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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Religious Sanction

THE question of the Moral Sanction is one that always has, and always will occupy, a prominent place in ethical speculation, although continuous discussion seems to do little towards uniting the various schools of thought. And, in view of this fact, it may be taken as a fortunate circumstance that inability to agree upon this question no more prevents mankind manifesting a workable degree of uniformity in their conduct than disputes as to the nutritive value of certain foods prevent their maintaining a passable degree of physical health. For conduct, however much it may be inspired to special effort by the acceptance of this or that particular theory, does not, in its fundamental aspects, depend upon any. Normal humanity is no more conscious of the high philosophic theories it illustrates in its daily actions than a man is aware that in throwing a stone across the road he changes the centre of gravity of the universe. Those who express fears of what *may* happen if a particular "sanction" be attacked are thus largely tilting at windmills. Those who are sufficiently developed to interest themselves in discussions on the nature of morals usually possess enough intelligence and balance to prevent their speculations seriously affecting their conduct, while the less developed show neither interest in, nor appreciation of, the points in dispute.

Broadly, it may be said that any "sanction" or "standard" of morality that may be proposed breaks down, or is ineffective as a conscious force, with someone. The religious sanction does not appeal to the Freethinker, and the sanction favoured by the Freethinker appears to the religious person to lack compelling power. It is useless telling a man who believes neither in a God or a future life that God wishes him to act in this or that particular manner. You might as well deliver a moral exordium in ancient Greek to an English peasant. And to a religious person, convinced that, apart from religion, no sanction of morals is possible, it is equally useless telling him to find a sufficient guide in the conception of general happiness or temporal welfare. Each will assert that the other's sanction is defective because it fails to appeal to *him*. And, so far, each will be justified in his assertion. Whether the failure of each is inevitable or not, or whether one might reasonably assert that development, individual and social, would strengthen one sanction and weaken the other, are wider and more important questions.

So far as the religious sanction is concerned, its failure has been unmistakable. It has not only failed to coerce the conduct of those who did not accept the Theistic postulate on which it is based, but it has failed to coerce those who did accept it. Its failure has formed one of the stock themes of even religious preachers, although they have

never ceased to emphasise its value. From St. Paul down to the most recent evangelist there has been the complaint that religious people are not as they should be, accompanied with the affirmation that nothing but religion can develop in human nature the required degree of excellence. Why it has failed, and why it was foredoomed to failure, are considerations worthy of a little attention.

A man is obliged to do something, said a once-eminent authority in the religious world (Archdeacon Paley), "when he is urged by a violent motive resulting from the command of another"; and he proceeds to argue that, as we should not be obliged to obey laws unless rewards and punishments, pleasure or pain, depended upon our obedience, so neither should we, but for a similar reason, be obliged to obey the command of God. Therefore, he concludes, private happiness is our (the Christians') motive, and the will of God our rule. This finding a reason for morality in an external authority, with the reduction of moral rules to so many criminal regulations, is a properly theological conception; but, however faulty it may be, it will serve to illustrate the point under discussion. To commence with, one may confidently say that the admitted failure of the theological sanction is not due to people not desiring happiness. This is an inexpugnable element of conscious action. Nor can it be because the will of God—granting certain conditions—could not play the part of Paley's "violent motive." If people believed in the existence of God with the same degree of certainty that they believe in the existence of, say, a policeman, and in a heaven and a hell with the same strength of conviction that they believe in Paris or Berlin, then we may assume that religious belief would supply a motive "violent" enough to secure all that is required of it.

But this is a pretty big "if," and in stating it one goes to the heart of the question. People believe in a God, true; but between this and their belief in the possibility of their contracting a disease there is a world of difference. The latter is constant, and, most of the time, active. The former, save in very rare cases, is fluctuating and, except under special circumstances, dormant. The belief in God has no more influence over average men and women than has their belief in the existence of Julius Caesar, or than the fact that one day our coal supply will be exhausted, influences them in replenishing the kitchen fire. At certain moments of their lives, individuals here and there may be brought to the point of giving this belief in Deity an actuality as real as that of their next door neighbour; but persons of this description are, of necessity, the exception. The overwhelming majority require something of a more concrete and realisable character if it is to exert a strong and conscious influence on their lives. And if a religious belief is to act as Paley believed it should act, it must present two characteristics that no religious belief the world has yet seen has ever possessed. It must be sufficiently strong in the mind to exert a constant force,

never falling below a given point, while the punishments and rewards promised must be certain in their action:

Now the belief in God is one that, even with the most religious, assumes widely different degrees of intensity. The despairing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" whether historically true in the one particular instance or not, does represent a true state of the religious mind under stress of unexpected circumstances. There is a doubt; and this doubt suggests itself to all, sensitive and brutal, cultured and uncultured. In more civilised times the doubt is suggested and strengthened in a thousand different ways, while little or nothing occurs to lend the belief renewed strength. All is *not* right with the world, whether God's in his heaven or not. Punishments and rewards do not follow in a manner that commends itself to the most rudimentary moral intelligence, while from the purely intellectual side doubts are suggested by every fresh scientific discovery. Thus, instead of the basis of the religious moral sanction being strengthened by time and experience, its force wavers at times even with the most devout, its efficacy becomes weaker with all professors of religion, while multitudes reject it with a contempt arising from a conviction of its profound falsity and inutility.

