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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

About the Priests

IT will be remembered that some time back we presented our readers with an account of the social value of the clergy of this country, in the form of a "Royal Commission." Curiously enough we appear to be the only ones who have ever seen the report of the Commission, and even I cannot now put my hands on the report. But it appears to have treated the priesthood rather badly. It is argued that the clergy were not treated fairly. Big and little they must have been of some service to the community or they would not have lived so long, and there is some ground for saying that the service of the numerous body of clergymen is not yet exhausted.

The argument set forth has an attractive look, and probably possesses a scientific value. It is at all events a strictly scientific statement to say that for an organism or an organ to survive it must play a useful part in the struggle for existence, or at least it must not obstruct the useful activities of other organs or organisms beyond a certain point. The survival of the clergy as an institution being a fact, the question that arises for discussion is, "What function or functions have the clergy performed in the course of social evolution that has ensured their continued existence from the remotest ages down to our own day?"

A careful study of the history of the clergy may show that the statements made by the Commission cover only one aspect of the situation and the services of the clergy may prove them to be of greater social value than most anticipate. There may be an intermediate period during which it is impossible to see that they performed any useful social function whatsoever. What that intermediate period is we shall see presently. For the present, one may point out that at that early stage of culture when belief in the supernatural is inevitable, the primitive clergy may be credited with a certain measure of utility, inasmuch as they relieved the rest of the community from devoting itself to the task of determining what were the wishes of these supposed supernatural governors. So far, and in spite of certain considerations on the other side, their activity would leave the rest of the community free to spend its energies on more useful social work. The clergy would thus represent in primitive society an illustration of that principle of differentiation of function that obtains in both the biological and the social world.

If the course of evolution had followed an ideal direction, the clergy would have ceased to exist with the condition of society that gave them birth. But it is a scientific truth that organs do not disappear with their period of utility. They may, if they are very injurious, die out with comparative rapidity, or otherwise they may linger on for

a considerable period at the expense of the general organism. The clergy offer an example of the latter description. For many centuries the Christian clergy succeeded in attaching itself to a large proportion of the best intellect of society, and thus stood in the same relation to the body politic as those rudimentary organs possessed by man, which having sole reference to a past condition of existence, absorb nutriment and give nothing in return. It is this that constitutes the intermediate period in the existence of the clergy, during which they might justly have been charged with being an obstructive and even dangerous body to the society in which they existed.

But the clergy have since then entered upon another period, and its nature is such that I am surprised that before now religious apologists have not seized upon it as a valuable defence of the clergy, both established and disestablished. To begin with, no one can any longer accuse the clergy of absorbing the best intellect of the nation. To that charge they have a simple and effective reply. They can point to the men eminent in the Church, and show how it has showered favours on those of only average mental endowments—men whom it would once upon a time have restricted to very subordinate positions. More, they may also show, that so far from being desirous of monopolising the highest intellect of the country, when within recent years men of more than average ability have arisen within the churches, everything has been done to discourage their activity and encourage them to withdraw. The churches to-day cheerfully offer these to Art, Science, Literature, even to Politics, and are content with such as would scarcely shine in other directions.

The churches go even further than this. Self-sacrifice is of the very essence of Christianity, and in no direction has it manifested this more than by the way in which it renounces the help of men who might, could they be secured, reflect credit upon it. In this it is in striking contrast to the vanity and egotism of other professions. In all other professions the tendency is ever to raise the standard and by making the conditions of attaining eminence harder, secure the strongest only, leaving out of sight and consideration the weaker and poorer endowed. Christianity acts upon a different principle. It is a gospel preached to the poor, the weak, the infirm. Even one of its bitterest enemies—Heine—was forced to pay it the tribute of admitting Christianity to be an admirable religion for cripples. Of these weaker brethren the sciences take little notice, except it be by casting them out as the result of the increasing ability required. But it is to these weaker ones that Christianity holds out the hand of loving fellowship. It says to them: "Come, when you are rejected of other professions, turn to us. We will not reject you, but take you in. Nay, we will take you in the more gladly and the more completely because of

the weakness for which you are rejected by these intellectual aristocracies. With us, your want of intellectual ability shall be no bar, but rather a recommendation. Long ago it was said that unless you became as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven, and the nearer the approximation to that idyllic condition, the warmer shall be the welcome, the more certain the advancement."

Here is a distinct benefit conferred upon society by Christianity and the clergy. For these weaker ones are social products equally with the stronger. Some arrangement for their welfare ought to be, must be, made. And in an unconscious manner society has provided an outlet by its encouragement of the clerical profession. Their enrolment in a special class confers, therefore, both a positive and a negative benefit upon the community at large. Positively, employment is provided for a class that society is morally bound to care for. And this is done in a manner that—short of confining them in an institution—could not be otherwise equally well done. In no other way could the sense of importance possessed of this class be so well satisfied, nor would the community be content to tax itself to provide salaries of equal value. It is beside the point to say that we do not desire this class to exist, neither do we desire the existence of lunatics or criminals. The truth is they are here, and being here, society is bound to provide for their maintenance in some way or other.

