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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

More About Atheism

DURING the first half of the last century there were some lively discussions as to whether man was born an Atheist or was religious by "instinct." "Instinct" is quite a misleading term at its best, and more than any other term, it is responsible for muddled thinking and for the glorification of downright ignorance. As a matter of fact, man is born with very few "instincts," certainly fewer than any other animal, and in the region of the intellect he has no instinct at all. Probably it is the fact of the absence of instinct that gives man so great a capacity for assimilating the experience and knowledge that is stored up in every human group. Long ago Professor William James—an authority in his day and a delightful writer for all who are interested in clarity of thought—suggested that the word "instinct" should be banished from all scientific studies. It stands for nothing, and merely makes the dull still duller. The great Russian scientist, Pavlov, suggested that "reflexes" should take the place of "instincts," and Professor Sherrington comes to the same conclusion. "Reflex" certainly carries with it a meaning that offers some degree of significance. "Instinct" seldom carries with it anything but a pseudo-scientific confession of ignorance.

That man has no "instinct" for religion is quite clear. Statements to the contrary were plausible when people believed, in some form, in the Bible story of creation; but to-day, with man having a million years of existence behind him, and the acceptance of his derivation from an animal group, yet with a cluster of "instincts" fitting him for a partly developed human life, it becomes too absurd for consideration. One might as well accept the Biblical story of the origin of language. And surely the story of how men went to sleep and awakened the next morning each speaking a different language is not more absurd than man appearing on the earth fully acquainted with the rights and wrongs of a social group. Such theories are acceptable to a gathering of priests who see nothing before them but disaster. Anyway, we do know that the arrival of God, or gods, on the human scene is a very late incident in our history. And we also know that however powerful gods are, they are in the long run nothing but birds of passage. They come and go; the history of the gods may be well expressed in those four words. The names of the gods may linger, the habits connected with them may die but slowly, but in the end they surely die. It is not without significance that everywhere, from the most primitive time, from medicine man to Archbishop, priests have loved to cloud themselves in mystery.

Great Atheists

The only indisputable statement that remains is that Atheism is preceded by theism. That is inevitable. No,

there is another indisputable statement. Atheism arises out of knowledge, religion is a product of ignorance and fear. Both these statements, I hold, are beyond successful dispute. In ancient India and ancient China we can count with such great teachers as Confucius and Buddha. Both set the world of gods aside, and even in God-saturated Britain these great teachers have their followers. In ancient Greece and Rome Atheism increased with the growth of knowledge. In Rome, among the names that have come down to us we have Polybius; Virgil, a follower of Epicurus; Pliny, near enough in his Atheism to remark "Whoever God is, if any God exists other than the universe"; Horace was an Eclectic, which might mean anything, but shows no great leaning to Theism; Lucian quite clearly sets all the gods on one side, and Lucretius gave mankind a first attempt at an evolutionary history of the world and left no doubt as to his Atheism. The flourishing school of the stoics were Pantheist, but of a kind that came near to, if not identical with, Atheism.

There is really no doubt as to the Atheism among the Greeks. Xenophanes gave the world the famous sarcasm that "If oxen and horses and lions could draw and paint they would picture their gods in their own image." Anaxagoras had to leave Athens, on account of his unbelief, and Thucydides completely eliminates God from his writings. Protagoras, one of the earliest of the Sophists, said he could not say whether God did or did not exist. Democritus, a pronounced materialist, put all the gods on one side. There is no doubt whatever about the great Euripides, who was plainly an Atheist. He could be none other who could put into one of his greatest plays:—

"And then to say there are gods in the heavens! Nay, there are none there. Think for yourself about the matter and do not be influenced by my words."

Aristippeus, Euhemerus, Epiphaneus, with many others, might be cited. Read the Platonic dialogues (*read them*), don't rest with hearing what someone says about them) and one cannot but be struck by the amount of freethinking that existed, and the extent to which the god idea had declined. Atheism did not begin with Christianity. The Churches merely made the confession of Atheism more awkward. It is also worth bearing in mind as an indication of Greek thought that there is not a single piece of writing from any of the Greek priesthoods that has come down to us. The priesthood has no honoured place in Greek literature. And in Rome there was a common saying that two priests could not meet without winking at each other.

Then came the rule of the Christian Churches, and the world went grey. Bit by bit the ancient greatness crumbled; learning lost its weight and authority. Terrorism, on the lines of German Nazism, was established by the Church. In the name of God, husbands were encouraged to play the spy on their wives, and wives on their husbands, children on parents, friend on friend. As Hitlerism burned and

banned the finest literature of Germany, so the Church did what it could to destroy the literature of the ancient world. It is not for nothing that the period during which the rule of the Christian Church was least questioned is called "The Dark Ages." And it must never be forgotten that when the revival came, after nearly a thousand years of darkness, the impetus did not come from the Church, but from the recovery of Greek and Roman learning, and the influence of Mohammedan culture through the medium of non-Christian Spain. Apart from this source of enlightenment, it is difficult to see from what direction a Renaissance (a rebirth) could have come.

The Advance of Atheism

The awakening of Europe may be dated from about the 12th century. It came via the contact of the Mohammedan civilisation of Spain, to be followed by what is known as the Italian Renaissance. One of the most powerful figures in the earlier Renaissance was Averoes, a gigantic figure and an Atheist. For a time he may be said to have dominated scientific Europe. Renan wrote a very fine "Life of Averoes," but it has never been translated into English. It was probably too strong a meat for this country. But with the Italian Renaissance there came an outburst of Atheism, which penetrated this country to an extent not generally recognised. In this connection I call attention to a recent book, "Atheism in the English Renaissance," by the University of Chicago Press. The author is Mr. G. T. Buckley, and the cost 14s. It is a fine piece of work. The list of English Atheists, all men of scholarship and standing, is very impressive and a lengthy one, too lengthy to be discussed in a single article. But if anyone turns to the theological writings of the 16th and 17th centuries he will see in the religious writings evidence that Atheism was widely spread. As Mr. Buckley says, the warring of the sects paved the way for a denial of religion altogether. The Earl of Essex, in 1576, could cry out "There is nothing but infidelity, Atheism, Atheism, Atheism, no religion." Such men as Marlowe, Cheke, Greene, Nash, Kyd, Walter Raleigh, and many others may be noted. But further evidence is found in the number of sermons, essays, books and pamphlets against Atheism. Hooker was one of the men who devoted some part of his great work, "Ecclesiastical Polity," to a disproof of Atheism, and later came the great work by Cudworth, towards the end of the 17th century. He set out to dispose of Atheism for ever. But he was so faithful in his presentation of the arguments for Atheism that his reply was obviously futile. He was accused—falsely—of being a Christian in the pulpit but an Atheist in his heart. He never finished his book, but it remains a great work on Atheism for those who will read through so large a work with adequate understanding.

But towards the end of the 18th century something happened. Something new came upon the scene. The "People," the common people, were hitherto unnoticed, if not unknown. And Christianity was one of the things that was looked upon to "keep the people in order." I remember that very foolish Bishop of London, Wilmington Ingram, telling a fashionable West-End gathering that they would not live so comfortably in the West were it not for Christianity in the East. That was an unusually sensible thing for a man of his calibre, but we do not believe that he saw the significance of what he said. "Keeping the

people in order" has been looked upon as part of the work of the Churches ever since the "people" began to recognise themselves. So from Atheism being everywhere, Atheism became something that loitered in dark corners with which even men of intelligence would have nothing to do. It reminds one of the story told of David Hume. Dining in France with a number of eminent writers and scientists, Hume remarked that he doubted whether a real Atheist existed. The reply was "You have been dining with ten of them."

