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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On the Danger of Touching Pitch

THERE is a passage in the Old Testament—believed to be “pinched” from Old Egypt and now given as the voice of God—which runs that a man cannot touch pitch without being defiled. I think that is supremely true when people set out in these modern days to find a guide in the Christian religion for the handling of modern social problems. I found an example of this in a copy of the “Manchester Evening News” which has been lying on my table for several weeks. But it has lost nothing by delay because it illustrates a phase that is very common. The feature that attracted my attention was not so much the matter, which is very common, but because the writer should be one whose articles and books I have read with pleasure because of their clarity of expression and directness of statement. That I often found myself disagreeing with him was of no importance. There was enough with which to agree to atone for disagreements. I was never one who would not study the “other side.”

The paper is decorated with portraits of the Dean of Canterbury, who became well-known to people because he recognised the greatness of the Russian revolution; Hillaire Belloc, Roman Catholic, and notable for his want of fairness with his opponents, and T. S. Eliot, of whom I know very little, a circumstance which also matters little; but I believe he has a reputation of being liberal-minded for a Christian. My chief regard is with Mr. Orwell, and that because I wish to illustrate how the sympathetic, even appreciative handling of a subject may demonstrate the truth that if one will handle pitch he must be prepared for some degree of defilement.

The main theme of Mr. Orwell appears to be that of showing to his readers that very fervid Christians may take a keen interest in some forms of social development. I don't think that anyone ever seriously questioned that much. Christians are human before they are religious believers, and there are occasions, as even the most powerful have found out, that the gods must give way to man. When we find the Pope of Rome—the head of an organisation that is completely Fascistic in its structure and as true to its circumstances will permit—proclaiming himself as a democrat, what we have just said may be granted. The truth concerning the “progressive” Christian that Mr. Orwell brings before us, is not that they have derived an interest in social development from their religion, but that they are more susceptible than most ardent religionists are to the pressure of modern life. We Atheists have had genuine support from Christians for the abolition of the blasphemy laws, but we feel pretty sure that Mr. Orwell would not argue that their action was due to their religious belief. If some Christians had not been better men and

women than their creed provided for, a decent human life would have been impossible.

It is only fair to say that Mr. Orwell does see that to some extent Christianity “may” make choice difficult even to believers. At the opening of his article he says:—

“The belief in life after death and the desire for earthly happiness are not irreconcilable, but they pull in opposite directions. If there is a life beyond the grave our chief purpose must be to prepare for that life, and the necessary spiritual discipline may lie in pain, sorrow, poverty, and the other things that the social reformer wants to get rid of.”

I think we may put this down as an example of the consequence of touching pitch. For the one thing quite clear is, that a future life such as the Christian religion foresees runs directly against life as we know it. The handful of Christian writers and preachers that Mr. Orwell parades all build upon a life immortal. But life as we know it, even life as we think it, is based upon mortality. Messrs. the Dean, Belloc, Eliot, Pastor Neimoller, and others *talk*—they simply cannot visualise it—of a life eternal that will follow this one; a life that will last for ever in more or less pleasant situations. But life and death represent a *whole*, and it is the certainty of death, sooner or later, on which the concern of parents for children, of children for parents, and of friend for friend creates and maintains all that is contained in the words “love” and “duty.” Love of parent for child, of man for woman, and woman for man, the sense of duty to one's neighbour or country, or the larger stretch covered by the word “humanity,” is built on the fact of death, and these feelings could find no place in a heaven where death has no being. Natural death, as we understand it, appears to have come late in the history of mankind. The Christian conception was actually a reversion to an earlier, a more primitive, idea of life. It is anthropology that ultimately understands the meaning and significance of both life and death, not our Archbishops and Popes.

A great deal of what Mr. Orwell has to say with regard to religion might well be taken as sarcasm. Perhaps it is so intended, and if he calls me a dolt for taking seriously what he says, I would just plead that all of us have our loose movements and our fits of dullness. Certainly some of the things he says read as though he was pulling someone's leg. For example, he says that “one cannot equate Christian belief with Conservatism.” Without having been warned we should have said that there is nothing that is so conservative as religion, and among religions none could beat the history of Christianity. Its doctrines, the official dress of the priests, the belief that death is just one phase of a continued existence, the struggle against any new form of worship, with numerous other phases are all equated with conservatism. It is true that much of

Christian conservatism has had to give way in favour of modern ideas. During the past century and a half we have seen the theory of evolution accepted by the Church, the doctrine of witchcraft swept aside by all of our Churches, we have seen the doctrine of eternal damnation whittled down to a considerable degree, we have seen the religious marriage set on one side by the State, and above all, the science of Anthropology which reduces all religions to the misinterpretation of normal phenomena. We have even seen the right of Atheists established to hold every civic office from the highest to the lowest. The only exception to this is as the reigning monarch and the Lord Chancellor. And in sociology we have seen, within the past two or three generations, the rights of man steadily overcoming the opposition that the established Churches did their best to uphold.

It is, therefore, peculiar that one might read this from the pen of Mr. Orwell:—

"In our own time there has been a far-reaching development in the attempt to reconcile orthodox otherworldism and Christian belief with revolutionary Socialism. Catholic Socialist parties all over the Continent, the Russian Orthodox Church, or an important part of it, have made their peace with the Soviet Government, and corresponding currents of thought have shown themselves in the Church of England."

