

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Parson in a Fog

THERE is a story concerning that great Scotch philosopher David Hume, which, whether true or not is worth the telling, because it illustrates what, until yesterday, was a very common frame of mind. Hume was in France dining with a number of distinguished scientists and writers. In the course of conversation he remarked that he did not believe a real Atheist existed. The reply came at once, "You are dining with ten." More than a century after the death of Hume there was another man, Warrington Ingram, Bishop of London, whom no one would accuse of being a philosopher, who handed to me the information that he denied that a real Atheist had ever been met, and added that whenever a man told him that he was an Atheist, he replied by asking "How did you spend last night?" With all the sheer rascality that could be found among Christians, he believed that Atheism was adopted as an excuse for evil living. It was a remarkable belief for anyone to hold, but anything that serves is to be found with established religionists. The "great lying Church," a phrase used by Protestants to characterise the Roman Catholic Church, runs true to form. Slander has played a great part in the history of Christianity. But Atheism could not be lied out of existence. To-day it is stronger than ever. Even such middle terms as Agnosticism, Rationalism, Ethicism, etc., have been unable to cover the fact that between Atheism and Theism there is no middle term.

Lately we have had the frightened outburst from the Archbishop of Canterbury that Atheism must be fought. He has hinted very plainly that Atheism must be fought, if possible destroyed. But up to date the Archbishop has not dared to meet Atheism in the open; he has not yet got further than to say that we must breed more Christians. But what is the good of breeding more Christians if the atmosphere tends to turn them into Atheists? As a Churchman, the Archbishop knows that the policy of breeding Christians has been in operation for many centuries, and yet, on his own plea, the number of Christians has diminished. In its history the Church has bribed, bullied and terrified. It has used the argument of the prison, the stake and the boycott. But with all these instruments of religion at its service, the Churches cannot hold their own. The only instrument that remains in open argument, and that no Church in the world dare risk. But if the Archbishop desires an open discussion, we should be pleased to provide him with a series of propositions that would—fathered by the Archbishop—call the attention of the civilised world. If he agreed to an open and real discussion he would prove to the world that he intends to live for the Cross. If he will not come out into the open then, like so many clerics, he is living on it.

But here in the secular press there has been a feeble attempt to disprove Atheism. It appeared in the "Daily Sketch" in the shape of an article by the Rev. A. W. Harrison, President of the Methodist Conference. He is obviously a man of religious distinction. His effort bears the curious title "Living Without Meaning." If it read "An Essay Without Meaning" it would have been more to the point. For his essay merely repeats the common-places of religious preaching. After all, if we put religion aside, we are still left with truth and lying. We shall have friends and enemies, there will be problems to solve and work to be done. The sun will shine, and the rain will fall. There will be with us the passion of discovery and the love for adventure. Men will continue to seek the truth, even though they never discover it. Politicians will lie and preachers will beat them to a dead-heat. It is man who creates the meaning of life. There is no other source from which it could be derived. But that truth is not likely to be found in a pulpit—unless an Atheist is invited to do the preaching.

I will take Mr. Harrison's points in their order. There are, according to Mr. Harrison, two kinds of Atheists. "There is the genuine Atheist (who) is rarely found, and the practical Atheist (who) is common enough." Number one is "fully convinced that there is no mind directing the affairs of the Universe." He believes that "all that has happened has come about by the process of natural law." I am fairly certain that no scientific man who appreciates philosophy would put it in this way. He would smile at "mind" directing the affairs of the Universe, or such language as things coming about by the process of law. Mr. Harrison must avoid thinking of natural process as though he were dealing with a railway junction. What would be said by anyone who understands the philosophy of science is "We can, or are, on the way to being able to describe the processes, or movements, of nature." The difference between the two is vital. Mr. Harrison next complains that in "Natural law (according to the Atheist) there is not an indication of the presence of mind in the Universe." Correct, but Mr. Harrison has, apparently, not the slightest idea of what science means by "law." He probably thinks of scientific "law" as the equivalent of a law passed by a House of Parliament. It is nothing of the kind. In science "law" is only a description of the way in which things behave. Science has nothing whatever to do with the "why" of things, it is interested only in the "how." So far as science is concerned, it knows nothing whatever of "why" events fall in this or that way. This is not argument on my part. I am simply pressing the A B C of scientific thinking. "Why" belongs to ignorance. "How" is as far as science can get, and probably marks the limit of our understanding. Mr. Harrison reads himself into a muddle and then marvels at finding himself—where he is. He is like a child

extracting wonders from a mechanical doll, or a dog barking on finding another dog in the looking-glass.

"The practical Atheist," says Mr. Harrison, is "a person who never thinks about God from Sunday morning to Saturday night. God is not in his thoughts." Granted, but the important point here is—do we find the man who does not believe in God any worse friend, parent, or citizen than he who has always "the fear of God before him"? There was a time—it is not altogether dead now—when the Christian priest or preacher would have drawn a curious picture of one who neglected his family, robbed his neighbour and, at the end, obligingly died calling on God to forgive him. Mr. Harrison does not go quite so far as the old preachers did, but he suggests darkly some of the religious truth of the same quality.