The negative benefits conferred upon society by the institution of the clergy are even more important. In commerce, a Merchandise Marks Act aims at securing that all goods sold shall be what it is claimed they are. It is difficult enough to enforce this Act as things are; but the irruption into commercial life of a large body of men who seem constitutionally unable to supply the public with a genuine article would increase the troubles of the legislature, and enormously enhance the cost to the community. As it is, the clerical profession, by supplying an opening for those people who *will* supply the public with Catholicism for Protestantism, Protestantism for Catholicism, Freethought for Christianity, and Christianity for Freethought, certainly eases the problem. Perhaps an intellectual Merchandise Marks Act might be framed, but it is doubtful whether the Bishops would allow this to pass the Upper House.

Now no one can deny that, so long as types of mind of this class exist, the whole of the community benefit by their being confined, to some extent at least, to a single profession. And one's appreciation of the value of the clergy will be exactly proportionate to one's dislike of these qualities in social, commercial, and political life. Of course, it may be argued that if those people who are now trained as clergymen were otherwise brought up they would behave as do other people; but this is mere opinion, and we are dealing with facts alone. And facts are that (1) the tendency of the non-clerical professions being to select the stronger characters, and the weaker being thus left unprovided for, the institution of the clergy does open up an occupation for this class. And (2) this institution provides a field for the exercise of certain qualities or characteristics, which if prevented from any other outlet, and so forced to express themselves in the purely social field, could not but be productive of greater harm than is

the case under present conditions. On both these grounds the clergy may fairly lay claim to consideration, and may justly hold that so far they are a benefit to the community. It is strange that this function of the clergy should have been overlooked by their opponents, and stranger still that they should have overlooked it themselves. Perhaps what has been said may suggest the proper and soundest line of defence for them to adopt, and also excite a greater toleration in the minds of their opponents. We may not desire the presence of the clergy as an institution in itself; but neither do we desire doctors or lunatic asylums but for the existence of diseases and disorders. And it is surely unreasonable, not to say unjust, to spend willingly the large sums that are spent on providing for the ailments of our fellow-creatures, and yet cavil at an institution that ministers to the well-being of the class described.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

AUTO-SUGGESTION

EXPLANATIONS seem to be of three kinds. There is one which does attempt to simplify and make plain; another of the type of sophisticated obscurantism which carefully avoids anything that might, by any stretch of imagination, be considered elucidation. There is another that is a complete inversion of what is presumed to explain. A classic example of the third category is Isaac Newton's apple; a story told by Voltaire to show that the movement of the planets and the stars in their courses, is no more wonderful than an apple falling off a tree. The story is retold as if it were true, with the moral that an apple falling is just as marvellous as the celestial movements.

An article in "Picture Post" on "The power of suggestion" certainly does not come within the first category. There is a general atmosphere of scepticism, but this seems to be directed against the scientific aspect of the case, for the writer seemed to avoid cutting across religious susceptibilities; and remarks about the fashionable "healer," patent medicine type of testimonial, the genial personality and showmanship of M. Coue, are not counterbalanced by any clear statement of the scientific character or method of the investigations of the New Nancy school.

It is interesting to reflect that in the development of this aspect of psychology, there has been much doubt and suspicion of charlatans and cranks. Whether Paracelsus, with his magnetic analogy and his bedside manner, was charlatan or crank, scientific or mystic; he relied on bluff and showmanship to a considerable extent. But even the sensationalism and theatricality of Mesmer does not debar the probability of a genuine belief in his own theory. The development of the study of hypnotism from mysticism involved a quaint mixture of science and superstition, with much violent controversy. Speculations following Mesmer's "magnetic fluid" developed into a science with subtle and ingenious theorising.

Our article gave an interesting biographical sketch of M. Coue, how he came to psychology study; his visits to this country and America. But in view of remarks on hypnotism as action of mind on mind, involving the power of mind over matter; perhaps the statement of Coue's position is the most intriguing. "Coue was merely restating a truth—known to all intelligent psychologists since the world began"; the "axiom" that "when the imagination and the will are in opposition the imagination always wins." Of course, this is not how Coue puts it. "He was expressing it in so simple a way that even a child could practice with profit and safety." Well, why not express it in his simple terms? Besides, where is the danger?

The interesting point about this statement is that it can be read across and back, up and down, and inside out. What is meant by opposition of imagination and will? Surely it requires effort even in moving the vocal organs? Does it not require "will" to continue repeating the suggestion? Continuous repetition may be tiring, surely it requires "will" to overcome this tired feeling. One may not get results all at once, it may take time; surely the longer it takes, the more "will" is required. And as it is the "will" that is being exercised, surely it is the imagination that gets the worst of it.

For let it be noted that Coue "made no absurd claims. He never pretended that a lost arm would grow again." Plainly he was more concerned with the nervous condition. We can well believe that the character of the ailment would be that of the "cure"; keeping to the terms of our statement, an imaginary complaint may have an imaginary cure. But why turn it the wrong way round and say that imagination wins? And what is meant by opposition? Perhaps the imagination, like the "power" of suggestion, is also a "power." In which case we seem to have a conflict of "powers." But it seems also, that we have imagination on both sides.

If the "power" of imagination always wins, what kind of a "will" is it? If the imagination has power, we have two powers; one imaginative, the other unimaginative. It looks as if the power of the imagination is identified with the spirit, the mind; and the unimaginative will, with the flesh, with matter; so that it is a case of the power of mind over matter with the ailment identified with the ills of the flesh. And, remembering that it is cases of illness that we are concerned with, it seems that the illness is wilful, and that it is the will to be ill that has to be counteracted by the imagination. Our patient is wilfully ill and imagines himself well again.