And now our new Archbishop of Canterbury insists over and over again that Atheism is advancing rapidly among the people. So far he shows courage, even though it be courage born of despair. But the poor man appears to believe that if sermons are made more attractive and parsons mingle more with the people, and if huge sums of money can be raised to provide all sorts of attractions, the Church may reinstate itself. And that is sheer foolishness. You cannot convert Atheists by comfortable churches and amiable preachers. Neither can you prove there is a God by better preaching. And our principal preachers dare not meet Atheists in open encounter. Religion, real religion, is doomed. It may linger for a time, but for a time only. Even the world-war has helped the recognition of Atheism, for it has broken down the boggy that, until Russia became our Ally in the war, Atheism meant in power all the evil things of which human nature is capable. The war has wiped out Nazism, but has it also got a step nearer to understanding the real quality of human nature? We know that the day of the gods is passing. Time alone will decide when all gods will take their proper place—in a museum.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SECULARISM AND ATHEISM

I.

THE articles on Atheism I wrote a short while back brought me one or two requests to deal with Secularism and its relation to Atheism. The older readers of this journal will of course know well the discussions which used to arise on the subject, and which now seem to have died down; and perhaps to recall some of the points raised will prove of interest to new readers, not so familiar with Freethought problems.

One must go back a little in history—to George Jacob Holyoake, in fact. In his early days, he was a convinced Atheist and indeed served six months in prison for "blasphemy." On this point, I do not think he really changed all his life; but he did not like the term "Atheism" which he declared carried too much obloquy with it ever to be readily assumed even by advanced reformers. At all events, he tried at first to substitute the word "Cosmism" for it but nobody but himself appears to have used it; he eventually coined the word Secularism.

Holyoake came to consider Atheism, quite apart from his other objections to the term, as being too "negative." All that could be gathered from it, he would say, was a denial or a disbelief in the existence of God, and it carried with it no other connotation. Freethinkers who professed only Atheism were, he contended, "negationists." These people attacked the Church, it is true, but they appeared to have nothing, or at least very little, to put in the place of anything they destroyed. What possible connection with "ethics" could there be in mere

Atheism? And after all it was in the realm of ethics that the Freethinker must find his place if he were to be of any use to society.

Nuttall's Dictionary defines a Secularist as "one who, regarding as irrelevant all theories and observances bearing upon the other world and its interests, holds that we ought to confine our attention solely to the immediate problems and duties of this," a definition which I think puts Holyoake's rather laboured explanations as to what he meant by the term when he coined it, very clearly and well.

Holyoake wanted the word "Secularism" to convey something very definite, something far from the speculations of both Theists and Atheists, yet implying the rights and duties of mankind in this world. He says:—

"Though respecting the right of the Atheist and Theist to their theories of the origin of nature, the Secularist regards them as belonging to the debateable ground of speculation. Secularism neither asks nor gives any opinion upon them, confining itself to the entirely independent field of study—the order of the universe. Neither asserting nor denying Theism, or a future life—having no sufficient reason to give if called upon, the fact remains that material influences exist, vast and available for good, as men have the wit and the will to employ them."

Obviously the word was an extension of "secular" which denotes pertaining to this world and ignoring all things "spiritual," and it is an excellent term in every way. Unfortunately Holyoake, rather shrilly, never ceased denouncing the preoccupation of Atheists with things which, he maintained, could not be found by reason only, and insisted that all this was a mere waste of time in a world where every citizen had something noble and inspiring to do to justify his existence. I have always felt that it was a great pity that he himself did not take some of his own moral sentiments and teaching more to heart; it might have saved his later reputation for childish bickerings.

Actually the word "Secularist" appeared for the first time in the "Reasoner," which was then edited by Holyoake, in the number for December, 1851; a week later he used for the first time the word "Secularism," and he insisted that while "secular" is merely descriptive, "Secularism" is "used as a subject."

The term caught on, and resulted in Holyoake having a series of discussions with various clergymen including the Rev. Brewin Grant. Grant was a keen debater with a sharp, but almost invariably nasty, wit and he made himself familiar with the Secularist position much as a barrister prepares his case. He loved to turn the tables on his opponent—"What you says I am, you is" kind of thing—and it is not surprising to find him claiming that the only true Secularism was "Christian Secularism." The two debates he had with Holyoake in 1853 and 1854 are still worth reading though for my own part I have often smiled at the typical Victorian fondness which Holyoake showed for moral maxims put something like this:—

"Our precursory conceptions are to this effect. We believe in relative Truth and discretionary Silence; in Reason as a test; in Science as a power; in Service as a duty; and in Endurance as a Virtue. And in Truth and Silence, in Reason and Science, in Service and Endurance, as we understand them, we seek Light and Law. Power and Repose."

I expect six nights of this sort of declamation would have been enough for even the most strenuous of Freethinkers, but fortunately Grant livened up the proceedings with most un-Christianlike levity, and managed to get a good deal out of Holyoake that that solemn—though indeed excellent—debater would have liked to be kept out of the published debate. He was made to fight for his cause.

Secularism versus Christianity became a good popular subject for debate, and the Freethought platform saw not only Holyoake, but Charles Watts, Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, and a host of other good men fight the good fight against some picked men on the Christian side; and it was soon evident that Holyoake's restrictions as to what Secularism really meant had to undergo some changes. After all, nearly everything one did in life was "secular"—like going to bed or taking a tram—and it was necessary to put such things on one side and insist that there was something more in Secularism than just being secular.

But as time went on he seems to have become more and more convinced that Secularists can be drawn equally as well from believers as unbelievers, and that so long as a man "will consider not only his own interest, but as far as he can, the welfare of the community or the world as his action or example may tell for the good of universal society," and does not call in the aid of God, he is a Secularist.

"Nor is Secularism Atheism," declared Holyoake over and over again. Speculations on the Deity and his existence form no part of Secularism "which exacts no denial of Deity or immortality from members of Secularist societies." In fact, Holyoake, in making this pronouncement, became, for him, just a little facetious, for he pointed out that he had met only two persons who maintained that "the Secular was Atheistic"—the Bishop of Peterborough and Charles Bradlaugh.

Bradlaugh was always something of an *enfant terrible* for the older and perhaps more "respectable" Holyoake, and it was his intervention in the debate on this very point, and his powerful personality, which took Secularism away from the rather timid hands of its founder and gave it the life and energy it has since retained.

H. CUTNER.

"LONG LIFE INDISPOSETH US TO DEATH"

THE author of "De Mortuis—Essays, Historical and Medical," is C. MacLaurin, a foremost member of the Australian medical profession, practising in Sydney.

Some of the essays in "De Mortuis" were first published in 1923 under the title "Post Mortem." There were ten editions of this book. The essays in it have been incorporated with others in "De Mortuis," first published in 1930, with a second edition in 1935. Except in one instance, "Death," Dr. MacLaurin's subjects are the lives of world-figures, presented with special reference to the physical disabilities under which they laboured. Side by side with his deep knowledge Dr. MacLaurin reveals himself as a writer of rare distinction.

Particularly marked in "Death" is the rationalistic tone of the essays generally, and it is for this reason I would like to give the following extracts made here and there from that study:—

"It is no shame to fear death. The fear appears to be a necessary condition of our existence. The shame begins when we allow that fear to influence us in the performance of our duty. But why should we fear death at all?"

