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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Society and Christianity

HAVING occasion to remark in the course of an article that "religions, save in their more primitive stages, have all along discharged the functions of subduing the mass of the people to the interests of a class," the generalisation is objected to by a very thoughtful opponent as of too sweeping a character. Yet the statement appears to me to be little more than a historical truism. To begin with, an established religion announces in the very fact of its establishment that it is the religion of the State, and that is only another way of saying that it is the religion of the ruling class. And its support by that class makes it plain that in their opinion it does not, at least, run counter to their interests. A religion that was not either positively or negatively favourable to the claims of a ruling class would receive no support, and if it were actively hostile it would be, on some pretext or other, suppressed. Moreover, once a religion is established it acquires vested interests of its own, the maintenance of those interests gives it a direct concern in conserving the existing social structure undisturbed. The mere fact that there are thousands of men whose incomes and social positions are dependent upon the existence of a specific set of beliefs is enough to create a very powerful economic interest in favour of doing all that can be done to keep those beliefs alive. In this way the interests of the priesthood of an established religion become identified with those of the ruling social class, and in its own interest it is driven to resist any movement that makes for a drastic alteration of the existing social arrangements. Conservatism and self-preservation are with religions interchangeable terms.

Religion and the Past

But here, as in so many other instances, the economic reason rests upon a psychologic one. Religious beliefs do not come to birth in a civilised society. All we have there are various modifications of existing beliefs. Organically, religious beliefs have reference to a set of conditions, psychological and social, that belong to the past. And although some of the conditions that create religious beliefs may continue to exist among a people for a very long time—we have them with us yet—still considered as a general part of the social structure, they may be said to exist once only. The fear and ignorance that give birth to the belief in a God and a soul once removed can never be recreated. Between never knowing and forgetting there is a very wide difference. It follows, therefore, that all religious beliefs depend for their vitality upon a perpetuation of the past. It has no hope in development either in the present or in the future. At the root of all the opposition shown by

religions to all advanced ideas lies the perception of this truth. It is a manifestation of the instinct of self-preservation. Every change, whether it be in the form of dress associated with ceremonial religion, or style of language, or mode of service, is opposed from the same fear of the new and from attachment to the old. And the clearest proof of the conservative power of religion lies in the fact that all ruling classes, without a single exception, have always seen that the people were well supplied with religious teachings. It is an admission that for the consolidation of vested interests there is nothing so serviceable as religion.

A Bulwark of Conservatism

This real influence of religion is disguised somewhat by the fact that the beginnings of religious revolts very often appeal to the masses as against the classes. This is so, but it is not at all in conflict with what has been said. It is mainly due to a political accident. Generally speaking, the ruling religion is the religion of the dominant class, and, therefore, for anyone who is in revolt to appeal to that class is hopeless. It would be an invitation to the dominant class to commit suicide. The religious rebel is, therefore, compelled to look for support to those who have least to gain from the established order, even if they are not consciously in opposition to it. It is for this reason that they who are in revolt against the established religion are compelled to seek support among the masses of the people. But, once established, it becomes as conservative as any other religious form. It has occupied the position of its rival, and with the position has annexed all its tendencies and interests. The assumed sympathy of English Nonconformity with the democracy is a case in point. A democratic religion Christianity can never be. It is at best a theocracy, and at worst a divinely established autoeracy. In the 16th and 17th centuries Nonconformity was fighting a Church that was essentially the Church of the dominant class. Indeed, it was not questioned by the overwhelming bulk of Nonconformists that once a Church gained political power it was quite justified in forcing conformity upon others. But the essential fact here is that the Nonconformists were compelled to look outside the governing class for help, and they thus gave a quite unintended support to what was to become a democratic movement. But just so soon as Nonconformity had become strong enough to maintain itself as a religious movement, its appeals to the "people" began to weaken, until to-day there is hardly a perceptible difference between it and its religious rival. Christianity has once again demonstrated its essential serviceableness to the established interests of a ruling class bent on keeping things as they are.

The Use of the Slave Virtues

It was argued by Nietzsche that Christianity achieved the unique triumph of a slave class imposing its virtues

upon a dominant class. To him the prevalence of Christianity represented the triumph of what he called the "slave virtues." This latter statement is true enough, but I do not think that history bears out precisely Nietzsche's interpretation of what occurred. The position seems rather to be that, in the disintegration of the old civilisation recourse was had to a teaching that would hold a people in continued subjection, and this could only be done by opposing the sterner and more manly teaching of the old pagan world with one that emphasised the slave, or as Winwood Reade called them, "lickspittle virtues." The emphasis placed by Christianity upon the teaching that this world was as nothing compared with the salvation of man's soul in the world to come, and upon the sanctifying virtues of suffering and submission, has been of enormous value to ruling classes everywhere, and Christianity has constantly stressed the teaching. The virtues of submission and resignation under injustice and wrong have been given a premier place, and they certainly have not been preached for the benefit of the mass of the people. Nor does it require a very profound study of history to perceive that it was the use of these "slave virtues" by the governing class that served to make the lot of the people the more hopeless. Nothing else could have given the Church the power it once possessed. And of the secular power it may certainly be said that no other teaching made the "sin" of rebellion so deadly an offence. Preaching of love, of charity, of brotherhood, there was always enough and to spare, but when the people were taught that the love of the ruling class was sufficiently manifested by acts of charity, and that their own love must be displayed by lack of envy, by contentment under suffering, and obedience to the established authority, it will be realised that these qualities were made themselves instruments of continued enslavement. From this point of view Christianity was, indeed, a triumphant success. True, there are certain features of life that make the most powerful of teachings inoperative in the course of time, and there were occasions when the restraining influence of Christianity proved itself ineffective. But so far as it could be done Christianity gave tyranny a completely religious sanction—not so much in name as by sanctifying the conditions that made misrule possible, and by making disobedience one of the gravest of offences.

Nietzsche was quite right when he said that the victory of Christianity meant the triumph of the "slave virtues." But its real significance from the point of view of the sociologist is that it meant the imposition of these virtues in the interests of a dominant class. It is not a question here of the abstract value of these particular qualities, neither is it a question of whether the dominant class is a bad one or a good one. The essential point here is that any class, once in power, finds Christianity useful as a means of reconciling people to the existing order, and so preventing that process of change which is of the essence of improvement. As a matter of fact it can be shown that for by far the larger part of its history the influence of Christianity has been exerted to the direct injury of society. And perhaps no clearer illustration of this evil influence could be given than the disappearance of those ideas of civic life and independence that were so marked a feature of the ancient world. It is equally noticeable also that both at the Renaissance and at the period of the French Revolution those who were working for a revivification of social life

were compelled to hark back to the pagan world for their ideals. All the intervening centuries had provided them with nothing in the way of an inspiration or an ideal for their purpose. Mentally, Christianity had demoralised the race by placing a veto upon the free exercise of reason, and by weeding out through direct persecution and otherwise the strongest and most independent types of intellect. Morally it made for disaster by placing in a premier position those qualities which are both the outcome and the condition of injustice and wrong. And, socially, by its withdrawal of attention from the task of social improvement, by the preaching of the equality of all before God, while emphasising the divinely ordered social and political inequality of men on earth, it gave injustice in the western world a security of tenure it could not otherwise have very easily obtained.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

EVOLUTION AS A MENDELIAN SEES IT

DR. JULIAN HUXLEY'S "Evolution, the Modern Synthesis" (Allen and Unwin, 1942; 25s.), is a long and laborious work. But it probably makes little appeal to the average reader: it is too technical for those unfamiliar with contemporary biological terminology. Still, it is an excellent text book for the advanced student and is avowedly intended for the consideration and even enlightenment of professional biologists.

