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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### An Easy Problem

IF we were to paraphrase Kant's "What can I know? What ought I to do? and For what may I hope?" by "What ought I to believe? How far am I responsible for believing it? and What relation do my beliefs bear to my conduct?" we should in so doing sum up by far the larger part of our religious, or anti-religious, discussions. Rightly or wrongly, we do praise some beliefs and censure others; and, as a belief may be the determining factor in conduct, it would seem as though there were some justification for our so doing. If, as Kingdon Clifford declared, belief is the link that unites knowledge to action, what a man believes can be hardly less important than what he does, and it will consequently be of some interest and no little value to attempt some answer to the above-named questions.

So far as the Christian Churches are concerned, they have usually proceeded on the assumption that belief is wholly a matter of conscious choice: and it is as easy for one to believe in A as in B without any corresponding change in either knowledge or character. Christianity, with its constant exhortation to blind belief, its threatened penalties and promised rewards in a future life, is plainly built upon such a conception, and it lies also at the root of all State action in matters of religion. Religious persecution is likewise based upon the assumption that a person's beliefs are under his control in precisely the same sense that his conduct is, and that just as it is possible by threats or bribes to induce the performance of certain actions, so by the same means may be ensured the adoption of particular beliefs. Apart from such a conception of the nature of belief the rational motive for persecution is absent, and the phenomenon becomes unintelligible.

That persecution has always failed to bring about uniformity of belief—although it has more than once succeeded in inducing uniformity of profession—is a historical truism; and it is quite as clear that its tendency has been not only to prevent that free criticism of current beliefs, which alone can secure a progressive purification and strengthening of opinion, but also to destroy all confidence in public honesty and truthfulness. Whenever a man's professed beliefs coincide with his personal interests, their sincerity must always be open to question; and when it is further found that their rejection would expose him to actual persecution, deprivation of office, or boycott in business, the presumption against their being honestly held is all the stronger. How can anyone be certain that another is honest in his profession of belief if it is known that he will be damned in the public esteem, or dismissed the public service, should he profess anything different? It is his interest to pretend to believe, whether he does or not. Said Dr. Parsons, head of Balliol College, to Theodore Hook, when he came

before him for "matriculation": "Are you prepared to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles?" "Oh, certainly," was the cheerful reply; "forty, if you please." And what Hook said from pure facetiousness of temper numbers of others are ready to practise from much lower motives, with the result that public honesty and confidence are destroyed, the whole tone of life lowered, and each gets insensibly into the habit of regarding his neighbour as a bit of a coward, a bit of a liar, a bit of a fool, or perhaps a mingling of the three.

It may appear a trite observation to make, and yet a glance round at the religious world proves it to be far from an unnecessary one, that every man's beliefs are selected for him rather than selected by him. Heredity in the shape of a specialised, physical, or nervous structure, and environment in the shape of climate, class, education, etc., are the factors that determine the beliefs of each. It may be difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine the relative value of each factor, but there can be little doubt that these do decide which of the conflicting mass of beliefs, amidst which we are born, shall receive our support. Not only is each man's belief strictly relative to his organisation as a whole, not only does the adoption of a belief depend upon the possibility of it being assimilated to his general character, but a particular state of health even may determine how he will regard certain teachings in philosophy or religion. Dyspepsia may resolve itself into a powerful advocate of Calvinism, as Universalism may discover a staunch ally in a healthy physique; or on the philosophic side Optimism or Pessimism may receive valuable assistance from the same quarters. People are, to a considerable extent, destined to be sceptical or orthodox, Materialist or Idealist, by their heredity, and each, by a kind of magnetic attraction, will select the view of life that is best fitted to his particular constitution.

All belief is a simple question of probability—a state of mind that falls short of absolute certainty. It is the assent of the mind to a given proposition, and is entirely determined by the quantity and quality of the evidence produced. Produce evidence that my greatest friend is a rogue, and, although I may be on the look-out to detect a flaw in the indictment, may betray an obvious bias in my reasoning on the subject, still my assent is not a matter of choice, but of necessity. It has no more to do with my "will" than the colour of my hair or the state of the weather. Consequently, to make a man morally responsible for the beliefs he may entertain is to saddle him also with responsibility for the physical structure he inherits and the environments that act upon it. As a matter of fact, he no more "chooses" the beliefs he holds than he selects the brain that entertains them.

For my part, I believe it to be a matter of utter impossibility for anyone to "adopt" or "give up" a belief. We may realise that we hold entirely different beliefs concerning religion or politics or science to those that we held years ago, but if we trouble to examine the course of our mental

development during the same period we shall discover innumerable circumstances that have led up to our present position, and that, while we are conscious of the result, we have been unconscious of the process. Mental growth is as continuous as physical growth, and we are no more conscious of the one than we are of the other. We may be troubled with "growing pains" in either case, but all that we can do is to register the changes at different periods, and where possible retrace our steps of our insensible evolution. But it by no means follows that, because our beliefs are determined by causes over which we have as little control as we have over the place of our birth, therefore what one believes is of little or no consequence. All that is meant is that whatever praise or blame may be attached to a belief must refer to its objective, not its subjective, aspect. As beliefs are all equal, since they are little more than registers of one's mental acquirements or disposition. It is only when we come to deal with the effect of beliefs on society at large that they may properly be called bad. A belief that is real must have some influence on conduct, and must be sharply discriminated from a mere formal assent to a given proposition. What I have said only means that by recognising the factors that induce belief we cease indulging in useless and stupid recriminations against such beliefs as we hold are inaccurate in form or dangerous in tendency, and, by correcting, when possible, the factor of heredity by a sound education and healthy environment, secure the existence of beliefs that shall be socially more beneficial.