Now every line in this sentence is true, and yet the whole of it stands out as a lie, and a lie that is so obvious that in no other subject than religion would one dare to offer that as evidence of the social value of religion. It is true that in all, or nearly all, social developments of individual liberty, of placing social rights in front of religious values, in all these things religious people have lent a hand, but if the question "Is it religion or concern for human betterment in this world that has led to this," there is only one kind of answer that can be given. The "far-reaching development" that has taken place during the past century and three-quarters was not the outcome of religious fervour, but a desire to see human beings in this world, and during their life here, made better than it was. Christian men and women have taken a hand in the reforms that have made life more worth living, but we should keep two things in mind. The evils that were removed belonged to a time when Atheism was the sign of everything that was vile, and when the Churches had great power. As a mere statement of fact, concern for a better life for all, irrespective of their religious belief, has grown with the growth of unbelief. The five volumes by the Hammonds of documented history of the period from 1760 to 1832 will fully bear out what I have said. I feel sure that Mr. Orwell is well acquainted with these very important books, and I need say no more.

Mr. Orwell does himself little kindness when he says of the social developments that have taken place, that the "development indicated would not have happened if individual Christians had not become more and more convinced of the inherent wickedness of capitalistic society." That does Mr. Orwell little credit either as a student in social development or as a statement of fact. To begin with it is not difficult to find some suspicion of the moral value of existing conditions at any time of which we have records. And instead of it being clear that the change of

opinion was a product of religion, it was—certainly so far as Christianity was concerned—the humanising of life that led to reforms. The expression of that in terms of a specific religion is a phenomenon that should not have misled Mr. Orwell. Men are always found who were better than their religion, and none should know better than the one we are criticising that the reasons given for what we do are not always scientifically correct.

There are a number of points on which much might be said, but space forbids and I will finish with one more point. In order to pile up credit for the Christian Churches, Mr. Orwell remarks, "Even in the Middle Ages there were already sects which preached heretical doctrines." If Mr. Orwell had intended to put in a good word for the very Christian people he selected as picturing so many single-minded advocates of a better life for all, he could easily have picked a better medium. For the "Middle Ages" was not of Christian origin, even though it made its appearance in Christian countries. For before the "Middle Ages" there was the period which bears the title of the "Dark Ages," and which brings us nearer to Christianity in both doctrine and behaviour than does the later one. "Dark Ages" dates from the fourth century of the Christian era. It gained the goodwill of the Roman Empire, which desired to use the growing Church to its own ends. Then the power of the Christian Church grew rapidly. Only two great civilisations are usually named—Greece and Rome. But there was a third—Egypt, then declining; but while not having the greatness of either Greece or Rome, it was still a centre of culture in art and science.

The Christian Church advanced greatly and rapidly in power, but not in culture nor in liberty. As the Church gained ground, and as it advanced so culture—science, law, art, literature, freedom—declined. That period is called by historians "The Dark Ages." And that might have remained a description of the whole of Europe for a much longer period but for one thing—Egypt, which became the repository of Greek and Roman science and philosophy. Without that it is difficult to say when there would have been a re-birth of the Christian world. I can give but a very rapid outline of the way in which learning, science and some degree of freedom of thought reached the degraded Christian world. While Christian Europe sank lower and lower, it was the Mohammedan world, in consort with the Jews, which developed. I have no space to dwell on this line, so I advise those who wish to see the way in which a new life was brought to Europe by the Mohammedans and the Jews, to read three volumes of the useful Legacy series—"The Legacy of Egypt," "The Legacy of Israel," and "The Legacy of Islam." There are others but these will give anyone enough to set out on the right track.

Mr. Orwell uses the—quite correct—description, "Middle Ages," but that tells the reader nothing vital. The better term is that of "The Renaissance," and that term does tell us something, for "Renaissance" means "re-birth." Re-birth of what? Something that once had lived, that is certain. But what was regained was the grandeur of Rome and the greatness of Greece. For centuries Europe sank lower and lower. Its learning was lost, nay, more than lost—it was replaced by ignorance and brutality. Europe owned

the Mohammedan world more than Christianity has permitted the people to know. And Mr. Orwell, unwittingly I believe, asks readers to think of heretical groups who were claiming a better life, with the insinuation that the impetus came from Christianity. To Christianity we owe nothing, to other forces we owe much.

But still I am a little puzzled why Mr. Orwell should be so anxious to offer praise to Christianity and looks forward to it helping to build a new world.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ISRAEL'S INTELLECTUAL MESSIAH

THE famous Jewish humanist, Baruch Spinoza, was a brilliant pioneer of modern thought. Long maligned, misrepresented and misunderstood, he is now enrolled among the world's elect. In Britain he was made known by Coleridge, and G. H. Lewes in his "History of Philosophy" rendered him honour. Later, Matthew Arnold and J. A. Froude acknowledged Spinoza's eminence. Still, the most elaborate study in English is Sir Frederick Pollock's "Life and Philosophy of Spinoza" which he dedicated to the memory of that valiant thinker, W. K. Clifford, his departed friend.

The Spinozas were Jews who had fled from Portugal to escape persecution. As Pollock states: "The result of the persecutions, banishments and forcible conversions which have earned for the sovereigns of Spain and Portugal the title of Catholic and laid the foundation of their country's ruin at the very height of its prosperity, had been to leave in Spain and Portugal a large class of 'new Christians' nominally converted and openly conforming Jews who in many cases kept up in secret some remnant of Jewish usage." These Marranos were constantly watched by the sleuth hounds of the Inquisition, but many managed to flee abroad, the Spinozas among them.

