

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWES AND OPINIONS

### On Ridicule

A WRITER in one of the religious weeklies recently observed that while there could be no defensible objection to a criticism of religious beliefs, there was a well-founded feeling against criticism that was merely intended to exhibit in a ridiculous light highly-cherished beliefs. It would have been interesting had the writer supplied his readers with samples of anti-religious criticism that had no other purpose than to raise a laugh, if only for the reason that such criticism is extremely scarce, and therefore worth preserving. Those who do place religious beliefs before the public in such a manner as to raise a laugh have usually a very serious purpose, and the method is of value to them only in proportion as it tends to realise this end. It is true that the religionist is not always able to see what this purpose is, but this may be due either to a poor sense of the function of ridicule or to an inability to credit anyone with a serious purpose whose opinions do not coincide with his own.

It is significant, however, that the believer dreads this form of attack more than any other. He not only asks that his beliefs shall be treated with the utmost solemnity, but is deeply aggrieved if his request is not complied with. And thanks to this repeated demand, thanks also to the power and influence of religion, it has come to pass that a considerable number of non-believers tacitly agree to the condition that the one subject in the world to be discussed with the utmost solemnity is that which they believe to be the outcome of primitive ignorance joined to perpetuated credulity and imposture. Psychologically these form an interesting study. They form part of a tolerably large class whose intelligence has outstripped their instincts. Intellectually they have outgrown religion, instinctively they are afraid of it. Like the people who do not believe in ghosts, and yet hold back from entering a house that has the reputation of being haunted, they have a lurking fear of religion, although they know it to be intellectually worthless. Their expressed respect for religion is, therefore, not due to any perception of either its moral or intellectual value, but simply to organic fear implanted in them by their earlier history, and which they have not yet outgrown. While people continue in this state, religion must present an appearance of strength and vitality which it does not, as a matter of fact, possess.

There is, then, good reason for the religionist asking that his beliefs shall be treated with the utmost solemnity, and every reason for the Freethinkers ignoring the request. No one questions the right of man to cherish a ridiculous belief as of the greatest value; all that the Freethinker reserves is the right to laugh at this belief should he choose to do so. For to admit that any particular belief, as a belief, deserves only serious treatment is to concede half the case, by

admitting its inherent importance or value. One admits in such a case that the belief is of value to the world, and that its disappearance is a matter of importance. But Freethinkers do not believe this, and there is no reason why they should act as though they do. And if, as I have suggested, the desire to approach religion with the utmost solemnity is partly due to unacknowledged fear, then there is ample reason why these people should be taught to laugh at what they have hitherto feared. For superstition is never really dead in any person until he (or she) has learned to laugh at it. Happiness is the psychological equivalent of physiological health, and laughter is in this connection a guarantee of perfect sanity of mind. The man who has faulty digestive organs, a badly working liver, or who is weighted with cares and fears, does not readily laugh; he smiles, he sniggers, but the good, round, hearty laugh is not his. So let all learn to laugh at religion, if only as a proof to their fellows that in them it is dead beyond the possibility of resurrection. Had people in the sixteenth century learned to laugh at the Church there would have been no Protestant Reformation. As it was, they only laughed at the abuse of some of its forms, and so paved the way for another Church equally objectionable. Had the people in the seventeenth century learned to laugh at kingship, England would have remained a Republic after 1649. An institution that has no better foundation than an act of faith cannot survive ridicule, which is at once the reason why its upholders dread the weapon and why its opponents should use it.

Laughter is not only an indication of health, it is in its way a test of truth and utility. A truthful thing or a useful thing does not dread ridicule; it persists in spite of all the laughter that may be directed against it. Consider how much laughter has been raised in connection with the family, with mother-in-laws, or with husbands and wives. Yet none of these institutions have complained, and none have been injured thereby. If anyone informed the President of the Royal Society that some one had been ridiculing the law of gravitation, the reply would be, "let him." But if some one informs the Bishop of London, or the Archbishop of Canterbury that people have been ridiculing the Virgin Birth, or the belief in the deity, the reply would be that it is really very shocking, and that all possible steps must be taken to suppress such conduct. Whence this difference? Plainly, because in the one case there is the conviction that the fact will outlast the laughter, and in the other the feeling that gods exist only so long as they are believed in, and that people believe only so long as they refrain from examination and criticism.

Another thing worth noting is that ridicule is only effective and only commands notice when it is directed against shams. The man who went about ridiculing honesty or truthfulness would find more people laugh at him than with him. But, as a matter of fact, men do not readily laugh



at such things. Their value is too obvious and too insistent to offer material for ridicule. People do laugh at religious beliefs, and some few always have; and as these have not been among the least illustrious of the sons of men, one may safely assume that there is something in the spectacle of a civilised people clinging to religious beliefs that invites ridicule.

The world's greatest reformers have often enough been mighty laughers. Consider the work of Rabelais, who, with his titanic humour, did more to purify men's minds of superstition than could have been accomplished by any number of solemn books written by equally solemn-minded men. So, too, stands the work of Lucian at an earlier date, and that of Swift and Voltaire at a later one. These men had grasped the secret that to attack a ridiculous thing with profound solemnity is but to convince those who uphold it of its importance and sacred character. It is to take the foolish at the valuation of the fool, instead of at the value set upon it by wiser men. One may silence by superior dialectic one who holds an absurd belief, but it is the ridiculous aspect that finally makes the believer ashamed of it. Freethinkers know this to be true in relation to Christianity, and Christians know it to be true in relation to other religions. The priests of one creed are ready enough to pour ridicule on the believers in an alien religion. When the weapon is turned against themselves they cry out for quarter and declaim against its use. It is then they protest against the exercise of that sense which—if there be a God—God gave his creatures at the same time that he furnished them with a religion. And to this one need only retort that if God did not wish man to laugh at religion he ought to have made him destitute of a sense of humor, or given him religious beliefs of an entirely different character. If Christians only asked themselves why it is that their religion so easily lends itself to ridicule, they would better appreciate the weakness of their own attitude and the real purpose of their opponents.

