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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Practical Atheism

FIRST let it be known that the title "Practical Atheism" is not of my making. Indeed, I am not so much concerned with being practicable—which must be an outcome determined by circumstances—as with getting the truth of a statement or a position. But we can commence with the statement that an Atheist is one who does not believe in a God. In fact, I should not know a god if I ran into one, and that is the case with all. I have not the slightest notion of what a god looks like, and I fancy an opponent is in the same position. "God" is a name, he is not a thing. More, I believe that is true of all gods. They are unknowable. They often begin in a dream and end in a nightmare.

I find that endorsed in many ways. For example: I turn over the pages of a reliable dictionary to find out what a God is like and find a number of different descriptions, and the most certain one is that "God is one of a class of powerful spirits." That sounds all right, but it leaves one where he was. Hunting for a God is interesting, because nothing seems to come out of it. Where gods are concerned, the less you know about gods the more certain about them their champions become.

Personally, I should be more willing to believe that gods are born in the darkness of Man, for the only time we can understand a picture of God is where he appears as a man. And that gives rise to the question: "Did man make God, or did God make man?" My bet is on the first item. It is in museums that they come as gods and then sink to almost nothing. Finally, modern science is in agreement that there was a time when in the history of man gods had not begun. One very great authority on the beginnings and ancestry of mankind has suggested that gods came into existence when men had sufficient power of thought to recognise good and bad, and to wonder what kind of power dominated the changeableness of human life. It was further suggested that at all times there were some who believed in a god, but that a dumb kind of Atheism also existed.

If one were not familiar with the vagaries of religious reasoning, one would be surprised at any condition, social or individual, being taken as the consequence of either the presence or the absence of religious belief. For if experience goes for anything, it proves conclusively that religious belief may co-exist with every conceivable condition of vice or virtue, of health or disease. The religious belief of a fool may be as fervent as that of a philosopher. A criminal may believe as sincerely as a thoroughly virtuous person. The sweater will repeat his confessions of faith with as much earnestness as the sweater's victim. People have gone to the stake in the name of the same Deity that those who sent them there believed in. Neither poverty nor

wealth, neither vice nor virtue, neither cruelty nor kindness creates religious conviction. Its existence is consonant with any and every condition both of the individual and of society. This is one of the plainest lessons of history and experience, and the ignoring of it by religious people is just one more piece of evidence of how ineffective religion is for purposes of mental and moral discipline.

It is not merely the absence of a belief in God that pious people have in mind when the phrase "practical Atheism" is used. No purpose would be served if it only meant that people did not believe in God, but were all right in their domestic and social relations. The way to refer to people of this kind is to speak of them as being Christians without knowing it. To give point to the expression, it must be applied to people whose conduct is plainly reprehensible, or whose general condition is deplorable. The useful fact is not that these people do not believe in God, but that they are bad citizens. They may, as they often do, believe in God, and are not Atheists at all; but this circumstance is screened by the blessed word "practical." If they are not Atheists in theory, well, they at least act as though there were no God of whom they stand in dread; and to those who cannot conceive morality as resulting from any other force than that of a policeman, earthly or heavenly, the argument is conclusive enough. They are carrying out in practice what all Atheists would do if they married their conduct to their theory. The Theist who is a bad man is so because he does not allow his belief to direct his practice. The Atheist who is good is so because he, also, does not square his conduct with his theory. It is the good old game of heads I win, tails you lose. An old game, and yet one that is continuously played with success wherever unscrupulousness encounters stupidity.

Why on earth should religionists place the responsibility for the world's evil on Atheism—practical or theoretical? When it suits their game, we are assured that Atheism makes no advance; on the contrary it is suffering from a constant decrease. Atheists are few in number, they say, and exert but little influence. Why then, give to "practical Atheism" the responsibility for the world's undesirable condition? Surely if the charge be solidly based, Atheism is one of the most powerful of the world's forces. A theory cannot at the same time be without influence and yet be responsible for the existence of one of the largest of social facts. The Christian ought to make up his mind which course of argument he will adopt—and stick to it. The Atheist is quite prepared to meet him in either direction. But how is one to attack a man who takes up, at the same time, both positions? If the Atheist does not meet him, it is because he declines to be met. He gathers his stupidity around him like a coat of armour; and against stupidity even the gods fight in vain.

The world as we know it is really not an Atheist world. Atheism has never had the direction of affairs. The present

generation of man springs from a religious stock, with the religious factor becoming more and more pronounced as we retrace its history. People have based their theories of morals and of social institutions on religion. They have looked to religion in times of health and disease, of joy and sorrow. It is the priest, not the Atheist teacher, who has the world in leading strings. Priests and parsons have elaborated extensive and costly machinery for dealing with evils of various kinds. Still, the evils remain. And it will clearly not do to place the responsibility for their continuance upon a theory which has never been consciously advocated by but a fraction of the people, which was never, until recent times, allowed to consciously air itself at all, and which, even now, can only be advocated when its advocates are prepared to face penalties for their speech. The religionist is really on the horns of a dilemma. He must either admit that religion is responsible for the evils he laments or that it is powerless to remove them. And his case is most exquisitely damned on either conclusion.

Besides, neither the lower-class nor the upper-class dregs of our population are really Atheistic. Our neuropaths, and our socially degraded classes, actually contain a larger proportion of religionists than does the normal population of the country. Why, we are always being told by preachers how little Freethought there is among the lower classes; how eagerly they listen to the preacher, and how gladly they receive his message. The working man who threw up his hat and called for "three cheers for Jesus," has become magnified in stock figures for popular preaching. Experience proves that the lower the district the more religious the people and the less likelihood there is of the Freethought speaker getting—not merely a fair hearing, but any hearing at all. Examples of sensualism, ease of moral degradation, or a submerged social class, cannot, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be attributed to Atheism. They are far more the products of generations of unreason and misdirection of energies. And when a sensualist is found, he will, in nine cases out of ten, spend no small portion of his time in defaming Atheism, if he is bitten with the itch of either speaking or writing.

The only honest and intelligible meaning of practical Atheism is living without belief in God. And why should this be supposed to result in evil living, in ignorance, and in a general disregard for one's duties and responsibilities? These things are not now seriously charged against Atheists. On the contrary, the Christian is sometimes told that many Atheists set him an example in right living, although the value of the compliment is discounted by the assurance that the avowed Atheist is what he is because of his Christian environment. So that while a Christian environment cannot keep a believer straight, it is duly credited with having that influence on the unbeliever. The truer aspect of the case was much more clearly and fairly put by a very great Judge, and also a fine thinker:—

"If human life is in the course of being fully described by science, I do not see what materials there are for any religion, or indeed, what would be the use of one, or why it is wanted. We can get on very well without one; for, though the view of life which science is opening to us gives us nothing to worship, it gives us an infinite number of things to enjoy. . . . The world seems a very good world, if it would only last. It is full of pleasant people and curious things, and I think

most men find no great difficulty in turning their eyes away from its transient character. Love, friendship, ambition, science, literature, art, politics, and a thousand other matters will go equally well, as far as I can see, whether there is or is not a God or a future state."

