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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Medicine Man—Ancient and Modern

WITH primitive peoples the medicine man and the magic worker are inevitable because they are of a piece with the rest of the social structure. Their presence is inevitable because in his gropings after knowledge man learns by trial and error, only finding the truth after many attempts. Moreover these experts in the supernatural have plenty of work on hand. Being in direct touch with that world of spirits which play so large a part in primitive life, they arrange for success in war and prosperity in peace. They secure good crops and avert disease. They interpret all the signs and wonders that surround man. They interpret omens on the birth of a child, and prescribe the proper methods of attending to the ghost after the individual is dead. If the tribe has to support the primitive priest he can at least be said to earn his keep. The savage does not see how he could get along without him. The primitive community begs the priest for help, the modern priest begs the community to help him. The positions are reversed; and therein lies a very important moral.

Time passes and the relations of the priest to the community undergo a profound change. Things that formerly the priest alone could do, other people have accomplished without him. Strength, skill and organisation in warfare are seen to be more important than incantation. The gods, ancient and modern, are on the side of the big battalions. The army chaplain is not invited to the council of war. He is allowed to bless the guns, but no one blames him if the guns do not fire straight. The priest blesses the army but he is not responsible either for success or failure. If disease rages we place more value on the medical doctor than the praying priest. We do not go to a priest to discover the cause of an eclipse or explain the significance of an epidemic. Nature as a whole has put off the livery of heaven. All that God does, apparently, is just exist, and cannot be counted on in an emergency. What God really does, no one knows, and most people do not seem to care.

In civilised countries the frame of mind that called for God is rapidly dying out. God is as much a rudimentary organ as the now useless organs of the body. Yet the gods are still with us, demanding support but doing nothing—except to give false statements and praise. But God no longer pleads supernatural reasons for his existence, he has almost ceased threatening humans who decline to praise him for things he has never done.

One curious feature of the situation to-day is that he has comparatively so few defenders. Also that a great many humans show no hesitancy in plainly setting aside God's mouthpieces. In fact the general contempt for

him seems to grow with the passing of the moons. A great many professed godites who claim to be God's mouthpiece join the Atheists in their contempt and after all it is what Man thinks of those who stand as the mouthpieces of God that will tell when the reckoning begins.

Let us take another phase of the situation. We may commence with the fact that it is a truism that the organised priesthoods of the world have been hostile to progress. It is conceded in the mere fact that each one admits it to be true of the other. Special individuals may here and there have taken the side of an improved social life, but special cases only. The truth remains that the priesthood are not the supporters of progressive ideas. This is so generally accepted that no elaborate evidence is required.

The proposition is a very simple one. It is that the existence of every cleric, every member of the priesthood, is bound up with the perpetuation of certain ideas quite irrespective of their truth or their utility. Progress, we may say, depends on a continuous readjustment of opinion to new ideas and a widening circle of information. No man and no society is truly progressive unless beliefs are held as subject to whatever modifications increased knowledge may demand.

To the true progressive the past is a book to be consulted, not an oracle to be slavishly obeyed. A new truth is something to be sought for, an opponent one to be welcomed for whatever light he may shed, not an enemy to be repulsed at all costs. On the other hand existence of the priest as priest depends upon the maintenance of the beliefs that all verifiable knowledge tends to discredit. Although he is in the present, he belongs to the past, and his power is exactly proportionate to his success in keeping the present in line with the past. His function is to hand on established opinions, not to create new ones. His is not only "not to reason why," it is his to prevent others reasoning why, or even to feel the necessity of so doing.

Instinctively he feels with an acuteness of perception that is curiously manifested by all vested interests, that a new idea is a ferment that may react disastrously on his position. Self-preservation, the first law of existence for institutions as for organisms, sets the priest in opposition to reform. Oppose it he must, to promote it is an act of class suicide.

The evil does not end here. A class that merely became identified with retrogressive ideas would exert but little influence. It would be known for what it was, and valued accordingly. Their success in safeguarding their status and function is really dependent upon the degree to which they are able to mould character. An historic tradition gives them a prominent place in this matter. In that and in matters of education generally, they still claim a prescriptive right to express an opinion. And yet the fact remains that of all classes in the community the priesthood

is the worst possible for the work. Men who commence their career by pledging themselves to a set confession of faith, and continue teaching it by setting upon it an interpretation quite at variance with its plain meaning, must make the worst possible teachers and moulders of character. The secular teacher may be inefficient, but in that case he merely fails. The priestly teacher really aims to distort and where he is allowed a free hand he rarely fails at that. Their object is to give a decisive bent to the mind, and one that is fatal to a really healthy citizenship. Men who think more of where an opinion may lead than of its justification can never either be genuine seekers for truth themselves or train others to the task. They would far rather see people grow up timid and credulous than strong with strength that is born of fearless questioning and honestly expressed doubt. The purpose of every medicine man, from the savage to the nonconformist preacher, is to train people to become dependent on their ministrations, not to walk boldly in a path of their own choosing. By tradition and training, by love of ease and lust of power, the clergy are thoroughly unfitted for the work of education or the healthy moulding of character. Every good teacher is interested in the ideas he gives his pupils, but the teacher whose existence, as a teacher, is bound up with the perpetuation of a special set of ideas is the most dangerous of all social forces.

