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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Who are the Materialists?

I HAVE received a very solemn warning for the public against the dangers of Materialism, with its "intellectual corollary scepticism." The warning is an old one, the antipathy of the clergy to the word Materialism being only equalled by their dislike of another expressive word, Atheism. In the latter case the chief reason for the antipathy lies in the uncompromising nature of the word. Freethought has become sufficiently prevalent for many Christians to claim that they too are Freethinkers. Agnosticism is so indefinite in its application and implications that with many it assumes the character of a religion, and Agnostics are found expressing feelings of reverence towards nothing in particular and everything in general. And some Christians also profess to be Agnostics "to a certain extent." But none of them are found claiming to be Atheists. Here no compromise is possible. Atheism may be saddled with various sinister meanings by those who will not or cannot understand it; but its central assertion of not believing in a deity is grasped by all.

In the case of "Materialism" the clergy attain their object by using the word in two senses and while offering one by a species of sleight of hand, substituting the other. For the word has both a technical or scientific, and a moral or social meaning. Scientifically Materialism may be taken as the assertion that all natural phenomena are ultimately explainable by mechanical formulæ, and that life, mind, and consciousness are also elaborated and complex products of the same forces that are everywhere at work around us. And from this point of view the connection between Materialism and morality is as evident and as necessary as that between geography and genesis, Marathon and mid-wifery, or Homer and Homocopathy. But the word has also a social significance which implies a devotion to mere sensual gratification, and a comparative ignoring of the higher social and intellectual pursuits. If preachers merely protested against this form of Materialism, Freethinkers would be the last to cavil at their utterances. But their policy is to confuse the two meanings, and having convicted certain people or opinions of Materialism, produce the impression that this carries with it the whole catalogue of social and moral offences.

Now the last thing that can be brought against either scientific or Freethought workers is that they are materialistic in this sinister sense of the word. They are, on the contrary, idealistic to a degree that has often earned for them the ridicule of a large number of their fellows. Scientific workers have not usually gone about the country parading their self-sacrifice, nor proclaiming their martyrdom with the unctuous selfishness of religious votaries, but the history of science is nevertheless full of records of men whose lives have been object lessons in devotion to the most

unselfish of ideals. The very last thing that could be said of these men is that they devoted themselves to sensual pleasures, or that they took a low view of life. And the case of Freethought is equally striking. Up and down the country are scores and scores of men and women who have been for years devoting themselves to a cause that from the mere view of "worldly" advancement has positively nothing to offer. These men and women are content to go on year after year enduring misrepresentation, slander, and various persecutions, the harder to bear because they are usually petty in character, and all for an ideal that the average Christian rejects because the solid and immediate personal gain is insufficient for him. And this quiet, but none the less real, idealism is the more admirable because it is so often consummated in solitude. It is easy to undergo martyrdom in a crowd, even passive resisters have found their kitchen-cloak and family-teapot martyrdom in clusters quite enjoyable; the test is when the martyrdom is undergone in solitude. It is then that there is demonstrated the presence of an idealism of a far from common character.

But if ever the "you're another" argument has any force, it is here. The Freethinker might turn round on the Christian and, with justice, accuse him of the most complete and the most vicious form of Materialism. In the first place, it may be noted that a great many of the objections to Secularism and Atheism actually involve the charge that the Freethinker is burdened with an overdose of idealism. Everyone is familiar with the statement that in destroying the belief in a God who punishes and rewards in a future life for deeds done in this, the Freethinker is sowing the seeds of a wide spread immorality. And what is this but reducing conduct to its lowest and most sordid proportions? It is saying that human nature is neither hopeful enough nor healthy enough to act on any other principle save that of a direct reward or punishment. The real charge brought against Freethinkers in such a statement is that they pitch their ideals too high, and take too lofty a conception of human nature. This may be true, but it is ridiculous for such as believe this to label their opponents Materialists. Their Materialism plainly belongs to those who take the lower view.

There is the same feature in the Christian religion itself. Until Christianity succumbed somewhat to the pressure of modern culture what could have been more materialistic than the Christian conception of a future? What was there in it of the higher intellectual or social pleasures? To have asserted their possibility would have outraged Christian susceptibilities. Charles Lamb said that he always felt like saying grace before reading Shakespeare; and this is regarded as a joke in a Christian country. Had he actually said grace before reading Lear or Othello, Christians would probably have taken it as an insult to their faith. But if a man believes in God why not say grace before reading Shakespeare? The Christian, who is fearful of the effects

of materialism, reserves his grace for his dinner. His æsthetic feelings centre about the neighbourhood of his stomach; just as the ideal man in practice, if not in theory, in a Christian country, is he who has "made his pile," honestly perhaps, but at all events, made it.

We have to be on our guard against materialism, said Canon Henson. But, as a matter of fact, and apart from all theory, could life be conducted on a more materialistic basis than it is in this Christian country after centuries of Christian nurture? Among select circles the artist, the man of letters, the scientist, the reformer, may each receive a measure of appreciation. But what of the mass of the people? It is a sober fact that with them the successful prize-fighter, the famous footballer, the victorious soldier, cuts a far greater figure. What is the ideal character placed before young men just entering life? Not the man who has devoted his life to high ideals, but the one who begins as a poor boy, and by the practice of a miserable thrift, and by qualities of a more or less "toadyish" description has amassed a fortune in solid cash. And once the fortune is made, the man with the money-bags is nowhere so sure of servile attention, flattery and adulation, as in Church or Chapel. Not even on the Stock Exchange is the man of money worshipped more than in the religious meeting-house. We starve and look down upon our hard working but poor student, we praise and pension our successful fighting man. Ruskin said that the motto of the Englishman was, wherever he was to get somewhere else, and whatever he had to get more, while the Christianity of England, in practice, is such, that if engineers could build a tunnel to hell, Christians would invest their money in it and close all the churches for fear of lowering the dividends. Is this more than a bare summary of facts? One would be only too pleased to say it was not true, but again, what are the facts? We have just passed through a great war, and we have been deluged with the speeches about the greatness and the might of England! our Christian humility being quite consonant with self-laudation of the most nauseous character. But when we ask why is England great, where is its greatness threatened, and how is its greatness maintained, what do we find? Why that the ideal aimed at is that of a universal stores, and that we are disgraced should some other trader come along and filch from us some of our commerce. We are great apparently, because we make more cotton goods or sell more coal than any other country, even though our doing so involves the gradual degradation of family life. From none of our official leaders do we get the teaching that to maintain the character of our people is of infinitely greater importance than to build up a huge trade without regard to the conditions of its increase. That character is of more importance than cash; that the trade of a country may be increasing and yet its people be deteriorating, are teachings that are heard, truly, but they are heard as mere fantastical speculations rather than the most important of truths to which a nation can give heed.

We are a materialised people—materialised in the sinister sense of the word—and by what? Very largely by the religion that is so fond of affixing this epithet to all with whom it disagrees. A religion that had really held up lofty ideals, and based its teachings upon realities while aiming at a gradually perfected human society, might surely have provided during the centuries of its rule, an antidote to the

money and commercial mania of the last four or five generations. The real worth of a Christian training is seen in the fact that it could offer nothing to oppose the demoralising tendencies of modern life but by its condemnation of scientific study and its indiscriminating condemnation of natural pleasures, paved the way for these tendencies to exert their fullest influence. The condemnation of theology and the final condemnation of Christianity is to be found in its inability to prevent the existence of present evils, as well as by the part it has played in their production.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A CELEBRATED MAN OF SCIENCE

THE biography recording the remarkable career of the late Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, F.R.S. (Jonathan Cape) is a splendid memorial. Mr. Warren R. Dawson ably prefaces the seven appreciations of their colleague's achievements from the pens of eminent scientists with a general biography. This last is chiefly based on Elliot Smith's correspondence with intimate friends, while as one of these, himself, Dawson writes with authority on his subject.