Practical Atheism is, in truth, only one of the many cries designedly or thoughtlessly used in the interests of religion. Some use it knowing its falsity; others repeat it because it is a catch-phrase which they know will please their readers. In either case it is only one more illustration of the way in which religion saps men's sense of intellectual veracity, and so influences character for the worse. Misrepresentation, slander, and falsehood are well-tried weapons in the Christian armoury, and fervent believers will never dispense with their use until intellectual enlightenment has robbed them of their efficiency. Ignorance is the mother of devotion, and it has a not very distant relationship to all forms of personal and social vice. Christianity, theoretical and practical, has not yet succeeded in making the world what it might have been, and improvement has generally resulted from the control of affairs being taken out of its hands. Atheism, theoretical and practical, could not fail more decisively in the future than religion has in the past. And it may well be that "practical Atheism," with its consequent faith in the power of human knowledge and co-operation, may go far towards solving problems that have withstood the attacks of religion. The assistance of the gods has not protected man from failure. It is only common sense to now try what can be done without their aid.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A STUDY OF HUMAN CREDULITY

BERGEN EVANS, in his *Natural History of Nonsense*, (Michael Joseph, 1947, 12s. 6d.), surveys and exposes the outstanding superstitions to which mankind most persistently cling. Many of our most cherished beliefs concerning the lower animals are challenged, and our author successfully replaces romance with realism. Yet, some of his conclusions seem too sweeping when he regards as settled, certain biological problems that are still unsolved.

Bergen Evans is an uncompromising Freethinker, who makes no concessions to the current religious creed. His opening chapter on Adam's navel is equally instructive and amusing, while he recalls that as late as 1675 the learned Jesuit, Kircherus, included griffins and mermaids among Noah's menagerie in the Ark. He also notes that in the earliest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the flood story is accepted, but "by the eleventh edition (1911) the story is described as a myth; though it is curious to observe that in the fourteenth (1943 revision) the expression of scepticism is more guarded. Perhaps the news that the Ark has recently been discovered 'embedded and preserved by ice' on the top of Mount Ararat had led them to doubt their own doubts, though it is more likely that they were merely considering the susceptibilities of a wider circle of subscribers. The Mountain of Learning has made more than one tentative step towards the Mahomet of ignorance in our time."

Evans emphasises the truth that modern science is of very recent origin. Darwin might have been seen by millions of still living men. More recently still, Pavlov, Pasteur, Lister and Freud were conducting their inquiries. Moreover, two centuries since, demonology, especially in the form of witchcraft, was

almost universally credited. Executions of those accused of this imaginary crime were common in New England in the 18th century, if the belief was almost extinct in Britain. But during the decade 1926-36, fifteen cases were reported in the U.S.A., distributed among New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Massachusetts."

Despite our vaunted progress, the old wives' tales eagerly entertained by all classes, are many and varied. Evans examines the evidences advanced in favour of these fables and, in the great majority of cases, finds them completely inconclusive. Among others, the queer stories of beast children are critically considered. Tales of infants suckled and adopted by animals figure in the list only to be dismissed as fabulous, while long-credited accounts of child marriage in India at a very immature age, are heavily discounted by our iconoclastic investigator.

Both in Europe and America the absurdest fancies concerning conception, childbirth, menstruation and kindred phenomena seem to defy all efforts to remove them, for they form part of ancestral and social tradition and, as we all know, what is generally regarded as gospel, must be true.

That animals were specially created for man's betterment and benefit was for centuries taught and believed throughout Christendom. St. Augustine declared that wild creatures were designed to punish, to test, to exercise or instruct mankind. Evans observes that: "The extent to which such ratiocinations were carried is rather startling to the modern mind, which has found inscrutability to be the most prominent of the Divine attributes. Pope's hearty assurance, for example, that man does not need a bear's fur to keep him warm because God has given him intelligence and skill enough to shoot the bear and kill it, fails to convey the comfort in the twentieth century that it possibly did in the eighteenth. We have an uneasy suspicion that fur-bearing animals grow their skins primarily for their own convenience."

Justification of God's ways to man is also illustrated by the pious reflections of Captain Scoresby, the whaler. He was astounded by the many millions of medusae scattered over the northern seas. These multitudes of jellyfish seemed so much protoplasmic waste. But the devout Captain soon unveiled the mystery, for it appeared that the medusae provided food for the shoals of herring that nourished the seals, so toothsome to the polar bears who were thus prevented from wandering south and trespassing on man's food supplies. Moreover, notes the satirical Evans, "the medusae feed the whales which supply us with whale oil (wherewith we may read of God's word by night as well as day) and whalebone wherewith are made corsets to prolong our illusions as to the divinity of the human race."

The assertion that the civilised races are declining both in strength and stature, Evans proves utterly erroneous, for research work shows that wherever healthy conditions prevail with an adequate supply of nourishing food, an increase in height and virility usually results.

Apart from cantharides, our author doubts whether any genuine aphrodisiac is known to exist. "Alcohol, it is true, often has the effect of one; but it operates not so much by increasing thoughts of love, as by lessening thoughts of consequences." Oysters, prunes, onions and tobacco have all been favoured as sexual excitants, while the Elizabethans provided prunes for free meals in their houses of ill-fame.

Alcohol functions both as a stimulant and as a sedative, and we gather that two distinguished physicians, Drs. Haggard and Jellinek, of the Yale University School of Medicine, after an exhaustive study have come to the conclusion that "the ascription of stomach ulcers, arterio-sclerosis, kidney diseases, cancer, and especially cirrhosis of the liver, to alcoholism as the due penalties of wickedness is unjustifiable." This liver disease is common among heavy drinkers, but it also occurs among abstainers. Again, these medical authorities found less hardening of the arteries and less cancer among chronic alcoholics than among the general population of the same age.

Perhaps there are, as Rabelais said, "more old toppers than old doctors."

Then there is the exasperating problem of the common cold, which seems insoluble. "The experts, however," observes Evans, "say that colds are caused by 'a filterable virus' plus the action of variable factors, including chilling. Which being interpreted means that colds are caused by whatever it is that causes colds." In any case, in the course of life, the undersigned has tried scores of infallible cures that have had no remedial effect whatever.

In his chapter entitled "Never Mind," Evans ridicules the popular fallacy which conceives the mind as an entity distinct from the body. Man is also supposed to be the only mammal possessing reasoning powers, all others being guided by instinct. In fact, in popular estimation, mind and soul are equivalent existences. Yet, the unwarranted assumption that man's mental powers are immensely superior to those of other animals has been completely overthrown by scientific research. Loeser, Yerkes and other anthropologists have demonstrated that the intelligence of the higher mammals is akin to our own. "They can combine parts of several past experiences in order to solve an immediate problem. And of what else can reason consist?"

Whether human nature changes fundamentally or not, human beings react to their surroundings very differently in one age to what they do in another. Amusements that gratified our great-grandfathers would shock humane sentiment to-day. As Evans reminds us, torturing sensitive animals for amusement was almost universal in Christendom a century ago, if Moslems and other non-Christians condemned it. A handbill dated 1702 announces the diverting entertainment to take place at Hockley in the Hole in England, where a bull "with fireworks all over him, and two or three cats tied to his tail and dogs after them," was exhibited. Other sports and pastimes, equally degrading, were extremely popular.

Evans queries the common belief that exceptionally gifted children die young. Some certainly depart early, but the available evidence apparently proves that most precocious children justify their promise of future distinction. For example: "John Stuart Mill began to learn Greek when he was three. Shelley and Pope wrote excellent poetry in their early teens. Clerk Maxwell contributed papers to the Royal Society before he was twenty, and Einstein was only eighteen when he first proposed the theory of relativity." It is true that Chatterton committed suicide as a boy, and Keats died from consumption, while Mozart and Schubert were early victims of fever. Still, the great majority of infant prodigies enjoy fair health and its accompaniment, long life.