Our explanation seems to be a bit of a tangle, and we are wondering who these "psychologists" were who knew this "truth" since the world began. It must have been the medicine men and priests. Certainly they have known the power of suggestion; they have used it in the repetition of their incantations, creeds and prayers; their catechisms and liturgies; course and blessing, anathemas and exorcisms; in their shibboleths and articles of faith. They have exercised the "power" of the imagination over the "will" to believe to the extent of believing in miracles; in the power of mind over matter; that faith will move mountains.

Certainly the facts are well known; every medical practitioner has patients who show no clinical evidence of ailment. It seems that in such cases, as children, they learned to simulate illness to get sympathy otherwise unobtainable; auto-suggestion gives a lowering of resistance to common ailments. The extent to which such a nervous condition facilitates disease is an interesting question; as also is the question to what extent counter-suggestion can be used as a remedy; and even the question to what extent the process is hypnotic. The ideas of suggestion and auto-suggestion have followed from the study of hypnotism. The scientific development has involved a process of elimination in the simplification of theory as well as of practical application in understanding.

Isaac Newton did not discover gravitation, he invented it. It was a new way of considering old and well-known facts. In the same way, Coue and other psychologists, with their suggestion and auto-suggestion, have given us new ways of considering psychological facts. The development has involved the discarding of a host of metaphysical, mystical and theological assumptions. A better understanding should replace the complications and dangers of misunderstanding and mental confusion.

Further consideration then, seems to show that this explanation of the "Power of suggestion" comes within the same category as Newton's apple. Its purpose is to reinstate the dethroned "powers."

H. H. PREECE.

HABEAS CORPUS

I HAVE long wondered at the general belief that the story of Hitler's end by burning in the courtyard of the Berlin Chancellery satisfactorily disposes of the mystery surrounding his death. It seems to have occurred to no one to ask the simple but potentially vital questions as to what happened to the remains. To those who may be disposed to regard any such sequel to the sordid story of the bunker as of no importance, I need only remind them of the two thousand-year controversy which hung, and still hangs on precisely the same issue. If the bodies of Hitler and his wife remained in sufficient substance to be removed intact, posterity may well regret the failure of those first on the spot to ascertain their final resting place. And it is manifestly certain that such was the case. No fire, however fierce, which was not contained in some form of enclosed incinerator, would reduce two adult bodies to nothingness in less than days of continuous burning, owing, of course, to the large quantity of fluid contained within them. In the case of these two, even after a fire much more fierce and lasting than any which the investigators can account for, remains even more or less recognisable, and still weighing many stones, would have to be disposed of when the flames died down. What happened to them?

One is left with the disquieting conclusion that someone, probably still living, deliberately removed and hid the historically significant relics of this macabre tragedy, and it would be contrary to all precedent if such a duty was carried out as a mere act of sanitary routine, without notice, and without some degree of veneration and ceremony, however misplaced.

As far as I can find, all accounts of the final scenes in the gruesome Chancellery, stop dead at this point—the omission being most noticeable—leaving one with the strongest suspicions of a deliberate iron curtain, which has never since been lifted.

Though it was not actually on account of the observation that I have for long been interested in this mystery, I cannot resist the opportunity of referring to the obvious conclusion. If in these days of accurate reporting, photography, chemical analysis, and scientific identification, etc., it is possible within a few hours for two famous bodies to be completely lost, how increasingly futile must be the pathetic efforts even yet being made to confirm the details of a burial drama nearly two thousand years ago?

J. STURGE-WHITING.

SALVATION IN THE FORENOON

He goes to purify his soul
each seventh day. But first he'll read
the lurid trivia (the meal
of predigested mush) and load
his mind with pearls the fourth estate
has deigned to cast. This done, and full
of daily toast and such, he'll put
aside the world to seek the grill.

He comes to feel the pulse of God
(and feels it) in hosannas flung
in unison, and in the flood
of pulpit cant. He sees the wrong
in other men, the evil in
their thoughts and deeds. He prays for them.
He nods until the last amen,
but strongly sings the final hymn.

Salvation gained, the cloudy gates of hell
and heaven alike recede. His upright stride
now homeward turns; forgot are good and guile
in eager thoughts of stomach to be fed.

C. J. STEVENS.

ACID DROPS

The Roman Church is the only Christian Church in this country that steadily increases in numbers. This is brought about in a very simple manner. Once a member of the Roman Church always a member. It is true that the Church has a process of ex-communication. We have several forms of this, and we can safely say that nowhere in the wide world, not even the tortures under Hitler, can outdo those inflicted on men and women by the Roman Church. But substantially, so far as Rome goes, once a Roman always a Roman. It is not for nothing that one of our first-rate historians, Lord Acton, said that if a man "accepts the Papacy with confidence, he must have made terms with murder." Lord Acton was neither a bully nor a fool. He was not beloved by Roman Catholics.

We have said that a large number of Churches do not hesitate now to publish the steady decay of church attendances, and in the "British Weekly" there is a plain statement that there is "a steady deterioration through the years," which has brought us another crisis more urgent than any other—England is dangerously near Paganism. Of the early Christians it was said, "See how these Christians love one another," etc., etc. We regret we have to leave this with a correction. "How Christians love one another," was not written to prove the brotherhood of Christians. It was Roman sarcasm, for so soon as we meet Christians, we find them quarrelling with one another. Only the threat of annihilation has driven Christians to-day into something like friendship with their Christian brethren.