But even if we were all perfectly rational in our views concerning the nature of belief, it is still easy to overestimate its influence on conduct. It is a common observation that good men often entertain beliefs of a demoralising character, and bad men hold beliefs of an entirely opposite description. Not every believer who loves to dwell on the torments of the damned is callous to suffering, and not every unbeliever who denounces in indignant language the brutality of certain aspects of the Christian faith is as quick to redress injustice as one would wish. The gulf between professed belief and actual practice is a well-worn theme with both moralist and satirist, but it is one that, when examined, points to a social truth of the most far-reaching character. For all evidence seems to show that conduct is determined far more by the inherited character of the individual than by the knowledge acquired during his or her lifetime. Here and there one may find an individual guiding his life by the knowledge he has acquired, but in the vast majority of cases it is the impressions already registered, the habits already formed—in a word, the established character of the individual—that will ultimately determine conduct. In but very few cases does the perception of a new truth lead to any immediate and marked alteration in action. It is only when it has had time to sink in, and become assimilated with, the established character that we can safely reckon on its manifestation in future behaviour. And when one reflects how infinitesimal is the knowledge that can be acquired by any single individual as against the dead-weight of custom and habit that he inherits as a member of a social organism and "heir of the ages," one need feel little surprised that the influence of acquired knowledge on conduct is not more marked than it is.

Nor should this view of the matter at all weaken our estimate of the value of intellectual pursuits; rather the reverse. For we may say that, even if a man's inherited character represents the preponderating force in the field

of conduct, it represents the past rather than the present, while knowledge represents the means by which the past may be modified so as to harmonise with present-day requirements. Slow as knowledge may be in modifying character, it is the only force on which any real dependence can be placed, and our main business should be to determine what *are* the forces that govern human development, not to waste our energies in useless regrets over the method of their operation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE ADVENT OF THE PRINTER'S ART

THE discovery of America by Columbus; the voyages of Vasco da Gama and the Cabots; the rounding of the Cape by Bartholomew Diaz in 1486, with several other successful explorations, made known to Europe a previously unsuspected extent of land and sea. The enlargement of men's outlook thus resulting, together with intercourse with alien peoples previously unknown to medieval Europe, heralded the enlightenment of the succeeding century.

The widened prospect arising from geographical discovery, was soon disseminated through the appearance of the printing press. Indeed, Professor W. T. Waugh in his "History of Europe, 1378-1494" (Methuen, 1943, 22s. 6d.) avers that though "It may be an exaggeration to say that it [printing] is the most momentous invention in the history of the world, it is certainly the most momentous since that of writing, and of more fundamental consequence than any of the countless inventions of the last two centuries, however much they may have transformed the conditions of life."

Our historian opines that the printing art was independently discovered in Europe and not adopted and improved from Chinese models. Still, it is noteworthy that at least as early as the eleventh century of our era, printing from movable types was practised in China and there is no positive proof that the art was not introduced to the West by travellers in the Far East. Also, its appearance in Europe soon followed European exploration in Oriental domains.

It is indeed surprising that printing was not invented in earlier centuries. As Dr. Waugh observes: "Dies, stamps and seals had been employed for thousands of years. Wood-blocks were used in the Far East in the eighth century A.D. and became common there later. But when in the fourteenth century they appear in Europe, they, too, seem to have been the outcome of European inventiveness."

Be this as it may, however, this crude method was in use on a minor scale for a short time only, as it had several disadvantages. For it wasted more time and caused more trouble to produce a page of print in this manner than in copying writing by hand.

But with the invention of separate types for each letter, types that could be repeatedly used, printing gradually superseded handwriting and printed books replaced the earlier manuscript rolls and volumes. It is uncertain where printing by means of movable types was first conducted. Bitter controversies and recriminations have raged over priority, and conflicting claims for this or that printer have been advanced and contested with equal assurance. So as Waugh concludes: "In the present state of knowledge, an open minded agnosticism seems the most prudent attitude."

All things considered, real printing appears to have been first practised in Holland, but judging from early examples of printed books of allegedly Low Country origin, their crudity was too manifest to commend them to book-lovers. In any case, when a Netherlands ruler, Philip the Good, wanted a printed work the order was sent to Cologne. Perhaps, printing in its infancy

first appeared in Holland, but later attained its most finished forms in Germany.

Apparently, John Gutenberg was the first printer whose productions proved artistic and who also created a printing business. Yet, his activities are shrouded in obscurity. As Waugh notes: "Nothing printed during his lifetime bears his name as printer or gives any information about him in that capacity . . . But the first piece of typography that can be attributed to him is an indulgence which was issued in 1454. There are also ascribed to Gutenberg's press a number of Bibles, grammars, and an encyclopedia of theology called the 'Catholicon.' Particularly famous among his productions are two magnificent Bibles . . . Which was printed first is disputed, but each is a very fine example of typographical art. Once books of this kind could be produced, the triumph of the new invention was assured."