But even though the existence of God were unquestioned and unquestionable, the religious sanction would still be one of very doubtful force. One of Beccaria's most fruitful generalisations in his dealing with the problem of crime was that the certainty of punishment was of more consequence, because of greater efficacy, than its severity. A slight punishment may deter if it is inevitable; a much severer one will fail if its operation be doubtful; and the extent of its failure will be exactly proportionate to the doubtfulness of its operation. Remoteness of punishment or reward would, in a similar manner, frustrate their object. A punishment that is to take effect forty or fifty years hence has but a small effect in preventing wrongdoing to-day. Present inducements easily outweigh the influence of so remote a contingency. This principle, the workings of which may easily be seen in everyday life, applies with special strength to religion. For here the object, God, is at least open to doubt; the consummation of the act as distant as any event can be. People who, in order to gratify particular desires, will chance what may happen a few years hence, will certainly not be more inclined to check present desires when the fruits are to be realised on the other side of the grave. All the probabilities are against such a sanction exercising a steady influence on human nature; and the facts support the probabilities. It is for this reason that with normal people some special circumstance—a disaster or a death, an attack of disease or the influence of a powerful personality—is needed to rouse religious feelings into activity, and even then resume a state of quiescence as soon as the exciting cause is removed.

To such criticism as the above the religious advocate usually makes the reply that virtue would lose all, or nearly all, its value if it were made too easy of accomplishment. To that the reply is that the whole tendency of moral discipline is to produce what is declared to be undesirable. Moral practice gives the foundation of moral habits, that is, desirable actions which are performed without the troublesome and wasteful operations of deliberation, decision, and struggle. Moreover, as perfection of character is the ideal end of moral discipline, nothing seems to be gained by

making that either difficult or impossible of realisation. Whether the good character appears at the beginning or end of the process makes no conceivable difference. And again, the aim of education is to do exactly what the religious person says God is justified in not doing. It aims, that is, at so developing the general intelligence that the consequences of actions may be more easily perceived, and thus exert a surer influence on conduct.

Finally, a very obvious comment upon the religious sanction is that it has most effect upon those who least need its influence. The brutal, the callous, the unthinking are not seriously affected by it. The kindly, the sensitive, the thoughtful are. It does not prevent the thief stealing, or the liar lying; but it does trouble those who are striving to do their best apart from its influence, and who consequently develop a more or less morbid frame of mind. The biographies of the best men in Christian history offer many melancholy examples of the extent to which they have falsely accused themselves of sins during their "unconvinced" state, and the manner in which harmless actions are magnified into deadly offences. Indeed, one of Christianity's chief offences is not that it has enlisted the services of bad men, but that it has monopolised the energies of good ones. The state of society at any period during its history is adequate proof that Christianity has not succeeded in seriously diminishing the volume of vice and crime. But it has succeeded in influencing in a morbid and anti-social manner many who, left alone, might have developed a sanely balanced intelligence, and have applied their energies to the work of profitable social development.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A DEFENCE OF HATRED

II.

THE conclusion is irresistible that our whole public life is pervaded through and through by organised humbug. Public men systematically profess one thing and believe another. This is glaringly so to-day, but was already evident when I first became interested in politics over forty years ago. Those forty years have been marked by certain highlights of deception—the "hang the Kaiser" election of 1918, the "save the pound" election of 1931, the "peace in our time" ramp of Munich. But these highlights are only special cases of a general rule which a student of politics over these forty years is driven to recognise. To use a much quoted phrase, "politics are a dirty game." A successful politician may be a charming fellow in private life, a model husband and father, a generous friend and all the rest of it. But in public life his trade is to lie and cheat and not be found out. He is not interested in the truth, he does not tell the people the truth, and so far as in him lies, he tries to prevent them learning the truth.

It is easy to see why. The reason is inherent in the structure of the society which the politician is called upon to administer. We live in what is called a capitalist democracy. That is to say, the economic structure of society is capitalist: in it one set of people, the owning class, live on the backs of another set of people, the working class; and the two classes have different standards of living and different interests. (The existence of a large middle class does not invalidate the analysis.) But the political framework is democratic: the working class, though with a lower standard of living and a cheaper and shorter education, have votes, and politicians have periodically to appeal for their votes in order to be elected to Parliament. Can we wonder that

politics are dishonest? They were not dishonest to the same degree when politicians appealed to a limited electorate, as men of property to men of property. They will not be dishonest to the same degree when an educated working class elects from its own number those best qualified to administer its own Socialist State. But we live in the transition period; and in this transition period politics stink.

What is our reaction to all this? Life, they say, is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel. If we were mere spectators with no special interest in the outcome, we might shrug our shoulders and turn with Voltaire to cultivate our gardens. But we cannot do this. These pampered, uneducated (or miseducated), lazy-minded humbugs and liars and cheats who govern us have already landed us in two world wars in my single lifetime. I say *they* have, not at all because I ignore the part played by the rulers of Germany in precipitating both catastrophes. Wilhelm II and Adolf Hitler were assuredly guilty men—damnably guilty men. But I cannot acquit our governing class of responsibility on both occasions. Before 1914 our rulers systematically lied to us about the game of power politics in which they were engaged. Before 1939 they even more systematically lied to us about the Fascist menace. They lied to us on both occasions because it is their trade to lie. They are not of the people, they live on the people, they deliberately leave the people uneducated, and having left them uneducated, they rule them by lies, because they know no other way in which to rule them.

