

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

SOME time ago there was a rather heated discussion on the fitness of staging a Shakespeare play in modern language and dress. The debate ran high and one of the disputants asked what would happen if Jesus Christ was also presented with a modern dress and using everyday language. He was assuming, perhaps unconsciously, that Jesus owed his power over moderns because of the peculiar dress he is always presented as wearing, and the more or less archaic quality of his language.

But the two cases are not really analogous. Shakespeare deals with enduring qualities of human nature, and the modes of speech and dress are not vital to his plays. The anguish of Lear is no more vital to dress or language than Pierre Goriot is peculiar to a particular phase of French society. It is the human qualities of Portia, or of Hamlet, or of Lear that link the people of all ages and of all countries to them. But in the case of Jesus we are not dealing with a human character at all. We cannot feel him because, on the Christian hypothesis we are not dealing with a true human being. It is not the fact that Christ is presented to us as an Eastern that explains the divergence between Christianity and modern thought. In all human relationships, those of parents, friends, citizens or children, the fact of country or colour counts for but little. Had the claims of Jesus been based on the broad grounds of humanity, his colour or country or age would have mattered as little as does the fact that Socrates was a Greek or Marcus Aurelius a Roman. It is the element of the supernatural that is fatal. You cannot be a god without paying the price for it. The final penalty for it is disintegration.

There have of course, been many attempts to put the New Testament story into current English, but the attempts have failed. They have met strong opposition from religious people who felt that such attempts robbed the story of its proper "atmosphere." And so far I agree with the protestors. Take, for example, the story of the birth of Jesus as told in the New Testament, and then imagine it as told in modern language by a modern man with a modern outlook:—

"A man named Joseph was engaged to a young woman named Mary, but before they were married he discovered that she was about to become a mother. But, being a man of kindly disposition and deeply in love with the girl, he shrank from making her condition public, and was strongly inclined to hush up the matter. Torn thus between his love for Mary and his fear of outraging the conventions, he went to bed and had a curious dream, one that must have been reminiscent of some of the religious legends he had read. He dreamed that an angel appeared to him and informed him that Mary had committed no fault, that the child was miraculously conceived. Eager to grasp

at anything that would enable him to marry Mary, Joseph pretended to accept the vision and trusted to the superstitious character of those around him to accept the story."

This is certainly the way in which a modern might relate the story, and surely no one could complain of it being so interpreted. At least no one could be charged with coarseness or offensiveness. Indeed, taking the New Testament story as being based on fact it is a simple and almost tender way of dealing with it. But if the story was read in that way what basis would it give to religious belief? Obviously, none. Any reader would count it as either the story of a tragedy that must have occurred times out of number, or a mere story belonging to one of the world's myths.

Put the New Testament into a completely modern dress and the consequence would be complete disbelief. Take away the gradually developed specialised language in which the Bible is written, a language that was never a language of the people in the sense of its being a spoken one, and the real nature of the narrative would be plain to everyone. Let anyone sit down and imagine what the scenes pictured in the New Testament would appear like to a modern coming into contact with them for the first time, and he will get a far better idea of the nature of genuine Christianity, and of the primitive believers in it, than he could possibly acquire from any course of theological study. Educated men are today surprised at the extravagance of revival meetings when carried on by a quite ignorant body of men and women, and yet this brings us as near a picture as one can get of what a body of primitive Christians was like. Instead of the New Testament reading of Jesus coming into contact with a being possessed of devils, read it as the modern would write it of a poor epileptic or lunatic, coming into contact with a wandering religious preacher who tried to cast out the devils by intoning an incantation, and you have the actual happening divested of the special terminology which prevents so many realising what is before them. The truth of this is seen in the fact that when a Freethinker does try to express biblical statements in current language he is accused of irreverence, if not of blasphemy. To see religion as it really is, is one of the surest ways to end it.

We may see the same thing from a slightly different angle, if we consider the talk of securing a suitable "atmosphere," if religious beliefs are to be kept in being. This bulks very largely in all questions of religious training from the child in the school to the adult attending in church. Catholics argue, in relation to schools, that a lesson in religion, given as something quite apart from the rest of the educational course, is not enough. They say it separates religion from the rest of life, and in time begets indifference if not positive unbelief. Thoughtful Christians of all denominations agree with this, although

they see the impossibility, in existing circumstances, of preventing it. With adults the creation of an artificial atmosphere is even more marked. The parson must have a distinctive dress which has the attractiveness and authority of a uniform to the commonplace mind, and it marks him as someone set aside for special work. A religious service must have its own "lingo" and in a thousand and one ways the policy of separating religion from the normal current of life is carried out. There is a general agreement in both theory and practice that to carry the same mental habits into religion that are in use in other directions is fatal to the "spiritual" life. You must be ready to believe or relief will not come.

Why should there be this anxiety to shut religion off from the current of everyday life? Why cannot we use in the matter of prayer exactly the same kind of language that we use when asking help from a human being? It is quite plain that at one time people must have done so. It is all a question of environment. It is one of the plainest of truths that all religious beliefs exist as a mental attitude towards the world in which man finds himself. His belief in spirits, or gods, or ghosts, or supernatural agencies sums up his theories of the forces around him. The primitive theories of disease, the belief that the forces of nature are under the control of certain superior beings who may modify their operations to meet human needs, are as much a theory of things as is the now generally accepted theory of evolution. At this stage no special atmosphere, no peculiar form of words is required. The social and intellectual conditions supply all that is necessary to keep religion alive. There is no need specially to guard the individual against an influence which tends to undermine religious belief. No one questions religion as such. There is no marking off of the religious and the secular life; it is a change in the general environment, the development of social life, the growth of more precise knowledge that creates the necessity of defending the "gods." Ideas, if they have to live, must somehow find a fitting environment. So it happens that a particular paraphernalia of special dresses, peculiar forms of language, the maintenance of outworn customs, exist as so many efforts to create an environment which shall perpetuate forms of religion that belong to the childhood of the race, or at least to an earlier period of social life. That no religion—Christian or other—can depend upon current science for support is evidence of its falsity.