A keen controversialist, especially when his conclusions were challenged, Professor Smith was a most lovable man. This is made abundantly clear by the positive affection with which his scientific intimates and pupils regarded him. Nevertheless, his novel theories aroused fierce opposition when first propounded, and, while some are now generally accepted, others are still under discussion.

Elliot Smith first saw the light in New South Wales in 1871 and remained in Australia till he was 25 years old. With a travelling scholarship from Sydney University he came to England in 1896, where facilities for study and research were far more favourable than in his native Continent. He soon entered Cambridge as a Research Student and began his studies in the Physiological Laboratory. Later, he lectured on the brain and nervous system, and he seemed firmly seated at Cambridge when Professor Macalister wrote asking him whether he would accept the Anatomical Professorship in the School of Medicine in Cairo, a post with an adequate salary with a pension on retirement. Macalister stated: "There is magnificent material for anatomical work there, all the bodies dissected are natives of one African tribe or another and they provide all the requisites for work there."

As a result Elliot Smith reluctantly left Cambridge, and his subsequent researches among the tombs of ancient Egypt led to his later enunciation of his theory that all civilisation in every part of the world was originated in the Land of the Nile, and was afterwards spread to the countries which now possess it.

The great Lord Rutherford's tribute to the memory of Elliot Smith is a mere fragment of what he hoped to write, for he was engaged in its composition a few days only before his untimely death. Still, he testifies that at Cambridge, "We all recognised that Elliot Smith was a man of outstanding ability who was sure to have a distinguished career."

The chapter dealing with Elliot Smith's experiences in Egypt and Nubia is that of Professor Wood Jones, his colleague at that time. The mummies of Egyptians who lived five thousand years ago were wonderfully well preserved in that dry climate. Diseases long regarded as modern were evidenced even in pre-dynastic remains. "Cases of gout," avers Wood Jones, "dental caries, rheumatoid arthritis, and even the adhesions consequent upon appendicitis were all discovered in the cemeteries in the immediate neighbourhood of Shellal. Healed fractures were met with in plenty, and even some cases in which persons had died with fractures still ununited but encased in splints. The bodies

of 62 men, who had been executed, some by the sword and some by the hangman's rope, were found huddled together in one trench. . . . The remains of domestic animals, such as dogs, goats, sheep and cattle were found in many graves and the recording of these needed to be as precise as those of the human material." Moreover, the discovery of ivory, beryl, coral and other relics suggest an early Egyptian intercourse with distant countries.

In 1909 Elliot Smith entered the University of Manchester as its Professor of Anatomy, where he and Dr. Wingate Todd carried out extensive reconstruction. As Professor Stopford, F.R.S., states: "Inevitably the student must dissect the cadaver, but Elliot Smith's aim was to foster the study of the structure and meaning of the living human body by employing every facility available for that purpose. Many Anatomy Departments now possess the X-ray outfit, all employ the living model, and an increasing number introduce patients at demonstrations to emphasise the significance of the facts about structure and function, but few had realised the value of such methods in 1909. The innovations which were introduced at Manchester led the way in this country to the almost revolutionary changes which have occurred in departments of anatomy in recent years." Under the new system the student's memory was not strained by minute details, but "instead his attention was constantly directed to principles, factors which regulate growth and development, and the interaction of structure and function."

During his Manchester period Elliot Smith was extremely popular as a lecturer and delivered many scientific addresses both in Britain and abroad. On the resignation of Professor Thane in 1919, Elliot Smith became the Professor of Anatomy at University College, London, where he led a busy and fruitful life. Yet, he was most unmethodical in his habits. The Professor of Anatomy in the University of Cambridge, Dr. H. A. Harris, assures us that Thane was most meticulous in all his arrangements and everything in his department was in apple-pie order. But, "Elliot Smith blew into the department, a magnificent figure, with books, manuscripts, loose notes, diagrams, negatives, full boxes, empty boxes, about 500 lantern slides thrown together in bits of newspapers, and loose cardboard trays of microscopic slides jumbled higgledy-piggledy—mostly without any form of label. All were placed on the table or on the floor without any seeming order—yet Elliot Smith spent less time looking for slides, notes and papers than any other man."

In his "Human History" Elliot Smith proclaims his convictions in these arresting terms:—

"It took Man hundreds of thousands of years to realise the possibilities conferred upon him by human powers of vision and skill.

"When Man began to devise civilisation, he became entangled in the shackles of the theory of the State, which he himself had forged.

"It remained for the Greeks to remove the shackles and restore to human reason the freedom it had lost.

"Ever since then the history of the world has been a conflict between the rationalism of Hellas and the superstition of Egypt.

"It depends upon the human population of the world themselves which will win. For thought and courage can decide the issue."

Elliot Smith, a marvellously many-sided man, like Buckle and Kingdon Clifford, was cut off before his time. As Professor Harris justly observes: "No sketch of Elliot Smith would be complete without stressing the wonderful manner in which he fitted into University College and Hospital—the home of rebels and agnostics. He dispelled the chill torpor of routine and liberated human anatomy and human biology from the trammels of superstition. His name ranks with those of Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Graham, John Stuart Mill, William Jenner, Sidney Ringer, William Ramsay, Francis Galton, Victor Horsley, Karl Pearson—a series of iconoclasts who vigorously illuminated many dark recesses in the older academic bowers and brought

a diffuse glow of stimulating illumination into the broad stream of urban and city life."

The preposterous contention that the Nordic, or so-called Aryan, Race, was the inheritor or even the originator of civilisation, and that these supermen, mostly in Prussia, were alone capable of holding aloft the torch of human culture, received short shrift from Elliot Smith. Certainly, there may have been purely Aryan languages, but languages are no index of race. Even Max Müller, who coined the term *Aryan*, careless as he was in writing of Aryan and Semitic races, was compelled to admit that: "To me an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar."

Referring to the German use of the Nordic legend as an excuse for the extermination of the Jews, Elliot Smith observes: "Would we had a T. H. Huxley or a Haeckel to deal in his trenchant fashion with the present situation." Or as the famous ethnologist, Ripley, wrote: "No other scientific question, with the exception, perhaps, of the doctrine of evolution, was ever so bitterly discussed or so infernally confounded at the hands of Chauvinistic or other biased writers."

T. F. PALMER.

THE FREETHOUGHT TRAGEDY

THE question is raised whether we are "flogging a dead horse." That such a question should be discussed, at least has the implication of doubt; and it also implies the need for reassurance. To talk of a "dead horse" while there are world-wide ramifications, manifold and widespread religious organisations is absurd. And without this, the persistence of tradition, even of crude superstition and its effect on behaviour needs attention. It has been said that we are all carrying about ghosts of gods. The difference between a ghost and a god is as ticklish a question as the age-old theological distinction between gods and devils.

The real question is much more ludicrous and much more serious. Certainly it is difficult to see how anyone can consider the "horse" as dead. Rather is it, whether or not the freethought movement is dead. In talking as if the battle is all but won, we are indulging in nothing but wish-fulfilment; and are apparently oblivious of the absurd position we have got ourselves into. As a propagandist organisation we are in an almost hopeless position. Whereas the religionist is making use of all the educational and propagandist facilities of the modern world, freethought still struggles on with the soapbox, a weekly journal and a few pamphlets. The superstitionist can reach his millions and the freethinker only his thousands. Even unorthodox and lesser organisations are in front of us in this respect. The Christian Scientist, or even the British Israelites, can smile at our puny efforts. The publishing houses which cater for the astrological superstition have an output far in excess of our own. While the religionist is adapting himself, the freethinker is still echoing out of date slogans and shibboleths and getting himself in a mess, even with regards to his own propaganda.