Christianity itself, it may be cheerfully admitted, is not a religion that has ever aimed at increasing happiness or encouraging laughter. Its principle figure is a man of sorrows, its great leaders have invariably been men to whom laughter was more or less alien. No man or no body of men who were in the habit of laughing heartily could ever have elaborated nine-tenths of the doctrines that go to make up orthodox Christianity. Still less could they have pursued bloodthirsty quarrels year after year, and drenched nations in blood. Could men, with a sense of the ridiculous, have solemnly elaborated such doctrines as the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, or the infallibility of the Bible? The proper cultivation of a sense of humor or the opportunity for the free play of ridicule would have prevented these doctrines gaining the importance they did, and the world would have been sweeter and healthier for their absence.

It may be admitted that there is a place for serious discussion, even in the case of religious beliefs. If one is studying the origin and development of religious belief there is no need, and little room, for ridicule. Or if one is dealing with religion under primitive conditions, where it is really alive and honestly held, one feels no very strong desire to use the weapon of ridicule. But when we find these beliefs, belonging properly to savages, perpetuated among a civilised people, then the most effective instrument one can use is the weapon of ridicule. Said Voltaire: "Men will

not cease to be persecutors until they have ceased to be absurd"; and one may also say that a common type of mind will never cease to hold an absurd opinion until they realise its absurdity, and have grown strong enough to laugh at the superstition that has hitherto enslaved them. That religion is an object of ridicule to-day is the price it pays for living beyond the period for which it was intellectually fitted. And that it now asks for social, as it once asked for legal, protection against ridicule, is an admission that it feels its own unfitness to the age.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## WHAT IS ATHEISM?

### No. 3—Atheism and Society

IN our survey of the fortunes of Atheism in relation to historic evolution the central fact that emerges is surely none other than this: up to, and even largely in the present age, the philosophy of Atheism has fulfilled the essential role of the hero of, say, a Greek or Shakespearian tragedy, in that it has been usually ahead of its time, and has consequently been frustrated by the primitive nature of its contemporary social background. Or, put briefly, the scientific psychology which mentally expresses itself as Atheism has never enjoyed the similarly advanced social conditions which alone can enable it to flourish. The world has usually, alas, lent a readier ear to its inquisitors than to its Giordano Brunos!

Why has this been so often the case? And the answer to this (what lawyers would term) leading sociological question is, unfortunately, simple: it is Fear, as Lucretius declared long ago, that "created the gods," and it has been Fear, similarly, that has usually ruled, and which even to-day in the era of the Atomic Bomb and the unemployed queue, still effectively rules the social order.

The psychology of Atheism, which is the psychology of scientific logic, is not produced by, and is, in fact, fundamentally inconsistent with the psychological human states induced by fear. It is not at all an accident that, as a modern bishop naively expressed it, "Ages of Faith" have invariably been Ages of Fear. Frightened men tend very easily to become religious men. And the greater the social fear, the grosser the resulting superstition. This last correlation may almost be regarded as axiomatic and as a sociological "law."

For example, the social history of Satanism is, in this last respect, particularly revealing. It is ages of social disintegration, the "storm and stress" of which reflects itself in demoniacal obsession. The Satan of "Paradise Lost," for instance, is the literary summary of twenty years of civil war in England; and it was in the civilised age of the Reformation rather than in the "Dark Ages" properly so called, that the hideous mania for witch-burning reached its zenith.

What must we deduce from the above correlation? Surely this: an advanced philosophy requires for its maintenance and diffusion an advanced social background. The Darwinian doctrine of "the survival of the fittest" applies, also, in the intellectual world. And it applies, also, in the original Darwinian sense: viz., ideas only survive in the appropriate social milieu. It was, for example, because such an ancient atheistic philosophy as Epicureanism had no appropriate social background in a disintegrating servile civilisation like that of the Roman Empire, that it ultimately gave way to Christianity. And it was for precisely the self-same reason that the classical rationalism which succeeded, not by another "Age of Reason" but by the "Age of Faith."



What is the nature of the social order which would furnish a fitting background to an atheistic philosophy? Since such a rational social order has unhappily never existed outside of the pages of literary Utopias it is obviously impossible to define it positively. But we can, perhaps, define it negatively: if we cannot precisely say what it is, we can, at least, generalising from past historical experience, say what it is not.

A social order congruous with the adoption and permanent maintenance of an atheistic philosophy is *not* a social order based, as has usually been the case up to now, upon a "scarcity economy," and upon a resulting jungle struggle for bare physical survival. The competitive struggle for physical survival produces those best able to compete in such struggles, but who are, even where they notably succeed, not usually the "fittest" in the intellectual sense, that is, in the primary sense which interests Atheism. To obtain this last result, if we are loyal Darwinians, intellectual struggles must be fought in intellectual spheres, if the "fittest" in such spheres are to survive. And, usually, intellectual struggles only begin where the struggle for (physical) existence leaves off. One cannot live in the intellectual sphere under a continual uncertainty in the sphere of physical existence. It takes a genius, a Spinoza, or a Marx, to do this, and such men are, unfortunately, neither normal nor common! The broad masses of the people, hitherto almost exclusively pre-occupied from birth to burial with the never-ending struggle to keep alive, lack the mental leisure necessary to attain the level of Atheism and fall readily for the religious demagogy of which history affords us only too many tragic examples.