The concluding chapter of Huxley's volume is of more general interest, concerned as it is with the controversial question of evolutionary progress. If we approach the problem by surveying the higher world of life as a whole, much as we apply the concept of progress to human affairs, Huxley's contention that the main course of evolution has been upward and onward seems supported by an imposing array of evidence.

When we survey the development of organisms as revealed by the sedimentary rocks, despite the pronounced advances disclosed, we are confronted with remarkable anomalies. The lamp shells, "Lingula," long since became so closely adapted to their surroundings that they have remained unmodified for hundreds of millions of years. Again, various sedentary and parasitic organisms have markedly degenerated both in form and function. Naturally, these anomalies have been instanced as cogent evidences of the unprogressive character of evolutionary change.

Obviously, if progress is general, it is by no means universal in the animal domain, any more than it is in human societies where in certain instances there is clear evidence of advance, while elsewhere communities long continue stationary, or even afford evidence of gradual decay.

It is objected that the idea of progress, when applied to life as a whole, is merely anthropomorphic when we relate human standards to non-human phenomena. Were we ants or vultures possessing the capacity for surveying organic Nature, we would evaluate improvement purely from an insect or avian standpoint.

Even J. B. S. Haldane has been influenced by this reasoning and Huxley cites him as saying: "I have been using such words as 'progress,' 'advance' and 'degeneration,' as I think one must in such a discussion, but I am well aware that such terminology represents rather a tendency of man to pat himself on the back rather than any clear scientific thinking . . . Man of to-day is probably an extremely primitive and imperfect type of rational being. He is a worse animal than the monkey . . . We must remember that when we speak of progress in evolution we are already leaving the relatively solid ground of scientific objectivity for the shifting morass of human values."

Herbert Spencer long since stressed the possession of independent power as an illustration of evolutionary progress. And in reply to Haldane's assertions, Dr. Huxley notes that the former ignores the verity that man exercises an enormously great influence over Nature and enjoys a far greater independence of his environment than any monkey.

Speech and conceptual thought are perhaps man's most precious acquisitions, for these have enabled him to ascend to the apex of the tree of life. As Huxley urges, these unique faculties "form the basis for man's biological dominance."

The earlier development of the fore-limb into a grasping organ and the greatly extended power of vision in our arboreal ancestors, and the attainment of the erect posture all assisted in increasing their range of experience, when having descended from the trees primitive ape-men progressively adapted themselves to their then novel surroundings. Chatter, gesture and grimace prepared the way for articulation and that in its turn aided the development of conceptual capacity—two priceless possessions apparently restricted to the human species alone.

Does our knowledge of the past assist us when we strive to foresee the future? All predictions of what coming generations will disclose are precarious, as nearly all preceding prophecies have proved. Huxley, however, suggests that man's mental power could be scientifically enlarged through selective reproduction "in acuteness of perception, memory, synthetic grasp and intuition, analytic capacity, mental energy, creative power, balance and judgment. If for all these attributes of mind the average of our population could be raised to the level now attained by the best endowed ten-thousandth or even thousandth, that alone would be of far-reaching evolutionary significance."

Moreover, Huxley opines that even more than this is possible and that the highest intellectual powers we possess may be exceeded. Faculties at present thought to be potential may become actual. This, of course, seems very speculative but cannot be ruled out.

Huxley observes that mathematical and aesthetic considerations played little if any part with modern man's forerunners. Yet these faculties have become integral parts of the higher intellectual and emotional acquisitions of our race. So Huxley sanguinely suggests that: "The development of telepathic knowledge or feeling, if it really exists, would have equally important consequences, practical as well as intrinsic."

In very plain language, Huxley repudiates those who postulate the existence of some overruling Providence that guides evolution. "I believe," he declares, "this reasoning to be entirely false. The purpose manifested, whether in adaptation, specialisation, or biological progress is only an apparent purpose. It is just as much a product of blind forces as is the falling of a stone to earth or the ebb and flow of the tides. It is we who have read purpose into evolution, as earlier men projected will and emotion into inorganic phenomena like storm or earthquake. If we wish to work towards a purpose for the future of man, we must formulate that purpose ourselves. Purposes in life are made, not found."

But if there is no deliberate purpose, there remains a direction imposed by the blind forces of Nature in the past which may now be supplemented and improved by intelligent human effort. Still, although we may learn from the past it must be remembered that every future development in human life creates new problems, as we realise only too keenly to-day. For the increased light which science has thrown on the potentialities of the atomic world has confronted humanity with difficulties and dangers unsuspected only a decade or so in the past.

Huxley deplors the obstacles presented to peaceful progress by the antagonistic claims of Democracy and Totalitarianism, whose opposing theories are hard to reconcile. Nor can Free-thinkers afford to ignore the struggle—far from ended—between the Black International with its punishment of eternal misery

for the heretic and unbeliever, and its reward in paradise for the true believer; and those whose ideal is betterment of this mundane sphere, as man's most rational aim and objective.

If the most is to be made of the only world we know or are ever likely to know, singleness of purpose must animate all the leaders in all the many departments of secular life. Until that unity is secured progress must remain fitful and irregular. During the 19th century sustained improvement was deemed as inevitable as dawn and dusk, but the untoward changes of recent years ruffle our former complacency, and some go so far as to deny the very existence of progress. But, as Dr. Huxley pertinently observes: "The truth is between the two extremes. Progress is a major fact of past evolution; but it is limited to a few selected stocks. It may continue in the future but it is not inevitable; man, by now become the trustee of evolution, must work and plan if he is to achieve further progress for himself and so for life."

The concept of progress is certainly consoling and therefore conducive to a more cheerful view of life. That conclusive scientific evidence for its existence has been established should encourage all who aspire to aid in the world's advance towards the better and the best.

T. F. PALMER.

THE CONVERSION OF NEWMAN

I.

IT has often been pointed out in these columns that when it comes to advertising and world-wide publicity, the Roman Church has very little to learn. It has the English Churches, Established and Nonconformist, beaten to a frazzle. While the Church of England is fumbling with a very pessimistic Report on how to "convert" England, the Roman Church never misses an opportunity to advance its claims; and even when it is attacked, it takes the occasion to vindicate itself in flaming and highly indignant articles which in the main are nothing but self-advertisements.

In this it is helped not only by our own Press but by the B.B.C. Take for example—it is only a small one but very significant—the talk given on the wireless in 1945 about the author of the "Ingoldsby Legends." As everyone knows who has read these incomparable legends with their humour and power of storytelling in verse, their richness in extraordinary rhymes, and their unfailing high spirits and satire, their author had no love whatever for Roman Catholicism. But the B.B.C., with a sort of uncanny aptitude of doing the wrong thing wherever possible, actually chose Fr. Knox to give the talk—the result being, as anyone would have expected, a particularly dull essay with hardly a whiff of appreciation of the uniqueness of the "Ingoldsby Legends" in English literature, and as little about Barham as Knox dared put into his address. Why was a Roman Catholic chosen at all? The answer is not easy to find.