But Gutenberg did not stand alone. Long before his death, his pre-eminence had been dimmed by the magnificent productions of Fust and Schoeffer. Fust or Faust was a goldsmith who for a time was Gutenberg's partner. Then each accused the other of breach of contract, with resulting litigation, when a legal decision gave Fust possession of Gutenberg's printing appliances. Fust then entered into partnership with Schoeffer who had been, it is said, Gutenberg's principal assistant. Their co-operation continued until Fust's death in 1466, and then Schoeffer carried on the business alone. He was a splendid craftsman whose productions have been ranked by recent experts as practically perfect examples of typography. It appears that he made "a number of technical improvements in his art; he was, for instance, the first to print in colours, to use lead spacing between the lines, to cast Greek types." His leading printing house was in Mainz with branches in other cities and he published others' productions in addition to his own.

Although the new art encountered opposition from those engaged in the preparation and sale of manuscripts, it made rapid advances. Bamberg, Strassburg and Augsburg all became celebrated book centres. But, by the close of the 15th century the leading publishing city was Nürnberg. There Anthony Koberger and his assistants printed an imposing array of pious works, the Nuremberg Chronicle, and various superfine editions of the classics. Another early printing centre was Cologne whose earliest typographer, Ulrich Zell, imparted the art to William Caxton.

The priority of Germany in early printing was so pronounced that, in adjacent countries, typography was known as the German art. But the art soon spread abroad and an Italian press operated by Germans was established in 1464. Yet, by the end of the century it is said that "seventy-three Italian towns had printing presses, and there were thirty-eight printers in Rome alone. But the great centre of the art was Venice, long famous for its manufacture of paper and as a market for manuscripts. It has been computed that by the year 1500 there were a hundred separate printing works in Venice. The quality as well as the quantity of their output was indeed amazing." Still, the achievements of all preceding printers in Venice were transcended by Aldus Manutius whose classical texts merited and obtained widespread admiration.

When Fust first attempted to sell printed Bibles in Paris, those who were concerned with earlier forms of book production drove him away. But the king, Louis XI, and Heynlin, the prior of the Paris Sorbonne, with its librarian, Fichet, were favourable to printing, and presses were set up within the College walls. Presses soon appeared in the capital itself, although Lyons later became the French centre of the publishing trade.

Even in priest-ridden Spain, progress was made, while a marked development of the new art occurred in the Netherlands. Caxton served his apprenticeship at Bruges, where he produced the earliest books printed in English. He then settled in Westminster where in 1476 he operated his famous press.

Travelling printers carrying portable presses wandered from place to place to obtain orders from patrons of letters and printed and published on the spot. These itinerant typographers were numerous in France, Spain and Germany until the greater conveniences of the town presses lessened the demand for their services.

In the early printed volumes, different types were utilised. Ultimately, the Black Letter and other types were superseded by the Roman type now used in English, French, Spanish and other nations' publications. The eye-straining Gothic lettering largely disappeared, although a conservative spirit has retained it in Germany to this day.

While scholars were dependent on manuscripts, recopied by hand alone, there was constant danger of corruption of the text in transmission, either by accident or design. But now with the easy standardisation and multiplication of printed books, an uncorrupted text was made secure.

In the schools and colleges listening and disputing began to give place to reading from books of an approved pattern. It is noteworthy that a very large proportion of early printed works were devoted to theological subjects. Yet, the printing press probably provided the longest nail ever driven into the coffin of theology, and although Dr. Waugh considers that in the religious contentions of the time, the influence of the printer's press was almost neutral, he is constrained to admit that it is nevertheless "true that the quick dissemination and easy exchange of ideas facilitate the introduction of novel opinions and render it harder for conservative forces to check the flow of subversive thought. Thus the greatest medieval gift to human civilisation was destined to hasten the downfall of medieval culture."

T. F. PALMER.

#### RUSSIA AND RELIGION

Christians are a little puzzled how to approach the Russian attitude towards Christianity. The first outcry was that the Russians were murdering all Christians. But there were so many alive that that tale did not work well. From the outset the Russians made it quite plain, first that those preachers who had been agents of the old tyranny were to be treated as criminals—much as the Allies have executed those Nazis who were responsible for the slaughter and torture of men, women and children. In Russia the only priests allowed to operate are genuine Christians. And the schools were not to be turned into advocates of religion. Churches have always been opened where there was a demand.

Now that the position is settled, the Christian leaders in England are in rather a difficulty. They first complain that Russia is trying to exterminate religion, and the only justification for this, apparently, is that the State is in favour of Atheism. That may be true, but it is only what is being done by religion, whenever religion is strong enough to exert itself. It is not very long ago when, if a man was a non-Christian, he was barred from holding a number of public services. Allow for what Russia was, the vile character of the domination of religion, in Russia, and we shall find little difference in what was done in England, and is in operation in Russia. We need only say that we are taking for granted much that the clergy are saying, and all of it may not be true.

**AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY. A Survey of Positions. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.**

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## ACID DROPS

The Archbishop of York seems to be upset in his mind because the miners, or a large section of them, decline to accept the offer for him to come and talk matters over differences that have occurred. We think that the men have acted sensibly in keeping the Archbishop at a distance. What kind of help can the clergy give the miners, even though they were really concerned with the matters occurring? Looking back at the difficulties that have occurred between the miners and the mine-owners we do not find the clergy very much concerned for the welfare of the "lower" section, and the men are, naturally, suspicious when the leading clergy are anxious to interfere. The miners will be wise to keep the clergy at a distance.

