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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Religion and the Child

IT is part of the case for religion that man is a religious animal. In opposition to this it has been affirmed that man is by nature an Atheist. No less a person than John Wesley held this opinion, meaning by Atheist a man unsaved by grace or revelation. It is a futile speculation in either direction. By nature man is neither an Atheist nor a Theist—that is, if we attach to either term certain definite beliefs for or against the belief in God. Indeed, by nature man is very little—far less than any other member of the animal world. Other animals are born into the world with fully formed instincts sufficient in number to preserve their lives. Man has least of all. The education of other animals lies chiefly in the direction of exercise; with man the chief work is acquisition. And herein lies the secret of man's superiority, and his capacity for continuous progress. The world of the animal varies but little. One generation succeeds another, and the adaptive actions essential to life are repeated in endless monotony. The world of man varies constantly. It changes with time and place, and puts on a growing complexity. Man is continually called on to make new adjustments, and to effect these his nature must be plastic and educable. Many instincts and less educability; fewer instincts and great capacity for education; these are the cardinal and all-important distinctions between man and the rest of the animal world.

But this advantage over the animal world has its drawbacks. The fact of man having everything to learn places him at the mercy of his surroundings. The fundamental functions of life are all right because they can be ignored by none, and so form part of every person's experience. But above these, what the child will become is mainly a question of his environment.

These principles give the reply to the propositions at the beginning of this article. Man is born neither an Atheist nor a Theist; but his capacity for, and his dependence upon, education makes him one or the other. It is theoretically not a harder task to bring up a child an Atheist than to train it as a Theist, given the same educational opportunities. It is only harder in practice because the dice of social life are loaded in favour of religion, and the two phases of thought do not fight under equal conditions. Inside the home one set of tendencies may be supreme, but outside other forces are encountered. The child is subjected to the incidence of other ideas and ideals. Opinions it is taught on the one hand to respect, it is taught on the other to despise. It sees certain beliefs held in admiration, and sees the social status of people determined by their adherence to these beliefs. And the

child is naturally imitative; that is the source of both its strength and weakness.

One may, therefore, say that if children are not born religious, their capacity for education, with their general mental endowment, hands them over unresisting subjects, to their religious instructors. They commence with the capacity for fetishism, and there are those who take full advantage of the fact. Of course, there is no reason why children should not pass through this period with safety. Many do, just as they pass through those physical disorders incidental to childhood. But in a great many instances, in the hands of parents acting from a mistaken sense of duty, and of a priesthood that possesses a keen sense of self-interest, a passing mental phase is seized, strengthened, and converted into a permanent possession. This in turn becomes a part of the environment that reacts, educationally, on every newcomer; while the priest appeals to the existence of an artificially prolonged mental phase as a proof of man's natural craving for religious belief. All religions in civilised countries have been quick to seize upon the plastic nature of childhood as the right period for the inculcation of religion.

Even with adults it is only when a sense of the mysterious is strong, and is enforced by a feeling of helplessness and a consciousness of ignorance, that religion grips them strongly. At other times it may appeal to one here and there as a plausible speculation, but it does not produce a strong conviction. Religion *must* get the child, if it is to live; it must utilise the child's capacity for receiving impressions. To wait until the individual reaches maturity is to lose everything.

Religion, be it observed, is the only subject that is compelled to do this. Every other subject can wait. If we try to teach a child simple principles of mathematics, or of physics, or of any of the sciences, and the child does not understand, we wait for a time until its understanding has developed. We say the thing is beyond the grasp of the child, and we wait for it to understand until we resume our teaching. A capacity for understanding what is taught is taken as an essential condition of the teaching. With religion this capacity is never considered. The child must be habituated to religious phrases, religious forms, and a religious atmosphere. Let it alone until it reaches years of understanding, and ministers of religion are the first to assure us that the task is then a hopeless one.

It may be granted that a policy of creating sentiments in favour of certain beliefs not *wholly* understood by the child is legitimate enough in its proper place. We do not wait until the child is old enough to appreciate rationally the grounds of good conduct to give its ethical instruction. We seek to bring out certain tendencies for good and suppress those of an opposite character, and so fashion the child's nature in accordance with an accepted standard. But, at least, these are things for which a reason *can* be

given, and we are sure of the child's approbation when it is old enough to understand the subject fully. But, in the case of religion, the situation is quite different. We dare not wait until the child is old enough to understand, because by that time reason would be against us. The mystery does not decrease as understanding develops; it remains to the end. Moreover, among adults it is freely admitted that the religious hypothesis *may* be wrong, and there is clearly a very wide and vital difference between cultivating in a child certain feelings, the validity of which may be rationally demonstrated at any time, and teaching it to regard as true things that all admit might be false. In the one case, we have in view the child's future welfare; in the other, we are forcing upon it certain speculations of our own, on which there exists no common agreement.

I come back to the point at which I set out. Man is born neither religious nor atheistic. But, unlike the rest of the animal world, which is furnished with instincts adequate to its self-preservation, man is born with an immense capacity for acquiring habits and information. It is this that makes him, in a very peculiar sense, the victim of the educational force of his environment. For good or ill that fact remains as the most important truth concerning him. Given a society in which knowledge of all kinds were allowed to develop naturally and express itself freely, there would be no struggle to capture the child, such as now exists in all civilised countries. But, given a society where religious ideas maintain an artificial existence by the deliberate cultivation of a frame of mind favourable to its claim, and religious organisations are forced to concentrate their energies upon the capture of the young. That is why the clergy makes so fierce a fight for the schools, it is also why, alarmed at a declining adult church attendance, both Church and Chapel are driven to paying renewed attention to Sunday School development.

The child is the raw material out of which Church and Chapel create their future patrons. The adult is in one or other class mainly because of habits formed and impressions gained during childhood. Secure the child and the rest is easy. The tenacity of early impressions is notorious; the man dying of delirium babbles of his childhood's days, the criminal on the scaffold has his recollection carried back to far-off years when he received lessons at his mother's knee; the religious lessons received in youth seldom entirely disappear. We may not always be conscious of their force, but they are there, like the scar of a wound long since received. Even when the positive belief in religion is outgrown, the fear of it remains. There is often a lurking timidity in opposing it. And if the clergy have to face the fact that a great many do escape their control, they have the consolation of knowing that their policy has diffused a certain general impression as to the value of religion in the social life of the community.

But the child is also the raw material out of which the future citizen is fashioned; and, therefore, the question of who shall possess the child—the priest or the community—involves more than a mere contest of rival teachers. It is really a struggle for the direction of civilisation. The issue is a simple but profoundly important one. Are we to pay more attention to the temper of mind induced in a child than to the inculcation

of specific beliefs? Are we to value the habit of finding reasons for beliefs—of criticising received opinions freely and without prejudice—more than a slavish re-echoing of hereditary doctrines? The inherited capacity of a child can be exercised in whichever direction seems preferable. We can turn it out a mere transmitter of established opinions or a new and healthy force for rational progress. The essential issue is whether the developing mind of the child is to be directed by agencies to which the growth of civilisation is entirely due, or by organisations that are bound to perpetuate the delusions of the past as the sole condition of their power in the present and the future.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

DYING LIKE A DOG

"DOTH God care for oxen?" asks Paul, and the question does him great discredit. Why should not God care for oxen? Why should he not care for all his creatures? It may not be true that the beetle crushed beneath our feet feels a corporal pang as great as when a giant dies. Nevertheless it feels in its degree, according to its position in the scale of existence. Consideration to what we call the lower animals should not depend upon their intellectual powers. It was well remarked by Bentham that the question is, not do they think, but do they feel? If they are susceptible to pain, they are morally within the scope of our regard. And if we are under an obligation to consider them, how much more so is God, who called them into being, and who should not only be wiser than the wisest man, but better than the best.