The year 1945 was the centenary of the death of Barham, and it was also the date of the conversion of Newman to Popery. It seems to me that there really was very little to be proud of in the fact that a brilliant and subtle thinker like Newman, a master—in the main—of English prose, should have gone over body and soul to the Roman Church. Instead, articles and books about Newman have poured from the Press, and as far as I read them, it was taken as something wonderful, something of world-wide significance, something which redounded both to the credit of Newman and the Church, that he was converted. And the picture of a man with Newman's great intellect grovelling—yes, actually grovelling—at the feet of an Italian priest, imploring to be taken into the bosom of Rome, is put before us as if it was almost equal to the coming of Jesus Christ—for those, of course, who believe that mythical story.

Why exactly should the conversion of Newman be considered of such tremendous importance? The true answer appears to be that the Roman Church has said so, and has made most of our newspapers fully agree. There is nothing whatever to be proud of in getting converted to Roman Catholicism, it is an act which should be highly deplored for it means losing body and soul and—in spite of loud protests from believers—becoming little more than a mouthpiece for a mass of dogmas and beliefs that are the very essence of credulity and childishness.

It is quite amusing to find how Roman Catholics these days very carefully hide the fact that Newman's entry into the Church was by no means looked upon with approval by the greater number of Catholics in his day. He had written very strongly against it, and while all converts are welcomed—as far as possible—the case of Newman was looked upon with very great suspicion. One reason I feel was that Newman, who could write beautiful prose, had what is known as a theological mind, a very subtle one, and both rightly and wrongly had steeped himself in the writings of the Fathers as well as in the many great theologians the Church has produced. He was not always easy to understand for simple folk. As Lytton Strachey points out in his brilliant, cynical, and utterly irreverent essay on Manning in "Eminent Victorians," when Newman followed up his famous "Tracts for the Times" with the one known as No. 90, it seemed at first to be "a deadly and treacherous blow aimed at the very heart of the Church of England." The members of the English Church, to which he then owed allegiance, "had ingeniously imagined up to that moment that it was possible to contain in a frame of words the subtle essence of their complicated doctrinal system, involving the mysteries of the Eternal and Infinite on the one hand, and the elaborate adjustments of temporal government on the other. They did not understand that verbal definitions in such a case will only perform their functions so long as there is no dispute about the matters which they are intended to define: that is to say, so long as there is no need for them."

Newman's way of dealing with the Thirty-Nine Articles "appalled and outraged" the ordinary Churchmen who could understand plain English, but who floundered hopelessly about when "a new and untraditional interpretation" was given them which made the Articles appear "a mass of ambiguity" which "might be twisted into meaning very nearly anything that anybody liked." If that is how Newman's writings appeared to his own Anglicans, it is not surprising that Roman Catholics were at first quite uncertain where to place him after the famous conversion.

And one thing did follow that conversion. It was almost the complete eclipse of Father Newman. For years hardly anything was known about him. In the Church of England he had made for himself a very great name in spite of many perplexities, and his "opinions" says Strachey, "however dubious, were followed in all their fluctuations with an eager and indeed a trembling respect." But in the Church of Rome he found himself "an unimportant man."

The truth was, of course, that Newman's restless mind was never satisfied, and though he wanted to lay all his doubts and fears entirely into the lap of Rome, the fact that he had opinions of his own was frowned on by the Church. It had, says Strachey, "an uneasy suspicion that Dr. Newman was a man of ideas" and ideas "in Rome were, to say the least of it, out of place."

Strachey brilliantly analyses Newman's position with the Italian cardinals, and shows that "it was not the nature of his views" that displeased them, "it was his having views at all that was objectionable." And so, in spite of the fact that efforts were made to obtain for him a rectorship for a new Catholic University in Ireland, which came to naught, Newman gradually sank back into "the dim recesses of the Oratory at Birmingham." He could only look back on "a long chronicle of wasted efforts, disappointed hopes, neglected possibilities,

unappreciated powers." And to cap all, he was actually accused by Rome of "a lack of orthodoxy."

The point to note in all this is that it gives a picture quite different from the one unblushingly put out and seemingly accepted now by most people of the rapturous enthusiasm which greeted Newman's entry into the Church of Rome. For many years afterwards, he was a disappointed man and almost wholly ignored by his fellow believers. And what brought him to life, as it were, was the unexpected attack on his personal character by Charles Kingsley.

Kingsley was a blunt, open-hearted, forthright Church of England clergyman, with strong leanings towards Socialism, Christian Socialism as he called it, and quite without the subtle working brain which distinguished Newman. "Kingsley," says Strachey, "could no more understand the nature of Newman's intelligence than a subaltern in a line regiment can understand a Brahmin of Benares." Not for him were theological meanderings and verbose disquisitions on the nature of sin from the Fathers, or the agonising search for the ways of God and their understanding. And so he charged Newman with "dishonesty," and professed ignorance as to what Father Newman meant. It was a controversy which brought Newman straight back into the limelight, made him the most talked-of man in the country, and in the opinion of most critics left Kingsley without a leg to stand on. It will be worth while considering this verdict again—

H. CUTNER.

THE NEW REVOLUTION

NOTE.—The following article should be of interest to Freethinkers, for it discusses an important book. Some of the things which I have said in it will probably annoy many readers. Nevertheless, I am sending it to the Editor, for I do not know any other journal in this country which would print it, and it seems to me that it says something which wants saying.

A BOOK which attracted wide attention from thinkers of all schools on its first appearance in Britain was James Burnham's "The Managerial Revolution"—partly because its author had been a prominent member of the theoretical wing of the Trotskyist Movement in America, and partly because the thesis advanced in it was superficially attractive to many people. It has recently been reprinted as a ninepenny Pelican Book, and will therefore have a far wider circulation than it had in 1942, when it first appeared here.

It seems to me that the book is worthy of the considered attention of all interested in political questions, for it is, with all its faults, an attempt to face up to the questions of the day. It does not—like so many political analyses—simply answer certain awkward economic conundrums by merely pretending that they are not there. It honestly tries to work out, in a coldly scientific spirit, the probable trend of events. It does not, strangely enough, indulge in the now fashionable habit of wishful thinking.

Burnham's theory, expressed briefly, is that all who have held that capitalism is dying are correct; he adds that those who consider that this must mean the emergence of a Socialist State are wrong. And the most brilliant and devastating part of his book is that in which he sets out to show that Russia at present provides a definite proof that Socialism may fail to take over when Capitalism dies. To an Anarchist or a Freethinker, of course, the case of Russia is not conclusive—and this is the weakness of the whole argument. Admittedly, Burnham

acknowledges the existence of Anarchism as a distinct mode of thought, but distorts it when he says:—

"Anarchism differs from Marxism in believing that the State cannot be used for ushering in the free classless society, but must be abolished at once, with the job of socialisation to be carried out by the workers' organisations—unions, co-operatives, etc. The net result, however, is the same."

The result of Anarchist experiments in Spain, carried out in the very teeth of an internecine war, gives the lie to this, and it is surprising that Burnham, in spite of having quoted the Catalan experiments, can calmly say that modern industry is so complicated that it is impossible to imagine the workers running things like transport organisations.

Looking at the international scene as it existed in 1941, when his book was originally written, Burnham sees that everywhere there is a tendency for the whole of industry to be taken over by those whom he calls "the managers"—i.e., technicians, engineers, chemists, planning experts, and so on. He thinks that the tendencies of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany provide sufficient proof that these tendencies will become more and more general, until the world develops into three managerial blocs, with the pleasant prospect of frequent wars between those, although it is quite obvious (as he admits) that none of them can hope to gain more than very temporary supremacy over the others. His three blocs are: (1) Central Europe, with Germany as the leader, (2) The Pacific, with Japan as the leader, and (3) The Americas, with the U.S.A. as the leader. Soviet Russia, he thinks, will split in two, the Western half joining the European bloc and the Eastern half the Japanese bloc. The fact that this prophecy has been completely falsified by the event also goes far to throw suspicion on the whole scheme as he advances it.