But Mr. Harrison should try to make the acquaintance of a few of the unbelievers of to-day. He would then discover that the average unbeliever does not worry about God or gods. He *thinks* about them and understands them. To-day the unbeliever knows where the gods came from, and also where and how they end. In his thoughts he is able to see gods appear, rule, and then fade into nothingness. And his interest in the gods of to-day is to try and fix a time or a set of conditions that will banish them for ever. It is not for nothing that priests and preachers stress so hard the need of keeping your mind on God. It requires no great mental effort to believe in gods. It is as easy as a child finds believing in fairies. The difficulty is for people to throw off the habits pressed upon them in their childhood, or to face with courage the social inconveniences of exposing mankind's greatest blunders.

Where Religion and Mental Dishonesty Meet

Mr. Harrison opens one of his paragraphs by saying "great emergency may startle a man into thought." Certainly, but his illustration is far from impressing one. He tells a tale—which may or may not be true—of a company of soldiers in a trench, who were heavily bombed. In the morning, with the bombing over the platoon sergeant said "I'll bet there wasn't a man in that trench who didn't pray last night." Of course, that may be true, but we would not mind taking a bet that for every one that prayed there were two who cursed. But the story belongs to the age-long yarn of dying men shrieking for God to pardon them. In fact, men die much as they live. If there are strains of goodness, they think more of their wives or children than about God. To-day, the kind of rubbish Mr. Harrison gives us is so thin that even he says that some people will say he is turning religion into a creed of funk. It is a pity he did not leave it at that. It is the most truthful passage in his essay.

Mr. Harrison backs up his funk story by saying that "out of that crude basis (fear) may come reverence and wonder." That is not true. Wonder will come from many sources, but not from fear. We may hate a mean man or a brutal one. We have hate for all sorts of brutality or meanness, but we cannot derive from those conditions "reverence, beauty or truth."

One final point. Mr. Harrison says "man is fundamentally a religious animal," and that is simply not true. First, we have to bear in mind the now generally accepted theory that humanity originated from a gregarious group of

animals about a million years ago. But there was no instantaneous appearance of man. That occurs only in the childish method of "Let there be." Distinctively full-fledged forms occur only in the Bible and fairy tales. It is also accepted that a very lengthy period elapsed before the gods appeared on the scene. Only gradually does the semi-human look round for causes. An intermediate sense of a force (Mana) appears to play its part before it takes a human shape. Whether magic precedes religion, or religion precedes magic are matters of detail. The important fact is that all gods are man-made, and their weakness increases with the understanding of man. The ancient Greek who said that if oxen had gods they would be like oxen let loose an indisputable truth. The goodness of gods follows the goodness of man. It was not God who said "Let man be." It was man, in his fear and ignorance, who said "Let Gods be," and the duration of their existence is dependent upon the understanding of man.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A REINTERPRETATION OF SHELLEY

MR. F. A. LEA'S "Shelley and the Romantic Revolution" (Routledge, 1945, 12s. 6d.), adds materially to the many earlier studies of the Freethinking poet. Fine editions of his poems have appeared, but his prose writings have been virtually disregarded by the critics. An alleged complete edition of his essays was published in 1906 but, as Lea protests, it was "distinguished by the omission of two of the three longest and most important of his essays; that 'On Christianity,' which had been printed over a quarter of a century before, and 'A Philosophical View of Reform,' which continued to be suppressed until 1920—exactly a hundred years after its composition." Moreover, Lea complains: "Several of the fragmentary pieces contained in this edition were presented in a form quite unlike that the author had intended, as a later examination of his manuscripts has proved."

Lea has a poor opinion of Dowden's biography and still less of other English writers who seemed to have been more concerned with scandal than with the poet's literary achievements. In America, however, important additions to our knowledge of Shelley have recently appeared. Lea acclaims as the poet's greatest biographer, Professor Newman White whose study was published in 1940, and he also recommends Dr. Kurz's careful interpretations of Shelley's philosophical opinions and especially Carl Grabo's "The Magic Plant."

Our critic analyses with consummate care the evidences which reveal the far-reaching influence over Shelley's thought of William Godwin's "Political Justice." This work, combined with the poet's personal relations with its author, apparently made the young aristocrat the social and political reformer he remained until his tragic death.

Plato also proved a permanent influence, as Shelley's splendid translation of the Greek sage's "Praise of Love" and in minor measure, "Prometheus Unbound" conclusively demonstrate. Shelley was ever responsive to the charms and glories displayed by Nature. The sun, the moon, the stars, the song of the skylark, the varying aspects of the clouds, the surging of the sea and the murmuring of the breeze all aroused his enthusiasm. Indeed, Mary Shelley tells us in her preface to the three-volume edition of her dead husband's poems published by Moxon in 1839 that "The Cloud" and "The Ode to the Skylark" "were written as his mind prompted, listening to the carolling of the bird, aloft in the azure sky of Italy, or marking the cloud

as it spread across the heavens, while he floated in his boat on the Thames."

Lea deprecates that morbid curiosity concerning the poet's matrimonial mistake which so entrances his detractors, and devotes his volume to a fairly dispassionate study of Shelley's message to mankind. His chapters on Shelley's abortive mission to Ireland and his shattered belief in Erin's eager acceptance of enlightenment, his transitional period, his major productions, his Rousseauism and, among others, his passion for reform, are replete with interest and reflection.

With reference to Shelley's convictions concerning Christianity, Lea notes that Browning surmised that had the poet survived he would have embraced some broad aspect of the faith. This view Lea fails to share, although he thinks that the Atheism of "Queen Mab" was succeeded by a pantheistic feeling deepened and developed by his studies of Plato, Spinoza and Berkeley.

