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IEWS AND OPINIONS

The State and Atheism

THERE is one crime, and one only, that the Atheist cannot perpetrate. In all other expressions of criminality the Atheist can walk cheek by jowl with a Christian. Together they can join in any kind of rascality. The one "crime" that the Atheist cannot commit is that of blasphemy. He is godless, and from a strict point of view he has nothing to blaspheme.

Consider the dictionary. I find blasphemy defined as "speaking profanely of God." But how can the poor Atheist speak profanely of something that does not exist? A further definition says that "profane" means "to treat sacred subjects with irreverence and contempt." But that, again, rules out the Atheist. One cannot treat with irreverence or contempt something that to him does not exist. In desperation almost we turn to a definition of "impious," only to find that "impious" marks a "wanting in respect and regard for God." The reply leaves us where we were. Until I am assured that God exists I can neither blackguard him nor praise him. Our law says that there cannot be a murder without a corpse. Really, it looks as though the only person who can be blasphemous, or treat sacred things with profanity, or talk of God without respectful approach, is the man who believes in God. A believer may curse God and die. An Atheist can only make himself an object of derision if he attempts it.

It was for committing the "crime" of blasphemy—impossible to an Atheist—that G. W. Foote spent twelve months in a State prison—filled with Christians. Many men—and women—had been imprisoned for the same fantastic offence, although we know that it was an assumption of power by some of the judges of the 17th century who, on their own authority, made "blasphemy" a serious offence. Against that it may be set down that, so far as it could be done, the highest legal authority in England in the 1900's did what it could to clip the claws of Christian bigots. Probably, had Foote not spent a year in a Christian prison he might never have done what he did to weaken a "law" that ought not to have existed. As it happened, the prison, not for the first time, led the way to greater freedom. For what was won all Freethinkers owe him their thanks.

Data to be Noted

Here are a few incidents and dates that ought to be remembered. Foote's trial and sentence occurred in 1883—just two years after the foundation of "The Freethinker." I was then nearing my fifteenth year and, of course, took no interest in the Freethought movement. That began some five years later, and my close acquaintance with

Foote about five years after that—about 1896. The Secular Society Limited was founded in 1868, and it was destined to play a great part in the fight for freedom. Foote died in 1915, two years before the House of Lords, the highest Court in England, gave its decision on a matter that stands as a great contribution to all matters dealing with freedom of thought. That case is now quoted outside British control as one that should be received with respect. The National Secular Society was an unregistered body formed by an amalgamation of Freethought societies, in 1868, by Bradlaugh. From time to time legacies had been left to the N.S.S., but in cases where the next-of-kin brought legal action the courts usually gave a verdict against the Society. The law did not act on its own accord, but it supported the claim made by relatives. The great feature of the Secular Society Limited was to do away with that kind of legal robbery. The decision in favour of the Secular Society Limited made it impossible for the wishes of testators to be set aside. Its reaction has been to make certain all gifts to the N.S.S.

I think I may step aside here further to explain the situation. The mistake made had been to claim bequests for the National Secular Society. But this was not, in the eyes of the law, a legal body. It was a mere collection of men and women. Had the claim been made on behalf of a number of individuals, I think the gifts would have reached their proper destination. I could never get Foote to agree with me on that point until one of the Roman Catholic bodies—unregistered—claimed a bequest for the individuals comprising the Order. The gift was decided to be perfectly legal. The law is that money left to an unregistered body is the property of the *people* forming that body. The benefit of a registered society is that the money can be spent only in terms of the Articles of Association.

Thoroughly to understand the decision before the House of Lords we must go back to the Foote trials. There were two charges out against him. The first was at the Old Bailey, before a judge who meant to get a verdict of "guilty" at any cost. In the first hearing the jury could not agree. In the second, to the obvious pleasure of the Judge, a verdict of "Guilty" was gained. Foote's reply to the Judge when he received his sentence of twelve months was "Your sentence is worthy of your creed."

The other trial awaiting Foote for blasphemy took place at the Court of Queen's Bench on April 24, before Lord Coleridge. Foote's speech in his defence I hold to being the greatest one of its kind. It was witty, grave, and displayed a dignity and ability that obviously impressed the Judge.

Lord Coleridge's charge to the jury opened a new era in the history of Freethought. He brushed on one side the idea that in common law it could be held that an attack on the Christian religion could be construed as a crime. We

had, he said, to judge in accordance with the times. We had among our Judges men who were Jews, and it would be ridiculous if a Jewish Judge was asked to send to prison a man for attacking the Christian faith. But once again the jury could not agree. The Home Secretary could have sanctioned a second trial, but it was expected that if the case came up again Lord Coleridge would take it, and he had already said that "a man might legally attack the very fundamentals of the Christian faith without committing a crime." The case was withdrawn. The Crown was beaten. Lord Coleridge had substantially reduced the great offence of blasphemy to the level of a "drunk and disorderly." Foote had scored a victory. He had fought one of the greatest blasphemy charges, and his imprisonment was destined to be a new reading of the most ridiculous of all charges.

The Enemy at Bay

In a way, the formation of the Secular Society Limited was a challenge. It placed the attack on Christianity on a legal footing. If it held, it would rank as a charter for Freethought. With regard to finance, the Society had received several small legacies, and they were paid without any bother. But neither Foote nor myself had any doubt that when a legacy was of sufficient size some legal challenge would be offered. We were not afraid of this; we welcomed it. The challenge came with a bequest of about £10,000—to be sadly reduced by expensive law costs. The testator was known to myself and Foote, although he was not a member of our societies. He was a widower and without children. But his next-of-kin set out to challenge the legality of the will.

The case came before the Master of the Rolls, Lord Justice Pickard and Lord Justice Warrington. The verdict was in our favour. The opposition gave notice of appeal to a higher court. That ended in another victory for us. Notice was then given of an appeal to the House of Lords. We were pleased rather than dismayed. If we could weather that storm we were quite safe.

But in the interval we received a blow from another quarter. G. W. Foote died; he had been in ill-health for some time. He died in October, 1915.

The House of Lords case did not mature till May, 1917. Foote was dead, but I was familiar with every move in the game. I had been in control of "The Freethinker," which was, and is, an independent journal, always at the service of the Freethought movement. But as the time passed those who were fighting us began to feel nervous. It was no secret that the Secular Society Limited was financially in low waters. Money had to be borrowed to carry on the action, and lawyers seldom take cases for nothing. In a rather roundabout way a feeler was thrown out by the next-of-kin for a compromise. Financially situated as we were, some of our members were inclined to accept the offer. I refused to take any part whatever in it, and would oppose it. My reply was that if we were offered 19s. 11½d. for every pound, we would fight the battle to the end. We needed money, but to keep the honour of the Freethought movement clean was more important.

The case came before the House of Lords on May 14, 1917. The Judges were the Lord Chancellor, Lord Dunedin, Lord Shaw, Lord Parker and Lord Buckmaster.

Of the five, all save the Lord Chancellor (I rather fancy that his post is in some way tied up with religion) voted in our favour. The greatest legal victory in the history of Freethought had been won. The only regret I had was that G. W. Foote was not with us.

Of the judgments read, by far the greatest was that of Lord Sumner. He gave a magnificent outline of the leading blasphemy cases for the past three centuries. He laid down the ruling consideration that the Judges were concerned with an anti-Christian Society, and they had to decide whether "the maxim that Christianity is part of the law of England was true, and if so, in what sense?" "If Christianity was part of the law of England, then that law, once established, though long ago, time cannot abolish it nor disfavour make it obsolete." He followed up by making a lengthy examination of blasphemy cases. He pointed out that English law was not concerned at all with fundamental Christianity, and to proclaim otherwise, to say that "Christianity is part of the law of England, is really not law; it is rhetoric." In other words, we have the House of Lords' decision that Christianity is not part of the law of England, and never was. And as a consequence, blasphemy cases had been wrongly tried. Lawyers, great lawyers, said Lord Dunedin, had been "indulging in rhetoric."