The Netherlands, after their release from Spanish oppression, became the refuge of heretics of all shades of opinion. Thus Holland was chosen as a shelter by persecuted Jews.

Young Spinoza was apparently attracted by the theories of Giordano Bruno and the method of Descartes. Although his relatives were proud of the youth's ability, they were painfully disquieted by his dissent from orthodox Judaism and the former victims of persecution became persecutors themselves. But before the heretic's excommunication, strong efforts were made to purchase his silence through his acceptance of a substantial monetary consideration. This offer, however, was firmly rejected, for Spinoza ever placed the freedom of thought and expression above worldly advantage. Even at a later time when he was offered a chair at Heidelberg University on condition that he said nothing reflecting on the received faith, he excused himself from its acceptance.

Spinoza's expulsion from his father's fold was no light matter. As Pollock states: "Thus was Baruch de Spinoza made an outcast from Israel, and cut off from his own people and his father's house. The ties of kindred, ties which for that people have ever been of exceeding strength and sanctity, were for him severed beyond recall. . . The excommunicated Jew became as it were a masterless man; he had no title by which he could call either upon Jew or Christian to stand by him or answer for him." If it is a good preparation in philosophy to be alone in the world, the needed discipline came upon Spinoza with terrible completeness."

Thus Spinoza was driven to gain a very modest competence from the making of lenses for optical instruments in which he displayed marked proficiency. His later fame as an optician probably brought him into communication with Leibnitz and Huyghens, two of the most eminent scientists of the time. Spinoza's domestic wants were easily satisfied, as he led an

extremely abstemious life, and to the very last he maintained both his mental and monetary independence, despite the many tempting offers of his admirers.

Although the Dutch were relatively tolerant, all who openly deviated from orthodoxy had to walk warily. The Reformers prosecuted two Hollanders who avowed views resembling those of Spinoza and one perished in prison. Still, the Secretary of the English Royal Society, Oldenburg, urged Spinoza to ignore the prejudices of the clericals. Nothing, he declared, would be more pleasing to the enlightened than the publication of his philosophical conclusions. "This," he writes, "is what a man of your wit and temper should regard more than what pleases theologians of the present age and fashion, for by them truth is less regarded than their own advantage." Ironically enough, after the appearance of Spinoza's "Tractatus Theologico Politicus," when rage and resentment at its teachings were in full blast, Oldenburg counsels caution and deference towards current theology. Still, Oldenburg himself had incurred suspicion of including too much political matter in his letters and had been immured in the Tower for a time in the dazzling days of Charles II. of England.

Spinoza was a confirmed Erastian and contended that the Civil Power must be supreme in theological affairs. But he argues "that in a free commonwealth it should be lawful for every man to think what he will and speak what he thinks." Yet this tolerant counsel was denounced by the pastors of the Reformed Church, while Rome promptly placed Spinoza's work on the Index and "it still holds its place in the strangely mixed company of that catalogue with many of the best and some of the worst books in the world."

Spinoza succumbed to consumption at the early age of 44 in 1677. The customary fictions concerning his deathbed were soon in circulation. Colerus, however, to whom we are indebted for the most trustworthy account of Spinoza's career, made the fullest inquiries when the philosopher died, and dismisses all these tales as untrue. Colerus was a Protestant pastor who, while admitting that Spinoza's life was blameless, denounced his doctrines as the spawn of Satan. But he allows that Spinoza "grew very famous in the World, amongst the most considerable Persons, who looked upon him as a Man of noble Genius and a great philosopher."

One of Spinoza's correspondents assured himself of salvation by joining the Roman communion, and he asks Spinoza how he can array his limited intellect "above all the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, doctors and confessors of the Church?" In reply Spinoza inquires: "You who assume that you at last have found the best religion; or rather the best teachers, and fixed your credulity on them, how do you know that they are the best among those who have taught other religions, or who now teach or shall hereafter teach them? Have you examined all those religions both ancient and modern which are taught here and in India and all the world over? And, even supposing you have duly examined them, how do you know that you have chosen the best?"

Novalis termed Spinoza the God intoxicated man. But the deity so constantly met with in his writings is not a magnified non-natural man, but an existence that comprises the Universe itself, in which we live and move and have our being. Thus, Spinoza was long considered an Atheist however much he might disavow the term. Perhaps Spinoza's religion is best described as Pantheism. Also, he was an uncompromising determinist and one of the founders of Biblical criticism.

Spinoza's philosophy is very carefully interpreted by Pollock, one of his most friendly critics, as follows: "It is independent of dogmatic theology, independent of any knowledge or belief in revelation, independent even of the so-called natural theology which holds to the conception of God as a person . . . and to the

(Continued on page 111)

ACID DROPS

The Vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields has, after very lengthy consideration, decided that the "real reason" why churches are empty is that "people have no sense of God." Wonderful! But whose fault is that? The "sense" that a man has is not something that he adopts for himself, and as "all things move in concordance with the will of God"—as said an old messenger from God—it is God who is responsible for the human make-up. But, really, it is about time that our spiritual leaders made up their minds. One minute we are all in the hands of God, the next we have nothing to do with God, save by our own "free will." It might ease the situation if the priests and preachers decided to be honest and told what remains of their congregations that the "God-game" was played out.