Consider the character of those feelings aroused and maintained by religious discipline. The most generous of them are limited by the boundaries of a faith, the less generous by puny sectarian divisions. So far as people outside the faith or sect are considered, they are thought about as potential converts. The larger, healthier, humanitarian note is quite lacking. Unconsciously this is admitted by the appeal to "Christian men and women and Christian feeling" when religious leaders are striving to rouse their followers to a sense of duty. Of course, it may be said that Christian feeling represents the highest of these people. This may be so, but the apology carries its own condemnation. For that, surely, is not the best teaching, which owes all its influence to appeal to what is essentially a sectarian feeling. It is but a poor defence of clerical training to argue that under its influence people are so poorly developed that appeals based on a common humanity fall upon practically deaf ears.

It is the system, not the individual, that I am attacking. Systems and castes mould men, just as surely as men create castes and systems. The medicine man, ancient or modern, is not born, but made. He is a creature of a system, just as he strives to make others its victims. Each class has its own special code of honour, and the mischief is that the clergy possess a caste and morality of their own that tend to subvert the awakening of healthier social consciousness. For the greater glory of God, almost anything becomes permissible, moral responsibilities that obtain elsewhere break down here. The story, probably apocryphal, told of Bunyan may be fitly applied. "There but for the grace of God go I," he said, on seeing a criminal led to execution. Were any of us in the pulpit, bound by its traditions, and swathed in its teachings, we all might behave as does the priest. It is not the man that spoils the religion, it is the religion that spoils the man. And that is the ultimate reason for its destruction.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE NECESSITY OF SIN

THIS essay is designed to show that sin is an indispensable cosmic factor, and that its abolition would immediately reduce life to the animal level. The truth of this would seem to be evident on the most cursory reflection: yet the slightest attempt to elaborate upon it is greeted with shrieks of protest from every type of moral reformer, from the most thorough-going Theist to the most uncompromising infidel. Sin is perpetually in the dock, being subjected to a never-ending barrage of insults and obloquy. Yet in the interests of common justice, we feel compelled to act as the prisoner's defence counsel and to try to show what an appalling calamity her death, which is being sought after by so many people, would be for the world.

Fortunately, it will not be necessary in order to proceed with the discussion to assume that the word can be satisfactorily defined. It is clear that one man's sin is frequently another man's virtue. Every sane person agrees that cruelty, intolerance, pride and avarice are sinful: but if we select a dozen representative people and ask them to give specific examples of each of these sins we shall receive as many answers as there are answers. In short, agreement on this question in the abstract is widespread; in the concrete it is almost infinitely variable. Sincere Conservatives and Socialists both hate injustice: but the former believe it consists in measures of nationalisation, while the latter hold just as firmly that it involves wholesale private enterprise. To the Roman Catholic it is wrong to disbelieve in purgatory: to the Protestant it is just as wrong to credit it, and so on ad nauseam. However, this universal disagreement with regard to particular sins need not concern us in our defence. For, as sin is an abstraction, all concur in assailing it. That fact is sufficient for our purpose, which is to demonstrate that sin is a necessary ingredient of modern life, however we may choose to define it.

Let us then try to imagine a world in which the efforts of the prosecutors have been successful and vice has been forever conquered. We shall consider first the lamentable plight of our authors and literature-loving public: for what would there be to write about and to read? It requires little thought to realise to what extent sin has entered into the literature of the world. Which of Shakespeare's plays does not owe its greatness to its graphic presentation of one or other of the human frailties? And the immortal bard is no exception. It would be almost impossible to name a work of art in the fictional sphere of literature, the subject-matter of which is not essentially concerned with sin. Writers and readers alike would be at a complete loss in the righteous world which our moral visionaries dream about. All types of fiction would be affected from the sublimest novel or play to the most blood-curdling thriller. The great literary productions of the past would be regarded as mere curiosities with no relation to real life. At present, we can recognise the famous characters of fiction in people we meet every day. But with everyone wholly good, the works of all the literary geniuses would cease to be valued, except perhaps as relics of a bygone age. The only books to appear would be concerned with purely technical, uncontroversial subjects. Fiction writing and publishing would be at a complete standstill. In short, practically all book-lovers and book-producers would in a sinless universe have nothing whatever to live for.

All other classes of people who depend for their livelihood upon the indiscretions of their fellow human-beings would fare no better. The legal profession and the police force would, of course, be non-existent reducing the members thereof to beggary. And what of those whose present business it is to try to make the world a fitter place to live in—our social and moral reformers? In the Utopia to which they look forward so ardently, they would be better dead. Their magnificent speeches which have thrilled men throughout the ages have all been directed against some wrong which they feel passionately should

be righted. From Jeremiah and Isaiah to Winston Churchill and Bernard Shaw, the cry of the prophets against oppression has wrung loud and clear. If ever that oppression were conquered there would be no ethics, no religion, and consequently, no prophets. And those lesser prophets of our own land, the clergy of the Christian Churches would find themselves in the worst plight of all. These gentlemen are in the vanguard of the attack on Madame Sin, yet if it were not for her they would all be unemployed. Few of them it is to be feared would be able to adjust themselves to any other type of work. The great majority would certainly be extremely miserable were they not engaged in saving souls from eternal damnation. In a perfect world, the ministers of the Church would be utterly superfluous: that is why none of them can be in heaven. Their task is, and always must be the reformation of erring creatures, but in the nature of things they can never have complete success, for that would spell for them an eternity of unemployed misery. I have no wish to take my place with my fellow ministers in a clerical dole-queue: but, unlike them, I realise I can only keep out of it, if sin continues to exist.