Religion has never been able to get far away from "sex," as witness its ever-recurring association with Christianity, exemplified in the thousands of sermons on the subject parsons spout every year. A week or so ago a Conference was held in London on "Christian Sex Education," and naturally there was a crowded Christian audience. To prove how much sex dominated the Christian Bible—and outlook—the Bishop of London pointed out how God's Holy Word dealt with Onanism, Bestiality, Fornication and Adultery, all "sex" subjects, and on these, "our Lord accepted, in the main, the Old Testament as a basis." All the same, "our Lord" could not accept Divorce as put by Moses, and it "could not be allowed to Christians." It must be a very sad blow for such a fundamentalist having to admit the fact that the law of the land accepts divorce, in spite of Jesus and Dr. Wand.

The "Universe" has lately dragged up an old sheet known as "The Holy Shroud" as an authentic relic of "our Lord." But even Catholics can sometimes demur, and some of them appear to have protested against the Holy Shroud's authenticity. Faced with this, the "Universe" now suggests that it is not "a point of faith," which means a good Catholic need not believe in the Holy Shroud; and it sends readers to the article by Fr. Thurston in the Catholic Encyclopedia which is against its being genuine. If Catholics could only show the same pluck in questioning other "relics" and "miracles," what a shake-up the Church would receive!

We are all apt to overlook how little removed from the savage—mentally—are large masses of the population. And there is nothing like religion for giving us a healthy reminder of the fact. For not alone is all religion a survival of primitive ways of looking at the world, but when a really religious man begins to apply his religion to life, the savage is rampant. Thus, we observe a writer in the "Leeds Mercury" saying that the lesson to be learned from the present state of the world is that man has lost "his God-given right to conduct his own government." All we should like to know is, if man cannot govern himself, who is to govern him? We fancy the writer's reply would be: "The clergy—or, in other words, the Church." It is a puzzle to us why editors open their columns to the rubbish that some of these rabid religionists send in. We presume it is a matter of circulation.

Those who study the matter closely are at no loss to account for this emphasis on social duty by present-day religionists. It represents the final stage of a lengthy process. Preachers are to-day forced to profess an interest in social topics, because whole masses of the population have lost interest in religious ones. Some may take up such topics willingly because of their strong human sympathies. Others do so because they are late enough to observe that unless they modify their creed in accordance with the spirit of the age they and their religion will soon be left far in the rear. It is the last stand of a form of belief that once dominated life from the cradle to the grave. With many these tactics are obviously successful. But the number of those who see through the policy grows steadily. If religion means social service, the sooner it is called by its right name the better. Society gains nothing by squandering its energies in

upholding, even indirectly, a system of beliefs which owe their origin to the ignorance of primitive savagery, and which were brought to maturity during the darkest and most deplorable period of European history.

Most of the papers have printed the case of two Mother Superiors who were found trying to evade the Customs. Well, there is nothing new in that. It is a common offence, and there is no real reason why members of the Catholic Church should not indulge in it. Men and women of all stages of life do not mind evading taxes if they can. A Christian group is as bad, or as good, as any other group. The Mother Superiors are just women as good or as bad as other women, but with special faults that come from their twisted minds. Other things equal, religion creates bad things in the name of their creed. Move them away, and we have faults of human nature clear—good and bad.

What we have said, reminds us of a curious experience we had some years ago. One of our members, as near as honesty can be, and good-natured to all, was devoted to our movement. He was an ardent Freethinker, and fell under the fantastical crime of "Blasphemy." That was created by a priest and cultured by rogues. It is an impossible crime for an Atheist, and a foolish one for a godite. We did what we could to secure a release, but the judge was a Christian and the jury mainly such. While he was in a London prison we also did what we could to cheer him by the allowed visits; and during one of these visits we noted that among the rules was, that in addition to the weekly visits of clergymen and the like, if some other "criminal" was without a clergyman he could be obtained. The consideration was supreme.

But our "criminal" had no regular visitor, such as a secular "chaplain," so we talked to the attendant. He did not see how it could be remedied. He could not interfere, but suggested that we might apply higher up. We did so, and were informed that the matter had never been considered, and therefore they could not alter the present method. We tried again, and finally reached the Home Secretary, with whom rested any alterations. But he refused, and his refusal was that there was not a sufficient number of Freethinkers in prison to warrant any of the existing regulations being altered. Of course we could have gone on, but we were left with the official declaration that so far as prisons were concerned, it was a case of "Prisons full with godites." One thing may be said. The Atheist ex-prisoner was well looked after while he lived, which was not very long after his release. We saw that he had all that was needed. But we are still of the opinion that Christians should not monopolise the prisons. They should be open to all. Even some of the priests should not be denied entrance.

By the way, it is only fair that we should say that the tender susceptibilities of the "Daily Mirror" were shocked that people should laugh over the two Mother Superiors. The editor says its a "moral tragedy." We are not quite clear whether this means sorrow for the people who were found out or for the people trying to out-do our officials, or surprised that two representatives of the Church had not been better trained.