Evans deeply deplores the injustices which the Negroes suffer in the U.S. He, himself, is an American, and judging from his references to the New World Jews, it is to be feared that anti-semitism is gaining influence in the U.S., as elsewhere. Evans concedes that the commercial Jew, like his Gentile competitor, is determined to "get on" and is not always innocent of business smartness. But, as early observers such as Dickens and Mrs. Trollope declared, and as our author caustically reminds his countrymen: "The very traits, by the way, for which the Jew and other recent immigrants to the U.S.A. are hated—their unscrupulousness in driving a bargain, their equivocation, the fact that 'you've got to watch them,' their boastfulness, penuriousness, aggressiveness, energy, and willingness to endure privation and even insult for the sake of a dollar—all these are pioneer American virtues. There is nothing in the whole sordid catalogue that was not charged against us, before the Greeks and Jews ever came, by European visitors and freely admitted by our grinning forebears."

As we have seen, Bergen Evans is no conventional writer and, whether we agree with or dissent from some of his conclusions, his volume richly merits, and should receive a wide welcome from the intelligent reading public.

T. F. PALMER.

GOD'S FIRST MISTAKE

IN the beginning God created heaven and earth, but it was not much of a job. The earth was without form and void, terribly dark and lonely. But being a real God, Jehovah set to work and soon the sun was shining, flowers blooming, fruit trees in full production, fish in the waters and birds in the air, then in a rich, godly baritone he declared it was good. He then made man and woman, telling them to be fruitful and multiply, and that's where he made the first mistake. So long as flowers, fruit, fishes, birds and animals were the sole occupants, the earth, air and waters retained their original beauty and setting. But as soon as man and woman arrived and in obedience to the divine command, "be fruitful and multiply," things began to take on a different shape. It was an easy and pleasant command for man to obey, but the result on God's earth was disastrous. Man was soon scrambling all over the earth, destroying, damaging, and spoiling wherever he went and getting completely out of God's control. The moment man saw God's fish in the sea and rivers he began dragging them out and eating them. Jehovah was just helpless while man went on picking his flowers and chewing his fruit, trapping the animals and shooting the birds, filling his pockets with nuts and conkers. Next, man began to rummage beneath the soil, hauling out coal in tons by the million, pumping out oceans of oil, prospecting and probing all over the world for Jehovah's hidden stores, serounging for precious stones and metals, boring, tunnelling and excavating, and dumping the rubbish all over countryside. Finally polluting the air with smoke, poisoning the rivers with factory discharges, and burning up all the combustible materials he can lay hands on. The Bible God can do nothing to stop it, the smashing and grabbing goes on ceaselessly, man has taken possession and control and Jehovah has become redundant in his own garden.

Fortunately, all men are not alike and nature lovers have always existed in all lands. Thanks to such, efforts have been made from time to time to preserve beauty spots and living things from those ravages, but with little success. In 1872 America made a serious move and by an Act of Congress established the Yellowstone National Park, the first of its kind in the world, and thus began a movement to set aside selected sites for the preservation of animal and botanical life, as well as affording pleasure to nature lovers. Yellowstone National Park is famous for the beauty of its sixty-two miles long and fifty-four miles wide area. The Belgian Congo also possesses an extensive National Park, and South Africa has its Kruger National Park. In Australia a similar reserve exists at Belair, as also does one in Switzerland. Other reserves or sanctuaries exist where botanical and animal life is protected from man's destructive habits and attentions.

In Britain we are not so fortunate—our restricted area and fruitful inhabitants need too much of our acreage for food production and housing to allow for extensive National Parks. But lovers of nature are a world-wide fraternity, and Britain has its full share of men and women who can read beauty and poetry into the wild blooms of forest, field, and fen; who can feel kinship with the winged choristers in their songs of hope; and to whom the swell and roll of the ocean waves has a far deeper message than mere wetness. Emerson said: "Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us, or we find it not." How thoroughly true. Nature is beautiful only to those in tune with nature. Happy is the one who can stand speechless in admiration to a wonderful landscape, far from the sight or sound of any other human, and hold silent discourse with the scene, feel the warmth of companionship with nature and interpret the gestures of welcome stirred by the sun-warmed play of a summer breeze on leaf and flower. The feeling is well expressed by Wordsworth in his "Daffodils."

It is to Britain's nature lovers, many of them donors of parks or other open spaces, that we owe the preservation of an increasing number of beauty spots where man, beast, birds, and flowers can rest and speak in the common language of nature, and we might even have had our own extensive National Parks if Jehovah had not made his first mistake in commanding man to be fruitful and multiply.

R. H. ROSETTL.

CHOICE FOR THE CHILD

I.

GLANCING at the calendar, I said: "Tomorrow's the first of April. Then the new Education Act comes into force."

I did not expect my innocuous remark to have the effect it had. The teacher seated opposite me widened his eyes, thrust out his jaw and retorted sardonically: "Very appropriate date."

"Who're the fools?"

"Don't know for sure; Parliament, parents, teachers or children. Perhaps all of 'em."

"You don't join in the chorus of praise for the new Education Act?"

"I do not." This emphatically.

"Why not?"

"Because it isn't an Education Act."

"Then what is it?"

"A mongrel crossbred between Fascism and religion, which not unaturally go hand in hand when you have a State Church that socially is the preserve of the governing class, its officers drawn from the same section of society as the Minister of Education and his associates who wish to keep the mass of people disciplined and subdued in the name of law and order."

"That takes some believing."

"I know it does. There's no proof of the sort which could be produced as evidence in a law court. One has to be teaching to know it, to feel it, to experience it."

"As you think you have."

"As I have. Notice the people who're most enthusiastic for the new Act. Apart from priests, parsons, ministers, pious lady and others who have special reasons for their enthusiasm, those who welcome the measure are not parents or children. They're politicians, bureaucrats, officers, employers, all kinds of people who've interest in seeing the populace regimented, or have some thing to gain by it."

"Like teachers?"

"Yes. We're bribed by increases of salaries and more jobs for the totality of us, as there'll be for inspectors, organisers, supervisors and all manner of officials. The Ministry of Education's the most bureaucratic Department in Whitehall."

"Possibly."

"Yet it's not free. Other Ministries use it as their instrument, apart from the Churches, which seem to have a big say in educational administration."

"That's obvious. How about the other Departments of State?"

"We teachers can tell from our work. Once we were teachers. Now we've ceased to be so. We're becoming a mixture of Government narks and junior curates."

"Explicate the details."

"At the way we're going we do less and less class teaching. The Ministry of Health's concerned about the physical development of children. So we distribute milk, manage meals, issue cards for glasses, boots and clothing, arrange for dental, orthopedic, eyesight and clinic treatment, organise open-air schools, camps, country holidays, visits and travel, evening institutes and youth movements, orchestras, choirs, drama, take gymnastics, dancing and games, as well as school gardens and workshop."

All those things make inroads on teaching, beside needing elaborate records to be kept. Nearly every one has its appropriate register and docket to be filled in detail."

"Yes. I hear complaints from teachers of the increasing time spent on clerical duties."

II.