You cannot then present Jesus, or any other god, in modern dress any more than primitive people can sleep in peace or move with a sense of security without feeling that their gods are with them. Give us Jesus in modern dress, talking in current language, and you have a wandering preacher filled with a number of crude and ignorant beliefs about man and the world. Publish an edition of the Bible with its ideas expressed with their exact equivalent in current language and in the course of a generation our "sacred book" would be nothing more than an interesting and instructive collection of the misunderstandings and superstitions of primitive peoples. Divest religion of the gloss placed on it by modern apologists and the *Christian Bible* would cease to exist. It is the Anthropologist who can explain the Bible. The priest can only pile lie on lie and call it the "Word of God."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

RELIGION AND ART

A B.B.C. "expert" in "Your Questions Answered," stated that musical instruments were "originally functional." This implies that they are no longer so. The questioner touched a dangerous point when suggesting as instances "the use of drums in ritual" and the "horn in calling in sheep," for these indicate religion and magic. The implication is that we have a persistence or religious and magic practices, but dare not admit the fact, though still claiming art to be "spiritual." Another "expert" asserted that Constable's landscapes were "a biography in green" and that "despite his turbulence, he was in search of tranquility." This hopeless inconsistency is also shown in the genius or hoax, Picasso controversy. "It is ugly, but it is art." Art is a search for the beautiful and there is beauty in the grotesque. Another "expert" said there is much in common between El Greco and Cezanne or Picasso. Of course there is; just as there is between these and the Aurignacian cave paintings.

Not only is the connection between religion and art close, but art shows the same basic ignorance and psychological misunderstanding. The magic in art is well expressed in a recently popular song: "If you wish long enough, wish strong enough, your dreams will come true." The religious element is seen in the idea, still taught by the Roman church, that the ringing of church bells is to drive away storms and evil spirits. We see a similar motive in the gargoyles and other symbols on cathedrals and churches. We rationalise by saying that the bells are to summon the faithful, and that the gargoyles are decorative and symbolic ornament. Art arises as an intellectual confusion which, under the guise of a search for beauty, ensures the persistence of magic and religious practices. Admiration for biblical language or the beauty of cathedrals, churches or shrines has the desirable and laudable object of justifying the superstition.

The pleasure involved in the search for the beautiful may be derived from the wish-fulfilment of magic, relief from religious or other emotions or satisfaction in self justification. The beauty may be that of craftsmanship or the beauty of the object portrayed or that of the ideological concept symbolised. This change from the expression of magic and religion to the search for beauty is a maze of conditioned reflex, rationalisation and sublimation. This mystification may be seen for instance in D. H. Lawrence's remarks about the "appleyness" of Cezanne's portrait of his wife, and Joad's assertion that we cannot describe the beauty of a Beethoven quartette. To which we might retort that our inability to use intelligent language is merely evidence of ignorance or intellectual confusion.

We can, perhaps, the better understand what is called the artistic temperament if we realise that we are not merely dealing with hyper-sensitive individuals, but with a cultural development, together with the persistence of antiquated notions; the persistence of two or more cultural stage levels in combination. This is seen in the transformation of the fetish into the idol, which is both a God and a symbol of a god, a Physical and a Metaphysical, or a Magic and a Religious entity. The creation of such an objet d'art was a mystical ceremony in which the artist is inspired, is clairvoyant, in communion with the divine; the creator of the divine, is himself divine. The same psychological confusion is seen with the actor in the play, which is derived from the miracle play, from the mystery; who was both a representation of and a presentation of, in communion with, the divine. The possessor of the artistic temperament is as much bewildered as anyone, and the admiration of artistic skill and the aura of sanctity gives the artist or artiste a superiority over the mere artisan. It is traditional.

Art develops from magic, so also does science. The question is what is the relationship between them? There is much in Buckle's suggestion that philosophy arose from poetry and

science from art. It may be said that the ancient Greeks had a geometrical obsession. This, with the concept of physics, gave accuracy in the presentation of the physical form, which was marred by an idealism, particularly noticeable in portraiture, to which much of the Roman is superior. Its evolution over a number of centuries shows the gradual elimination of a stereotyped conventionalism. Perhaps the connection between art and science is best seen with Leonardo da Vinci, who introduced perspective into flat painting and was at the same time the father of modern optics. Rembrandt lived at a time when optics was developing, and we can appreciate his idea of focus and his attempt at a stereoscopic vision effect. Instead of calling him the painter who discovered the magic mystery of gloom we might realise that this darkness was due to the *chiara obscura* technique. The use of impasto was an attempt to get more light; at first used mainly for high-lights and flesh-tones, led up to the modern method of direct painting. The invention of the microscope, showing the limitations of the human eye, led to impressionism. The study of the chemical composition of air and Newton's demonstration that light was colour, led to the study of light and atmospheric effect in terms of colour in painting. An appreciation of this gives a better understanding of such men as Turner, or such impressionists as Arnesby Brown.