Still worrying over the empty Churches, the Vicar of St. Augustine, Mansfield, discusses whether the Churches should advertise. Bless the innocent man, the Churches have never stopped advertising, and to-day the advertising leaves commercial advertising in the rear. The clergy are represented in every national function, there is a regular preacher in the House of Commons, there is a select body of them in the House of Lords, they appear in most public functions, and there are thousands of "sacred buildings." Even the King is raked in to advertise religion, both with phrases and actions, and now with child-like innocence we are asked, "Shall we advertise?" They have never stopped advertising. The real matter that is causing trouble is that the goods advertised are markedly out of date.

The Archbishop of York has been considering the shortness of crops, and the effect on the food supply. After careful consideration he decides that a new effort ought to be made to increase the food supply, and there should be campaigns to induce all to produce more crops. There is nothing new in this advice, but it is startling to find that a highly placed agent of religion has left God completely outside. After all, the special job of God's was to look after the food supply; and it will certainly send a shiver through heaven when an Archbishop puts God out of sight.

Catholic priests have great difficulty these days to explain "immortality" in a way that makes it both feasible and desirable. The "Universe," for example, tells its puzzled readers that "it is quite true that human destiny is fixed for ever immediately after death," and that some "particular soul" may even frizzle in Hell for all eternity. But nobody knows this for certain, so we must offer Masses all the same to save us, and God Almighty, if these Masses are useless for one soul, will use them for another soul which needs them. Whether this is true of God Almighty we know not—but the faithful have to pay for the Masses, which appears to us to be the only point worth anything, even to Roman Catholics.

The Diocese of Salisbury has issued a report dealing with the existence of so many empty, or nearly empty, churches. We have not read the report, but we learn from that energetic advertiser, the Rev. W. Elliott, that the reasons given by one-time churchgoers are that the clergy mumble their words, the singing is poor, the hymns are sugary, etc. In other words, the "show" is not interesting enough. But none of these reports have either the honesty or intelligence enough to say quite plainly that the real cause for so many nearly empty churches is that people have ceased to believe. Once upon a time men went to church because they believed in the Christian religion. Now they want a "show" for their money and the clergy are not able to provide it. Mr. Elliott believes that the country needs a "new spiritual movement." But that is simply not the case. It is the clergy who want a new spiritual movement. The only thing that would again fill the churches would be to turn the churches into cinema shows. But that, of course, would give the game away.

Lent always gives our Bishops a chance to let themselves go. Generally the theme is a doleful one with heart-rending appeals to get back to belief in Hell, Angels, Devils, the Counting of Beads, Relics, Miracles, and the awful consequences of not believing everything in the Bible and the Church. What can be more saddening, writes Archbishop McGrath, than the "alarming fact that our civilisation is far from truly Christian"? Alas, those Golden Days when the Church was in full power, when it could imprison, torture, and burn the humble citizen with impunity have gone for ever. No wonder our priests and clergy look back on those happy times when they could command the respect and admiration of kings and emperors and contrast them with what is happening now.

The Archbishop calls the "excruciating tortures of the martyrdom" of the newly-won converts for Christ in the first centuries "no fairy tale" but "sober history." Whichever it is, the pathetic story is always a good card to play for it is most unlikely that any of the Church's converts these days would endure "excruciating tortures" for the Faith—or, indeed, care two hoots as to what happened 1,800 years ago. So what Christians suffered then must be rubbed in as perfect examples of what Christians should do now for their beliefs. In the end, Archbishop McGrath comes to the conclusion that many Catholics, far from being "ordinary Christians," are not even "good pagans." What effect this will have on the people for whom he writes is not at all clear. But it is very doubtful if it will bring a single convert into the unhappy fold.

On the other hand, Archbishop Downey has come to the conclusion that there is only one way of saving the world from disaster. He does not appeal to the myriads of martyrs who died so that Christianity could be saved; for him "One means alone can save us from disaster and secure for the nations a lasting peace—the conversion of Russia to the Faith." This will undoubtedly please Russia, and we suggest the Archbishop make a pilgrimage to Moscow and has a shot at converting Stalin first. Or perhaps the Pope himself could go and see whether he can do the trick that so many centuries of the Papacy have utterly failed to do. But why wait for Russia? Why not have a crack at converting England? Would not the conversion of England "save the world?"

Archbishop McDonald (R.C.) proudly produces Portugal as a palpable proof of the way in which the Church can completely alter the work of "impious atheists." It appears that Portugal had eight Presidents in 16 years and 43 changes of Ministry. Then the Mother of God took up the challenge and in the twinkling of an eye she reversed everything. The "impious atheists" were routed, and Portugal, with a Catholic Head and, of course, helped in everything by the Virgin herself, escaped the horrors of war. Strange, we had an idea that Italy also was Catholic, and in addition had the ineffable delight of a Pope in the country—yet Our Lady did nothing to help Italy from the horrors of war. Ah, but there were no miracles as at Fatima, in Portugal, so what could one expect?

The Reverend Hubert Thomas, of Porthcawl, is firm in his determination to back those members of the established Church who say that "the ignorance of the Bible amongst the clergy is really horrifying." We do not doubt this for a moment. But we have a very strong opinion that this want of understanding of the Bible is true of the whole army of preachers. The real situation is that, on the one hand a body of preachers keep the old teaching concerning the Bible, while the more widely awake, and perhaps better educated, try to make the Bible look a little more respectable in the light of present-day understanding. If the matter is reduced to honesty, we think those who are being rebuked are really the most honest in their teaching.