The religion professed by the clergy has brought comfort to millions of human souls. Yet it is based upon sin, and could not exist for another second without it. How many millions of sermons, good bad and indifferent have been preached since the beginning of the Christian era praising the courageous death of Jesus upon the Cross? He died, we are told, for the sins of the world. Precisely! And if it were not for the sins of the world, Jesus could never have died, could never have taught, could never even have lived; and all those fine sermons could never have been written. Life without Jesus would be for millions of pious souls intolerable. But whether Jesus is in the rôle of ethical teacher, divine Messiah or Incarnate God, he is as nothing unless human souls yield to temptation. The Sermon on the Mount would be unintelligible rubbish if men never hated their enemies. The Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son and Pharisee and Publican parables to name but a few of the many beautiful stories the Master related would be completely irrelevant were cruelty, foolishness and hypocrisy unknown—indeed they could never have been told. The atonement, from which so many of the orthodox gather inspiration to perform courageous deeds, would be a mere historical oddity if there were nothing to make atonement for. Jesus and sin are inseparable: the one entails the other as surely as the outside of a frying-pan entails the inside. If we substitute the word goodness for Jesus we come to the crux of the whole question. In the world as it exists, goodness has no meaning apart from badness. If everyone was good, no one would be good, for the term "good" would then be unintelligible. The most noble deeds of the finest characters in history owe their nobility to the evils against which these characters had to contend. To desire a world without sin is equivalent to desiring a world without goodness, for the one cannot exist without the other. People who say that heaven is a place where everyone is virtuous are talking plain nonsense. There can be no such condition where virtue is, there vice must be also.

I will not, however, be misunderstood. All this does not mean that those who feel impelled to act righteously should not do so; on the contrary it means precisely the opposite. It is because goodness is of such importance that it is necessary to emphasise that the disappearance of sin would automatically result in the disappearance of its opposite. However, it is luckily impossible that vice will ever be conquered. The Almighty has, with great foresight, given each of us a different temperament, a different way of looking at things and a different way of acting: who would have it otherwise? Suppose by some miracle it were possible to have everyone wholly good, or everyone wholly bad. From whence then would come that fascinating diversity of character and temperament which alone makes our present life tolerable? We would all be better in our graves, though even that escape might be denied us, if heaven were composed

solely of the virtuous and hell of the vicious. No, thank God, we are not all of a sameness—a few of us are very good, a few more good than bad, some others more bad than good and a few very bad. This extremely creditable arrangement has obtained from the beginning of time and will, we trust, obtain to the end. In this sense human nature never changes, for which grace we should be well and truly thankful.

We may of course quarrel with the Almighty for having made a world in which goodness depends for its existence upon the prevalence of sin. A system of things could perhaps be imagined where it was not necessary that virtue should entail vice. Why it may be asked did God, who is supposed to be all-powerful, construct an inferior universe in which virtue and vice are inseparable when he could have constructed a superior one in which they were not? That is a very interesting academic question, but in the nature of things it is unanswerable, though it may be used legitimately, I think, as an argument against the perfection of God. It need not trouble us now, however. We are concerned with the world as it is, not with what it might have been. And we cannot afford to ignore the facts. If we love goodness and all its manifestations we must never cease to emphasise and believe in the necessity of sin; for all the fine qualities we admire and reverence in human nature will be snuffed out like so many candles, if vice does not continue to flourish, now and always.

JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

POLITICAL SATIRES OF WILLIAM HONE

One of the most outstanding and successful of the many political broadsheets that came from William Hone's agile pen was that bearing the label of "The Clerical Magistrate." Published about 1819.

The woodcut that adorns the top half of the first page sketched by George Cruikshank, shows a broad breast-high pulpit divided into two, the facia of each half-section being as follows:—

(Left-hand side)

I H S

Surmounting a triangle apex downwards radiating beams of light from each side.

(Right-hand side)

G P R

Surmounting a glittering crown.

Inside the pulpit is seated a dual effigy back to back, the left half facing left showing the vestmented priest holding a small cross high in his right hand, whereas his "opposite number" facing the right, dressed in funereal black, is armed with a miniature scaffold with dangling noose in his left hand, whilst his right holds a many-tongued whip, and the dangling chains of law, and at the same time an old fashioned blunderbuss pressed tightly under his arm.

THE BISHOP: "Will you be diligent in prayers . . . laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?"

THE PRIEST: "I will."

THE BISHOP: "Will you maintain and set forward, as much as lieth in you, quietness, peace, and love, amongst all Christian people?"

THE PRIEST: "I will."

The Bishop, laying his hand upon the head of him that receiveth the order of Priesthood, shall say, "Receive the Holy Ghost." (The form of ordination for a priest).

... The pulpit (in the sober use of its legitimate peculiar powers)

Must stand acknowledged, whilst the world shall stand, The most important and effectual guard, Support, and ornament of virtue's cause."

E. H. S.

ACID DROPS

We are indebted to the "Church Times" for the information that there is to be three whole weeks to pray that there shall be unity between Christians. If that succeeds, it will really be something new in the world. For ever since the date given for the appearance of Christianity, there has never been any agreement as to what Christianity really is. Jesus told them, but he must have been a very bad hand at explaining his meaning. In the New Testament they were fighting each other. When we get on firm ground as to the nature of Christianity, we find a quarrelling body of men as to what was Christianity. What they were doing in the early days they are doing to-day. The greatest of all these different quarrelling bodies is the Roman Church, and it stands first in numbers and power. They have so much love for their brother Christians that they do what they can to prevent marriage between them.

The gathering of this extra body together reminds us of some lines in Kipling's "The Jungle Book":—

All the talk we ever have heard
Uttered by day or beast or bird
Hide or fin or scale or feather,
Jabber it quickly and all together.
Excellent, wonderful, once again.
Now we're talking just like men.