It is not the part of the Common Law of blasphemy to punish men and women for attacking Christianity, although it is quite plain that many Judges have considered they had the power to do so. Christianity has no necessary part in English law, although the State may help and protect it.

One final point for the benefit of Mr. O'Sullivan, K.C. He was horrified, almost to tears, that the trial I have been describing ended the right of England to be called a Christian country. Legally, I believe, it never was that. For a very long period the Church in England was the Roman Church, and that would never permit itself to become part of the State. Then, after the suppression of the Roman Church, other forms of religion took their place, and all religious offences came within the province of Ecclesiastic authorities. Then came the Cromwellian Revolution, and the Ecclesiastic authorities lost their power. That appears to have been replaced by some of our Judges, not so much to preserve religion as to maintain social order and decency. But the judges did not keep to their task. They confused their functions and enlarged their field of operations. Always and with every case of blasphemy there had been an association with indecency or breach of the peace. Religion was mentioned, but that factor had no real place or authority. There is, as the House of Lords made quite plain, no law or judicial procedure known to English law that makes a criticism or attack on Christianity a criminal offence. Church law may run differently, but there is no criminal offence in attacking the Christian religion. In every case of blasphemy the element of indecency of speech or behaviour, or inciting to a breach of the peace, must occur.

We must remember always that our highest Court of Law has decided that Christianity is not, and never was, part of the laws of this country. The pretence that it is otherwise is "mere rhetoric," it is not law. Legally,

England was never a Christian country. It is a country that owes some of its darkest pages to the prevalence of the Christian religion. So my reply to Mr. O'Sullivan's question, "Is England a Christian Country?" is another question, "Was England ever, legally, a Christian country?"

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THREE EMINENT BRITISH HISTORIANS

AMONG outstanding historians in the nineteenth century who were distinguished by their literary abilities stand Macaulay, Carlyle and Froude. In truth, their dissimilar styles of writing are sufficiently attractive to ensure their survival with the reading public long after many of their verdicts have been qualified by more recent research.

Macaulay was born in the Tory tradition, but the obscurantist policy of the Government and the influence of the philosophical Whig, Charles Austin, converted him to progressive principles. Consequently, the Reform Bill of 1832 remained with Macaulay the chief achievement of his political life.

Macaulay's early articles in *Knights' "Quarterly Magazine"* attracted Jeffrey, the influential editor of the "*Edinburgh Review*," and his famous essay on "*Milton*" appeared in that periodical in 1825. Then, for nearly a score of years, there was published in succession a series of 36 critical and historical essays which, with the "*Lays of Ancient Rome*," enjoyed a remarkably favourable reception in literary circles and the reading public generally.

But the magnum opus of Macaulay is his "*History of England*" and its fame endures. Unfortunately, its author's early death in 1859 left his masterpiece a mere fragment of the monumental work he intended to compose. Still, its sales were astounding and even exceeded those of Walter Scott, the favourite writer of the day. We read that: "Of '*Marmion*' 2,000 were sold in the first month; of the *History*, 3,000 copies were sold in ten days. Of the '*Lay of the Last Minstrel*,' 2,250 copies were disposed of in the first year; but the publishers sold 13,000 copies of Macaulay in four months." In the United States the sales were even more extensive, for "there they exceeded any book ever printed, save the Bible and some school texts."

The *History* is admittedly a Whig manifesto and it blackened the character of Marlborough and even that of Penn. Yet, its pictorial power and its flowing style grip the reader's attention and make it one of the most fascinating narratives in any modern tongue. Still, Macaulay's survey is limited. As Professor Westfall Thompson notes in his "*History of Historical Writing*" (2 Vols., Macmillan, 1942): "In contrast to Gibbon's majestic sweep over fifteen centuries, Macaulay devoted himself to less than two decades (1685-1702) of England's long history."

Macaulay was an optimist, with undying faith in Parliamentary machinery, who looked forward to unimpeded progress. It has been said that he was the favoured child of fortune, whereas Carlyle, after a long penurious struggle at last emerged as a recognised man of letters. Macaulay was sunny; Carlyle was gloomy and austere. While the former was the enthusiastic exponent of his own time, Carlyle scorned all our vaunted progress as a pitiful delusion. Thompson opines that Macaulay saw too much light while Carlyle dwelt in too much shadow. Thus, each painted a false picture. No one was more alive to Macaulay's limitations than Lord Acton. Yet he admitted that he was one of the greatest of all writers and masters."

Acton again dismissed Carlyle as "the most detestable of historians," Froude alone excepted. To the Sage of Chelsea, the modern world was mainly composed of lies, shoddies and

shams. Apparently, this Scottish dyspeptic's aversion to contemporary life was a reflection of his personal ailments. What the world needed was not the happiness of "the swinish multitude," but the emergence of greater and nobler men and women. To him there was too much chicanery in business, too much sickening cant in religion and deceptiveness in political life. The great man was Carlyle's ideal, and humanity would never prosper until "the wise ruled and the ignorant obeyed." The Utilitarian philosophy, he sternly reprobated, although it is doubtful whether he ever understood its teachings.

Intended for the Church, Carlyle's increasing scepticism ended all thoughts of a clerical career. His early literary efforts won him little regard, but his "*French Revolution*" (1837) proved a pronounced success. The work is practically a prose poem and, despite its general accuracy, there are probably few chapters that would bear detailed critical analysis in the light of later investigation.

Carlyle rehabilitated the character of Oliver Cromwell with his *Letters and Speeches of the great regicide*, and thus rendered invaluable services to truth. Still, he presents Cromwell in too heroic a form, while his mistakes are minimised. This work, like the volumes on Frederick the Great of Prussia, is distinctly corrective, even if Carlyle cites Frederick's achievements as a justification of the War of 1870.

The third notable literary historian was Carlyle's dutiful disciple, James Anthony Froude. Unlike his pious brother, Hurrell, Anthony soon drifted away from his transient allegiance to Newman and Tractarianism. Attracted to history by Carlyle, Froude studied the rationalistic German thinkers including Goethe and Lessing. His subsequent scepticism shocked his orthodox friends and, although he responded to Newman's invitation to assist in preparing the "*Lives of the English Saints*," the glaring fictions and fables associated with medieval miracles drove him away from traditional beliefs. Froude's "*Shadows of the Clouds*" offended his pious father, while his "*Nemesis of Faith*" (1848) created consternation in clerical circles.

Consequently, Froude resigned his fellowship at Exeter College and became a private tutor, while his intimacy with Carlyle and Kingsley increased.

Froude's brilliant "*History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*" is his masterpiece. This twelve-volume work was severely assailed for its alleged falsifications, especially the chapters dealing with the reign of Henry VIII. Yet, the leading living authority on the period in question, Professor Pollard, urges that: "It may be remarked that there is inadequate justification for the systematic detraction of Froude's '*History*' which has become the fashion. He held strong views and he made some mistakes; but his mistakes were no greater than those of other historians, and there are not half-a-dozen histories in the English language which have been based on so extensive a survey of original materials."

While granting that Froude was occasionally inspired by prejudice, Thompson denies that he was consciously dishonest. Froude was a superb literary artist. He restored the greatness of Burghley and rescued Cranmer's character from the contempt into which it had fallen. Moreover, he depicted neither fanciful saints nor impossible sinners, but frail men and women. His work remains the most elaborate rendering of our history in the sixteenth century and the fullest examination of that period.

Certainly, Froude's judgment of Elizabeth seems unfair to that great ruler, and he displays animus when dealing with Mary, Queen of Scots, however revengeful and unscrupulous she may have been.