From the "Daily Mail" we get the news there is to be a desperate series of "moves" to spend money and energy to "The Conversion of England." Well we have seen and heard of many of these desperate attempts to keep the Christian deity in being. We put the matter in that way because it really expresses the meaning of this new publicity burst. Money is to be spent on the Press. It is also admitted that hitherto propaganda has been dull. The people are to be made "religiously active." This is getting desperate. Attention must be gained. It is admitted that the "Fleet Street approach may at times bring disrepute on the Church as a whole," but something must be done. This is very touching. We are so affected to see this ancient thing dropping to pieces that we are inclined to give a column of "The Freethinker," without pay, to see what could be done. A king without a crown and a God without worshippers are sad sights.

A letter which appeared in the "Tavistock Gazette":—

Sir.—What a victory!

And now the quite unnecessary storm in a tea cup is over; there are many much more important things now for taxpayer's time and money to be spent on than closing cinemas on Sundays.

Surely it is better for young men and women to go there than to pubs. And if people want to go to church in the evening, well they can go and pray for the sinners enjoying good music and pictures. Yours, etc., FREEDOM.

In the outlook for better things to follow the war, we must remember that, whether possible to evade war, or whether we are unable to avert, the prices for victory, as well as the price for defeat, in all directions the practice of war of necessity involves a relapse to a low standard of ethics, even if it does not negative all that is usually covered by the term. In civil life it is considered wrong to lie; in war lying is one of the first things necessary. One must lie to the enemy about one's strength, or one's aims, or one's movements. Starving a man to induce consent is of all things the most villainous to the civil conscience. In war one may legitimately starve a whole nation to bring about surrender. In civil life the exercise of private judgment is taken as one of the marks of a developed civic life; it is the first thing forbidden to those who engage in war. Slandering one's neighbour is a properly detested offence in civil life; in war, organisations are created for no other purpose than that of slandering the

enemy. Force in civil life is admittedly of no value as an index of right; in war it is the only argument of any weight. So one might go right through the list of civic virtues. In nearly every case we are moving on a lower level, doing collectively what each of us would be ashamed to do individually. Small wonder that every war leaves a nation—whether it be victor or vanquished—in a poorer state than it found it.

The Roman Church seems strongly opposed to a state-controlled medical service. As to which is the best plan, we cannot say, but we do know why the R.C. is so strongly opposed to State medicine. At present the Church, when it can, has Roman doctors for Roman believers, and while that remains, the Church will find it easy to keep alive the miracles on which the Roman Church lives. In almost everything the Church works for the maintenance of a State within a State, and to have non-religious hospitals, staffed by non-Roman doctors, is to weaken the beautiful lines of magic on which the Roman Church lives. Consider the stock of miracles the Church has got and anyone can see that a medical system that takes no notice of saints and miracles will play the devil with the Church. The R.C. is not so concerned with the physical health of man, woman and child, as it is for large stocks of R.C. magic. Dr. Fairfield, R.C. doctor, says plainly that the Government will have "to come to terms based on Catholic principles." That seems to put the matter in a nutshell.

"The Universe" says quite plainly that "Our Lord's descent into hell is affirmed in the Apostle's Creed." That seems to settle the matter. No one knows where it was, who it was, or how it was, but you can get it verified for twopence.

Almost as good as the proofs for the descent of Jesus into hell is the information given by a Christian paper that Emerson declared himself as a Christian when he said: "Whoso must be a man must be a nonconformist." Of course all that Emerson meant was that he who merely conforms to anything is of no great quality.

Christians of the more serious type are not afraid of confessing the difficulties the Churches have to hold their own. It matters little what part of Christianity we note, from Rome to the smallest group of professed Christians, the picture is the same. We saw this expressed well enough in the "Belfast News-Letter" recently. It pointed out that whether we took "Roman Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, Confucians, etc.," the same picture of decay can be seen. Of course, the two last groups cannot be taken as even religious, but we can let that pass. The main point to notice is the plain confession of the steady decay of all forms of religion. The paper also admits that "Militant Atheism" is the only effective rival the Churches have to face.

The other day there was a gathering of ministers of religion in Kilmarnock to discuss how more houses could be built for people who are in need of shelter. A good purpose, but not one of the ministers remembered what Jesus did when his mother's husband, who was a carpenter, found certain planks too short. But Jesus was an adept at bringing out something from nothing. He asked his mother's husband to hold one end of the plank. Jesus held the other end and pulled it to the required length. Readers will find this in one of the Apocryphal Gospels. It is not more wonderful than the other miracles in the other gospels. But nowadays even Christians are not compelled to believe it.

Our good feeling for the Bishop of Exeter; right or wrong, he is a good, sound Christian priest, and that is something that is rather scarce. What we usually have is a mixture of humility and cowardice. But the Exeter Bishop, according to the "Scottish Daily Mail," found outside his church, that all the headstones bearing a cross had been overturned, and inside, an image of Christ had been turned upside down, hymn books had been scattered and altar candles had been burned. There were other damages, and the Bishop being a pure servant of God, easily recognised that the whole thing "Bore the mark of Satan." Once more we congratulate the Bishop. So far he is real Christian. He is not ashamed of teaching real Christianity.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We are not sure that Ruskin lived up to the heights he held before others, but it is good, and so worth noting. It was given to a young man, and it runs thus,

Since no man was ever yet wise enough to see the whole truth about anything, there is no discredit in his being willing to consider the ideas of others.