We feel certain that this jabber of Christians of all sorts trying to agree together to produce the same religious teaching, might well have come from "The Jungle Book."

Something seems to have happened to the Pope, or the guardian angels that usually guard him from danger were asleep. The Pope was booked for the College of Cardinals on Christmas Eve, it was reported that he was too ill to attend, and could not make the journey. If this had happened to an ordinary person, the excuse would have been adequate, but the Pope is on a different plane, he is the representative of God on earth. God seem to have let the Pope down very badly. It is enough to make the Pope lose confidence in God.

The Scottish "Daily Mail" reporting the Christian Commando Campaign says that the "Scots were hostile to the campaigners" and that there are in Scotland "many people who consider the Church a failure." We are not surprised at that, what does surprise us is that the Scots, for whom we have a high regard allowed the Commandoes to "spread their 'Gospel' over Scotland." We do, however, congratulate the Rev. E. Miller, of Edinburgh, secretary of the campaigners, on the honesty in admitting that the campaign was a failure. We cannot imagine their English counterparts being so frank.

The Bishop of Lincoln and his brethren are losing heart through preaching to "congregations of two old ladies and a dog." Of course we do not think it is quite so bad as that, but that the situation (for the clergy) is becoming desperate. Perhaps our disheartened clergy in Lincoln will take heart at the assurance that Lincoln is not alone in their plight, the Church is losing ground all over the country, nay, over the world, and is an illustration of the old saying—attributed to Lincoln—the man not the City—that you can fool all the people some of the time . . . you cannot fool all the people all the time.

We make no apology for referring again and again to the Bishop of Birmingham, for we consider his latest book very important, another work like that and we shall consider sending him a membership form of the National Secular Society. But is it not really time that the Bishop threw aside the pretence and declared that he no longer has any faith in Christianity? We might well ask what is Christianity apart from its miracles. Ignore them and what is left of Christianity will not cause a ripple. Even if we were to adopt the perfectly ridiculous assumption that the world has to thank Jesus for *all* moral qualities, what then? The lesson has been learned, we can thank him if we like, but surely the matter ends there. In science, axioms once learnt are part of the mental make-up of the scientist, and he doesn't grovel to an idea of the discoverer for ever and ever.

A report of the dwindling church attendances is not something new, some years ago the Vicar of Christchurch, Chadderton Lane, said of his dwindling congregation that they must have been attacked by some disease, and his diagnosis was that the attack comes on suddenly every Sunday. No symptoms are felt on Saturday night, the patient sleeps well, eats a hearty breakfast, but about church time the attack comes on, and continues till services are over for the morning.

Then the patient feels easy, and eats a hearty dinner. In the afternoon he feels much better, and is able to take a walk, and talk about cricket or politics, but about church time he gets another attack, and stays at home. He retires early (sometimes), sleeps well, and wakes up on Monday morning refreshed and able to go to work, and does not have any symptoms of the disease until the next Sunday.

The peculiar features of the disease are:—

It always attacks professing church people.

It never makes its appearance except on Sundays.

The symptoms vary, but it never interferes with the sleep and appetite.

It never lasts more than 24 hours.

No physician is ever called in.

It is becoming painfully prevalent, and is alarmingly infectious: make no friends of the infected.

No remedy is known for it, except prayer.

Unless checked it always proves fatal in the end—to the soul.

All that need be said is that the disease is on the increase, and it is quite incurable.

There are certain laws, still in being, bearing on the Roman Catholic Church in this country. So long as they remain they are standing exhibitions of the degree to which Christians love one another. Most of these laws are just ignored by Protestants, not because these Christian bodies love one another, but some may not be pleasant to Protestants. Several attempts to enforce some of the laws have been made, but nothing happened. One day something may be done, and when it is done, we may see an open recognition that England never was a Christian country. It was all "bounce." It is time when something should be done.

When Hobbes (seventeenth century) said that superstition was religion not allowed, while religion was superstition allowed, we were reminded of him, when the other day a clergyman of note declared that the carrying of a "mascot" was sheer superstition, but when a woman carries a cross on her body—that is pure religion. The fact is that in spite of all being able to read and write, the country is still well charged with primitive superstitions. Superstition is hard to kill.

Turning over a number of old papers, we came across some of the Scottish journals, one supplying the information that in Scotland the Roman Catholic Church provided 13 per cent. of the criminal population. The period was 1930.

Christian impudence has become so common that most people seem inclined to take it as given. For example: In a recent issue of the "Methodist Recorder" we were told that Christian men and women have for a long time been seeking to "make industry more humane than it is." That sounds very nice. But one cannot forget, ought *not* to forget that the very worst features in the development of industry, when men were treated worse than cattle, it was the least religious ones who fought so hard to humanise the working man. Of course, there were many Christians who protested against children being in the mills from morning to night, ill-fed and badly clothed. And as for adults, it was not the Christians alone that strived to kill the cruelty that existed. Again we advise all to read the five volumes by Mr. and Mrs. Hammond and see how little Christianity did to prevent the brutality of the industrial barons, and then select the number of non-Christians who fought for creating a better state of life. In the early days of the machine age, the main teaching of the Churches was to obey. Finally we may point out that the order from the Methodist Church was that no member of the Church must take any part in the struggle for a better industrial life.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

For "The Freethinker."—Miss L. Pye, £2; Mrs. Rupp, 7s. 6d.
BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Amy Cross, £1 2s. 6d.; A. L. Jones, £1.
J. R. DUNCAN.—We doubt whether a copy of the "Black Book," 1831, can be procured. The British Museum may have one.