What is our reaction to all this? My own reaction, first and foremost, is candidly hatred. Shortly before the war Professor Haldane wrote in the "New Statesman" that he felt personally unclean in the company of supporters of the Chamberlain Government. I sympathise with him and agree with him. If a leading front-bench politician (I name no names—"it really doesn't matter whom you put upon the list") came into this room now, I should not be rude to him. I should, I hope, preserve my manners and my dignity. But my feelings towards him would be entirely uncharitable. I should feel that he was a member of a different species. I should feel bound to him by no ethical ties whatsoever. And I should feel that if the wheel of fortune gave me the opportunity, I could liquidate him with as little compunction as I should crush a louse.

That is my reaction, first and foremost. But I am a Rationalist, and I think hatred, like love, should be informed, that is shaped and directed, by reason. Grant Allen wrote a short story about an Anarchist who threw a bomb into a Paris restaurant and who, when asked why he had killed so many innocent people, replied: "There are no innocent bourgeois." Let it be granted that there are not. Nevertheless, if instead of throwing a bomb into a restaurant, that man had devoted his energy to organising trade unions among the employees of those bourgeois, he would have enjoyed a more subtle and more lasting revenge. Instead of a sudden death by dynamite, he would have put them to a lingering death by headaches induced by coping with strikes in their factories, and what is more, he would have been building up the power of the working class and paving the way for the supersession of that social order in which one set of people exploits, miseducates, misleads, and finally leads into wholesale massacre another set of people.

For this reason my discovery that the religion in which I had been brought up was false, that its professors did not themselves really and effectively believe it, and that the Church of England was merely the Tory Party at prayers, inevitably led me to the Left in politics. I joined the Labour movement because its enemies were also my enemies: I had been "had," and the people had been "had," by the same racket. Of course, there are other reasons too. Man is a social animal. He cannot, if he wishes to be happy, live for himself alone. He needs to co-operate, to play a part in something bigger than himself. As the Anglican, Tory, old-school tie ideology in which I had been

brought up was plainly hollow—a camouflage for a social and political racket—I provided myself with another, that of the French Revolution, that of the Chartists, and that of the modern Socialist movement, the objective of which is the achievement of equal opportunities for every man and woman to be happy here in this life without waiting for "pie in the sky when you die."

But, you will say, cannot we serve that cause without hating anybody? Why should we not convert the world to Socialism by conciliation, persuasion, and sweet reasonableness? My reply to that is quite definitely that we cannot. If you want proof that we cannot, look at the career of two people whom it is impossible for any Socialist not to admire—Sidney and Beatrice Webb. They thought that they and those whom they gathered round them could convert Britain to Socialism by conciliation, persuasion, and sweet reasonableness, without propagating hatred of anybody or anything. They spoke peaceably to the capitalist, they invited him to dinner, they demonstrated to him how much happier he would be and how his rates and taxes would be lowered if destitution were abolished and a minimum standard of wages, leisure, health, and education established according to their plan. The capitalist was politely conciliatory. He sat on their platform, and moved a vote of thanks to them for being so reasonable. But he was a wily bird and was not taken in. The trouble was that the Webbs, like so many of us, did not really know the world with which they had to cope. When war broke out in 1914, they had to confess that they had not provided for that eventuality. Sidney Webb disappeared into two Labour Governments, became Lord Passfield, and was very nearly sunk without trace. Then, in the evening of their life, those two good people suddenly woke up to the fact that the Socialism to which they had devoted their careers was becoming a fact, and that a new civilisation was being built upon it, not by conciliation, persuasion, and sweet reasonableness, but by ruthless battle; not by inviting the capitalist to dinner and having him on your platform, but by confiscating his property and liquidating him as a class; not by love alone, but by hatred too—"hating wickedness that hinders loving," hating it to the very death!

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

(To be concluded)

GOD'S VICTIMS HERE AND HEREAFTER

Now my gross, earthly, human heart
With man and not with God takes part;
With men, however vile, and not
With seraphim I cast my lot;
With those poor ruffian thieves, too strong
To starve amidst our social wrong,
And yet too weak to wait and earn
Dry bread by honest labour stern;
With those poor harlots steeping sin
And shame and woe in vitriol-gin;
Shall these, so hardly dealt with here,
Be worse off in a future sphere;
And I, a well-fed loungeur, seek
To "cut" them dead, to cringe and sneak
Into that bland *beau monde* the sky,
Whose upper circles are so high?
If any human soul at all
Must die the second death, must fall
Into that gulf of quenchless flame
Which keeps its victims still the same,
Unpurified as unconsumed,
To everlasting torments doomed;
Then I give God my scorn and hate,
And turning back from Heaven's gate
(Suppose me got there!) bow, *Adieu!*
Almighty Devil, damn me too!

JAMES THOMSON.

ACID DROPS

From the U.S.A. comes the news that, after five years of fighting the owners of the Broadcasting Machinery Company, Mr. Robert Harold Scott has secured, against much opposition, the right to broadcast a defence of Atheism. Every Sunday there is now to be a half-hour of explanation and defence of Atheism. The fight has been a hard one, but it ended successfully. We congratulate him on his courage and his success. We wonder how long it will be before we have a similar exhibition of fair play in this country. At present the rulers of the B.B.C. not only refuse to give fair play where religion is discussed, but they openly count to its credit that it prevents anything like honesty where religion is concerned. The matter has been raised several times in the House of Commons, but up to date only a mere handful of Members have protested against what is beginning to assume the feature of a national scandal.

That pious flounderer in unmeaning words, the Rev. L. B. Ashby, in the "Daily Telegraph," has come to the conclusion that, after all, "Christianity is a very difficult religion." This is a far cry from the beautiful "simple" religion taught by "our Lord" which always—and no exception was admitted—was listened to by the common people so gladly and reverently. The truth is, of course, that "true" Christianity is such a hotch-potch of myth, miracle and downright rubbish that only a few theologians claim to understand it, and even they often differ among themselves as to what Christianity really means. There is, however, one reservation to this. The Catholic convert always understands Christianity.

