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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Piety and Persecution

BISHOP BOSSUET was one of the ablest of the French theologians of the seventeenth century. He was a staunch son of the Church, and his criticism of Protestantism was both acute and deadly. He had a breadth of view—in spite of his devotion to the Roman Church—which few Protestants could rival. This was probably due to the fact that he belonged to a Church that claimed to be universal, and so had to think in continents where Protestants thought in conventicles. Looking over some of his writings the other day, I came across the following passage, which formed a sarcastic comment upon a writer who had been praising the state of toleration that existed in Holland:—

"Happy country, where the heretic is at rest as well as the orthodox, where vipers are preserved like doves and innocent animals, where those who compound poisons enjoy the same tranquillity with those who prepare remedies; who would not admire the clemency of these reformed States!"

Bossuet, I repeat, was a very able man. His ability was unquestioned, as was, where religion was not in question, his humanity. He was eloquent, and kindly in disposition, and so long as he was dealing with ordinary delinquencies, showed himself to be kindly and tolerant. But where heresy was concerned he could see but one proper course to adopt, and that was to carry out the policy of the Roman Church—the oldest, the strongest, and the most logical of the Christian Churches. The heretic must be suppressed at all costs. The truth was so self-evident to him that quite evidently, the mere existence of a State in which the non-Christian enjoyed the same freedom, and the same privileges as the Christian, was so absurd that merely to state it was enough to condemn it. It was as though one proposed establishing a State in which thieves and murderers should enjoy the same privileges as decent citizens.

Bossuet lived at a time when Christians had not yet grown ashamed of their religion; when they not merely said with the Bishop of London that nothing could save the world but Christianity, but actually believed it. It was a time when the principle of toleration was advanced by a few with a full sense of the novelty and daring of the suggestion. John Locke's famous letters on toleration, for instance, could only have been written at a time when this was the case. For with neither Protestants nor Catholics was there any question as to the legitimacy of the State, under the guidance of the Church, suppressing heresy. The only question as issue was whose heresy was to be suppressed. The Christian—Catholic and Protestant—said that right religious beliefs must be maintained, and wrong belief must be suppressed. Bossuet's famous argument against the

Protestants was exactly that which the Protestants themselves endorsed—with a different application. Both agreed that to give everyone the right to form and express his own individual opinion about religions was to run the risk of destroying "true religion" altogether. Deny the right of the Church to prohibit heresy and the way was clear for the complete rejection of religion. You are sheltering vipers, and giving the concoctors of poisons the same freedom as is enjoyed by those who provide the remedy. Heretics and unbelievers must be met with the full force of the civil power, enforced and encouraged by the spiritual thunder of the Church. Men reasoned thus because they were Christians. They persecuted because they were Christians—not because they were of necessity bad men, or brutal men, but simply because their belief in Christianity was sincere. Their conviction as to the necessity of persecution, weakened only as their faith in Christianity weakened. Persecution was born of religious belief. Toleration was born of unbelief.

It is a favourite thesis of the modern Christian that intolerance and its product, persecution, does not belong to religion, but was imported into it. That is not true. On the purely secular side the tendencies are all in the other direction. Among primitive peoples, what we see is a readiness to discuss all things that are of a secular nature, and fear of discussing things that belong to the region of religion. Early man is intolerant only because he is religious, although in course of time the intolerance bred by his religion reacts on the whole of his life. He believes himself surrounded by gods and ghosts on whose goodwill his welfare depends. The gods are there, not as desirable facts, but as facts that have to be faced and dealt with. It is a sheer delusion that early mankind hunted for gods; the truth is that they hunt for them. The Gods are untiring in their activity, indiscriminate in their vengeance when offended. They rule everything; they cause the food to grow, they send disease, they determine success in war. If offended they punish in a delightfully promiscuous manner. If one member of a tribe offends they punish the whole of the tribe by withholding food or by sending disease. We still see the same belief in those representatives of savagery who tell us that a war, or an epidemic, or a food shortage has been "sent" because God is offended with us. The tribe is collectively responsible to the Gods for what any one of its members may do. What the offended deity wants is revenge. What the tribe has to do is to see that none of its members give him cause to seek it.