It will be seen, however, that what Burnham is anticipating is a continuation into the indefinite future of what is essentially the Police State. He sees no hope of human liberation, and he anticipates some form of political police, military and industrial conscription, together with frequent wars (now, since the atomic bomb, wars of mutual extermination). Those of us who see the lunacy of the armed State will agree that the continuation of National sovereignty, while left in the hands of exploiting classes, will certainly cause wars to go on. But we who confidently expect that, as the mass of the people grow more conscious of their strength as individuals, and of the mutual advancement which can come their way when once the exploiters have been eliminated, will not agree that this is a sure and certain consequence of the evils of capitalist misrule. To quote Burnham again:—

"In Marx's time, one could think without too much strain of the workers taking over the factories and mines and railroads and shipyards and running them for themselves; at least, on the side of the actual running of the productive machine, there was reason to suppose that the workers could not handle it. Such a possibility is to-day excluded on purely technical grounds if on no others. The workers, the proletarians, could not by themselves run the productive machine of contemporary society."

Apart from Spain, which I have already mentioned, there is the fact that in the 1939-1945 war the machine was largely run by the workers themselves. The British aircraft industry, as I was recently informed by a technician in one of the biggest of its factories, was entirely in the hands of chargehands and foremen. Many of the amendments to the bombers were put into effect in the finished products weeks and months before engineering designs were available. A shortage of skilled draughtsmen made it necessary, if a machine was to appear on schedule, to produce it without drawings. And this was often done.

Burnham's theory is superficially plausible, and it will appeal to all who see themselves as the chosen class of "managers." But the indication is that Burnham, as a disappointed Trotskyist, will not see the objections to a theory which envisages the permanent subjection of ninety per cent. of the people of the world to the remaining ten per cent.

Nevertheless all who value freedom would do well to read the book. It has the nightmare quality of some of Swift, and, if combined, say, with a reading of George Orwell's recent "Animal Farm," it gives a very effective counterblast to the ravings of the strict party-line Stalinists. Bureaucracy, as Burnham sees it, is to be the method by which the managers will retain their hold on the community. He tends to disregard the fact (brought out by Orwell) of the completely arbitrary nature of much that is done by the Stalinist bureaucracy, and the consequent failure of the bureaucrats to make an effective counterblast to the resentment from below which will assuredly end their rule one day.

That is the present role of Anarchism. If the exploiters of the human race are called capitalists or bureaucrats, it matters little. What does matter is that exploitation should cease. In our day we have seen the first stirrings of the revolt which will sometime be successful. And it is only by individual conviction that the doctrine and practice of resistance can be made to increase.

Burnham regards men in the mass. He disregards the way in which thoughtful individuals react to regimentation. During the war a number of people managed to make their protest heard. And the fact that Anarchists have been gaoled is enough to show that the powers that be in the modern State are realising the danger of ideas. It is not only in Japan that "dangerous thoughts" have come to the attention of the political police. That is why Burnham deserves attention. He may not have the attractiveness for the ordinary man of, say, George Orwell or Koestler or Alex Comfort, but there can be no doubt that he has the ear of the ruling class. Many of the capitalists will hope to turn themselves into "managers" in his sense. Our job is to see that both capitalists and managers are defied, so that neither of them have an opportunity of fastening their fetters on humanity until further notice.

S. H.

LIFE

From the Nothingness that was—

We came;

And to the Nothingness return
Again.

Risen from slime—

Most Noble Worm is Man;

Worming his woeful way

And blindly burrowing

For what?

That he may greedily devour

All lesser worms,

Thus growing monstrous fat:

If not—

His purpose is in vain,

A wormy failure

To be trampled in the dust.

Who cares?

That is just—

Say all the super worms.

He failed,

Therefore he had no right to breathe

The filthy air they thrive on.

Back into the slime

He goes.

Squelch! Squelch!

That is Life!

W. H. Wood.

ACID DROPS

Mr. Walter Winchell is a well-known newspaper writer in the U.S.A. This is how he describes part of his experience in Japan during the war—we take it from the U.S.A. "Daily Mirror" for December 7—and how he was brought to believe in God:—

"One of our planes was parked on the apron right outside the hangar—and many of the boys were inside manning the guns—when the plane was hit in the gas tank with incendiary bullets. All the boys but one managed to get out. That one was trapped in the nose of the B-18, and he burned alive. That was the first time that I saw grown men cry. We cried at our helplessness and our inability to defend ourselves from the Japs.

"Up until that day I was an agnostic saying: 'Prove to me that there is a God.' Well, it was proven to me that day . . . I was carrying some ammunition to one of the guns when a bomb exploded about 150 yards from me. The concussion picked me up, ammunition and all, and flung me fifty feet through the air against a concrete hangar wall with such force that several days later I was able to see the impression my body made on the wall. I hit the wall spread-eagled and fell unconscious. Several days later, when things had quietened down a bit, I examined the wall where I hit and found a mass of shrapnel imbedded around the impression—and yet not one piece touched me."

There really is nothing new in this kind of conversion. It is a mixture of conceit and lack of clear thinking. There have been myriads of such conversions, although they are not so common as they used to be. The diagnosis is simple. Mr. Winchell never was an Atheist. He was just a believer in a state of "wobble," he could see that "God" was not acting as reasonable people would expect. Then there also was a good dash of conceit. Millions have been killed in this war and a wise and modest man would wonder whether he was of such value to be saved while others were allowed to die who were as good as he. Finally, Mr. Winchell knew nothing of Atheism. Atheists are made of sterner and better stuff. There was no conversion from Atheism to Theism. There was just a shake-up that brought to the front a mixture of fears, folly and conceit.

There has been considerable uneasiness over the revival of Fascism by Mosley and his followers. Many of these were confined—under a special Act—but are now at liberty. Recently a question was asked if it was intended to prosecute the English citizens who were "sympathetic" towards Hitler and Hitlerism as disclosed by the secret list found in the German Foreign Office. The reply was that the Government was not aware that such list exists. One may easily believe that this was a falsehood. But there is also another long list of names which were brought before a court in the cause of a protest against being treated under the special law passed. That contained a long list of English Fascists and admirers of Nazism. What is being done with that list? Is it too deadly for publicity?

A note of rare wisdom in the "Western Mail" (Cardiff) caught our eye the other day. It was the information that it is not the clergy who are responsible for empty churches. Genius will out, but we must, for ourselves, plead "not guilty." We never believed that the clergy wished to empty the churches. That would mean a loss to the clergy of both status and cash. We never blamed the clergy for the churches being empty. Our surprise was that some maintained good attendances. The last Monarch we had of real wit was Charles II., and he explained the large following of a certain preacher: "His foolishness suits their foolishness." Of course it may be that foolishness to-day has merely taken another form.

Here is another piece of religious wisdom that is worth filing. The Bishop of Chelmsford, preaching at Parkstone, said that "one ounce of Christianity would solve all the problems of the

world." Well, think of the number of preachers we have, and then of the bishop who cannot find an ounce of Christianity in the country! What will the recording angels think when they hear from Christian headquarters in England that there is not an ounce of genuine Christianity in the country. But, in spite of this tremendous failure, we have not on record a single bishop who has declined to receive his salary.