Although Shelley disdained didactic poetry, several of his masterpieces are nothing if not an expression of earnest advocacy. His "Queen Mab" is plainly a political and anti-theistic manifesto. In reality, he regarded the great poets as the primary teachers when he asserted that they were the unacknowledged legislators of mankind.

Shelley penned his "Defence of Poetry" as a rejoinder to his friend Peacock's attack on a highly imaginative art. The poet replies that the practical philosophers—Locke, Hume, Gibbon and Voltaire—derive their inspiration from the muses and are then enabled to expose superstition and encourage invention. While acclaiming their splendid services in undermining theology, Shelley contends that their writings have led to the production of a deep chasm between wealth and poverty. "The rich," he avers, "have become richer and the poor poorer; and the vessel of the State is driven between Scylla and Charybdis, of anarchy and despotism."

There were already sinister aspects of the Industrial Revolution observable, and Shelley feared that worse were to come. Yet, the poet's emotions, always highly strung, tended to intensify the evils of the transition, while ignoring the increasing benefits of the factory system then scarcely adolescent.

Like other humanists, the poet was depressed by the evils around him. It was the period succeeding the disastrous Napoleonic conflicts when economic stagnation led to widespread misery and unemployment, with its attendant starvation, and when political reaction was in full blast. The wages of industrial workers were so meagre that parents were only too pleased to send five-year-old infants to toil in mines and factories for the money that would buy a little bread. Again, dismissed soldiers intensified competition in the labour market, and what Shelley denounced as "Time's worst Statute," the Corn Law, was passed in a landowner's Parliament; increased the price of bread, and thus aggravated the misery of the poor. It was a time when the penal laws were at their pitiless worst. Those who dared to net a rabbit were sentenced as criminals by the squire and parson on whose glebe or estate they had poached. Even mild protests "were met," writes Lea, "by the suspension of *habeas corpus*, and riots by wholesale transportation." Indeed, a heart-rending age when "the executions of Brandreth, Turner and Ludlam, victims of a Government 'agent provocateur' . . . were only three among scores that marked those years; his (Shelley's) opinion of Sidmouth and Castlereagh, the chief champions and symbols of that malignant despotism, was not harsher than that of the thousands who lined the pavements of Westminster to cheer Castlereagh's coffin to the grave."

If Shelley's assurance of ultimate amelioration remained unshaken, he visualised the pitfalls and impediments that obstructed advance. He saw clearly that any form of real democracy would encounter obstacles hard to surmount but, even if at times he wrote almost in despair, he thought right would triumph in the end.

Truly, there seems little hope in his "England in 1819"—the good old times of George III. :—

"An old, mad, blind, despised and dying king—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn—mud from a muddy spring—
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know
But leech-like to their fainting country cling."

But to bring into existence any social structure approaching perfectibility, the poet urged that men must become entirely disinterested, a counsel of perfection at present and perhaps in the future unattainable. Unfortunately, average human nature seems to have improved very slightly, if at all, from its first recorded history.

Yet there is profound wisdom in Shelley's "Philosophical View of Reform." He realised that only in a far distant day any equality in possessions may become the birthright of our race. Much may emerge if a general desire for liberty and equity prevails. As he eloquently stated in a passage which combines realism and idealism: "We derive tranquillity and courage and grandeur of soul from contemplating an object which is, because we will it, and may be, because we hope and desire it, and must be if succeeding generations of the enlightened sincerely and earnestly seek it. But our present business is with the difficult and unbending realities of actual life, and when we have drawn inspiration from the great object of our hopes it becomes us with patience and resolution to apply ourselves to accommodating our theories to immediate practice."

No mere dreamer, Shelley was never a violent revolutionary. When, at Peterloo in Manchester in 1819, an orderly gathering was forcibly dispersed and eleven people were killed and 400 wounded, Shelley was inspired to pen his "Masque of Anarchy" and his "View of Reform." "His pamphlet," observes Lea, "was designed in the first place to appeal from the passions to the reason of men."

Shelley was gravely disconcerted by the vindictive prosecution of Eaton and Carlisle, the Freethought publishers. Yet, still he urged restraint upon the oppressed people. Even in the fiery "Masque of Anarchy," he counsels the downtrodden to preserve order, even when they witness the maiming and murdering of their relatives and friends. Quite naturally, the poet averred:—

"Then it is to feel revenge
Fiercely thirsting to exchange
Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong—
Do not do thus when ye are strong."

The repeal of the Combination Acts; the Reform Bill of 1832 were later brought about by comparatively peaceful means. That stalwart pioneer, the Freethinking Robert Owen, prepared the way for Trade Union organisation, while the Rochdale Pioneers who were mostly Freethinkers, laid the firm foundations of working class co-operation in the production and exchange of serviceable commodities. To all these improvements the reformers of a preceding generation had lent their influence, and among the noblest of these must be inscribed the immortal name of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

T. F. PALMER.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

MISTAKES OF MOSES, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

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

THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS, by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

The trials of the Nazis are proceeding steadily, but whatever charges may be brought against them, there is one thing which cannot be properly urged—that of not being religious. From the dawn of that movement we have always insisted that Nazism was essentially a religious movement. Hitler constantly insisted that he was an instrument of God, and now we see that Ley and Frank—both notorious for their brutality, write in prison a testimony of their faith in religion. It will also be remembered that Rosenberg pleaded earnestly for a return to the "good old German God." With most of the Nazi leaders religion was very strongly marked.