This one laughed briefly, settled himself more easily in his chair, and continued:—

"Much of it is wasted. That isn't all. During the war there were salvage collections and savings, arranging for older children to go on war work, and care of evacuees. Humanitarians want kindness to animals taught in schools, teetotal people abstinence from alcohol, with competitive essays, also called for on occasions like Anglo-American Friendship Week. Hospital and Poppy Day Funds get at schools for collections, not to mention other movements and funds which would like to, sometimes do, also at the request of the police the inculcation of Safety First."

"Not all Government action."

"No, but most of it is. All have to have Ministry or municipal permission. Increasingly schools are implements for propagandising State control of everything. For example, the use of radio, because the B.B.C. is a completely upper-class and Government controlled affair. Let me give you another instance. In the "Suggestions for Teachers," an official handbook issued by the Ministry of Education, is an appendix. It sets forth at length details of the League of Nations. At one time leaflets and pamphlets were sent, too. We were expected to boost the League of Nations, it being mainly a British idea, to make the world more secure for the Imperial race. Really it was not a League of Nations at all, but an alliance of some of the winning governments in the 1914-18 War, led by Britain to impose their will upon the rest. No wonder it failed. Maybe it deserved to do so."

"Hm. Perhaps."

"Of course, Empire Day has to be celebrated in schools. History and other textbooks are weighted, biased, tilted to glorify Britain in the past and present. Fascism has little to teach us—except that we're more subtle—in the way of inclining and affecting people's minds in one direction; the one making them subordinate to the State and its ruling class and officialdom."

"There is danger of that."

"Danger! One has only to look at the awful fate of Germany, the highest educated nation in the world—"

"Eh?"

"What I said. There's no dispute about that. It's a matter of fact, not of controversy. For two centuries, since Frederick the Great, Germany has been the fullest educated country on the earth. Most of our educational practices are copied from Germany."

"Results there are ghastly enough."

"A warning to us to avoid their causes. But I fear greatly. Our aim's far too much toward turning out masses of youngsters all alike, their thinking and much else done for them."

"The British tendency to dissent and argument may save us from that."

"We can only hope so, but conformity to pattern's increasingly an ideal; the standardised type taken as the norm, achievement of the same level of intellect the purpose of schools."

III.

As the man went silent, I asked him: "Do you see that in the schools?"

"In many ways. Introduction of compulsory piety is another step toward it."

"Compulsory piety?"

"Yes. I won't say compulsory religion, though that was the intention. A century ago there had to be a big struggle to get

universities freed from the church. Now the struggle will have to be for freeing all other educational institutions from the churches. Liberals and Nonconformists boast how their ancestors fought and died resisting compulsory religion. Yet those same people welcome it forced upon children in the guise of education."

"You must remember how fast Nonconformity's dying out. The remnants have to clutch at any straw to save themselves. Lip service to God's better in their view than complete extinction."

"Which is their ultimate end. In this country it's doubtful if ten per cent. of the populace attend places of worship. Yet religious observances are to be forced upon all their children. I was angry at first, but now I find it funny. The official phrase: "an act of public worship", is richly comic as official phrases often are."

"What're you going to do about it?"

"Nothing. The temporary victory of the churches will fade away, especially as fewer and fewer people attend worship. Meanwhile, it's a waste of time and memory and energy in schools. Worst feature's the encouragement of hypocrisy and smugness, those defects which smear religious folk to the degree of humbug."

"You know that's the reputation we have on the Continent."

"Apparently deserved."

"Referring to pupils and parents: in spite of the small attendance at places of worship there's a lingering piety in the English; a vague godfearingness."

"I know it. I may be in a minority, though the majority are indifferent, in wanting religious teaching and practices swept clean out of schools."

"That's revolutionary."

"Magnificently so. An intellectual group want comparative religion taught in schools, with no stress on any one of them being the only right one. That is above primary school children's heads, besides giving religion a world importance it no longer deserves. Alternatively, the new Act might've put denominational schools on the rates and taxes, but Council schools should've been made non-religious, so parents and children would have choice of any brand of Christianity or naught of it. I know which most of them would choose."

"The latter, I fancy."

"Judging by developments since the 1902 Act they would."

"What's your final aim; an entirely secular system of education?"

"Yes. And more."

"What more?"

"Freedom for the child. The drafters of this last Education Act overlooked that, as the advocates of it forgot that first essential. It's the most ignored principle of education we have; freedom for the child."

A. R. WILLIAMS.

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ACID DROPS

The Roman Catholic papers never forget the value of advertising. In the war the papers gave reports of men taken prisoner irrespective of religion. The Catholic papers only seemed to hear Catholic. Catholicism is always before the public. The latest sample is that Miss Clare Lamore was the winner of the 100 metres swimming championship. That was very good, but why note the Catholic swimmers alone? We suppose it is suggested that some of the Saints helped Miss Lamore to win a prize; and that may add more to the Church.

It may be that the man and the woman who together fight the Churches and their ideas, stand as what we call "Sports"; and in the nature of it "Sports" are not everyday identicals. Biologically this couple may be "Sports" and sports do not come every day and everywhere. Sports would cease to be "Sports" if they were like others.

It is reported that in Sweden out of a population 66,500,000 there are only 5,600 Roman Catholics with just 25 priests. Well, that seems plenty to make mischief. But the people of Sweden are level-headed and are not likely to be overcome by a large onslaught from a system which managed to ruin two civilisations and nearly added a third.

It is interesting to note that Church attendants are getting more and more dissatisfied with the attitude of their clerical leaders towards the divorce question. There is no question that there are very many couples who would—particularly where there are children—be better with a divorce than without. The orders on the lines of religion are, as usual, both stupid and unjust. It could also be noted that those who have fought so rigidly against divorce have done so with no regard for the well-being of the married couple or the children attached. "Thus saith the Lord," has been responsible for more evil than any other four words that one might pick out.

The certainty of the Archbishop of Canterbury as to what lines are open for the future of the human race is very clear. One was through Christianity. The other possibility is that "there will be a revolutionary civilisation which makes the past both good and bad, or civilisation itself may perish." What a pity that these leading Christians will not put a little serious thinking into their heads. Dr. Fisher should remember that there were civilisations before Christianity existed, and that new revelations fell as many others have fallen. But there was a Christian religion that, so far as it could, almost wiped civilisation out of existence. He must know that it was the impetuous evil of Christianity that finally broke down the pagan culture, and it was the revival of the ancient civilisation that brought a new and a better life than Christianity had induced.

The Rev. D. White, of Glasgow, warns his followers that there is a great deal of Paganism in the Churches. To that we very humbly ask: "What religion is there in our country that has not a great deal of Paganism in it?" The Bible is drenched with it. The New Testament is built on it. Mr. Churchill has also told his followers that their duty was to protect our religion, which is, again, filled with Paganism—under other names. Bishop Barnes has been getting into trouble because he wants to get Paganism out of the Christian Churches. Well, about an arm's length from where we sit we lift our eyes to find three volumes entitled "Folk-lore in the Old Testament" filled with "Paganism."

Who was it who first referred to the Roman Catholics as "The great lying Church"? We are not certain, but fancy that it was the great writer, Heine, but the sentence is strong enough to stand. Here is an illustration of Catholic "truth." It comes from the "Catholic Herald" for October 24. The purpose of the article "is to substitute spiritual rules and conduct for the secular and temporal activities which fall in the natural order on mankind." It is not the Church's business to rule countries or to

undertake the social and economic ordering of human rights. The Church teaches "spiritual and moral truths." Now that seems quite clear. The Church aims at substituting spiritual rules and conduct, but does not wish to control the secular life of man. It is a curious position.