Not only is he lost in breadth, but is also out of his depth. Religion touches every aspect of human endeavour. It shows itself in our customs as well as our thoughts; in our very actions as well as our antiquated ideas of morality. It is there in the very language we use, and even in our feelings and sentiments. It is plainly seen in the mystical mummerly of political organisation and pageantry. It touches all the Arts, and it distorts our ideas in our philosophical outlook, even on science. But the freethinker is dead to all this; out of touch with modern scientific developments. With the "immaterialism" of the modern physicist, and the "old Adam" of the modern psychologist; the religionist claims that the "old fashioned materialism"

is out of date. With the atom confused and diffused in a mist of radiation, and the very ideas of solidity and contact illusory, the freethinker makes himself foolish by reiterating the "old fashioned materialism." The scientific advance of the past hundred years has gone by without notice, and has left the freethinker in a maze of wishfulfilment. He has put himself in an absurd position.

Speakers on our platforms, and in articles and literature, constantly assert that God does nothing and that God does not exist. The least one can do is to face up to one's opponent's case. With all its equivocation, there is a case. One does not solve problems by denying their existence. At one time, freethought had an educational value, but this denial of our opponent's case puts us in a ridiculous position; for two reasons. In the first place, even though our opponent may be absurd enough to talk vaguely about a sort of a something which somehow or another does something or another; he is at least concerned with something. The believer may be intellectually befogged, but he is not muddleheaded enough to imagine that he is concerned about nothing. In the second place, the freethinker, in his denial, is asserting that he is arguing about nothing. If God is nothing and does nothing, then there is nothing to argue about. There was a time when the freethinker set out to explain God, but now, having explained God out of existence, there is no educational value in arguments about nothing.

Now, we have the absurdity of people organising themselves in a movement, organising lectures, meetings and debates, and publishing a magazine and literature, in order to tell the world that they are arguing about nothing. It certainly does appear ludicrous and it is difficult to see how anybody claiming to be rational can justify such a position. To openly assert that one's mind is a blank is surely the height of absurdity. No wonder outsiders look at us queerly, and point a finger to their heads and smile. The logic is no longer on the side of the freethinker, for he can no longer play on the illogicality of his opponents' case in view of the absurdity of his own. One can see the idea of such an argument being put forward as a joke, as a leg pull to ridicule childish superstition; but in all seriousness! It leaves one wondering whether the freethinker takes himself too seriously or not seriously enough. But that is only part of the trouble, there is another aspect of the case.

Now, having explained the gods out of existence, there are no gods to trouble us, religion becomes a personal matter. We are concerned with human beings. It used to be quite a ticklish problem, how to tackle theological inconsistencies and contradictions and avoid personalities. Any attempt to show absurdity or ignorance met with resentment. Religion is such a personal matter; God is so intensely personal; that it was very awkward and personalities seemed almost unavoidable. But now it is worse than that, it is we who are concerned with the "old Adam." Instead of the imputation of motive coming from the religious side, the position is the reverse. The freethinker approaches the matter from a personal angle. He imputes motives. His attack on the religionist is of personal character. Whereas before, the religionist read into our remarks the implication of roguery or folly, to-day the freethinker makes the direct accusation of greed, lust of power and domination; of power politics.

With the freethinker openly advocating antipathy and animosity, it should not be long for the argumentation to descend from the ideological to the material plane. Religion has always been an emotional question, and to go out of our way to make it so is tantamount to committing suicide. It really is a tragedy to see the Freethought Movement sliding downhill, not merely involved in personalities, but openly involving personal feeling and personal accusation; to end in a mass of bruised noses and cracked skulls. It seems that freethinkers are trying to play the Christian at his own game. They will soon be behaving like Christians as well as talking like them. We see the absurdity

of an incarnate God, but still think of human beings as devils incarnate. Having got rid of God, the devil is having things all his own way. But it certainly does seem absurd to accuse the Christian of the seven deadly sins, considering that he has always accused himself of them; in asserting that all men are sinners; that man is born in sin.

Perhaps we ought to start a new "Ism," to deal with the "old Adam," and call it Adiabulism; in order to explain the devil out of existence. For if the God has gone, the Old Man himself seems to be a devil of a nuisance.

H. H. PREECE

MARRIAGE REFORM

AMONG the various proposals for the reform of the marriage laws, the recently published Denning Report is likely to take high place as a document of importance. It seeks to probe into various issues arising from the present state of the law and suggest necessary remedies. For example, questions of alimony and of the unsatisfactory state of the law concerning the wife's costs are examined and reforms suggested. The commission undertook a fresh approach to its terms of reference by regarding them as of wider importance than the specific question of the terms upon which legal dissolution of marriage may be tolerated and granted. Questions concerning the future of the children came under their survey and they made far-reaching proposals for the setting up of machinery which might act in the interest of reconciliation and therefore avoid a divorce. The commission were impressed by the considerable ignorance of the majority of the population concerning marriage and related subjects. It is a fresh departure which would recommend instituting of state-aided advisory centres where information of an expert kind might be obtained upon all matters related to marriage and sex. If this recommendation is followed, the state will have entered upon a wholly new and secular attitude towards marriage as an institution. Previously, it has solely concerned itself with questions of registration and with problems of dissolution.

It is not without interest that the Denning commission remark upon the failure of the churches in this matter. Although a great deal has been written during recent years concerning the Christian attitude to marriage, very little has been done by the churches as a whole to offer scientific advice and help. For the most part, their attitude has been reflected in the Anglican League, the Mothers' Union, with its violent opposition to birth control or to divorce in any shape or form. As a result, at a period when social morality is in upheaval through the impact of war, the churches find themselves regarded as irrelevant in their own self-appointed sphere of morality so far as an expert governmental commission is concerned.

Up till 1857, when the modern Divorce Courts were set up, it is difficult to find any consistent ecclesiastical opposition to divorce. The process of a private Act of Parliament was expensive and therefore closed to all save the very wealthy. Where divorce took place in highly aristocratic circles, the more prominent ecclesiastics merely accepted the situation. For example, Archbishop Laud, the hero of the high church party, remarried a divorcee drawn from these circles whilst the bishop had nothing to say concerning the efforts of George IV to obtain a dissolution of his marriage. But, when the law made divorce easier, a bitter ecclesiastical warfare was commenced on the grounds that marriage, as an institution, was slipping out of the control of the church. Each successive modification of the law had to face episcopal opposition and the reforms associated with Mr. A. P. Herbert's Act of Parliament in 1938 took place despite the angry attacks of various ecclesiastics. Only a small handful of modernist scholars showed themselves willing to take a tolerant or reasonable view of the subject. For the most part

the theory was held that marriages were made in Heaven, that vows taken in church held good whatever the conduct of either partner, and that a life of utter misery was to be preferred to any laxity, however safeguarded legally, on the subject of the indissolubility of the marriage-tie.

Actually, this point of view is unhistorical and of comparatively modern adoption. It has no place in the Synoptic Gospels where, as the Rev. R. H. Charles showed, there is no clear statement of the indissolubility of marriage at all. A considerable conflict of opinion existed on the matter among contemporary rabbis. The Greek Orthodox churches have never insisted upon indissolubility nor have they refused to recognise divorce. In the West, the narrowly rigid point of view was adopted by the modern Roman Catholic Church from the Mediaeval Canon Law and owes its recent impetus to the pre-scientific theological viewpoint of the Council of Trent. So far as the Church of England is concerned, it is a state-established institution and therefore amenable to the King's Law which has always recognised divorce. Indeed, Archbishop Cranmer was to the forefront in assisting Henry VIII through his matrimonial tangles! Yet, the mediaeval point of view has been allowed to prevail since the reforms of 1857. The law permitted the church to be used for the remarriage of the divorcee and also permitted the clergy to officiate. Generations of clergy have set the law aside and refused the concession. Bishops have insisted that they must be consulted before a marriage of this kind is solemnised although episcopal interference is not suggested in the law and is nothing other than a piece of gratuitous impertinence. Some years ago two London clergymen, the Rev. Dr. Geikie-Cobb and the Rev. Hugh Chapman, were publicly repudiated by the then bishop for officiating at weddings of this type. Actually, it was the two clergymen who had the law on their side but the episcopal rebuke showed that the law-breakers formed the overwhelming majority.