Good news from the Pope of Rome. He has informed the world "that an enduring peace must rest upon Christian principles." That sounds very well, or would sound well if we only knew what exactly is meant by "Christian Principles." Hitler was ready to teach that at any time—so long as he was allowed to give his own interpretation of what was meant by Christian principles. Ever since Christianity began that has been the cry. There have been long stretched-out wars as black and as brutal as could be conceived, and the Christian flag waved over the heads of both sides. Even in the last war, we had a deeply religiously-impressed man in Hitler, and he almost always claimed that he acted on Christian principles.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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*Mr. DUPRE.*—Thanks for cuttings.

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*When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.*

*THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.*

*Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.*

## SUGAR PLUMS

From Mr. S. Gray of West Wickham:—

I have often wondered whether you have birthdays or whether yours was a special creation. Now I know the facts, I now tender you my very best wishes—by "you," I mean both of you.

It may interest you to know that I first heard you in the mid-90s on Mile End Waste; since when I have been amongst your auditors many, many times—always in London. I have attended, since '95, all the debates you have had with progressing Christians.

We think that there are still some readers who can equal Mr. Gray's record.

We received a lengthy dissertation on the theme "What would the world be like without Christianity?" Well, it is ever so easy to say what would be the value of something that never happened. But it is easy to note what did arrive, and we may well ask what has the world been like with Christianity? We must remember that if the Christian creed was poor in its essence, there were apart from religion, the development of the Egyptian, the Roman, the Greek and other civilisations—to go no further—great promised a development of life and learning. That culture weakened step by step with the development of Christianity. Of that there is not the slightest doubt. Let anyone take note of the way religion has had to give way to science since the Renaissance and how much the world has progressed in knowledge and culture in spite of religion.

The following come from our old favourite, Oliver Wendell Holmes—there must be some people alive who still read him:—  
We frequently see persons in insane hospitals sent there in consequence of what are called religious mental disturbances. I confess that I think better of them than of many who hold the same notions and keep their wits, and appear to enjoy life very well, outside of the asylums. Any decent person ought to go mad if he really holds such opinions. Anything that is brutal, that makes life hopeless for the most of mankind, anything that assumes the necessity of extermination, no matter what you call it, no matter by what name you call it, no matter whether a fakir or a monk, or a deacon believe it, if received, ought to produce insanity in every well regulated mind. I am very much ashamed of some people for retaining their reason when they know perfectly well if they were not the most stupid or the most selfish of human beings they would become non-compos at once."

The Doxology was sung when a vote against Sunday Cinemas was recorded at a Shrewsbury Town's meeting recently. A poll was demanded and the result just to hand shows 6,220 in favour of Sunday opening and 1,986 against; a majority in favour, 4,234. We understand there will be no thanksgiving services in the local churches. One of the hardest workers for the Sunday opening was Robert Cooper, aged 73 in years but young in spirit, he is a member of the N.S.S. and proud of the part he played.

Following a very successful open-air season in which Messrs. G. Thompson, W. Parry, Sen., and W. C. Parry, Jun., played an active part, the Merseyside Branch N.S.S. announce that the Picton Hall, William Brown Street, Liverpool, has been engaged for Sunday, October 5, when the Branch Chairman, Mr. Geoffrey Thompson, will lecture on, "Why the Gods must Go." Doors open at 6-30 commence at 7 p.m. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each. From October 12 fortnightly meetings will be held in the Stork Hotel, Queen's Square, Liverpool. There is plenty of room in the Branch for helpers and those willing should get in touch with the Branch Secretary, Miss A. M. Parry, 476, Mill Street, Liverpool, 8.

The Kingston-on-Thames Branch, N.S.S., sends a report of one of its most successful open-air seasons. Christian opponents, clerical and lay, have been very helpful, audiences have been large and interested, and Messrs. F. A. Ridley, J. W. Barker, L. Ebury and E. T. Bryant have been skilful in attack and defence. The Branch Secretary, Mr. J. W. Barker, is a very valuable asset in our local propaganda there.

The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. opens its indoor season on October 5, in the McLellan Galleries, with a platform consisting of Mrs. M. Whitefield and Messrs. A. Reilly (Edinburgh), J. McCorrister (Helensburgh) and R. Hamilton. Questions and answers will be a feature of the evening, with some stories in humour and dialogue by R. Hamilton. Admission is free, and proceedings begin at 7 p.m. A syllabus is being arranged and the Branch Secretary, Mrs. M. Whitefield, 351, Castlemilk Road, Kings Park, Glasgow, S.4, will be pleased to give any further information required.

The Rationalist Press Association has arranged a series of six illustrated lectures on "Some Aspects of Evolution" by Maurice Burton, D.Sc., and W. E. Swinton, Ph.D., F.R.S.E., of the British Museum, to take place in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1, on Wednesdays, beginning October 8, at 7 p.m. Tickets for six lectures, 6s., may be obtained from the R.P.A., Johnsons Court, E.C.4.

The Conway Discussion Circle reopens its winter syllabus with a "Brains Trust" on Tuesday, October 7, in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. The "Brains" will include Mrs. Blanco White, Mr. J. Fortes, Mr. S. L. Hsung, and a representative of the Christian Evidence Society. Miss I. M. James requests that questions—on postcards—be sent as soon as possible to Johnsons Court, E.C.4.