This exclamation of Paul's puts Christianity, in this respect, on a lower level than the higher Judaism. Even the Mosaic Law forbids the muzzling of the ox that treads out the corn. It is also said in the Old Testament that the good man is merciful unto his beast. Christianity has ever been remarkable in its disregard of the rights of animals. In fact, it allows them none. God gave Adam dominion over them, and that lordship has descended to his posterity. No ill-treatment of them is a sin, although it may be regrettable. Now and then a Catholic saint, like St. Francis, overflowing with an invincible sweetness of nature, recognises the brotherhood of the winged and four-footed creation; but the Catholic Church has never recognised it officially; on the contrary, it still teaches the opposite doctrine. They have no souls. Only man has a soul. And it must be admitted that sometimes he has only enough, as Ben Jonson said, to save his body the expense of salt.

It is strange how the Bible insults dogs. Certainly they have objectionable features. Their habits are liable to be offensive when they have not been properly trained—though the same may be said of human beings, and especially of savages. They are devoid of sexual modesty. But then again there are many millions of men and women, and some whole tribes and even nations, that are not overburdened with this virtue. When all is said against him that can be said, however, the great fact remains that the dog has been an invaluable friend to man-kind. It is difficult to see how men could have passed from the nomadic into the pastoral state without the dog's assistance. The shepherd still knows his worth. Moreover, it must be allowed that the dog is generally brave, and nearly always faithful. He sticks to his master in all weathers and in all fortunes. He will not forsake a tramp for a millionaire. He usually resents the lifting of a man's hand against a woman, and he puts up with endless worries and indignities from children, because he knows their helplessness, and feels they do not mean him any harm.

The human is higher than the canine, but sometimes the dog is the nobler animal of the two. Yet the Christians have always used the dog's name to express their deepest sense of contempt. How common it is to hear them say to an Atheist that he "dies like a dog," when a dog has often died sublimely, fighting against desperate odds, and pouring out his heart's blood for his master, or his master's children, or even his master's property. What could be more touching than the story of the dog whose master succumbed in the snow? When they were found, the man had still some living warmth about his heart. But the dog was frozen dead. He had shielded his master with his own body. He had died inch by inch to save the one he loved.

Byron had a favourite Newfoundland dog, whose memory he has enshrined in famous verses. "Boatswain," the poet wrote to his friend Hodgson, "is dead!—he expired in a state of madness, after suffering much, yet retaining all the gentleness of his nature to the last; never attempting to do the least injury to anyone near him." Boatswain was buried in the garden of Newstead, and his virtues were celebrated in an inscription on his monument. Then came the verses, from which we extract the following:—

But the poor dog, in life the firmest friend
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still his master's own,
Who labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone,
Unhonour'd falls, unnoticed all his worth,
Denied in heaven the soul he held on earth:
While man, vain insect! hopes to be forgiven,
And claims himself a sole exclusive heaven.

This is the finest part of Byron's poem on Boatswain. The rest is marred by the poet's extravagant and affected misanthropy.

A hundred years before Byron, another great satirist—not the greatest, but the most finished—had put in a good word for the dog. Pope's splendid "Essay on Man," whatever the admirers of "true poetry" may say against it, is full of good sense and philosophy, and marked by astonishingly fine versification. And although this has nothing to do with our immediate subject, we cannot resist the temptation of saying, by the way, that Ruskin has done justice to Pope in his beautiful "Lectures on Art." Ruskin brackets Pope and Virgil as "two great masters of the absolute art of language." "They are," he says, "the two most accomplished 'Artists,' merely as such, whom I know in literature." He notices Pope's "serene and just benevolence," which placed him, in theology, two centuries in advance of his time, and "enabled him to sum the law of noble life in two lines which, so far as I know, are the most complete, the most concise, and the most lofty expression of moral temper existing in English words." This is grand praise, but if we may corroborate Ruskin without impertinence, it is richly deserved. Here are the two lines in question:—

Never elated, while one man's oppress'd;
Never dejected, while another's bless'd.

Think over these lines, dear reader, and the more you reflect upon them the more they will fill you with admiration. If they do not, there is something wrong with you, and you had better consult a doctor.

But let us get back to the dog, and quote the lines of Pope already referred to:—

Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
Yet simple Nature to his hope has giv'n,
Behind the cloud-topt hill, an humbler heav'n;
Some safer world in depth of woods embrac'd
Some happier island in the watery waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.

To Be, contents his natural desire,
He asks no Angel's wings, no Seraph's fire;
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

Call this poetry or not, according to the catholicity or limitations of your taste—it is certainly magnificent writing; and nothing could be more masterly than the way in which the most terrible satire is flung, without producing the least chaos, into the midst of that pastoral scene.

The poor Indian—not the Hindu, mark, good reader—the "savage" of North America, not the "barbarian" of India—believed his faithful dog would bear him company in the happy hunting-grounds of Paradise. With his dog he might be happy, particularly as he escaped the Christians who enslaved him on earth, tormented him like devils, and drove him to the death-in-life of their gold mines. Talking to him about dying like a dog would have invited the retort, that he would sooner die like a dog than live like a Christian.

Pope is said to have been a Catholic, but he was really a Freethinker. In the "Essay on Man" he versified the philosophy of the sceptical Bolingbroke. Everyone knows that Byron was a Freethinker. Let us now take another Freethinker—the late Matthew Arnold. He also wrote beautiful verses on a dead dog. "Geist's Grave" is one of the later poems which showed that he had not altogether lost his singing voice while drudging as Inspector of Schools, and writing volumes of controversial prose. "Dear little friend" he calls the dead Geist, and praises his "loving heart" and "patient soul." After remarking that Nature, with all her infinite resources, never quite repeats the past, nor reproduces a personality, Arnold continues:—

Stern law of every mortal lot!
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,
And builds himself I know not what
Of second life I know not where.

But thou, when struck thine hour to go,
On us who stood despondent by,
A meek last glance of love didst throw,
And humbly lay thee down to die.

Well for all of us will it be, when the end comes, if we only die like that dog; with a last glance of love on dear ones around us, and a serene submission to the fiat of Nature. We like that word "humbly." It is foolish to resist the inevitable, like a kicking, spluttering child in the grasp of a giant. Death should always bring resignation. This, indeed, is all that religionists mean when they talk of bowing to the will of God. There is a world of wisdom in the old proverb that "What can't be cured must be endured"; or, in the great language of Shakespeare:—

But let determin'd things to destiny
Hold unbewail'd their way.

We may even go beyond that. For death comes to all, and will come, in spite of our unwelcome. Often at last it comes as a deliverer; and then we may cry with brave Walt Whitman. "Come, lovely and soothing Death!"

Men die and dogs die, and a living dog is better than a dead man. Let the Christian cease his foolish talk about the Atheist's dying like a dog. When his time comes he will have to die in just the same fashion. Meanwhile he might ponder the words of one of his own "sacred" writers:—

"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath. . . All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"

Ah, if the clergy only wrote like that! We should read them oftener. But let us not omit this "sacred" writer's conclusion:—

"Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works: for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"

There, good Christian—you who whimper about dying like a dog—you are answered out of your own Book. And don't reply that the Atheist, like the Devil, can cite Scripture for his purpose. Why should he not? He accepts a good thing wherever he finds it.

G. W. FOOTE.

(Founder of "The Freethinker.")