As the rigid attitude has come to prevail in church circles, it has even infected the Nonconformist churches where it might have been expected that Protestant individualism would have made for a broader outlook. Certain leading Methodist ministers have shown themselves to be quite as overbearing as their Anglican colleagues. It is not without interest that, in the Roman Catholic Church, the absolute standard has proved to be unworkable and elaborate machinery exists for the Papal annulment of an unsatisfactory marriage. So far as the non-Roman bodies are concerned, they have adopted the mediaeval rigidity without the possibility of escape and find themselves caught up into a curious position.

One outcome of the ecclesiastical attitude has been the sharp division between church marriages and those taking place before the Registrar. A conventional viewpoint has grown up that the first are the more binding and the weddings in a registry office are merely a civil contract. In fact, this conventional viewpoint is a delusion and the church marriage, in the eyes of law, is likewise a contract subject to the usual legal regulations governing contracts and their breach. At the present time, the general collapse of theological sanctions in these matters has forced a new survey to be made and the Denning Report is an important step towards a new assessment of the whole matter. It is clear that church interference has simply led to disaster. Refusing to accept the state law on the matter, it has insisted on standards which are not commonly accepted and upon an unscientific theological basis for marriage. The terms of union and the conduct of the marriage itself must be left to a pre-scientific attitude of chance based upon ignorance. The Denning Report illustrates the extent to which this attitude has increased human misery and has operated in an anti-social direction.

In the view of the Denning commissioners, whole areas of the subject must now be taken over by the state. It is an apt illustration of the extent to which the orthodox churches, by subjecting morality to theological sanctions, have failed in the moral sphere. The interests of a scientific attitude towards moral problems and the needs of society as a whole will lead to the

hope that the report will be implemented by legislation and by action without delay. But it is impossible to avoid a further conclusion. Individual churches have the right to impose any moral sanctions which they see fit upon their individual members so long as they do not conflict with the law of the State. If otherwise reasonable people desire to accept the moral dictatorship of a cardinal or an archbishop, they should be at liberty to do so. But marriage is a subject which affects the whole of society and the Denning Report is an illustration of what was already apparent in many directions, that the orthodox churches have failed to provide a satisfactory background and that their interference has been with the object of making this far-reaching social institution into an ecclesiastical vested interest. The result has been to hold up long-needed reforms and to increase the general stock of human misery. It is time that marriage itself was regarded as a civil contract and that the whole question of its validity made into a state affair with every registration of marriage taking place before a state official. Religious ceremonies should be regarded as a private matter having no bearing upon the question of validity of the marriage so far as social considerations are concerned. The way would then be open for the carrying through of reforms without the constant danger of interference from bodies which, whilst claiming a monopoly over moral questions, have failed very obviously so far as the foundations of social morality are involved in their demands.

JULIAN.

THE ANSWER

If someone said: "Your food is on the table,
The purest food that you'll find anywhere."
But when you looked you simply were not able
To see a thing—but just a table bare:
Would you believe that what he said was *true*?
Or would you think that he was fooling you?

If someone said: "Just ask for what you're needing
And you will surely get it when you call."
But when you got no answer to your pleading
Or else got what you didn't want at all:
Would you believe that what he said was *true*?
Or would you say that he was fooling you?

If someone said: "I'm standing here beside you—
Although you cannot see me I am here;
Just trust in me and I will safely guide you."
And then you fell headlong into a weir:
Would you believe that what he said was *true*?
Or would you know that he was fooling you?

If someone said: "I will be very frank; you
Cannot stand alone without my aid."
And then you found you got on nicely, thank you;
And needed no support in efforts made:
Would you believe that what he said was *true*?
Or would you guess that he was fooling you?

If someone said those things to me, I'd wonder
If he thought I was simple as could be;
And I would not be making any blunder
If I said: "Liar! Cheat! You don't fool *me*!"

W. H. WOOD.

In parts of Germany, it is believed that a cock when seven years old, lays a small egg, which must be thrown over the roof, or the storm will penetrate the dwelling house. If hatched, the egg becomes a basilisk.—GRIMM'S "GERMAN MYTHOLOGY."

ACID DROPS

We wonder how long it will be before the Government puts an end to the ridiculous trials by voting concerning the liberty to do on Sunday what is quite permissible on other days in the week. If there were a genuine complaint of annoyance, or bad conduct, inquiry would be advisable. But it approaches insanity to say that while it is legal to do a certain thing on six days in the week, it may be an offence if on the seventh day the same thing is done. Moreover, we have museums open on Sunday—after much trouble, trains running on Sundays, a rite gained by a struggle, we may have Sunday performances—provided it is called a club. And above all, the Church gives its experience that Sunday entertainments and occupations make for good conduct on the streets. Finally, the test as to whether the people would like Sunday entertainments the voting reply is very much stronger in its favour.

For a long time the people of this country were befooled by the sing-song repetition that this is a Christian country. We have been fighting that for nearly 50 years, and have had our opinion admitted as sound law in the House of Lords. We wonder how long it will be before we shall have the law recognised that the harmless treatment of a "show" is as free on Sunday as it is on other days of the week. Surely if cinemas are bad on Sunday they must be bad during the other six days. It is sheer insanity to argue in any other way. Moreover, we have open on Sunday picture galleries, museums, reading rooms, travelling by trains, seeking pleasure by motor cars, etc., and no one finds danger or misdemeanour following. On this head the police are very firm. They say that to leave people on the streets, lounging about doing nothing, etc., invites bad behaviour. There is only one real test with cinemas and that is, do they pay? And the answer is, they do. The clergy are the principal opponents and say it keeps people away from Church. We do not believe it, if people want to go to Church there is nothing to prevent their going. Sunday entertainments do not prevent people going to Church. It does evidence the fact that the people do not wish to go. The maintenance of these Sunday prohibitions is an insult to English freedom and to common sense.

We may take a point from the Rev. Tylor Lane and his opposition to Sunday cinemas. We are quoting from the "Northampton Chronicle and Echo." He says he did not wish to be a "kill-joy," "but he believed that Sunday cinemas was a retrograde step." Why retrograde? Sunday entertainments cannot be called "retrograde" unless Mr. Lane considers that a correct description of Church attendance. The fact is that it is only a minority that wish to go to Church, and Mr. Lane and his crew are really saying to the people that if they will not go to Church they shall not go anywhere else. The police have said over and over again that Sunday cinemas make for decent behaviour in the streets. The parson says that if the people will not come to Church they can go to hell. The people say they will risk hell and entertainments, and in the long run time will endorse their choice.

There are murmurs in the religious world that some of those who broke away from the established Church are now likely to go back. We can quite appreciate that. Church attendances are getting smaller in proportion to population certainly, and probably in regard to regular Church and Chapel-goers. It is true that pretences of the cause of leaving are some excuses in dislike to the preacher, or the poor quality of music, etc., may serve as an excuse, but these things are not causes. If there were a disease for telling lies about religion the churches would soon look like hospitals.

Suppose every man in the House of Commons, who is not a Christian, were to make a true statement in relation to religion, how many Christians would be left? The fact is that with the educated and intelligent there would be found a very, very small gathering.

Where religion is concerned one is certain to meet with impudence. Here, for example, is the Rev. Cook, Rector of Batnigton, writing in the "Yorkshire Post," severely condemning the B.B.C. for permitting "Itma" to be performed at a time

when the churchgoers were getting ready for church. Mr. Cook seems to think that the B.B.C. and the religious section have let Christians down, and adds there are "very few preachers who can hope to compete with Mr. T. Handley and Co." Perhaps Mr. Cook may be right, and when we are dealing with the Church has had some very fine wits at his service. But we agree that the Church has decayed so much that its wits are absent, and even in commonplace human clowning in the churches can make but a poor show.