An atheistic philosophy cannot, similarly, flourish in a society dominated by war preparations and the fear of war. In such societies, based on fear and hatred, as such militaristic societies must necessarily be based, reason must necessarily become clouded by passion; and the emotions peculiar to a state of chronic emergency are entirely incompatible with scientific impartiality. One observes these characteristics very clearly in connection with such a social order as Fascism, which extended military conceptions to every aspect of social life, and, as a result, lived in a state of artificially stimulated and unnatural hysteria. To think rationally, it is, first of all, necessary to live rationally. The physical black-out of war is invariably accompanied by a mental black-out. The barracks, no less than the altar, is the temple of authority against reason. And, of course, total war of the modern type is total mental black-out.

An atheistic philosophy cannot become general in a social order that is dominated exclusively or predominantly by privileged minorities of exploiters, who, in order to preserve their own unjust rule, have a vested interest in keeping the subject masses in an artificially imposed state of ignorance. For ignorance and the mental habits that preserve such primitive states, cannot be imposed upon one part of the human brain without, at the same time imposing it upon all. Reason, like Peace, is indivisible. Any ruling minority be it what it may: of Kings, landlords, soldiers, priests, capitalists, or bureaucrats, will use its power, whenever society at large permits it, first and foremost in its own interests and not in those of society at large. If universal history has any lesson at all which it teaches without ambiguity, it is precisely this. In no society can Atheism flourish where all the organs of publicity and propaganda are primarily used by the ruling clique to keep the people in a state of fundamental ignorance. We repeat: Reason, like Peace, is indivisible.

Thus we observe, if only by their absence, what are the fundamental sociological prerequisites of an atheistic society. For in no social state thus far known, have all the above desiderata been present, and only too often none of them have existed. Which is sufficient in and by itself to explain why Atheism has been usually reduced to the role of the philosophy of the intellectual minority.

What are the current prospects of the effective realisation of such social prerequisites? Despite the present adolescent storms

of humanity we are entitled, at least upon any long view, to assert that they are excellent; brighter than ever before. For the coming of the Machine-Age has laid the economic foundations of an "Age of Plenty," and the dawning Atomic Age promises to complete the liberating process. Moreover, the conscious entry of the masses upon the stage of history—which last is the pre-eminent social feature of our age—affords hope for the proximate advent of a rational democracy.

It is, of course, true that the advent of an age of science has its own peculiar dangers, as we can see only too clearly in the current uses of atomic energy. For science is *socially* neutral, and is, in this respect, what society makes it. But, none the less, we may assert as possible, and even as probable, the advent of a 100 per cent. democratic society, social, political, economic, and cultural. And that with the arrival of such a society the social prerequisites for the age of Atheism will have, at long last, arrived. The rest is a new chapter in human history.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## STILL LOOKING BACKWARDS

(From "Annals of Rothwell" by J. Batty)

(a) IN the year 1834 a stone-built "Lock-up" was erected in the Woggan. It was an octagonal building with slits in which admitted only a very dim light. It was fitted up inside with narrow fixed seats along the wall, and must have been anything but a comfortable place. Above the doorway was carved an imitation of a pair of handcuffs, whilst at the front was the inscription: "The Wicked's Retreat"; and below, in Latin, "*Noce te ipsum*," which, literally translated means "Know thee thyself," a well-chosen, deep meaning motto. Strangely enough, this erection was built by one, Vincent Hardwick, a mason, and well known in the district as a dissipated man and a waster. Singularly enough he was the *first* to be imprisoned in it.

(b) On occasions when two unmarried persons of opposite sex had been convicted of a private or scandalous bit of sin, they had to undertake public penance in the church. They were dressed in long white smocks, and had to confess their transgression and to beg pardon, vowing never to commit the offence again. Public disapproval of the misdemeanour of wife beating or husband abused by his spouse, or unfaithfulness on either side, was shown by the neighbours assembling in the streets and carrying out what was called "riding the stang," that is: a young man usually, on a short pole or ladder, was borne on the shoulders of others, and at the front of the dwelling of the guilty party an old *nominey* (a form of address in rhyme, or perhaps some doggerel verses) was repeated, as often as not composed to fit the individual circumstances of the case, by some native rhymster. The rabble paraded the streets around, creating riotous and boisterous fun, much to the annoyance and discomfort of the parties concerned.

Such an affair took place in 1804 when Reuben Booth, an old pensioner, of Rothwell, had a strong muscular wife who frequently beat and otherwise abused him. Upon hearing of these matrimonial squabbles, the "stang" was ridden, and a young man with an old tin can placed before him walked three times round the church beating his can and chanting—

"Me ran tan, tan, This is the sound of my old tin can,  
Reuben and Matty's been fighting again,  
The folks of the town are all crying shame,  
Matty raced Reuben into the garden  
And there she beat him into a farden;  
Up stairs and back o't door,  
There she made poor Reuben roar."

E. H. S.



## ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Coventry has discovered, if not the source of all our troubles, at least the source of most of them. Here it is:—

“The dogmatism of the scientist has placed him in a position of infallibility once enjoyed by the Church. Mankind was deluded by the progress in material things, and believed that progress was automatic in all phases. That was why we were being spiritually and intellectually corrupted by the unlimited power which science has provided.”

That was intended to shame the scientists: actually the shame falls on the preacher. Science has really nothing to do with the use to which scientific discoveries are put. It is not, as a matter of fact, much benefit of a material kind that comes to the working scientist. It is not they who live easily and die rich with the Churches praising them. The material benefits mainly come from religious people, and the clergy are among the first to praise those who have become rich through the labours of the scientists. The bishop must have another try.

But we are ready to agree that scientists have been, and still are, more or less antagonistic to religion and especially to the Christian religion. Consider. It was not until science poked its head into the Church that the creation of the world in six days five thousand years ago, was laughed out of existence. That led the way to brushing aside all the Christian practices of drowning witches and burning unbelievers. Then one by one the teachings of the Christian Churches fell, and science took the place of the folk lore that the Churches had taken for scientific facts. Science even made it possible for historians to demonstrate the evil course of the Church of God; and to crown all the Anthropologists showed to the world the way in which gods came into the world and the way in which they were turned out. Without science man, as man, would be nothing and the priest would be all. The Bishop has let loose some truth, and a Bishop should be careful how he does that. His brother priests will not be pleased with him.