Men may do daring things while still remaining true to their religion. In Quebec the clergy of the English Church are now walking the streets in ordinary clothes, and it is expected that some of the Roman Catholics will follow suit. There are dare-devils even in the Churches.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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SUGAR PLUMS

The "Catholic Times" gives prominence to an article by a Mr. Woodruff who says that "civilisation exists for the benefit of religion, and not religion for the benefit of civilisation." We have always been aware of that opinion, and it accounts for our opinion that the Churches—Catholic and others—have to new ideas and human freedom. All the Churches agree that it is the duty of all to "glorify God," and to do that one must pander to the priesthood and all the interests that the priesthood uphold.

By 41 votes to 12 the Swansea Council has vetoed Cinemas for Sunday. We suppose that every constituency deserves the kind of rulers it gets, and the quality of the Swansea rules may be judged by the fact that Sunday Cinemas have been permitted during the war, and for the sake of soldiers. But what we should like to know is, why there is a distinction made for men in military uniform. If it is bad for soldiers to wander aimlessly about the streets on Sunday, why is it not bad for civilians? We deny altogether that soldiering makes a man better—save in very rare instances. We are all born civilians, the better qualities of humanity spring from and are developed by civil life. Compulsion or semi-compulsion for the sake of an outward expression of religious belief creates humbugs. And we have enough of that type without working to breed more. Sacred days are just as sensible as sacred boots.

Apropos of what we have just said, we well remember our first week-end at Burnley. Sunday came and about twelve o'clock we left the hotel to find a newsagent. There was not a shop of any kind open. There was not a place available to a visitor. The population was visible only in a few men and children wandering aimlessly about. It was a town of the almost dead. And now we see that the Council has decided Sunday games are to be permitted in the Corporation parks and playing fields. We congratulate Burnley for this tremendous step forward. We should add to what we have said that we found public houses and Churches opened at certain hours. And by arrangement, when the public houses opened the Churches were shut, and when the Churches opened the "pubs" closed. There was no opposition between the two forms of "spiritual" entertainment.

Leeds has also been in the throes of the common discussion of Sunday cinemas. The "Noes" mustering all their strength in meetings generally top the voting—the chance of preventing other people enjoying themselves is always too good to be missed

by earnest Christians. As is well known, the Puritans only opposed bear-baiting because some people thought it good fun—and not at all because it was horribly cruel. And so the earnest Christian will do his utmost to make Sunday a day of misery for other people if he can. However, in Leeds there is to be an official voting by all the townspeople, and we shall be greatly surprised if the voting is not in favour of Sunday cinemas.

In the Public (Lecture) Hall, Northgate, Blackburn, to-day, Mr. J. V. Shortt will lecture for the local N.S.S. branch on "Priests, Parsons, and Piffle," at 7 p.m., and if weather permits he will address a meeting in the Blackburn Market at 3 p.m. on "Christ Jesus." Mr. Shortt is a regular speaker on the branch platform and that is an indication of his work being sought for and appreciated. We wish him success at both meetings.

Newcastle Branch is rapidly reviving under the able stimulus of Mr. J. T. Brighton. Next Sunday, March 31, Mr. F. J. Corina will speak in the Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street, at 7 p.m., on "Freethought or Christianity?" Admission is free, with some reserved seats at 1s. each. At 4-30 p.m., a party of members and friends will welcome Mr. Corina at the Odeon Cafe, Northumberland Street, Newcastle, where tea will be served. Will those wishing to take part in the welcome notify Mr. J. T. Brighton, 23, Brown's Buildings, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham, without delay; that is essential for catering purposes.

In a case in North Shropshire the coroner came down heavily on a Christian Science practitioner who had stated that she was "endowed with the power of healing." A man died from diabetic coma, and the only attendance he appears to have had was from one who claimed to be endowed with curative powers. The coroner said to the alleged agent of God, "I think it is wicked to imply that God was responsible for the things which I have heard." It was stated that the dead man had not asked for any other treatment than the one under which he died. The Christian Science healer escaped punishment.

But there is a larger field than that offered by the Christian Science healer. There is the Catholic Church with its miraculous cures, from which it might be easily proven large sums of money were received—not by individuals, but by the Church. There are sacred relics that have the power to heal the sick; and there is no question but that the Catholic Church does receive large sums of money by means which, if practised by individuals, in certain circumstances would be open to a criminal charge. There is also the New Testament, that advises that anyone who is sick should call in the elders of the Church and their prayers shall cure the sick. Finally, there is the prayer book of the English Church, which proclaims that every sickness one may have comes from God. So fraud is not determined by the nature of the offence, but only by whether God did or did not have a hand in it.

The war with Germany was not fair. The medals and praise given to our men was all bunkum. They had nothing to do with the winning of the war. But the matter did not end there. In this country we returned thanks to God for winning the war for us, and the medals given to the men-at-arms, and the praise to the men for their bravery, was so much humbug. It was God who won the war for us. Good Christians must believe this. But how much better if God instead of winning the war had prevented the war from occurring. Of course, that would have given God no grounds for "showing off," but the odds are that people would never have known how much God had done for them, and gods, like man, must look after their own welfare.