We haven't the slightest knowledge of who Mr. M. Ince is, but he is evidently a keen-sighted person. In a brief note to the "Sunday Express" he calls attention to the fact that in a recent speech Mr. Attlee never once mentioned "God," and he reminds the world that Mr. Churchill did mention God in his "Great War speeches." Mr. Ince may be too hasty. Mr. Attlee may think that God can look after his own business without calling His political party to help. Or it may be that Churchill's announcement that in future the Tory Party will keep God to the front may be read as evidence that God cannot look after himself. Or it may be that Mr. Churchill feels that nothing but the grace of God will restore him to the post of Prime Minister. One need not know. And rash friends often do one more harm than active enemies.

We have it in our mind that Carrs Lane Church is, as churches go, quite a respectable kind of thing. By that we mean that its religious foolishness is not so well advertised as is the case with many churches. For instance, we get this: "Many attempts have been made to stamp out the Christian faith. Russia was an example." But that is not true. Arrangements for different forms of religion were made with the declaration of other matters directly after the revolution. The Russian Churches during Tsarism were nothing more or better than an army for the upkeep of one of the worst governments in the world, and just as the priests remained priests they were unmolested.

It is true that a large proportion of the men—and women—who dominated the new Russia and planned the State education were anti-religious, but it remains to be made clear why force against religion should be a crime, and force against Atheism should be a religious duty. If the Carrs Lane preacher will look over the three semi-official books written by J. F. Hecker in 1938 he will find that the great sin the Russians committed was that they were determined to wipe out the Church rule of Russia as it existed under the Tsars. There is nothing more absurd than to weigh the good and the bad of a revolution than counting it as against a peaceful and flourishing community. Russia under the revolution has proved itself the best Russia that has yet been seen.

Proudly the Roman Church points to the fact that in the U.S.A. one in six Americans is a Catholic; and very horrified it also points to the fact in the same country that one marriage in three ends in divorce. Whether the two have any connection is not very clear—but it makes one think. What we should like to know is, with 25,000,000 Catholics in the U.S.A. out of a population of 140,000,000, with its score of (R.C.) archbishops, 150 bishops, 25,000 priests and 20,000 churches, why in the world can there be so many divorcees—or any divorcees at all among fully-believing Catholics?

Very Christian people are certain to be very foolish when their religion is on the carpet. Here is a case in Durham where a Christian Science (healer) was very sharply called down by a coroner, who had a God also. The first man prayed to God to cure a sick man, and left it there. That was good sound religious behaviour. But the man died, as men often do, and the coroner asked the accused man, with contempt, as to whether he believed that prayers to God would save the sick man's life. The Christian Scientist said he would, or at least he could if he would. The coroner—a Christian—said it was all bunkum, with which as Atheists, we agree. But why the deuce does he believe in God? You really cannot confine God to a coroner.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- C. LEONARD.—Thanks for paper. It helps to keep one in touch with things even though they are not used immediately.
 - A. W. HOOK.—Thanks for sending these old books. They give a certain amount of knowledge of people which one cannot get by reading about them in a volume that has been arranged yesterday.
 - B. C. TAYLOR.—You cannot expect much enlightenment when the two disputants are both Christians. Christians can always disagree on the value of Christianity. But when it is done neither you nor the audience have gained much.
 - L. WALTER WILLIAMS.—Certainly being prohibited from printing two issues of "The Freethinker" involves a loss. None of the running liabilities are removed. Still, we are not downhearted. Thanks for good wishes.
- To the "Freethinker": Mr. W. Distin, Salcombe, £1; Mr. T. Quin, Horsham, U.S.A., 8s.
- Benevolent Fund N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 from Mr. P. A. Bick to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We are not concerned with party politics and, therefore, we had nothing to say against the stopping of the printing of two issues of this journal. Something happened which our political governors could not be expected to foresee, and then when something had to be done it called for immediate action by the reigning government, and the shortest possible notice could be given. On the action we would only suggest that all papers could have been stopped for a day without serious consequences. There are already occasions when newspapers and others do not appear for a short period, and no one seems the worst for it. Naturally, we did not like it, if for no other reason than because it made our weekly financial losses larger than they are. If something had to be done it had to be done on the moment. Our only surprise is that it did not make the sweep wider. If two issues of "The Freethinker" could be set aside we feel that others that were not molested could have been treated as we were, the one and only weekly "Freethinker."

We are pleased to see that Mr. Frederick Laws, writing in the "News Chronicle," continues his attack on the B.B.C. with regard to the way in which religion is boasted while steadily refusing to permit any serious comments that might be made against the continuous boasting of different churches. Some of these broadcasts are of a quality that many educated Christians would be ashamed to put forward. Here is a brief comment by Mr. Laws on some recent performances:—

"Unless the B.B.C. wants to stimulate anti-clericalism it should stop passing tales to religious departments for censorship. I keep saying that this has happened and sooner or later someone is going to lose his temper and quote cases.

I would also suggest that a long and ecstatic advertisement for the 'Sword of the Spirit' (R.C.), by Professor John Foster would never have been broadcast if it had been judged as an ordinary talk.

We heard that broadcast, and a more fantastic advertisement for the Catholic Church could not be conceived.

We are bound to say that this open religious propaganda is made easy because of the number of men of high standing in science, history, etc.—who are known to be free thinkers, and yet remain silent. More than that, it is quite clear if one analyses what is said by these men, that they deliberately tone down their own opinions for fear the religious sections should take offence. If the self-muzzled unbelievers were to insist on selecting their own subjects, and demanding the right to express their opinions of the religious rubbish that is put on the air, there would be a change for the better. Publicity is a great trap for many people.

We know nothing about Mr. Desmond Leslie, but it is quite clear that the "Freethinker" has made him wild. Someone has sent him a copy of the "One and Only," which has quite disturbed his balance. (We never sent the copy.) So he writes:

"Please send me more of the 'Freethinker.' It is the funniest thing I have ever read. It's quite the best satire on nineteenth century gutter Atheism I have had the pleasure to come across."

Now when a man writes like that he is evidently smarting very, very much. But we advise him to buy a few copies, say one per month, and very soon his friends will find him so interesting and so much improved that they will hardly recognise how much he has changed for the better.

Here are some more results of Sunday Cinema polls:—

	For Sunday Opening	Against	Majority For
Maldon (Essex)	1,950	735	1,215
Barry	9,149	3,208	5,941
Loughborough	5,699	1,439	4,260
Bletchley	2,122	328	1,794
Hastings	12,374	2,784	9,590

We think that those who are not well acquainted with the writings of the famous historian, J. B. Bury, will be glad of the following, taken from his "History of Freedom of Thought." It is a fine tribute to free thought.

"Nothing should be left undone to impress upon the young that freedom of thought is an axiom to human progress. It may be feared, however, that this is not likely to be done for a long time to come. For our methods of early education are founded on authority. It is true that children are sometimes exhorted to think for themselves. But the parent or instructor who gives this excellent advice is confident that the results of the child's thinking for himself will agree with the opinions which his elders consider desirable. It is assumed that he will reason from principles which have already been instilled into him by authority. But if the thinking for himself takes the form of questioning these principles, whether moral or religious, his parents and teachers, unless they are very exceptional persons, will be extremely displeased, and will certainly discourage him. It is, of course, only singular children whose freedom of thought will go so far. In this sense it might be said that 'Distrust thy father and thy mother' is the first commandment with promise. It should be a part of education to explain to children, as soon as they are old enough to understand, when it is reasonable and when it is not, to accept what they are told on authority." (pp. 250-251.)

We would like to see that hung up in every school, and particularly those that are labelled "advanced."

ARE THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS RELIABLE ?

III.