A STRIKING EVENT

UNTIL quite recent years the avowed object of science has been to study and investigate the phenomena of nature, to give a natural explanation to what had hitherto been ascribed to the occult, and in general to make things appear less mysterious than they were before. Nowadays, among certain scientists, the position appears to have been reversed. If anything appears to be at all mysterious, instead of an attempt being made to solve it by the scientific method of proceeding to the unknown from the known, the attempt is often made to proceed from one unknown to another, and to render the subject of investigation still more mysterious than it was before. Instead of leading us away from mysteries, the claim is often made that science now leads us to them. We find many instances of this in the writings of Eddington and Jeans. The latter has written a book, "The Mysterious Universe," the title of which is intended to emphasise the growing mystery by which we are surrounded. Professor Andrade, in an article on "The Uncertainty Principle" which appeared in "The Listener," July 10, 1947, after referring to electronic jumps in the atom, and the mysterious phenomena of radioactivity, concludes: "If I have shown you that to-day science leads us to mysteries, and not away from them, it is sufficient."

Such being the attitude of prominent scientists we need not be surprised to find that, among the less enlightened, explanations of unusual events are still sought in the occult. The latest example of this is the case of a piano which tells the time. Three months ago, Mr. John Turner, of Salford, bought a piano in a junk shop for 35s. Ever since, says Mr. Turner, it has been behaving as if it were a clock instead of a musical instrument. The matter is reported at length in the "Daily Mirror" of October 7, 1947. At the invitation of the "Daily Mirror," three "experts" tried to solve the riddle of the striking piano. It is worthy of remark that in this class of investigation the solution of the mystery is usually entrusted to those who appear least fitted to solve it. Two of the "experts" chosen are connected with the Manchester Psychological Research Institute, and the other is manager of Crane & Sons, the piano manufacturers. Apart from the latter the selection appears to be rather a one-sided affair, and one cannot help thinking that it would have been much more satisfactory if a physicist had been added to the team.

The investigation was carried out on the following lines. A careful check of the time was made on the telephone with Manchester's "Tim." At three o'clock the three experts heard the piano ping three times. It was twenty seconds before "Tim" time. In silence, one ping was heard at 3-30 p.m. Mr. Riding, one of the physical investigators, said quietly: "If you have a spirit entity, will you strike the note again, please?" There was no response. Mr. Elkes, the piano expert, stripped the piano, examined the action, tested each individual wire, and looked for any hidden automatic or electrical mechanism, but was unsuccessful in finding any reason why the

piano should strike. The opinion of Mr. Barker, the other physical expert, was that it was probably a direct spirit manifestation of a being who has "gone over" with a strong attachment to the piano, and who was using the instrument to make contact with the earth. The results of this so-called investigation are, however, not yet regarded as conclusive, and another expert, this time a "scientific" medium, whatever that may mean, is being called upon to make a further test. What this test will reveal remains to be seen.

It is worthy of remark that while Mr. Turner, the owner of the piano, had declared that it "struck" the hours, the investigators found that it only "pinged," and it is reasonable to infer that the matter has been as much exaggerated as that of the talking dog, with which the "Daily Mirror" entertained its readers some time ago.

Instead of examining the piano, the attention of the investigators would have been better employed elsewhere. It is a well-known fact that if there is a piano in a room in which a radio loudspeaker is working it will often give out a ping, or faint note, in sympathy. The sound waves travel across the room and vibrate the strings of the piano that are tuned to respond to the same wave-length. A neighbouring clock may produce a similar effect, and that this is a possible solution of the mystery is strengthened by the fact that when double British Summer Time ended the piano "went back an hour, too." The fact that the time is always struck on the "G" string might help to identify the source of the phenomenon. It is in some such natural explanation that the solution is to be sought. Why, at the investigation, did the piano strike three twenty seconds before "Tim" time? And when Mr. Riding asked the piano to strike the note again, why was there no response? Such facts as these, which in a scientific investigation would be of the utmost importance, were totally ignored in the investigation referred to. In such investigations the results depend, not so much upon the facts observed, as upon the personal prejudices of the investigators, and the special doctrines they have undertaken to maintain.

F. KENYON.

SUPERSTITION WITH FOOD (Kosher and Horse Meat)

TO primitive man it seemed obvious that death was the cause of a profuse loss of blood due to wounds and accidents. Blood, he argued, was the "seat" of the "vital spirits" that animated the living being. Blood, therefore, was considered responsible for the being's characteristics, its abilities, faculties and tendencies. Cannibalism aimed at "incorporating" those qualities and fitnesses of the killed foe. When drinking the eucharistic blood, substantiated by the priest with wine (and bread), the believer hopes to create his magic unity with God, much as unrelated persons become "blood-brothers" by consuming a few drops of one another's blood.

It is the same survival of pagan superstition and ignorance that lies in the Nazi claim, that mental and bodily peculiarities are in some mysterious way a property of the blood; the decisive element in a nation is its blood. People refrain from eating the meat of hares lest they would become cowards, but they feed on tigers, etc. Still, the consumption of the animating spirits (blood) is a rather dangerous venture and must not be done without proper preparations and ceremonies. In general, you must "be sure that thou eat not the blood; for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh" (Deut. XII, 23). Hence blood and other parts considered unfit for human consumption (such as fat, heart and kidneys, etc.) were sacrificed as the pabulum of the gods.

In order not to commit a sin by eating "flesh with the blood" (cf. 1 Sam. XIV, 32; Ez. XXXIII, 25), orthodox Jews still have

to render it "kosher" by extracting its blood as far as possible. The process of kosher killing the cattle is inhuman and gruesome enough, yet this tradition still survives in spite of the fact that nowadays we have come to know better and do not believe any longer in the blood spirits, as actually did the authors of the Old Testament (cf. Lev. XVII, 14 and III, 17; Lev. VII, 23-26, etc.).

A reminder of this can still be found in Acts XV, 20-29, for spilled blood cries out for vengeance (Gen. IV, 10, 23). In order to gag the spirits, blood must be buried with earth after the victim had been killed, so that the spirits do not become aware of him who was the killer (cf. Num. XXXV, 11-13). The magical value of blood can be seen from Ex. IV, 23 (circumcision) and Lev. XVII, 11 (atonement), whereby evil spirits are being banned, and the blood of Christ "is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew XXVI, 28). For the precautions taken see Lev. IX, 8-22.

The differentiation between "clean" and "unclean" food has nothing to do—as is commonly thought—with any notions of hygiene, this being the outcome of modern research only. Rather it is related with the fact that every animal was thought connected with some deity or other as a residue of totemistic ideas. So, for instance, ostrich and camel were the totems of many Arab clans, the swine was related with the Egyptian god Sutekh-Set, hare and horse were sacred animals for our Northern forebears, etc. Hence, the Yahveh believer was banned from eating these animals' meat (Deut. XIV, 7, where a naive attempt is made to list categories, the hare is included in the animals "that divide the cloven hoof"!). Mohammed, on the other hand, did not consider that you may be defiled by external food but only from really abhorrent food, or that "KILLED IN THE NAME OF ANOTHER GOD" (Sure. VI, 146); and this is what really matters. According to Mark VII, 15-23, Evantus the abbot then concluded that with civilized people it was unnecessary to ban deceased animals from consumption or to consider the blood unclean if the flesh is not.

According to the Talmud (Hullin c. 8), the Jews must not take meat together with milk. This custom also prevails with certain African tribes such as the Wataturu and the Massai who, besides using dishes strictly kept apart for the respective usage, refrain from milk on those days when they eat meat.