Like Acton's, Froude's approach to history was severely moral. Roman Catholicism was to him the inveterate foe of mental liberty, and during the critical period he surveyed, desperate circumstances imperatively demanded exceptional measures. With all his faults, Henry VIII. was a brave man who boldly overthrew Roman domination and, strange as it may appear,

he remained a popular sovereign until his death. Dr. Thompson avers that with all its blemishes Froude's History "has the qualities of immortality."

Palgrave, Freeman and other carping critics were never tired of dwelling on what they termed "Froudacity." Freeman's malevolence may be inferred from his marginal notes in his copies of Froude's volumes, one of which reads: "Froude is certainly the vilest brute that ever wrote a book."

For some time Froude maintained a dignified silence towards his detractors, and then suggested that "an impartial committee" should compare any selected sections of his History with the transcripts of the original documents he had prepared and sent to the British Museum, if the "Saturday Review," in which many of the most virulent attacks on his work had appeared, would publish its findings. But significantly enough, this fair request was never complied with.

When one remembers the age and dilapidated state of the Spanish documents Froude examined, as well as the extreme difficulty of their decipherment, no wonder some misreadings occurred. As Froude himself recalls his experiences: "I had to cut my way through a jungle, for no one had opened the way for me. I have been turned into rooms piled to the window-sill with bundles of dust-covered despatches and told to make the best of it. Often I have found the sand glistening on the ink where it had been sprinkled when a page was turned . . . There the letters had lain, never looked at again since they were read and put away."

T. F. PALMER.

FREETHINKERS AND REBELS v. GODISTS AND CONFORMISTS

III.

CONCRETE CONTRASTS

1543 . . . 1600, 1609, 1633

1912 . . . 1933

"And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope."

"To conceal, under some verbalist fallacy about 'the innocence of error,' the fact that religion has in mass wrought vast evil both directly and indirectly, by inspiring cruelty and suppressing alike knowledge and the faculty for it, would be merely to write false history on a new principle reached *a priori*. All error is potentially maleficent; and the error of religious infallibilism has been visibly destructive in the highest degree."—J. M. ROBERTSON.

"Social causation takes place in terms of motives of choice or conviction or fear, and on the other hand of economic interests."—J. M. R.

"It is always to be remembered in regard to the struggle between Freethought and Religion that it is mainly a conflict between unsalaried and salaried combatants; between disinterested propaganda, right or wrong, and propaganda always backed by large vested interests. The latter may be perfectly sincere, but, like the functioning of the priest, it is on the side of an endowed institution, collectively rich, broad-bottomed on common prejudice, while the militant Freethinker appeals to the more thoughtful few, and is commonly poor, since the possession of wealth is a strong suasive to social conformity, save for eccentrics ('fanatics'—A.Z.). Except in respect of the guarded activities of well-placed wise men alive to the need for a gradual correction of common dogmas, the battle is broadly one between unpaid freelancers and an army of professional defenders."—J. M. R.

THE question, as put by "S. H.," could well-nigh be answered fully by quotations from J. M. R. He was my first "Master" in dialectic reasoning—so far as I ever had any; and I learned much from him—and G. W. Foote—in lectures and answers to questioners, before these appeared in print. (The hiring of tongues and pens of the B.B.C. have much lessened the opportunity and scope of that independent method of education in thinking). I am content with these few passages, because long before he had finished his life's work, I had acted on what he taught. So now I am concerned—so far as I can—to develop and apply his principles to the urgent, vital, sociologic problems of the present and the future. As he himself has said of Freethinkers: "Rationalists, indeed, who have seen their pioneers commit error and fallacy, can as little pretend to frame a final conspectus that, in detail, will resist all criticism. But they are the pioneers. Theirs for ever is the function of advance, though they do but effect a perpetual rectification, knowing that, in the grave words of the great ancient commonplace, they are as runners successively carrying forward the ever new-kindled torches of the life of the mind."

The place and value of Freethinkers and Rebels as opposed against Godists and Conformists in the long story of Evolutionary Sociology is, in itself, an essential part of our case for a scientific Atheist philosophy. As the large majority of Humans in all classes, lands, and periods, think in terms of the individual and concrete, the explaining can best be continued by considering some illustrative concrete-contrast specimens. In doing this the need for the use of scientific abstracts must always be remembered. Necessary in all sciences; they are particularly so in the social sciences.

The two forms or modes of human existence have been much in evidence in this discussing: Human individual existences or entities (i.e., individual persons) and human social entities. To understand, these two forms of existence are, in theory, examined separately; but in actual fact neither can exist without the other. This is true despite the fact that for some 4000 years, the people who now constitute the United Kingdom have become less and less anything of a "community"—ideologically or economically. So much so that from 1939 till now the only one idea and/or interest about which we have had unity has been the vital urgency of completely defeating and breaking the power of "Nazi"-Fascism—and we haven't done it yet!

Another necessary scientific abstract, and one often stressed by J. M. R., is what may be "pictured," mentally, as the two-fold "stream" of human life—definitely during the last 6,000 years or so. These two "streams" are the economic development in the social existence and the ideologic development in the individual. They "flow" separately, sometimes they mingle and, anon, divide again; and, neither "stream" can be a "stream" without the mutual intermingling. The one "stream" is that of finding or producing by labour—generally "hard labour," but not penal—the necessities of human existence—should that "stream" cease to "flow," sooner or later the life in and on it will also cease. The other arises out of the growing sensitivity of the nervous system to sensations and emotions in some individuals. This began, as "C. C." has many a time reminded us, in the need to have more food, without which there is neither individual nor social life, neither ideologic nor economic. Then came primitive—and sporadic—Godisms: later in the "flow" of the "stream" came elaborate systems of Godism, and, ever since, the "flow" of both "streams" has been fouled by the mud and blood of Godism. But out of the ideologic "stream" came also song, music, pictorial art, literature, sciences, metaphysical philosophy; and now, a scientific Atheist philosophy is giving us a connected evolutionary sociology based upon evolutionary economics. Just as astrology, secularised, became the science of astronomy; alchemy, secularised, became chemistry; and the myths of creation became

evolutionary biology; so now at long last, "morals" and "politics" are not rules imposed upon us by some mythical gods, but necessary modes of conduct arising out of our social conditions, and to be guided by scientific understanding.

As with the economic "stream," so with the ideologic: should the "flow" cease, life will also cease—indirectly if not directly. Herein "lies" the present danger from Godisms and, most insidiously of all, from the B.B.C. The "flow," in those "channels" comes from very far, in time; but it is now a stagnant and poisonous swamp. Their "guards" (!) do not want to find a "channel" by which the "stream" can be cleared from ideologic mud and blood.

This metaphor of the two "streams" of human life is based upon what, years ago, I described as the "Scientific Conception of History" and which, as a means to understand, is superior to any of the three "Materialist Conceptions." Recently, the diagrammatic method of expressing ideas in social studies has been much used in books for the general public. This has emboldened me to try my 'prentice hand on the graphic method of explaining an abstract, but scientific, analysis.

* * *

Looked at from the static point of view, i.e., as it appears at any point in time during the last 400 years, the diagram is a fairly correct picture of the position. Regarded as a plan of the two "flows" it is even more correct, and roughly it depicts the "flow" of the two "streams," from the beginning of the "archaic civilisation," 6,000 years or so ago. Then kings, priests and nobles first arose as organised minorities of privilege and power over the great majority—the common folk.

Now, having our chart, let us travel in time 400 years up-stream and see some "ancient lights."