The naval C-in-C. at Portsmouth, says the "Daily Express," "is very disappointed in his Orders at the falling-off in voluntary church attendance" at the usual Sunday Church Parade. This is very sad news, and we venture humbly to suggest that Admiral Sir G. Layton is much more than very disappointed; he is obviously very angry that at last the power of ordering men to Church Parade has been taken from him. He has "emphasised" that officers "should give the men every facility to attend," and for all we know it may mean God help the men who don't; but the Admiral has now a different class of men to deal with than was the case 40 or 50 years ago. It is hoped that they won't allow themselves to be bullied any longer—by petty officers, or captains, or even admirals.

The quality of the clergy appears to be falling lower and lower. That, of course, is not unexpected. The farther back we go the fewer the men and women who were familiar with advanced thinking, and the less telling scientific knowledge. Less than a hundred years ago they believed in the truth of the Bible. Another century back and Christian leaders had a full belief in witches, and men and women—mostly women—were burned or drowned for practising witchcraft. Three centuries back and the sun went round the earth, and men were killed and tortured for believing otherwise. And so we travel from a time when Christianity could, and did, believe nearly all that now we read for amusement; or, more seriously, how man lived in ignorance and had no doubt of the truth of Christianity.

But there are still with us in the year 1946 some of the friends of God. There is, for example, the Archdeacon of Lewes, who solemnly declares that "people who stay at home in bed on Sunday mornings are guilty of theft." We appreciate the complaint, without wishing to endorse it. For who is it that suffers because a man, after a week of early rising, decides to have a good rest on Sunday? The family is not likely to suffer, the man himself will certainly not suffer, neighbours cannot suffer, and the man is the better for a good sleep. We take it that the only suffering experienced is by God, for he lives literally, on a given number of people advertising him. Drop that advertising and gods are forgotten; and gods who are forgotten soon shrink into nothingness. Multitudes of gods have died of sheer neglect, and many are still dying. Poor gods who were once something and are now just nothing. Poor gods!

Bernard Shaw is going the way to convince people that he is neither a Christian nor a god-man. Recently a Prebendary wrote Shaw asking him to support the Training College for Lay Evangelists. By return of post came the answer:—

"I am glad to be included in your circle of sympathisers, but I am not an evangelist; it is not my shop, and my views are well known and in active circulation. I won't sign."

"Jesus gave the worst possible advice to the young man who had great possessions; and St. Peter struck a man and his wife dead for a petty anti-Communist delinquency. I cannot endorse such crudities. You, not being a Communist, can overlook them comprising yourself and do good by it. Not so G. Bernard Shaw."

Shaw, of course, is an unbeliever in any gods and any supernatural saviours. But he is a man of money, and his fame would help Christians if he would pretend to be what he is not. Our compliments to G. B. S., and thanks to the money-scraping gentleman who thought he could catch Shaw napping.

Once again the Church of Rome has proved how infallibly prayers are answered from heaven if only they are directed aright. Recently, prayers for rain were ordered to be said in all churches in Rome, and the result exceeded all expectations. It came down unceasingly, and so profusely that the floods it caused even reached Vatican City. Thousands of people were, of course, washed out, and even the basement of the Vatican Radio buildings was flooded. The Pope hurriedly arranged for hot meals to be provided for people rendered homeless—but this should not prevent them realising that prayers appear to bring more rain, floods, and even earthquakes, than winning tickets in lotteries.

Whether conversion brings with it joy or tragedy is a point not easily settled, but the case of the Dutch novelist Herman de Man is worth considering. He was a Jew who turned to the Roman Church for spiritual comfort. During the war his wife and children were deported to Poland by the Germans, all except the eldest son dying there. This son, who happened to escape, was captured in France and shot. Finally, de Man himself was killed the other week in an aeroplane accident. Perhaps the God of the Jews, who is a very jealous God, felt it was time to deal thoroughly with such a backslider.

From the "Mona's Herald" we learn that the President of the Victoria Methodist Circuit declares, "As a Church we are fast losing our grip on young people." After giving their cheerful announcement he said they were "fast losing their sense of the love of God." That is really very bad—for Methodists and other preachers. But somehow the people seem to be getting on comfortably. The preacher also says that "they were losing their sense of the love of God and the capacity to get the best out of life." We suppose that the choice lying before the world is that of God and a better and more humane life, and the young people are making for the latter. We congratulate the youngsters.

At the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Rev. John McKenzie declared:—

"Our Church by and large is becoming a Church purely of the low middle classes. The poor no longer think of entering our doors—as for the so-called nobility and gentry of Scotland they have all become Episcopalians. We are left with the grocer and draper, the butcher and baker—all the most smug and self-satisfied section of our community."

Poor devils, their outlook seems very black indeed.

In England the Churches give us the same lament. Speaking at the Nottingham Conference the Bishop of Southwell, the Rev. Barry, said:—

"To-day we have got a kind of civilisation that is entirely secular which thinks almost exclusively in terms of this world and in which there is no room for God."

Poor God, he has nowhere to rest. More still, poor parsons, who see their status rapidly declining. Poor parsons and poor God from being everything to approach being nothing; to be every thing yesterday and rapidly approaching to a discarded myth.