All this gives us the beginning of Bossuet's conception of the heretic as a viper threatening the safety of doves, of a poisoner who concocts his deadly things for the destruction of others. It was this primitive conception that the Christian Church revived, established with a strength unknown to the culture of Greece or Rome, which has been responsible for more misery and cruelty and racial degradation.

tion than any other single force that has operated during the past two thousand years. And if the Christian theory be true the Church was justified in its action. Man is an immortal soul; his destiny is determined by his belief about God while he is on this earth. The unbeliever, the heretic, is thus a very centre of contamination, a point from which radiates damnation, one from whom the faithful must be protected at all costs. If Christianity is true, that theory is unchallengeable. There is as much reason and as much justification for suppressing the heretic as there is for isolating and confining the carrier of an infectious disease—more, because the carrier of an infectious disease can kill the body only, the heretic can destroy the immortal soul of man. Bossuet would not have denied that considered as a mere man the heretic might be unobjectionable. He might be honest, truthful, sincere, a good parent, a good friend, a good citizen, but he was an unbeliever, and as such a source of danger to man's immortal welfare—and as all good Christians have taught, it is that alone that matters. It was thus that persecution became with the Christian a moral duty, the highest and the most sacred of obligations. And if Christianity be true I agree with him. A Christian ought to persecute—it is a Christian kindness to those around him.

Primitive heresy is an act of treason to the tribe; the removal of the heretic is an act of social justification. He who offends the gods is bad because he is dangerous. At a later stage of social growth, when the belief in gods is not quite so urgent, and the social sense has become clear, he is dangerous because he is bad. But the moral badness of the heretic is an afterthought; it is the apology which the bigot makes to his only partly developed moral sense. Long after the conditions which made it reasonable to regard the heretic as a social danger have died out, the feelings associated with heresy continue, and much the same justification has to be found for their expression. The difference is that they are given a social colour instead of a purely religious one. And here, again, Christianity strengthened the primitive feeling that had become weakened under the civilising influence of Greek and Roman culture. It not merely re-established intolerance, it made the persecution of heresy the most sacred of all duties. Never in the world's history was the code of the persecutor so elaborate as it became under Christian influences; never was the inquisition into opinions so searching as it was under the Christian Church. Children were encouraged to inform against their parents, wives against husbands; no tie was held so dear that it might sanction or excuse the sheltering of heresy or the heretic. From the field of religion this spirit of intolerance flowed over into social life. Some restraint upon the intolerance of the Church was placed here and there by the secular powers, but so long as the power of the Church was unbroken that restraint was but slight. Only with the development of disbelief in Christian doctrines was there a genuine slackening of the persecuting spirit. A genuine, a sincere Christian cannot but persecute. And it is not the least of the evil influences of Christianity that it seizes upon the better aspects of human nature, the concern for others, and uses that as an incentive to persecution. If Christianity be true, persecution becomes a duty. It only ceases to be such when men and women begin to be doubtful of its truth, and uncertain as to its social utility.

CHAPMAN COHEN

A WORLD FOR OUR CHILDREN

THIS will be a largely personal article, and I therefore begin on a personal note. I am aged 40; I have a small son now aged nearly four. During the war I acted as a Technical Assistant in the Filling Factories Section of the Ministry of Supply, thus using my scientific and technical knowledge to help (as I believed) in the defeat of Fascism and the building of a better world. I am now released from Government service and am back at my old job as writer and journalist.

And what do I see? I see a world in which all the old evils are scrambling back, but intensified, both in their impact and in their implications. Spheres of influence, regional blocs, strategic frontiers—all the old bogies and fallacies are raising their heads. There have, it is true, been here and there indications that the Labour Government was doing its best to break this vicious circle; but Soviet Russia, once the hope of the future, is clearly one of the more difficult of the countries in these new circumstances.

In the internal affairs of the country I see unrest, dissatisfaction, strikes, and lock-outs. I see the capitalists carrying out disreputable schemes so as to force the workers to strike and thus to put themselves in the wrong with the general public. I see the Trade Union leaders, obviously out of touch with the rank and file membership, acting as unofficial agents for the Government, and consequently not allowing the case for the workers to make itself known.

A disappointing world? I think so, but I am not content to shrug my shoulders and pass on. You see, I hope that I have a good few years to live on this earth yet, and after that there is the world which my son will find. If a stand is not made against present-day tendencies, there is no knowing how horrible will be the world of my old age and his maturity.