With the increased acquisition of scientific knowledge there is a change in both technique and in outlook. Whereas Paolo Veronese portrayed the family of Darius in contemporary costume, Brangwyn gave us a John the Baptist or a Saint Simon Stylites as eastern fakirs. The idea of evolution is apparent in Epstein's Adam, which is anthropoid and sub-human. With the development of psychology, post-impressionism became less concerned with the physical, with what is seen, than with feeling. Art was less a question of intelligence than emotion. With Futurism and Cubism, art became geometrically formal and symbolical. What mattered was the geometry of composition and the mystical meaning; while Surrealism has no concern with appearances, but with an underlying reality; it strives to get away from traditional convention and to fashion a new symbolism. With photography taking over the role of portraiture and physical representation, the artist attempts to justify himself beyond the idea of doing what the camera cannot do; of seeing as religion retreats before the onward march of science, its connection with art becomes more apparent. With the study of dream psychology, art shows more the character of a dream phantasy, even of a nightmare.

We have done so much intellectual acrobatics that we do not know if we are standing on our heads or our feet. This esoteric obscurantism reminds one of the mystical allegories of the Gnostics, and of Jesus talking in parables, so that "seeing they might see and not perceive, hearing they might hear and not understand"; and of the neo-Platonic philosophy of self-abnegation. We accept a traditional method of mystical self-expression, yet decline openly to accept the traditional ideology; develop a new symbolism and leave posterity to unravel the mystery. What is wanted is a better understanding of the old. With music there is the same intellectual acrobatics, a change in both technique and outlook. With the development of physical science came a theory of harmony and discord, and the idea that music is an expression of joy and happiness. From the weird and doleful chanting of magic and the mournful dirge of primitive lamentations, we pass through a stage of the melodious and light-hearted gaiety of a madrigal or glee song, or the ecstatic dance of an Offenbach or a Strauss; on to the ponderous solemnity of a highbrow symphony or the lowbrow search for happiness in "feeling blue." We now have the attempt to portray emotional conflict in a harmony of discord.

H. H. PREECE.

(To be concluded)

WHY NOT ESPERANTO?

THE number of things I have "had a shot at" in my journey through life, the things I was going to do but never got started, and the things I started but never mastered would make a formidable catalogue. A wise man, it is said, is one who knows something about everything, and everything about one thing. I have never been accused of possessing wisdom, although in accumulation of knowledge and experience I might be termed a good mixer. But life is so full of a number of good things that one who would enjoy most of them would require centuries of childhood and youth.

A wise selectivity would seem imperative; and, of course, *chacun à son gout*. But, allowing for diversity of taste, and the utmost freedom of choice, there are common denominators of knowledge. Everyone should be able to read, write, and talk intelligently with his fellows, yet we are nearly all restricted to the exchange of ideas with those who speak our language. This, of course, applies to the natives of every country and is realised fully when one or more "foreign languages" appear in the educational curriculum. The French have a saying that a man who knows two languages is two men. It would follow that one who knew all the languages would be Everyman. But that is impossible, and it is here that Esperanto comes in.

In the war years I was in business in Aldershot. Soldiers from different countries were coming and going. Free French and French Canadians came in and I was able to talk with them freely because in my youth I lived in France. Yes, but when Poles and Czechs and Dutch arrived I was stumped. The most superficial consideration will show the sheer impossibility of anyone ever being able to master but a fraction of the world's languages. There is much talk nowadays of the world becoming smaller, barriers being broken down, and so on; yet thousands of different languages all "foreign" to each other keep men apart.

The case for an auxiliary language is overwhelming. I may be pardoned for just briefly going over the elementary points:—

Esperanto does not seek to supersede any national language, but it takes its stand on the position that if every child of man learnt Esperanto after his native tongue the "language difficulty" would be completely annihilated. Hindoos, Chinamen, Turks, Asiatics, Europeans, Americans, can all meet as Esperantists on perfect equality. *This has already been done with perfect success*, and the only question is the extension of the auxiliary language principle.

It must never be lost sight of that the great idea behind Doctor Zamenhof's language was the hope that, knowing each other better, men would not resort to war, indeed Esperanto is the word for Hope. Few will believe that the learning and general use of an international language would abolish war. But it would certainly save us from being at the mercy of "interpreters" whose word cannot be checked, and nothing but good could accrue from the extension of travel and exchange of ideas opened up by Esperanto. I noticed recently that both British and Russian delegates protested that they had been improperly "translated." That sort of thing might have far-reaching evil effects, and simply could not happen in Esperanto, the most logical and exact of all languages, with no ambiguities, no exceptions.

It is gratifying to know that many prominent Freethinkers are enthusiastic about Esperanto. It might be possible to form a group the members of which could, no doubt, obtain information as to the progress of our movement in other lands. I submit that the matter is worth consideration. With the Editor's permission and to save needless questions to this paper, I give this address for those who wish to know more of the subject: British Esperanto Association, Heronsgate, Rickmansworth, Herts. Of course, mention "The Freethinker."