If anyone doubts this, evidence will be found in the castle of Nuremberg. We recall seeing there the famous statue of the Virgin Mary. This was a life-size model of the Virgin Mary. The front had two doors. When opened, the inside of the doors was studded with thin but strong knives. When the victim was placed inside, the doors were closed and the knives, very, very slowly, began their work. It took a considerable time before kindly death finished the torture. But the figure of the Virgin continued to smile with sad enjoyment. There can be no mistake of the religious quality of the Hitler regime.

"Christian morals," said the Archbishop of York, as reported in the "Workshop Guardian," "sprang from Christian faith." Wonderful! It is as wonderful as twice two are four when they might have stood for six or seven. God's wisdom is also shown in the fact that death comes at the end of life instead of in the middle of it. And God shows his judgment clearly in the kind of men he selects to represent him. But what the Archbishop lacks in wit he makes up in artfulness. For note that human morals arise from the necessity of things. Morality does not belong to black, or white, or any other coloured men. In some form or another the "heathen in his blindness" gives his homage to the exigencies of human group life. But the Archbishop apparently thinks only of a "Christian" morality, the nature of which has been a curse wherever it made itself powerful. Meanwhile, we are content with mere human morality.

According to a report in the "Catholic Times," Cardinal Tisserant has hopes of Russia coming back to the Church. His evidence is that in many houses are "sacred images." But the Cardinal knows quite well that Christians in Russia have never been prevented from hanging up "sacred" images. Russians were never prohibited going to church and worshipping. The clergy were prohibited from taking part in attacks on the Government from the pulpit. We think that if parsons confined themselves to religion our political life might be more honest than it is.

The Rev. A. M. Cook, President of the Rotherham Council, says: "It is a distressing state of affairs that the Church has in it more middle-class people than working-class people." We consider that more than distressing; it is disastrous. Always the function of the Churches has been to keep the people "in order," and if they fail to do this, their utility is of very small value. The majority of social reformers are aware of this. So also are those who are publicly interested in keeping religion alive.

Very solemnly there comes from one of our religious journals the information that there is no subject so important as to consider how we stand with God. With equal earnestness, if not with equal solemnity, we assert that there is nothing of so little importance whether we bother our heads with God or not. For in the history of mankind it is quite clear that men and women can get along very well without God. On the other hand, it stares us in the face that when man ignores God, it is the God that disappears, not the man. Provided we get hold of a people in a sufficiently low form of social life, we may find the gods active and flourishing. But it is also obvious that with the development of the group the influence of religion gets weaker.

The President of "The Baptist Union," Glasgow, says he "cannot ignore the questions that are being asked." Good, but in that case the President should come out into the open and let the world know the kind of reply he has to offer. It is not of much value to reply to what is being said in all directions against the Churches if the reply is given in a Church where no retort is permitted.

We notice that in spite of the paper shortage which cuts severely space for articles, the "News Chronicle" can find room for more than a column of news concerning that stupid and humbugging Christian group, the "Jehovah's Witnesses." The "Witnesses" say they number about 2,000,000 members. We do not doubt it. The crop of fools—and worse—is usually large. But the surprising part is that the "News Chronicle" has never managed to find space for the many millions of people in this country who have rejected all religion to express their views. We are a free country, but our freedom has its limits.

Cardinal Innitzer, Archbishop of Vienna, says he expects that "the builders of a new Vienna will grant priority of residence to God." In plain language, the Churches are to be rebuilt before homes. We expect that his wish will be gratified, but it is a scandal that it should be so. If God exists, he can wait. If he does not exist, we have the scandal of men, women and children, sick and healthy, remaining without homes until the priests are safely domiciled. The impudence of it all is characteristic.

What we have said of Vienna applies with equal force to this country. The demand for houses is great and urgent. It looks as though for some time to come families will be herded together cattle-like, and the effects will be certain and unpleasant. On the other hand, the Churches will be clamouring for rebuilding of what they call the House of God, and as with Austria and other places, so we expect—unless the people are alert—we shall see churches placed before houses. But we should bear in mind that before the war, in the main, the churches were filled mostly with empty places. A fourth of the space of the churches would accommodate those who go to church without causing a crush. We wonder whether the Government will issue an order to the clergy "Homes first"? We have doubts, unless a firm determination of the people is shown.

Here, if ever, it is a matter that should be raised in the House of Commons. But we wonder, if it is raised, how many members will be roused to act on the cry, "Who goes home"? Pressure could be brought if that cry was adopted—and heard. But again, fear of the religious people will be too strong to bring Members of Parliament to heel. We must remember that the Churches were not seriously disturbed over the hovels in which people lived before the war; and that it was not until German bombs blasted acres of these hovels that an interest in housing was "expressed." But the clergy knew all about the conditions under which people lived before the war, and then they remained next to silent. And when the exposure came they concentrated on a campaign in favour of more religious teaching after the war. It was a case of "Business first." The cry of the clergy will be "Priority for God," which, being interpreted, means secure the clergy and their buildings first. We should like to see a body of Members of Parliament formed with the determination to see that a regular campaign was set on foot to see that the priority for homes was assured. It is men, women and children who need decent shelter. God should be able to look after himself.