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

We were very pleased to see in "The Times Literary Supplement" a couple of columns dealing approvingly with the work of a Freethinker, George Meredith. He was not everybody's meat, but he had two outstanding features. One was his portraying of women. One would have to get back as far as Shakespeare to beat it. Perhaps we ought to have said "to equal it," but we leave it at that. Our introduction to him came from G. W. Foote, founder of the "Freethinker" to whom many letters of approval were given by Meredith, both privately and happily. Meredith spoke openly for the "Freethinker" as did some others. But the majority, as usual, whispered. The greatest sin that Christianity committed was not the number of people the churches killed, but the number of hypocrites they created.

There is one other point that we alone could now tell fully, but we must be satisfied with some short notes. Soon after "The Freethinker" was established, Foote was charged with the impossible crime of "blasphemy," tried by a very bigoted judge, and sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. Meredith was furious. He wrote at once and offered to write some articles to show his disgust. Foote replied and told Meredith that he had enough troubles to face to make the place he deserved without shouldering the power of Christian bigotry. These were two fine attitudes of two fine men. We should like to have seen this story in "The Times Literary Supplement." One day we may write more upon this story.

The Manchester Branch N.S.S. will have a visit to-day (Sunday) from Mr. F. A. Ridley who will lecture in Chorlton Town Hall, at 6-30 p.m., on "The Problem of Palestine." A Freethinker's point of view on that problem will no doubt be interesting and informative, and with questions and discussion a well spent evening should result.

We are glad to learn that two very successful meetings were held in the Newcastle area by Mr. T. M. Mosley and Mr. J. Clayton. The meetings, arranged by Mr. J. T. Brighton, evoked considerable discussion which augurs well for the future.

JANET IRVING

It was with greatest sorrow that I learned of the death of Mrs. Janet Irving, wife of H. Irving. I could only appreciate how he would feel his loss, but knowing him I felt that he would be glad that the loss had fallen to him. Shortly before his wife died he wrote me, in one of his kindly sarcastic notes, to say that they were speculating which one would die first. His hope was fulfilled. The death pain was his. His wife was beyond it.

Mrs. Irving was a woman of fine character, kindly to all when help for others was most needed. A great deal of her active life she spent in Yorkshire hospitals, Homes and later on military hospitals. Her interests were theatricals, literature and a dozen of other public institutions and needs. She played her part in the world war, although she loathed war as only woman could, and at the end was engaged in new forms of helping others. A fine woman in fine causes.

She was cremated in accord with her express wish, and the ashes were scattered on her native soil. Mr. E. G. Bayford addressed the mourners in the home, and then gave another Secular address at the Sheffield Crematorium. The gathering of many men and women from various parts offered evidence of the degree to which Janet Irving stood in the memory of men and women.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

We have often noticed the way in which people will kick against a very small lie, and directly afterwards swallow a lie ten times as large. Here is a very good sample which comes from a well-known defender of religion:—

If Jesus was a divine being, then His incarnation was the greatest of miracles, and it opens the road for more miracles. It is idle to dispute about His miracle of feeding the hungry and healing the sick. He came down from heaven to earth, and if he has a Heavenly Father, and if He does come again to judge the living and the dead, He must take the consequences.

In other words, if we believe any of the nonsensical stories about Jesus, what is the use of disregarding any of these fantastic tales. The Bishop was right. When anyone swallows the first miracle he ought not to jib at anything that is put before him.

SIR STAFFORD STUMBLES

ONCE again the World Evangelical Alliance has sponsored what it describes as a "Universal Week of Prayer," drawing God's attention to the serious situation at home and abroad and presumably inviting Him to do something about it. It would hardly have been worth noticing, but somehow or other they persuaded Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to address their London meeting and lead a call to prayer to which it was hoped the people of this country would respond. Now Sir Stafford is the superman who has recently been entrusted by the Prime Minister with special responsibility for measures to get us out of the financial and industrial mess in which the late war has landed us. He has already exhorted us to tighten our belts, to work harder, to save, to avoid wasted effort and to help the export trade, so we may be excused for inquiring whether by leading a "prayer drive" he is himself using his energies for the country's good.

First, was it necessary? It scarcely seems so, for according to recent speeches of Sir Stafford's fellow members of the Government the nation has achieved wonders since the first call to greater output was made. Before his week of prayer began the miners had almost reached a target long considered far beyond their powers, exports had been steadily expanding and we had been told that we had only to keep it up and all would come right in time.

Secondly, was it fair to God? Suppose He decides, now that the orgy of praying is over, to give us a little help for a change, how will anyone know that any improvement noticed is the result of His handiwork and not a continuation of the progress the workers had set going previously? Another question with which the prayers were concerned was that of international relations. Couldn't Sir Stafford and his friends have arranged for Mr. Henry Wallace, the advocate of friendship between America and Russia, to have come forward as a candidate for the Presidency of the United States after the prayers, instead of a week before they began? That would have been some result! I feel we shall look in vain for anything really convincing. God should show more discrimination in His choice of friends.

Really, I cannot possibly imagine God's being at all pleased with the organised weeks and days of prayers that His more influential followers are so fond of arranging. Advertising God is all very well, but for God's sake let it be a *good* advertisement, not a damaging admission that the one-time general habit of spontaneous prayer, inspired by sincere faith, is on its last legs! Does Sir Stafford think that forcing this humiliating fact on God's attention is a good way of getting Him to show a kindly interest in our affairs? Many will doubt it.