## THE ARAB EMPIRE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO OUR MODERN CIVILISATION

### V

THE medieval Christians forbade washing as being an attention of which the "vile body" was unworthy, the monks and nuns boasting of their bodily filthiness, which was considered an essential attribute of sanctity. It is recorded of one saint (whose image is still worshipped by millions of Catholics) that in all her life she never washed any part of her body all the sixty years of her holy life. One of the first acts of the Catholic ruler, Philip II, husband of our English Queen Mary, on attaining the reinstated throne of Spain, was to order every one of the many hundreds of public baths to be destroyed, and forbid the "heathen practice" of washing even to the Mahomedans, to whom it is an integral part of their religion.

Abd-er-Rahman III, the last great Sultan of Cordova, described as "the most enlightened and successful sovereign that ever ruled any country," built in honour of his mistress an additional suburb to Cordova which took forty years to complete, 10,000 workmen being employed. It is recorded that there were 15,000 doors of polished brass, and the interior walls of the mosques were inlaid with mosaic of mother-of-pearl, gold and silver. The Palace in this suburb was served by no less than 23,300 attendants. In fact the description reminds one vividly of the House of God which Solomon built at Jerusalem in accordance with instructions from Jehovah.

One important industry introduced to Spain was that of silk weaving, there being 130,000 weavers in Cordova alone.

Toledo and Damascus taught the whole world how to make the finest tempered sword blades. We owe even our watchsprings to the Saracens!

About 1150, Averroes, the greatest, most admired and last of the Arabian philosophers in the West, was flourishing at Cordova. Master of jurisprudence, theology, medicine, mathematics and philosophy, he might be taken as the model upon which the heavily handicapped scientists of Europe endeavoured to build up their knowledge. Many of his manuscript treatises still exist, together with German and Latin translations; the work, however, for which he is best known to scholars, is his commentary on Aristotle.

Fifty years earlier, the star of the scientist Omar Khayyam had been shining with a similar brilliance at Khorassan, in the Eastern part of the Empire. The only work of his now known to the modern public, however, is Edward Fitzgerald's inspired poetic rendering of this great thinker's philosophical epigrams.

In one Sultan's library at Cordova there were 600,000 manuscript books, the collected knowledge, wisdom and history of the then known world. Most of these were later destroyed by the Berbers of N.W. Africa who never seem to have acquired their Arab and Jew brothers' respect for and love of learning and culture, and indeed were little if any better than the contemporary Christians. (Read Lane-Poole, "Moors in Spain.")

The history of Andalusia, just like that of the Saracen's African and Eastern Empires, affords one almost uninterrupted record of insurrections and internal wars, besides the ever-present external enemies. Powerful princes and generals everlastingly struggling for still more power, and rival religious parties unceasingly plotting for the same thing. It took a very strong, very wise and very courageous hand to keep all these conflicting factions and nationalities in tolerable order, and such a hand was not, of course, always in power. Arabs, Moors, Christians, Jews, Slavs and Spaniards never lost an opportunity of venting their jealousies upon one another the instant the strong hand was absent or temporarily relaxed. After a while the Kalifs of Cordova, just like the Kalifs at Baghdad (as in parts of present-day America) came to be the mere puppets of some powerful faction or other, and the country in general suffered in consequence.

More than once the Moslems of Andalusia had to appeal to the Berbers across the Straits to help them repel the attacks of the Christians who still occupied the hilly country in the North of Spain. By 1100, Spain had become merely a province of the North African Berber Empire. These new and uncultured fanatics, obsessed by their religion, inaugurated a period of persecution of Jews and Christians, and very soon the chaos which their armies had temporarily reduced to some sort of order broke out again. The Christian provinces of the North, Leon and Castile, poor, rude and uncultured boors, but when it came to fanaticism as good men as the Berbers, took advantage of the general unrest to suspend their own civil wars and organise combined attacks on the Moslems, in which they met with considerable successes.

Wonderful deeds of prowess were performed by the Cid (Sayid) Ruy Diez, who made himself King of Valencia in 1094, after

allying himself indifferently with Christian or Moslem, which ever happened to be likely to help him to power.

By 1260, only the province of Granada remained to the Moors.

Two hundred years later the Moslem King of Granada was paying tribute to the Christian King of Spain, while still carrying on the civilisation and culture of the now almost forgotten Cordova.

The Alhambra was completed in the fourteenth century.

At the end of the fifteenth century the important seaport of Malaga was taken by the troops of Ferdinand and Isabella (the pious, who confessed to having had two baths: one at birth, the other on her wedding day!), the survivors, 15,000 men, women and children, being made slaves by their Christian conquerors. Granada fell soon after, and the 800 years of Moor sovereignty in the West was ended. The victory was celebrated by the burning by the Christians of countless Arabic books in which had been collected for 700 years the sciences and general culture of "these benighted heathen." The Moors remaining in Spain were now forced to renounce their god and accept the "god of brotherly love and goodwill" or forfeit everything they possessed and leave the country. Three million Moslems did this rather than acknowledge the false god of the Christians.

Barbarian Catholicism had killed the golden goose of culture and the bright sun of Spain had begun its setting.

"Then followed that abomination of desolation, the rule of the Holy Inquisition, and the blackness of the intellectual darkness in which Spain has been plunged ever since" (Lane-Poole). The once fertile irrigated lands relapsed into deserts. Spanish medicine became a joke. Scientific knowledge was replaced by prayer. The discoveries of Newton and Harvey—made possible by Moorish groundwork—were condemned as being incompatible with the Holy Scriptures!