With the home policy of the Labour Government I have not much fault to find. It savours a little too much of regimentation, but that, I suppose, is unavoidable in present circumstances. Only on one item of their home policy do I violently dissent (and at the time of writing that has not been clarified, though I have little doubt of what the outcome will be). I refer to the apparent decision to continue military conscription indefinitely. (The Act dealing with this officially ends, I think, in 1954.) If my son is going to be forced to serve twelve months with the forces, learning how to kill his fellow men in other countries—well, I am going to do my level best to bring him up to be a rebel against authority. I would much rather see him serving twelve months in gaol. This may seem inconsistent for one who has done some of the organisational work in the war just over, work which probably resulted in death for Germans, Italians, and Japanese, but my ideas have developed. At 40, I am glad to say, my mind is not completely closed to new thoughts.

Of course, the Government of Great Britain, if it does introduce another, and more permanent, Conscription Bill, will be doing so against all the tenets of common sense; but common sense usually flies out of the window when military experts come in at the door. I think it was Lloyd George in his radical days who said that military experts are always preparing to fight the last war. And there is as yet no indication that military experts on either side of the Atlantic (or even in the Soviet Union) have realised the true implications of the Atom Bomb. Or would it be unforgivable heresy to suggest that they have realised it, but prefer to herd the young into military organisations, because that is the best way of securing obedient little robots? If any event, whatever the reason, that is one of the items in the programme of all governments which I am resolved to kick against, and which, I hope, my son will grow up to fight.

That is my priority on home policy. With the general principles of nationalisation I am in general agreement, though

I think that the Government, for the sake of saving too many unseemly squabbles in the House of Commons, has been far too lenient with the *rentiers*, if the Bank of England scheme is any indication of what is likely to happen.

Foreign policy, however, seems to me to be the crucial point when we consider what sort of world we are building for our children. Shall we see them grow up into a world of mutual suspicion and distrust, or shall we see them happy and contented in a world where men are able to live at peace with their neighbours? This, you will observe, links on to the emphasis which I place on freedom from military conscription at home. If we are to see our children employed fighting for the old, reactionary ideas of a Greek ruling class or a Dutch Empire (aye, or a Communist Bureaucracy intent on extending its domains), we shall certainly not see a free world or a happy world, and the time, trouble, money, and love which will have been spent on our children might as well have been wasted.

Men and women of my generation, growing up in the years immediately following 1914-1918, were inclined to blame the older generation for the mess and muddle which they had made of the world. But the world of, say, 1920 was a heavenly affair compared to the world of 1948. We shall have to work with all our will if we are not to expose ourselves to the same criticism from our children in due course, if they are not to accuse us of inventing hideous engines of destruction without the common sense precaution of making them restricted in their use.

There are some, such as the Bishop of Chelmsford, who hold that a return to religion is the only way in which that sensible international order could emerge. I cannot, I am afraid, agree—first of all, because I have no religious faith myself, never have had, and cannot see that I am ever likely to have. You see, the arguments against the truth of the orthodox Christian explanation of things are so strong that I fail to understand how anyone, not starting with a bias in favour of religion, could possibly believe in it. And, even if we did succeed, through some miracle, in making Christianity again intellectually respectable to the majority in this country, what about the Buddhists and Mohammedans, what about the Jews and the Atheists? The situation in Palestine at this moment is a fair commentary on the value of religion as a force for peace.

But if religion is useless as a peacemaker, what remains? As far as I can see, only the force of individual opinion. We have in this country the right to expound our views if we can find a platform, and the strength, in spite of all the ridicule and the unfair opposition, of the movement of the Conscientious Objectors, is a fair guide to the way in which individual protests can be made to work. Against the might of the State, with the police, the armed forces, and all the great institutions behind it, the individual may be a small thing. But I hold that the lesson of all the greatest leaders (Marx possibly excepted) is that the individual matters. This was the lesson of Tolstoy, Kropotkin, Henry George, William Morris, Godwin, and all the rest.

Such events of the inter-war period as the collapse of the Hoare-Laval plan to partition Abyssinia show that if enough individuals feel strongly about something they will make their collective will felt. If enough people feel strongly enough about this militaristic bogey which hangs over our future, something will have to be done about it. But even the Labour Government of this country will have to be forced by public opinion. Otherwise the pundits of Wall Street and the more rigid bureaucrats of the Kremlin will want to divide the world between them, and the common man will be dissolved into atoms in the process.

That is the reading of the situation of an ordinary individual without special knowledge, but only anxious that his son shall inherit a world which will be worth while. I may be hopelessly wrong in my diagnosis, but if so, I should like to know where I have erred.

JOHN ROWLAND.