The Archbishop of Canterbury says that "Never before had the clergy been nearer to the people than in the darkest days of the war." That looks cheerful, but the real question would be "Are the people nearer to the clergy?" The Archbishop has said publicly they are not. Having told the truth once he goes back to his pulpit. To keep on saying would wreck the churches.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

We regret that by an accident the poem "The Purpose of Life" was wrongly attributed to Miss Beatrice Francis-Jupp. We offer our apologies to the lady and to the author.

EMILE CORNWALL (Los Angeles).—Thanks for papers. They will be useful.

L. V. F.—Thanks for letter. We should be pleased to publish it, but you mark it "Personal." But it will keep, and if your mind alters, we shall be glad to publish. (Let us know.)

PTE. MACFARLANE (Holland).—We have read your letter with considerable interest. Why not write an article dealing with the whole matter? We are sure our readers would welcome it.

G. H. PEATE.—We cannot say what is the amount to be paid to the coal kings when the pits pass over to the State. Your figure of £60,000,000 may be right. But in any case the payment whatever it be will represent an unbroken income to the present mine owners. The value of the amount paid will represent the interest of that sum. And that continues.

A. W. H.—We quite appreciate the difficulty the head master of Malvern College would experience if he tried to reply to the Freethought pamphlets you sent him. That he would find it "difficult" to reply to the criticism offered we can understand. But a thesis that cannot be dealt with in open discussion stands condemned.

E. HANSON.—Received. Will appear.

The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of five shillings from Frank S. Docherty to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

For "The Freethinker."—C. J. Tacchi, 13s.; F. S. Docherty, 5s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We understand there is no truth in the report that the President of the United States has announced his intention to shower atomic bombs on any country in any part of the world that is known to be engaged in the making of them, or indulging in experiments that are calculated to bring understanding of their manufacture.

France has given women the vote, and the Pope has declared it the duty of women to take their share in public life—which, being interpreted, means that all Catholic women must obey the orders of priests as to how they shall use their vote. To do the Papacy justice, it has always used women, as it has used other instruments. But we must never forget that it was the Church that wiped out the advances made by ancient Rome and held women up as the source of the downfall of the human race. It is part of the unscrupulous quality of the Church that it will use almost anything that furthers its end. But Frenchwomen

are, as a rule, very level-headed, and we believe they will act with as much common sense as the French have always displayed in such a situation.

When one analyses all the talk of mutual friendships, respect, love of freedom and devotion to straightforwardness by the nations that worked together during the war, the plain fact before us is the ugly one that there is not one of the nations that feels it can trust the others. The United States gives its contribution to the peace of the world by demanding that it shall retain the use of the atomic bomb, and also that all citizens shall go through a military training and the U.S.A. shall have armed forces large enough to hold the world in fear. Russia feels that it cannot trust other people enough not to be ready to fight the nations if necessary. France also seems to be preparing with armed forces by land and sea that will enable them to say "Never again." So the fight for what is called "Freedom" goes on. Between us we win the world war—and the first step taken is to increase our readiness to have another conflict.

At the Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester, at 3 p.m. to-day, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture on "God and the Atomic Bomb." It is one in the series of lectures being run by the Manchester Branch N.S.S. which is now getting into its stride and calls for the active support of all Freethinkers in the area.

The Belfast Branch N.S.S. was very disappointed when arrangements for Mr. Brighton's visit could not be completed in time. We understand arrangements for a later date are being made. To-day, Mr. F. C. Blore will lecture in the Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North at 7.30 p.m., on "The Journey of the Dead." The subject looks inviting and should attract a full house.

The Pope has been urging the people of Italy to make the new Italy Christian. Well, we have always had a respectful feeling towards the Italian intellect, and we do not believe it has essentially deteriorated. Strongly Catholic in whatever religion there is, a definite break with Roman Catholicism may be easier than it would be in other countries. And it must not be forgotten that while Rome has been the headquarters of the Catholic Church, its chief supporters have come from abroad. One day some of our politicians may undertake the investigation of Roman Catholicism in England. We fancy the result would astonish many.

The hard time a "priest-schoolmaster" has in our secondary schools is duly set out in a very doleful article in the "Church Times." The writer complains that if criticism is levelled against his religion, it is generally "subtly-designed" to see what he knows, rather than to elicit "an answer which will solve the questioner's personal problem." In addition, so long as parents are satisfied with their children's general education, "they appear uniformly indifferent as to what they are taught about religion." His greatest enemy is "indifference" and "the lack of Christian standards in the home." In fact, the ideal of a "Christian" England is rapidly receding.

We congratulate the Birmingham people on the action of the local authorities in declining to alter the rules dominating Sunday. Cinemas are permitted to open from three o'clock till nine o'clock. The Christian Social Council was responsible for the agitation. Of course, the whole situation is ridiculous and, to outsiders, it will stand as an example of the muddle-headed way we conduct our public life. Consider, first, that the bigots are not asking for Sunday "shows" which might indicate an honest belief in the sanctity of Sunday. The request is that the times of opening should be from seven till ten. But if Sunday "shows" are bad—religiously bad—they are bad for the whole of Sunday. Yet these bigots, headed by the Rector of Birmingham, can stomach the cinemas being open after seven o'clock. Why? Obviously so that Sunday shall be so dull—till seven—that people may go to church merely to pass the time away, and, above all, it will not prevent children getting a religious service on Sunday afternoon. Humbug and intolerance is written plain in these religious agitations.

IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE

WHAT crimes, alas, are perpetrated in the name of justice! The Mosaic insistence upon life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and so on, still holds strong sway in our legal code and general outlook, preventing the adoption of a more rational and humane approach towards crime and punishment. Consider the concentration of our rulers upon punishment for war crimes. "Justice must be served," is the slogan, and in the name of justice, numerous trials are to be held for months on end, to convict German, Japanese and other war criminals.

Now, I have no liking for the Nazis or the German and Japanese military leaders. Like all true Freethinkers I have condemned Nazism and militarism completely and continuously before and during the war. I condemn it now, I fight it now, and I intend to carry on doing so. But I condemn also what I think is a shameful pretence at justice. It is not prompted by any such desire. The motives, I maintain, are largely those of revenge, and in some cases deliberate acts of psychological cruelty are discernible.

How else can one regard the Tojo episode? Considering that he is an undesirable person who has been responsible for thousands of deaths, and therefore deserving of death himself—as the Allied leaders hold—why was he not allowed to die? It would obviously have been much the most satisfactory solution from all standpoints (excepting only the Allied lust for revenge). It was certainly the best way out for Tojo, it would have saved the Allies a great deal of time, trouble and expense, including special medical attention which was badly needed elsewhere. Why, then, was his life deliberately saved, when he presumably will have to die at the hands of a firing squad? So that he would not "cheat justice," the polite way of saying "cheat our revenge." Similarly with Ley, every effort was made to prevent his death by suicide. This time they were unsuccessful, as they had been with Himmler and others, but the attempt was made.

We will, therefore, witness the spectacle of German war leaders, and their associates in other lands, being tried and probably in many cases sentenced to death. Leaving aside the Nazis—many of whom, I think, are sadistic types, though not without counterparts in other nations—let us view the position of the German military high command. I repeat that I have no love for these men, but I suggest that they are going to suffer merely because they were on the losing side in the war. Did they not do their duty for their country? Were they not forced to do it, and are we not honouring and belauding our own military leaders who did precisely the same things but happened to be successful? We acclaim our commanders as patriotic heroes, whilst the German generals are to suffer at the hands of their conquerors for being likewise "patriotic." The Germans, it may be said, started the war and were the first to bomb cities, but can this not be defended from a military point of view? The element of surprise is an important one in warfare, and it is considered excellent strategy to do something before the enemy does it. It cannot, of course, be defended from a humanistic standpoint, but whilst professing to be humane, the Allies would seem to display this quality only when it suits them.

I am fully aware that some of the war prisoners have committed ghastly crimes, but the important fact, for me, is that once committed, those crimes cannot be undone. Killing the guilty party satisfies nothing but a desire for vengeance, if we really analyse the situation. The idea that it in some way wipes out the former crime is sheer nonsense; instead it duplicates it. Remembering also the vitally important point that these crimes took place during the most terrible war in history, when life was held deplorably cheap and the term "atrocities" lost all its meaning, I am compelled to pass censure on the whole fantastic and vengeful *auto-da-fé*. I must insist that it is only war crimes that can be taken into consideration. Everyone knows that

Nazism was responsible for horrors before the war, but the British Government refused to investigate these when asked to do so. I cannot forget this, nor should others be allowed to. I cannot condemn the German Nazis without condemning their associates (not always in black shirts) in this and other lands.

These problems are, I think, inseparably linked with the convicting of war criminals. Returning, however, to the preventing of these men from taking their own lives. In addition to the lust for vengeance, which I am convinced is the major motive, there remains, of course, the Christian opposition to suicide, standing in the way of a more sensible attitude on the subject. In spite of the fact that the Bible contains no condemnation of suicide, Christianity regards it as a sin, and we still treat as felons poor creatures who fail in the attempt to end their lives. This is just one more of the disastrous legacies of Christianity which we have yet to outgrow.

Schopenhauer noted that this attitude is almost peculiar to "the followers of monotheistic, that is of Jewish, religions," and it has certainly been deeply ingrained in Christian teaching. This was not so with the Stoics, for example, who advocated suicide if life became a burden or lost its attraction, nor with many great thinkers and writers. John Donne, the somewhat enigmatic Dean of St. Paul's, was considerably superior to the religion he professed, and wrote in his "Biathanatos," that "whosoever any affliction assails me, mee thinks I have the keyes of my prison in mine owne hand, and no remedy presents it selfe so soone to my heart, as mine own sword. Often Meditation of this hath wonne me to a charitable interpretation of their action, who dy so: and provoked me a little to watch and exagitate their reasons, which pronounce so peremptory judgments upon them."

Shakespeare, too, certainly did not consider suicide a crime. Hamlet, in his magnificent soliloquy, has no compunctions about the act of suicide, for the end of "The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," is "Devoutly to be wished." His qualms are solely concerned with "the dread of something after death." If he could be sure that death meant oblivion all would be well, but he fears we may sleep "perchance to dream," and "there's the rub." The same author gives nobility to the suicide of Othello, and the virtual suicides (though performed with assistance) of Brutus and Cassius. Similar instances could be taken from other authors.

David Hume philosophically defended a man's right to take his own life in "An Essay on Suicide," showing that it was superstition which prevented a logical consideration of the question. "Has not everyone . . . the free disposal of his own life? And may he not lawfully employ that power with which nature has endowed him?" he asked, and later he said: "That suicide may often be consistent with interest and with our duty to ourselves, no one can question, who allows that age, sickness, or misfortune may render life a burthen, and make it worse even than annihilation. I believe that no man ever threw away life, while it was worth keeping."