By the eighteenth century Madrid did not possess a single public library, so overpowering was the Catholic dread of any sort of scientific knowledge. Even to-day, in what we flatter ourselves is an era of enlightenment, Catholic reading of scientific books is very rigorously censored, under threat of "mortal sin."

However, even when the blossom of Moslem culture had fallen its seeds had been carried far and wide to germinate painfully and slowly here and there through the following centuries in spite of every imaginable effort being made to suppress it by the Christian Churches. And now, at last, Science is coming into its own, and we may hope that before long the scientific outlook, no longer hampered by religious obstruction, may come to be cultivated in our schools just as it was in Cordova and Baghdad a thousand years ago.

M. C. BROTHERTON, Comdr., R.N.

## PATHOLOGICAL PIETY

[The following excerpts from the "Life of the Blessed Henry Suso" (1300-1365), translated by T. F. Knox, 1865, published 1913, with an introduction by Dean Inge, illustrates one of the methods by which a consciousness of religion has been kept alive in certain cases, and accepted as proofs of piety by the people.]

Page 17.—He (Suso) thrust the style into the flesh above his heart, drawing it backwards and forwards, up and down, until he had inscribed the name of Jesus on his heart. The blood flowed plentifully out of his flesh from the sharp stabs, but this was so ravishing a sight to him from the ardour of his love that he cared little for the pain . . . The letters were about the breadth of a smooth stalk of corn, and the length of a joint of the little finger . . . At every beat of his heart the Name moved with it.

Page 28.—For two years (after a vision had told him he was too fond of fruit) he ate no more fruit. Next year the fruit crop failed, so that the convent was without fruit. The servitor (Suso) having now after many combats gained the mastery over himself, and wishing to be no longer singular at table about fruit, besought Almighty God to supply the whole convent with it. When it was morning, an unknown person arrived with a large quantity of new pennies for the convent, and desired that fresh apples might be bought up everywhere with them. This was done.<sup>1</sup>

Page 45.—For thirty years he never broke silence at table except once when he was returning from a chapter with many other brothers, and they ate on board ship (on Lake Constance?).

Page 46.—Chapter XVII.—To bring his body into subjection to his spirit . . . he secretly caused an undergarment to be made for him, and in the undergarment he had strips of leather, into which 150 brass nails, pointed and filed sharp, were driven, and the points of the nails were always turned towards his flesh. He had this garment made very tight, and so arranged as to go round him and fasten in front, and it reached up to his navel. Now in summer, when it was hot, and he was very tired and ill from his journeyings, he would sometimes, as he lay thus in bonds, and tormented also by noxious insects, cry aloud and give way to fretfulness. "Alas, gentle God, what a dying is this! When a man is killed by murderers, it is soon over, but I lie dying here under the cruel insects, and cannot die" . . . He bound a part of his girdle round his waist, and made out of it two leather loops, into which he put his hands, and then locked his arms into them with two padlocks and placed the keys on a plank beside his bed, where they remained until he rose for matins and unlocked himself. His arms were thus stretched upwards, and fastened one on each side of his throat, and he made the fastenings so secure that even if his cell had been on fire about him he could not have helped himself. This practice he continued until his hands and arms had become almost tremulous from the strain, and when he devised something else (leather gloves covered with spikes, to tear him if he scratched himself in sleep).

C. HARPUR.

<sup>1</sup> Suso ate no apples while he could eat them without hurting anyone, but as soon as they were scarce, he and his convent monopolised all the apples in the district! O kindly and benevolent Religion.—C. H.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### A PROTEST

—Mr. DuCann must not be allowed to get away with his most apoplectic vituperations against British fare in 1947 (the Freethinker, September 7). I am shocked that he should lower the standards of rationalism to the fantastic extent of suggesting that talk of a world food shortage is political camouflage for a situation that is peculiar to Britain. Presumably he regards the available analyses of our current economic crisis as so much poppycock? Maybe he dismisses Sir John Boyd Orr's estimate that the world's food supply would have to be almost doubled to enable everyone to be as well fed as the British, as either wrong or irrelevant? And it goes without saying that he considers a nutritional contrast between Britain and Luxembourg to be more illuminating than one between Britain and France. Is he aware that France, agriculturalised to a degree we can never hope to attain, is nevertheless worse off than Britain?

Serious refutation of the economics of our nations would indeed be welcome, but to imply that shortages are due to governmental incompetence or knavery or ignorance of Luxembourgianism is merely trifling with the patience of your readers. A pity, too, for Mr. DuCann's wrapping paper, the title of the "Continental Sunday," was excellent and timely. Yours, etc.,

N. T. GRIDGEMANN.

## OBITUARY

Although not an active worker for the Rationalist Movement, but one of those who would always defend her own views and thoughts relative to Rationalism, Sarah Ann Lyddon (widow) of 29, Broad Walk, Knowle, Bristol 4, died at the age of 81 years.

She had been an invalid these past five years due to the "air raids" on this City and also due to the loss of her only daughter in 1943. Dr. Datta paid great tribute to her wonderful philosophy and wisdom and her thoughts and actions for her fellow citizens.

Dr. Datta said that although this beautiful lady has left us, her thoughts and wisdom still remained in her only son, Edwin Lyddon, who has devoted the whole of his time in nursing and attending to her while an invalid.