A FREETHINKING PHYSICIAN

SAMUEL GARTH, a Yorkshireman, born in 1661, got his B.A. and M.A. at Cambridge, which he left in 1687 to study medicine at Leyden, but to which he returned in 1691 for his M.D. He held various honourable posts in his profession, and was knighted in 1714, receiving the titles of Physician in Ordinary to the King, and Physician General to the Army. He retained a warm affection for the literary pursuits of his earlier years. The most prominent of his achievements in the field of letters is a Satire entitled "The Dispensary" which concerns a feud between the physicians and the apothecaries. In this work he displayed fancy and wit. His political principles were those of the Whig party, of whose Kit Cat Club he was a lively member, but his genial disposition won him the regard of many who differed from him about state affairs. Pope termed him "Well-natured Garth," and said that, if ever a Christian existed without knowing it, "Garth was that man."

On surveying his career, it is evident that Garth made good use of favourable opportunities, and his success was due to his merits. He had a pleasure-loving but not improvident disposition, and knew how to regulate matters so as to get the best out of both work and play. Wife and son composed his family, and his circumstances were affluent. His death occurred at London, January 18, 1719, and his interment was at Harrow.¹

The Ency. Brit., 1797, in its notice of Sir Samuel Garth, says: "He died after a short illness, which he bore with great patience." But the Biog. Brit., 1780, in its article on Bishop Berkeley relates the following anecdote:—

"Mr. Addison went to see the Doctor (Garth) and began to discourse with him about preparing for his approaching dissolution, the other made answer, 'Surely, Addison, I have good reason not to believe those trifles, since my friend, Dr. Halley,² who has dealt so much in demonstration, has assured me that the doctrines of Christianity are incomprehensible, and the religion itself an imposture.'"

Samuel Johnson in his "English Poets," 1779, says that Pope, a Roman Catholic, "declared himself convinced that Garth died in the communion of the Church of Rome, having been privately reconciled." The Rev. Mark Noble in his "Biographical History of England," 1806, says that "Garth, more celebrated for his abilities than his piety, lived an epicure, and died a latitudinarian taking, as has been reported, a Roman Catholic priest's absolution as a perfect atonement for a life of voluptuousness." He said when expiring: "I am glad of it, being weary of having my shoes pulled on and off." Noble, however, pays him a fine tribute, saying: "Garth, we have reason to believe, was as universally liked as any person of his day. He was mild and complacent, though a zealous party-man, and kind though a wit."

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

¹ "A Dictionary of English Authors," by F. Farquharson Sharp, London; George Redway, 1897, Ed. 3. This useful work of 310 pages takes our authors alphabetically, lists and dates the principal facts of their lives, and gives the titles and dates of their works. Let us hope it may be republished at suitable intervals with additions conforming to the original plan.

² Edmund Halley (1656-1744), was an eminent astronomer who undertook long and perilous voyages in pursuit of science. In 1703 he became professor of geometry at Oxford, and was made doctor of law by that University, but he is said "to have lost his professorship because he would not profess belief in the Christian religion." See article "Halley" in the above edition of the Ency. Brit.

AGE OF REASON. By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s.; paper 2s.; postage 3d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

The Wood Green Empire was the scene of an unusual occurrence. At the end of a performance the actors were leaving the stage when another actor made his appearance and asked permission to say a short prayer. The "actor," the Rev. K. J. O'Farrel, said his prayer, and it is reported that the other actors were very interested. After all, actors are always on the look out for some new "act." Or perhaps it was because the actors felt that there was some bond of brotherhood between them and the pulpit. New tricks are as welcome to actors as to clergymen.

The foregoing reminds us of a similar occurrence when King George V was on a visit to the troops during the first "war to end war." A special theatrical performance was staged for the King, who after the show went back stage and spoke to the leading actor and asked him what his business was in civilian life. The man answered, "I am an actor." "Really," said the King, "so am I." Our present King and Queen are not noted for their wit; perhaps they take themselves too seriously.