"I remember a girl who had sarcoma of the thigh, which recurred after amputation, and I had to send her to a home for the dying. She did not seem very much perturbed. I suppose the proper thing to say would be that she was conscious of her salvation and had nothing to fear; but the truth was that she was a young rake who had committed nearly every crime possible to the female sex, and she died as peacefully and happily as any young member of the Church I ever knew.

"I do not remember to have noticed any of that ecstasy which we are told should attend the dying of the saved. Generally, so far as I have observed, the dying man falls asleep some hours or days before he actually dies, and does not wake again. His

breathing becomes more and more feeble; his heart beats more irregularly and feebly; and finally it does not resume.

"There is no more heroism nor pain nor agony in dying than in falling asleep every night.

"Nor have I ever heard any genuine last words such as we read in books. I doubt if they ever occur. At the actual time of death the man's body is far too busy with its dying for his mind to formulate any ideas.

"It is one of the disservices of the Mediaeval Church to mankind that it popularised and enforced the idea of hell, and that idea has been diligently perpetuated by some narrow-minded sects to this very day. But to a modern man, who with all his faults is a kindly and forgiving creature, hell is unthinkable, and he cannot bring himself to believe that it was actually part of the teaching of Christ. If the New Testament says so, then—thinks the average man—it must be in an interpolation by some mediaeval ecclesiastic whose zeal outran his mercy; and an average modern man is not seriously swayed by any idea of everlasting flames.

"He may even quaintly wonder, if he has studied the known facts of the universe, where either hell or heaven is to be found, considering that they are supposed to have lasted for ever, and to be fated to last as long.

"In time to come the souls, saved and lost, must be of infinite number, if they are not so already; and an infinite number would fill all available space and spill over for an infinite distance, leaving no room for flames, or brimstone, or harps, or golden cities. Perhaps it may not be beyond Almighty Power to solve this difficulty; but it is a very real one to the average thoughtful man. When we begin to realise infinity—to realise that every one of the millions of known suns must each last for millions of years, after which the whole process must begin again, endure as long, and so on ad infinitum—the thing becomes simply inconceivable. The mind staggers, and takes refuge in agnosticism, which is not cured by the scoffing of clergymen whom one suspects of not viewing things from a modern standpoint.

"Nor is the problem of God himself any more easy of solution, unless we are prepared to see Him everywhere, in every cell and tiny bacterium.

"Hell is a concrete attempt at Divine punishment. Punishment for what? For disobeying the commandments of God? How are we to know what God really commanded? And how are we to weigh the relative effects of temptation and powers of resistance upon any given man? How are we to say that an action which in one man may be desperately wicked may not be positively virtuous in another? It is a commonplace that virtue changes with latitude, and that we find 'the crimes of Clapham chaste in Martaban.'

"And what is sin?

"Is there any real evidence as to what the commandments of God really are? Modern psychology seems to hold that virtue and vice are simply phases of the herd-complex of normal man, and have been evolved by the herd during countless generations as the best method of perpetuating the human species. No individual man made his own herd-complex, by which he is so enormously swayed; and no individual man made his own sex-complex, or his ego-complex, or anything that is his.

"How can he be held responsible for his actions by a God who made him the subject of such frightful temptations and gave him such feeble powers of resistance?

"Nor has there ever been any proof that there can be consciousness without living nervous matter. One turns to the spiritualistic evidence offered by Myers, Conan Doyle, Oliver Lodge, and other observers; but after carefully studying their reports one feels inclined to agree with Huxley that spiritualism has merely added a new terror to death, for according to the spiritualists, death appears to transform men into idiots who on earth were known to be able and clever, and the marvel is—not

the miracles which they report—but that clever men should be found to believe them.

"But it is difficult to find any really rational cause for the desire to live longer, unless Sir Thomas Browne is right in thinking that the long habit of living indisposeth us for dying—

"After all, what does it really matter whether we die to-morrow or live twenty more years? In another century it will be all the same. At most we but postpone dissolution. Death has to come sooner or later; and whatever we believe of our life beyond the grave is not likely to make any difference. We were not consulted as to whether we were to be born, nor as to the parts and capabilities which were to be allotted to us, and it is exceedingly unlikely that our wishes will be taken into consideration as regards our eternal disposition. We can do no more when we come to die than take an involuntary leap into the dark like innumerable living creatures before us, and—conscious of having done our duty to the best that lay in us—hope for the best.

"The idea of Heaven is simply an idea that the atrocious injustice and unhappiness of life in this world must be balanced by equally great happiness in the world to come.

"But is there any evidence to favour such a belief? Is there any evidence throughout Nature that the spirit of justice is anything but a dream of man himself which is never to be fulfilled? We do not like to speak of 'death,' but prefer rather to avoid the hated term by some journalistic periphrasis, such as 'solved the great enigma.' But is there any enigma? Or are we going to solve it? Is it not more likely that our protoplasm is destined to become dissolved into its primordial electrons, and ultimately to be lost in the general ocean of ether, and that when we die we shall solve no enigma, because there is no enigma to solve?

"To sum up, death probably does not hurt nearly so much as the ordinary sufferings which are the lot of everybody in living; the act of death is probably no more terrible than 'our nightly falling asleep; and probably the condition of everlasting rest is what Fate has in store for us, and we can face it bravely without flinching when the time comes.

"But whether we flinch or not will not matter. We have to die all the same, and we shall be less likely to flinch if we can feel that we have tried to do our duty. And what are we to say of a man who has seen his duty, and urgently longed to perform it, but has failed because God has not given him sufficient strength? If there is any enigma at all, it lies in the frustrated longings and bitter disappointment of that man.

"And, probably, Huxley was not far wrong when he said: 'I have no faith, very little hope, and as much charity as I can afford.' It is amazing that there are some people in the world to-day who look upon a man who professes these merciful sentiments as a miscreant doomed to eternal flames because he will not profess to believe in their own particular form of religion. They think they have answered him when they proclaim that his creed is sterile!"

Such, then, are some of the conclusions and sentiments expressed by Dr. MacLaurin—sentiments and conclusions which, because of the wide circulation of his books, must provide stimulating thought for many whose reading has hitherto been of a more or less conventional character.

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

NO OTHER WORLD

There is no Other World; there never was anything that man has meant by Other World; neither spirit nor mystical behind the veil. There is only matter, which is the infinite; which is space, which is eternity; which we are.

JOHN DAVIDSON.

THE GOD OF THE S.G.M.

THE S.G.M. you must know is the Scripture Gift Mission of Eccleston Hall, Victoria, S.W.1, and the following portrait of its god is taken entirely from its tract No. 3302/44 entitled "Four things that God wants you to know" which was pushed through my letter box a few Sundays ago.

The "four things"—with italics either by god himself or by his confidant the S.G.M.—are:—

1. That I *need* to be saved.
2. That I *cannot* save myself.
3. That the Lord Jesus has *provided* for my salvation.
4. That he is *able* to *save* and to *keep*.

Under the heading "Therefore" a fifth page gives the conclusions I am supposed to draw from the foregoing, i.e.:—

"That I must *repent*, *believe*, and *confess*."

What like, then is the god who wants me to know all this? Let us see what the tract tells us:—

First: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."—Isaiah lxiv., 6.

"For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."—James ii., 10.

However: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."—2 Peter ii., 9.

So, if on our own initiative we resist temptation, contrive to be honest, and live honourable lives—all is filth in the eyes of this god and we shall be reserved for punishment. Moreover, if we tell the smallest of white lies we shall also be deemed guilty of false witness, fornication, theft, robbery and murder, and presumably be punished accordingly.

On the other hand he who grovels enough will be sheltered from temptation and duly rewarded for being kept respectable in spite of himself.