A great many people still experience a certain horror towards horse meat, though they feel unable to explain it by reason. As a matter of fact, it has been ingrained in them through generations and thus survives subconsciously. In pagan times, the horse was for the Kelts, Teutons and Slavs alike the holiest of their sacred animals, and on earth it was the embodiment of their paramount gods. Therefore, horses were consulted as an oracle; when the tribe was forced to change their dwelling place, they just followed one of their sacred horses to where it chose to go. Thus, tradition will have it that the "leaders" of the Anglo-Saxons into this country were called Horsa and Hengist (horse and stallion).

With the Western Slavs, the priests drew their oracles from the Holy Horse according to its gait (cf. the White-Horse Rock near Aylesbury). From Iceland a document is preserved that testifies to the effect that, at certain occasions, up to A.D. 997, horse meat was eaten in holy communion. Since, even after conversion, this custom proved ineradicable, Popes Gregorius and Zacharius, at the beginning of the 8th Century, set St. Boniface the task of instilling horror of horse meat (and similar sacred animals) into his converts. And the saint did succeed rather well, as can be seen. After it, anyway, the Christianised Normans thought it rather spiteful to nickname the Swedes "the Horse Eaters."

Nowadays, more than ever, with our acute shortage of food, we have got to rid ourselves of the disgust at eating certain food-stuffs, due to primitive superstitions.

PERCY G. ROY.

WHISKY *versus* RELIGION

Were I a drinking man, and I am not,
I'd much prefer to be intoxicated—
With whisky, though not to be a sot,
Than with religion be inoculated.

Both only serve to muddle up the brain,
But with religion the effect is lasting,
With whisky, soon all is well again,
The brain is clear, and once again exacting.

Religion permanently warps the brain,
To render it incapable of clear thinking;
Whisky is but a temporary strain,
Harm comes only from excessive drinking.

'Tis rare from this that man becomes insane,
Religion counts its many thousands when—
All hopeless in a home they must remain,
Lost to the world, who might be brighter men.

Religious hate, how bitter it can be,
All creeds and colours suffer from its blight;
Not even lessened by the Atlantic sea,
In every land, a stimulant to fight.

How narrow-minded mortals can become,
Ev'n to the splitting of a hair;
How dismal can become the home
Where children only breath religious air.

With whisky, men will sing and laugh,
Pour out their joy, and love for all mankind;
Ev'n ministers and priests a glass will quaff,
And for a time leave all their hates behind.

Solomon, oft said to have been wondrous wise,
Strong drink and wine he recommended;
To those in trouble he frankly did advise
To bury all their cares when thus befriended.

And likewise Paul, endorsed a little wine,
For stomach's sake, and oft infirmities;
And Moses says to spend for what you pine,
For strong drink, or what e'er the soul decrees.

Most men of letters, all through history's pages
Indulged in whisky as an aid to work;
Their brightest thoughts, inspired all down the ages,
When brain grew tired, and felt inclined to shirk.

But when the will is found to be too weak,
Let not strong drink become a lasting foe;
Summon your strength, and by it seek
The courage for to say emphatically NO.

ROBERT HOWDEN.

AN ACTOR'S PHILOSOPHY

Is it not possible that the peoples of the earth will arise in the might of a new-born religion and will knock at the gates of the world's conscience, singing in unison the hymn of humanity and crying "Thou shalt do no murder—even for the divine right of kings"; when frontiers shall be swept away and there shall be one brotherhood of man, one flag, one language, and one religion, the religion of Humanity; when the people shall be generalised by the dreamers, the poets, the philosophers, the seers and singers, the artists of the world?—SIR HERBERT TREE, "Thoughts and After Thoughts."

ACID DROPS

The Rev. Dr. White of Glasgow, says that church congregations are declining because there is too much Paganism in the churches. We agree with him, but that is not the cause of empty churches. A few centuries ago there were far more Pagans in the churches than there are to-day. The old story of the Christian creed—the Creation, the miracles, etc.—may have been believed when the commonest of people saw plenty of proofs of heavens and angels, and took it all as a mere matter of fact. Now, most of that attitude has vanished, with the notable exception of Roman Catholics, who have their visits from angels, and see the working of miracles when wide awake people are not about. Once again we advise all who have the slightest doubt as to the cause of the falling numbers of church goers, to note that people have a little more scientific knowledge, and are more wide awake than their parents were. People who stay away from church show they have the courage to drop these fragments of what was once a world-dominating superstition.

We do believe that too much Paganism is the cause of the fall from favour of the Christian gods. We know where they come from, and what is their worth, you may fool some of the people some of the time, but you must not expect to fool all the people all the time. It is a curious situation, the Churches are crying out for more followers, and the Atheists are asking for more paper to make the decrease in the number of godists more marked.

Consider the following: The mental world of man began in a region of illusion. The stars—far away—seemed so near, to reach them one only had to reach a little. The earth was obviously flat. We now know better. Disease was the work of spirits who came from Hell, and not to get the aid of other benevolent spirits was courting disaster. In the midst of existing forces there appeared no co-ordination, words usurped the place of things, inconstancy reigned supreme, where later, constancy is the rule. Gods and ghosts were the prime movers, angels and devils were everywhere. It was the golden age of gods, and devils felt at home in such conditions. The gods are going back where they came from. The real reason that people are no longer attending church services is that religion has been found out.

Dean Inge is not beloved by his people, and he is certainly not in love with his colleagues, for he is apt to say things that orthodox preachers do not like. It looks as if that feeling will remain. Here is an example of the "gloomy Dean's" latest.

"The Humanitarian Movement began to be important in the eighteenth century. . . . In France the Movement had nothing to do with religion, unless we call Voltaire a Christian. The French Humanitarians were often avowed Atheists, and I do not think the Church did anything to support the Movement. . . . was Humanitarianism a part of the Creed of the Reformers—Luther, Calvin, Knox? I speak under correction, but I think it was not."

This is a nice paragraph; good Christians should appreciate what good friends we Atheists are to them.

Someone was good enough to send us a booklet explaining how God would help us to cure certain ailments. God, however, moves in curious ways. . . . He may send something to cure an ailment, but then he appears to have caused the illness. Should the remedy fail, it is not God's fault, it is our own lack of faith. God sends plague, pestilence and famine, and man worked hard to overcome these things. We think it better and wiser to ignore the help of God in these matters.

According to the "Church Times" there is designed "two voices"—the aspiration of man to Almighty God, and the aspiration of God to man. We do not pretend to be well advised as to which came first, God or man, but the relationship seems to be a little mixed. Perhaps there were two parties at the Creation, each struggling for first place, for there certainly seems to have been some trouble just after the Creation between man and god number one, and other gods that were contending for first place.

Another philosophic gem from the same source. "When worship is regarded only as a means for giving utterance to human feeling, can anybody wonder that man should no longer see any duty or obligation to attend public worship. If the man in the pew is taught to regard the service as directed to his own edification he will not attend unless he is perpetually edified." Now this is what we can only call "clotted bosh," one would be glad to know how we can worship anything from a delightful dinner, or a brilliant sunset, without having some feeling that is more or less "deep"? Human feelings are—human feelings, and while they may differ in quality, they do not differ in general character. Things must be what they are, because they can never be anything else. Really the "Church Times" ought to know that love and hate will remain love and hate, whether they find expression in a pub or church.

We are all aware that the Roman Catholic Church, more than any other Church, orders its followers what they shall do from birth to death. The priests gets hold of the new-born child and hangs on to it until it sees it safely into the grave. We have received a circular issued by the Catholic Introduction Bureau with the approval of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. The Bureau professes to provide all sorts of suitable husbands or wives, the charge is 17s. 6d.—the Roman Church does not miss much where money is concerned. True, there is nothing new in this sort of Bureau, but we do not know whether the Catholic Introduction Bureau guarantees that the union will be successful, despite the imprimatur of the Cardinal. By the way, there is no "money back" guarantee if the marriage is unsuccessful.