IT was, of course, inevitable that Mr. F. F. Bruce, M.A., in his "Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?" should refer to Luke. Luke is always appealed to, because he was "a physician by profession"—though it need hardly be said that never a scrap of evidence is brought to prove it. There is a mention of "Luke, the beloved physician" in Colossians—an Epistle, by the way, which is not one of the "genuine" four—and that settles it. On the strength of this bare reference, people like Mr. Bruce want us to infer that Luke was a kind of Lord Horder or Lord Dawson of Penn—a physician of the greatest genius; in fact, if Jesus had not been often referred to as the Greatest Physician that ever lived, I am quite sure that that honour would have been accorded Luke. Yet there is not the slightest trace that he ever cured anybody, or that anybody outside the N.T. reference had ever heard of him. I believe he is also considered to be a great portrait painter because he is said to have painted the Virgin. And I am quite sure that this distinction would be strenuously contended for if only it would help to make the N.T. documents "reliable." When it comes to crass credulity it is impossible to beat a Christian.

Luke's great champion was Sir William Ramsay, a Fundamentalist of the deepest dye. Sir William Ramsay came into prominence when he attempted to show that Luke was an absolutely accurate historian on the question of Quirinius as Governor of Syria. According to Josephus, he became the Governor about the year A.D. 6, and that is the date Luke gives for the birth of Jesus. As Matthew puts the date in Herod's reign, and Herod died in 4 B.C., Jesus must have been born before the year 4 B.C. Such a discrepancy between Luke and Matthew (both writing under Divine Inspiration) makes most theologians get hot and bothered; so here came Sir William Ramsay with what he considered invincible proof that Quirinius had been the Governor twice—the first time between 7 and 10 n.c.

Unfortunately, many other theologians were not quite so convinced, and the question is still hotly discussed. Even Mr. Bruce, ready to believe anything, does not positively agree with Ramsay; for it appears that a gentleman called Saturnius was really Governor of Syria in 8-6 B.C., and Dr. J. W. Jack thinks that the mutilated inscription upon which Ramsay relies actually reads Saturnius and not Quirinius. All you need do then is to pay your money and take your choice.

But if Dr. Jack is right, Luke and Matthew clash miserably and which is right? Nobody knows. In any case, Ramsay declares that "Luke is a historian of the first rank," and "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness." And, warming up in his enthusiasm, he insists that Luke "should be placed along with the very greatest historians." For sheer fudge these statements would be hard to beat.

When Jesus was born, according to Matthew, a new "star" appeared; but according to Luke, there is nothing whatever about the star. Instead, "an angel of the Lord came upon them" and "a multitude of the heavenly host" started singing. There is nothing about the "wise men from the East" either only about some shepherds from a neighbouring field.

According to Matthew also, the parents of Jesus went helter-skelter for Egypt; according to Luke, they stayed in Palestine. No theologian has ever been able to reconcile the two accounts. Nor can they harmonise the statement that, according to Matthew their home was in Bethlehem previous to the birth of Jesus; according to Luke, it was in Nazareth. When we are told that Luke is one of the greatest of all historians, and he thus gives the lie to the express statements of Matthew, what are we to think of the veracity of Matthew?

But we must not omit Luke and the Angels. If Luke is absolutely unsurpassed as a reliable historian, how are we to

consider "the angel Gabriel sent from God" to Mary to tell her some of the biggest rubbish in the whole of the Bible? Are we now to admit that there are angels from God? Could ignorant superstition go much further than the recital of Luke called the "Annunciation" if taken as real history? That the ignorant, primitive Christians were ready to believe all this, I admit; but we are living in the year 1947, and we get an M.A. tell us backed up by "authorities," that Luke is a "reliable" historian. I can only say that even in the "Arabian Nights" it would not be possible to find a greater strain on intelligence than many of the yarns in the Gospel of Luke.

Needless to say that if the various statements in the four Gospels are taken and compared, Luke will be found to disagree with the others in hundreds of places. All the Gospels are at variance with each other, of course, and it is a great pity that Mr. Bruce did not prove to us that this only makes the Gospels all the more reliable. It proves that they did not copy each other, don't you know, and are, therefore, thoroughly trustworthy. This kind of argument always reminds me of the people who say that, after all, a good war is a blessing—it draws us all together so.

The great historian Luke also believes in the Devil—as he ought to if he believes in Angels. Luke's Devil does not follow the same order as Matthew's. In Matthew, the Devil first takes Jesus up to the Temple; in Luke, he first takes him to the mountain. Both cannot be right and Archdeacon Farrar in his "Life of Christ" has to admit the fatal variation as he cannot naturally reconcile the accounts. Nor can he explain why Matthew says Peter was called by Jesus when he was walking by the sea of Galilee, while Luke says it was on the lake in a ship.

There are dozens of similar "variations" in the "biographies" of Jesus, all written under Divine Inspiration, and as I have asked already, how in the face of all this can Luke be a "great" historian, indeed one of the Greatest?

The Gospel of Luke is really an extended version of Marcion and Marcion's was almost always considered heretical. Although it is not easy to prove it, I am convinced that it was Marcion who first brought Paul's Gnostic God Jesus from the clouds and made a man of him—and he was followed by many Gospel writers. John's Gospel is an attempt to keep Jesus somehow in the Gnostic Heaven while discoursing, and delivering enigmatical "teachings" on earth.

That Luke managed his topography quite well can be admitted but this no more proves his work history than the fact that Sinbad the Sailor lived in Baghdad proves the truth of his famous voyages. This emphasis on Luke's topography is one of the trump cards of both Ramsay and Mr. Bruce; but when analysed it means nothing whatever. How can "Luke's intimate acquaintance with Asia Minor and the Greek East" (Ramsay) prove the reality of a Devil, let alone a God like Jesus?

The truth is that if a Christian is ready to believe, there is nothing at all which he won't believe—the more superstition the more primitive and infantile, the better. It's all in a book or rather in *the* Book and that is good enough for him. The Book is all that is necessary for "salvation," and anything against it can go hang. And out-and-out believer like Mr. Bruce never, if he can help it, reads the other side. That is why his work is quite valueless from any point of view—except that of the most hopeless credulity.

H. CUTNER

It is believed in Brittany that certain eggs, which are covered with nothing but a film, are laid by the cocks, and emanate from the Devil, like everything out of the ordinary course of nature. These eggs, it is said, are hatched by snakes and produce monsters. The expression, "race born of cocks' eggs" is therefore an insulting epithet, which expresses the diabolical origin of the persons to whom it is addressed.—FOYER BRERON.

PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION

A PERSON who realises that he has been seriously misled by priestcraft may perceive that emotion was an important factor in his deception; also that reasoning about facts is the only real basis for a sound philosophy of life. Right thinking is of greatest importance.

Most of us were taught that it is a necessity of thought to start with the assumption of a Creator; and Religion adds many other assumptions as it proceeds to build up a philosophy. Science starts with objective reality, building on facts, having no confidence in anything that cannot be verified.

A genuine Science of Mental Phenomena would be of the greatest value to the Atheist or Rationalist; these people know the folly of assuming, especially such things as Gods, Demons and immortal Souls in Heaven or in Hell, etc. In place of the guesswork basis of Religion, they appreciate the factual basis of Science. This is the great difference; also Science submits evidence and invites investigation. Whereas Religion asks for Faith and for trust in its dogmas (which priests have formulated). Belief is the great desideratum, not understanding (C. Cohen).

Psychology claims to be the Science of Mental Phenomena, and should be of greatest assistance to our understanding of our mentality—of ourselves. Unfortunately some who teach psychology subordinate their new ideas and force them to fit in with their preconceived religious assumptions. To harness a new science to a dying delusion destroys its efficiency.

The heads of Churches loudly deplore the growing indifference of the public to religion. It is discredited more than ever by the most advanced and progressive thinkers. No World Council books assistance or guidance from above; their existence is a denial of the ancient use of priests and religion; their activities the denial of any Spirit Government. Primitive priests spoke as the Oracles of Gods; existing primitives speak as dogmatically as if they believed in their own infallibility.