J. EFFEL.

ACID DROPS

It is announced that the Church of England—so called because it is not the Church of England, but only a Church *in* England—intends making war on ignorance. A very excellent resolve—on paper. But how will it carry out its plan? Will the Church tell the truth about religion? It dare not. Will it enlighten the mind of Christians to the extent of telling them that every aspect of religion is much older than the Christian Church? Will it advocate that such a nonsensical thing as the blasphemy law should be abolished? Will it agitate for all Sunday laws to be abolished? One might fill a long sheet of paper with similar questions all of which will be answered with an imperative "No." We fancy that all the Church means is that people must be so drilled as to accept a living lie as an indisputable truth—one of the greatest lies in the whole of human history.

But when the determination is uncovered it amounts to just this. It is discovered that "the anti-Christian forces of Secularism, Materialism and ignorance have never been more menacing." That is the kind of insulting language that one might expect to hear from the mouth of some coarse bishop of the eighteenth century. But we are in the twentieth century, and one might expect a better approach to opponents than is adopted by the cowardly chief of the English Church. Consider the number of prominent men in science, in literature, in philosophy, who fall into the category by this servant of God who lives on the people of this country. One might have thought that in these days even an archbishop would be more careful in his blackguardism. We were almost saying that he is a disgrace to his office. But perhaps we should be nearer the truth if we said that he was worthy of his post.

It was, we suppose, bound to come. Hollywood is arranging to produce a film that will, at the cost of a million dollars, present the life of Jesus in "glorious technicolour." But we hope it will be a complete picture. Mary's escapade with the angel can easily be managed, and the attitude of Joseph when he found his betrothed was about to produce a baby, would arouse interest. And as the life of Jesus pursues its course some of his alleged actions might well be drawn from the Apocryphal Gospels which are just as authentic as any part of the New Testament. The picture of Jesus helping his mother's husband to stretch a plank of wood to a desired length; of the power of Jesus to make birds of clay and then see them flying through the air when Jesus claps his hands. Jesus may also be pictured doing his famous act in which he fed a multitude of people with a handful of fishes and a few loaves and had more left when the banquet finished than when it started. (A repetition of this would be a veritable "god-send" to the present government.) Then there is the record of how he walked into a dyer's shop and calmly threw all the clothes that were there into the furnace. But when the dyer complained Jesus took the clothes out of the furnace where "they were all unspoiled and of the colours which the dyer desired." That film should be a complete success.

Judging from various newspapers the clergy are getting fearful of taking a vote for or against Sunday cinemas. Here and there the Churches may gain a verdict, but the defeats outstrip the conquests and the reaction is bad. Speaking on behalf of a doleful Sunday, one priest says:—

"We feel that a general vote throughout the country approving the opening of cinemas on Sunday will be an open declaration to the whole world that as a nation we are turning our backs on God."

That is a very good summing up of the situation. Even when bigotry wins in a place here and there, the desire for a free Sunday grows stronger and stronger. Religion to-day, and in more than one place, is fighting a losing battle—and the clergy know it.

Another man who comes forth with a doleful declaration that, religiously, things are marching backwards is Sir John Shaw, organising secretary to the Church Union. He says: "There are great losses of Christian standards." In analysing we find Sir John is lamenting that year by year the Church attendances are

getting thinner and thinner. We can appreciate the sorrow of the clergy over this, but the rest of the population takes the news without feeling seriously upset.

The Bishop of St. Alban's is a modest but a hopeful one. He announces that he wants £90,000 per year for "the next few years" to keep his area in order. Of course some people will be foolish enough to help a little, but a continuous gift of £90,000 per year is a bit stiff, particularly when the poor are not quite so dependent on charity as they were. That game is almost played out.

We gather from the "Psychic News" that the spirit of Marie Lloyd has been singing some of her songs in spiritualistic circles. Well, if Marie Lloyd sings the songs that she did when on earth the appearance of that spirit would be worth seeing or listening to. Marie Lloyd was a great artist, and there is almost certain to be a smile on her lips when she sings the songs she used to sing. There is also money in it if the spirit leaders here could induce her to give her songs in the Albert Hall. We would go to listen to her.

It is officially stated that out of 701 churches in the London area 624 received bomb damage. That is the way in which the Lord looks after his own. In proportion, the damage to God's buildings was greater than it was to public-houses. But not one of the clergy had the courage to call the attention of God to this neglect of his worshippers.

This neglect of God is getting very pronounced and in many directions. For instance, one of our most respectable religious papers says that: "Under the providence of God we destroyed the great enemy of civilisation." But if we really did defeat Germany, owing to the help of God, why, in the name of all that is sensible, did he not prevent Germany from turning Europe upside down. What would any of us say of a man who could have prevented the war, with its loss of life and its ethical demoralisation of the public? The war has been bad enough, but it becomes horrible to think of the possibility of a God who could have prevented the war but did nothing but look down on the "show."

Mgr. Knox's recent version of the New Testament written entirely under the heavy hand of Roman Catholic censors with its "grotesque restrictions," as a "Church Times" writer complains, has been followed by a Protestant version issued in the United States. From the point of view of the latest scholarship, it is "far ahead of" the Knox attempt, but as a translation, "unfortunately it is less satisfying." All this really means is that it has not got that solemn and reverent "style" which distinguishes the Authorised Version, and prevents so many people detecting its superstitious and childish credulity. Put into straight English the New Testament as well as the Old would be immediately seen to be a conglomeration of fairy tales. Hence the desperate clinging to the A.V.

A correspondent to the "Church Times" agrees that almost as long as he can remember laymen have been "complaining" about the parsonic voice, complaints which, he admits, are quite justified; and he adds that while most people know this, the parsons themselves "do not realise" it. He suggests that aspiring holy men who cannot properly read English, or deliver it, should be turned down. The parsonic voice is, of course, extremely painful for listeners, but doing away with it will not help the Church very much. The rot goes much deeper than that. It is not a question of the parsons but of the Church itself. The Church, in fact, is being found out.