The Pope is intimate with God, he was appointed by God, even though the Cardinals had to vote for him also. Recently the Pope was ill, not seriously ill, just ill. It seems that the Pope either did not trust God, or he just did not want to bother Him, at any rate, the Pope went to stay at Castle Gandolfo. Presently the Pope thought it was time to get back to Rome, but his doctor whom the Pope took with him in case God should be busy elsewhere, told him to stay at Gandolfo until the fine weather broke. O ye of little faith.

This story seems a little out of joint because it leaves God out. The "Sunday Dispatch," which never loses an opportunity to boost religion, reports a story of a sailor who was nearly drowned. The sailor, Hays, was thrown into the sea during a terrible storm, and had to fight for his life, he did not pray, so God never interfered. Hays said he "had no time for prayers." He managed to get back to his ship and was saved—minus God. Moral, when you are in trouble never waste time or energy, fight it out, if God is inclined to give a hand, let him do so as would any ordinary person, if not, don't waste your energy.

A reader of the "Freethinker" wants to know how to make the acquaintance of a ghost. We don't know. We never met one, and should not know if it was a ghost even if it stood in front of us. As far as we know, ghosts seem to avoid solitariness, they like to draw all the attention to themselves. Surely if ghosts wished merely to see the inside of a house they could come when the inmates are not at home. They seem to love a show, with their groanings and clanking of chains, this is all right, but when they start talking, it is usually such foolishness, that most people get tired of them.

What fools are those who believe what they say about the help of God. One clergyman in Lancashire has, so he says, managed to get more work out of a certain group of working men by getting them to listen with a few minutes praise to God. Taking the matter as a fact, we can put the whole thing down as something very, very foolish. The people who believed God helped, would work harder because they believed in God's help. The same result could be caused by a pot of beer, a game at cards, etc. What we should like to know is what we are to make of a God who would not help until someone grovels before him? As it stands, things settle down to an artful parson, a foolish group and a God who must find the game very, very silly.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No. : Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Will Mr. H. Coha be kind enough to send his address to the office.

Mr. HUMPHREY.—Thanks: next week.

Mrs. BEESLEY.—For "The Freethinker," £1.

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SUGAR PLUMS

The following appeared in the "Liverpool Echo." The report, and the correction recalls the fight of Bradlaugh, one of the great men of his day. He might easily have reached the highest political position had he followed in the lines of those who placed their position first, and truthfulness and honesty when it was profitable, second. It was one of the Opposition who said to Bradlaugh after he had won the respect of the House, "Good God, Bradlaugh, what does it matter whether there is a God or not." Yet when Bradlaugh has been dead for so long this lie of religion is still current. We thank Mr. Gourmand for his correction, and the Editor of the "Liverpool Echo" for inserting the following letter:—

"In a recent comment on the Allighan case you gave fresh currency to the erroneous statement that Charles Bradlaugh refused to take the Parliamentary oath. Bradlaugh never refused to take the oath. Here are the facts:—

"When first elected for Northampton, Bradlaugh was advised that the Evidence Amendment Acts of 1866-7-9 applied to his case, and he, therefore, asked to be 'allowed to affirm as a person permitted to make a solemn affirmation or declaration, instead of taking the oath.'

"A committee of the House by the casting vote of the chairman decided that these Acts did not apply to Parliament, whereupon Bradlaugh offered to take the oath. He explained that, as an atheist, to have taken it voluntarily would have been an act of hypocrisy, but he was prepared to repeat the formula, treating it as an affirmation. 'Any form,' he said, 'that I went through, any oath that I took, I should regard as binding upon my conscience in the fullest degree. I would go through no form, I would take no oath, unless I meant it to be binding.'

"The House, however, refused to allow him to take the oath, and stubbornly maintained its refusal for five years until his final re-election when it was obliged to give way. Then, in 1866, when he presented himself to take the oath, the new Speaker (Peel) refused to allow any questions or intervention, and he took the oath in the usual form."

THE BISHOP AND CHRISTIANITY

I

ANY book written by Bishop Barnes, of Birmingham, must of necessity be characterised by scholarship, sincerity, and culture, and this makes any review by a hostile critic difficult, especially by such a convinced heretic like myself. In his latest book, "The Rise of Christianity," he almost disarms criticism by saying that he can now understand why the early Christian story "as it can now be explained" has led men to worship Jesus Christ as divine—and that he, too, "so worships him." And he adds, "I have been at pains that the fact should not affect my historical inquiry."

But it does appear to me, an ordinary Freethought layman, that willy-nilly to believe that Jesus Christ is divine is bound to colour any historical inquiry on this very subject. How can one, so believing, be unbiassed? If any one is convinced that Jesus is God, or the Son of God, I fail to see the worth of any historical exposition which can only inevitably arrive at the conclusion that Jesus is "divine"—the very point at issue. Either the rise of Christianity was due to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, or God himself, and was revealed to man as such; or it was, as Gibbon showed, a purely "human" rise in which case Jesus was a man just like the founders of other religions. We must, however, do justice to a very honest attempt on the part of Bishop Barnes to write without bias, and to give as far as he can the historical "facts" as to the origins of Christianity apart from his own special beliefs.

Many of us, I am afraid, are wont to "cut the cackle and get on with the 'osses" in our anxiety to get to Christianity as quickly as possible. For these, I most earnestly recommend the first chapter in the book dealing with fine lucidity and detail with "The Remote Background of Christianity." Here there is no nonsense from Genesis, but a most instructive account of early man and his religions, intensely interesting, the details of which one should know if such a comparatively late religion as Christianity can be really understood. In any case, Bishop Barnes frankly admits that the history of "the Egyptian, Hittite and Babylonian Empires differs markedly from that given in the Old Testament." In addition, "no trace can be found in Egyptian history either of Joseph or of that story of the exodus, which began with the ten plagues of Egypt and ended with the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army." Even the forty years spent by the Israelites in the desert and the final invasion of Palestine "must be legend transmuted into history"; and Christians must think again when one of their own bishops has to write that "little" of Genesis and Exodus "can be retained as exact history."

All this is very elementary for Freethinkers, and if the disintegration of Biblical history is once freely allowed in the Christian Church, when and where will it cease? After all, if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and naturally Joseph, are myths, and we can add Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japeth, where can we place Moses? Is he a myth, too? We confirmed heretics can say, why not? but Bishop Barnes (very rightly from his point of view) can only say "Moses was certainly believed in later ages to have been a religious leader" which is very handsome of him. If "the final invasion of Palestine" was legend, why not Moses who led the legendary invasion? There is, of course, no mention in history of either Moses or the invasion, as Freethinkers have maintained for many years, but we cannot expect even Bishop Barnes to go the whole hog at once.

He seems to believe in David and Solomon, but history has not recorded them any more than Moses. It is possible that two such "monarchs" may have lived, but it is still more possible that they were the inventions of later writers. Actually, the Jews come on the scene somewhere about the sixth century B.C., but what their religion was really like then we do not

know. We are not certain if they were a white race—though I suspect that they were then just like the Arabs. The modern white Jew is most unlikely to have been descended from them, and though most people look upon the Jews as a "race," the fact remains that they represent a dozen races, ranging from black to white. The word "race" in connection with the Jews is as much a myth as is their early Biblical history.