A different kind of complaint comes from Canon Little. Addressing a meeting of the Coventry diocese he says, explaining the altered state of things, that when Jesus spoke to the people he could talk to them about fishing and agriculture. Now we have to speak about more complex matters. The truth is that those who created Christianity did their level best to crush the ancient learning, and, in man, their capacity for creating a newer and better civic life. But Christianity could make no appeal along the lines that both Romans and Greeks were interested in. The truth of what we have said is proven by the fact that when the awakening of the world took place it was largely by commencing again where the Pagan world had stopped. It is not without significance that the period covered by the most complete rule of Christianity is known as the "Dark Ages."

Some of the younger Roman Catholics appear to be getting dangerously inquisitive. They are getting curious about the rib story, and they naturally wonder whether it is true. To the rescue comes a "registered" nurse who says that modern science confirms the Bible story because modern surgery uses part of a rib to make new bones. That is what we really call "inside information." We still fail to understand how the medical skill in transposing a bone, or a piece of one, proves that the rib story in the Bible is true. It really seems as though some medical genius has been using the brains of a few religious devotees in the same way and failed to implant new material in their place.

Although the new Education Act is still being criticised by the rival churches, the Rev. W. J. Brown in the "Church Times" recently showed how tremendously it favours religion. "The proposals contained in the White Paper," he insists, "were far more generous in regard to Church schools and religious education than had previously been made by any government." That puts the religious side very well, but Mr. Brown goes on to show why—for example, in all controlled schools, Church children receive Church teaching in two periods a week and reserved teachers must be appointed for this purpose. Moreover, a controlled school is "of greater advantage to the Church than a transferred one." And he concludes that the Act provides the Church with a great opportunity and it should make the most of it. Exactly what the Act wanted and planned for; though the religious fight has yet to be fought, for it is not settled by the proposals. Secular Education is in fact the only fair and sane solution.

The "Universe" is one of the leading Roman Catholic papers in this country. As an absurd journal it must beware of offending absurd people. That will explain some of the very foolish things it publishes. Here is a sample. One reader writes to know if Adam was completely ignorant? In return a learned priest writes reminding the questioner that Adam was not very ignorant. For example, he actually named the animals. We agree that was a big task for a man who could not read or write, and had only just made contact with the animal world. We should not be surprised that if the truth was known it would be found that whatever intellectual output there was came from Eve. It was Eve that induced Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge. We ought not to forget that Satan also had a hand in it. It is well to remember how much the world owes to these two. And if one follows the course of history it will be noted how many discoveries of new ideas and facts were condemned by the Churches. We think mankind owes more to Satan for what is true and useful than any other figure in the history of mankind.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.
Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. N. S.—There is some mistake in the matter. We are quite sure that G. W. Foote never dreamed of inquiring whether it was legally permissible to publish the "Age of Reason." Editions of that work was printed over and over again in the time of both Bradlaugh and Foote.

B. B. PINDER.—Very pleased to hear from an old friend. Our chances of meeting you are slim, unless you are in London. Thanks for thoughtfulness. Also for a copy of the impudence displayed by the servant of God. The parson evidently hopes there will be a good crop of fools.

H. W. THOMSON.—There is no question whatever that among the Forces during this war there has been shown a great falling off amongst those who signed themselves "religious." And we may safely say that for one who openly rejects Christianity there probably would be three if a frank confession was made.

H. BAYFORD.—Thanks for note, which reached us too late to get in this issue of "The Freethinker." Will appear next week. Dr. English was a very fine man and a very staunch Freethinker.

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Mr. G. A. Saunders, 4s.; Mr. and Mrs. W. Heal, £10; H. Bury, 15s.; E. Maxwell, £2 2s.; F. S. B. Lawes, £3 6s.; F. Kennedy, 10s.

For "The Freethinker."—Mrs. Margaret Seed, 5s.; A. Fletcher, £1; J. Shipp, 10s.

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

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SUGAR PLUMS

The compliments of the season to all our readers. Our thanks also for the good wishes from all who have sent us letters of cheer and appreciation of all that has been done to keep the flag flying. We have had a hard fight, but the strength has been derived from those who have been so loyal to the great cause of Freethought. We hope that we shall all continue to do our best for "the best of causes."

Archbishop Griffin (R.C.) has been broadcasting to Portugal reminding the Portuguese that the "Immaculate Mother of God" has been reigning at Fatima as the Queen of Peace." We can hardly blame the "Queen of Peace" spending her time in a country which is not at war; other, very ordinary, folk went to the U.S.A., but when the Archbishop proceeds to say that the Portuguese and the "Immaculate Mother" brought about peace we can only remark that Heine's description of the Roman Catholic system as the "Great lying Church" is still true.

The following is worth noting if only to illustrate the humility that Christianity evokes. It is taken from the Northamptonshire "Chronicle and Echo":—

"WANTED: £1,000 TO BUY A HOUSE FOR A LOCAL MINISTER.

"Will Ten Business Men who have done well in the war, or other well-disposed persons, send us a cheque or cash for £100 as a thankoffering to God for—

1. A recovery from illness.
2. An escape from a threatened danger.
3. A son safely home from the war, and many other blessings.

"Strictest privacy.

"Receipts and full particulars—Box 2701."

The advertiser has faith in the Lord, but he evidently does not wish to bother him too soon.

THE WEST BOWLING BOMBSHELL

Exploding the Myth of the Catholic Vote

AT the risk of being accused of conceit I propose to tell a story in which I am the central figure, first because the story is important, and then because it may serve as an example worth following in other parts of the country where similar circumstances arise.

In October last the Bradford City Council granted 75 per cent. of the cost of four new Roman Catholic secondary schools which it is proposed to build in the city. Whether there was any connection between this action and the fact that the first municipal elections for six years were due to be held I will leave you to guess. One guess will be enough, I think. The dread slogan, "The Catholic Vote," had been whispered among the City Fathers by the energetic and ever-watchful leaders of the Catholic Parents and Electors' Association, and the Labour and Conservative Parties on the Council went down before it like the proverbial ninepins, fifty of them voting in favour of the 75 per cent. grant (which meant an additional burden on the rates of £120,000) while two Labour "rebels" and nine consistent Liberals formed the opposition of eleven, the remaining nineteen squaring their consciences by abstaining or being absent from the meeting.

So it appeared that Rome had won one more battle in its fight for the reconversion of England at the expense of English rate-payers.

And despite the work of a number of Bradford Freethinkers and others during the municipal elections, in raising the issue at election meetings, not one candidate could be found who would give a straight and honest answer in favour of the principle of public control of public money and no sectional privileges. Labour, Liberal, and Conservative candidates alike regurgitated every principle of democratic government rather than risk the disfavour of the Holy Shop as I and my friends tackled them with our questions. Any excuse, all kinds of subterfuges, were resorted to rather than face an honest issue and give an honest answer, and as polling day approached it was obvious that, as every candidate refused to offend the Papal wire-pullers, some other method must be found of drumming honesty into the city's administration.

So a great protest meeting was organised about which you probably read in the "Freethinker" a week or two ago—an almost riotous meeting in which R.C.s did their utmost to maintain the impression of numerical strength by making a devil of a lot of noise, but in which they suffered their first

exposure by being in a hopeless minority when the resolution of protest was carried, supported by all kinds of citizens from Atheists to Anglicans.