A Mr. J. Harrison writes to the "Church Times" that the best method of "bringing the Gospel message is for Christians to try to live so that men may take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus." So far we have always understood that the only Christians who have been with Jesus are dead ones, and we would have to take a lot of persuading to believe otherwise. Besides, what would Mr. Harrison say if he were told that the sight of a Christian telling us he had been with Jesus would put us off more than ever? As an example, take the roaring, if harmless, Salvation Army captain. He certainly claims he is always with Jesus. Is he likely to convert us?

MY SCIENCE OR H.H.P.'s MYSTICISM ?

EVER since, December 9, 1945, I criticised H. H. Preece as a brother in sentiment with Koestler and Co., he has been longing to have a dialectic cut at my case. Now that he has, he shows the "desire" to be stronger than his ability to "rationalise" it. Bain taught me in 1893-4 the danger of analogy; but analogy is not necessarily fallacious. To prove mine so, he might at least have tried to see what it represented; but, to say that it is mystic or metaphysical is to assert something against which I have guarded myself. He falls into the fallacy of trying to disprove what ain't there; and he doesn't get out by posing as a defender of Marx, who was a Freethinker cum mental and militant Rebel, as were Lenin, Bradlaugh, Foote, etc., and as Stalin, C.C., etc., are.

What do the "two streams" figuratively represent?

August 5, 1945, Lenin, Stalin and G. W. Foote are described as Freethinkers cum mental and militant rebels whose policies were guided by scientific analysis. August 12, 1945, I wrote, "... an evolutionary sociology which 'explains' the evolution of human social existences as effectively as evolutionary biology 'explains' the evolution of human individual existences, i.e., individual men and women." December 9, 1945, I said Kropotkin was a mental rebel and Emma Goldman a mental cum militant one; but, neither full Freethinkers, inasmuch as their thinking was dominated by an "absolute idea." November 4, 1945, C.C.'s three principles "contain all that is scientifically useful in 'Hegelian' Materialism, etc." November 25, 1945, "... all this 'classifying' is in terms of scientific—not metaphysic—abstract or theoretic lines of dividing. Such are not 'absolute' lines; there is overlapping and crossing as in other sciences. . . Scientific abstract or theoretic lines are not only useful, but necessary in science generally; but particularly in the social sciences which together make-up evolutionary sociology."

In other words, the one "stream" figuratively represents either at the moment or during the last c. 6,000 years, the mentally dynamic value of the individual Freethinker and rebel type, chiefly out of biologic forces and processes: the other, the social existence, chiefly from sociologic factors in which "conformity" is of most value to the individual. Of course, there are "crossings" in the "streams"—as there are, physically, in the Hooghly. Some climb so far up in the "conformity stream"; become aroused and cross to the less "cushy" side as rebels of some variety. Others get tired of the less cushy stream and cross to the more so; sometimes attaining name and fame and honour, but losing—as G. W. Foote once said, of a lady novelist—their self-respect.

December 16, 1945, I wrote "Two forms or modes of human existence have been much in evidence: 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."

So whether by diagram (not put in evidence), by analogy, or in plain simple words, I have used a "scientific abstract" in order to compare the relative "values" of Freethinkers and Rebels (mentally dynamic) with "Conformists" (socially static) in any given form of social existence and/or during the last c. 6,000 years. Anyone who is capable of understanding a "scientific abstract" will see quite clearly the meaning of my analysis; and also how my analogy of two "streams"—one of individual values and one of social values—illustrates the age-old struggle for human freedom and progress against Godism, as the guardian of minorities of privilege. Of course, if my "thesis" is, to H. H. P., a "Dr. Fell, the reason why he cannot tell," a charge of mysticism or metaphysics serves as ersatz logic.

Some of H. H. P.'s pars., though confused, in no way contradict my case; but others are glaringly incorrect. Such is the statement, "Without a doubt economic development is progressive." Economic development is not necessarily "progressive": it may equally be "retrogressive"—as it has been in the U.K. for a long time. C. C. has often commented on the fallacy of assuming that "evolution" of any kind is necessarily "progressive" by our values, and has described it as a substitute for Godism (like "absolute ideas," etc.). It becomes a "dope for the weak," such as a parson writes in a weekly paper. Thus it was that "progressives" in the democratic lands failed to unite against Fascism in time; and this erroneous belief has misled members of the Communist Party at times as well as other democrats.

There is nothing in my case about streams "in opposite directions." That has been answered. Then, comparing Tyler's "Belief in Spirits" with Marx's "Method of Production and Distribution," he writes "belief" is a question of theory and "method" one of practice. Wrong again: Belief in spirits began as a practical method in primitive—and later—life. C. C. has explained that also.

Again, that I "show a lack of wisdom in using the old metaphysical trick of trying to separate in fancy what cannot be separated in fact," has already been answered. My scientific abstract is similar to some used by Marx. Using terms then in use, he "pictured" the worker having to sell his own "commodity—his labour power—to the industrial capitalist, although there is no such "commodity" by itself. By the scientific, not metaphysical, "separating in fancy" he was able to "explain" the origin of "surplus value" in the industrial capitalism of economic individualism. When we find the employer buying, not merely labour power, but that power along with another abstract, e.g., labour power mixed with Roman Catholic Belief—or some other characteristic, we realise that evolutionary sociology must consider Godism and "parsons" of every variety as phenomena in economics and politics—certainly not in any "progressive" way.