Once, however, we get away from speculation and enter into the domain of history which can be checked from ancient records, Bishop Barnes gives a fascinating resumé of what is known of the making of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, and the state of Palestine just before the period assigned to Jesus. As must be expected, he appeals to the Gospels where he can to complete his picture, but he admits that "we are not well informed as to the parties within Judaism" and "there is reason to think that the gospels give too harsh a picture of the 'scribes, pharisees, hypocrites'"—a point which Christians might take to heart. If the Pharisee was not a blackguard as Jesus insisted in many a passage of bitter invective—what comes of the thesis that Jesus was "divine?" Bishop Barnes does not answer.

Generally speaking, the Jews of the early Christian era have been fiercely attacked, precious few if any good qualities have been allowed them, and "Serves them ruddy well right!" is the usual Christian comment on the misfortunes which overwhelmed them after the fall of Jerusalem. And the more Christ-like is the Christian, the more gloating is the comment. In justice to Bishop Barnes, he does at least credit the Jews with some decent qualities. His example should shame the very pious.

He points out that the Jews were very tolerant of the various sects in their ranks like the movement—if there was one—created by John the Baptist, and that of the Essenes. But if this is so, it is difficult to explain the violent hatred of Jesus which the Gospels record of the Jews. "It is to be feared," says the Bishop, "that the Christians developed a strong anti-Semitic bias," and he quotes from the account of the trial by Matthew, ch. xxvii, 25—"Its power for evil is not even yet exhausted," he adds. I doubt whether its power for evil will be exhausted even when it will be finally admitted that the whole story of the trial and Crucifixion is pure myth, and that the Jews have always been right in rejecting the "Son of God."

No one who gets "behind the veil" can doubt for a moment that Christianity, like many of its forerunners, was (and is) a mystery religion, and Bishop Barnes shows more than usual Christian courage in giving an account of mystery religions in general, and many in particular. If there is one thing no real believing Christian likes to know it is that so much of his religious rites and so many of his beliefs were borrowed—no, not borrowed, stolen from the worship of Isis and Horus and Mithra and many other pagan gods. Bishop Barnes is not so shy. He is ready to admit the pagan parallels, he admits that "each faith borrowed from the other"—at least as far as Mithra and Christ are concerned—in fact, those Freethinkers like Robert Taylor who said as much and were damned for their pains, are now vindicated by a Bishop of the Church of England.

Certainly their work was not done in vain.

H. CUTNER.

OUR MISSIONARIES

"The arrangements by which missionaries were to ride in green chairs and be recognised as the equals of Governors and Viceroy had its special significance and underlined missionary aspiration, telling people and officials in every province what they had to expect from it."—SIR R. HART, "Land of Sinim."

REVIEW OF "PSYCHOLOGY AND WORLD ORDER"

HANYARD WEST, M.D., M.R.C.P. (Lond.), D.Phil. (Oxon.)
Pelican Books.

THE child is father to the man. The little boy who blames the cat for pulling its own tail when he is "only holding it" grows up into the self-styled realist who clings to the opinion that the old League of Nations did not fail; the world it was that failed the League! War came again upon Earth because the sons of Man did not desire Peace earnestly enough. Tinkerbell can be cured of mortal poison if a sufficient number of children can be found to believe in fairies; world peace is assured if enough people will kneel down and wish for it. This is the logical conclusion to the argument that "it is the spirit that counts, not constitutional machinery." On this reasoning, a parasol is just as good as a parachute on a transatlantic flight. Things spiritual are no doubt far more important than things material, but it is a very incomplete man who has no body.

It is refreshing to find a book which combines an optimistic view of human nature, scientific reasoning in support of its optimism, and serious proposals for world constitutional machinery and institutions through which it can become effective in the service of world peace.

"There seems to be enough friendly human nature throughout the world to enable all normal men and women to live a life of very great freedom and happiness. What is required in the psychological field is an organisation which is based upon our knowledge of the facts." Dr. West's argument continues inexorably towards the conclusion that "all law, municipal and international alike," should be founded upon a single concept: "The law of any society should represent the best selves of the majority of that society put into a commission of execution. The executive body must never include a party to a dispute." The book is an argument for a world democratic electorate behind a world legislature and government.

How to attain it? Here again, Dr. West is an optimist. "No power on earth will preserve the sovereign nation states of the world if men once become convinced that they can see a better way of securing their lives, their liberties, their estates and their welfare."

The attack upon the existing international "order" is specific, detailed and well documented. "Everybody knows that all is not well with 'International Law,'" Dr. West considers. "Austin, one of the greatest of our British law writers of the 19th century, was categorically clear: it is 'not law at all, but a branch of positive morality . . .'. International Law asks us to keep ourselves in order. It can never control us as long as 'we' are sovereign states."

The author clearly shows the impossibility of predicting what types of dispute an international authority will be required to resolve in its task of upholding peace. "Those who point to economic conflict between proletarian and capitalist point to one instance only of the source of human disorder."

The weakness of the book reveals itself when Dr. West turns from the role of psychologist to that of constitutional lawyer. For some obscure reason he shies at the conclusion towards which his own logic has driven the reader and suggests, albeit not heartedly that a World Confederation might achieve his purpose. Though he gently rejects this alternative in favour of a federal scheme, the idea reappears in his "World Charter": "Pending the introduction of a wider democratic initiative, access to the World Court shall be open to all democratically elected governments of states as such."

A well-meaning but impracticable piece of idealism is the suggestion that: "Where Equity conflicts with any other 'law' Equity shall prevail."

One is left with the feeling that if the author had prescribed the cure with as much care and attention as he devoted to the diagnosis, this would be a brilliant book.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

THE NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE "BIBLE DEFENDER"

CLOSE upon a hundred years ago, there suddenly sprang up in Newcastle a group of religious fanatics who commenced the publication of a penny weekly organ called the "Bible Defender." No doubt some of you surviving Geordies will be able to remember a little about its activities.

As may be expected, this tract was extremely narrow and bigoted in its adoration of the Bible and exchange of religious information. It was "red-hot" in its declared determination to make the sound of the Gospel ring out in glorious abandon both far and wide. Now I do not intend to eulogise on its sentiments by quoting any clap-trap from its columns, but I will say that the Editor was human enough to provide what he called an "open column" for the purpose of receiving criticism and subject matter intended for free discussion, from infidels outside his circle of believers.

One of the first chaps to accept this medium for exchange of views was Mr. W. H. Johnson, Secretary for the Huddersfield Secular Society, who for at least six months kept the ball rolling in grand style in conducting a discussion between Atheism and Christianity in its columns. Much of the stuff printed greatly shocked and horrified the Sabbatarians very nearly out of their lives, as you will well imagine! Then came a surprise.

On the morning of Monday January 14, 1856, the Editor of the "Bible Defender" received by post a most remarkable missive. This proved to be a mourning card (contained in a black-edged envelope) with the following words printed on it:—

"In memory of the late W. H. Johnson, Editor of the "Yorkshire Tribune" who died January 10, 1856, aged 21 years and 6 months. He died a sincere and penitent Christian in the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection."

Not having heard of Mr. Johnson's illness, and feeling unable to vouch for the truth of the statement made in this death-memorial card, the Editor wrote at once to some of Johnson's friends to ascertain the actual facts of the matter, and in due course he suffered another shock by receiving back a letter written by Johnson himself, which revealed the knowledge that the mourning card received the week before was nothing more or less than a hoax. Some of the mischievous Secularists belonging to Blackburn were blamed for this perpetration, because, when asked to give an explanation for their "crime" they answered that as Johnson had recently overthrown his secular beliefs he was now considered to be "dead" to their movement; it being the same as turning a Christian as far as they were concerned. The upshot was that Johnson ceased to supply the "Bible Defender" with any further criticism or discussion. In fact he used the pretext of being so upset by the cruel hoax that he withdrew entirely from performing any further secular activities altogether.