These essential Freethought sentiments are dangerous notions to disseminate among upper circles. Many readers may be sound Christians, and the churches might lose clients. We may as well admit that willingness to listen to the ideas of others, presuming that these others have complete freedom to voice their ideas. Some may wonder why they never heard it mentioned by the Church. Others may say that Christ never advocated freedom of thought and speech for all men. In his view anyone who obstinately dared to differ from him was charged with speaking against God, and fearful punishment followed. All the Christian churches have stuck to that. One may say that the terrible consequences that followed "Thou shalt not" have cast a shadow over the whole human race. Theoretically Christ did not come to teach. His main weapon was to threaten. From evil mankind has never freed itself.

God's followers move in wondrous ways his blunders to perform. We are moved to think of that paraphrase of one of the Christian hymns on receiving from a Burnley Freethinker a copy of the "Burnley Express" containing an advertisement of "Sunday Films" in the Enon Baptist School. In the same paper we find a report of a Town's Meeting at which Sunday Cinemas were rejected by 471 votes to 435. We have the usual attempts of justification by C. of E. and R.C. bigots and it is boldly asserted that the clergy are purely and solely concerned for cinema staffs, that they shall not be overworked. This is indeed touching, and we may well ask what has caused this sudden concern of the clergy over the workers. 'Twas not ever thus, as anyone who has a slight knowledge of the history of Christianity will know.

The National Secular Society will be pleased to send copies of leaflets for distribution at towns' meetings. Here is a chance for Burnley Freethinkers to help put the issue plainly before the electors. Inform the citizens of Burnley the real reason for the Churches' antagonism to Sunday Cinemas, do not allow them to be fobbed off with the lame excuses of the Bishop of Burnley. The Churches are slowly losing their stranglehold on the people—help to break it.

Nottingham readers are reminded that Mr. H. Cutner will speak for the Cosmopolitan Debating Society to-day (February 8) on "Science and Psychological Research," at 2-30 p.m., in Technical College, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham. The Cosmopolitan Debating Society is one in which the expression of all shades of opinion is encouraged and Mr. Cutner's subject should result in an interesting afternoon to speaker and audience. All seats are free, and anybody can attend.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY

We have just received the Annual Report of the Leicester Secular Society. It is one of our oldest Secular Societies, if not the oldest. We should say that many Secular speakers from all parts of the country have lectured there, and a list of its speakers would cover many men and women of note. It has had the good fortune of having at its command a body of hard-working and single-minded people. As a Leicester-born Freethinker, I feel grateful to the Society that has existed so long and which has done so much in the interests of one of the greatest of causes. "Leicester Secular Society," Leicester, is the address for all who wish to get into touch with it.

C. C.

G. BERNARD SHAW AND "CAPITAL PUNISHMENT"

THE letter below appeared in "The Times" for December 5, 1947, under the heading, "Capital Punishment":—

"SIR,—Had not the ambiguous and confusing terms, 'Capital Punishment' and 'Death Penalty' better be dropped? The public right and power of civilised States to kill the unprofitable or incorrigibly mischievous in self-defence can never be abrogated. Were it abolished verbally it would be restored or evaded by martial law in the next emergency. Punishment is a different matter. It should be got rid of altogether on the simple ground that two blacks do not make a white, to say nothing of the fact that criminals cannot help their nature and that retaliation is flatly un-Christian. Why not call the subject judicial homicide, or, to avoid unpleasant associations, judicial liquidation? It would clear our minds, now so confused that discussion seems hopeless.

"As to deterrence, there are insuperable objections to it. It must be cruel or it will not deter. It is effective only when detection is certain. This could be secured only by providing a police officer to watch every citizen, which is impossible. And it involves the very undesirable consequence that when a crime is committed it does not matter who is punished somebody is punished. The police are not impartial. They must do everything in their power to obtain a conviction. As one of Dickens's characters put it: 'Much better hang the wrong fellow than no fellow.'

"Criminals should be liquidated humanely, not because they are wicked, but because they are mischievous or dangerous. A vitriol-thrower should be got rid of as ruthlessly as a cobra or a mad dog. A man who lives by promising to marry women and deserting them as soon as he has spent all their money is a social weed to be uprooted no less than if he drowned them in their baths. Dangerous insanity, instead of exempting from liquidation, should be one of the strongest grounds for it.

"To simply ostracise liquidation as something that is 'not done' is not humane when the alternative is long deterrent imprisonment, involving the waste of man and woman power by staffs of tormentors and maintenance of prisons. At present our death dreaders are quite satisfied when a murderer is relieved. If they were really humane it would horrify them.

"What is greatly needed is an institution to deal with people who, under tutelage, discipline, and support (like soldiers and 'good' prisoners) are well behaved and useful citizens, but when left to their own resources are presently in the dock or helpless on the street as beggars.

"Criminals who can be reformed raise no problem and should be left out of the discussion. If they are reformable, reform them: that is all.

"Most of what is being said in your columns at present has been said over and over again for thousands of years in vain. My excuse for cumbering your columns with more of it is that it may still be possible to clear our muddled heads about it.—Yours, etc., G. BERNARD SHAW."

He is a bold man who ventures to enter into controversy with the venerable and redoubtable G. B. S.; but courage did not fail David against Goliath. My object is an honest desire to get at the real truth of a difficult, interesting, and important problem.