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Mr. Gimms.—To "Freethinker": 10s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

There was not much doubt as to the wishes of the people of Lowestoft as regards Sunday cinemas. There was a vote of 8,104 in favour of Sunday shows and 3,688 against. We wonder how long before this survival of one of the foolish phases of the Christian creed will be wiped away. We also wonder that some Member of the House of Commons does not raise the matter.

At Chester a majority vote of 9,000 against 2,000 has enabled those who will to indulge in the wild dissipation of entering cinemas on Sunday. Common sense would find no more harm in attending a cinema on Sunday than any other day in the week. But, alas! as we have often a large section of our population who are but slightly removed from primitiveness and savagery, so the people have taken over three hundred years to acquire a right that should never have been questioned.

The "Financial Times" reports that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners hold on behalf of the Church of England British railway stock at six hundred and forty-one millions, and nearly three millions of Trust holdings. The Bishop of Southwark says that if the railways are nationalised the Church would suffer a serious loss in dividends, which is not bad for the Jesus who knew not where to rest his head.

The Roman Catholic papers are working hard, and we suspect working still harder by underground methods, to secure more exhibitions through the organ of the B.B.C. We shall not be surprised if they do get something of their desire. But the glaring scandal of the B.B.C. in refusing to permit any straightforward criticism of religion as a whole, and of avowed Atheism continues. We could put our hands on a goodly number of people broadcasting who are atheistic or non-religious, who stand quietly by while religious ideas—often of the most crude character—are advocated. Self-respect should be enough to produce fairer dealings, but we suppose that the advertising value of using the B.B.C. is too great a temptation.

Mr. F. A. Hornibrook is addressing the Sheffield Branch N.S.S. on Monday, December 9, at 7-30 p.m. (Fitzwilliam Room, Grand Hotel) on "Religion, Press and Politics." Mr. Hornibrook is a careful speaker and should attract a good audience.

We smile with no little irony at the "Universe's" protest over the way in which the Catholic religion was ignored by the B.B.C. at the recent Remembrance Sunday services. Catholic soldiers have died for their country, it claimed, and they rightly expected their own priests to mediate for them with God Almighty and not through a bunch of heretics like Anglicans, Nonconformists, etc. A "United Service" is heresy, plain and unashamed. So our gallant contemporary, who never said a word in defence of "freedom of the air," never protested once at the gross impudence of the B.B.C. monopolising broadcasting in favour of religion—so long as Catholicism could share in the plums—is now almost weeping with indignation at the B.B.C.'s religious monopoly and censorship.

THOMAS PAINE

If you have any books by or about Tom Paine—whether in English or any other language—which you would sell to one who has spent many years in collecting data for the purpose of a biography he is at work on, he would be grateful for any information, not only of books but of prints, cartoons, caricatures, coins, jugs, mugs and anything else relating to Thomas Paine which you may be willing to dispose of to: ADRIAN BRUNEL, First House, Bulstrode Way, Gerrards Cross.

THE CREATION OF GREAT BRITAIN

ALTHOUGH the English and Scottish Crowns were united when James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of England in 1603, the Union of the two countries was not consummated until 1707 in the reign of Queen Anne. Cromwell desiderated the peaceful unification of North and South Britain in terms mutually advantageous. But his efforts were nullified when the Lowlands of Scotland were bitterly aggrieved by the persecution of the Presbyterians both by Charles II and his brother James.

The deep estrangement still prevalent between the two British peoples in Anne's reign, gave little promise of the comparatively cordial relations that ultimately arose through the closer relationship and intercourse of North and South.

But in the early eighteenth century, ignorance and prejudice on both sides of the Border were the constant begetters of hatred and contempt. Then, as now, adventurous Scots wandered far from their native land to better their estate. Many more settled on the Continent than in England, and they were not allowed to emigrate to English Colonies abroad. In our northern counties, largely owing to the Border raids, the Scots were both feared and execrated. Few Southerners went to Scotland while the primitive roads, where they existed, and the rude accommodation of the unclean hovels called inns, intimidated the most hardened traveller.

To intensify the evil, many English scribes spoke of the Scots in terms of scornful contempt. Indeed, none save Defoe displayed any sympathy, or understanding of our neighbours. Scottish writers retorted in kind, and the English were never allowed to forget their overthrow by Bruce at Bannockburn. The worst offenders on the Southern side were the High Church Tories, but even men of moderate outlook anathematised the Scots as Jacobites and anti-English propagandists.

The dour theology of the Kirk was ridiculed by English prelatists and Nonconformists alike. The stool of repentance in the churches was mimicked and derided. As Professor Trevelyan notes in the second volume of his learned history, *England under Queen Anne*: "Calamy, the leader of the English Nonconformists, in his tour of fraternisation among the Scottish Presbyterians in 1709, gave offence by calling some proceedings of the Kirk Assembly, 'the Inquisition revived.'" Also, apart from religion, the Scots deeply resented the scorn of the purse-proud Southerner for their poverty especially when borne with dignity. Again, the four centuries of strife between the two kingdoms inspired

Scottish poetry and prose with hatred of the English, who were depicted as the unscrupulous enemies of Scotland.

The disaster of Flodden was never forgotten or forgiven, and according to the treasured tradition Scottish chivalry perished on that bloody battlefield. Differing in everything else, Jacobite and Presbyterian coincided in the conviction that the subjection of their native country to the rule of the Southerner must cease. This feeling was now manifested in the Edinburgh Parliament, which showed an independent spirit almost without precedent in its chequered career.