Ergo: This god is an unjust god.

Again: "Jesus sayeth unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life: *no man* cometh unto the Father but by Me."—John xiv., 6.

Yet: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house*."—Acts xvi., 31.

Thus—either some *can* come to the father otherwise than "by me" or else "my house" cannot be saved because "I" believe.

Ergo: This god tells lies or (if this be the correct expression for a Trinity) "one of him" does.

Lastly: "For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."—1 Peter iii., 18.

In other words the spectacle of the suffering of an innocent person is so pleasing to this god that he accepts it as payment for other people's crimes.

Ergo: He is cruel, a sadist and . . . but enough . . . on the showing of the S.G.M. itself we are asked to worship a being who openly proclaims his own injustice, lies to his creatures, and gloats over the sufferings of the innocent.

Could we suggest a state of degradation more abject than to revere a vile being for his very vileness? The savage propitiates his jujū but only to ward off some injury he fears—he does not profess to love him for his very ferocity.

It is easy to say "Let the S.G.M. stick to its precious god, and welcome," but what of those, grown men and women, capable of distributing such trash?

We can only surmise that the minds they must once have had have been so well and truly blitzed by the parsonry in youth that they have never recovered.

The fact that such exist should make every Freethinker realise how urgent it is that he should pull his full weight in the struggle against the religious provisions of the new Education Act, for now that the priests and parsons have obtained the right of entry into the schools and can impose religious tests on teachers, we can expect even worse things. Voltaire's slogan is still very much to the purpose so "En avant—écrasons l'infâme."

W. A. GOURMAND.

NOTE: The abbreviation "écr. l'inf." is often rendered "Ecrasez l'infâme" but Voltaire would not willingly have left himself out of the noble work. The right word is thus "Ecrasons" = "Let us crush," etc.

AN AIRBORNE ATHEIST

SOME time ago, while glancing through a copy of "The Readers' Digest," I came upon an article entitled "There are no Atheists in the Skies." Now I myself am an Atheist and my work takes me into the skies, so I wrote to the editor of the magazine and told him that there was at least one Atheist up aloft!

The author of this article gave as "evidence" of God's care for airmen some stories of wonderful escapes from crashed or damaged aircraft. In other words, the same old miracle stories. What the author did not attempt to explain was the fact that in the great majority of plane crashes miracles are sadly lacking.

Why is this so? Are only the "godly" airmen saved and the sinners left to their fate in burning or bullet-riddled aircraft? There is not one scrap of evidence to show that airmen "miraculously" saved are any better than those who perished; indeed to advance this suggestion is insulting to the many very gallant men of the Royal Air Force who have been killed during the war.

Then are the "miraculous escape" candidates picked at random from the righteous and the unrighteous? Surely a slipshod manner of working magic! And in any case, why should a god who sees unmoved the horrors of modern war stir a finger to save one single life? Or if this god is moved to influence the destiny of one man, why does he not put forward a little more effort and by means of a bigger and better miracle stop the whole insane business of war?

The answer is obvious. These so-called "miraculous" escapes have a perfectly logical explanation and are due to quite natural causes. Had the circumstances surrounding the incidents been changed, the outcome would have been different; so much for "divine" interference.

The airman knows well that survival depends, not on "miracles" but on the perfect functioning of his aircraft and his control over it and over himself. That is why he keeps himself physically fit and mentally alert and checks and re-checks his equipment before leaving the ground.

During the Battle of Britain we had hymn-tunes and Hurricanes, Sunday-schools and Spitfires—which of these were the decisive factors in the "miraculous" defeat of the Luftwaffe? And as a prelude to victory, Germany's industries were smashed, not by bible-thumping but by bombing.

We who have survived to fashion the World of To-morrow will build on a foundation of rational fact instead of religious superstition, because we know that by so doing we shall ensure that what we build will stand the tests of Time and Reason—those acid tests that have bitten so deeply into the priestly falsehoods of "divine revelations and truths."

Sgt. G. L. BETT.

ACID DROPS

A notice in the "Portsmouth Diocesan News," asks whether people in Portsmouth would give their bishop their coupons to buy a new Cope and Mitre that he may use when paying visits. We quite appreciate the importance of getting the bishop dressed in a full pantomimic dress, but we believe it is illegal to pass coupons to any but members of the family. Of course, if the bishop goes about in ordinary clothes he will not be nearly so impressive as he would be dressed up in a distinctive harlequin robe. It is related that when the father of Jesus, who was a carpenter, found a plank too small, Joseph took hold of one end and Jesus the other and pulled the plank to the desired size. But these things occurred a long while ago.

Archbishop Griffin (R.C.) gives to the world the information that "The Future of England Depends upon Christian Marriage." In that case the outlook is very bad indeed; for it happens that there is no such thing as a Christian marriage in this country, and there has not been for some considerable time. Religious ceremonies may accompany the marriage, but that is entirely an "extra" with no legal bearing on the marriage. The confusion among people and the deliberate lying on the part of the priesthood is due (first) to the fact that any kind of "extra" may accompany the legal "secular" ceremony, and (second) that the parson must hold a permit from the "secular" of the same quality as that held outside the Church. There is no such thing in English law as a religious marriage. Of course that will not prevent priests and parsons from fathering the lie that a genuinely religious marriage is a legal one.

Part of the plan adopted by the clergy is to get weekly sermonettes in the newspapers. But sometimes they are not fortunate in their quotation from the Bible. For example, in the "Wallasey News" there recently appeared a sermonette from a local minister, likening the victory over the Germans to God's bringing a victory of his people over the King of Canaan. In a succeeding issue there appeared a telling letter from Mr. J. W. Pointer, who points out that the way God managed things is not very flattering to the deity. Here is the way God set to work. Thus:—

"And Jael went out to Sisera and said to him 'turn in my Lord and fear not' . . . Then Jael, wife of Heber, took a nail and a hammer and smote the nail into his temple, for he was fast asleep and weary, so he died. And for that she was called Blessed above women."

Mr. Pointer asks whether that is a method that reflects credit on God. We do not expect that the parson will reply.

When we read the Bible, not exactly for the first time, but when we read it for understanding, the first general feeling is that there were so many things, now commonplaces, that God did not know. Here are a few items. He did not know how old mankind was. He was not aware that man began life only a little different from the animals around him. He did not know how the different languages came into existence. He knew nothing of the Hindoo or the Chinese civilisations. He did not know the shape of the earth or the constitution of the heavens. How much he did not know would fill a volume.

On the other hand, he *did* know a great many more things than we know. He knew that a man could be made out of dust, and a woman out of a rib. He knew that bears could be ordered to devour children. He knew that certain diseases could be cured by sprinkling blood on the sufferer. He knew that at the word of command the sea could be rolled back. He knew that children could be born without any earthly parent. He did not know much about the inner crust of the earth, but he was certain that there was a hell there where to send those who disobeyed him. Yes, a very, very big volume could be written on what God did and did not know.

The alarm of the clergy as a body concerning the outlook of Christianity is widely spread. The situation gets "wusser and wusser." Here is the Bishop of Ely, who says that for many

years he has been disturbed and baffled by the indifference of many to the claims of our religion. He says that the "attitude of many . . . has been succinctly described by the farmer who told his parson, 'Your hobby's Church, mine's pigs.'" Well, we suppose the farmer would justify his choice on the ground that he can always see a parson whenever he wishes, but pigs must have attention and are of the greater importance.