Mr. Wilson Harris, who is the editor of the “Spectator,” as well as an M.P., must have got the shock of his life the other day. He went to church and found that he was the only person present, and started the rector so much to find that he (the rector) had a “congregation” after all, that he conducted the service. All Mr. Wilson could find out was that the rector had “alienated” his parishioners, and they wouldn’t come to his church again. Which does not quite explain to unbelievers like ourselves wherein lies the saving grace of Christianity. Nor, it appears, even to such an earnest Christian as Mr. Harris.

Catholics are being solemnly warned to have nothing to do with “Buchmanism”—the “Oxford Group Movement.” The Hierarchy of England insists that “this movement is so tainted with indifferentism, with the error that one religion is as good as another,” that it is as much as a Catholic is worth in God’s eyes to go to a meeting even as a spectator. We are quite sure that now no Catholic dares to attend one of these orgies of “confession”—though there seems precious little difference between confessing to a priest or confessing to a Buchmanite. How well do these rival sects of Christians love each other, and what a marvel of love and trust do they offer to the unbeliever!

Archbishop McDonald of Edinburgh (R.C.), is actually discovering that “secularism is permeating all branches of our social life,” and to crown all, “even in our university teaching”! Poor man, he must have been asleep a long time if he is only now waking up to something all the Christian sects and Churches have been groaning about for many decades. However, the fact that he is almost in tears about us as having “no philosophy of life” shows what a lot he has to learn—in particular, that Secularism is a *real* philosophy of life, characterised with freedom of thought, and utterly opposed to “totalitarianism,” with which the good Archbishop wishes to confound it. But he will learn—nay, he is already learning, however hard is the lesson.

For Christmas, from one of our readers, who has re-written one of Thomas Hardy’s carols:—

“Peace on earth” was said, we sing it,  
And pay a million priests to bring it;  
After years of Church Catholic  
We’s got as far as bomb atomic.

We have just finished what our papers and our Churches call a “great war.” That is a lie. There is no such thing as a great war. There is only a large or little. It is just war, with all the falsehood and brutality that wars always involve. Our country in this respect covers all. People return from the war: some only too pleased to forget it, others to put into operation that rascality that has been created by a long and brutal war. We are not concerned here with whether this war was or was not inevitable. We are only concerned with the facts of war, and those facts all prove the dishonesty, the rascality that is abroad. To say that war breeds courage is simply untrue. War no more breeds courage than it breeds kindness. It makes natures coarser, and hardens those who are not hard at the beginning.

We take the following from Shelley, whom we think came near the truth:—

“War is a kind of superstition. The parades of arms and badges corrupt the imagination of men. How far more appropriate would be the symbol of inconsolable grief, muffled drums and melancholy music, and arms reversed, would be the livery of sorrow. War waged for whatever motive extinguishes the sentiment of reason and justice in the mind. A sentiment of confidence in brute force and a contempt of death and danger are considered as the highest virtues, when in truth they are the means and the instruments capable of being perverted to destroy the cause they were assumed to promote.”

That is one of the finest indictments with which we are acquainted. It is truth that needed much real courage to say openly.

We have often quoted with appreciation that delivery by a great 17th century preacher that the course of mankind is that of an advancing spiral. It depicts the familiar deeds of men, but on a higher level. We were reminded of this on reading a passage in one of the books of a century ago. It ran:—

“Our social atmosphere is thick and hazy with insincerities and unrealities. We bow down before false gods and we practise ignoble creeds, and, what is almost worse, we neither heartily worship the one nor honestly believe the other. We are not exactly bad, but neither are we strong and true. The religion we profess has for one of its most significant features the denunciation of wealth as a trust or a pursuit. Yet in England and America, perhaps the two most sincerely Christian nations in the world—one a cradle of and the other the offspring of Puritanism—the practice likeliest to a national one is money getting; not the effort after competence or comfort, but the pushing, struggling for vast possessions or redundant affluence.”

That comes to us as evidence that human nature remains the same human nature as that which lived and fought a few generations ago.

One of our religious papers says that prayer is a splendid exercise. It may be, but we have heard that said of getting drunk. It is really a matter of taste.

Good truth-loving Christians should set down a few facts when searching for the truth of religion, and should bear in mind a few solemn truths. Religion did not begin among civilised peoples. Civilised people did not discover God; they inherited him, or her, or it. Heaven is a place that men dreamed about; no one has ever come back to say where it exists and how one gets there. These things seem worth looking at—that is, if one wishes to know the truth. But it is not “truth,” naked and unashamed; it is heavenly truth, and that is very different from the plain, easily understood everyday truth of plain men and women.



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## SUGAR PLUMS

One of our readers writes from Los Angeles tendering his thanks for becoming acquainted with "The Freethinker," and he ends by calling attention to the victory won by an Atheist who has succeeded in securing the right to use the broadcasting machinery for the purpose of advocating Atheism. He says:—

"By the way, recently over a San Francisco station, as a result of a Federal Communication Office decision, an Atheist broadcast was presented. This occurred last Sunday morning, sandwiched between the usual godly rantings. The results have been spectacular. The Catholic defenders of democracy (!) are telegraphing to the President, Congress, and probably God in protest. 'It's un-American,' they screech. It is hoped that the program can be continued, but such optimism is probably unwarranted. But it is, I think, progress."

We refrain from printing the compliments to "The Freethinker" and its work, but we appreciate them none the less.

