly

as before, but this time it is supposed to have travelled along the diagonal, i.e., only 50 yards all told. What has become of the energy which previously was sufficient to overcome friction and resistance through another 20 yards?

Shall we again suggest heat as the solution? But then why should the stone end up hotter when the two forces act simultaneously than when they act consecutively?

On the other hand, in the second case does the stone travel along the diagonal? Does it really though? Or does it move in tiny jerks first north, south, then west, east, in the ratio of 3 to 4 thus covering the full distance of 70 yards whilst giving the appearance of moving along the diagonal?

These may be fool questions—probably they are—but I am quite willing to be called fool in exchange for the information; in any case I shall still have my Rosa Dartelism to thank for providing me with the answers.

W. A. GOURMAND.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway, Bradford).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., a lecture.

Colne (Lancs.).—Wednesday, May 23, 7.20 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Crawshawbooth (Lancs.).—Friday, May 18, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Read (Lancs.).—Thursday, May 24, 7.15 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

National Secular Society

HOLBORN HALL, Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.

A

FREETHOUGHT DEMONSTRATION

WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 20th, 1945

Chairman:

Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN

(President of the National Secular Society, Editor of "The Freethinker")

Speakers:

- J. T. BRIGHTON.
- L. EBURY.
- J. CLAYTON.
- F. J. CORINA.
- R. H. ROSETTI.
- J. V. SHORTT.

C. McCALL.

Doors Open 6 p.m.

Commence 6.30 p.m.

ADMISSION FREE

FISHING

I WAS never a keen fisherman, maybe because I was never a successful one. In my juvenile days, with boots and stockings removed, my brother and I, like Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, did cast our net—handkerchief—into the River Roding and dredged many miraculoſs draughts of fishes—Tiddlers. The dignity of my later teens demanded an angling outfit, and from that time my catches never reached more than an occasional indolent starfish until two years ago when my hook, baited by an experienced old salt, tempted a number of Devonshire mackerel with the result that the consumption of mackerel in the village increased by that number. It was then I began to pick up some of the technique of baiting, and the idea of the right bait for the right fish set me thinking in a certain direction. There were other fish besides those found in water, human fish in large numbers floating about on the dry land waiting to be caught providing the right bait was used.

At one stage of pre-natal life the human embryo has gill clefts and a single-chamber heart like fishes, and if those features are modified at a later stage before birth the fish-like habit of taking the proper bait is carried right through life by a large number of people. Thus successful angling may be had from numerous dry land ponds well stocked with human fish. Very profitable sport can be found in the fortune-telling pond providing the right bait is used. A gipsy get-up, a coloured skin or a crystal globe, is usually selected by the old hands. An angler of small physique will obtain good catches from the racing tipster fishing grounds if his hook is baited with a jockey's outfit. A hefty six-foot angler will succeed better with a smart suit, well-groomed hair and a careless twiddling of one-pound notes.

Fishing in the cure-all-ailments pond needs careful baiting. A shabby suit, cockney accent, and a declaration that "the medical perfeshun" fear his concoction, and that he could "hempty the 'orsepittles in a week" would never secure a bite. In that pond a prosperous appearance is essential although it may be only skin deep as it most likely is, and it must be supported by a running patter in which such words as oxygen, carbon, sodium chloride and alkali are well patronised.

By far the best fishing ground of all is that of religion, and fortunate indeed are those who acquire fishing rights there. Every theological college should display a figure of Jesus coupled with the inscription: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4, 19). For in the pond of religion human fish are trained to be hooked. With Jesus and immortality as ground bait, and the holy line baited with a reversed collar, flat hat and Oxford accent, very profitable catches are assured. And, Oh boy!, what sport—flat fish, white fish, jellyfish, and squirts, swarming around the bait, pushing and jostling each other to take the bite, stirring up the muddy bottom, and feeling so very superior over the blatant little sceptic fish swimming calmly in clean water, fending for themselves, and giving the warning that the clerical bait on the ecclesiastic hook is the first step to the frying pan.

The young inexperienced angler in the curate stage teels his mission is to win the little sceptic fishes' attention, but all the old hands sense danger and agree that extermination of the sceptic fish is the only safeguard for their sport which will continue to thrive so long as the mud can be kept circulating in their patch. There is, however, the haunting fear that the faithful fish may get wise, their number diminish, the decreased fin activity permit the mud to settle, and all except the most stupid fish see through the game. Still, there is Westminster, and the holy anglers have their eyes on hon. members, and hon. members, even those who can see through the game, are too honourable to refuse their help for the perpetuation of the religious pond and of the fishing rights of the clerical anglers.

R. H. ROSETTI.

"QUIRES AND PLACES WHERE THEY SING"

IT is not only the congregations in places of worship that have dwindled in numbers and deteriorated in quality. Choirs also, in a majority of these places, have become moribund.

Undoubtedly the war has had some influence in this, but the dry rot had set in long before.

The dwindled anaemic congregations were the main cause; the choristers felt somewhat like actors playing to a nearly empty house; rather disheartening, unless one is well paid—like the parson.

A glory had passed away. It is long since that we heard the proud claim of "Principal Basso," or "Principal Tenor" in High Doodlum Parish Church flaunted, or "Leading Soprano," or "Leading Contralto" in orthodox places where they sing. The glory has passed away.

Time was when membership of a church or chapel choir was an endorsement of the qualification of a singer, and a thing to be reasonably proud of (as a vocalist).

Now, anyone who can grate his or her "serannel pipes" is welcomed in "Quires and Places where they Sing"; and a grating, scratchy lot most of them now are, if they be judged by the specimens put over by the B.B.C. from various and widely spread "Quires and Places."

Recently recorded in the Press was a wail from a prominent divine—that "crooning is killing choirs." A generation or more has grown up afflicted with the deadly "drone," and they are of no use whatever where the praise of the Lord comes in.

There may be something in this. Anyway, most of the choirs are in an "elderly," "serannel" state. Can anything be done to clear the cobwebs away? Yes!

Now! now! is the time for the churches to wake up!—to take a tip from the flourishing Salvation Army; who firmly avow (via General Booth) that the Devil shan't have monopoly of the best tunes; God must have his share, and they see to it that He gets them by their impressing "popular" tunes into their services. They're not at all fastidious—"Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," for example. Shall the Devil have monopoly in crooning?—What would General Booth have said?—"No! no! perish the thought!" "To his 'abode' with him!"

So must the churches fulminate if they are to attract worshippers (?) Nobody knows what kind of music God favours, or if any at all, for that matter. Let the church choirs and congregations croon the hymns and service pieces. Thus will the choirs, Phoenix-like, rise newborn from their dead ashes. Resurgam! There!

And then, think of the "drawing" power of a Nunc Dim. and Magnificat in C by Irving Berlin; or Te Deums, etc., etc., by the sub-men composers of Tin Pan Alley.

On festival occasions, such as Easter, special efforts by choirs might be made. Instead of sleepily droning the hymn tunes—Swing them! Ye Gods!—the gates of heaven would swing wide in appreciative response.

What an awakening! what a resurgence it would be, compared to the narcotic and graveyard ceremony of swinging the censor!

The parsons would develop a new technique, and the pulpit itself resonate in concordance with the parson's crooning delivery of his sermon. Oh how amiable are Thy dwellings.

Anyone passing a church would be reminded of Tennyson's line, something about the "cooing of doves in immemorable elms." It would be memorable, anyhow!

And there's not much difference between the cooing of doves and the crooning of devotees; mentally, anyhow. And—there are still grains of wheat in bushels of chaff.

ARTHUR GODFREY.