Mr. Attlee, our Prime Minister, seems to be advertising himself by his Church attendances, and the like. Of course, Mr. Attlee has the legal right to have whatever religion he fancies, or if he likes a number, say one for every day of the week, he would display a measure of fair play if he remembered that he is also Prime Minister of all sorts of religionists and religionists, and that he was not made Prime Minister to take the opportunity to advertise Churches and their creeds. But we suppose that this advertising of Christianity still pays, and politicians usually care little for justice and fair play if it helps to keep them in the public eye.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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SUGAR PLUMS

Will those who have sent the Editor so many kindly letters during the past few days be good enough to enhance his indebtedness by taking these lines as his thanks for their good wishes. Between "The Freethinker" and its readers there has always been a line of mutual affection. We feel certain that will continue.

In Ilford there is a Baptist Church. The Minister of that Church is the Rev. Beasley Murray. Attached to the Church is a "Youth Club." Also, in the "Ilford Recorder," there is a note that the "Youth Club" is ready—we assume, on the advice of the Minister—and is anxious to have a discussion on Atheism. Up to that point all seems quite good, and it may be taken that Atheism is rife in Ilford. But the public challenge is rather artful. The Debate is to run, "No Intelligent Man can be a Christian To-day." That may be called artful, stupidly artful. No one has ever thought or said that no intelligent man can be a Christian. There are plenty of them, but it is evident that the preacher is artful, and also dishonest. But if the preacher is willing to enter into a discussion on "Atheism versus Christianity," or, more correctly, "Atheism or Theism," we dare say a debate could be staged. And in that case—if we may use the phrase—"God help the parson." He will need help.

The Catholic "Universe" announced that some Swiss people travelled—on foot—to a special sanctuary to thank God for preserving them from war, and to show their sincerity gave up alcohol and smoking. But that seems to be wrong. For up to date the Swiss smoked and drank, and God may say—if gods ever think—that it was both smokers and drinkers he helped, and not a number of nitwits who could not be trusted with a cigarette and a glass of wine. In England the celebration of victory was carried out by giving extra smokes and drinks. We wonder what view god takes of these two bands of worshippers. But in these days gods have to put up with what they can get. The old saying, that beggars cannot be choosers, holds good with gods and crossing sweepers.

Another heroic figure is the Cardinal Von Galen. He has publicly said that he is prepared to "accept death in any place in any fashion." That sounds very heroic, but we suppose that when death comes we have to die in whatever shape or form nature prescribes. Cardinal Von Galen is either very silly or he has a keen eye for gullible people. If any of the Cardinals have common sense they may reflect that we shall all die in circumstances that occur to us. But sensible and honest people do not go bragging about it.

We have received the following letter from Mr. G. Bernard Shaw in reply to an article in the "Freethinker" dated June 16.

THE GOD OF BERNARD SHAW

I have to thank Mr. Du Cann and your good self for an astonishingly accurate account of my philosophy, such as it is.

When I described the heart of the despairing pessimist as sinking into a heap of sand I was not thinking of any experience of my own nor of any of the atheists, secularists, freethinkers, and other godless persons of my acquaintance. I never suffered the least inconvenience from my desertion of my old Nobodaddy, nor as far as I know did they. But others did and do; and I had to take them into account in a rhetorical passage written for platform delivery.

My biology starts with the fact that there is no discovered chemical difference between a live body and a dead one. The same creature has ceased to breathe and pump its blood; and it presently disintegrates and rots, nobody knows why. Until we do know, the Life Force, as I call it, though visibly at work everywhere, is a miracle and a mystery; but we can say of it that it has evident purposes which transcend those of self-preservation and reproduction by visible physical operations. It has an evolutionary appetite for power and knowledge, in pursuit of which it will risk martyrdom and face the extremity of hardship and danger. The man who might be the prosperous village churchwarden prefers to be the persecuted village freethinker. The squire abandons his comfortable country house, and undertakes "the worst journey in the world" to gather an egg or two of the Emperor Penguin because it is a missing link in genetic theory.

Rationalism, Materialism, Hedonism cannot account for this—it is just a hard fact of incalculable importance and promise. Freethinkers and Fundamentalists alike must face it, whatever arguments or legends they may decorate it with.

I am no more a Christian than I am a Confucian, a Moslem, or a Jain. The sentimental "Love one another" and "Our Father" of Jesus do not fit into a world of thinly venerated unlovable savages. To love them would be unnatural vice. The counsel of perfection is to be just and humane to those whom we rightly detest. Jesus was deeply right in urging us to discard revenge and punishment. Two blacks do not make a white. We must weed the garden, but not unkindly.

As a crude political agitator Jesus must be classed with Essex, Emmet, and the many other novices who have attempted an insurrection without an army, and have been at once taken by the police and executed. And his advice to the rich young man will not hold water.

In short, "the god of Bernard Shaw" is very obviously not a god at all as the word goes. The Life Force is a metaphysical hypothesis deduced from undeniable facts, not the imaginary sifter painted by Michael Angelo, Raphael, and Blake. Mankind is an experiment in godhead, so far not a successful one. But the Life Force will no doubt try again.—Gratefully yours,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. has arranged a Freehought Brains Trust at 38, John Bright Street, this afternoon at 3-30. Apart from the promise of an interesting afternoon it offers an excellent opportunity for inquiring Christians to bring doubts and strong points into the open.