Then followed, a few days later, another public meeting, to weld together into a solid body the widely diffused opposition of various religious and other groups who disagreed with the City Council decision—and the logical answer to the Catholic Parents and Electors' Association was born that night in the form of a Protestant Electors' Association, embracing all varieties of non-Catholics who wished to "protest" against Roman Catholic privileges at the public expense. This was probably the first time in English municipal history that non-Catholic ratepayers and citizens had risen in an organised body to oppose their City Council for granting favours to Roman Catholics. Even more unique was the unanimous choice by this conglomerate body of religious and non-religious people of an avowed and much-publicised Atheist for their leader in the struggle against the authorities. That person was myself; and I feel that in making that choice the public demonstrated the truth of an argument I have often stated. That is, that the people will respond and collaborate when it can be shown that the church dips into their pockets to maintain its privileges.

Even Anglicans, who feel very sore at the Catholic 75 per cent. gift, while they have been left to struggle on the 50 per cent. or hand over their schools, numbered prominently in the new organisation.

But City Fathers are slow to respond to treatment, and despite the protests and meetings no move was made to accommodate the newly organised non-Catholic point of view. They still believed in the crude myth of "The Catholic Vote"; they still feared it; they still whispered to each other that Bradford was half full of Roman Catholics, ignoring the fact that my public declaration that they represented no more than eight per cent. of the city had gone unchallenged by the Catholics themselves.

Later, when the by-election candidates were in the field (after the aldermanic elections) it was impossible to find one who would take up the non-Catholic electors' issue and make a test before the electors. Authority was still afraid, and Catholic nominees of the Labour Party were still in the field, threatening to swell the already inflated numbers of R.C.s on the City Council. I personally approached one Liberal candidate three times, asking him, on the Liberal principle of public control of public money, to make the Catholic grants an issue against his Catholic Labour opponent, promising him both personal and Association support if he agreed. The last approach was late on the night before nominations. But it was no use. The Catholic Electors' Association had done its work well.

The position seemed to be that everybody except myself imagined the city to be full of R.C.s. So there was no alternative. Almost at the last hour of nomination I selected the second most Catholic ward in the city—West Bowling—and decided to prove my theory or go down in the attempt. The nomination was like a bolt from the blue, and set the Town Hall in a flutter, from the Roman Catholic Lord Mayor downwards; but after the first shock the sages and prophets settled down to comforting predictions that I would finish up "nowhere," and bets were made on my chances, usually with long odds against me.

But something had begun to stir. West Bowling, the largest ward, the second most Catholic ward, realised that all Bradford eyes were upon it when the election address went out. For here was a prominent Secularist, standing as Independent, with Liberal and Catholic-Labour opponents, yet the only one of the three openly opposing the Catholic schools grants and upholding the old Labour and Liberal principle of public control of public money. As polling day approached somebody got "the wind up," and we were all surprised to learn that the Education Committee, by nine votes to four, two days before the poll, had

recommended that the City Council 75 per cent. resolution be taken back for further consideration.

Round one had been won before polling day! Then came polling day—with another violent surprise for the Council. Although every Catholic who could possibly vote, sick, crippled, blind or maimed, had voted against F. J. Corina, and for the Catholic-Labour candidate, and although the Labour Party had worked feverishly to plead for party loyalty and no "side-tracking," and with a "split vote" on the non-Catholic side by the presence of the Liberal, the result was as follows: J. T. Tiernan (Lab.), 2,184; F. J. Corina (Ind.), 1,721; P. Singleton (Lib.), 1,258. The combined Catholic and Labour vote, with the organised party machine working at full pressure, and in a very "Labour" ward which had previously returned Labour candidates with good majorities, could muster only 463 votes more than a man who, with only a five-day campaign and no party machine, had come before the electors with a straight and honest case. In a straight fight it is quite clear I would have been returned with a big majority over the combined Labour and Catholic vote. I was out, but not down. My point had been proved beyond dispute. More than 1,700 voters had deserted their party ties to vote against the Catholic schools grant. The Labour man went in on a minority vote, and a further analysis established the total Catholic vote to be less than 1,000 in a very Catholic ward, containing 12,500 electors—or less than the eight per cent. which I had estimated.

Then round two. On the following Tuesday, after an acrimonious debate in which the 20 R.C. councillors fought tooth and nail to save their grant, the City Council showed that they could learn a lesson when it was thrust right down their throats. The Education Committee's recommendation to reconsider the grant, *de novo*; was carried by 38 votes to 20, and, at any rate for the time being, Rome has been kept off the Bradford rates to the tune of £120,000.

In conclusion, I would add only the following comments. Rarely in the history of municipal elections have such splendid meetings taken place as those at West Bowling in early December, showing that the public will take notice when honesty appears in politics; rarely have the civic heads of Bradford been so surprised at a by-election result, for it was expected that I would be the laughing stock of the city with about two or three hundred votes; rarely has a candidate been so vilified by Roman Catholic electors, some of whom deliberately set out to damage my character by stating that I believed "that Protestant children should have instruments of evil and immorality (contraceptives) put within their reach"; rarely have politicians generally had a better example to study of the value of an honest stand on democratic principles; rarely has the myth of the Catholic vote been so devastatingly exploded.

And rarely has a candidate had such a loyal and inspiring band of helpers as those who gathered around me to help in manufacturing the West Bowling Bombshell.

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

AN ELUCIDATION

IN reply to friendly criticism touching a quotation from Paul in my recent article upon the Jewish claim to Palestine, I would like to remark that the New Testament contains various allegories based upon what the makers thereof regarded as historical facts. Jonah and the Whale (Matt. xii, 45), and Moses and the Brazen Serpent (John xiii, 14), are classical examples of this practice. In the above case where Paul (Gal. iv., 22-26) refers to the affair of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, he allegorically illustrates one of his religious ideas by an incident which he believed to have occurred. His invention of the allegory there implies his belief of the narrative upon which he rested it.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

AN OPEN LETTER TO C. E. M. JOAD

DEAR SIR,—You are an artful dodger. You reply to critics in an annual.* There, obviously, you are inaccessible. Still this means that while some will read you who will not read me, in some cases it will be the reverse.

You ask who am I? A bit late when you have spent a page in rebutting my sallies. "Who's Who" might have given some information; on one matter more than about yourself. I divulge particulars of wife and family. Two of my books, I venture to say, have had publicity you would like and one perhaps obtained a review which was a record in length—two-thirds of a page in the "Evening News." The "Times" and "Times Literary Supplement" have been kind to my books. I have not been accused of "second hand slapdashery" as you were recently for your book on education. Once I was invited to broadcast to the Empire, which perhaps you have not done. Of course, my subjects are low-browed. I could not expect a philosopher to take cognisance of London history and topography.

I am honoured by your attentions. I said, when your reprisals were promised, that you would waste no ammunition on me. I imagined you taking a far-off view, like the King of Brobdingnag surveying poor little Gulliver through a magnifying glass, and then deciding I was unworthy of further notice. As it is, only H. G. Wells seems to have riled you more. Your attitude to him—in the "New Statesman"—reminded me of a rabbit that had unluckily attracted the attention of a boa constrictor.

Still, I shall not, though now much exalted, blow myself out, like the frog in the fable. I shall not, for instance, offer to advertise tea. I might aspire to cocoa—a drink upon which Chesterton poured much cold water for which he had no other use. Miss Ellen Wilkinson tried to boost it, when, in a broadcast during the election, she envisaged its consumption by Churchill, but did not carry conviction.