Perhaps the value of Sir Stafford's patronage of the purveyors of prayers is shown by the advice with which he wound up his speech to those assembled in Westminster Chapel. He said that there was only one test of how they should act: they should do that which conscience, refreshed by communion with God, instructed them was right. Somebody should remind him that this is exactly what Hitler used to do. Moreover, he should know from the lessons of history and his own experience that, of all guides, conscience is the one most likely to set people at sixes and sevens. Now if he had suggested that they should bring their intelligence to bear on their problems, a God worth having might have been impressed, and might even feel inclined to throw in a little heavenly help as make-weight over and above what human effort could achieve.

To an Atheist the idea of a Christian making a really intelligent attempt to win the Almighty's goodwill is very attractive, so I will proceed with a suggestion that Sir Stafford might like to try. Let him begin by crediting God with the good sense to value a sensible prayer from a sincere believer more than millions of silly ones from half-wits joining in a stunt. Let him next make a list of ways in which God can help this country and the world during the next six months, enclose it in an envelope and seal it. They must, of course, be results that are not likely to be achieved by human efforts. The envelope can then be handed into safe care, and Sir Stafford can pray to his heart's content for God's help. After all, he knows what the requirements of the situation are, if anybody does. It is his job, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to do so. If he wants people to pray, he would be much better employed demonstrating its value in a practical way than talking a lot of nonsense. At the end of six months the envelope can be opened and the list of things Sir Stafford has been praying for can be published. If no other editor is willing to find space for them, I think the Editor of "The Freethinker" can be relied upon to do so.

"Prayer and action" are the remedies the Chancellor has prescribed for our present troubles, and what I have done is suggest that he shall take his own medicine for a time and let us observe results. If he is unwilling, others should not be blamed for ignoring his advice. Nor would it be surprising if they ended by regarding his participation in the World Evangelical Alliance's ridiculous circus as a piece of hypocrisy, in no way consonant with his position and indicative of a power of judgment far below any likely to command the confidence of the people who think.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

SYMBOLS OF WELL-WISHING

IN those times when cattle served for money—whence the term "fee," from Anglo-Saxon "feoh"—cattle—any additional hand among the kinsmen meant an increase in the communal wealth; in this way, fertility was equivalent to good luck.

Nowadays this is the general rule no longer and the original meaning of fertility symbols having been obscured, they are taken for symbols of good luck and as such are still prevalent in our wedding customs.

It goes without saying that many of these old fertility rites were of a rather outspoken nature, and the corresponding religions, therefore, did sanction sexual indulgence. When the procreative instinct in Man, however, ceased to be a boon in general, the religious outlook grew hostile to sexuality. Negation of earthly life, therefore, lies at the bottom of the great monotheist creeds. Along with this change, a number of ritual symbols had their proper meaning twisted whilst surviving formally; people still go on performing them without understanding their real meaning. If stripped of their ritual or customary camouflage, those symbols are still recognizable as what they originally were.

1. With Bread and Water

Notably, water is indispensable for the growth of plants. From this, the language of symbolism infers the necessity of spraying or drenching "for luck." There is a belief that particularly rain in May is propitious to further the growth of children, or a saying prevails that a bride will be particularly "happy" if her bridal garland had been wetted by rain. Thus, this is artificially done, if not with water, so at least with a substitute such as "confetti."

Danae—as the Greek myth goes—was impregnated through a Golden Rain, and the "sieving" of water the Danaids were condemned to, is reminiscent of the rites of "Rain Magic," which, in turn, is connected with frogs and other aquatic animals. As a further consequence it is they—and in particular the STORK—who carry the "souls" of babies (actually the Child-Spirits) from the depths of wells (the ritual Stork dancers walk on stilts). The myth of the Wells of Rejuvenescence is the last trace of the conception that the germ of youth is buried in water.

Water currents are mainly symbolized by snakes (or dragons) which, in the different myths of the Creation are also represented by the Demon of CHAOS that had to be cut in two by the God of Light; in this way the waters "below" are being separated from the waters "above" as stored up in the clouds. According to the myth of the Hopi Indians, the waters come forth from the breasts of a big female snake. Thus, the bosom—"shad" in Hebrew—is another symbol for the life-sustaining liquid, and probably the name of "El-Shadday" for Yahve is derived from it.

The patter of falling rain drops can be imitated by the throwing of lentils, grain, etc., and, lastly, "confetti." In Italian "to give confetti" (*dare i confetti*) is tantamount to "get married." In older times coarse meal of lime was used instead and "Pierrot" is one who was powdered in that way. The German word for "Wedding" is "Vermählung" = the MEALING with its double meaning (1) meal=fLOUR and (2) the legal union through the eating in communion of a meal—consisting mainly of a cake of meal or pollard (in Latin *FAR*—hence the term of "conferreatio" for marriage). The wedding cake, therefore, in the consumption of which the couple allow their next-of-kin and friends to share, is the oldest symbol for wedlock.

Symbol cakes often were shaped according to human—particularly, sexual organs or the moon, were offered to the "Queen of Heaven" by the Israelites (Jer. vii, 18 and xlv, 17-19), in 2 Sam. xiii, 6-10, the kneading of dough and making of

cakes precedes rape. Cakes went along with the holy prostitution in honour of the Mylitta (Bélit) of Babylon.

The Roman Catholic Wafer (hostia) is kept in a vessel called the "lunula" (little moon). Bread in the shape of half-moons or whetstones is still to be found. As birth-place of Jesus, the Giver of (eternal) Life, Beth-Lehem was chosen, an old sanctuary the name of which means "House of Bread." Despite the obscuring "explanation" in the Bible, the Jewish "Mazzoth" are simply a thanksgiving "hostia" made from the new crop.