The Church of England wants more money. It has decided to employ a "public collector." We would like to know when the Church did not want more money. Of course, the Church of England is not alone in this, but the best collector we know was a Nonconformist who said that he never asked any but God for money, and he always got what he asked for. His practice was simple, he announced in the Press that he had asked God to send him a certain sum, God was to send neither more nor less than the amount mentioned. He would ask no man for help, but would leave it to God, and in due course God sent the money. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Rev. John Madox (R.C.) chides Christians for the superstition held that a woman, after she has had a baby, must be "Churched" before it is safe to allow her to "cut bread or go visiting." The reverend gentleman says that this is "an evil superstition." We certainly agree. Pity the Rev. Mr. Madox did not explain the true significance of the Churching ceremony, but then that may have led to the asking of some awkward questions. The Rev. Mr. Madox, to say something that he knows is not true, can only be excused on the grounds that he is defending his Church, but even that is no reason for straying so far from the truth as to state that the "Churching" of women is an act of thanksgiving for the safe delivery of the child. This is plainly untrue, and it is strange that the Rev. J. Madox does not know it.

The Prayer Book that exists to-day states that the "Churching" of women after childbirth is a cleansing act, and there is certainly no suggestion that it is a thanksgiving for a safe delivery. We note also that "cleansing" has not the same meaning as taking a bath, but is meant to convey the exorcism of evil spirits. In any case, although it is suggested that "cleanliness comes next to godliness," washing was never a strong point in the early Christianity—even Jesus is not reported to have any particular liking for washing.

If, instead of going step by step in the history of mankind, we devote ourselves to reading the Bible, we find that the subject of sex and child-birth is hedged with taboos, and to understand the subject we ought to go back to the history of early primitive peoples. With them the mother is a fact, and the male is believed to play but a little part in child birth. In fact, there are primitive people in existence to-day who still consider the part of the male as of no consequence. Understanding this, and we can understand the "Churching" ceremony. We are still very close to our primitive ancestors.

Our Christian leaders are still complaining of the small numbers of young men who are ready to take "Holy orders," and some of our religious leaders attribute this to the smallness of the salaries. We realise that a fairly large number of ordained

preachers work for little pay, but there are always other opportunities. It ought to be impressed on minor clerics that they all carry in their Prayer Book an archbishop's crook, just as a private soldier is told that he carries a field-marshal's baton in his knapsack.

We have always held the people of the Newcastle area in high esteem, but this cutting from a local newspaper is likely to shatter it. We console ourselves with the thought that there is in Newcastle a strong branch of the National Secular Society, and would point out that there are still years of hard work in front of them to eradicate the stupidity of local Christians. The cutting is as follows:—

"Lent rules suggested by the Rev. T. A. Drewette, Vicar of St. Cuthbert's, Hebburn, in the current edition of the parish magazine, are as follows:—

Fasting.—Give up tobacco, beer, sweets, football, entertainments and dancing, light reading, or anything else on which you have depended for pleasure. Restrict also the basic things of life—food, sleep.

Almsgiving.—Give liberally of your sacrifice to your Lent box, missionary box and to the poor.

Penance.—Offer for the love of God and for the salvation of sinners some regular act of real self-sacrifice.

Prayer.—Make an extra attendance at worship on Sunday and during the week. Spend more time in preparation for Communion. Give more of your prayer time to intercession (i.e.) praying for others."

The people of Burnley have gained the right to go to a cinema on Sundays if they feel so inclined. The local bishop says that in winning this right it shows that the people of Burnley have lost the power of amusing themselves. We fail to see the point. The people of Burnley are not compelled to go to a cinema. They can if they please go to a church and laugh until their ribs ache, for there is nothing more amusing than a church service.

When we read the questions and answers that are put by Roman Catholics in the "Universe" we wonder whether questioner and answerer are pulling each other's leg. One question last week, "Why are mysteries revealed to me?" the editor answers cautiously, and replies that he does not know why "doctrines of our faith are revealed," and "naturally any knowledge we obtain must be mysterious." This is quite clear, at least we have the word of the editor. What good comedy has been lost to us by making the Bible a sacred document.

There may be many opinions for or against the Nationalisation of the Medical Service, but we are of the opinion that there is more real human feeling in the medical profession than in any other association. We have had experience of that. But the opposition of the Roman Church is of such a low level, intellectually and morally. The Roman Catholics are not concerned with a good medical service, but only with a perpetuation of their own religious ideas. Medical service in the hands of the Catholics would consist of an atmosphere saturated with gross superstition, with the welfare of the patient occupying a secondary position.