Against this kindly, fatherly, non-interfering—what we may call "natural forces" as against "material matters" (that phrase is not ours)—we note the following. At our side there lies the "Sunday Times" for October 26, just two days after the issue of the "Catholic Herald." We take a step to Scotland—Glasgow. There we find, at the time we are writing, that municipal activities are in full swing. There are a fair number of Catholics in Glasgow. (Please note the word "fair" has no moral indication.) Here is the way in which the representatives of non-interference act on the eve of an election, where Catholics have a vote:—

"Members of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland have received copies of a circular letter giving them advice as to the use of their votes in the coming municipal elections.

The three-page document, which is headed 'Joint Circular Letter from the Scottish Hierarchy to the Faithful in Scotland,' carries an instruction that it shall be read 'at all public Masses on any one Sunday before the municipal elections in 1947.'

After a preamble which disusses the problems of Catholics living under authority and in co-operation with their fellow-men, it says: 'On the Continent of Europe the issue is becoming clearer with every day that passes. A few years, at most, will decide whether the Christian tradition which has made Europe is to survive, or atheistic materialism is, for a time at least, to triumph. . . . At a time when State direction is increasingly affecting our daily activities, it is of vital importance that the men and women who exercise authority—in local as well as in national administration—should be thoroughly imbued with the Christian outlook on life.'

The letter goes on to say, 'With regard to the forthcoming elections, therefore, we wish to emphasise the following points:—

1. Everyone who has the right to vote must use it.
2. Your vote should be cast after carefully weighing up the qualifications of the various candidates, and with prayer for the Divine guidance.
3. No Catholic can in consequence vote for the representative of a party which denies the fundamental truths of Christian philosophy.'

The letter is signed by the Archbishops of St. Andrew's, Edinburgh and of Glasgow, the Bishops of Galloway, Argyll and the Isles, and Aberdeen, and the Coadjutor Bishop of Dunkeld.'

We may well leave these matters where they are. We need only say that more than ever Roman Catholicism is a living threat to the development of civilised communities. We should never forget the lesson that W. Kingdon Clifford gave us, that Christianity ruined two civilisations and came near crushing a third.

Bishop Heywood says that those who reject miracles are "strangely behind the time." In support of that he quotes the first Huxley as saying that the only reason "Agnostics" rejected miracles is because of lack of evidence. We cannot recall the statement, still we will accept, with the comment that the statement is a foolish one, and that is probably why Bishop Heywood selected the passage quoted. Huxley was one of England's great men, but in England it is quite common for first-class minds in science, or other branches of learning, to show an almost criminal readiness to bow before religious beliefs. For example, Huxley's creating of the word "Agnostic" as a substitute for the hated word "Atheist" only served to help religion, for which he could have no love. "Agnostic" is not nearly so fashionable as it was, and one element in bringing that about is due to those who have made "Atheism" fairly common. Even Christians are beginning to respect it. Truth may come slowly, but it does come.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

D. Williams, for "The Freethinker," 10s.

Rev. F. H. E. Harfit: Received, but too late for this issue. Next week.

J. Duncan.—Thanks for sending your back numbers of the "Freethinker." In these days of paper scarcity back numbers are useful for re-circulation.

H. Whitefield.—Thanks for your high appreciation of our article ("A Call to Advance"). We have received letters from others on the same topic.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, and not to the Editor.

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.

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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

Most people have read the alleged translation of "Omar Khayyam"—we say "alleged" because there has been much discussion as to whether it was no more than a mere presentation of Eastern opinion. There was in the East a well developed literature and science when Christianity had not emerged from the "Dark Ages," it is quite probable that Fitzgerald pictured the wisdom of the East as against much of the Christian philosophy. In fact, as all real students know, it was the influence of the Mohammedan literature and science that so largely helped the awakening of Europe. From the tenth century to the thirteenth it may safely be said that it was from the East that real culture came to the West. So, when we find a religious writer damning with faint praise the work of Fitzgerald, we concluded that the book is a good one. We have ordered a copy. We feel our money will not be thrown away.

A "Naval Chaplain," name not given, says through the "Church Times," that in his experience the majority of sailors just love the religious services. It is surprising that very few people can speak the truth when they praise religion. That sailors love a sing-song everyone knows, the solitariness of the sea accounts for that. But that sailors love a religious service is just a lie. There is no other word to use except to say that the writer in the "Church Times" knows it is a lie. The sailors are ordered to service and that settles it. As we have had several exchanges of words with the Government on this matter, we know what we are talking about. We are glad to say that the "Freethinker" is not unknown on "board ship." Less than half the crews want the religious service.

Mr. F. A. Hornibrook has been busy lecturing in the provinces. On Sunday, October 26, he spoke to a large audience at The Technical College, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, on "The Atomic Menace." To-day he is due to speak at the Newcastle Branch of the N.S.S. on "The Colour Bar." This lecture is to be held at the Socialist Hall at 7 p.m.

A STORM IN A TEACUP

DR. BARNES, the Bishop of Birmingham, has recently written a book entitled "The Rise of Christianity" in which he denies the Virgin Birth, the story of the temptation in the wilderness, the Resurrection, the appearance of Christ to his Apostles after the Resurrection, and the Ascension. The details of the birth at Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt, and the return to Nazareth, he says, were written into the Gospel story to make it look as if ancient prophecies had been fulfilled. He also denies the miracles, and the reliability of other New Testament narratives. All these things have often been said before, and if such a book as the one in question had been written by some obscure layman it would, to-day, have excited little or no comment. As the Bishop of Chelmsford, writing in the "Sunday Chronicle" of October 19, says: "There is very little new matter in the Bishop's book. Indeed, an unkind critic would be justified in saying that it is a rehash of all the anti-Christian and agnostic booklets of the last 25 years." It is not, then, the novelty of the views expressed that is responsible for the attention the book has received. Neither would it have received anything like the same attention had Dr. Barnes carried his researches through to their logical conclusion and, realising that he could no longer advocate the doctrines he had undertaken to maintain, resigned the high ecclesiastical office which he now holds.

The chief reason why so much attention has been drawn to the book is that Dr. Barnes does not write as an opponent, but as an advocate of Christianity and that, while he considers the proportion of fiction to fact in the Bible narrative to be greater than what the Church of England has hitherto allowed, he nevertheless considers that when the truth has been disentangled from the fiction, sufficient still remains to enable Christianity to survive as a distinctive creed.

Under the pressure of advancing knowledge the Church has made many concessions in the past, but there is obviously a limit beyond which they are not prepared to go. The Commission of Doctrine which sat for fourteen years from 1922 agreed that all the Bible could not be taken literally as the truth. Members of the Commission also differed in their attitude to the Virgin Birth. But they fully accepted the reality of the Incarnation as the central truth of Christianity, and unanimously considered the doctrine of the Resurrection as vital to the Christian faith. Dr. Barnes, however, thinks otherwise, and his opinion regarding the Resurrection elicits the following from Dr. Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury: "If any man is able to believe no more than this book offers him about the Resurrection, let him believe, and Christ will be with him. But it is not the faith of the New Testament or of the Church"; and in this we must agree with the Archbishop. What can there be distinctively Christian about a creed from which all the mystery and supernaturalism has been stripped away? All that Dr. Barnes has apparently left is, in the words of the Bishop of Chelmsford, "nothing at all except a sentimental and subjective impression of a misty figure of whose words and teaching scarcely any certain record remains and who was credited with deeds which belong to fairyland."