A local vicar, writing in the "Smethwick Telegraph," describes Smethwick as "a place of dirt, smoke and noise." We find no great fault in this description, for nothing can for dirt and dinginess beat some of our manufacturing towns. They are dreary, ugly and dirty; but they were never intended to be centres of beauty. They were planned places for making money: sites for factories for the manufacture of goods mainly in the interests of those who owned the land and fattened thereon. Some of the most beautiful parts of England were trampled on and ruined; the offerings to the god Mammon. They were the times when women worked down in the pits; when men were sent to prison if two of them asked together for a rise of wages from twelve to fourteen shillings a week. It was also when there were special outbreaks of Christian campaigning. And let it be counted to the owners of slums and the bosses of the fourteen-hours-a-day workers that great interest was taken in the Christianising of the people.

To-day the situation has changed. The working people are better paid, which has properly created an appetite for wanting still more. The working man is better educated than he was, which may, of course, lift him, as many trained in public schools, to become a Minister of State. Above all, the standing of the clergy has changed for the best if one considers the repudiation of doctrines by which the clergy swore, and for the worst if they stick to doctrines that belong to the Dark Ages. The clergy have lost their ability to keep the people—poor people—in order. Christian doctrines are exploded by science and by men in public positions who are bold enough to set religion altogether on one side. So they find it advisable to forget their past in order to realise a future. The places of "dirt, smoke and noise"—created without opposition from the clergy—are preaching a kind of bastard Socialism in the hope that their past might be forgotten. It could hardly be forgiven.

It is certain that there are large numbers of men and women in Germany who did not believe in Hitler and his religion. The hundreds of thousands who were sent to the concentration camps and tortured and murdered there proves this to be the case. It might also be further proved by the number of prominent English who gave their blessings to both Mussolini and Hitler with the tender wish that they would not be too hard on those who did not think so highly of the Fascist rule as they did. But now we find that another man who was confined—not tortured—in Hitler's dens has been released. Now comes the case of Pastor Niemoller, and he somewhat astonishes many that he now declares that he had no objection to Hitlerism, but it interfered with his Church. Without, he would have been quite a good Hitlerite.

Archbishop Groeber, of Freiburg, has now denounced Nazism in a Vatican radio speech, making it quite clear that Germany was divided into camps—Nazis and Christians. He admitted, however, that general culture also would have been destroyed by the Nazis had they won the war. Needless to say, he blamed "anti-Christianity" for everything, apportioning most of the blame, for example, to Nietzsche, though he took good care not to point out that Hitler and all his gang never made a speech without dragging God into it on their side, and that they would have been horrified to have been classed with such an out-and-out opponent of Christianity as Nietzsche. The Archbishop wants the Allies to help the German people to regain their soul; so to speak, in Christianity. But apart from a number of "intellectuals," were not the German people always classed as Christians—and what good did it for them?

The first lesson in decency that a missionary teaches "uncivilised" natives is to force them to wear clothes—after our fashion. The fact that the native had no indecent thoughts until the missionary came is generally overlooked.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. K. LODGE.—Thanks for pamphlet. We are keeping it for use in the near future. The Lord's Day Observance Society gets steadily more impudent and more foolish with the passing of the days.

H. H. PREECE and A. R. WILLIAMS.—Thanks. Shall appear as early as possible.

S. WARNER.—We do not question the importance of either economics or politics. But our work, and the work of the "Freethinker" lies in a different field.

C. T. SMITHERS.—There is no prospect of our reprinting "The Bible Handbook" until the paper control is more generous than at present.

T. D. SMITH.—Thanks, will be useful.

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

The General Secretary N.S.S. will leave for a short vacation on July 20 and until his return only matters of urgent importance will be dealt with. All communications received up to the morning of July 20 will receive immediate attention.

How many people are there who remember the stories of the brutality to children when the Bolshevik reign began in Russia? The Churches roared their indignation, the ordinary people, who read little that was solid and understood less—even Churchill—wallowed in the horrors of Russia. But now Mrs. Churchill has just returned from Russia; she has been everywhere and seen much. She has written a small pamphlet on certain aspects of things she saw. We hope to deal with that pamphlet when it comes to hand, but for the moment we take an excerpt, as given in the "Sunday Observer," dealing with children in Russia. Thus it runs:—

"Wherever she went she mingled with Russian children, and the care and affection lavished on them impressed her more than anything else. There is some quality in the traditional treatment of children in Russia that seems to instil obedience and good manners without fear—at least until the age of seven or eight. I believe that no child is ever beaten in Russia."

Great Scott!—and we still have heaps of teachers who feel they cannot get on without a cane, and we have a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. What have the Churches to say?

When the Education Bill was placed before the public we said that the main aim of the Bill was to reinstate the clergy in the schools. There have been many indications since the Bill became an Act that we were not far from the truth. At first the Act did not permit "Clerks in Holy Orders" to be teachers in State schools. Now the Act has been modified to the extent of permitting men in Holy Orders to also be in the schools as

teachers. This means that ordained clergymen will not merely be in the schools as teachers, they will also be useful instruments to guard against, first, the introduction by a teacher of any truth against Christianity, and secondly to have so many watchdogs to see that the religious lessons are "properly" given, and that no truth about religion ever reaches the pupils. Of course, as we have so often said, this might have been prevented by the teachers themselves. But with education, as other matters, the principal concern of the men and women employed is to secure a comfortable, well-paid job. And religion in the schools nowadays means definitely on one side the rejection of the better type of teacher. We must never forget that the aim of the religious part of the Act was, as the Archbishop of Canterbury said, to saturate every lesson with religion.

According to the "Universe," out of a hundred letters seventy-five have voted in favour of having the Church ceremonies in Latin. We wonder how many of that seventy-five really understand Latin. We are not likely to get an answer. Meanwhile, we agree with the seventy-five. A doctrine that cannot be made reasonable is safest when expressed in a dead language which few understand. After all, people are saved by believing. How many would be saved by understanding?

How difficult it is for a Roman Catholic paper to avoid suggesting a lie when a plain statement of truth would put religion in the background. For example, someone asks the Editor of the "Universe" the question whether a registry marriage is always invalid. The reply given is that it is not. But the whole truth is that no marriage in this country is valid unless a licence is held from the Secular State. Whether the licence is held by a priest or by a layman makes no difference. It is the secular marriage, and that alone, that is valid.

If you shut your eyes and keep your mind fixed upon a statue of the Virgin Mary nursing a baby Jesus, while shutting out all mundane suggestions, you will be well on the way to salvation. But even then questions suggest themselves, and to satisfy them the "Universe" explains in its June 22 issue that (1) Our Lord derived the matter which formed his sacred body from "Our Lady." (2) This matter was not created by the Holy Ghost, "for that would have destroyed Mary's true and real motherhood." (3) Christ's "human soul came into existence at the moment of conception." (4) Body and soul were simultaneously conceived through the third person of the Trinity. (5) "Jesus was born in such a way that Mary remained perpetually a virgin." That seems to settle the matter.

We do not suppose for a moment that the "Sunday Times" will agree with our interpretation of the opening words of a leading article which appeared in a recent issue. It runs thus:—

"The world has largely robbed the Church of her heritage—dominion over the souls of men. But is there any reason why the Church should not employ some at least of the world's weapons to win that heritage back?"

No, there is no reason why the Churches should not attempt to bring people back to religion. It is indeed a case of "I can call spirits from the vasty deep," and the reply that Shakespeare puts in the mouth of his character, "Why, so can I. But will they come?"