ATHOSO ZENOO.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF THE JEWISH CLAIM TO PALESTINE

CANAAN was first promised to Abram for himself and his posterity in his seventy-sixth year when he resided in the land of Haran. He departed thither at once with all his family and property, and soon after his arrival the promise was repeated (Gen. xii.). Subsequently, there was a further repetition in which the promised territory was defined as extending from the Nile to the Euphrates (xv.). Later still a miraculous confirmation of the promise was afforded by the birth of Isaac, Abram's son, whose mother was long past the age of child-bearing. On this occasion a peculiarly solemn attestation was made and the rite of circumcision was instituted in token of the covenant, as a further mark of which Abram, and his wife, Sarai, were thenceforth to be known as Abraham and Sarah (xvi. and xvii.).

Isaac, the son, and Jacob, the grandson, of the above pair, had the aforesaid covenant revealed to them no less impressively than it had been to their revered ancestor (xxvi. xxvii. and xxxv.). In the last of these instances the name Israel was substituted for the name Jacob, and thenceforth the descendants of the patriarch in question were known as Israelites, or children of Israel.

When Moses was divinely chosen to deliver the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, he was told to conduct them to Canaan, the land promised unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. vi.). Shortly before his death, Moses ascended the top of Pisgah near Jericho from which he had an extensive view of Canaan, and was then divinely informed that the land spread out before him was the one promised unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

(Deut. xxxiv.). Joshua, who succeeded Moses in the leadership of Israel, and who settled the Israelites in Canaan by force of arms, regarded his victories as due to divine assistance, and his conquests as divine gifts. He taught that the Israelites would be safe as long as they worshipped none save their national god, Jehovah, but that if they worshipped any other god, either along with him, or without him, they would not only lose his help, but also incur his anger.

Many Jews have believed, and still do believe that the covenant above specified is as the scriptures say "everlasting," but in the opinion of such persons it is liable to abeyance under certain conditions. Apostacy has been regarded as a principal cause, prevalent mostly in olden times. Laxity in religious duties, and decline of morality, have also been adduced to excuse the severity of Jehovah towards his chosen people. Hence, pious Jews are convinced that if Jewry does its part the covenant still holds good, and the Lord of Hosts, who led Joshua to victory, will restore them to Canaan and give them the ends of the earth for their possession. It cannot be said that the Jews lost Canaan because they refused to have Jesus Christ for their king. For long before his birth, Herod the Great who was then ruling over it, had been appointed by the Romans, and was their vassal. Moreover, some years before the death of Christ the Romans began to rule Judaea and Samaria by procurators under their legates of Syria, whilst elsewhere still remaining overlords to the successors of Herod. The apostle Paul, who claimed to be a Roman citizen, did not believe that his people, the Hebrews, had lost their right to Canaan, conferred upon them by the divine promise made unto Abraham; whilst as to the right of the Arabs to the country, because their ancestor Ishmael was the eldest son of Abraham, he being born of Hagar, Sarah's slave, whom she had given Abraham for a wife when she herself was childless. Paul adduces her own exclamation: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Gal. iv. 30; Gen. xxxi. 10).

This is what the Bible states about the Jewish right to Palestine; and if the statement is true, then it would be safer for a man to plunge into the wildest swellings of Jordan than to raise a finger against a claim thus established.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

PRUDERY

THE time will come—it's a great way off—when a joke about sex will be not so much objectionable as unintelligible. Thanks to Christian teaching, a nude body is now an obscenity, of the congress of the sexes it is indecent to speak and our birth is a corruption. Hence come a legion of evils: reticence, therefore ignorance and therefore venereal disease; prurience, especially in adolescence, poisonous literature, and dirty jokes. The mind is contaminated from early youth; even the healthiest-minded girl will blush at the mention of the wonder of creation. Yet to the perfectly enfranchised mind it should be as impossible to joke about sex as about mind or digestion or physiology. The perfectly enfranchised poet—and Walt Whitman in "The Song of Myself" came near being it—should be as ready to sing of the incredible raptures of the sexual act between "Twin Souls" as of the clouds or sunshine. Every man or woman who has loved has a heart full of beautiful things to say but no man dare—for fear of the police, for fear of the coarse jests of others, and even of a breakdown in his own high-mindedness. I wonder just how much wonderful lyric poetry has thus been lost to the world!—From "Journal of a Disappointed Man" by W. N. P. Barbellion.

ACID DROPS

Some of our readers will remember that as soon as Hitler and Hitlerism appeared in the world's eye we insisted that the movement was, before anything, a repetition of the wars that were carried on by the medieval Christian Church. The fanaticism, the slaughter of men, women and children, the intolerance, the assertion that Hitler was sent by God to rescue the German people, and then reign supreme in the world, step by step the parallel with the crusades ran. At the Ribbentrop sale the properties fetched large sums beyond the value of things sold, and finally we had the frank confession of the chief buyers that in their opinion Hitler was sent by God, and gave the usual Bible quotation proving that Hitler was called by God. These men have never departed from the belief that Hitler was a child of God. We are waiting now to hear some of the highly placed men in this country who did so much to help Hitler publicly confess their position. Nothing worth noting has been observed up to the present.

It is an insult to every soldier to be "ordered" to Church. George Meredith once said that women would be the last civilised. We think he was wrong. The last thing that will be civilised will be religion. And the only way to civilise religion is to destroy it. We should like to see someone in the House of Commons call attention to compulsory religious service in the Armed Forces. We do not think we shall; it requires more courage than the average politician possesses.

If we did not understand the clergy we should be inclined to regard every one of them as a very simple-minded individual of the type of Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield." We do not say that that type of character does not exist; indeed, there is not a type of character inside the Church that is not to be found outside. The chief distinction is that while the layman in general gets through life with a moderate mixture of good and bad qualities "good" is not counted a miracle. The priest, if he is bad counts the blame as due to Satan, and if he is good he thanks God for having worked a miracle. Our own belief is that the cleric and the layman are both on the same level in all matters. We believe that layman and priest are almost on the same level. The balance, if any, is in favour of the layman.

Consider the case of the Rev. R. Fielding. He sees that the Churches are losing ground rapidly. So he blames laymen for saying that it is due to the fact that the people have lost their "spiritual vision," whatever that may be. He says that what is now wanted is a repetition of the early years of Christianity, when the Church "swept through the world shouting that it had found that which the world was seeking." Which, being analysed, was just pulpit windbagging, and we should be surprised if Mr. Fielding was not aware of its quality. For the Church never did sweep through anywhere in that way. Its first failure—it should have been otherwise—was in Judea. Certainly the people who were there, and who might have been expected to welcome God, did not rush to embrace the new religion. And three hundred years later Christianity was established only as a political side-stepping, the turning point was the political conversion of Constantine. Even then the cry that the people gathered round the cross is historically not true.

The truth is that Christianity had to fight hard to establish itself, and to keep on fighting to hold what it had. It used bribery, terrorism and cruelty, the terrifying picture of hell, and every other possible method to maintain its hold on the world. We must also remember that the Church had, in its earlier history, to deal with an unscientific view of life. To-day it has modern science, a scientific philosophy and an understanding of the origin of religious ideas. We may not know where Jesus went, but we do from what direction he came. We know that real Christianity is but a rehash of age-old superstitions. It is impossible that Mr. Fielding should not be aware of these things. He knows there are only two ways to gain converts—by persuasion and by bribery. And even those weapons are losing their power.

Mr. Norman Taylor writes from Preston:—

"The splendid article in a recent issue on 'The Freedom of the Press' and its mention of a Freethinker ex-Lord Mayor, gave me food for thought—what happens when a Freethinker is made Mayor? You will know that usually such an honour is followed by the escorting of the Mayor to Church."

We know of the custom, and we also know, regretfully, that most of the local officials submit to the ridiculous parade. There are exceptions, but it is high time that all Mayors displayed a more sensitive regard to truth and declined the parade. A Mayor is not filling a religious post, and all the people who elect him are not Christians. But in such matters honesty of opinion often goes to the wall.