"The Rise of Christianity" is clearly an attempt to equate Christianity with scientific knowledge. Professor Joad, in the "Sunday Dispatch" of October 19, commenting on this aspect of the matter, asks: "Why does the Bishop surrender these traditional and distinctive Christian doctrines? Because he wants to make Christianity square with science. . . . In other words, religion is to be made reasonable in order to appease the scientists. Why should the scientists be appeased?" These remarks serve as an introduction to the favourite, though totally irrelevant, argument that science does not, and cannot, give a complete account of the universe. "Suppose," says Professor Joad, "that the physical world is all? It operates, no doubt, according to the laws discovered by science. . . . but scientific

laws and the uniformity of nature won't explain the fact of there being a world to explain . . . how did it get here? The question certainly can't be answered according to any formula that science can lay down, since nothing can come out of nothing, and before the physical world, *if the physical world is all*, there must have been nothing. Art, poetry, music, love—above all, religion—all these seem to me to give the lie to the notion that matter is the only thing that exists." But in what way is this rather dubious argument supposed to affect the position of Dr. Barnes, and his expressed opinions with regard to the traditional and distinctive Christian doctrines? It is quite foreign to the subject, and we need only remark in passing that while Professor Joad emphasises the fact that science cannot tell us how the physical world got here, he is sufficiently cautious not to assert that religion can. In the matter under consideration we are not concerned with such questions as to how the physical world got here, but with the far more definite questions of the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the other doctrines constituting the essentials of the Christian faith.

In an attempt to discredit the opinions of Dr. Barnes the suggestion is made that his conclusions are based on a conception of science which is now hopelessly out of date. The Bishop of Chelmsford says: "Indeed, it might even be true to say that the climate of scientific, philosophical and historic thought is more favourable to-day to Christianity than ever before; for the mechanical world, enslaved by unvarying law, which is the groundwork of Dr. Barnes's thinking, is either rejected or modified out of all recognition by the best thought of our time"; the best thought of our time in this connection naturally being that which is supposed to lend support to the orthodox Christian point of view. According to the Bishop of Chelmsford the best thought of our time tells us that: "the world is now thought of as a vital organism, purposive and spiritual, and not as mechanism which keeps perfect time and runs on rails." This statement is equally as questionable, and as irrelevant, as the arguments of Professor Joad. What we want to be told is whether "the best thought of our time," even the most carefully selected, would give sanction to the belief that a child may be born without a father; or that a human organism could come to life again after being dead and buried, and afterwards make an "Ascension" in a universe where there is no absolute "up" or "down." No amount of sophistry could make it appear that science gives any support whatever to such absurd doctrines.

The controversy at present raging round the book of Dr. Barnes may, as some have predicted, turn out to be a "storm in a teacup," but there still remains the more serious question as to how Dr. Barnes is to justify his conduct in retaining office, and the emoluments appertaining thereto, while denying root and branch the doctrines he was appointed to maintain.

F. KENYON.

HOW AND WHY I BECAME AN ATHEIST

They that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

THESE magnificent lines, which I've just turned up in one of my old diary-scrapbooks at the head of some observations upon which this monograph is based, remind me of my first years at sea, as a midshipman, and of how I first began to suspect that all these marvels could scarcely have been engineered for poor, miserable little man's edification, as I had been taught to believe.

A truly colossal conceit it seemed to me that man, and the salvation of man's soul could be the chief concern of the creator of such staggering magnitudes around and above.

Endlessly pacing the bridge through the brilliant tropical nights, incessantly conscious of the microscopic proportions of the ship in the vast expanse of ocean, and pondering on man and his relationship to the mighty universe, I called to mind the swarms of invisible protozoa inhabiting a drop of water I had once watched through a microscope. All these tiny lives, so preoccupied with their "goods" and "bads," endowed with a furious vitality were dashing about, attending to the very serious business of living. Copulating, getting themselves generated, hunting food, fighting, killing, dying . . . Each, no doubt, calling on his god (made no doubt in the image and likeness of a protozoan) to help him to get the better of his competitors: all, doubtless, fully persuaded that their own particular drop was really an enormous and extremely important world—the world, in fact, specially created for them.

Well, the lesson I learnt from the vastly impressive, awe inspiring and often terrifying phenomena of the sea and the heavens was that they were most decidedly not thought up, created, organised and sustained for my benefit—very much to the contrary.

The realisation that was slowly but very strongly being borne in on me that the earth and universe, reaching to the utmost limits of limitless space, were utterly unconscious of, supremely indifferent to the existence of such a ridiculously insignificant exerecense as man. And that if there was any conscious Direction behind it all it was totally unethical, no more personal or moral than, say, electricity or gravitation.

Up there in the blue twinkled my old friend Betelgeuse, at the North West corner of Orion, not only larger than the earth and larger than the sun but larger than the whole space enclosed by the earth's yearly orbit round the sun. And put there, a mere speck of light at a quite inconceivable distance away, just to help me find my latitude. No, I decided that I could not swallow that one.

I had learnt at school from our Scripture master that the stars were created, ready-made just as we see them, but now I was learning that they had been forming through unnumbered millions of years, and that stars still in the making—and un-making—could easily be seen through telescopes. So now the seven-day creation story was beginning to wobble, too. My Bible gave me 4004 B.C. as the date of creation, supporting this with genealogical tables in St. Matthew and St. Luke (which I noticed were mutually contradictory!) giving the line from Christ back to Adam. But I was learning now that even our little twopenny-halfpenny throw-off from the sun—let alone the countless myriads of mighty stars—was thousands of millions of years old, and that man himself had only quite recently appeared on the scene. It seemed to me (I was about eighteen years old then) that this religion business, heretofore accepted more or less unquestioningly, would have to be looked into, and very closely.

Even as a boy I had discovered that our governess and parents were terrified of being questioned about religion once they had realised that the usual futile platitudes obviously did not really satisfy us. "Mother, why did God teach that horrid little weasel to torture the poor rabbit?" would reduce her to the verge of tears; so we gave it up altogether and concentrated on our stamps and tram tickets, though vaguely in the back of my mind, wordless and incoherent, an idea must have been germinating: If a thing is true the more openly and thoroughly it is examined the more clearly will its truth stand out. *And vice versa.*

M. C. BROTHERTON, Cmdr. R.N.

(To be continued)

WHAT HAS PRESBYTERIANISM DONE FOR SCOTLAND?

IV

THE Church has always sought to overawe the people with the Fear of God, fear of the Devil, and fear of Hell. A man is considered good when known as a god-fearing man. This in a man destroys a progressive spirit, and inculcates one of meekness and submission. Why should it be necessary to have this fear of God continually impressed upon us, His Chosen People. The Jews feared him, and what has it brought them: bondage and persecution all through their history. I never wanted my children to fear me; I would have blushed in humiliation had they gathered around me and thanked me for only having done my duty to them as a father by providing for their wants. So much is frowned upon as being irreligious that would afford a little happiness here and now. Presbyterianism narrows a person's view to that of a pin-point.