We have no doubt whatever that a number of loose-minded people can be attracted to attend a kind of superior musical performance, or to listen to addresses that deal with secular matters, and leave religion—real religion—in the background. But what the Churches have to do, if they have any trace of honesty left, is to bring back belief in cardinal religious doctrines. How can the Church get people to forget all they know of the origins of religious doctrines? What is there to be told to the people concerning better housing conditions, a larger share for all in the riches of a country? And how can a wrong theology take the place of the growing conviction that man alone has the power to make life better than it is? This simply cannot be done. Religion is slowly dying, and not all the power of the united Churches can rob the world of the growing belief that the destiny of man rests with man.

MY LADY GASOLINE

WRITING in the "News Chronicle" recently, Robert Lynd, in an essay entitled "In Praise of Petrol," remarked:—

"It is surprising that the philosophers who write about liberty never mention the contribution that petrol has made to it . . . Petrol . . . has been one of the great liberators of modern life. It has given the ordinary man such freedom of movement as he has never known before."

With which, generally, I can agree. But even if "philosophers who write about liberty" have overlooked the contribution of petrol to freedom, I, as a Freethinker, claim to have anticipated Mr. Lynd, as I have for some time been stressing this very point in Freethought speeches. The difference is that while Mr. Lynd is content to praise the petrol and leave it at that, I have developed the argument in an endeavour to explain the position more fully. As a petrol addict myself I can well understand Mr. Lynd's devotional praise of the Goddess Gasoline; but as an Atheist I prefer to explain the development of the goddess's popularity in terms of history, for thereby we get a better understanding of the question and at the same time give recognition to men and women whose work in bygone days made possible that present freedom which is so much appreciated by Mr. Lynd.

Mr. Lynd will probably agree that the greatest "contribution of petrol to freedom" has taken place during the week-ends, in the leisure time of the people; whether he will agree with the next point I do not know. That point is, that the freeing of the people from what was formerly a condition of immobilisation in their scanty leisure time provides an effective answer to the rather stupid question: "If you take away religion what will you put in its place?"

During the past fifty years or so people have been solving for themselves what they will have in place of religion, and the process began long before the era of popular motoring. Before the century dawned, in 1900, the social conditions of the masses were such that the weekly round of life for most people consisted of work and bed, and at the week-ends the choice of church or pub, or often a combination of both forms of week-end dope.

But roughly at the turn of the century the age of the bicycle as a plaything had begun. The safety machine had evolved as a practical and economical means of pleasurable (and utility) transport, having shed the clumsy forms and unscientific principles of its ancestral prototypes. The new mode was eagerly taken up by people in hundreds of thousands, and for the first time the ordinary people began to see and learn something of the land which they had so often been told was theirs when it had to be "fought for," but about which they knew little.

This proved far more interesting, and a much healthier pastime, than vegetating on Sundays in the sanctimonious atmosphere of stuffy churches, for, despite the inevitable outcry against this new instrument of immorality (anything is immoral which strikes at the Christian monopoly of Sunday) increasing numbers continued to enjoy a new conception of freedom; week-end freedom from the bondage of religion, and a change from the industrial slavery of the week-days. It may sound a little far-fetched to argue that so harmless an instrument as the bicycle did so much harm to religion, and so much good in freeing people from the churches, but this tendency is within my own recollection, for in my boyhood days and onward, I saw it operating especially in the industrial north, where even the hilly and mountainous districts could not diminish enthusiasm for the new-found freedom, but seemed rather to add to it the peculiar zest of worth-while effort.

As the century went on the era of cheap cycling developed into the era of cheap motoring, the char-a-banc, that early atrocity of internal combustion, opening up Britain to an even

larger circle who had found "something to put in its place." Subsequent developments in the cheapening of private motoring, and the advent of the ordinary man's Rolls Royce—the modern motor coach—accelerated the growth of the new outlook, and all this was coupled with the nation-wide spread of hiking, rambling, youth movements, hostels, week-end camping, and caravanning, etc., the whole vast movement spelling the ultimate dissolution of the churches as a power over the people.

The practising of religion melted away in the warmer and more human atmosphere of these new national habits, which gave the common people a form of happiness and pleasure long enjoyed by their "betters" but hitherto denied to themselves. To-day there remains little of the former deadening religious solidity, though there are widespread traces of its misty mental hangover, waiting to be blown away by the coming of intellectual breezes for which there will be more scope when the first glamour of the new freedom wears off, and people settle to a more cultured appreciation of their broader opportunities.

So on the whole we may agree with Mr. Lynd's generalisation that petrol has contributed to the liberty of the people. But there is a further point. These changing habits of the people, and the breakaway from the churches, would never have been possible without another factor. That other factor was the work of the Freethinkers of the last century in breaking down the Sabbatarian barriers. Fifty years ago, and earlier, it was a much more dreadful thing than it is to-day to spend Sunday in pleasurable fashion. Even to laugh on the "Sawbath" was a crime in certain places, and when some of the churches boast to-day of their broadmindedness in holding socials and dances on Sundays let us always bear in mind that their broadmindedness is usually no more than a despairing effort to recapture people from their secular pursuits.

But for the work of our predecessors in the Freethought movement in breaking down the tough barriers of religious Sabbatarian bigotry, even the bicycle, the char-a-banc, the motor coach, and all the other vehicles of the new freedom, would have been useless, for the terrible Victorian weapon of "respectability" would have still enforced attendance at church and a grovelling respect for Christianity's primitive and antiquated nonsense, as it still does in such matters as christenings, weddings, and funerals, though to an ever-decreasing degree.

As usual, then, we can trace the beginnings of our latest liberty, the liberty to enjoy the benefits of petrol and the consequent broader form of life, to the work of Freethought pioneers, who had to break the bigots' barriers before the wheels could turn for pleasure.

Perhaps it is too much to ask that Mr. Lynd should have pointed out this fact in what, after all, was primarily a joyful essay recording the return of My Lady Gasoline, one of his, and one of my, beloved mistresses, our other similar devotion being to My Lady Nicotine. But in "The Freethinker" at least we can be thorough as well as joyful, and give due praise to those stalwart pioneers who made our petroleum peregrinations possible.

F. J. CORINA.

THE HAND OF GOD

"It is said that the Lord hath manifestly prospered our armies. This opens the question, whether, when our hands are strengthened to make great slaughter of our enemies, it be absolutely and demonstratively certain that this might is added to us from above, or whether some Potentate from an opposite quarter may not have a finger in it, as there are few pies into which his meddling digits are not thrust."—From the "Biglow Papers," by James Russell Lowell.

AS OTHERS SEE US

[THE following was sent to us as a mere letter, but we think it will be sufficiently interesting to readers to justify giving it space as an article.—EDITOR.]

Whilst we do right to-day in taking no notice of miracles, it must be placed upon record, however, that "something of the sort" took place to-day in Newcastle, because I was actually able to purchase the current issue of the "Freethinker" off the counter of a newsagent, whom I noticed, however, gave me a very curious stare and made perfectly sure that the brassy three-penny piece I handed to him was legal currency. He also seemed somewhat on pinpricks with himself because I lingered near the door for a few seconds—which made me wonder if he thought I was someone who could not be trusted! Very strange, was it not?

However, I rambled up the street reading the first column with avidity, very pleased that I had succeeded in my quest, as I have been up to now quite unsuccessful in obtaining a copy each week, despite agitated requests to local and other news-agents to book an order for it.

Whilst I am about it, permit me to pay a very sincere and great tribute to your contributor, Leonard Hawkes, for his most interesting article in a recent issue. I was misled at first into thinking that you have obtained the services of some reputable Indian man of letters, until I realised that the cognomen was in reality a transposition anagram.