It was a favourite saying of Bradlaugh that the final religious, or semi-religious struggle will be between Atheism and Roman Catholicism. History is proving it, not because either of the two religious systems have come into the open to fight together, but because it is becoming a case of hanging together in order to prevent being hung separately. For example: it did not take the Archbishop of Canterbury long to realise that so far as education—teaching would be the better term where the clergy rule—went "Universal education might easily come to mean universal unbelief." Of course it might, and if it is genuine, it will. But the good, honest teacher teaches his pupils to get beyond him. The Archbishop and his kind impress upon those the duty of following him. A teacher who does not incite his pupils—other things equal—to get beyond, to do better than him, ought never to be permitted inside a school.

NOT QUITE AN OBITUARY

IT is a fact not to be ignored by Freethinkers that the Roman Catholic Church as it stands today is the greatest and strongest Christian Church in the world. Any Freethinker is suffering under the strongest of delusions if for one moment he believes the Christian Church to be practically extinct and a negligible factor in the lives of millions of people.

Christianity is not as great a power today as it was say, 100 years ago. The Church of England and the various Nonconformist bodies have suffered deadly blows during recent years as far as church attendances are concerned, but although Roman Catholic officials have scented danger the Roman Church has not weakened to any appreciable degree during the last century.

To many I will appear a pessimist. Yet we, as Atheists, cannot oppose the Church until we know its strength. In recent years I have observed that a minority of Atheists consider the Christian religion as already dead. This is not the case. "We Seek for Truth" is the maxim adopted by the National Secular Society and every true follower of that Society cannot ignore the fact that the Roman Church is yet the dominating feature in the lives of the majority of its people. An Atheist cannot delude him or herself into believing that this fact does not exist. The Papist Church is yet growing. The Pope is yet the wooden idol through which a credulous set of noodles hope to gain that dull, idle, imaginative existence fit only for gods and Christians—Eternal Life in "Heaven." The beliefs of the Roman Church are yet forced into the minds of its subjects, drilled into them and hung before their blurred, prejudiced visions upon every possible occasion. From childhood the fear of the Church, the fear of Hell, the fear of God, the omnipotence of the "Holy Virgin" and "His Holiness the Pope" are yet, in a civilised, cultured country, coerced into their simple minds and down their innocent throats without one word of explanation concerning the weaknesses of those beliefs. I wonder why? Every Atheist knows the answer.

For many years the Secular Society and the R.P.A. have been doing good work in the publication and distribution of Free-thought and Scientific literature. We can do little more than write and lecture what we know to be the Truth. In time the B.B.C. may higher the standard of its religious education to include our side of the great controversy, that in itself will be a miracle worthy of God himself and a great step forward by this buttress of English hypocrisy. Here, however, may I give a little "Acid Drop" of gentle correction.

We, as Atheists, have for many years been disclosing the deceitful character of the Roman Catholic Church. We have tried to give this information to Roman Catholics . . . with what results? In the vast majority of cases we have failed miserably. It must be admitted. We know the detestable character of the Roman Church but it is practically a life's work to instil this knowledge in the mind of a Catholic. The fault is not ours. It is not even that of the humble Catholic. The fault might be described as lying in the "tyranny of the Church."

A Catholic dare not have any other views presented to him but those of the Faith. It is, therefore, a difficult task to coax him to read or listen to the Freethought point of view. If they do read and even digest such works the majority do not believe what they have read or change their views "one jot or tittle." Again, the fault is not theirs personally. The fault is not ours. The dominating factor in their lives (yes, I am saying it again), is the fear of the Church and (most important) the results which they have been taught to be imminent if they take the slightest step contrary to the doctrine of the Church.

Now, bearing this in mind, a Catholic is not going to abandon something which he has been taught to believe since childhood—and taught in a biased, awe-inspiring manner—and in which he does honestly believe because a certain little book says something entirely different. All his friends are in the Church, his

life is entangled with that of the Church, practically everybody he has met holds the same religious opinions as himself. No, he is not going to abandon all this because a certain little book (a book he has never heard of before by a writer whose name is unfamiliar) refutes it and replaces it with a world in which there is no future life. Rather is he going to do what his parents did before him, namely, to call the book a "pack of lies" and pitch it in the fire.

The above statements must be admitted by all and they result because we, as Atheists, are trying to convert individuals after the Church has filled their heads with "dirty water" as Shaw terms it. We all realise that we cannot fill their heads with clean water until this dirty water has been thrown away. It is, however, the very devil to throw out the dirty water, for while we are using pamphlets and breath in reforming one Roman Catholic the Church is doing deadly work with a whole classroom of children whose minds are open to any fairy tale the priest might tell them.

In this way we find ourselves trying to stop the cart instead of the horse which is pulling it. We should, therefore, give our attention to the Church and not to its subjects. This, however, is exactly what we have been doing for the last hundred years in the course of which we have found that the Church cannot be influenced except through its subjects. The subjects, however, cannot be influenced except through the Church. The whole thing, therefore, works in a circle. What is to be done?