Still, the Scots realised that an independent kingdom condemned them to perpetual poverty and distress, and would leave them liable to English invasion. Thus, a more practical solution of the problem seemed the granting to Scotland the commercial and other solid advantages, so long monopolised by the Southerner. The shrewder Scots suggested that a united Britain could only be secured by ending the existence of the Edinburgh Parliament.

There were many trials and tribulations in store before the Union was effected. In truth, at times, the projected Union was in grave danger, and its establishment was long regarded with misgiving in Scotland. One of the most serious obstacles to its consummation was the religious difficulty. Yet, this was surmounted and opposition died down when the Presbyterian Church was guaranteed ample security. As Dr. Trevelyan states: "The Scots Commissioners who made the Treaty in London had been forbidden to treat of matters ecclesiastical which the Edinburgh Parliament reserved for its own consideration. Between November 7 and 12 (1706) it debated and carried an Act for securing the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government within the Kingdom of Scotland, and incorporated it as an essential part of the Union Treaty. This Act preserved the existing privileges and monopolies of the Presbyterian Establishment to continue without any alteration to the people of this land in all succeeding generations." Still, later, a Toleration Act was passed and Church patronage in Scotland was restored.

Prior to this legislation, Presbyterian zealots denounced the measure as a shameful betrayal of the Kirk into the clutches of prelacy, but the insertion of the safeguarding clause in the Union Treaty reassured the doubtful and promoted peace.

Great was the indignation of the Jacobites and Nationalists when it became obvious that the Union would be incorporated in the British Constitution. For in February, 1707, the Treaty, approved by the Scottish Estates, was submitted to the inspection of the English Parliament at Westminster. The clerical Tories, both in the Lords and Commons, opposed the Union, which not only recognised the Kirk, but permitted Presbyterians to sit in both Houses of Parliament. Two Churches in one Kingdom was an arrangement deemed utterly unconstitutional, but this alleged anomaly persists to-day.

The majority of Bishops supported the Treaty. In fact, "Archbishop Tenison grieved the High Churchmen and placated the Scots by declaring that the 'narrow notions of all Churches had been their ruin, and that he believed the Church of Scotland to be as true a Protestant Church as the Church of England, though he could not say it was so perfect.'"

Subsequently, a Bill was passed giving fuller security to the Episcopal Church in Scotland, although the High Tories derided the measure as an imaginary safeguard. In the Lords, the Whig peer, Wharton, whose scepticism was notorious, smilingly assured his hearers "that the Church was secure enough without it, since the Scriptures had declared that it was built upon a rock and the gates of Hell should not prevail against it."

The Union Treaty had been passed precisely in the form approved by the Scottish Estates, and its ratification was announced in Edinburgh by the Duke of Queensberry. Then, with the conclusion of the proceedings of the final session of Scotland's Edinburgh Parliament, that assembly came to an end.

Great Britain, now made so by Statute, began its career on May 1, 1707. The Union was acclaimed in England, while many Scots viewed the loss of their independence with doubt and misgiving. Still, Scots resident in England became popular. May Day was made a national holiday, with the customary ceremony at St. Paul's, in the presence of the Queen, Court and Parliament, piously observed.

But this unilateral celebration of the Union was soon overcast by dissension. As usual, benefits immediately expected were slow to emerge. Many misunderstandings and much mistrust long dimmed the lustre of the Union. The economic gains the Scots expected were sadly delayed, but even so, prosperity appeared at last as the aftermath of the Union, and the Scottish people as a whole, have proved loyal to its provisions ever since.

On each side the gain was great. At long last, the two peoples grew to understand and respect each other. Also, England grew more powerful than she could ever have been, had she remained separated from a Scotland at variance in arms, commerce and conviction with herself.

Patriotism in the best sense of the term did not perish in Scotland. As Trevelyan appositely says: "The golden age of Scotland was still in the future—the age of Burns and Scott. Then would be seen a sight to make Defoe smile and Swift sneer—England coming to worship at the shrine of Scottish tradition and legend! The angry reluctance with which Scotland had consented to the Union was not meaningless; if she had agreed with enthusiasm, if she had nourished no resentments and no regrets, she might have dwindled down into the thing she was officially to be called—'North Britain.'"

T. F. PALMER.

THE LAST BATTLE

FOR many years it has been known that the death-throes of organised Christianity will be extremely violent. The "patient" may make astonishing recoveries only to relapse into a state of greater weakness. This will undoubtedly go on for a very long time, and as the end draws nearer, the Cardinals and Archbishops and their like will draw closer together in an attempt to save the "patient" at all costs. No measures will be considered too ruthless; everything and anything will be lawful and proper if it be to save the soul of England.

It is generally conceded, and I believe this to be true, that the final struggle will be between the Roman Catholic Church and Freethinkers. The real enemy of Freethought is, and has always been, the Roman Church. The Protestant Churches, although cunning and unscrupulous, lack the authority to impose their will on their members; a Protestant can go to Church or not as he pleases and can still call himself a Christian. He is tolerant and easy-going and his Archbishop has no power to force him into church-going. In that lies the weakness of the Protestant Churches and explains the falling off in church attendance to a certain extent.

I do not wish to give the impression that the Protestant Churches are going to collapse like a pricked balloon within the next few years. The rot is working but it will take a very long time yet. As I see it things will (for the Churches) go from bad to worse; the Churches will be emptier as the years pass until many will be unable to continue for lack of funds. Then will come a closing of the ranks in the Protestant Churches. The Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and the Wesleyans will sink their petty differences and combine; and the form of service will come a little nearer to the Low Church of England. For a time they will be able to hold their own, but the rot will go on and the next step will be union with the Anglican Church; the Nonconformists will become Low Churchmen, and the Anglicans will adhere to a "higher" form of service. In this way the Anglican Church will be stronger than it has been for

years, but the Nonconformist Churches will have disappeared. I do not think that the Anglican and the Roman will ever join forces. Both churches will grow weaker as the years pass, but the Anglican will lose its members far more rapidly than the Roman. Finally, the great unconcern of the masses for religion may cause disestablishment to become effective and without State support the Church of England will gradually cease to exist as far as power and influence are concerned.