Your equally veiled contributor "S. H." (does he live in or near Baker Street?) is a go-getter, to whom I also wish to pay tribute. I well recall reading his curious and pungent criticism on that booklet "Britain without God" which he riddles so effectively. I was most intrigued by his account of the circumstances under which he picked up his copy in some North country sixpenny box, and very strangely enough, only a few days before I set eyes on his article I, too, had been in Sunderland, and visiting a bookstall in the covered market, I dug out of the "4d. box" an identical copy of the booklet in question. I soon dived headlong into it, and before long I was of the unanimous opinion that the bigoted journalist who had written the chapters thereof had succeeded only in creating a tremendous advertisement for Secularism, for he "exposed" the terrific extent of the weapons which organised Freethought were using to combat the onslaught of sound (?) religion. That booklet is a landmark, and every Freethinker should obtain a copy if possible. The arguments used in the theme of the book are only in accord with the bleatings of a decadent group of thought protecting religion, and if he, the writer, thinks seriously that intelligent readers will be gulled with his pious platitudes, it is time he learn different.

To "S. H." too, I must acknowledge a most interesting "criticism" of Horobin's Penguin Special upon Politics. This booklet also should be in the hands of every Freethinker without question, because the Tory-Church brigade are to be regarded as Public Enemies No. 1, and until they are routed, lock, stock and barrel, we shall be regimented into being slaves in what we know is not a land of freedom, confirmed by the weekly message published by John Hargrave.

Finally, Mr. Editor, I send you my greetings and good wishes, and regret I am not able to come through to London to hear you speak on the platform, but should you ever again be able to journey North to Newcastle we shall all look out to meet and greet you. To you, therefore, and the rest of the able group of valiant reformers under your banner, I give my warmest thanks for services rendered, and I look eagerly forward to hearing more from you in your columns, the more pungently the better.

E. H. SIMPSON.

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTERY

"WE cannot describe the reality revealed in mystical contemplation," says Joad. Well, we may mistrust our Joads, but we cannot doubt the integrity of our Havelock Ellises. Havelock Ellis made the same assertion. Such a remark from one so conversant with modern psychology would suggest that the mystery really is a mystery. The assumption that the mystery is a mystery gives rise to the further assumption that it can only be dealt with by introspection and metaphysics. Yet it is precisely the use of such methods which leads to such hopeless inconsistency, for instance, Havelock Ellis's conclusion that "a scientist is a true mystic if he keeps his mysticism out of his science, and a mystic is a true scientist if he keeps his science out of his mysticism."

What is really needed is a little "trained and organised common sense." Why should we attempt to describe the reality revealed in mystical contemplation? We do not bother to describe the reality revealed in D.T.S. Are we afraid that the use of the scientific method would show that the mystery is not so mysterious after all? Are we afraid of upsetting the susceptibilities of our religious friends? Or do we desire to retain the atmosphere of mystery? Another thing, to select some one particular type of mysticism and discard or discredit all others is not sense, and it merely confuses the issue; whereas the use of the scientific method is both practicable and useful.

There is an abundance of data available and modern psychology and anthropology are sufficiently established, that by attempting classification and generalisation we can find some explanation of the unknown in terms of the known; that is, of mysticism in terms of everyday experience.

Even a cursory glance at the evidence will confirm this probability, because so wide is the field of investigation and so varied are the types of mystic behaviour, that there is the difficulty of describing just where to draw the distinction between what is and what is not mysticism. So that we may safely make our first generalisation; that mysticism is common to all men, in all places, in all climes, of all races and of all times. In other words we are in fact confirming the psychologist's assertion that the difference between the abnormal and the normal is one of degree; that lunatic or sane, depends on which side of the wall we happen to be.

A first classification shows that mysticism is not always or necessarily religious, because we find philosophical types, such as that of Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists. There is the same hopeless inconsistency in both types, but the most extreme abnormalities are found in those of a religious character. There is nothing too idiotic, nothing too vile, nothing too sensuous, nothing too brutal, including self torture and self mutilation, but can be found in religious mysticism. No wonder such types are disowned as being degenerate or degraded by superstition. Having regard for the legal definition of a lunatic we can say that to give these things a religious interpretation is to take the first step towards finding oneself on the wrong side of the wall.

Another classification would be on the distinction between public and private performance. The distinction is clear, although we do find communities of Cenobites and Monastic institutions, but in these cases there is provision for private practice. This association and dissociation of individuals is an indication of a social fact, even though it appears in a religious guise. For instance, in the case of types like the Eleusinian or Dionysian Mysteries there is an association of individuals who are co-operating together for a specific purpose.

In considering such a typical case of public mystery, the leading figure, high priest or medicine man, is considered as a personification of, or incarnation of the god. He is "not himself." Nor is it considered as acting, he is the god. Further,

all the other participants are "not themselves." This is evidenced by the fact that they are behaving in an unusual or abnormal manner. Here we observe the basic principle of mysticism, for the same thing is also to be seen in the case of the private performer; for he also is "not himself." This used to be called self abnegation.

Many and various are the methods used, but the whole of the ritual, ceremonial, or method of these mystical performances is for the specific purpose of producing these abnormal psychological states; to produce, that is, the condition of being "not oneself." Not only do we observe a misunderstanding of psychological states, but there is also an indication of the social factor, especially as in cases where the chief performer is conceived as an incarnation of the group, or as in such cases as the early Christian Gnostics where the group was conceived as the body of the god.

The social factor is brought out in our next classification, that of the evolutionary development: not only can we trace an increasing degree of complexity from the savage performance, such as the Corroboree of the Australian aborigine, to the more complex types such as the classic Greek mysteries, not only from the religious into the philosophical, but we can also trace the development further into realms which are not considered to be mystical, but which still retain a sufficient indication of their mystical origin. There can be no doubt of the development, through the dance to the ballet, through the Greek comedy, the Christian miracle play to the playhouse, the theatre and the cinema. These are no longer considered as mystical, yet they retain the characteristic element of being "not self." A good actor must *live* the part, he must be "not himself," and the members of the audience go because it takes them "out of themselves," that is, the performance produces unusual psychological states. The same may be said about our public games where the spectators enjoy themselves by proxy. It goes without saying that the political arena must also be noticed. That the King is a descendant of the god-priest is plain enough, and in more primitive language the identity is definitely expressed. We remember Louis XIV. "L'état c'est moi," "I am the State."

But there is also an etymological connection between mystery and ministry, the minister of a congregation speaks not for himself but for God, the Prime Minister speaks, not as a private individual but as public representative, he is "not himself." And this gives us our final clue.

The fundamental fact underlying the mystery, and which is obscured by a mass of superstition and philosophical speculation, is that man is a social animal; it is that fact which accounts for the illogical and paradoxical character of mysticism. Each and every one of us is both a public and a private individual.

Such is the social discipline that the influence of the group on the individual gives rise to inhibitions, complexes, and sublimations. So that each individual is a mass of conflicting emotions and desires. The herd instinct, developing into mob psychology, may give rise to mass hysteria or other forms of abnormality. The individual is aware of a sense of frustration, of a desire to escape; to give expression to pent up emotions or to find comfort in solitude and tranquillity. To escape even for a few moments from this intolerable bondage gives an intensity of relief that is extremely satisfying.

An appreciation of this fact does not dispel the illusion, we can still enjoy the drama, even though we know that it is only acting. Nor does it remove the necessity; we still need our games and dance halls. But, in understanding we are taking the first step towards the wisdom of making use of it; to use our moments of contemplation to further our understanding, and to guide our surplus energies into useful channels.