I note you have to go back nearly three hundred years for previous menaces to liberty. Surely this goes far to confirm my complaint against the B.B.C. This is nothing to do with you! Have you not lent yourself on every possible occasion to its machinery of make believe—selected questions, edited answers, rehearsed and carefully staged discussions? What have you ever risked against it? All I can trace was in 1942 when you said to an interviewer from the "Literary Guide" (I am sure not read at Broadcasting House) that you were annoyed that the Brains Trust were not allowed to deal with religious questions. I suppose I am asked to believe that men like Bradlaugh and Robertson would have stopped at that! If this has nothing to do with you, why did you say at Conway Hall that you would prefer rival systems, with advertisements as subsidies, rather than the present monopoly? Perhaps you often forget what you have said. I think it most likely.

Please explain how a man "by implication" admires people he has not mentioned. I am quite sure the men you cite have not your record of docility. You might advertise as follows: "Strong but docile intellectual horse for hire. Can be harnessed to any chariot. Blinkers not objected to. Never kicks. For references apply to Lord Beaverbrook, B.B.C., and the Editor of the 'Sunday Dispatch.'" Re the last, what a game to get the following question in its Brains Trust: "We understand that you have broken your collar bone and are comparatively helpless. How have you reacted to this accident?" Who drafted it, yourself or the editor? It is a pity not to have mentioned you were riding a horse. It is not a plebeian pastime.

Re your pacifism; who are the people you say were as foolish as yourself "After Munich." Names please. I recall you quoting with approval, at Conway Hall, a passage from Bertrand Russell in which he envisaged an invading German Army retiring

discomfited on a policy of non-co-operation being adopted in this country, but I doubt if he believed it then. Do not take a line of defence that involves the tarring of other people.

Re Conway Hall, did it not occur to you that I might have tapped other sources than the "Monthly Record"? After being a member for about twenty years, I resigned as I so much disliked Pastor Joad. The secretary wrote me an appeasing letter, intimating growing discontent which was likely to come to a head. Later I heard that only a small majority had made your retirement voluntary. You are not so simple as to be ignorant of the fact that there is sometimes a very thin line between resignation and dismissal. I think the feeling generally was that you were too much attracted by limelight and lucre.

You are greatly mistaken if you think it is simply a case of annoyance because you have changed your opinions. That may well hurt you most. I have induced you to say you were wrong about the war; you admit you were wrong about religion. Happily your fans must now falter in following you. What we complain of most is your protean personality that makes you appear as a play-boy rather than a philosopher. Let me illustrate. So recently as 1943 you published your book "God and Evil." You recounted a re-reading of the New Testament which left you critical and cold towards the founder of Christianity. I felt just the same on a recent re-reading. Yet you were singing Easter hymns in church in 1945 and a little later telling hearers of a "Daily Express" Brains Trust that Christianity is true and God's chosen religion! It may be that, in the interim, you had become a complete convert. All right; please let us know what this involves. How many miracles do you accept? What is your doctrine of atonement and resurrection? What Christian work do you propose to do? When I was a Christian (as shown in my "Testament of a Victorian Youth") I taught in a Sunday school and proclaimed the gospel at street corners. Let C. E. M. Joad do this on the hard road back to orthodoxy. Then some of his former critics will find their one-time respect returning.

Poor "Aunt Sally!" Why not picture yourself rather as a Saint Sebastian, picking out arrows shot by a Bishop, a Master of Arts, and an unlettered upstart? Or you might quote Shakespeare (probably you think he came from Stratford, as to which I would debate with you at any time) and say "They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly." In Carlylean phrase, tears stream down the granite rock that is William Kent at your sad situation. Dr. Johnson, in a "Rambler" essay, described a young man whose life languished away in idle expectation of a fortune from his aunt. Johnson quaintly moralised: "Let no man suffer his felicity to depend on the death of his aunt." Take heart! Keep Aunt Sally Joad alive as long as you can. Think of the guineas you will earn returning the shies. Therefore, the more the better. Pray that they may come from many sides.

I see you have taken to heart that nasty one from the reviewer about "second-hand slapdashery." Never mind, you can always be entertaining, and who asks originality from comedians? One of my ignored letters showed, by way of extract from the autobiographical work already mentioned, that a joke you fathered at Birkbeck College I had heard at a mission hall when you were a schoolboy. Still, let me say once more, I have not attached much importance to your failure to reply to letters, though I am not the only one snubbed, and it is curious that letters overlooked seem to be those deficient in jam.

I regret I have no space to enumerate all my points you have not met.

Yours still unrespectfully,

WILLIAM KENT.

There is neither virtue, utility, nor courage in attacking prostrate opinions. It is living, thriving, mischievous error which calls for refutation and be fearlessly attacked.

DR. T. C. MORGAN.

* "The Rationalist Annual," 1946 (Watts & Co.).

A SECULARIST'S REMINISCENCES

HALF a century ago as a youth I began to think for myself and how this happened I thought might be of interest to your readers.

At that time I was employed as a shop assistant at a small but busy shop near Piccadilly, London.

I had previously resided in a small village in Herts., where everything the local priest or parson said went down. In the church choir (of which I was a member) the boys made fun of the Bible yarns which I thought was shocking. I found the 12s. yearly pocket money and an outing every year came in useful, so nothing else mattered.

At the above-mentioned shop the manager was a member of the C.E. Society. He was full of brag about his lectures or debates, so one day I decided to go to Hyde Park and ascertain for myself. It was as I suspected. He relied on bluff and flowery language but seemed quite unable to give the necessary reply to the opposition. One day he asked me to get a copy of the "Freethinker." On the way back I read part of it and, luckily for me, he was busy with a customer when I returned or he would certainly have asked where I had been.

After that I used to get two copies, which I enjoyed reading, and this led to visits to lectures and debates all over London. Many a time I have had to fight my way out of the crowd at Victoria Park on a Sunday afternoon during the summer to get a cup of tea. Good old days, I do miss them.

The debates at the Hall of Science were the cream, with Charles Watts, G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen. I cannot realise that fifty years have passed, but it still seems to make little difference to the Clerical crowd who are as brazen-faced as ever.

Their remedy for all ills has had a 2,000 years' trial and the organised salesmen (or shall I say disorganised) are still trying to force their wares on the public. They forget that free education is slowly but surely doing its work.

As we know the F. E. Bill was rejected more than once but we do not use a X now for our signatures. I am writing this from the City of the Saints (St. Alban's), but I am glad to get out of it when the day's business is completed. I have been up to 100 miles at week-ends on an ordinary cycle up to last summer, but at the age of 70 (they say I don't look it) I find 20 the limit.

E. M. J.

EPITAPHS

"Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs."

—KING RICHARD II.

A GOOD collection of epitaphs forms one of the most amusing chapters in the history of human vanity, spite, vulgarity, and general eccentricity.

The oldest extant epitaphs are the Egyptian written on sarcophagi, but they are brief and pointless, giving only the rank and name of the deceased and a prayer to the gods, generally Osiris and Anubis. The Greek and Roman epitaphs are much more interesting, especially the former which are of great literary interest, deep and tender in feeling, rich and varied in expression, and often epigrammatic in form. Among the gems of Greek anthology familiar to English readers through translations are the epitaphs upon those who had fallen in battle. The most celebrated attributed to Simonides, on the heroes who fell at Thermopylæ is as follows:—

Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by
That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

An ironic note is struck in the Greek epitaph which runs:—

Lie heavy on him, earth, for he
Laid many a heavy load on thee.