Of one thing we can give the more intelligent Catholics credit—they know when a shaft pierces their faith, no matter how much "apologetic" is woven around it. Take, as an example, Moliere's famous play "Tartuffe." Anyone who knows the period in which he was writing will know also how impossible it was for him to attack the Church openly and defiantly. But he did his best, and in "Tartuffe" will be found not just an attack on hypocrisy, as Christian admirers of Moliere pretend, but an attack on Christian fundamentals—if only it is read with understanding. This is particularly noted by "Pasquin," one of the writers on the "Universe," who is obliged to admit that "Tartuffe" struck also "at the roots of Christian devotion—unfortunately." Moliere, in fact, like Shakespeare was an "unbeliever," and it must be a bitter pill to swallow that the two greatest playwrights in England and France, at a time when Romanism was all powerful, both rejected Christianity.

FROM "LEGENDS OF COUNTY DURHAM":—

"The Bishops of Durham were long proverbial for their riches. For a thing to be too dear for the Bishop of Durham to buy meant that it was priceless. In the 13th century a piece of cloth, richly embroidered, was offered for sale, but was held up at so high a price that even the nobles themselves refused or durst not buy. This coming to the ears of Anthony Beck, who then filled the See as prince-bishop, he went immediately and bought it, and ordered that it should be cut into cloths for his sumpter horses. It is likewise recorded that at one time in London, the Bishop of Durham gave forty shillings for forty fresh herrings—the dearest fish of the kind ever heard of."

## "REMARKS ON MARX"—A GOOD DIGESTIVE!

H. H. PREECE, in friendly criticism (November 17, 1946) on my recent contributions, states that my "remarks on Marx" are "ludicrous." "Ludicrous" signifies, tending to produce laughter; and it has been said that thanks are due to anyone who gives another a laugh—especially at meal times. My writing has been, at least so far, successful. "Remarks on Marx" helps good Digestion and both are good for Health! May it be true for "Mental" food as well.

What I have written during the last five or six years has been, unavoidably, rather intermittent. This accounts for the repeating, at times, of what has appeared before from C.C., myself, or others. It was not done to say, "I—or he—told you so," but because there has been a continuous theme extending through all these articles of late years. So, after a gap in time, some point made before has been restated to refresh the memory of the reader. Naturally, when a point has been repeated, on which friend Preece has already been corrected, the effect is conducive neither to healthy laughter nor good digestion. However, as Jacob Faithful used to say, "What's done can't be helped."

The "task"—if any—which I would choose in my last lap of life would be to help with others to explain, in terms of "Evolutional Sociology," how the "Democratic Peoples" drifted to Fascism and World Civil War during the last c. 60 years. This period is the latest—perhaps final—stage in the Economic Individualism, generated about 400 years ago, out of the Sociologic Instability caused by the disintegrating of the socially cohesive Forces in "Feudalism." Of these 400 years, it is only since c. 200 years ago that Industrial Capitalism developed from the "regrouping" of various "Forces," in the Sociologic sense, generated by the increased Momentum ("blind economic drive") in Economic Individualism. Here it may be repeated that *all* the "Democratic Nations" and *all* the Parties in these Nations failed to stop the "Drift," although, naturally, the "Progressives" are most conspicuous in failure. Similarly, C.C.'s indictment was not against any particular Christian Nation, but *all* of these, for having been, during four Centuries, "gangs of freebooters engaged in world-wide piracy." Barbarians—literally.

Another point, before proceeding in detail to H.H.P.'s criticism: it has a bearing on the subject, anyhow. In this "Drift" the "Force" (sociologically) of greatest Power was the mental deceit and hypocrisy in Public Affairs, of those who, by Profession and Position, were regarded as "Leaders" in thought and action. The "reaction" to this, according to the Primary Principles of Force as applied to Sociologic Processes, was mental cowardice, fear, doubt, lack of confidence which, summed up, equals Political Instability in the Mass of Common People (the great majority); for it is in the field of "Politics" that all these Sociologic Forces operate. It seems correct to say that the Power of the Privilege Minorities (not merely one) was inversely as their "Mass," for the mental deceit and hypocrisy common to them all acted as a cohesive Force, tending to a maximum, while the "Mass" of the Common People was inversely as their Power, for the Political Instability common to them, tended to reduce their cohesive Force to a minimum. It was only when the threat arising out of Dunkirk operated that the "Reaction" so it generated a Cohesive Force sufficient to produce ultimate victory.

Ever since the "Drift" as a Sociologic Phenomenon of utmost importance (cp. U.S.A. to-day) was definitely stated in these pages, it has been extremely interesting to note the many varied "Reactions" to that "Thesis"—Political, Religious (Godist), Philosophic, Journalistic, Cynimatic, Radiotic, etc. Perhaps the most significant has been the revival of subjects—not superficial—on which any full, free, open, discussion has been Tabooed for 50 years or more; which is not to say that we're going to get that full, free, open scientific discussion now—not on your Spiritual life! Be Eclectic on Superficials, but never Eleatic on Funda-



mentals, is still the rule—which is where the Freethinker or Scientific Thinker should come in.

One of these subjects is "Marx as a Scientist" which seems to friend Preece to be ludicrous. Fifty years ago and later, Darwin and Marx were, fairly often, bracketed together as great in the field of Evolution—the one in Biology, the other in Human Social History. Frequent discussions have I heard in my younger days as to which was the more valuable to the "Mental and Manual Workers of the World." Later than 50 years ago, there was a pamphlet which had a great sale—I myself sold many—coupling the two. My use of the phrase was merely rescuing the fact from the near-oblivion of the Eclectic Spiritual Taboo. My own part in this was due not only to an analytic tendency, but to the other "urge," beginning in boyhood, always to try to fit-in (integrate) the new fact to the Understanding already reached. So it was emphasised that "Stalin," in applying the Principles of Force to Human Social (Sociologic) evolution had developed and corrected in practice (or "action") Marx's "Laws of Motion" in Human History. Even H. H. P. seems to admit at least the possibility of applying the Three Principles of Force to sociologic experience, including reliably recorded experience, for, in "The Freethinker" I received to-day (November 24, 1946), he states, in his last par.: "The need is to appreciate that psychological or sociological experience is as much reality as the physical." Marx said: "... we must always distinguish between the *material changes* in the economic conditions of production . . . and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic, in short, *ideological forms* in which human beings *become conscious of this conflict* and fight it out to an issue." Och Aye! Friend Preece will get on his logical feet yet!