In honour of the Roman VESTA, donkeys decked with cakes were carried round the town. The ass in general is the emblem of lasciviousness (Ez. xxxviii. 17-20), but particularly so is the he-goat (Gen. xxxviii. 17-20). In this shape, therefore, all vegetation gods were represented (cf. Pan, Priapus, Faunus). Nowadays, with the sexual taboo in religion, they have degenerated into the "Devil" with horn and hoof.

PERCY GORDON ROY.

MILLENNIUM

Little man, certain and smug,
living in your little, smug, prefabricated universe,
what would you do if the blizzard of reason rushed
into your stagnate little haven?

What would you do with no priest to guide you,
no saint to turn to, no jealous god beside you?

I, being perpetual pilgrim, ever journeying,
could offer you no fit and suitable shelter.
And I, being neither saintly nor cheek-turning,
(and bearing a long-time grudge)
would offer you nothing, nothing but laughter.

C. J. STEVENS.

CORRESPONDENCE

"THE USES OF PHILOSOPHY."

Sir.—Surely the well-worn troubles of "philosophy" resuscitated by Mr. J. W. Poynter in your issue of January 11 are capable of, at least a potential solution? The first clarification needed is one of definition. Modern usage defines Philosophy as the logic of science. This at once eliminates the verbiage of metaphysics and theology and calls in the first place for a critical and logical examination of the language in which positions are made. This is, of course, no new procedure. Hume some 200 years ago showed in no uncertain way the nature of significant and non-significant terms, and many Freethinkers must be familiar with the contemporary work in logical analysis of Camap, Wittgenstein, Russell, Ayers and others, originating largely from Hume's conclusions. Most of the "isms" fire badly, whether pluralism, monism, materialism, idealism, determinism or what-not, but it is at least comforting to find that the age-long conundrums are, after all, only pseudo-problems, at least in their conventional settings, and have their insolubility not in profundity of thought but in errors of grammar!—Yours, etc.,

J. W. SEITZ.

ON TRYPHO AGAIN.

Sir.—I am sorry Mr. Robertson did not read my article more carefully. I did not accuse some opponents of dishonesty because they reject my "gloss on a passage in Justin's 'Trypho'"—whether it is or is not an "old game" of mine. My exact words are, "... my Rationalist opponents—in my opinion, very dishonestly—always retorted that when Trypho used the word Christ or the Messiah, he did not mean Jesus but some other Messiah."

I say this is dishonest, I hold to every word in the paragraph Mr. Robertson quotes—that is, that Trypho knows nothing whatever about Christ, that "if he has indeed been born and exists anywhere, is unknown," and that the Christians "invented" a Christ and accepted "a groundless report."—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

G. B. S. AND MRS. BESANT.

Sir.—In his apologetic letter to Mr. Cutner in "The Freethinker" of January 11, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw overlooks that "the old Secular guard" were more concerned with Mrs. Besant's sudden change over to Theosophy than her political views or opinions; and Charles Bradlaugh, being a Radical, would certainly oppose her Fabianism. Mrs. Besant was much too experienced a person not to have realised this without needing a hint from Bradlaugh.

Similarly, freethinking Liberals would doubtless look askance at a Fabian sharing the same platform at Bradlaugh's meetings at Northampton regardless of Mrs. Besant's "notoriety" in connection with her co-partnership and assistance in the publication and sale of the Knowlton pamphlet entitled "Fruits of Philosophy" for which, by the way, Bradlaugh alone was obviously responsible.

Moreover, this alleged "notoriety" was so little thought of even by the Tories, who were after Bradlaugh's blood, that Mr. Douglas Straight, their prosecuting counsel, offered to proceed against Bradlaugh alone at a further hearing of the case at the Guildhall on April 17, 1877, for selling "Fruits of Philosophy," which had previously been declared unlawful at the Central Criminal Court when Mr. Charles Watts was prosecuted on February 5, 1877, and pleaded guilty to publishing such a physiological treatise even for a good purpose.—Yours, etc.,

BRIAN FERGUS O'CONNELL.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 27, 7 p.m.: "The Fallacy of Discipline," Mr. W. DAVID WILLS.

Ethical Union (Ethical Hall, 4a, Inverness Place, Queensway, W.2).—Saturday, January 24: A One-Day School, 3 p.m., C. BERTRAM PARKES: "New Standards of Amenity in Town and Country," 5 p.m.; Tea, 6 p.m.; H. J. BLACKHAM: "Rural County—A Study Tour of Suffolk." Tickets, 3s.6d., inclusive of tea.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Plight of Man," Mr. OLAF STAPLETON, M.A., Ph.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Crisis—Its Cause and Cure," Mr. STUART MORRIS (P.P.U.).

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Colour Bar," Dr. JOSEPH MITCHELL, B.Sc. (League of Coloured Peoples).

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Twilight of the Gods," Mr. HAROLD DAY (President, Bradford Branch).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "A Night with 'Rabbie the Rebel,'" Mr. ARTHUR COPLAND.

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

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Is Religion Necessary?" Mr. A. SAMMS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Problem of Palestine," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (Author, "Julian the Apostate").

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespear St.).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Communism," Mr. ANTHONY GORMAN (Young Conservatives).

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DUBIETY

"On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man." YOUNG.