Here, Hume struck the right note. If a man's life is worth keeping he will keep it, if not he is surely at liberty to end it. The Christian attitude that one should endure all hardships and sufferings in the interests of another life is despicable. All the essays in the world are hardly likely to drive one person to, or deter one person from, suicide, but the general approach to the matter can be affected, and thereby the antiquated criminal law. William Archer foresaw the time when lethal chambers would be provided for those who wished to commit suicide. Certainly it is a blight upon our civilisation, that in the twentieth century we take life for life and reprimand a man for trying to end his own life, in the name of justice. In the words of Schopenhauer, "it is perfectly clear that no one has such indisputable right over anything in the world as over his own person and life." Let us—as Freethinkers—fight the Christian opposition to a saner outlook in this as in other matters. Let us

the adoption of more humane and merciful treatment of criminals. We must by all means take measures to prevent the person committing another crime, but we should not commit exactly the same crime for which we condemn him. Set a better example, and the better fruits will, I am sure, be reaped by society.

C. McCALL.

WAR !

When the Masses move to Murder
And the World is set a-fire ;
When the Savage is a hero
And the sane man is a liar.
When the Lust to Kill is loosened
And the Hymn of Hate is sung,
Then we cast the Voice of Reason
On the nearest heap of dung.
Let the Flies of War pollute it,
Let them buzz and let them sting—
They are merry little fellows
Now that Death is on the wing.
Let them fly in through your window,
Settle lightly on your brow,
And inject their load of poison,
Then you will enjoy the Show.
See those banners bravely flying,
Shrill the bugle, loud the drum—
For the living will be dying
Scarcely has echoed far the hum.
'Tis a day worth living long for
When your sons march out to War—
It is worth a dance and song for
You may never see them more.
In the crash and clash of battle—
When the bullets gaily fly
From machine-guns with a rattle—
'Tis a noble way to die !
On the field of bloody slaughter
They must kill or else be killed ;
It is Culture, it is Progress
From the Savage to the Skilled—
From the dark and early ages
This Advancement of the Mind
Is the March of Evolution
From Brute Beast to Humankind.
So be thankful, aye, be joyful
You have lived to see the day
When your children, wives, and mothers
All are targets in the fray.
When the heavens rain down Murder
And your loved ones bleeding lie—
On bended knees give thanks to One
Who would not hurt a little fly !!

W. H. Wood.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHOUGHT AND THE CHILD.

Sir,—The response to my recent article regarding the best way in which to deal with the child in the matter of religion has surprised me. A number of people have written to me direct, and I should like to thank them for all the helpful things they have said. If I do not acknowledge all the letters personally it is because I am exceedingly busy just now. In particular I should like to say how helpful I found a book called "Fireside Talks to My Children," sent to me by its author, "The Armchair Philosopher." I remember seeing this reviewed a few years ago

on its first publication; but I was then not a father and the subject did not interest me. I hope, if it is now out of print, as are so many books in these days of paper shortage, that it will be reprinted as soon as conditions permit.

At any rate, I am sure that my son will be very flattered at all the attention which he has received from all and sundry. When he is old enough to appreciate these things, I will break to him as gently as I can the way in which his well-being was discussed when he was only two!—Yours, etc.,

"FREETHINKING FATHER."

OBITUARY

We regret to report the death of Mrs. Josephine Ainsley, of Darlington. She had been a member of the N.S.S. for many years and was a keen and loyal supporter of the Freethought Movement. Kindly in nature, she won the respect of all who knew her. She was a reliable and lovable friend to many. Her Freethought was always to the front in any direction where it could be serviceable. The Freethought cause has lost a good friend, but the memory of her will live with all who had the privilege of knowing her. A secular service was conducted by Mr. J. Brighton on August 25, at the Darlington Crematorium. Later, her ashes were scattered on her beloved Yorkshire Moors where she had spent many happy hours. We offer our sympathy to her husband and children.

J. T. B.

"THE UNIVERSE. WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT." Price 7d., post free. Factual Knowledge (Education) Bureau, 35, Doughty Street (Top Floor), London, W.C. 1.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY, Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Messrs WOOD, HART, and PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Dr. R. H. THOULESS, M.A., Ph.D.: "A Moral Equivalent of War." Tuesday, Conway Discussion Circle, JOHN KATZ, B.A.: "Humanism and the World Religions."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Buildings, 7 College Square North).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. F. BLORE: "The Journey of the Dead."

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (173, Church Street).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m.: "Crimes of Christianity, Part 1: Pious Forgeries."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. TITUS TOWNSEND: "How the Mind Functions."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. E. H. HASSELL: "Theism and Design."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSSETI: "God and the Atomic Bomb."

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

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, by Lady (Robert) Simon. Price, post free, 2s. 8d.

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST, by C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; by post 5d.

BIBLE CURIOSITIES AND STATISTICS

READERS who possess a copy of the Bible Handbook should be fully acquainted with the absurdities, atrocities, contradictions and immoralities appearing in Holy Writ. By way of a change we present a few Bible Curiosities and Bible Statistics, for amusement, in the hope that some of them will be new to old readers and students of the Bible.