Now comes the sequel.

The Editor of the above journal said that many had enquired the reason why the discussion upon Atheism had so abruptly terminated in the "Bible Defender." He told his supporters that he hoped that Mr. Johnson may yet see it his duty to publish in his pages the entire facts of the case, or provide some further general history of the Atheistic movement at large. In the meantime, however, he declared his intention of keeping the "Open Column" intact for the continued insertion of any further discussion which might come to his hand. Time elapsed, but nothing more appeared to be forthcoming from Mr. Johnson or anyone else, until one day the "Open Column" splashed the great news that a lady secularist combatant had entered the arena to defend secularist principles.

Writing from Seacombe, she said:—

"... although I confess there appears to be no need of any Atheistic advocate to expound his views to the readers

of the 'Bible Defender,' for those who read the last volume of the 'Defender' would be able to see the masterly exposure of Christianity by my former friend, and one whose character none could know but were compelled to admire, until that fatal day when he was brought over to silence (if not consent) by the pecuniary advantages of his relatives. I admire the ability of Mr. W. H. Johnson, but deeply lament his withdrawal from our ranks. My reference to Mr. Johnson is only made for the purpose of stating that if you really need an Infidel advocate to defend his principles I am prepared to commence where Mr. Johnson left off, and carry it forward to the end. My qualifications for this task are few and simple: I am a disbeliever in the Divine origin of Christianity; in Supernatural Responsibility; in the existence of God; a believer in the efficiency of material salvation through the Agency of Secularism."—Signed "Annie."

That very brave speech produced the following comments: "Well, this is brave. A lady coming forward to defend secularism! It is unexpected and we scarcely know how to deal with it. We could meet Mr. Holyoake, Mr. Barker and Mr. Johnson, whose abilities she admires, without trepidation or distrust of the results, but this is new and untried ground. The appearance of a fair combatant in the arena may well try the strongest nerves! We are free to confess that it is no easy matter to answer a lady, and after consideration we beg most respectfully to decline the encounter. It would, however, be both ungallant and ungenerous to allow 'ANNIE' no opportunity of stating and defending her sentiments; we shall, therefore, appropriate to her use, as soon as she may feel inclined, two pages of our space for four or five consecutive weeks, that she may favour us with her thoughts on 'the efficiency of material salvation through the agency of secularism', in the full assurance that some of our lady readers will, if need be, favour us with a rejoinder. We hope this arrangement will be satisfactory to our fair correspondent; as the probability is, that some of her brother secularists will at the same time be taking up some of the questions which she mentions in our columns—Ed., 'Bible Defender.'"

At that stage (June 7, 1856) I am sorry to say I find myself unable to proceed, and utterly at a loss for want of more evidence as my references can carry me no further. This is to me extremely disappointing, as I am most curious to learn if our heroic "Annie" disclosed who she was and where she belonged. Don't you agree? It is so annoying! Conjecture will not help. We want more facts to enable this chronicle to be satisfactorily rounded off. They should be in evidence somewhere. Surely there must be one Geordie, at least, who can lay hands on a few old copies of the "Defender," commencing with the period June 14, 1856, or be able to ransack his memory for details enough to close this narrative in the way we should like to.

Did dear "Annie" fulfil her promised intentions by writing for the "Open Column" of the "Defender"? What did she say? Come along, someone, do please let us be knowing!

ED. H. SIMPSON.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

IT is convenient to accept the superficial view that everything is quite separate; on second thoughts we see that all things are inter-related, all have a common origin in the environment of any given period. It is a necessity of thought to imagine divisions even when we know that none exist—in time, temperature, day and night, etc. This applies both to material and to mental things, to the physical and to the emotional. Thoughts have their origin in feelings of the earliest most primitive consciousness. However slow the earliest development was, the length of time is so very great that the infinitesimal becomes an accumulation, and to-day unrecognisable. The "Freethinker" illustration: "The primeval man floating on a log, is the origin of the ocean liner, which races round the world"; this is self-evident.

A thought of something trivial or remote, can be such a faint imagination that it seems to have no connection with feeling; thinking power has so far developed that it seems to have little connection with reaction to a stimulus, but that is what it really is.

Countless reactions have developed our abilities, both for physical and mental activity. The size, form and quality of our structure is the measure of our accomplishments: for instance, a muscular blacksmith, or a muscular fast runner. Our contrasts have a definite relation to our abilities; these facts are obvious in the physical material realm, and should be just as easily perceived in the mental emotional realm. The most vital part of us is our brain; it is the greatest development of nerve centre, and with its extensions, makes us more sensitive to pleasure and pain than animals with less brain and nerves. These remarks on the mental and physical illustrate our use of imaginary divisions, for, after all, our thinking machine is part of our physique, and like other internal organs, it absorbs sustenance and performs a function which is a necessity. We may know very little about the processes that go on in different parts of us, but we cannot mistake the net results, whether it is our lungs in breathing or our stomach digesting. The brain processes may be the least understood, but we are well acquainted with the results of excellent brainwork, and very often shocked at the absence of clear thinking. Although many agree with these premises, yet they find difficulty in applying the same principles to the brain, as do apply to our other organs, especially to its size, form and quality. There is no reason why the same should not apply, and a little careful observation will show that the same laws do apply. No one can mistake the development: the form of any great thinker, when comparing with any primitive type, and more still with one who lacks ability to think—an idiot. The thinker has a good upstanding forehead, whereas the idiot's is a flat one that slopes back from the eye brows. The one has accommodation for brain, the other has not. The primitives come between these two extremes. Each of these types has much resemblance at the back and base of the skull, because here are the "animal faculties" so called because some part of this is all that most of them possess, and none have the upper and front portions, which is our great advantage.

The science of character reading has laws as immutable as any science and as usual its critics give a display of their ignorance of the subject. The commonest idea is that it is a branch of fortune telling like palmistry—a myth. Probably every part of us shows some of our character: the heavy worker's hands are very different to the singer's or orator's, and so are their vocal organs; but these are only a portion of them, and not the vital seat of their characters; and certainly no clue to any future events. Distinguishing between a racehorse and a heavy horse, is not forecasting the winner of a race, or saying if a horse will be used for a dray or a plough. Their abilities are shown by their size, form and quality, just as I judge a human.

Seeing abilities is not seeing future opportunity for use. Character, mental abilities, are obviously shown by the head, the skull, and usually very plainly by the front of the head, the face. The cunning schemer may easily deceive the unwary, by his suave kind manner, but his Chinese eyes and V-shaped brows are not hidden, and would be an open label to the veriest novice in Physiognomy. It is a fact that Palmists do exhibit a Phrenological bust as part of their window dressing, but every fraud must offer something of real value as a bait, and the greater its virtues, the more efficient it is, as a cloak, for a swindle. Palmists merely try to show that they have some foundation in reality for their myths. People without prejudice often mistake the motives behind actions and therefore mistake characters. I was told I was quite mistaken in thinking that a certain man was so very acquisitive, his generosity was given as proof of an opposite disposition. As a matter of fact, his acquisitiveness was the maintenance of his generosity, without acquiring he would soon be bankrupt. It is all a matter of balance, even a thief