A number of my Agnostic friends have said to me, "Why worry about it? Why hound the poor devils into their graves? They are going there fast enough—why not let them slide to perdition under their own steam?" This sounds a reasonable argument until one looks to the future—to the final battle that is bound to come, and sees the great danger to the liberty of Freethought.—won at such bitter cost in the past. When Protestantism has succumbed our last enemy will remain and our victory will be no walk-over. It will be the most ruthless war we have ever fought, and if we are not ready for it Freethought may disappear for centuries.

Let me put it this way. When Protestantism is dead there will be a great mass of people, neither anti nor pro religious, but who still believe in a vague sort of way in a supernatural Being. Under a flood of Anti-Atheist propaganda from Rome these people will be led, if not to active support of the Roman Church, then to passive sympathy and to fear Atheism worse than they used to fear the Devil. To the small number of practising Anglicans the Church of Rome will present clever propaganda designed to show how little difference remains between their two religions: "One religion is after all very much like another—just a difference of form and ceremony." Thus as the years pass the Roman Church will hold the whole stage, mightier than she has been for centuries in this Isle. In her shadow will live in restricted freedom of worship a small hard core of Anglicans, Jews and Quakers, who will be allowed to slowly rot in peace. Outside the Church there will be this vast mass of unthinking but vaguely sympathetic people, unaware as yet of their lost freedom, and, I hope, a strong army of Freethinkers—anti-Christ—the Hell-Hounds to whom no mercy must be shown.

It will be the Divine duty of the Church to stamp this heresy underfoot to the greater glory of God. I do not suggest that the stake will come back to Smithfield or that Lambeth Palace will become the G.H.Q. of the Holy Office. There are plenty of methods of forcing Freethought underground to a point when it will constitute little danger to the Church, without laying an ecclesiastical finger on the body of a single unbeliever.

Let us see how this end could be achieved. We have already seen how the Bill framing the new regulations for religious instruction of children in schools was passed through Parliament when the attention of the country was centred on the conduct of the war. The Roman Church would use similar methods for passing through a Bill bringing all education under its supervision; for there would be enough Roman Catholics in both Houses to see that this was done with as little fuss as possible. Then by easy stages would come agitation for the suppression of all anti-religious literature and the revival of the blasphemy laws. It would not be long before official appointments to the Civil Services would be forbidden to Freethinkers. And, as we have just seen in the last war in the case of conscientious objectors, a man can be forced out of employment altogether, boycotted by his co-workers and unless he has means of his own, beggared to the point when he will, if he has dependants, abandon his views and go with the crowd. This method of persuasion would be a masterly stroke of the Roman Church but by no means its only weapon. It could easily be decided by a court of public and private morals that a Freethinking parent is not a fit person to have charge of his children whose immortal souls are in gravest danger from his heretical influence. How many Freethinking parents would still hold out after that?

Lastly, when headway had been made and sufficient sympathy for the Holy Cause had been obtained, would come the disbanding of all anti-Religious Organisations, the prohibition of all meetings where anti-religious views are expressed in public and the withdrawal from circulation of all cheap popular editions of the sciences, to be replaced by those written and edited by Roman Catholic scientists.

There would, of course, be hundreds of other regulations covering the censorship of new plays, books and films, the wearing of swim-suits, the display of feminine models in shop windows, etc., etc. To the statement, "It couldn't happen here," I would say, "It has happened before this, wherever the Roman Church has held enough power. It is happening in Eire at this very moment. It happened in Spain directly Franco entered Madrid in 1939. It happened in Italy under Mussolini. It *could* happen here." That is why Freethinkers everywhere must get close together, organise and work as they have never done before.

BERTRAM GORDON.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held November 28, 1946

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

Also present: Messrs. Hornbrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Wood, Griffiths, Seibert, Ebury, Lupton, Horowitz, Page, Morris, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Merseyside, North London, West London Branches and to the Parent Society. A report of the adjourned Conference meeting was before the Executive and discussed. Lecture arrangements, Branch reports, and correspondence from Belfast, Nottingham, Halifax, Bradford, Blackburn, Newcastle and London Districts were dealt with.

Full support was promised for a proposed week-end conference to be organised by the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, and to be held outside London next year. Mr. J. Seibert was elected to represent the N.E. Area Branches on the Executive.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for December 19, and the meeting closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—12 noon: Mr. J. Ebury.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, December 10, 7 p.m.: "How To Make Our Philosophies More True," Mr. JOHN LEWIS, B.Sc., Ph.D.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Nationality and Ideology," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, 12, Great Newport Street, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Making of the Bible," Mr. A. D. HOWELL-SMITH, B.A.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Christian Communism—Is It Possible?" Mr. E. V. TEMPEST, D.S.O., M.C.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (L.L.P. Lecture Hall, St. James Street).—Friday, December 13, 7-30 p.m. Debate: "Is There a Future Life," pro. Mr. B. CARTER; contra Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Freewill, Freethought and Determinism," Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: "Mistakes and Mediums," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON (Durham).