"The public right and power of civilised States to kill the unprofitable and incorrigibly mischievous in self-defence can never be abrogated," says Shaw. I must ask: "What is meant by 'unprofitable and incorrigibly mischievous'?" At present, our British laws allow the death penalty only, unless I am mistaken, for murder and high treason. In former times it was incurred by many other crimes. Amongst these was "heresy." Not only before, but also for a considerable time after the "so-called Reformation," death was inflicted for denial of the prevailing religion. Would G. B. S. say that that policy was justified? On the principle seemingly implied in his words ("incorrigibly mischievous") it seems to me that the answer must be "yes." Consider: In the Middle Ages religion permeated the whole life of Europe. It was at the basis of all public and private life. All institutions recognised and were bound up with it. Any attack on it, therefore, was unquestionably not merely "mischievous," but a deadly danger to the security of the State. It would seem to follow logically, therefore, that the State was justified in inflicting the most severe possible punishment on anyone making such an attack. The most severe punishment possible is the irrevocable one of death; and the most severe and impressive form of inflicting it is by fire. Question to G. B. S.: Does he think the mediaevals were right in burning heretics at the stake?

If he should reply that heresy is a matter of opinion, I would answer: (a) So, for the matter of that, is murder. Crippen was of the opinion that Belle Elmore was better dead than alive; in this he differed from the view held by the State. (b) Even in matters not of killing one's unwanted wife, but of spreading unorthodox opinions, there may be more danger in such opinions than in many positive overt acts. An obscure anarchist who puts a home-made bomb in a pillar-box is less dangerous than an eloquent writer who (never lifting his little finger in violence) spreads subversive doctrines far and wide. Marx was more powerful than poor Morales who threw the bomb at King Alfonso XIII on his wedding day. So I repeat the above question to G. B. S. I would even add to it this one: Would he think it unjustifiable if, in some Fascist totalitarian State, the authorities were to conclude that G. B. S., by reason of his apparent habit of always denying (often, apparently, just "for the fun of the thing") accepted beliefs, is "incorrigibly mischievous" and therefore should be, in his own words, "liquidated" for the sake of the State's "self-defence"?

Next I would ask what Shaw means by "unprofitable"? Would he apply that word to anyone unable to earn his/her living? If so, many valuable citizens would have to be "liquidated." Many economically impotent persons have left valuable literary or other artistic works. The author of "Hudibras" died a pauper. Was he less "profitable" than Charles II in his palace?

If "dangerous insanity" justifies killing the sufferer from it, why not also incurable cancer, tuberculosis, and so on? Indeed, there is a school of thought ("euthanasists") which would so extend the principle. The question arises, however: What would be the limits of that policy? Also another question: Who is to decide whether any given sufferer shall die or not; the sufferer, his/her relatives, or the public authorities? In short, such a principle seems open to endless confusions in application.

G. B. S. may be right in regarding death as often more "humane" than long imprisonment. That, however, is "another question." The question at present at issue is: For the State's "self-defence," is the death penalty right or needed? Myself would reply: A State, as a "complete society" (*societas perfecta*) should retain the right; but it should be inflicted as infrequently as possible. Would not the theory maintained in his letter make society into a chaos of killers?—or, whereat would he "draw the line"?

J. W. POYNTER.

ALWAYS THE JEW

A CHURCH of England clergyman of my acquaintance who had lived for some years in Germany before Hitler came to power, revisited that country on a month's holiday in 1937. He returned to England after a week for he felt that the ceaseless anti-Semitic propaganda that met his gaze everywhere—in hotels, in public lavatories, on hoardings and in the Press, was beginning to take effect on him.

This man, personally a kindly decent chap, found to his horror that much of the anti-Jewish propaganda had stuck, and that almost unconsciously he was beginning to regard all Jews, if not with hatred, at least with dislike. It took him months to eradicate the poison from his brain.

There is no doubt that many of the people who listened to the German propaganda during the war were, and still are, influenced by the Niagara of filth poured out by Lord Haw-Haw and his fellow crooks on the subject of anti-Semitism. If our people had only realised the truth of Voltaire's dictum that ridicule is the most deadly of all weapons and had christened the fellow Lord He-Haw, the braying of this ass would only have been laughed at; instead of which his words were taken seriously by many people incapable of doing their own thinking.

Anti-Semitism is the weapon of degenerates and tyrants. Hitler and his band of criminals started their campaign by appealing to the vanity of the German people, telling them that they were pure Aryans. This was a most unscientific stupid statement to make. A scarecrow had to be found as an explanation for Germany's loss of face in being defeated in the First World War and for the economic upset and distress that followed it, so Hitler and Co. copied the technique which had for centuries been followed by the Christian Churches—they blamed the Jews. The Jews were a small minority who could not offer any resistance so they were massacred in cold blood. Then when the Jews could no longer be blamed, as by that time most of them were dead or in concentration camps, the attack was switched on to the Trade Unions, the Press, and every radical and democratic organisation.

Start with anti-Semitism and then attack every cause that stands for decency and freedom!