My critic makes much of Marx having arrived at "the basic formula" "after study of law." Well, in working back to try to trace how human Social Existence has developed, the history of "Law," religious and civil, ought to be a most fruitful field for Scientific research. (Marx, Lenin, Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, Darrow, etc., proved it so.) This is almost self-evident, whether we stand on the Secularist and Scientific Principle that "morality (law) is social in origin and application," or on the doctrine of the Eclectic Spiritual Tabooist that Law is imposed on Human-kind by a Spiritual Power (Incomprehensible) through Priests and Parsons as its Agents on this Planet. But there's much more in it than that. Marx's father had ceased to be a Jew, and as a Freethinker he had become a Christian "to safeguard his family." He was a lawyer, a scholar, and of progressive ideas. Marx's "Mother was a Dutch Jewess of a family of rabbis and scholars." After Bonn University he went to the University of Berlin. "Marx, however, was impatient with the ordinary methods of study and was for some time in a turmoil of indecision." He became "not the least important of a brilliant band of 'Young Hegelians.'" He "... in 1841 had conferred on him his doctor's degree for a thesis upon the *Natural Philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus . . .*" (My italics). Rather an effective preparing for extending Philosophic Materialism to the Modes of Human Social Existence! And, as an extreme radical democrat he worked as journalist and editor, developing his philosophy in theory and fighting political practice. Marx and Engels together; but the latter has put on record how much of the original work was done by Marx. He was the only one of his family with "any outstanding intellectual ability." In other words, as I have stated before, he was an "Inborn Freethinker." All these facts are easily available; and H. H. P. seems scarcely to have been as "Thorough" as a Freethinker and Secularist should be, in preparing his criticism on my Aid to digestion.

One point more, out of several. In the words, "This is a very brief summary of a theme which 'ought' to have been 'explained' long ago" I was not referring to Marx, a hundred years ago, but to the *present time and the way in which the name*

"Dialectical" Materialism is used in the Political Struggle. Marx had been so deep in Hegelian Idealism that he used Hegelian phraseology long after he and Engles had thought-out and put in action a Scientific Philosophy which was the reverse of Hegel's. T. A. Jackson refers to this on page 25 of his "Dialectics" "That they retained all their lives a fondness for (as Marx himself called it) 'coquetting with Hegelian terminology' is true." I have always strongly objected against the name "Dialectical" as applied to *any* Philosophic Materialism; but particularly when it is used as a matter of tactics in bitter Political struggles. I put a reasoned case against it in "The Freethinker," before and after 1935, when Jack Lindsay and others were trying to involve the N.S.S. in a Political "United Front." As a "question-begging" term, it gave and gives an opening for the Professional Sophist Apologists for the Eclectic Spiritual Taboo on scientific analysis of the Sacred Incomprehensible Mysteries—and full use they make of it. Thus, whether my case be scientifically correct or not, I have at least acted throughout on the Principle of "logical consistency and intellectual sincerity," which J. M. R. rated so highly. If friend Preece will consider carefully the sentences which follow, "... a theme which 'ought' to have been 'explained' long ago" in the article of November 3, 1946, he "ought" to be able to realise that I was merely re-stating a position, *relatively to much present-day Political Practice*, which I have consistently maintained throughout.

The demonstrating of how effectively the Professional Apologists have exploited the term "Dialectical Materialism," and how desperately they are trying to use it *now* among the English-speaking peoples is another subject. Meantime it remains another "Anon" one.

This reply may not be as laughter-producing as my previous effort, but in a friendly Secularist way I wish for H. H. P.: "May good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both."

ATHOSO ZENOO.

## THE PROBLEM OF EUTHANASIA

A VERY tragic case recently came before a Criminal Court. A man had a daughter who was a complete idiot. She was totally unable to do anything for herself. The only "speech" she had was an inarticulate grunt. She would throw things about senselessly. This had been her condition since birth; yet the father said, at the trial, that he loved her more than if she had been normal. Obviously the future before her was hopeless: "simply to be restrained in bed and barely kept alive." In this terrible position the devoted father came to a tragic decision. He would not see her continue so horrible an existence. He gave her a piece of chocolate and put her to a gas stove. She "went limp" and died. At the trial he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to death, "the judge speaking in little more than a whisper." At time (November 26) of the writing of this article a petition for his reprieve is pending. [Later (November 26) the reprieve was granted.]

Such a case raises the old problem of "mercy killing" (euthanasia). Is it justifiable to kill a hopeless invalid and, if so, in what circumstances?

It may be accepted at once that it is not justifiable for anyone so to act merely on his or her own responsibility, and in defiance of the law of the land. A person—such as the man in the case just mentioned—may feel so justified in conscience. He may think: "This poor invalid is beyond all cure or even amelioration; only a life of pain lies before him; it is kindness to end it by death; the law, however, forbids this; so the law is an ass, and I will act for the best by doing the deed of my own will." That is plausible, and may suffice to clear him of evil intention morally; but, all the same, it is a fallacy. If one person



allowed, for reasons that seem to him good, to do what the law forbids, so may any other person—and anarchy follows. It seems clear, then, that even if mercy killing is ever justifiable, it is not so if forbidden by the laws of the land.

Is it, however, justifiable in any case? The reply to this question involves many complicated considerations. First of all, the law does claim a right to kill citizens. It executes murderers and traitors, and it orders soldiers to risk, and in numberless cases to meet, death in battle. Logically it follows, then, that in the eyes of the law it is legitimate to kill for a sufficient reason. Why, then, not for the sake of avoiding a life of useless pain?