Scotland owes Robert Burns a debt of gratitude in having ridiculed its Personal Devil into obscurity, and the drowning out the fires of Hell. Only for him Scotland might still be listening to such sermons, all of which were the common belief of his day, and required courage to openly oppose such doctrines. He was the only man Scotland ever produced who dared to do so, first to cause its people to doubt, and first to advocate a woman's rights. Instead of fear he planted joy and laughter in the human heart. His popularity is ever on the increase, while a wail over empty pews is heard throughout the land. Their principal source of revenue, Hell and the Devil, was given a terrible jolt by Robbie.

But some may contend, no such doctrines are taught in the churches to-day. Why refer to these ancient beliefs. Read your Bible and you will find the conditions for Salvation just as emphatic in the Bibles of to-day as in those that came off the press a hundred years ago. There has been no revision of Scripture in our day. A fire and Brimstone Hell, and the casting out of Devils were the pet doctrines of Jesus, and that He came only to save the Jews.

Time and again he asserted: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel." And talked in parables so that only the Jews might understand him: "Go not in the way of the Gentiles," he instructed his followers. Scotland and Presbyterianism are still tied hand and foot to Jehovah and Son of the Jews and their Bible, and are expected to reverence its bloody chapters, its brutal saints, and its adulterous women.

If you believe otherwise you are just as much an Infidel as I am. Our Public Schools are gradually undermining the Church. This is only natural, if it were otherwise it would be a reflection upon the efficiency of our educational system. The youths of to-day will listen to sense and reason, to established facts, but are not interested in the myths of Palestine, of two thousand years ago. They are interested in the living, not in the dead, the story of Jesus only interests them at Christmas time with presents and good things to eat.

Suppose that you wanted to employ one of those graduates in a position of trust such as the keeping of books. Would it inspire confidence in you were he to assure you that he also believed in the Holy Trinity, that father, son and holy ghost were one, or that three times one were one? Can you picture the state of your books at the end of the month with such a system of mathematics? You might be impressed with his honesty, but would it still inspire in you confidence of his ability were he to also assure you of his belief in the story of the Fiery Furnace and of Jonah and the Whale?

What the Scottish people have accomplished by way of progress has been done in spite of the Church and its influence in misdirecting the thoughts of its followers. Granting that we need a Moral Guide apart from that of the Sermon on the Mount, the ignoring of which has kept people out of the Insane Asylum.

Let Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, agree upon a code of morals for the public schools, founded upon the Golden Rule, as taught by Confucius five hundred years before Jesus Christ. To do right from love of right, with no thought of reward here or hereafter. And with only Truth as a guiding star, Jealousy will prevent its ever becoming a reality.

Infidelity has done much for me. I had never read, seen or heard of any liberal or Freethought literature being published in Scotland and, like thousands of others, I was content to doubt, without being able to give an intelligent answer. I thought it strange that so many should believe in Christianity, and I had a vague idea that it might be right and that I might be wrong. I tried so hard to fathom it; I went to Church occasionally, even to the Salvation Army, but I always came home with an unsatisfied feeling that I had been to a Kindergarten for Adults. Always the uppermost thought in my mind when I heard men extolling in prayer the virtues of God was the knowledge that this was the same one I was so familiar with as a boy. The same one whose Holy Word had caused an innocent little girl to shed tears. The same one who had shocked my sense of decency in school. Still uppermost in my mind was: Why excuse in God what we condemn in Man. I could never harmonise the laudatory prayers to him when Minnesota had been visited by a terrible cyclone.

Preaching, I figured, was just another means of earning a living; where the salary was set in accordance with crowds the Minister was able to attract, and that he never received a "Call" unless there was a larger salary attached. Money, money, and more money was the continual cry from the pulpit.

I left St. Paul for Tacoma, Washington, in the fall of 1889, and while here a wave of religious hysteria was sweeping over the country. It struck Tacoma and like the other cities it built a huge wooden Tabernacle capable of seating a great many hundreds, and the Revival was on. That which needs reviving is evidence of decay, but Tacoma was all hot up over her Tabernacle and the prospect of saving the sinners from the "Bottomless Pit." The Rev. Mr. Mills was the big attraction. I went to hear him, but the whole proceedings had the appearance of Jehovah having gone into the show business just as he did with Moses and Aaron in Egypt. I was in no manner impressed by the performance.

Later I was given a handbill advertising that ex-Rev. C. B. Reynolds would that evening answer Mr. Mills. Fortunately I got there early, and soon the hall was filled to overflowing. I could not imagine anyone in that audience being more interested than I was. Here was where my early Biblical education was of the utmost importance to me. I had no trouble in following the speaker in his many references to Scripture. I at once felt that I had at last found that for which I had so long craved. An exponent of Scripture as it is written, without the quibblings and evasions I had listened to from the pulpit. Without a moment's hesitation I cast my vote for Mr. Reynolds. In that short space of time I was "born again."

Realising that the Bible is the foundation of Christianity, and that a thorough knowledge of its teachings to anyone interested is necessary whether for or against, I at once took to reading it from cover to cover, marking all the passages that interested me. I subscribed for the Boston "Investigator" and the New York "Truth Seeker," also enough books to start a library. I soon noticed a wonderful change in my peace of mind; my dormant brain had been stirred into action; I was becoming self-educated; I found an assurance in myself I had never known before. I could now combat the sermons recorded in the Monday papers, which I had passed over before with indifference.

I was now convinced I was on the right road to freedom from all the nonsense attached to religion which had muddled my brain all those years. I found the Bible abounding in contradictions. That many of its characters had their parallels in other religions, with most of them being classified as myths. That Jesus was only one of many crucified Saviours, and that

the Bible was only one of many sacred books, and for the most part written in the third person. That Moses did not say, "And the Lord spake unto Me," but that "The Lord spake unto Moses," and is the only man in history to have written an account of his own death and burial, all of which casts a doubt of his ever having lived, and of his being the author of the first five books of the Bible. (Deut. xxxiv-5-6.)

I found that the New Testament was equally as cruel as was the Old. That Jesus could say as harsh things as could Jehovah, and that as a moral guide it sanctioned every crime in the calendar, and that Christianity did not come with glad tidings of great joy, but with a message of grief.

My moral character will bear investigation, but I have never felt that I was in any way indebted to religion for this. I had every opportunity to become a "Naer-dae-weel." I went to work at the age of nine; I was my own boss, kept myself, paid my way, and owed not any man.

What would have been the result had I "followed Jesus," and took no thoughts of to-morrow; laid not up treasures on earth, but followed the example of the Ravens which gather not into barns. Instead, I decided that a country which revered such teachings was no place for a boy who had ambition enough to make the world just a little bit better through his having lived in it.

What has all this cost me? Socially and otherwise much. As I have already asserted, not one in a thousand has the slightest conception of what the Bible teaches, it remains the great "Unread Book." My having read it in school enabled me to grasp its absurdity and the message of Freethought on hearing Mr. Reynolds.

The cause of Freethought cannot be injured, but rather advanced by its being read. The Freethinker should be ready with a come-back, verse for verse, to the religionist who invariably starts off by quoting Scripture. How many can do it? Many Americans with whom I have spoken are of the opinion that every Scotchman is familiar with Burns and the Bible; sorry to relate, I have not found this to be true.