Freethinkers have a powerful weapon to use in combating anti-Semitism. Again and again I have reminded the Jew-baiters that the Christians, having no originality, had to borrow a god from the Jews: that the "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" about whom the Christian children sing, was a Jew; that the Virgin Lady who was supposed to be his mother, was a Jewess, and that the twelve Apostles were all Jews. No doubt many of these devout Christians hate the Jews; but they believe in the second coming of Christ, and that when He does come He will arrive in the form of an English gentleman with an Oxford accent, quite forgetting that, if such a thing was possible, the Lord would probably come to earth as a little Jewish man wearing a tail coat, an old silk hat, and carrying an umbrella—and saying: "Vell, here I am—vot do you vant?"

"How odd of God to choose the Jews,
But odder still that those who choose
A Jewish God, should spurn the Jews."

How often we are told that, in attacking religion, Freethinkers are flogging a dead horse—well, are we?

Hindus and Mohammedans at each other's throats in India; Jew and Moslem turning the alleged Holy Land into a human abattoir, the Vatican, day after day, week after week, trying to impress upon their ignorant followers, especially in U.S.A., that war with Russia is inevitable and desirable. In Europe, we see the Vatican with a finger in every pie, trying to stir up trouble and wildly enthusiastic about the Fascist regimes of Spain and Portugal. We have had the German myth theory of the pure Aryan race, and we still have the Jewish absurdity that the Jews are God's own chosen people: unfortunately the Arabs hold similar views about Mohammedanism. The Christians have their particular Joss and are prepared to fight anybody who states that the Trinity story is impossible—that three cannot go into one.

How well summed up all this was by Voltaire when he said: "In trying to save their souls, mankind has nearly damned the human race."

These warring sects, each one claiming that they alone possess all the truth, are out of touch with modern scientific thought. For over 2,000 years men have killed, tortured and persecuted in the name of religion, all those who disagreed with them—all hating each other for the love of God.

To save their wretched souls, men have slaughtered millions of their fellows, wasted billions of pounds on superstition, maintained ignorance as their greatest ally, preached the horrors of hell in another world whilst they did their best to turn this world into a living hell. All religions whether Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan, Hindu, etc., are founded on fear and are enemies of progress.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

ONE-SIDED RELIGION

The Archbishop of Prague says that he is shocked at finding that a one-sided religion is being taught. We agree that this is a very bad practice, but we should like to know when and where religion is not being taught in a one-sided way. Certainly nearly all religious people we have come across have regarded it a one-sided religion as the only form they will permit. We fancy what is troubling the Archbishop is that the religion which is being taught is not his religion, and to the religionist that is the gravest sin that anyone may commit. If we must have religion we should take care that the religions are mixed. The believer in religion will get mixed in any case, so they may as well get in as great a mix-up as is possible.

CORRESPONDENCE

REAL CHRISTIANITY.

Sir,—May I say how heartily I appreciate the article by C. C. on "God, Woman and Man," January 11. As a woman and a Freethinker I can endorse the comments on the religious fanatics and their relation to sex.

I recently had an interview with such a fanatic, a male evangelist, which left me with the oddest mixture of pity and contempt. He claimed to have unique access to eternal bliss (divine, of course), and lots more clap-trap, all of which he was anxious to share with me in a brotherly way. His whole conversation was coloured with a concern for morality, which obviously meant only one thing to him—sexual intercourse. His attempts to convert me to his way of thinking led along one track, thinly disguised by religious fervour.

"If I had you alone for 24 hours," he told me, his gleaming fanatical eyes gloating over my anatomy, "I would have you safe in the Arms of Jesus!"

The man's subsequent correspondence on the subject of a debate proved him to be illiterate and ignorant, and needless to say, there was no debate.

His was a sad case of sexual perversion or frustration, but nevertheless such people are a social menace and the sooner people are educated to recognise such phenomena the better.—Yours,
F. E. (Halifax).

OBITUARY

JAMES FREDRICK CLEAVER

It is with deep sympathy that we announce the death of James Fredrick Cleaver, father of the secretary of the West London Branch N.S.S., which took place on March 28, in his 76th year. A Freethinker of many years standing he found no difficulty in guiding his life by the principles inspired by his Freethought outlook, and it was no doubt a further consolation to know his son was taking an active part in the Movement. The funeral took place on February 2 at the Hammersmith Cemetery, London, where before an assembly of relatives and friends a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary N.S.S.

R. H. R.

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, February 10, 7 p.m.: "The Influence on Mind of Unconscious Factors," Miss BARBARA LOW.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Communist Manifesto—100 Years After," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "As I See It," Mr. F. MACKAY (N.S.S.).

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Whist Drive. Tickets 2s., refreshments included.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Jews in Europe—A Survey," Rev. J. ISRAELSTAM.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Jewish Case," Mr. M. LOVVISH, M.A.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Do We Need Religion?" Mr. ALLAN FLANDERS.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Religion and Ethics in the Atomic Age," Mr. EDMUND TAYLOR.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Science and Psychological Research," Mr. H. CUTNER (N.S.S.).

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"ARE THERE RESERVED SEATS IN HEAVEN?"

A Parable

JUST before Good Friday I had the funniest dream. I thought I had died and was standing before the Pearly Gates. A commissionaire stood at the gates and stopped me as I was about to enter, saying: "Excuse me, sir, but may I see your ticket?"

Naturally I said, "What ticket—there are no reserved seats in heaven?" "To-day there are," was the reply, "the Dean and Chapter have let the place for a concert, and if you want to come in you must reserve a seat—prices 6s., 3s. 6d. and 2s.!"

While we were talking, an elderly lady and a shabbily-dressed workman came along. They approached us and the worker said to the commissionaire, "Excuse me, brother, but is this where we enter?" "Got your tickets?" said the commissionaire.