THE FOOLISH AND THE NO-MORE

IT is always with feelings of irony as well as humour that I wander through our cemetery. The superstitious concept of the duality of man's being coupled with the primitive fear of the alleged departed ghost one here sees endeavoured to impress with all material means available. Primitive man, it is possible, tortured himself intending to destroy the ghost's incentive to wreak personal vengeance; and for all the world of religion-pomp and ceremony (not to mention the now much developed science of brow-beating) I fail here to conceive any but the obvious relation: that tomb-stones, inscriptions, flowers, etc., are really the means to the unconscious end of appeasing the departed person's ghost. If it be argued that human love sponsors such things, I would reply that this, strictly speaking, is of questionable truth. All affections, one could argue, are ultimately reducible to the sexual instinct (despite Rousseau's dissertations concerning his love for Mme. Warrand), and having such a basis it is difficult to conceive them as else but selfish.

But before going any farther (our aim being partly to ridicule the present-day treatment of the dead) it is necessary that we should look into the meaning of life and death.

Life and death are frequently defined as animate and inanimate existences. Now this has neither the conciseness nor the clarity with which at first it meets the eye: a jet of water is appreciably animate, so is a flame. Ah, but they are not organic. That is equally ambiguous; for though the sensations of flesh are different to those of stone, it should be remembered that this is only in so far that their combinations vary. They are both, in other words, reducible to the same ninety-eight or so elements.

When we turn to evolution, and, starting with the Nebular Hypothesis mean to lead up to the advent of the organic, we are soon stopped and we find ourselves at grips with a theological quibbling stone. The influence upon the nebula of gravitation and segregation the mind reared upon theology can digest comparatively well, but when it comes to asking it to consider the natural (causal) advent of the organic upon what, as we shall see in a minute, are quite reasonable grounds, it fails and refuses to comprehend by utilising to the utmost that ever-prevalent proclivity to self-hypnotism.

But on what grounds? saner persons ask. Well, the mind reared upon theology considers the scientific explanation as involving too great a stretch of the imagination. Instead it postulates either an "élan vital" or a vivifying principle and, of course, supernatural intervention. This they prefer to the scientific theory based upon the wonderful intricacy of the atom: above all, protoplasm, which has a molecule of over one thousand atoms. If this intricacy is duly considered, the idea of material concoctions producing the organic at a certain stage of the earth's development effects a reasonable conception which renders quite inexplicable all other theories.

So much for the advent of life. But of more immediate use is the evolution of life on earth. If we were able to multiply in a manner similar to that of the amoeba, it is unlikely that we should ever bother to think about immortality. As this happy creature multiplies by dividing in two we should, I suppose, have the assurance that half our characteristics would go one way and half the other. In man the accumulated interminglement of characteristics, and of course the sexes, have rendered dubious this simple process. Thus of necessity, one may theorise, arose the concept of immortality: the illusion of spirit (?) helping to endorse this view. This belief laid the foundation and paved the way for a multitudinous host of superstitions and customs, the motives being rendered selfish by any disagreement between the two factors when both were alive.

Yet, if considered broadmindedly, immortality is not infrequent. Though a father seldom sees his entire image in his son, it should be remembered that his qualities will contribute sooner or later to the making of an individual. We should think in terms of the species. The individual lives that he may contribute to the species; the development of the species is dependent on the progressiveness of the individual. By viewing things thus, death is seen to be merely the end of activity: the individual no more a remunerative factor to the species. This, from my view, should be the secular attitude to life and death: a mere cessation of individual effort in the endless flux of things. The ceremonies of death, grave stones, flowers, top hats, etc., viewed in this light are reduced to mere absurdities.

It was Schopenhauer who remarked that if we make mistakes in our accounts they are generally in our favour. As Schopenhauer was in early life a business man this may, to him, have been the perfect illustration of what was probably an old idea: that man's desires decide his beliefs. So it is not unreasonable to ask spiritualists to consider this possibility now and again. They and Christian Science have been said to be examples of an age tending to pseudo-religions; be this true it seems unlikely that in fifty years time we will no longer see on the graves of children: "Jesus called a little child."

STANLEY WOLF.

LENIN ON RELIGION

READERS of these pages will not need to be reminded of the immense prejudice which has always informed religious folk when the achievements of Soviet Russia are under consideration. It was only during the war with Nazi Germany, when it was obvious that a Russian victory on the Eastern Front would immensely simplify the problems of the Western Allies, that our prelates and priests suddenly discovered that, instead of being a kind of hell on earth where religious folk were intolerably persecuted, merely because of their religion, Russia was a fundamentally religious country, where everyone (or everyone who really mattered) was a Christian at heart, no matter what type of Atheism they might avow in public. It says much for the long-suffering British public that they allowed this deliberate lie to be put across, without protest, and I think it is as well that there has just appeared a new edition of a little volume entitled "Lenin on Religion" (Lawrence and Wishart; 1s.) which puts the matter in its correct perspective, by showing what the great architect of the Russian Revolution really thought of these matters.

The book consists of a series of articles written at widely differing times in Lenin's life, and they demonstrate, beyond all controversy, that the political attitude which brought about the amazing progress of Russia from Feudalism to Industrialism was necessarily bound up with a strong anti-religious line.

I do not say, mark you, that everything which Lenin says is necessarily in agreement with that of leading Freethinkers and Rationalists in this country, but one article at least—"On the Significance of Militant Materialism"—deserves to be carefully read and pondered by every Freethinker who wishes to keep abreast of the times. In this article Lenin argues—soundly, as I view it—that the Atheist philosophy as held by himself is inseparable from the general Communist outlook. He thinks that the fight against religion is but one aspect of the fight for good against evil, for the people against exploitation. And in Christian Capitalist England one can agree. But—and this is the great point to note—he considers that this is possibly the most important aspect of the ideological struggle, and he states that all good Communists should co-operate with those who are not wholeheartedly Communists but who appreciate as much as any Communist the evil done by religion.

Elsewhere in the little book there may be found a tendency to subordinate the anti-religious struggle to the general fight for economic freedom which the Communist Party in Russia waged in Czarist days; yet I prefer to think that the article which I have mentioned is the most important and the most valuable of them all. Materialism is oft-times sneered at by the reactionaries and the clericals, but to my mind there can be no doubt whatsoever that it is only in a complete reversal of the pro-Fascist tendencies of the Church (especially the Roman Church) that true freedom can be found.

Lenin died before the real rise of Fascism, but had he lived only a few years longer he would have seen his policy triumphantly vindicated. Witness the rape of Abyssinia, when the dealers in poison gas were praised by the Pope. Witness the atrocities of the Catholic and Catholic-supported rebel Franco in Spain. Witness the Papal Concordat with Hitler. Witness the latest example—the Catholic support of a King of the Belgians whom no progressive Belgian ever wants to see again on the throne. It is all of one piece with Lenin's lesson—that the first step towards cultural and economic freedom is to be rid for ever of the thralldom of the priest.

S. H.

OBITUARY

It is with sincere sorrow that I have to chronicle the death of Mary Niven, widow of Dr. Niven, of Liverpool. I have known the family for many years, and I pride myself that on both sides friendship developed to a deep and solid affection that was never marred in the slightest degree. Whenever I visited Liverpool the Niven home was mine, and now there is left of the elder Nivens but a very dear memory. Mrs. Niven leaves two daughters who are following the footsteps of their parents—both hold medical degrees. Death has no terrors, but the gap it leaves is there. I have lost many friends of late years, but none whose passing I regret more. She will live in my memory while it lasts.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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