This leads to the question: If that is justifiable, for what forms of pain? Complete idiots or lunatics are not the only sufferers from acute pain. — Victims of cancer, tuberculosis, acute rheumatoid poly-arthritis, paralysis, blindness, and many other diseases, are in a similar category. Should it be legal, then, to kill all or any of those? If so, the list would become very long. Further, who is to decide as to whether this or that person should die? Is the person himself/herself to make the choice? If so, many would decide to be killed when really not hopeless: for invalids are proverbially pessimistic. Yet life is precious. Some bad sufferers might choose life while others, suffering less, might choose death. On the other hand, is the decision to be reached not by the invalid but by an independent arbiter? Supposing that to be so, should the arbiter decide to kill even if the ill person be unwilling? That might easily be the case with lunatics, blind people, and many others—indeed, probably it would be so in most instances, for life is precious even in very terrible conditions. Is the decision to depend on the invalid's wish supplemented by the agreement of the arbiter? If so, the cases would be probably few, and very likely some of the most "eligible" would be rejected.

It will be seen than euthanasia would involve very complicated problems. It is not so simple as it looks at first sight to the emotional mind! When it came to drawing up a law legalising euthanasia, insurmountable difficulties probably would be encountered. What cases to include as permissible; under what conditions the permit to be given—it would indeed need a super-Solon to decide on these problems!

On the whole, the argument seems to lead to the conclusion that euthanasia ought not to be legalised. It would solve a number of painful domestic tragedies, but, in relation to the total population, they would be few. It would almost certainly pass over a far greater number of cases equally terrible. Thus it would be no solution of the problem of incurable invalidism. While not solving its problem, also, it would give a shock to innumerable consciences, whether they be those of people of religious faith or of "natural ethical" beliefs. It would also indefinitely decrease the respect for human life. We conclude, then, that euthanasia ought not to be made lawful. "Hard cases make bad law."

J. W. POYNTER.

### PIETY IN PRISON

"THE FREETHINKER" was good enough to widen the circulation of my pamphlet on Catholic delinquency in New South Wales by reprinting it. It is a subject for which I have risked clergyman's throat and scrivener's palsy in my endeavours to publicise my contention that religious training does not conduce to good social behaviour.

Of course, it may be argued that bad social conditions breed delinquents, but I reply that, although clergymen and some others claim that religious training is essential, where religious training is most intense there delinquency is highest.

In Australia Catholics and non-Catholics have equal opportunities for advancement in life. Once a Catholic in Australia could easily be distinguished by his poverty, but this has passed. The only possible disadvantage is that imposed by the Catholic Church itself, which seems to be top-heavy with churches, schools,

hospitals, monasteries, nunneries, orphanages, the enormous priesthood and what not. In its struggle to live a life separate from the rest of the tribe it imposes a serious burden on its adherents. It is not like the Middle Ages, when zealots impoverished and almost extinguished themselves in building cathedrals, but it is a strain on Catholics.

Further statistics have been released by the N.S.W. Government Statistician, which show that of 1,856 persons in N.S.W. prisons on June 30, 1945, 650 were Catholic, or 35 per cent., a ratio which has been almost constant for many years. According to the census of 1933 only 21 per cent. of the people of N.S.W. were Catholics. The rate for Catholic female delinquents was 43 per cent., also a constant figure.

School statistics, compiled for 1944 and 1945, show that 127,790 schoolchildren out of the total of 462,528 were Catholics, or 27 per cent. This indicates an increase in the ratio of Catholics to non-Catholics, but I have not yet found that Catholics in Australia multiply very much faster than non-Catholics, the exhortations of celibate priests falling mostly on deaf ears.

Seventy-one per cent. of the Catholic schoolchildren were being educated in schools conducted by the Catholic Church—90,745 out of 127,790, and the priests had full access to the remainder who were in the State schools. And you know how priests collar the kids!

They who think that religious training is best for any human society had better study statistics, and think again.

I notice that some local authorities in England have taken advantage of the amended Education Act and made grants to church-conducted schools. They are asking for trouble, and, worse still, buying it.

The problem is world-wide. New York Freethinkers are on the track of Catholic delinquency and they have damning figures. Freethinkers everywhere should become statisticians so that the true picture of Global Nuisance Number One in the education field may be painted. Most Protestant children are educated in schools conducted by the State, so the effect of religious training, usually by that horror known as "religious instruction," cannot be accurately determined; but the truth is that Protestants, who are less under the influence of clergymen than Catholics, are better conducted.

Delinquency, of course, imposes a strain on the whole tribe, for it necessitates the diversion of people who would otherwise be useful into such non-gainful occupations as policemen, warders, magistrates and judges, as well as compelling the useful members to provide food, clothing and shelter for useless delinquents. Some day this truth will be realised by the taxpayer and he will become less tolerant of religious organisations that he is today. He might even insist on the Church keeping out of the schools.

New South Wales.

BERTRAM CALCUTT.

### OBITUARY

ALBERT HOWARD WARNER.

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Albert Howard Warner, who was knocked down and killed on the L.N.E.R. line at Harold Wood, Essex. One of a large family of Freethinkers with a long record of honourable service in the West Ham Branch N.S.S., he was ever ready and keen for general service in the Movement. Cheerful and sincere, he played his part in making the Warner family a valuable and popular asset to the Branch in West Ham. He was also keenly interested in the Trade Union Movement and for 20 years was secretary of his local Branch of the Transport and General Workers Union, winning the respect and affection of his colleagues. The chapel of the City of London Crematorium was filled to capacity on December 17 with members of the family, relatives and friends, among the latter being representatives of the West Ham Branch N.S.S. and of Trades Unions, when the remains were cremated and a Secular Service conducted by the General Secretary N.S.S.