"Tickets!" he exclaimed, "my Father's House has many mansions—open to all—free." "Look here," said the commissionaire turning to me, "I've had enough of this. I'll go and fetch the Warden."

He walked away and came back with a well-dressed distinguished-looking gentleman who said to the workman, "I'm awfully sorry, old man, but there's been such a rush for tickets that I haven't any vacant seats at all." "Standing room at two shillings," interjected the commissionaire.

"Neither of us has any money," said the worker. "Well," retorted the Warden, "if you are a deserving case I might get you in free. Is either of you connected with the Church in any way?"

The old lady said softly: "For many years my husband was a church organist and choir-master. After his death the Church didn't give me a pension, and I had to go to the Parish for Poor Relief." "Oh," said the Warden, "So sad. What of you Mr. . . ." "Well," said the worker, "I've just come out of prison—I was a conscientious objector." "Hm," said the Warden, "I think the Salvation Army would be more in your line."

"I don't know about that," said the worker, "as I mention in my book . . ." "Your book—are you an author?" said the Warden. "I am," rejoined the worker. "I wrote it when I was in prison—like this good lady's husband I served God with all my talents." "Hm, local talent, the Bishop might be interested," said the Warden thoughtfully: "are you a university man? If so the W.E.A. might find you a job lecturing in Literary Appreciation, they pay well, you know."

"I have been to no university and you don't need a university degree to write."

"I'm sorry," said the Warden, "but you've only yourself to blame, you know, if you want to teach you must be properly qualified."

"But," said the old lady, "my husband was considered a very fine musician, although he never went to school. He even had some of his work published."

"Yes, yes," said the Warden, "you both seem genuine enough I must admit. You can come in free. You'll have to stand at the back, but it's the best I can do. It's a pity so many good musicians die so poor."

"He worked hard for the Church too," said the old lady. "It was his whole life, you know. He used to quarrel with the Council because they wouldn't give the choir-boys enough to eat or buy decent clothes. They didn't like him because of it."

"Ah, yes," said the Warden, hastily consulting his watch. "Well, I must be off now, the Lord Mayor and their Worships will be here at any minute."

From inside there came a glorious burst of sound from trumpets and drums and voices began singing: "Christians be Joyful and Praise your Salvation."

The Warden turned and opening the gate, said: "Goodbye, Mrs. —" "Anna Magdalena Bach," said the old lady, "and this workman beside me is my good friend, John Bunyan."

Then I woke up.

ALAN MASON.

HOLY BAPTISM!

HE (Padre Amaro), though embittered and ill, had to leave for the Cathedral to baptize the son of Guedes.

It was a maddening torture for him to see those happy people, who on that drear December day filled the Cathedral with the noise of domestic rejoicing and paternal felicity, which they vainly endeavoured to restrain. There they all were: Papa Guedes, resplendent in his white coat and white necktie, the godfather, full of his own importance, with a great camellia on his chest, the senhoras in their gala attire; standing out amongst them all was the stout midwife, walking up and down carrying with pomp her mountain of starched lace and blue ribbons, amongst which two little brown cheeks were barely visible.

At the end of the Cathedral, with his thoughts far away, he hastily rushed and gabbled through the ceremony: blowing the Sign of the Cross over the cheeks of the infant in order to drive out the Devil who had already taken up his abode in that tender flesh: he laid the salt on the little mouth so that all his life he would loath the bitter taste of Sin and nurture himself only with the divine desires of Truth: he (the priest) then took saliva from his mouth and put it into the ear holes and up the nostrils of the baby, so that he should never listen to the solicitations of the flesh and never breath the alluring perfumes of the earthly things. And standing all round with tapers in their hands, the godfather and godmother and the guests, wearied with all that quickly muttered Latin, were only occupied with the baby, fearing that he might respond with some impudent irreverence to the tremendous exhortations which his Holy Mother the Church was making to him.

Padre Amaro, then, lightly putting his finger on the little white bonnet urged the baby, there in that great Cathedral, to renounce for life the Devil with all his Works and Poms. The sacristan, who gave the ritual replies in Latin, renounced them for him—while the poor little baby opened his mouth in search of his mother's nipple. The priest then went in the direction of the baptismal font, followed by a crowd of sanctimonious old women and a bunch of beggars waiting for a distribution of coins. But the anointing of the baby was a scene of confusion: the midwife excitedly fumbled at the ribbon of the gown, which had to be undone for the oil to be put on the little bare shoulders and chest; the godmother went to her aid, letting her taper slip and spilling the wax down the dress of one of the senhoras, who frowned with anger.

"Franciscus, credis?"

Mathias hurried to affirm in the name of Francisco.

"Credo."

"Franciscus, vis baptisari?"

"Volo," responded Mathias.

Then the shining water fell on the little head, round and soft as a tender melon: the baby kicked with impatience.

"Ego te baptiso, Franciscus, in nomine Patria . . . et Filii . . . et Spiritus Sancti . . ."

At last it was all over! Padre Amaro ran to the sacristy to take off his vestments, while the midwife looking very serious, the dotting senhoras, the old women and the expectant beggars departed to the jingle of the bells; sheltering under their umbrellas and splashing in the mud, carrying in triumph Francisco, the new Christian.

Translated by NAN FLANAGAN,
from "The Crime of Padre Amaro" by Queiroz.