The Church of England and the numerous Nonconformist bodies are slowly dying. I am convinced that this deterioration will continue. There is nothing to stop it. The Church of England has infused very little Fear into the minds of its congregations and cannot begin to bind them with such a chain now. Indeed this chain is the chief, if not the only force, with which any Christian Church can keep a large percentage of adherents. Thus the number of church-goers of Nonconformist and Church of England faiths dwindle. In addition this new generation is a highly sceptical one and in the main is Christian only so long as Christianity allows it to visit the cinema on Sundays instead of going to church. It is Christian only on the Saturday night when the church organises a dance, but not on the Sunday night when the church holds a service. I am of course writing of Protestantism now, for the Church of Rome never had and never will have free church-goers.

Thus the boundaries of Christianity are extended by each generation and the time will come (long before Christ's "thief in the night" stunt) when they will reach to the fertile pastures of Atheism.

The Church of England then will be the first to perish. To which faith will these people turn having rejected Christianity? One thing is certain, they will not turn to Papist Rome in search of a creed, for Christian Protestantism was always the enemy of Christian Roman Catholicism. There is only one alternative . . . no religion whatever or in other words Freethought and just round the corner—Atheism.

I feel sure that in this way the vast majority of Protestants will turn to Freethought and Atheism. I feel sure that stronger pressure on the already tottering structure of Protestantism in the form of pamphlets and lectures will gain us a bigger army to oppose the regiments of the Vatican, for we can be sure of one thing, the officials of the Roman Church will fight with a fanatical energy . . . after all, they have a lot to lose.

The adherents of the Roman Catholic Church are mentally hypnotised to do the will of their agent—the Church. This spell is one which can only be broken by the ceaseless activity of Atheists and the steady growth of knowledge and education. Education will take a large share in the destruction of the Church, Christianity and, indeed, any religion. With the advance of education the Church will grow weaker and their congregations dwindle until even Church officials realise that Christianity will die.

In writing this article I do not pretend to be a prophet (Heaven forbid) for it has long been obvious to Atheists that the Christian religion will decay. I am merely propounding briefly a hypothesis based on experience by which I think Unbelief can gain a greater proportion of adherents to battle against the remaining section of Belief. The time, energy and pamphlets expended upon that hypnotised robot the Pope can be used with more progressive results upon the much less dictated individual the Protestant. With more followers we have a much greater chance of success when addressing ourselves to that phenomenal, opaque and doubtful substance the religious intellect of the Roman Catholic.

May I address my concluding paragraph to God when I say that the only thing needed to crush Atheism for ever is just one little miracle from his mighty self. On the other hand one thing which will help to crush the Church for ever is no miracle from God. So far we have had the latter, so perhaps God unlike the Church has observed that a section of the boundaries of Christianity is very close to the fertile pastures of Atheism? Perhaps he has taken himself off to some other world convinced that as far as the Earth is concerned "Atheism is inevitable" and that the ceaseless activity of Atheists makes the end only a matter of time?

K. EASTAUGH.

OTHER PEOPLE'S GODS—SHAKESPEARE

WHY does your correspondent, Mr. Kent, express surprise that I accept Shakespeare as being Shakespeare? I am in the very best company in doing so. All his contemporary fellow-writers, whether hostilely-critical like Robert Greene or friendly-critical like Ben Jonson (who thought his own writing better than Shakespeare's) accepted Shakespeare. I can hardly believe that the keen brains that met at the Mermaid or the Temple were fools to be taken in by "an upstart Crow beautified with the feathers" of de Vere, Earl of Oxford! After all, these men heard Shakespeare talk as well as write.

For my part, I would as readily believe that Asquith, Earl of Oxford, wrote the plays of Bernard Shaw or Somerset Maugham as that de Vere, Earl of Oxford, wrote Shakespeare.

No: Queen Elizabeth's Lord Great Chamberlain, the "Italianated Englishman" of Gabriel Harvey, who called Sir Philip Sidney "a puppy" on the tennis court and then tried to murder him, who sat to try Mary, Queen of Scots, and who wrote some small lyrics of some little merit—still extant, by the way—did not write Shakespeare's plays. This violent-tempered, erratic, spendthrift, duelling creature was not a Shakespeare.

There is nothing in Mr. Kent's point about Shakespeare's miss-spelt name. In Elizabeth's day, the spelling was flexible: John Shakespeare's name in Stratford's Council Book is spelt in 16 different ways. De Vere's own youthful title—Lord Bolebec or Bulbec—was spelt in two ways at Cambridge University. Even today, my own name has been spelt in six different ways by educated people.

Nor is there anything in Mr. Kent's other point that the religious ideas extracted by me from Shakespeare's work vaguely fit de Vere. They would fit Marlowe and others equally.

It used to be said that Shakespeare was Lord Bacon. The real answer to all this poppycock of pretending that Shakespeare was someone else is to compare the respective literary work. In Gray's Inn we have a play or "masque" which Bacon actually did write for the private performance of his Gray's Inn brethren and it is nothing like Shakespeare's work. Similarly de Vere's poems are unlike, and inferior to, Shakespeare's.

Why on earth shouldn't Shakespeare be "an actor, a salt-dealer and a litigant for small debts" as well as a dramatic poet? "One man in his time plays many parts"—even if he is only a genius. As to Shakespeare being a mere shadow as

Mr. Kent says, Shakespeare has the answer to that: "The best in this kind are but shadows." I entirely believe that Shakespeare was Shakespeare; Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Beaumont, Fletcher, John Webster, Ford and Cyril Tourneur and the rest of the brilliant galaxy each himself.