At 83, I keep poking at them the product of my little typewriter. I retired from three Fraternal Orders so that the finger of hypocrisy could not be pointed against me, and that I might be able to speak my mind freely. Such Orders are a restraint on the lips of members regarding their religious beliefs.

A person is pooh-poohed for his having too much religion, and classed as a heathen for having none. The man who goes to Church considers himself just a bit superior to the one who does not find it necessary to do so, in order to live an honest and upright life.

In every Denomination of the Christian Religion (and there are quite a number of them) the principal characters pertaining to it are Father and Son, Jehovah and Jesus. It will be found educational for the honest investigator to scan Bible quotations concerning what these Deities are supposed to have said and done. Or would you rather not? Perhaps that "Old Time Religion" is good enough for you, and instead of your being interested you may be ready to damn me for having had the audacity to bring this to your attention. Thomas Paine, the grandest Englishman that ever lived, wrote "The Age of Reason"; it has never been answered, but its author has been vilified from every pulpit in Christendom. So do not blame me if you are shocked by quotations from the Bible.

ROBERT HOWDEN.

THE CATHOLIC RELIGION

Of course, my Church is the best, said I, but that is not the reason why I belong to it; I belong to it because it was the faith of my house; I wish to take my chances with my own people, and so should you. If it is a question of going to hell, go to hell like a gentleman with your ancestors.—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, "St. Ives."

CORRESPONDENCE

"CATHOLIC EXPERIENCES"

SIR,—May I make a small explanation arising out of my recent articles, "Catholic Experiences"? In the third (the last) of them, which appeared in your October 12 issue, I mentioned my controversies with the Westminster Catholic Federation over its attempts to obtain alterations in London County Council school history books, and with the then Editor of the Catholic paper, "The Tablet," over its controversial methods. In my article, I wrote very moderately of those old disputes, and perhaps some readers may have thought this meant that I now think I was in the wrong in them.

If such an impression has been made, it is largely a mistake. My moderation of tone, in my article, was due to two causes: (1) The elapse of years has made me—as often happens—see things in a less excited manner; and (2) I can now separate the questions of principle from those of mere personal antagonism. In those days, I admit, I did feel that my opponents were to some extent dishonest in their acts, even though not in their intentions. This feeling made me more angry than should have been the case. It is that feeling which, as indicated in my article, has been modified by the lapse of time. It does not follow, however, that I now think I was wrong in regard to the matters of principle involved. I still think the Federation's "secret" ways were harmful, and that the then style of "The Tablet" in argument was too violent. If anyone is interested in these matters, I would refer them to two books, "Rome at Close Quarters," by myself (London, The Epworth Press, 1930; pp. 91-96), and "Roman Catholicism and Freedom," by Dr. C. J. Cadoux (London, The Independent Press, 1947 edition, pp. 147-150 and 196). I would admit, now, that in those keen disputes I did tend—as our human nature does incline us to do too often—to mix up "personal feeling" with matters of principle; but of course I may all the same have been right in regard to the latter, even though (as seems was so) to a great extent mistaken in not regarding my opponents as being as sincere as myself personally. It is only the latter mistake that I would correct.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. POYNTER.

THE BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

SIR,—The Bishop's new book, "The Rise of Christianity," is causing an enormous commotion among those Christians who have not yet realised how their religion has been "modernised" in the last two generations, by the advance of scientific knowledge and education. Probably most of the bishops and more intelligent priests were already aware of the truths this book reveals, and, indeed, very much more, but have thought it expedient to conceal this knowledge from their flocks.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury himself, broadcasting on the occasion of the fourth centenary of Cromwell's order for the setting up of a Bible in every church, said (I copy verbatim from a press cutting):—

"... The wonder of the Bible as a whole has been missed because it was so often regarded merely as a storehouse of texts for theological controversy or meditation. . . . Within its covers are primitive myths and legends of heroes in which history began; odes of war and lyrics of love; the oratory of preachers and the visions of prophets; the musings of wise men . . ."

Had Cromwell heard such words the speaker would have paid the penalty at the stake! Truth is a favourite word with religious people, but many of them don't seem to like even a very little of it when it is applied to Christianity.—Yours, etc.,

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

THE AWFUL PLAGUE

"That which you keep in your hearts, my brothers, is the slender remnant of a system which has made its red mark on history, and still lives to threaten mankind. . . . Take heed lest you have given soil and shelter to the seed of that awful plague which has destroyed two civilisations, and but barely failed to slay such promise of good as is now struggling to live among men."—PROFESSOR CLIFFORD, "Lectures and Essays," 1866.

OBITUARY

It is with the deepest regret that we record the death of Lady Maud Simon. We have known her for many years and respected her ability. Her hatred for intolerance and injustice was very marked. She was a member of the National Secular Society and a contributor to "The Freethinker" which she held in high esteem. Her pen was always busy in the cause of Freedom. She had many interests and wrote many articles on various subjects, and was also an accomplished musician and a water colour painter. But the two subjects nearest her heart were, Freethought and the founding of a better world on Ethical Principles. Personal contact with her served to increase my respect and admiration for her. I have lost a good friend, and humanity is the poorer for her passing. The following is a tribute by her daughter.

C. C.

TO THE MEMORY OF MY DARLING MOTHER, LADY SIMON.

So falls the twilight gently, and you go
 Much loved, much honoured, from our transient day,
 Unto that bourne, our vision may not know,
 You but precede us on that unknown way.

And you are safe from change and sorrow now,
 And we are left to face the loneliness,
 Needing your spirit and your love each hour,
 Needing your courage in deep sorrow's stress.

Always you sought for truth that makes men free,
 You worked to liberate the fettered mind;
 Your name is honoured and will ever be,
 By those who seek for truth and love mankind.

Love changes not and time but proves it true,
 The memory of life well lived endures,
 Love changes not, and the dear thought of you
 Will lift our hearts above our mortal tears.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held October 23, 1947

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

Also present: Messrs. Rosetti (A.C.), Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Woodley, Page, Morris, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Venton and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Newcastle, Merseyside, North London, West London Branches and The Parent Society. The application in the Chancery Court to transfer the Bradford Case to London on points of law was not upheld by the judge as he considered the case could be dealt with in the County Court. The case will therefore be tried at Bradford.

Sheffield and Kingston Branches reported police interference at their open air meetings. Both Branches were promised full support from the Executive should further developments arise.

Lecture reports and future arrangements were dealt with from Blackburn, Newcastle, Merseyside and Birmingham Branches. Final arrangements concerning the World Union of Freethinkers public conference at Birmingham were reported and agreed that the President and General Secretary represent the N.S.S.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for November 20, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

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.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square)—Tuesday, November 11, 7 p.m.: "The Emotional Resistance to Rationalism", Mr. RUPERT CRAWSHAY-WILLIAMS, B.A.

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square)—Wednesday, November 12, 7 p.m.: "Aspects of Evolution"—Sixth Lecture. "Whither Man?" Dr. W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., F.R.S.E.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square)—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Last Thirty Years" Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Money Must Go" Mr. J. PHILIPS and Colleague PHILOREN.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust—Have your questions ready.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, 270, Sauchiehall Street)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: No meeting.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Atomic Warfare, Where Will it End?" Mr. A. C. DUTTON.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "What are Western Values?" Dr. C. A. SMITH.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, Arcade, Pilgrim Street)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Colour Bar" Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street)—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Roman Catholic Church and the Bible" Mr. A. W. MARTIN.

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