Diligence in reading the Bible has resulted in the detection of many peculiar errors of the printers, and some strange choice of words by translators. The most famous of these arranged in chronological order are as follows:—

The Breeches Bible: "Then the eies of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed figge tree leaves together and made themselves breeches" (Genesis iii. 7. Printed in 1560). In the authorised version published in 1611 this picturesque attire has been changed to "aprons."

The Bug Bible: "So that thou shalt not nede to be afraid for any bugges by nighte nor for the arrow that flyeth by day" (Psalms 91, 5. Printed in 1561). Bug was originally identical with bogy, and has substantially the same meaning as "terror," the word substituted in the Authorised Version.

The Place-maker's Bible: "Blessed are the place makers; for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew v. 9. Printed in 1561-2). Should not this version be in demand by politicians?

The Treacle Bible: "Is there not treacle at Gilead? Is there no physician there?" (Jeremiah viii. 22. Printed in 1568).

The Rosin Bible: "Is there no rosin in Gilead? Is there no physician there" (Jeremiah viii. 22. A Douay version. Printed in 1609).

The Wicked Bible: "Thou shalt commit adultery" (Ex. xx. 14. Printed in 1631). Owing to the zeal of Dr. Usher, the printers Robert Barker and Martin Lucas, of London, were prosecuted and fined more than £2,000. The same title has been given to a Bible published in 1653. The publishers called it the "Pearl Bible," from the size of the type used, and contained the following errors: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of righteousness (instead of 'unrighteousness') unto sin" (Romans vi. 13). Another verse read "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit (instead of 'shall not inherit') the Kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians vi. 9). These wicked Bibles were very popular among the profligates of the period, who urged the texts as "pleas of justification" against the reproofs of the divines.

The Vinegar Bible: "The Parable of the Vinegar" instead of "The Parable of the Vineyard." Published in 1717, being an Oxford edition of the Authorised Version, the error appearing as a chapter heading to Luke xx.

"The Murderer's Bible": This appalling title was given to an edition published in 1801 from an error in the Epistle of Jude Verse 16 where "murmurers" appear as "murderers."

To-remain Bible: "Persecuted him that was born after the spirit to remain even so it is now" (Galatians iv. 29. Printed at Cambridge in 1805). The proof reader being in doubt as to whether or not he should remove a comma had the proof sheets returned by his superior, to whom he had applied, with the reply "to remain" pencilled in the margin. These words were transferred to the body of the text which was repeated in another edition in 1819.

The Discharge Bible: "I discharge thee before God" (1 Timothy v. 21. Printed in 1806).

The Standing Fishes Bible: "And it shall come to pass that the fishes shall stand upon it" (Ezekiel xlvi. 10. Printed in 1806).

The Ears-to-ear Bible: "Who hath ears to ear, let him hear" (Matthew xiii. 43. Printed in 1810).

The Wife-hater Bible: "If any man come to me and hate not his father—yea, and his own wife also" (Luke xiv. 26. Printed in 1810).

The Rebekah-Camels Bible: "And Rebekah arose and her camels" (Genesis xxiv. 61. Printed in 1823). We hope the damsels arose more elegantly than the camels!

Few, if anyone, would willingly undertake the task of counting the number of verses in the Bible. Many years ago a Dr. Horne not only counted the verses, but the words and letters also. This prodigious feat of misapplied zeal occupied three years of the doctor's life and was embodied in his book "Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures." Should anyone be interested the result was as follows: Verses 31,173, words 773,746, and letters 3,566,480. Not content with this labour of love, the indefatigable compiler commenced on the Apocrypha! On the day of the last trump he should prove invaluable in the post of secretary to Jehovah. The position of assistant secretary would be filled in an exemplary manner by another religious enthusiast who went one better than the doctor. This poor fellow was imprisoned for several years and occupied himself by counting the verses, words and letters of the Bible, as did Dr. Horne. Having completed this task, the result of which differed but slightly from the figures just mentioned, he went on to count the number of times "and," "Lord," and certain other words appeared. Just imagine plodding through the Bible and finding that the word "girl" appears but once, "reverend," but once, and "everlasting punishment" but once! Imagine the prisoner's delight in finding that "everlasting fire" appears twice! He discovered also that there is no word of more than six syllables, and also set himself the task of finding the middle line, the middle verse and the middle chapter in addition to other data. We hope that he derived comfort from his work and a sense of fleeting time.

During the time of the Commonwealth, a printer was said to have accepted a bribe of £1,500 to alter a text in the Bible. This incident relates to the "Pearl Bible," of which reference has been made, which was printed by the firm of Hills and Field. An Independent sect of religious enthusiasts induced Field, reputed to be a "dangerous forger," to alter the text in Acts vi. 5 in order to sanction the right of the people to appoint their own pastors. The corruption was effected quite easily: to put "ye" instead of "we" so that the right, in Field's Bible, emanated from the people and not from the apostles. It was to interpretations such as these that Butler alluded in "Hudibras":—

"Religion spawn'd a various rout
Of petulant religious sects,
The maggots of corrupted texts."

S. GORDON HOGG.

THE TRUE AND THE FALSE

"You can hide your graveyard places,
And all your Town Hall squares,
Your courts are all disgraces,
Your terraces possess no stairs;
I don't want secluded cloisters
Where romance feels much too shy,
Give me wide open spaces
Where I can see what passes by."

ED. HESLING SIMPSON.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING, by Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each. postage 2½d. The four volumes, 10s. post free.