The remains were cremated at Arnos Vale Crematorium on August 14, 1947.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead). Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY (Highbury Corner); 7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD. Thursday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Between Two Ages," Mr. J. HUTTON HYND (Leader of St. Louis Ethical Society).

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Accrington Market.—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Crawshawbooth.—Friday, September 26, 7-15 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. A. REILLY.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Messrs. KAY, TAYLOR and McCALL.

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Bigg Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Oswaldtwistle.—Saturday, September 27, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers' Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. A. SAMMS, G. L. GREAVES.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Man Power: Past, Present and Future," Mr. E. BRINDLEY.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "These Multilateral Schools," Councillor J. BACKHOUSE (Bradford).

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (7, St. James Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Rooms, Royal Arcade, Pilgrim Street).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Special Meeting. All members and friends invited.

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## A WORLD FIT FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE IN

### Plan for Individuals—not Governments

PERMANENT peace can never rest upon the basis of agreement between Governments. Furthermore, in any international security system which rests primarily upon the continual collaboration of proud and powerful Powers, justice will prevail only on those occasions when it coincides with expediency. Wars have often resulted from the fact that men are prone to consider injustice too high a price to pay for peace.

The administration of justice frequently involves a choice between right and right. Many of the expedients to which statesmen are now being driven in their search for world security face us, however, with a choice between wrong and wrong. Of this nature is the question of boundary revision in Europe. In a region where boundaries between politically independent States cannot be drawn anywhere without causing injustice and misery to millions of human beings, even the best frontier is no better than a grey veil over a black outlook.

Similarly, to attempt to improve the United Nations Charter might seem like building a palace upon sands which had scarcely borne the weight of a tent. The world is confronted with a dilemma: whether to create a world-wide international organisation that cannot possibly be a government, or to create an international government that cannot at the outset be world-wide. The purpose of this article is to suggest that we do both. Attempts by the protagonists of either to discredit the other may lead to the rejection of each. In the post-war world, divided whether we like it or not into at least three major and many lesser political blocs, dominated by governments which derive their powers from, and owe their allegiance to, separate communities, we shall need a table round which the inter-play of power politics can proceed without bloodshed, and across which the guns can be pointed without the triggers being pulled. The alternative to that table is the battlefield.

But any hope that the world can be peacefully and justly governed by a cartel of sovereign governments is as vain as to expect the Government of Britain to preserve the peace of the Realm, if that "government" derived from an assembly of nominees of the County Councils, whose "laws" could not pass into effect until ratified by the 52 separate Councils, and if such "laws" even then did not act directly upon individual citizens but only on and through the County authorities. International law can never mean what it says until it operates directly upon individuals. Police action cannot be taken against a whole nation. The perverted principle of legislation upon States, as the only subjects of international law, has invariably failed. Throughout history, attempts to coerce dissentient powers have split the comity of nations into two—usually equal—camps, and led to wars whose outcomes seldom bore much relation to the merits of the case, and which have inevitably punished the innocent with the guilty.

The weakness of the "United" Nations lies not so much in minor imperfections, for these would exist in any scheme propounded by fallible human minds. The fundamental principle on which it is based is false: it is not possible to govern governments, even by governments. Individual men and women are the only proper objects of government, and they are the only subjects from which an international authority can properly derive its powers. An authority which ostensibly derives its powers from governments finds in practice—as do all leagues—that in an emergency it is left with only duties and blame for failure to perform those duties, whilst the power indispensable for their performance remains in other hands! It follows therefore that the world community needs an elected parliament, to make binding personal law in purely international matters,

whilst leaving the various national legislatures full power in their separate national spheres. Only thus can we ensure at the same time the safety and the independence of nations.

Most idealists would agree with the realists that such an ideal can probably not be realised, in our generation, on a global scale, but we owe it to posterity to start the world in that direction. We must create forthwith a working model of the future international community, a "regional arrangement" which might prove to be the dynamic without which UNO will inevitably fail.

Such a working model could be created, for example, by the peoples of the British Commonwealth of Nations and the countries of Western Europe, who in matters of safety and prosperity are so interdependent, and whose democratic mode of life provides the basis of mutual trust so necessary for such a step. In such a Union, each national community would have a minority share in the defence and foreign policy of the whole. The system should be open to all other like-minded nations to join as and when they are able and willing to accept the constitutional conditions binding the founder members.

From such an acorn will spring the oak that will in future ages shelter the earth.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

### A DYING GOD

Tread ye lightly—whisper low;  
Fall upon your knees and bow  
For God lies on his death-bed now.

Softly, sadly in dismay  
All good Christians watch and pray—  
While God grows weaker ev'ry day.

Mother Church with wringing hands  
From the B.B.C. demands  
An S.O.S. for monkey-glands!

Days of National Prayer are urged;  
Doleful, dismal psalms are dirged—  
For Man is still in Sin submerged.

Hence the reason for God's ills;  
Windy wrath his belly fills.  
Let's give him constipation pills!

But alas, there is no hope;  
No results from our soft-soap—  
No healing from the bishops' dope.

None can save him—he must die  
As other gods have long passed by—  
And REASON is the reason why.

Priests have failed with all their lies—  
All that Ignorance implies.  
When Reason lives—God gasps and dies!

W. H. WOOD.

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