There are other errors, but no space in which to correct them so I leave it at that. Finally, I would suggest that if we all, as Freethinkers and Secularists, try to understand the outcome of the war for the world's common people, we shall find more on which we are united than speculative points on which we differ. The war was fought to save democracy from Fascism; that, so far, has been won. It is no mere slogan but a straightforward, simple, provable truth to say that Secularism is the only philosophy consistent with real democracy. But agencies of the Godisms are doing all they can in well-nigh all the Parties to save what they can of their anti-democratic vested interests. Bradlaugh won his victory for democracy against the organised force of British Godism. We can honour his memory by winning our victory; but that can be done only by united effort for our common purpose, for "The Freethinker" of the N.S.S.

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ISRAEL'S INTELLECTUAL MESSIAH

(Concluded from page 107)

expectation of another life which shall redress the balance of the present one in some manner, of which all specific knowledge is disclaimed. The essence of religion is in Spinoza's mind a cheerful and willing co-operation with the order of the world as manifested in the nature of man and of society. . . The true and saving worship is to do justice and love one's neighbour."

In his fine chapter on "Spinoza and Modern Thought," Pollock surveys the transformed attitude of many of the best minds in Germany, France, Holland and Britain, towards Spinoza's teaching. These embrace Lessing, Goethe, Renan, Taine, Van Vloten, Land of Leyden, Coleridge, Lewes, Wordsworth, F. D. Maurice and others.

More in sorrow than in anger, Sir Frederick Pollock deplors the persistence of men who, despite all the revelations of modern science, still cling tenaciously to a discredited creed. But when they obstinately and maliciously obstruct progress, their obscurantism must be met. "Science," they cry, "is irreverent." Pollock observes: "She has laid her hand on mysteries and made the world profane and common. In the face of such language it is not for those who bear the lamp of knowledge to apologise and speak humbly. They need no excuse and have no occasion to do their work by the good leave of the letter worshippers and makers of articles. Nay, it is the article-makers and dogmatists who are irreverent. They have desecrated the glory of the world with dark habitations and dwellings of idols, not enduring to live in the open light; and when their tabernacles are broken down and the sun in his strength quells at last the unclean fumes of their censers and sacrifices, their eyes are blinked with that splendour and they cry out that the world is darkened." This splendid passage recalls the many brave utterances of Pollock's lamented friend, the late Professor W. K. Clifford, at his very best.

T. F. PALMER.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHINKING PARENTS.

Sir—My wife and I being Atheists, our son was not christened and he heard nothing of God or prayer till the age of 5½. We considered that he could not benefit from a good school till later on. He was therefore sent to a Council school, receiving the ordinary religious instruction.

My wife visited the school to see how he was getting on and the teacher said: "Your little boy is funny. I was giving the little voice piped out before all the class, 'Oh, but teacher, is this all really true?' I did not know what on earth to say, but I couldn't help laughing." The boy later went to a well-known public school where he was never far from the top of his form. Later, he took an honours B.A. and M.A. at London University not long before the outbreak of war. Joining in the ranks, after hairbreadth escapes in France and Norway, he was promoted to the Field Security service, and in Africa was quickly promoted and is now a Major and a Colonial administrator in an important province, with a magnificent job and assured future.—Yours, etc., J. R. D.

OBITUARY

HAROLD ELLIOTT.

We regret to announce the death of Harold Elliott of Bournes Green, Southend-on-Sea, which took place on March 5 in his 76th year. He was a staunch reader of "The Freethinker" and member of the National Secular Society taking a keen interest in the movement generally. In accordance with his expressed wishes for cremation and a Secular Service, both were carried out at the City of London Crematorium, Manor Park, London, E., on March 11, where before relatives the General Secretary N.S.S. read the service.

R. H. R.

WILLIAM FINNIMORE.

The large chapel at Golders Green Crematorium was well filled on Monday afternoon, March 11, when the remains of William Finnimore were cremated. The large assembly of relatives and friends gave ample testimony of his wide and respected interest in progressive movements in which the Freethought, Socialist and Co-operative held front rank, and of which representatives were present to join in the tribute and farewell to the 75 year-old veteran. The Secular Service was read by the General Secretary N.S.S., and our sympathy goes out to the surviving members of the family in their sorrow.

R. H. R.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held March 14, 1946

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

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Ebury, Silvester, Morris, Page, and the Secretary. Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted; Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to Manchester, Newcastle, Belfast, Bristol, Birmingham, Bradford, West London, West Ham Branches, and to the Parent Society. Details in connection with the Annual Conference at Bradford were dealt with and Messrs. Griffiths, Morris and Barker elected as an Agenda Committee. Fifty pounds were voted towards the expenses of the forthcoming Congress in London being organised by the London Committee of the International Union of Freethinkers. (Fifty pounds have also been voted by the Secular Society Limited for the same purpose.) Lecture reports and arrangements were received from West Ham, Bethnal Green, Preston, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Sheffield, Bradford and Blackpool Branches. Items of correspondence from various parts were noted and instructions given.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, April 11, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

MARRIED couple (Freethinkers) require house, flat or unfurnished rooms in Birmingham district. Wife's house-keeping services in exchange for accommodation with widower considered.—Box No. 44, c/o "The Freethinker," 41, Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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.: "The Prospects for Civilisation." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., Professor H. LEVY, M.A., D. Sc.: "The Future of European Jewry."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public (Lecture) Hall, Northgate, Blackburn).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORRT: "Priests, Parsons and Piffle."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. A. E. DUTTON: "Atomic Energy."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. FRANCIS J. CORINA: "Freethought or Christianity."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORRT: "Christ Jesus." (If fine.)