IN his article, "The Catholic View of Church and Age," ("Freethinker," November 23), Mr. J. W. Poynter, discussing certain arguments for and against Catholicism says: "He wishes he could accept (or rather re-accept) the Church's claims. Morally and intellectually it would be a great help and solace to him, as to many others to have a real divinely ordained infallible guide. The removal of such doubts as those described herein would cause him to become actively aware of a duty to submit to the Church: but can they be removed?"

The obvious answer is: If Mr. Poynter believes that to accept the Church's claims would be morally and intellectually a great help and solace to him, why not accept them? What more could he desire than to be "morally and intellectually" assured of their efficacy? Such a degree of certitude should leave no room for doubt. In fact, in so far as he believes that his acceptance of them would have such results, he virtually admits their truth.

But let us examine Mr. Poynter's position as shown in some of his late contributions on the subject. We may, perhaps, be better able to discover the cause of his doubts, and, at the same time, form an idea of his chances of resolving them.

In concluding the last of three articles on his "Catholic Experiences" ("The Freethinker," October 12), he tells us: "Meanwhile I intend to continue honestly seeking truth notwithstanding difficulties, and irrespective of where it may be found or whereto it may lead."

The particular truth that Mr. Poynter is seeking is, it appears, "religious truth"; and, by his account, the quest has occupied a considerable portion of his life without, so far, leading to any satisfactory result; he is still on the track of that elusive verity. For many years he thought he had found it enshrined in the doctrines of the Catholic Church, but a difference of opinion concerning the propriety of Catholic procedure in a certain case started doubts and misgivings which ended in his leaving Catholicism. He is now, he says, "unattached," but still retains "a wistful fondness for the old religious associations," and "the difficulties of an intellectual kind which had alienated him are still unsolved."

As far as I understand him, Mr. Poynter wishes to believe that religious truth exists if he could but find it, and the effect of his failure hitherto is not to convince him that there is no such thing, but to leave him in a state of wistful uncertainty about it. What his "difficulties of an intellectual kind" are, he does not say; but as the phrase is a kind of euphemism much in vogue with those who find themselves unable to reconcile the absurdities of religion with the facts of science—and are sorry for it—we may take it that as such it correctly describes Mr. Poynter's present state of mind.

It might occur to many inquirers that there was something amiss either with the method or the object of a search that had resulted, so far, in nothing but uncertainty. To seek for the truth of religion is to assume there is such a thing. It is to start with a prepossession which heavily handicaps every adverse argument. One would think that the best course in such a case would be to rid the mind of all emotional influences as, for instance, "a wistful fondness for old religious associations," delusive assurances of "moral and intellectual help and solace" and all longings and regrets that might prejudice the issue, and to aim at attaining a more balanced judgment by extending the field of inquiry in all directions. Almost every branch of science furnishes something that would help one to a decision. But Mr. Poynter would doubtless regard any such suggestions as superfluous in his case. He is, it appears, a seasoned polemic who, in a long course of controversy, has canvassed every

argument pro et con, and finds himself notwithstanding in the peculiar position of being neither able nor willing to come to a decision one way or the other. I recall a passage in a former article of his, "Are we Freethinkers?" which appears to confirm that view. He then says: "For my part I would not call myself definitely an Atheist, a Theist, a Polytheist, a Pantheist, a Monist or by any other name distinctive of a final belief as to the nature of ultimate reality. That ultimate reality is far too mysterious for me to be sure of its nature. I would call myself either a Freethinker or a Rationalist or (in a long phrase) simply a person of independent mind."

If this be really Mr. Poynter's attitude he is self-consigned to uncertainty, and his declared intention of "seeking truth notwithstanding difficulties and irrespective of where it may be found" is a mere parade of impartial inquiry signifying nothing. Truth, if it is to be found at all, must exist in a form adapted to our powers of perception. It is obviously hopeless to look for it in what is admittedly inscrutable.

But Mr. Poynter is not consistent even in his uncertainty. How does he reconcile this sweeping negation of belief with his latest declaration that it would be a great help and solace to him to accept the Catholic Church as "a real divinely ordained infallible guide"? A while ago, he would not accept any religious belief known to mankind; now, he is ready and desirous to accept the most incredible of all—Catholicism! In one mood he would call himself a Freethinker or a Rationalist, in another, he would submit to the claims of the most arrogantly irrational of superstitions—and this, too, after having once already renounced them.

I will close these remarks with another citation and a comment. In his last article, "Grim Evangelicalism," he says: "The Roman Catholic Church by giving me 'colour and life' to some extent remedied the ill-effects" (of his puritanical upbringing) "and so I am grateful to it even though, rightly or wrongly, I lost faith eventually in its dogmas," and he adds "(Note rightly or wrongly)" thus emphasising the doubt he feels whether he was right or wrong in losing faith in the dogmas of the Catholic Church.

If he "rightly" lost faith in the "Church" how can he be grateful for those things which were really the means of his becoming her dupe? It is by what he calls "colour and life"—that is, her showy ceremonial of music, lights, incense, robes, posturing, etc., and not by her doctrines that she gains and retains most of her members. And, if he "wrongly" lost faith, why hesitate when the way back to "colour and life" lies open to him? Let him forgo for a time the evident pleasure he feels in discussing his doubts, recant his errors and rejoin the "Church." The position will be familiar to him and need not be final. He will easily find occasion, as formerly, to indulge his propensity. He would do well, however, to remember with what deep suspicion the Catholic Church has ever regarded (and wisely regarded) the relapsed heretic, and what penitential ordinances she has framed for his special benefit on re-admission to her fold.

A. YATES.

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