(Continued on next page)

ENLIGHTENED SELFISHNESS

SELFISHNESS is a fundamental influence in the development of the human race. Psychologically it is the main-spring of all decisions, the chief determining factor in the behaviour of individuals and the source of their emotional strivings. Biologically, the search for gratification of the self is the instrument of survival, the power of adaptation in an organism which principally distinguishes it from inorganic matter. Selfishness is imperative to life and life without it is inconceivable.

Man is, of course, a thoroughly selfish animal. This does not mean that he always acts exactly as he would like to do, but that he always behaves in a manner which is consistent with his conception of his own best interest and with his total self. The reason for this modification of the immediate satisfaction of his instinctive drives is man's early discovery as a child that such direct expression of his egotism was not always the most beneficial course to pursue. He has thus become adapted to the ethical standards of his social group and has learned that the infringement of this standard will not often be to his advantage. Even moral man is, therefore, as self-seeking as his dog.

The recognition of this fundamental selfishness in man is of great importance in the formulation of rational ethics. Dr. Kenneth Urwin in his contribution to "Rationalism in Education and Life" makes the following observation:—

"With primitive men we had an unreasoning selfishness; later we had more reasoning selfishness; now is the time for the establishment of a spirit of enlightened selfishness."

It is clear from this extract that Dr. Urwin believes that the self-seeking element in man can be utilised to great advantage in a rational society. Egotism is a strong enemy of war, poverty and tyranny, and, correctly used, can become a great weapon for defeating these antagonists of humanity. For it is selfishness which makes intelligent men dream of a world planned for peace, plenty and all possible freedom; and it is good that they should do so.

But human beings are not always intelligent or well educated, and selfishness is seldom so enlightened. We have only to examine the pages of recent history to realise how terrible in its results unreasoning selfishness may be. The young people who flocked to the battle standards of Fascism on the continent were the victims of pride in national glory and in brute strength to the exclusion of all reasonable thoughts of self-interest. There was the psycho-pathic, unreasoning selfishness of the subconscious mind, which dotes on blood and violence. More rational than these were the international capitalists and armament manufacturers who suffered from a strange myopia of selfishness, which enabled them to distinguish between a benefit and an injury only when the consequences were an inch before their eyes. The actions of these men were often so regardless of their own safety and well-being that one is tempted to suppose that they were exceptions to the psychological laws of egotism, and sought their own destruction as thoroughly as most animals will seek security. But it was not actually so. The truth and the tragedy is that all these men acted as they did because they found their actions satisfactory to themselves and believed that they were securing their own true advantage.

What happened is well known. The fanatical youths were obliterated on the battlefields, the international capitalists destroyed each other's property and the armament manufacturers saw their factories blown to pieces by their bombs. They had proved once more the law which required no proving—that man can only live successfully by co-operation and can only find his strength in unity.

Man's constant failure to observe this law and to reach that stage of enlightenment which would make his selfishness an advantage have led many to despair of his ever achieving it. But in reality there is no cause for such despair. Man is highly

adaptive, and much of his previous failure to evolve a rational ethical code has been due to the monopolisation of this subject by religious thinkers and institutions, who have failed to clearly distinguish the factors involved. For although the great religions of the world have all had a clear grasp of the importance of selfishness in ethics, they have tended to stress the fact that rewards for the good conduct of their followers would be granted not in this life but in the next, and this emphasis on a heavenly reward for righteousness has had two most unfortunate consequences. It has tended to produce the conclusion that the material condition of one's fellows in this world was of little importance provided that one sought spiritual goodness, and also it has given rise to the more dangerous belief that even this goodness is not of any immediately imperative value, since the after-life is hard to take into account. Religion, in short, while it has told men what to do, has given them no very good reason for doing it.

But so long as the power of the Church over men's hearts and minds was of considerable magnitude, the fear of Hell was often sufficient to keep them from any grave transgression of the moral code. The twentieth century saw the end of all that, and with it, the end of the discipline of the Church. For the vast majority of people there was no longer any stimulus towards moral conduct, and the world was plunged into a barbarity which in many ways exceeded the fearfulness of the Middle Ages. The time had come, and was indeed long overdue, for the establishment of a new ethical standard.

The demand of the present, if we are to escape destruction in atomic warfare, is for the spread of rational ethics over the surface of the globe. The peoples of the world must understand that the choice before them to-day is not the choice between Heaven and Hell but between living together in peaceful co-operation and being blown to pieces in futile and fratricidal strife. Every child in every school must learn the simple lesson that only by giving a little can he gain a lot, and that only by playing his part in the social pattern of the world can he secure the best results for himself. If we can establish to-day the spirit of enlightened selfishness we shall have taken a great step forward in the achievement of peace and prosperity for the world.

KENNETH H. TAYLOR.

LECTURE NOTICES (continued)

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society N.S.S. (Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "Personal Religion." Mr. JOSEPH RODGERS.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Pitzwilliam Room, Grand Hotel, Sheffield).—Monday, December 9, 7-30 p.m.: "Religion, Press and Politics." Mr. F. A. HORNBY.

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

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH. By Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

Pamphlets for the People

By Chapman Cohen

What is the Use of Prayer? Did Jesus Christ Exist? Thou shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. The Devil, Deity and Design. Agnosticism or . . . ? Atheism. What is Freethought? Must we have a Religion? The Church's Fight for the Child. Giving 'em Hell. Freethought and the Child. Morality without God. Christianity and Slavery. Gods and their Makers. Woman and Christianity. What is the use of a Future Life? Price 2d. each. Postage 1d. each.