GOD — DISHONoured

"... wake up, Ted! Wake up, lad! It's not bedtime yet, you know!"

"All right, Andy. Stop pawing me about, will you! I'm not asleep, you big chump! I was just thinking..."

"Well, my poor old dormouse, you really shouldn't do your thinking here. Your proper place should be kneeling on the floor like those church worshippers and camels who find it a burden having to think! Anyway, what were you thinking about. What's the dope now?"

"That's for you to find out. Have you seen the paper?"

"What! To-day's? No! I can't say that I have, why?"

"Here you are then (picking up and holding it out), just take a look at this!"

Andy (reading aloud): "New photo of Mrs. Hitler, is she..."

"No! not that!" "Great fog! Half Britain blacked out..."

"No! you fathead! Over on the other side!"

"Ha! New Year awards...! Ex-errand boy, richest man honoured... eh! what's all this! The King's New Year's honours list...! Biggest ever issued!... most democratic...! Here, I say! You're not expecting me to wade through all that tosh are you, Ted?"

"Not if you don't want to Andy! All the same it's pretty stiff, you know! Do you see what it says? Honours going to people in every walk of life, from a former errand boy, a farmer's boy, to reigning Princes, Dukes, and the world's richest man. Political big-wigs, soldiers, sailors, airmen, many women, and at least two German Jews. See that, Andy!... 'to people in every walk of life...'. But that is a thumping mis-statement surely! These honours and awards ain't going to every class of people... not by long chalks! That's the queerness of it, Andy! It's an absolute paradox and a travesty of the truth to say so! Talk about honours, indeed! Someone has slipped up somewhere, my son... betcha!"

"Well, Ted, I may be deaf, dumb or plain daft, still I can't see what you're driving at! Anyway! What the devil does it matter, chum! You and I aren't going to get any honours, so what's the odds!"

"The point is, Andy, it's you who's asleep. You're the prize ostrich who's gone blind and stuffed his head in the sand! Can't you twig? Dammit! It's staring you in the face! Listen! I've been right through that column, just as it is given, and all these folk mentioned are going to be rewarded and honoured or decorated for something that they have just not done! Tell me, Andy! What's it all about?"

"Why, Ted, surely because they won the war, that's why!"

"But look here, you prize fathead! It seems as though I am the only one who has realised the farcical nature of these proceedings! It's all wrong, I tell you! These people didn't win the war, no matter what you or they think, and no matter what they all did whilst the war was on! That honours list is just part of a 'face-saving' plan embodied in a gigantic list of all those who were out for kudos or cushy jobs, and got others to shoulder responsibilities and perform essential tasks necessary to carry on the war, which may be O.K., but I still insist that none of 'em actually won the war! And, what's more, Andy! Just this! The powers-that-be are making these awards and what-not, to the wrong people and the wrong places! Got that?"

"I think I see what you mean, Ted! It's the host of 'unsung heroes' who did their duty valiantly here at home you are referring too, eh, what!" "No, Andy, whilst I by no means forget them, I am not thinking of their contributions to the struggle at this moment." "Well, then, who on earth are you referring to as there doesn't seem to be anyone else outside our ranks so far as I can tell..." "Now, now, Andy, don't try to be stupid! Just try and cast your mind back to the Sunday morning when

war was declared. The first thing most people did was to flock to the churches which became filled to capacity for the first time in years! The people clamoured and prostrated themselves in their mad rush to seek protection from perils, and they demanded that prayers and exhortations be offered up; and the priests were there to do their share in pushing the business on, and what a fine time they had shoving the plate round. Just imagine those fat and rubicund clerics smirking for all they were worth as they gathered in the shekles as fast as they could manage. Still, the prayers offered up to God continued, followed up the due course by still more solemn prayers and appeals and what not, the Press took it up, so did the B.B.C., and along came more calls for special intercessions, and periodical days of prayer and nauseam! All those prayers, Andy, finally did their work—the parsons saw to that, you bet they did, and the religious fervour decanted pleased God Almighty so much that he made the workers use still greater efforts and finally, as you know, he decided that we had done all that he expected, and so he decided he would win the war for us. Now, do you see? It's God who wants honouring, and his servants—the infatuated Pope, the Bishops, Archbishops and, of course, honours mention must be made of Rev. J. W. Welsh of the B.B.C. and the Rev. L. B. Ashby who writes the clap-trap in the 'Telegraph.' But, mark you, Andy, here is the cream of the joke! God Almighty and his myrmidons are not even mentioned! I've explored the whole list and there is positively no mention of a national call going out to honour this crew. But, Andy, God answered all our prayers, and after winning this war for us, look how shabby and treacherously we have treated him! Surely someone should have included him in the list of rewards, don't you think so?"

"Of course not, Ted! He expects something far more substantial than O.B.E.'s and tinsel decorations. As you know now, they have been busy in America making some prizes for atomic bombs. These are intended for God. Won't he be pleased to get them. Perhaps some of our superior minds will put one into each of our largest Cathedrals and Churches for people to pray to! That'll please God so much, and should he or two eventually explode, won't God be delighted that our dumb sheep did so devoutly what he told them to do in executing their pious duty 'in the sacred cause of establishing a way to the eternity of heaven's exalted blue!"

"The bar's open, Ted, what'll you have?"

"PLATYPIOUS I."

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