The Bishop of Ely says that "everyone of us is called to arm and to fight, and manfully to play his part on the battlefields of God." Poor God, he is always in trouble one way or another. To-day he has to call his followers to protect him against Roman Catholics. To-morrow he calls for assistance against Protestantism. Then he musters both of these classes to ward off an attack from Atheists. One day he has to call on his friends in Germany to fight for him against Russia. Another day he is helping Russia to destroy Germany. He sends his son to earth to get worshippers for him, with the result that his son monopolises the worship of his might-have-been followers of God. Someone ought to write an essay on God—the elder.

Our compliments to the Rev. L. B. Ashby, who week by week turns out every Saturday a half-column of double-barrelled religious nonsense. In the "Daily Telegraph" for December 1, greatly daring, Mr. Ashby throws overboard the "physical and visible reappearance of Christ. . . . It is now replaced in the minds of almost all Christians by a more spiritual conception." What that means in plain language is that the wonders of the appearance of Jesus occurred only in the opinion of Christians. That looks like giving up the ghost, but Mr. Ashby evidently knows his audience and is aware that, provided there is a certain amount of slobbery language, the fact that the early Christians were dead wrong in their belief in Jesus as an actual living person the old game will continue. Mr. Ashby evidently appreciates the quality of his people.

So Mr. Ashby explains that "there is nothing illogical in believing that when actual death finally closes a human life there will be, in some way which we do not know, and in circumstances which we cannot discern nor visualise, a final judgment upon life as a whole. . . . Inexorably we shall reap what we have sown." Now that is what we may call first quality faith. We don't know what we are doing or why we do it, we cannot think of a final judgment, not what the next world will be like, or how it will affect us, but we do know that whatever it is it will be "inexorable." Hats off to Mr. Ashby.

The wisdom of our spiritual leaders almost defies belief. For example, the Archbishop of York says that according to the Prayer Book "the primary purpose of marriage is children." Every Christian who reads this will say, "Thank God for the Prayer Book." Without that we might have lived and died thinking that the purpose of marriage was to provide business for the manufacturers of furniture.

Our hearty compliments to Mrs. A. D. Lindsay, wife of the Master of Balliol (who has now, for political reasons, become Lord Lindsay of Birker). Titles that are given as a recognition of services done to the country may be permissible, but otherwise they produce little but mischief in one form or another. Above all, hereditary titles are a disgrace to commonsense and a distinct threat to the health of a country that permits them. Mrs. Lindsay wishes to remain as such, and it is to be hoped that others will follow her example. It is time we left off playing at being a democratic country. We are not that by a very long shot. Mrs. Lindsay has followed the example of Mrs. Sidney Webb, who openly derided her husband being called Lord Passfield. We remember that Herbert Spencer and Stuart Mill were both offered titles but refused them. Many others have had them offered, but have refused.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. WORTHINGTON.—We have made it a point not to chronicle the number of Christians in prison. It would take up too much room. Moreover, we are not inclined to deny Christians a shelter in which to continue their religious meditations. Our only complaint is that Christians in prison should be more kindly disposed to those Freethinkers subscribing to find their erring brethren a shelter.

For "The Freethinker."—Mr. Ward, £1; H. J. Hewer, 2s. 6d.

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Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

In noting Chapman Cohen's booklet on Thomas Paine the "Co-operative News," in complaining of the scandalous manner in which Paine has been ignored by writers on history and social reform, says that we have ignored "the place given to Paine by Trevelyan's 'History of England' and others." We are familiar with the names of writers who mention Thomas Paine, and these references—with the exception of Trevelyan—are quite inadequate. A very wide-awake reader might be led to pay attention to Paine, but the majority would be content to note the name and let it go at that. If the writer of the review will turn to the pupils in public schools, and to the "upper schools" in general, he will find that Paine's work and influence is practically ignored. As things are, the slight references to Paine by our historians only stand out with greater significance. Meanwhile we suggest to the writer of the review to inquire of any acquaintances he may have who have attended "superior schools" as to what they know about Paine? He will have his eyes opened. Ordinary schools never hear the name.

We much regret that, owing to the acute paper shortage, it will be impossible to publish Mr. W. Kent's anthology for Freethinkers—to be entitled "Lift Up Your Heads"—this year. Mr. Kent has just published the fourth edition of his booklet on the last galleried inn in London, "The George," Southwark. There are twelve pictures, including two of a Shakespeare and a Dickens play in the yard of the inn during the war. It would be an acceptable Christmas gift to many people. The price is a shilling, and copies can be obtained, post free, from the author at 71, Union Road, Clapham, S.W. 1.

We hear from Mr. Joseph Lewis that after many years the "Paine Memoria! Committee" has succeeded in getting a memorial of Thomas Paine placed in the United States "Hall of Fame." We congratulate Mr. Lewis's committee with the success. We have a picture of Paine in our Portrait Gallery, but it should be England's duty to see that proper respect is paid the greatest Englishman of his time.

Talking of religious morals and their consequences, the following will amuse—and probably instruct. Its author is Mark Twain:—

Once when he was on his way to Sunday school he saw some bad boys starting off pleasuring in a sail-boat. He was filled with consternation because he knew from his reading that boys who went sailing on Sunday invariably got drowned. So he ran out on a raft to warn them, but a log turned with him and slid him into the river. A man got him out pretty soon and the doctor pumped the water out of him and gave him a fresh start with his bellows, but he caught cold and lay sick-abled nine weeks. But the most unaccountable thing about it was that the bad boys in the boat had a good time all day and reached home alive and well in the most surprising manner. Jacob Blivens said there was nothing like these things in the books. He was perfectly dumbfounded.

We are pleased to note that the Tees-side Branch of the N.S.S. has been doing some useful work in a quiet but effective manner. Among other things it has, by pressing the local Council and providing it with adequate data stopped some of the Churches arranging for concerts and charging for admission. By law the Church of England—and others—are relieved from taxation. But that prohibits any charge for admission. Whether the Council turned a blind eye to this, or was unaware of the legal position we do not know. But we are pleased to learn that the local Council on the basis of the facts presented to it has informed that church that if a charge for admission to a concert in the church is made, the church will be subject to rates as are other places of entertainment.

The Blackburn Branch N.S.S. has a visit from Mr. Colin McCall of Manchester to-day. He will lecture in the Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate, on "Materialism; A Scientific Philosophy," at 7 p.m. There is plenty of work to be done in Blackburn and those willing to give a hand are asked to introduce themselves to branch officials at the meeting. One immediate form of help would be to bring an orthodox friend.

We are always invited by the clergy of all denominations to put our trust in God. But the Rev. Ferguson, of Stranraer, has given notice that considering the kind of weather we have he will always keep his hat on during the Christian ceremony at the grave side. There seems to be more common sense than piety about Mr. Ferguson. He will put his trust in the next world, but he will look after himself in this one.

At the recent Church of England Assembly the question was raised as to whether the Church should advertise. One would much like to know whether the Church—all Churches for that matter—ever ceases advertising? Consider the number of Churches that exists, the number of public functions in which the clergy figure, the use made of the Press, the representatives of the Church in the House of Lords, and how the clergy pop up in a hundred different ways to advertise their presence. When a body of clergy ask, "Shall we advertise?" the fitting reply is, "When do they cease to advertise?" They do not find advertising as profitable as it once was, but that is because there is a decreasing demand for the goods the Churches have to offer.

One of the wandering parsons who has gone the rounds of factories asks in the "Sunday Mail," "Why cannot these visits be continued now the war is over?" He says most of his parishioners like to have these talks with him. That is a statement we would question, but he adds "even if it is only to argue with him." That explains much. But we question whether many parsons would stand up for long against many who wish "to talk back."

While we are on this subject we suggest a method by which the Churches might experience a "full house." Let them open their pulpits to free discussion, and we guarantee a full house—for a while.