Dr. R. Macdonald Ladell teaches "the basic principles of psychology" in the primitive way—by asserting dogmas. He gives some illustrations of what he means, but illustrations prove nothing: he makes no attempt to prove anything. This is (as always) the way of priests with their religions.

It is quite the opposite way to the teaching of a science; knowledge of principles is not, and cannot be, taught by mere assertions.

He has another bad priestly habit, which is to minimise words or, more often, to emphasise them to the limit of their meaning for his own convenience. Like most psychologists, he insists on using the adjective "unconscious" as a noun—as the name of some thing. This is a way of confusing while pretending an explanation. Religionists who say that man has a soul say little about it except that it is the ego—the self inhabiting the body. This makes man dual. This psychologist makes man triple: body, soul and the "unconscious." He also asserts quite a lot of "knowledge" of this unconscious. He cannot state clearly what it is, but tells us what it is not. He "knows" a great deal about what it holds, or does not hold. He tells us what things it is the seat of, also what it contains—one of these is a super-ego and he actually tells us of what it is compounded. Altogether these components exert a very unwelcome influence, making this "unconscious" a far worse possession than a soul or a guilty conscience.

He tells us there are "processes in the unconscious" which we cannot become aware of, except by noting their effects." These appear to be our quite ordinary mistakes. "The unconscious exerts its purposeful influence on all we do." "It sets our course for us in life." "The unconscious makes us miss our appointments; thrusts illnesses on to us . . ." During a fairly long life I have been remarkably free from illness, and very rarely have I missed appointments; if I have missed, it

was often caused by traffic hold-ups. Apparently my unconscious is not very influential, in these ways.

"It is the seat of primitive urges . . . it holds the memories of early childhood, beside later memories . . . retains the values and fantasies of infancy . . . the habitat of primitive desires, and not a repository of dead memories, is dynamic."

Now what is a "dead memory"? Is it something forgotten, or something faintly remembered? Or is it a misuse of words, which confuse while pretending to explain? "Something of its impulses leak through and shape our conduct." This seems to have a greater power over us than that old Satan whose evil temptations we could resist—this can "shape our conduct." "It includes a super-ego, compounded partly of the child's terrifying fantasies." Our ego is generally understood to be our inmost self, the self that thinks and is the centre of consciousness, but what can this super-ego be? Super means over, above, beyond or in excess. Apparently it is something more than the ego or self. Is this another imagined mystery? "This super-ego may bring upon us illness . . . as a punishment for what it judges to be our misdeeds." This is personification with a vengeance. Here is our super-self bringing a punishment on our self for what it judges to be the misdeeds of its self. A guilty conscience might drive one to actions of despair, but to be possessed by an "unconscious" containing a super-ego is about the most mystifying bewilderment that could be imagined.

After reading such fantastical flights of imagination, one is not at all surprised at the writer telling us: "The life force, when it meets with a check, is driven back; it never stays still."

G. B. Shaw may have invented the "life force" and C. E. M. Joad built up a theory about it, but after 15 years discarded it as imaginative mental gymnastics; but here is one who is familiar with its movements. The remarkable thing about these priest-like talkers is their personal acquaintance with these mysteries. How they obtain this familiarity and definite information is a further mystery which they never disclose. In the most unscientific manner they make all sorts of statements, without the faintest attempt to justify their dogmas.

We are told that our unconscious cherishes a memory or impression of our position before we were born: "Let's get back to that," says the unconscious. He knows this because some people lie (in bed) "in the position of an unborn child in the womb." Wherever it is cool almost every creature huddles up to sleep; we often do and for various reasons, the main reason being that, in common with many other creatures, the joints of our legs and of our backbone can bend one way only. This is the only way we can huddle, it is inevitable. There is not the slightest reason for thinking it is caused by an impression retained from before we had any impressions—before we had any awareness of anything. If we sit in a deck chair to read we take exactly the same position: this is because we are "conscious" that it is a most restful and therefore comfortable position.

He started by saying that man's behaviour is not governed as much by reason as by instinct. He unwittingly gives us an example of his own want of reason when he finishes with the remark: "I prefer to believe that man has both an unconscious and a soul." Is psychology to help people to think? How can they do so if they think they can believe what they "prefer"? Belief is not a matter of choice.

Most people know that they can only believe that which appears to be true and disbelieve that which seems to be false. We believe, with more or less certainty, according to the weight of the evidence for it, or disbelieve by the compulsion of the evidence against it. Can anyone discard that which appears to be true, and believe what he "prefers" because it seems pleasanter, or for any other reason?

"WE ARE FREETHINKERS"

IN the "Sugar Plums" column of this paper for February 9 appeared this paragraph: "A little while ago one man who considers himself a 'Freethinker' warned us that one man who writes occasionally in these columns is not an Atheist; in fact, he was not certain whether he was not a believer in God, etc. We had to plead guilty. But then we never asked a man or woman what their position with regard to religion was. So long as the writing was good, and was likely to be of interest to readers, we are quite content. We are Freethinkers, and if the Archbishop of Canterbury sent us an article of an interesting character he will be welcome. We are afraid there are many people knocking around who have only exchanged one form of intolerance for another."

I have no idea who was the man who was accused of being "not an Atheist." It may have been myself—though I have no positive evidence to that effect. Whoever he may have been, however, the paragraph just quoted is of interest as raising a matter of some importance.

What is a Freethinker? Surely, a person who thinks freely: that is, forms his opinions by candid reason rather than by prejudice. If so, he should allow a similar liberty to other people, even if (as is sure to be the case, folk's minds being constituted so diversely) the opinions they reach may differ even very widely from his own. To set up a censorship, exacting conformity to a standard of orthodoxy, seems as intolerant when done by a person opposed to religion as when done by one of devout beliefs.

For my part, I would not call myself definitely an Atheist, a Theist, a Polytheist, a Pantheist, a Monist, or by any other name distinctive of a final belief as to the nature of ultimate reality. That "ultimate reality" is far too mysterious for me to be sure of its nature. I would call myself either a Freethinker, a Rationalist, or (in a long phrase) simply "a person of independent mind." So far as able, I form opinions honestly on the available evidence, and allow the like liberty to other people, even when their conclusions are extremely dissimilar from those which to me seem probable.

To my mind any theory of ultimate reality, which hitherto I have seen propounded, offers insurmountable difficulties. At first sight there seems a nobility and air of credibility, for example, in the Catholic ("Roman Catholic"—but, of course, other Churches also hold it) conception of God as a simple spiritual Essence, "eternal and infinite in all perfections," who is the Creator of the universe. On examination, however, it seems to involve at least one fundamental self-contradiction. How could a Being, who is "eternal and infinite in all perfections," "create" anything? To create is to bring into existence something which previously did not exist. To do that, however, implies a preceding wish to do so. A wish to do something implies that the Being having such a wish lacks that which is about to be created. To have a lack of anything, however, is to be imperfect. A perfect Being could lack nothing, and therefore could not desire the coming into existence of anything outside Him- (It-) self. Therefore, the desire to create means that the creating Being is imperfect. If to this it be replied that a Being who could not create would lack one element of power, and therefore would be imperfect, there would be alternative rejoinders: (a) that such an argument would mean merely that the very idea of a Being, "infinite and eternal in all perfections," is self-contradictory either way; or (b) that it is no contradiction to say that such a Being could not create; for, as creating means satisfying an unfulfilled wish, such a wish could not exist in such a Being, and therefore its absence is no sign of imperfection. In any case, the Catholic theory of "an infinite, eternally perfect Creator," seems to me logically defective. A Being who is eternal in infinite perfections must include in Him- (It-) self, from all

eternity, all that can exist. That is, "God" and "Nature" must be one and the same, and must have existed from all eternity as a single (and thereby) reality. This, however, is Pantheism.