can be generous to his own people. Once I remarked on the excessive refinement of a very clever man. This Grecian type will neither attack nor defend, and this great apathy was agreed by my critics; but when I said that it amounted to laziness it was flatly denied. It was pointed out that, at that moment he was working in heavy rain, risking his health and certainly suffering discomfort. Why? Was it because he preferred activity to idleness? Not on your life. It was because this clever man was getting three times the wages of others in the same trade (we all knew that this was his reward), but he was far too lazy to keep himself clean, and this was also well known. Refinement and laziness are not contradictions but closely akin. It has been said that the brain is not shaped parallel with the contour of the skull; but who cares whether it is or not? We know this: if self-respect is very plainly indicated on the face (it may amount to pride or even conceit) and if so, we always find it equally shown by the form of the skull; their correspondence is inevitable. It is said that people and "things are not what they seem" to be, and therefore character reading is impossible; but however many objections are made, the fact remains, that every body practises it as far as they possibly can. People have likes and dislikes, without knowing why, attracted to or repulsed, have suspicions of, or confidence in others. Although feeling antipathy they have no definite reason; or understanding why they are attracted. People are like other things, and just what they seem to be, to those who can properly observe and have understanding; but only so far as we have perception and the accumulated knowledge of experience—science. To give very fine and accurate details of the balance of about fifty faculties requires a long and careful study and experience, neither can such be given without a very close examination, but the novice can make no mistakes about the broad outlines. As an Atheist that thinks the best study for men is mankind, I take great interest in characters and thought. There are no bad faculties. No evidence that man is full of evils, or born of or in sin. Quite the contrary. Every faculty is definitely good. Why good? Because each has been a necessity to our survival, and is still a necessity to our endurance in the uphill fight for existence; this battle with our environment, is the exercise that has made us what we are, and has occupied so much time and attention, and probably always will. In unity we can, and do, produce all that makes life worth living. If our powers of aggression are organised to that end, no one can set a limit to our attainments; but warfare is destructive—a misdirection of valuable efforts, which should be directed to things of real value. Even selfishness is not an evil: it is the basis of self preservation; for if anyone was very selfless, they would be useless (even in their own interests) and therefore useless to everybody else. Abnormal self-interest overbalances normal outlook, it is caused by inequality between parts. There is no definite faculty of selfishness, but there is acquisitiveness and benevolence. Acquisitiveness can become greed, but without it we should not acquire knowledge or accumulate things of real value. There is no definite religious faculty. Fear of the unknown is a weakness, credulity is a deficiency. Lacking perception we misjudge values. If strong in causality and comparison we seek reasons, and foundation in facts, and have little use for assumptions. By-the-way, some religions give lip service to unity and morality, yet to-day their exhibition of the opposites is world wide. Each one attributes it to the other's falsity. Preaching about loving everyone is detestable nonsense; not only impossible, but neither given, expected or desired. Love is a private family concern. The most we can expect or give is justice for all; we should have mercy because "to know all is to forgive all."

A knowledge of character reading prevents us misjudging, condemning, blaming or hating. We perceive causes and apply remedies—opportunities or restraints. Emotional, we are fond of animals; reasonable, we restrain the ferocious by enclosures, yet give them every possible benefit.

"MJLEROI."

"THE BIBLE HANDBOOK"

I AM pleased to see that another edition of "The Bible Handbook" has been published. The edition in my possession is dated 1900. I have often found it very useful. For instance, there was recently a controversy in a Welsh weekly newspaper ("Y Cymro") regarding a short story which had been published in a Welsh periodical ("Y Fflam"). The author of the story is a Baptist minister and a poet—the "Crowned Bard" at the 1946 National Eisteddfod in fact. The critics of the story in question included two or three ministers. They contended that the author had dealt too outspokenly and unseemly with sex matters. Then I thought that I would take a hand, and I sent a letter to the editor, who printed it. The following is a free translation of my epistle:—

"Seeing that this controversy has assumed a 'free for all' character, I may as well put my oar in. I notice that the chief protagonists on both sides are religious people. Sex, and referring to sex, has a peculiar attraction for preachers and especially for priests. It appears that sexual irregularities (as an excuse for having something to condemn) is as necessary for priests and preachers as the House of Lords was to the Liberals years ago, or as the devil and hell are to the Salvation Army and the Roman Catholics of our day.

I am surprised at priests and preachers condemning stories and poems as being 'immoral'—when the Bible is full of similar things. Here are few examples from 'the old Book': Gen. xix, 30-38; Gen. xxxviii, 7-9; Deut. xxiii, 1; Deut. xxv, 11, 12; 2 Sam. xiii, 1-22; Rom. i, 26, 27; 1 Cor. v, 1 and vi, 9. I see that J. Gwyn Griffiths has already referred to the 'Song of Songs.' That is what the Englishman calls 'calling their bluff,' and it was high time somebody did it.

Don't you, Mr. Editor, dare to print the verses referred to above in full, otherwise you and I will be liable to be committed to prison for publishing indecent literature. And the Bible, you know, is the handbook of these religious people; and this is the book that the schoolchildren of this country are *compelled* to become familiar with its contents."

Three readers, all of them laymen—the "reverends" were too careful—replied to my letter. One of the writers ("T.R.T.") challenged me to give a *single verse* from the Bible in which an immoral act was facilitated or encouraged. I replied to all three letters, but all the editor allowed to appear was the following:—

"Mr. 'T.R.T.' should not be so cock-sure, confident, oracular and infallible. What about Num. xxxi, 17, 18, 35, 40; Zech. xiv, 2; 2 Sam. xii, 11; Jer. viii, 10; Deut. xxi, 10-14 and Hosea i, 2, 3? Let him also refer to 1 Kings xxii, 23; Ezek. xiv, 9; and 2 Thes. ii, 11."

In writing the above letters I found the "Bible Handbook" of the utmost value; it saved me hours in searching for "examples" to prove my points. I don't want to appear self-righteous as a Welshman, but I doubt whether similar letters would be allowed to appear in an English newspaper.

THOS. OWEN.

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CORRESPONDENCE

JESUS IN FICTION.

SIR,—May I supplement Mr. Cutner's article "On Jesus Again" by recommending yet another historical novel on this subject?" I refer to "King Jesus," by Robert Graves. Those who have read Mr. Graves' "I, Claudius" and "Claudius the God" are well acquainted with his ability to make the past live. In "King Jesus" he exploits the hypothesis that Jesus was the son of Antipater, the eldest son of Herod the Great, and, therefore, really by right king of the Jews. The only criticism I make of Mr. Graves is that he doesn't mind dabbling in the supernatural now and then to embellish the story. This applies as much to his Roman novels as to "King Jesus." When that has been said, the book is still a thriller.

Personally I cannot see that books like those of George Moore and Robert Graves do any harm to Freethought or any good to Christianity. Christians are fond of asking us, if we reject the Gospel story, how else we account for the origin of the faith. The answer is that it can be accounted for in a hundred ways. The difficulty is to choose which. Moore and Graves have each in his way suggested how the thing could have started (the supernatural "extras" in Graves are unessential). Will not some mythicist with a turn for fiction write a story to show how it could have started with no Jesus?—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

PEACE AND CONVERSION

It had been boldly predicted by some of the early Christians that the conversion of the world would lead to the establishment of perpetual peace. In looking back, with our present experience, we are driven to the melancholy conclusion that, instead of diminishing the number of wars, ecclesiastical influence has actually and very seriously increased it. We may look in vain for any period since Constantine, in which the clergy, as a body, exerted themselves to repress the military spirit, or to prevent or abridge a particular war.—LECKY.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 2, 7 p.m.: "Education and the World Order," Mr. W. B. CURRY, M.A., B.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "National Character and Discipline," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Secularism of Dickens," Mr. W. KENT.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Palestine and the Jews," Mr. W. J. RUSSELL.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Ye Must be Born Again," Mr. A. C. DUTTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Position in India Analysed," Mr. GUY ALFRED (Editor, "The Word").

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: A lecture. Mr. ILBA BAREA.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Idea of the Soul," Prof. J. G. MCKENZIE.

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