CATHOLICS AND THE "SECULAR ARM"

DURING the nineteenth century there were many formidable antagonists to the Roman Church in the Protestant ranks; they produced many devastating works which in their day were widely circulated and must have been responsible, to a great degree, for the no-Popery cry which then pervaded England with no little ferocity. From our own point of view there was perhaps little to choose between the blatant and undisguised intolerance of Catholics and the humbug that was written about "freedom" by Protestants—I mean, of course, real Protestants, not the mealy-mouthed ones who in these days try their best to hide their unbelief in Jesus the God by preaching him as a sort of upright Sunday-school teacher.

Where these Protestant works, however, were exceptionally valuable was in the way they gathered together, from all kinds of Catholic authorities, quotations particularly hostile to Popery as they loved to call the rival Christian Church—often not seeing that these quotations hit "true" Christianity just as hard. And the only answer Catholics could give was, wherever possible, silence; with a devout prayer that the passing of time would mean also the passing of these terrible attacks on the Faith. In a measure, these prayers have been answered for I must admit that it is not easy to get hold of copies of the books in question. But if we are unlucky in this, there are other compensations, our greater historical knowledge for example, a juster comparison of the known data, a more scientific study of comparative religions, and last, but by no means least, the work of Dr. G. G. Coulton.

Dr. Coulton has one advantage over his predecessors. He does not hate Roman Catholicism as they did, nor does he fear it. He is concerned almost exclusively with historical accuracy and he has shown in book after book, with exact and overwhelming precision, that the average Roman Catholic writer, whether priest or layman, rarely hesitates to put down statements to help his creed which are quite contrary to the facts. When he entitles one of his books "Romanism and Truth" we can be quite certain he means "Lies in Romanism."

Not that it is easy to catch Romanists out. One has to be very well read in their own literature to do this, for naturally they are by no means disposed to accept a correction from a Protestant writer; and this is where the encyclopædic knowledge of Catholic writers which Dr. Coulton possesses is so valuable. Let me give an illustration from one of his very controversial works—"In Defence of the Reformation."

The Roman Church has always protested that it never put heretics to death; it handed those condemned for heresy to the secular arm for punishment insisting that the State officials must "act with moderation and to avoid all bloodshed and death." In many discussions I myself had with Catholics, they always quoted this, and as Dr. Coulton himself admits, "That was the regular formula in the Inquisition." And what is really the truth?

Well, Dr. Coulton gives us the exact words of "the best of the orthodox Roman Catholic historians who has written in these later times on the Inquisition . . . This is Canon Vacandard, one of the half dozen most distinguished orthodox Roman Catholic historians." He wrote:—

"Modern apologists have tried their best to show that the execution of heretics was solely the work of the civil power, and that the Church was in no way responsible. It is erroneous, however, to pretend that the Church had absolutely no part in the condemnation of heretics to death. It is true that this participation of hers was not direct and immediate, but even though indirect it was none the less real and efficacious. To reassure their conscience (the Church judges) tried an expedient in abandoning heretics to the secular arm. They besought the State officials to

act with moderation and to avoid all 'bloodshed and danger of death.' This was unfortunately an empty formula which deceived no one. It was intended to safeguard the principle which the Church had taken for her motto: 'The Church abhors bloodshed.' In strongly asserting this traditional law the Inquisitors imagined they thereby freed themselves from all responsibility. We must take this for what it is worth. It has been styled 'cunning' and 'hypocrisy'; let us call it simply a legal fiction."

So much for Canon Vacandard—and Dr. Coulton leaves it to his readers to decide as to the "legal fiction." He himself would prefer to use "stronger words." But the Canon "is supported by the two latest French historians of the Inquisition, both of them orthodox Roman Catholics." It is they who claim, says Dr. Coulton:—

"That when the Ecclesiastical judge handed over Joan of Arc to be burned by the English, he handed her over under a law which compelled the English when they received her to burn her. If the English officials had refused to burn Joan of Arc, by the medieval Church law they would have been excommunicated for disobedience to the law; if they had remained a year under that excommunication without obeying the law, they would then have become heretics, and they would then have been liable to be burned themselves. Yet it was under these conditions that the Church in the Middle Ages, time after time, had to face the formula, in handing over the heretics, 'Please either do not shed his blood or bring him in any danger of death'; while behind that law was the strict law, 'If you do not burn that person you yourself will be burned!' That then was the law all through the Middle Ages, and was the law in Rome until yesterday, in fact."

The reader should make a note of this fact—especially when we hear the sweet warblings from Catholics about their excessive toleration. For, as Dr. Coulton points out, he himself, as a baptised person, is subject to the Pope. "Yes," he continues, "it may surprise you, but everybody who has been baptised is, by Roman Catholic law even up to the present day, a subject of the Pope—an erring subject but a subject of the Pope." The Catholic Church can, if it likes, send someone to convert its erring subject, and if he or she remains obstinate it has the right to burn the heretic. "That is the law," says Dr. Coulton, "of Roman Catholics up to the present moment (1930), except so far as that new code of 1917 has omitted any mention of the punishment of death . . ."

It appears, however, that the Church has made the change very obscure—"Up to 1917 there was no question" that if people were impenitent, they could immediately be burned. And the Pope, even if he upset this law one day, could if he wished, bring it into force again with one stroke of his pen. And does any one doubt, given that power, he would bring it back?

Of course, *autos-da-fé* are now out of the question, but that does not mean the Church has ever repented its past horrors, most of them quite equal to the kind of thing revealed at Belsen and elsewhere. And where it is not a question of burning and torturing, the Church has made no scruple in using its power as far as it dared. For example, in its Index of prohibited works, the latest edition shows that Montaigne's "Essays," Bacon's "Advancement of Learning," John Stuart Mill's "Political Economy," and Taine's "English Literature," are still there with dozens, nay hundreds, of similar works. "Everything is done," comments Dr. Coulton, "short of measures which would defeat their own purpose, to prevent Roman Catholics from hearing both sides."

Needless to say, Dr. Coulton is not liked by the Roman Church, and in their attacks on his integrity they do their utmost to expose him to their sheep as an ignoramus, all the while taking good care to avoid any serious discussion with him. He

prints, often at his own expense, their angry letters or articles against him with a hearty gusto, for they show how thoroughly he is feared.

For Freethinkers I know of no greater opponent of the lies and hypocrisy and humbug of the Roman Church than Dr. Coulton, for he is backed not only by his own passionate love of truth, fair play and tolerance, but with something which is rarer—a great and modest scholarship.

We Freethinkers at least should see that his books never suffer the fate of those I referred to at the beginning of this article.

H. CUTNER.

A PERSONAL REPLY TO A PERSONAL PROBLEM

MAY I reply to the problem of "Freethinking Father" in his article in "The Freethinker" of recent date. It is factual and not theoretical, and as such will, I hope, be helpful.

My son is now eleven. From the time of his entry into the elementary school at the age of five he was withdrawn from religious instruction until leaving for the secondary school a few months ago; incidentally, as a special scholarship winner. He thus early "learned to stand alone," as Chapman Cohen says, and suffered no discomfort thereby. On one occasion an inquisitive teacher did inquire was he a Jew? That was all. Obviously, he was not thus removed from "religious influences," using that phrase in its widest application; no human being is. Our literature, speech, customs, and architecture are permeated with relics and residues of an intensely religious past. I was concerned and responsible that he should recognise and have factual explanation of their social significance; I was equally emphatic that he should not be doped and duped in his most impressionable years by their parade as "religious truth" at the hands of some teacher who might himself be playing the hypocrite under economic necessity.