R. H. R.



## THE BACON SLICER

On a provision dealer's counter in two enamel trays are heaps of what we once knew as rashers. They are of varying sizes, thickness, and texture, some are very fatty, some very lean. An assistant has just brought them through from the back premises where slicing machines are at work, and where the public do not see the dismemberment of the unclean quadrupeds.

A gentleman in a white coat sticks enamelled notices into the heaps of potential breakfast provender. The labels read "Bacon" and "Shakon." The latter is priced much higher than the bacon, and sells much better. The salesman always recommends it—yes, ma'am, it's the genuine Stratford, fresh in from the Broadway! Still, there are one or two who always take bacon, some there are who say that it has infinite variety, fat, lean, streaky. But, say the Shakonites, it can never have the shakon flavour, for Bacon wasn't that kind of an animal. And how would you know? asks the Baconite. What even do they know of shakon who never bacon tasted? You've never gone through the contents of our dish. One who eats only one food (and but a restricted part of that) has no right to pass judgment on food which he has not sampled. But come, let's forget about restrictions. We'll buy the contents of the two dishes. Spread out your rashers on the slab, and I'll spread mine. Play fair. Don't ask me to compare a thick cut of fat in your lot with a thin shaving of streaky in mine. True I cannot match them all, but I show you so many startling resemblances that must make you think that . . . but gracious, whatever is the matter?

Two white-coated men come, shouting loudly, from the back shop. They are both very angry. There is an accusation of carelessness, and some mix up of the grades of rashers.

"But what the hell does it matter?" roars the assistant who seems to be Irish. "Sure you know ruddy well, it's all cut from the same side of bacon."

That's the conclusion (although expressed differently) of a wonderful book called "The Bacon-Shakespeare Anatomy," by the late Doctor Melsome, published last year. His first words are:—

"My object in writing the following pages is to demonstrate that the minds of Bacon and of Shakespeare are not two minds but one."

Does the author succeed? I have lately been re-reading some "scientific" books which impressed me long ago, and I have been shocked at much that is irrational in, among others, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Havelock Ellis! So I am not likely to be caught out easily by spurious logic. I have read Doctor Melsome's book thoroughly, I have re-read it more thoroughly, and I have been at pains to check up what appeared to be doubtful. I have again gone through a good deal of Bacon (in my youth I read him extensively, under expert guidance at Cambridge) and once more I have looked through Shakespeare.

Yes, I say, the author succeeds. Firstly, because he knows his subject far better than any other writer I have come across who dealt with the authorship of the Plays. Sidney Lee, Frank Harris and all the rest of the Stratford apologists, with their "might have beens," "one must conclude" and "it seems reasonable to suppose," are flummoxed by the merciless logic of Melsome, and his well stored mind. Card index, cross reference, asterisk, footnote—these are all sweet things, brother, but give me the boy who is saturated with his subject, and pronounces his view trippingly from his finger-tips, as 'twere to hold the Bacon up to Shakespeare. Secondly, our author succeeds because of his method. There was never writer so objective that he could not be accused, with some reason, of special pleading. Doctor Melsome is no exception. But where he gives his opinion (he is content for the greater part of his book merely to show us his dissections) that opinion is based on ascertained knowledge. In one or two instances I think he strains too hard to establish a

parallel or an analogy. But if, without argument, you were to cut these portions out of the book, there would still remain scores of staggering similarities that must baffle orthodox Shakespearians.

It is quite impossible in my space thoroughly to go through this book. However, what case does the author make out, and what in brief is his line of argument?

In my essay "Genius and Shakespeare," I took the purely negative attitude, not with any pretence of originality, that the son of illiterate parents did not write the world's greatest literature. I agreed with the postulate of Ringland Robinson "That the name William Shakespeare is a pseudonym." Doctor Melsome says Francis Bacon was the Master Mind behind the "Works of Shakespeare." Let me quote from his introduction.

"It has been shown that (again supposing Bacon, and Shakespeare the real poet and dramatist to be two different men) their work reveals them both as aristocrats, devoted to aristocratic tradition; both statesmen, and members of the same political faction; both lawyers; both poets; both dramatists and lovers of the play and the player's art; both holding the same religious and philosophical convictions (or sharing the lack of them); both travellers to the same places; both reading the same books; both enjoying the same sports, thinking and feeling alike, using the same expressions, employing the same curious vocabulary, citing the same quotations, and making the same mistakes."

"Sez you," and "so what?" are the arrows of the typical Marble Archer to whom Tubby or not Tubby, and speaking maketh a ready man are the Alpha and Omega of popular Bacon Shakespeare learning.

But Doctor Melsome, even though he is aware that writing maketh an exact man, is not content with mere assertion. A skilled surgeon, he uses his mental slicing machinery equally on Shakespeare and Bacon, and we are left to judge for ourselves.

Writing of the many identities of thought and diction between the Shakespeare Plays and Poems and Bacon's acknowledged works, Edwin Reed declares:—

"The argument from parallelisms in general may be stated thus: one parallelism has no significance; five parallelisms attract attention; ten suggest inquiry; twenty raise a presumption; fifty establish a probability; one hundred dissolve every doubt."

Slightly qualified, this statement could be accepted as axiomatic. True, there have been others who pointed out the similarities in both writers but none that I have met with have approached the question in such scientific manner. Doctor Melsome's book is not only a noble book, it is an epoch making one. No one seriously concerned about the authorship of the finest literature in the English language can afford to be without this stimulating work.\*

J. EFFEL

\* "The Bacon-Shakespeare Anatomy," by W. S. Melsome, M.A., M.D., F.R.C.S., etc. Price 15s. Publishers: George Lapworth and Company Limited, Vernon House, London, W.C.1.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1)—11 a.m.: "Ring in the New," Mr. JOSEPH McCANN.  
West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Gt. Newport Street, W.C.1)—6-30 p.m.: A debate.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute)—  
6-30 p.m.: "Power Politics in the Far East," Mr. DON  
BATEMAN, I.L.P.