And benevolence in—

Hail, universal mother. Lightly rest

On that dead form

Which when with life invested, ne'er oppressed

Its fellow worm (WORM).

Another example from the Greek, brief and pointed, is the following:—

This man

Envied of all, now holds of all, a span.

A classic epitaph "Thou art not dead but gone to a better land," is often seen in its modern form "Not dead but gone before."

A remarkable feature of many of the Roman epitaphs was the terrible denunciation they often pronounced upon those who violated the sepulchre. Such denunciations were not uncommon in later times. A well known instance is furnished in the lines on Shakespeare's tomb at Stratford-on-Avon, and said to have been written by the poet himself:—

Good friend, for Jesus sake forbear

To digg the dust enclosed here,

Blest be ye yt spares thes stones

And curst be he yt moves my bones.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the epitaph first began to assume a distinct literary character, although the prejudice in favour of writing epitaphs in Latin still survived. The oldest epitaph in English found in a churchyard in Oxfordshire dates from the year 1370 and to modern readers would be unintelligible because of its obsolete language and typography. When Dr. Johnson was asked to write an English inscription for Oliver Goldsmith's tomb he replied that he would "never consent to disgrace the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English inscription." Although a stickler for Latin, Dr. Johnson wrote some very beautiful English epitaphs.

Alexander Pope's epitaphs were once much admired but are too cold and formal for modern taste. Perhaps the best is:—

Of manners gentle, of affections mild,

In wit a man, simplicity, a child.

Another by Pope, to Sir Isaac Newton, although not inscribed on any monument, was objected to on the grounds that it "savoured of profanity":—

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night,

God said, Let Newton be! and all was light.

It is a remarkable fact that English epitaphs represent a greater variety of intellectual and emotional states than those of any other nation. The reasons are too numerous to be mentioned here. Of epitaphs in general it may be said that they range from the sublime to the ridiculous, from pathos to coarseness, from eulogy to scurrility, and from elegance to the commonplace. It is a matter for reflection that the most solemn of all subjects should have been frequently treated in a manner deserving of the utmost contempt and censure.

The following lines by an anonymous writer are much admired. They were written for a little child.

Just to her lips the cup of life she pressed,

Found the taste bitter and refused the rest,

She felt averse to life's returning day

And softly sighed her little soul away.

The concluding lines of an epitaph written by Garrick have been often copied:—

In nature's happiest mould, however cast

To this complexion must thou come at last!

This couplet is reminiscent of Hamlet's phrase "Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come."

Originality and simplicity are lacking in modern epitaphs, the average being usually repetitions of familiar platitudes.

The following has been considered audacious although its pedigree is ancient. It was copied from a churchyard in Aberdeen:—

Here lies I, Martin Elmrod
Have mercy on my soul, gude God
As I would have gin I were God
And thou wert Martin Elmrod.

The germ of this idea appears in Rig-Veda and other sacred books of the East.

An Italian epitaph combines cleverly and concisely the past, the present, and the hope of the future:—

I was well, I would be better, and here I am.

High praise must be given to the following for brevity and aptness. It was written on Dr. Fuller:—

Here lies Fuller's Earth.

A few examples by the wits and punsters may not be out of place here. The epitaph of Mr. Foote of Norwich, reads:—

Here lies one Foote, whose death may thousands save,
For death hath now one foot within the grave.

And the famous one on a legal celebrity, Sir John Strange:—

Here lies an honest lawyer
That is Strange.

Brevity is the soul of wit and this is shown in the epitaph in the churchyard of St. John, Worcester:—

Honest John
's dead and gone.

The neat and original arrangement of the verb is noteworthy. Dean Swift is responsible for the following play upon words and refers to the Earl of Kildare:—

Who killed Kildare? Who dared Kildare to kill?
Death killed Kildare—who dare kill whom he will.

In Otsego County, New York, may be seen the following:—

John burns.

The writer appears to be sure that retribution has overtaken the deceased. It is doubtful whether Dr. Johnson had such an epitaph in mind when he recommended brevity and simplicity in epitaphs. Be that as it may an anonymous writer has summed up the danger of lengthy epitaphs in the admirable epigram:—

Friend, in your epitaphs I'm grieved
So very much is said,
One-half will never be believed
The other never read.

S. GORDON HOGG.

A LETTER TO "FREETHINKING FATHER"

FIRST, I must sympathise with "Freethinking Father's" son for having a father who finds it a problem as to whether he should allow his child to be infected with the virus of Christianity when he has the power to prevent it. Some Freethinker! Poor child!

I'm not brave, but as a Freethinker I would go to any lengths to protect my children's minds from the damaging influence of Christian teaching. If withdrawal from religious teaching at school were not permitted I would still find some way to avoid the doping, by private tuition, or even by quitting Britain for some civilised place where the horrible practice did not prevail.

Having said that, let me, as the father of two children who have had the inestimable advantage of never having had any religious training, see if I can help "Freethinking Father" in any way by showing him that I have had no "difficulties" to overcome in the matter.

My two children are: Girl, eighteen years, who attended two elementary schools and one secondary school. Boy, age nine and a-half years, attending elementary school. At each school I served copy of notice (obtainable "Freethinker" office) withdrawing child from religious instruction. No reason given, no questions asked. Jusk like that. All so easy, so simple.

Result: Girl, while her schoolmates were receiving the religious dope, spent the extra time priming herself in the subjects for that day, and naturally knew her subjects as well as or better than the other girls, and on that account was favoured by the teachers. And as girls don't look down on their equals or superiors at school she was naturally popular with the girls, too, particularly so at the secondary school where she was a member of the school tennis and hockey teams. If there was any "scorn" poured on anyone I fancy it was my girl who did the pouring by making her companions ashamed of accepting and believing stupid and primitive religious conceptions.

She has left school now, after a happy time there. She reads "The Freethinker" nowadays, and thanks me for having "saved her soul" from Christianity.

The boy. Although we live in a back-wash town in the extreme South-West of England, where religion is still in its pristine state, and although he attends a Church of England school, my boy is even luckier than was his sister, for he is excused attending school for the first forty-five minutes of each morning. Of course, that time is put to good use, for every day before leaving home he has, as it were, a forty-five minute "knock-up" at his sums, reading, etc., and arrives at school in form to tackle anything he's likely to get.

With the start he gets each day he is naturally always somewhere near the top of his class. In his case there is no doubt who pours out the "scorn." He knows he's good and he lets the other boys know it, too.

Here are two sidelights on what schoolboys think about religion. The other day, being Scripture examination day, my boy was given a holiday. He and I on our way to the beach met one of his schoolmates hurrying to school. As he passed he said to my boy, "Lucky you, Webster, no scripture."

Coming back at lunch time we met some of the boys returning from the examination. "Hi, ya, Webster, you're laughing," said one of them to my boy when passing.

No, schoolboys are not as dull and as conservative as "Freethinking Father" imagines, and I ask him and all other Freethinkers to withdraw their children from religious instruction, and so hasten the time when Christianity will be relegated to its proper place, the compost heap, along with other decaying rubbish.

D. L. WEBSTER.

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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., JOSEPH McCABE: "Criticism of Science." Tuesday, 7 p.m., Rev. F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.: "The Churches and Social Change."

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