"Freethinking Father" is, in my opinion, wrong in presuming it "quite likely that a child who is told nothing about religion will not ask questions about it," and in deciding that "unless he has asked definite questions about religion he will have been told nothing about it." That policy to be pursued would suggest a very carefully coddled child and savours of the religious attitude to sex that is such a vicious taboo in all too many homes. An implicit or explicit taboo in the home means ignorance in meeting the world outside. Distorted information gathered there can never be brought home for advice and sifting between parents and children who have not before progressively discussed such matters together in an atmosphere of frankness and co-operation. The child who has not had objective instruction in sexual matters can never discuss with a parent the subjective experiences of puberty and adolescence. But I digress—of that, more anon.

When my son asked me "Who made the world?" I did not say "No one knows the answer to that question," as "Freethinking Father" anticipates doing. He should dispel the "Who," for that is the projection of personality into nature and the repetition of primitive man's mistake; natural to him and natural to the child. Progressively I explained to him (reinforced by appeals to his own reasoning and observation) that there is no justification for presuming a personality, akin to but above man, in the formation and progress of the universe. The answer "God made it—or did it—or willed it" is, of course, the straw of ignorance at which the average, harassed parent clutches to curb the questioning importunings of enquiring childhood: Fairy stories, that cause children of developing intelligence making contact with and getting information from the outside world to secretly smirk at the imbecility of parents. My son loves fairy stories of the right kind—and so do I.

The straight, scientific answer that "Freethinking Father" desires to give to questionings will make increasing demands on his own needs to be up to date in his education and factual knowledge in order to impart to his son and to teach him to think for himself. I note that was Ellen Wilkinson's instruction to the German education authorities on her recent visit to the schoolchildren of Berlin. Is it too much to hope that in her capacity as Minister of Education she will instruct our educational authorities likewise? I think it is.

But if "Freethinking Father" is concerned in reasonably and factually presenting to his son the outlines of religious history and anthropology—readings from the abridged "Golden Bough" of Sir James Fraser can be as entrancing as any fairy story—he need not fear for his son being inculcated with religious doctrines under the new Education Act; even if he is fearful of exposing him to scorn from his conservative schoolfellows by being different and by being withdrawn in the first years of his schooling. Much depends on ability, personality and environment I will concede, but can claim that despite or because of being "different" my son terminated his elementary schooling as school captain. I may perhaps interpose that throughout five years, just completed in the Services, I was an avowed Atheist, and promoted some reactions from Christian colleagues but scorn was not one of them. Respect for, and in many cases acceptance and adoption, of my ideas (for "my" ideas understand the inclusion and projection of my acceptance of others ideas—Chapman Cohen first; and he would be first to admit his indebtedness to others) was my reward. "The measure of the real respect that the Freethinker will get from the religious world will ultimately depend on the amount of respect he has for himself": Chapman Cohen in the issue of "Freethinking Father's" problem.

I asked my son if he wished to be withdrawn from religious instruction at his new school. He replied "I might as well learn a little more about it." I acquiesced, for you must know your opponent's case in order to criticise it. At scripture lesson recently he asked the mistress "Who was God's mother, since we all have mothers?" And if, after that, he gets a call from God and desires to take a dog collar he will be a worthy successor to Dean Inge!

When quite young, no more than three or four, and we were having a Sunday morning cuddle in the parental bed, he asked me where he came from. I replied "You came from Mummy's belly." He rejoined "You are telling me a fairy story." The scientific factual answer was to him, at that age, stranger than fiction. A fairy story—but a fairy story that came true! He has never had to be disillusioned about that, nor hoodwinked about the little sister who has lately arrived in this troubled world. No deceit or spurious delicacy embarrassed the months of waiting in the intimacy of a small home. Instead, he took with us a lively interest in her development; was consulted in the choice of her name (we knew it would be a girl!); was sympathetic and understanding of his mother's progress during gestation; and shares the joy and care of "Susan," now that she is here.

I recall my own flounderings towards sexual knowledge and the bruising I endured through ignorance and repression; recall, as I instanced in a previous "Freethinker" article, that I was turned thirty years of age before I shed my fear and ignorance of religion by being introduced to "The Freethinker" and the works of Chapman Cohen; and hope that my son will recall me the better for that with affection, and improve upon me with guidance to his son—and I am sure that "Freethinking Father" wishes that from his son, too.

A. J. ASHBY.

The highest ideal of a family is where all are equal—where love has superseded authority—where each seeks the good of all, and where none obey—where no religion can sunder hearts, and with which no church can interfere.—"Rome or Reason" by R. G. Ingersoll.

A PRIORITY JOB

IT is generally accepted that the biggest job facing Freethinkers at the present time (and probably for some time to come) is the most uncompromising of opposition to the pretensions of the religionists. In the theoretical, philosophic sphere I quite certainly agree. The total destruction of the basis on which the Church of Rome has built such an imposing spiritual and material structure is, for instance, a necessary preliminary to any really satisfactory building of a new world, a decent world in which the ordinary man can live at peace with his neighbours.

But it seems to me that there is an equally urgent job in the more practical sphere of immediate politics—and unless this is carried out concurrently with the theoretical propaganda or Freethought there is a definite danger that the whole of the work which has been done in hundreds of years will fall to the ground. We are to-day faced with the greatest menace to humanity that we have ever seen—the atom bomb. If, as I have already suggested in these columns, atomic warfare breaks out, then everything in our civilisation that we consider valuable will be destroyed—probably in a matter of days. And the stupid world in which we live has handed out this weapon* so that any criminal lunatic in a place of power in any of the larger countries of the world can light the match which will start off the conflagration.

I therefore feel that the most important practical job that Freethinkers (in common with others, such as Anarchists) can undertake is to fight the menace of militarism. Only if we can succeed in destroying the idea that there is something fine and noble about that form of mass-murder which we call war can we expect to build that better world for which we all long.

Some people have expressed the view that the coming of the atomic bomb, on top of such complex weapons as those which were in general use during the war which has just ended, has made resistance to governmental control impossible and useless. I do not think that this is a fair deduction from the facts. It has, it is true, made armed insurrection more difficult, but Freethinkers will be the first to admit that armed insurrection is not the best way to oppose governments. Individual refusal to co-operate in warlike measures has in the past proved far more satisfactory. The present state of affairs in the Soviet Union shows that armed insurrection, even though it may start with the idea of advancing progress, may lead eventually to the installation of a tyranny as great as that which has been supplanted.

But the fact that present-day weapons require enormous concentrations of capital to produce, and difficult skills to operate, need not prevent the individual opposition to anti-social measures. It is possible to use against individuals only the old weapons—the rifle, the hand grenade, the political police—which have been used by the majority of States at most periods in history.

As I view it, therefore, the only way in which Freethinkers and other oppositionists can make themselves felt is by the means of individual passive resistance. Conscientious objectors, during the two world wars, have shown that this can be elevated into a principle, and that it does give the individual a chance to utter his protest, if nothing more. And if it prove possible to develop some kind of international organisation, with representatives in all countries, the plans of the militarists in this atomic age might be smashed beyond repair.

The International Freethought Movement provides one channel in which these struggles against oppression might be made to work. The task will not be easy, but it is probable that on its outcome the future of our children may depend. As Alex Comfort has said, the State in our day shows the characteristics

of a lunatic. And, while one may humour lunatics, one does not co-operate with them.

The great testing time for our future will come when the Labour Government of this country introduces (as it no doubt will introduce during the next few months) its plans for peacetime conscription. There is, it should be needless to say, no justification for this. The atom bomb has made the concept of huge conscript armies totally out of date, and the only genuine reason for forcing young men to spend twelve months in the Armed Forces is clearly to make them more willing servants of the State.

If a man has been psychologically conditioned by life in the Army, with its unthinking obedience to authority and its compulsory Church parades, he will be less likely to be a Freethinker, a rebel, an Anarchist, or whatever term of derision and contempt the powers that be feel inclined to apply to those who prefer not to have their thinking done for them.