Some of the official preachers of religion are interesting in their simplicity. For example, the Bishop of London preached the annual "Memorial Lecture of the Christian Evidence Society." He began by saying that he is "more and more convinced that the real point of attack as Christians should be, not the intelligentsia, but the rank and file of their people." Now that is rather shrewd advice, but it is not likely to help Christianity out of its troubles. From one point of view the remark is smart, but is it wise, from the Christian point of view to let the cat out of the bag in this fashion? The Bishop has also discovered that people today are "not so ready to accept the teaching of Christianity as was the case half a century ago." That is true, but if the Bishop lets the cat out of the bag in that shape there will be a lot of trouble.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We congratulate the "Thetford Times" on publishing the following:—

"Son of a staymaker, Thomas Paine was born at Thetford 211 years ago today. A special act of commemoration is taking place in Paris.

Thomas Paine, after leaving Thetford Grammar School at 13, and after an interlude in which he ran away to sea, suffered such vicissitudes that at 37 he was penniless and apparently destined to failure.

Then came a journey to America, inspiration and a series of powerful writings which culminated in his great work "The Rights of Man." This, composed in Paris, was a tremendous defence of the principles of the French Revolution and of the rights of the individual."

We have not seen any other references to Thomas Paine in the daily Press. One day Thomas Paine will be honoured as one of the greatest sons of Britain.

In view of the Criminal Justice Bill to be brought before Parliament, the reprinting of "A Handbook on Hanging," C. Duff (Freedom Press, 2s.), is particularly opportune. Whether one has decided opinions for or against capital punishment, the "handbook" is well worth reading. Mr. Duff can be as satirical as Swift and as vitriolic as Voltaire. Despite the sordid subject, the book is one of the most provocative we have read for years. Freethinkers will be particularly interested in the portrayal of the prison chaplain, and the—no doubt—well-meaning practice of the hangman who always hauded the condemned poetry of his own composition exhorting the doomed man to "kneel to God" and to be "washed in the blood." The first edition received many favourable Press notices, and if Freethinkers need any urging to buy the book, the fact that the "Tablet" (R.C.) stated that it was "outrageous" should be inducement enough.

Mr. R. H. Rosetti visits Leicester to-day (Sunday) and will lecture for The Leicester Secular Society in The Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, at 6-30 p.m. on "From Jesus to Atom Bombs." N.S.S. speakers always receive a warm welcome from Leicester friends, and both organisations have an appreciative regard for each other's work in the Freethought movement.

"We are all God's children," but sometimes the relationship is not appreciated. For example, Mr. Sam Morris, a coloured man, came from the West Indies. Recently there was trouble among the workmen and the West Indians were parted. One of the "boys" believed in Christianity, and one of the boys was invited to a catholic social in Liverpool—and the priest asked him not to come again. "Suffer little children," etc., etc.

"UNTIL IT SHALL PLEASE THE COURT"

HUMAN institutions embodied in law and tradition have almost always been outstripped by social change. In classical times, and during the slow stagnation of the millennium between the fifth and fifteenth Centuries—the dark ages—the disharmony was perhaps hardly noticeable. But ever since the beginning of the industrial era, the time lag has become wider and wider, until the advent of the ferment due to two world wars, when its acceleration has completely outmoded a host of time honoured conventions, many of which are honoured almost entirely in the breach. "It is not what I do, but what I appear to do."

We are concerned with marriage—not to attack it, but to preserve it. And the following outline of what we consider might be the basis of new legislation in this field is an attempt to simplify the archaic and immoral divorce laws of the present day—to purify and liberalise the institution of marriage as a whole, and bring it to conformity with modern enlightened principles.

Modern marriage, if it is to survive, must be considered in the light of revolutionary changes in the fields both of scientific knowledge and religious belief.

For vast numbers of people in Western Europe it has long ceased to have any religious significance. Anthropology has laid bare its primitive roots in the realm of male interest in matters concerned with security of inheritance (property) and insurance against mixed progeny. And there is now the twentieth Century discovery of scientific birth control.

Small wonder that even with its recent tardy amendments, the law as it stands at present is considered by many thoughtful people to be completely at variance with the requirements of the present day.

Under the code suggested, which attempts to embody the minimum possible interference by the State in essentially personal matters, many ugly and deplorable features of the present system would disappear. The Divorce Courts with their atmosphere of cynical and endemic dishonesty would go the way of the King's Proctor, and the loathsome inquiry agents, whilst the snoop, the defamer and the blackmailer would have to adopt decent employment.

The proposed new code is based on the simple principle of a licence from the State available to couples wishing to become parents. Nothing less, and nothing more. It is held that in intimate personal relationships no further legislative interest than this is justified.