Can we, however, form any conception of existence which need had a beginning? Everything around us has one. Whether we try to conceive a beginning or no beginning, of the universe, we find ourselves up against a problem beyond our ken. Why not, then, frankly admit that the problem cannot (so far as at present our capabilities extend) be solved? "The ultimate nature of things is to our minds inscrutable."

This conclusion would not lead to any lessening of opposition to definite errors or injustices. If we cannot understand the nature of ultimate reality, we can none the less judge the logical value (or lack of value) of any theories attempted to be imposed on us as solutions of it. If we find them to be defective, and if it is attempted to make us accept them as revealed truths, we must oppose such efforts and refute the arguments adduced in their favour. If, on particular matters of detailed belief, manifest untruths are put before us as calling for our assent, a similar duty of opposition confronts us. If wealthy and ancient institutions exist to impose beliefs which can be shown, by historic or other evidences, to be wrong, we have a duty to oppose such institutions. In short, the inscrutability of ultimate reality does not preclude our contending for truth in matters which are inscrutable. In so doing, however, we should be candid and tolerant, not trying to force other people to see things exactly as we ourselves do: though, of course, trying by fair logic to persuade them.

J. W. POYNTER

A FRENCH PHILOSOPHER

IT seems to be fairly generally assumed that Jean-Paul Sartre, the leader of the school of Existentialists in Paris, is one of the few writers of European stature to emerge within the past few years. But until recent months his work has been available only in his own language; readers whose knowledge of French is fragmentary have been able to read him only with difficulty, and to assess his value as an artist has been well-nigh impossible, except for those who can read French with comparative ease and without access to a dictionary at every sentence.

Now, however, we have "Huis Clos" and "Les Mouches" of his dramatic works and "L'Age de Raison" of his fiction, rendered brilliantly into English by Mr. Stuart Gilbert and Mr. Eric Sutton. The appearance of "Two Plays" and "The Age of Reason" within a few weeks of each other seems to make it advisable to construct at any rate a preliminary analysis of Sartre as an artist and a philosopher.

Of his status as an artist there can be little doubt. "Huis Clos," that frightening picture of a hell which is made out of the fact that evil personalities react on each other, is one of the most taut, alert, and brilliant pieces of stage-craft which has appeared for a very long time. The fact that the Lord Chamberlain forbade its public performance in Great Britain is not in itself a guarantee that it is first-rate, is an indication that the censors of our day are running true to form. As for "Les Mouches," it was Alexandre Astruc, in the French journal "Poesie," who acclaimed it as a successful resuscitation of a tradition of tragedy forgotten on the French stage since the days of Corneille. Certainly its fine reconstruction of the familiar Agamemnon-Orestes-Clytemnestra story is done in a manner which is at once poignant and grand. The fine organic notes which one must expect in a reconstruction of a Greek tragedy are there; but so is the relation of these old tales to the special dilemmas of our day, which is presumably what has given Sartre his great following on the Continent.

Of "L'Age de Raison" it is less easy to write. This is the first volume of a trilogy of novels, and to some extent the critic

is bound to reserve judgment until the three volumes have appeared. But it is clear enough that it is a work of fiction drawn on the largest scale, and one which will take its place with some of the finest products of the French literary mind. It has all the characteristics of a classic in the making—the skilful evocation of a period background (that of the now almost forgotten months between the Munich Pact and the outbreak of war in 1939), the portrayal of a wide variety of characters, the smooth plot which, though involved, nevertheless unwinds itself with sureness and an air of inevitability.

As an imaginative artist, then, Sartre clearly takes his place as one of the finest. Whether he will maintain his leadership is yet to be seen; and the English reader will wait impatiently for further translations. The more formal aspects of his philosophy are not as well known as they should be. The only book on the subject yet to appear in English—Ruggiero's "Existentialism," with an introduction by Rayner Heppenstall—is an attack, written from the standpoint of the old-fashioned idealist, and as such cannot be assumed to give a true picture of the attitude of the Existentialist to the problems of our time.

Yet to analyse the philosophical content of Sartre's published works in English is not difficult. There is one overwhelming motive which his central characters possess. That motive is the desire for freedom. The man who desires freedom as ardently as others desire money, or love, or fame, is the man who deserves to be admired. This is the true lesson of his Orestes, revolting against the demands of Zeus, of Garcin, struggling in "Huis Clos" against the entangling squabbles of Inez and Estelle, and of Mathieu, in "L'Age de Raison," in his attempt to get away from the personal implications of his mistress and his friends. Freedom, according to Sartre, is the only thing that really matters. And, in order to become free, men must somehow manage to see through the shallow pretences of religion and politics. "Human life begins on the far side of despair," says Orestes in "Les Mouches"; that is a remark which will never be understood by the facile optimists of Church or political Party. And the moral is underlined in a particularly subtle passage in "L'Age de Raison" in which Mathieu refuses to join the Communist Party, feeling that to do so would be to give up his freedom to think, to submerge his personality in the vast machine of politics.

All this is not to say—which it might easily be thought to say—that Sartre is a mere escapist, a man intent, in the once fashionable phrase, on retirement to an ivory tower. The mere fact that he took a prominent part in the underground opposition to Nazism should be enough to refute that suggestion. But what it does say is that Sartre has realised the impossibility, for a man of genuine integrity, of handing over his conscience to the keeping of a Church or a Party, whatever infallibility that organisation may claim.

One other point deserves stressing. The Existentialists are avowed Atheists. They declare that "God is dead." Perhaps the finest statement of this point of view is to be found in the striking dialogue between Zeus and Orestes in "Les Mouches," where the man defies the God. "You are the king of gods," he says, "the king of stones, of earth, of water. But you are not the king of man." Whether we agree with that or not, it has a grandeur of expression which its very simplicity increases.

I have read no works of Sartre in French. My knowledge of the French language is not sufficient for me to do so with the necessary ease. But I feel for that reason I am in some respects more qualified to say how much I think Sartre might easily come to mean to my generation. Inevitably something is lost when a work is translated into a foreign tongue; but occasionally something is gained. It is easier for an Englishman not gifted with a foreign guile which he finds difficult to read. And I think it is quite certain that the works of Sartre in their English clothes will rapidly gain for him a new public on this side of the channel.

H. L. S.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY SIXTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr. E. H. Hassall, President of the Society, presided on Sunday, March 2, at the 66th anniversary of the founding of the Leicester Secular Hall.

In tracing the history of the Movement, since then, Mr. Hassall spoke of the great debt of gratitude that we owed to-day to the courage and vigilance of those early pioneers. He said that on the platform from which he was speaking had appeared some of the giants of the great Freethought Movement past and present—Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, J. M. Robertson, J. T. Lloyd, Chapman Cohen, Joseph McCabe. Many of the reforms that these early pioneers fought for, apparently against hopeless odds, have now been established as part of our every-day lives.

Mr. H. Smith, an accomplished musician, delighted the audience with some really fine pieces of music while Messrs. A. Orton and G. Abbott contributed some rousing songs which were much appreciated. Mr. F. A. Hornbrook, representing the Executive from London, was the guest of the evening and contributed an informal speech, congratulating Mr. Hassall and the Leicester Society for having carried on their meetings throughout the war and through an exceptionally bad winter.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, March 18, 7 p.m.: "The Religion of China," Mr. S. L. HSUNG.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Gambler's Throw," Professor A. W. HEATH.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Great Newport Street, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Esperanto," Mr. ROY.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Science and Materialism," Mr. T. SUTCLIFFE.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, 7, St. James Street, Halifax).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Psychology and Religion," Mr. J. CLAYTON (Burnley).

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Education—Loyola or Comenius?" Mr. EDMUND TAYLOR.

Nottingham Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Catholic Religion, the True Faith of the People of England," Mr. J. NORBURY.

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