I hope that the Freethought Movement will play its part in this anti-militarist drive, which *must* succeed if civilisation is not to crash within the lifetime of many living. We have somehow staggered through the years 1939-1945. We should not succeed if another war broke out in 1950. That is the greatest danger of our day, and that, it appears, is the biggest priority job that we have to face.

S. H.

BIBLE BOOSTERS

NOT long ago somebody conceived the idea of designing the Bible in a manner "to be read as literature." Many people have never regarded the Bible as being anything else but literature—a sort of olla podrida of the so-called sacred books of the East—a pot-pourri of tales similar to the Arabian Nights Entertainments—a hash of extravagancies of the Don Quixote—Sancho Panza flavour. The result of all these divine revelations is like a mess of pottage with the seasoning of Rabelaisian mustard, the unsavoury salt of Sterne, with a dash of the pepper of Swift. This accounts for the efforts to make the brew palatable to modern tastes. But the idea is not new.

Nearly two hundred years ago the Reverend Edward Harwood, D.D., a well-known scholar, critic, and one of the most prolific writers of his day, had a similar happy thought concerning the Bible or to be more exact, the New Testament part of it. His idea, to quote his own words, was "to clothe the genuine ideas and doctrines of the apostles with that propriety and perspicuity in which they themselves, I apprehend, would have exhibited them had they now lived and written in our language." The good doctor though pained with "the bald and barbarous language of the old vulgar version" which had from long usage "acquired a venerable sacredness" was not without hope that an attempt to "diffuse over the sacred page the elegance of modern English" might allure "men of cultivated and improved minds" to a book "now, alas, too generally neglected." An excellent introduction to be sure! Dr. Harwood then proceeded to shake his readers out of their lethargy into a bemused amazement. Here are a few illustrations of his style (somewhat genteel, perhaps): The warning of the Laodicean Church, which was very plain spoken is rendered by the doctor thus: "Since, therefore, you are now in a state of lukewarmness, a disagreeable medium between the two extremes, I will, in no long time eject you from my heart with fastidious contempt." Most excellent! A delicious morsel, that! Nicodemus is referred to as "this gentleman," and the Athenian convert, Damaris, as "a lady of distinction," whilst the daughter of Herodias is "a young lady who danced with inimitable grace and elegance." "Young lady arise," are the words addressed to the daughter

* Or will hand it out very shortly.

of Jains; the father of the Prodigal is "a gentleman of splendid family," whilst St. Peter exclaims, on the Mount of Transfiguration, "Oh, sir! what a delectable residence we might fix here." St. Paul has a "portmanteau" conferred upon him in place of the cloak mentioned by himself as having been left by him at Troas. The apostolic statement "We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed" is rendered thus, "We shall not all pay the common debt of nature, but we shall, by a soft transition, be changed from mortality to immortality."

One can imagine the effect of this style of language on the unco guid of the period. Such meddling with God's Holy Word must have been considered little short of blasphemy. The extent of the pecuniary advantages Dr. Harwood derived from his "New Translation of the New Testament" must have been meagre for he died in reduced circumstances.

Among the very many psalms and hymns written there are two which have been described as the "greatest in Christendom," i.e., "The Magnificat" and the "Nunc Dimittis," and appear in the first and second chapters of St. Luke. Dr. Harwood did not hesitate to re-word them. The new rendering must have confounded the Psalm singers. Here is the first verse of the Harwoodian version of the "Magnificat": "My soul with reverence adores my Creator, and all my faculties with transport join in celebrating the goodness of God, my Saviour, who hath in so signal a manner condescended to regard my poor and humble station. Transcendent goodness! every future age will now conjoin in celebrating my happiness." Good Heavens! And the first verse of the "Nunc Dimittis": "O God! thy promise to me is amply fulfilled! I now quit the post of human life with satisfaction and joy since thou hast indulged mine eyes with so divine a spectacle as the great Messiah." Very good indeed.

Dr. Harwood said that his edition of the New Testament "leaves the most exacting velleity without ground for quiritation." Quite.

CONVERSATION

FEBRUARY 23, 1863

TURGENIEFF having pronounced the name of Heine, and we having affirmed our great admiration for the German poet, Sainte-Beuve said that he had known him well, that the man was a miserable rascal; and the whole table raining protest down upon him, he shut up, covering his face with his hands while the rest of us praised Heine. Baudry told us this pretty remark made by Heine on his deathbed. His wife praying beside the bed that God forgive him, he interrupted the prayer to say: "Have no fear, my darling. He will forgive me; that's His trade."

JULY 20.

"Yes, yes. I admire Jesus wholeheartedly," Renan said.
 "But after all," cried Sainte-Beuve, "there are a great many stupid things in His Gospels: 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.' The thing doesn't make sense."
 "And Sakyamuni," Gautier threw in, "suppose we did a little drinking to the health of Sakyamuni."
 "And Confucius," someone proposed.
 "Not him, he's terribly dull."

"What could possibly be duller than the Koran?"
 "Ah!" sighed Sainte-Beuve, leaning forward towards me, "the thing to do is to make the rounds of everything and believe none of it. There is nothing true except woman. Wisdom . . . really . . . wisdom is what Sénac de Meilhan put into his novel, 'L'Emigré.'"

"Quite right," said I, "an amiable scepticism is still the summum of humanity. To believe nothing, not even one's doubts. All conviction is stupid . . . as a Pope."

MAY 4, 1868.

M. de Marcellus, the Christian nobleman, took communion in his chateau only with consecrated wafers stamped with his

arms. One day the officiating priest observed with terror that the stock of stamped wafers was exhausted, and he took the risk of holding out to the devout and noble communicant a common wafer, excusing himself with this admirable remark: "Pot luck, eh! your lordship?—From 'The Goncourt Journals,' 1851-1870, translated by G. L. GALANTIERE."

CORRESPONDENCE

ANOTHER CORRECTION!

Sir,—The Editor of "The Freethinker," in a recent issue of that paper, refers to "the rude back answers Mary had to endure from her famous Son." Such, for instance, as "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" This was in answer to her quite natural inquiry concerning the wine for the marriage feast. The Editor entirely misapprehends our Lord and Saviour's reproving attitude.

Jesus, through His divine intuition, had already fully sensed with shock and shame His irregular position resulting from His mother's association and affair with that master-seducer of virgins the Holy Ghost. And, furthermore, no less reproving was his answer to His parents when they had the impertinence to ask, Him where He had been. He practically told them to mind their own business—"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business." Perfectly natural, if indeed not supernatural, in view of the fact that both He and His Father were in the same line of business. His reply in both instances had the sanction and sanctity of supernatural authority. Nevertheless, and even so, some Son!

ARTHUR HANSON.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held November 29, 1945

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Horowitz, Morris, Page, Barker, Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Glasgow, Bradford, Blackpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Belfast, Chester-le-Street, Birmingham, Bristol, West London Branches, and to the Parent Society. Lecture reports from various sources were noted, and decisions made for lectures in Glasgow, Newcastle, Darlington, and Blackpool. A report of meetings held by the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers was given and nominations for sub-committees made. Remittances from India under the Chapman Estate and re-investments were reported. Correspondence under various headings was dealt with and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "Nationalism in Eastern Asia."
 Conway Discussion Circle.—Tuesday, 7 p.m., Professor A. E. HEATH, M.A.: "Science and Civilisation."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Accrington (King's Hall Cinema, Accrington).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: "Catholic Christianity and Democracy."
 Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Lecture Halls, Northgate, Blackburn).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. COLIN McCALL (Manchester): "Materialism; A Scientific Philosophy."
 Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. C. H. BURDEN (Batley): "Trusts and Cartels in Social Development."
 Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Miss MARGARET POPE: "India."

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