Shakespeare was not the Lord Great Chamberlain nor the Lord High Chancellor of England as de Vere and Bacon respectively were; he was a poor devil of an author, scribbling for dear life and dearer livelihood as such poor devils as authors must, for writing is in them and must out.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

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South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., OLAF STAPLEDON, M.A., Ph.D.: "Reason and Religion."

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WOT! NO PENSIONS FOR MOTHERS?

MY DEAR DOCTOR OLDFIELD,

With all due respect to your high intelligence and good works I really cannot agree with your suggestion or your protest against what you term the "Exploitation of Mothers."

In the first place *who* is exploiting them? Surely they have been always the spoiled darlings of both National and Labour Governments. They are No. 1 Priority in all things. The poor bachelors and spinsters and even the very aged have to go short so that they may be fattened up and sustained in "the pains of childbirth" as you so eloquently put it.

But let us try to look at the subject quite dispassionately. If you tax bachelors and spinsters who may perhaps have to remain as such through no desire of their own—for instance they may have aged or invalid parents to look after—you are being anything but just; and by still lessening their incomes you are not increasing their chances of getting married even if they could. Even mothers and fathers must first of all be *spinsters* and *bachelors*.

Then again, if the object of this great boost for breeding is merely to produce human targets for future wars (as it has been for the past two generations) surely it would be far better to prohibit breeding altogether. With nobody left to fight there could be no more wars. That seems to me a very good case for taxing or fining all those selfish and unthinking people who, for a moment's pleasure, will bring into a suffering world, already overcrowded and starving, innocent children so that they too may suffer and be eventually killed off like flies when they reach their prime by an all-powerful swatter.

No, no, Doctor Oldfield. It is not Quantity but Quality that matters. The encouragement of indiscriminate breeding by penalising all those who do not breed is utterly wrong and immoral. We do not want to see hordes of frenzied spinsters shouting from the housetops: "A child! A child! My Queenom for a child!" This was Hitler's fetish.

Also, how are you going to distinguish between those who can afford to have children but cannot, and those who could have children but cannot afford to? Perhaps you have in mind an army of quizzing Government Inspectors who shall descend upon our homes and demand information concerning our most private and intimate relations, and the filling up of even more forms and questionnaires!

With modern sex education the days when women were regarded merely as breeding machines have gone for ever. Even the medical profession has done much in this respect by advising contraception. Would you then have us return to the old order with all its accompanying evils of misery, disease and squalor?

Lastly, I must remind you that we have just fought a second world war for Freedom and Liberty. Let us then enjoy some measure of that hard-earned liberty and be free to breed or not to breed as our conscience guides us.

Yours, etc.,

W. H. WOOD.

P.S.—

A lovely thought has hit me
A Flag Day would be fun—
Or was it Conscience bit me?
One never knows, does one?

So spare a copper, brother,
For Mrs. Murgatroyd;
She's going to have "another"—
The last two were destroyed.

We must keep up the birth-rate,
It's due to Church and State;
So breed for all you're worth, mate—
Before it is too late.

Dear Spinsters, dare I mention?

You should study stoats and rabbits;
Then you will get a pension
For copying their habits.

Each married girl must toe the line
And populate the earth;
Or else she'll have to pay a fine
For spreading not her girth.

She suffered no confinement,
No pains from kicking life;
Delivered no consignment—
And calls herself a wife!

So let this be our war cry—
We must have lots more babies—
Though more and more and more die
From rickets, rashes, rabies.

Yes, pay up quick and snappy
That pensions may be had.
We must make mothers happy—
But what about poor Dad?

W. H. W.

A CURIOSITY

BEFORE me is a small 18th century volume handsomely bound in leather. The title-page reads: "Miscellanies or Essays Literary, Political and Moral," by the Reverend Dr. Jonathan Swift, D.S.P.D. Glasgow. Printed for Robert Vrie. (No date.)

On page 137 the author says:—

"There is one observation which I never knew to fall, and I desire you will examine it in the course of your life, that no gentleman of a liberal education, and regular in his morals, did ever profess himself a *Freethinker*."

This dictum has no small interest because it proceeded from the self-same man who wrote that mordant satire entitled, "The Tale of a Tub," which relates how three brothers, Peter, Martin and Jack, pretended to discover all sorts of fantastic significations in their blessed father's Will; how Peter by and by dispossessed Martin and Jack; how, after long suppression, these two raised a disturbance in many lands to Peter's great misfortune; and how in this country, after Peter lost his footing, Martin turned on Jack and basted him, and Jack, recovering strength, basted Martin, and then, after Martin had once more got the upper hand, Peter slyly aided Jack for his own interest until at last Martin, taking advantage of a political upset, gave Peter a knock out and reduced Jack to imbecility.

A fly leaf at the end of the present volume offers an anonymously hardly less amusing, for there we read:—

"The following Pieces of the Celebrated Voltaire elegantly translated from the French, are all printed and sold by Robert Vrie, at his Printing Office, foot of the Salt Market."

The list comprises 17 works. All the volumes are "bound," except two, one of these being "stitched," and the other "in boards." The prices of the bound ones vary from 3s. 6d. to 2s. per volume; the remaining two cost 1s. each. Interesting items are: "IX. The Philosophical Dictionary. A new edition, corrected. 12 mo. price 3s. 6d. bound"; and "XVI. Letters addressed to His Highness the Prince of —, containing comments on the writings of the most eminent authors who have been accused of attacking the Christian religion. Price 3s. 6d. bound." Voltaire is the only writer whose works are advertised in the present edition of Dean Swift's "Miscellanies."

C. CLAYTON DOVE