Matrimonial Law, as distinct from custom and any possible significance which in a free society might be the wish of individuals, should have but one function, the protection of the immature family. Beyond this it tends to become an insufferable tyranny in its denial of private rights, and its presumption to coerce and direct by narrow rulings a vast field of infinitely variable emotional and sentimental situations it is totally unqualified to appreciate or understand.

The basis of the modern family, if anything at all, is the voluntary partnership of parents who have chosen each other for the purpose of procreation, and are prepared to carry out its duties and obligations until the children are old enough to care for themselves.

Beyond the enforcement of such obligations as devolved under existing economic conditions on those responsible for the birth and upbringing of the new generation, the State should have no legislative interest whatsoever.

From acceptance of this view, one or two cardinal considerations follow as a natural consequence.

1. Adultery, as such, is removed from the list of sins and torts with all the incalculable evils associated with it.

2. As at present (and often misunderstood) the marriage laws remain completely divorced from any religious implication, which is left entirely at the discretion and wish of the partners as to whether or not it should be the private basis of their union.

3. Virginity and chastity *as such* become aspects of relationship subject only to tradition, sentiment, expedience, or æsthetic consideration—outside the jurisdiction of the law and the State.

4. Divorce becomes available to any couple by mutual request excepting those with children under 16 years of age.

Believing that an atmosphere dominated by police, magistrates, the press, and officials is highly unsuitable for the purpose of dealing wisely with delicate human situations, divorce cases will be held in private. As such courts will have before them issues of a much greater simplicity than heretofore, only interested members of the public will be admitted by special request.

To all childless couples (which includes those with children over 16) divorce decrees will be granted on a simple mutual request.

Unilateral requests for divorce will be granted only on proof of *insufferable conduct* on the part of one party, in which adultery under certain circumstances may be taken into consideration in the general body of evidence. The duty of the Court in cases of unilateral petitions is clearly to grant relief *only* where, having regard to all the facts, the petitioner can show that by ordinary humane standards, taking everything into consideration, the conditions of remaining tied to his or her partner are no longer *sufferable*, in spite of that partner's wish to continue the marriage.

Under laws such as these, the main business of the Divorce Courts would tend to centre round petitions by couples or parties having children within the legal age. The guiding principle here would remain always the same. "How will this proposed divorce affect the welfare and safety of the children of the marriage?" And on that issue and that alone it would be granted or refused.

It should be noted, that under laws of this description, one very important new principle emerges: the freedom of individual courts to act in accordance with the habits and traditions of an *ever-changing Society*, interpreting and reinterpreting such central values and considerations in the light of current, and even local, conditions, thought and sentiment. Thus "insufferable conduct" might be proved in one case and refused in another on broadly the same evidence, the business of the Court being to ascertain the degree of "insufferability" as applicable to the particular case. Or in the case of couples with young children, granted or refused in accordance with means, individual hardship, home conditions and so forth.

Though the final ideal behind such proposals as these is probably unattainable in any society, human nature being what it is, some such reform would bring much nearer that far-off day when every married couple is living together for one reason only, and that the best of all reasons. BECAUSE THEY WISH TO do so.

J. STURGE WHITING.

ISRAEL IN EGYPT?

ON the authority of the Bible everybody is made to believe in a temporary sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt. But so far nobody has been able to make out when this event should have taken place.

About 1700 B.C., it is true, there was an invasion of a motley of peoples under Semitic leaders into Egypt. The Delta and the northern parts of the country were at that time seized by a confederation of nomad tribes to whose Syrian leaders on the authority of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian (about A.D. 100), the name of Hyksôs or Shepherd Kings has been given.* The invaders soon adopted the manners and customs of the Egyptians; their chiefs assumed the titles of the old Pharaohs and became the kings of the XVth to XVIIth Dynasties. Historically, it is chiefly mere names of such Hyksôs kings that are recorded, like one, Yegeb-al (Jacob is God) or Yekeb-ba'al (Jacob is Lord). Now, Jacob is an old Semitic god

* From the Egyptian *Hika-khasut*, pronounced in later times *Hik-shosun*=Prince of the Desert.

of Heaven, the name of which means "He revolves", this name in itself, therefore, is no proof whatsoever that a human being of that name existed and emigrated to Egypt. It only bears out that Jacob originally was a god and that the twelve constellations in the sky were humanised as his twelve sons (or tribes).

The expulsion of the Hyksôs by A'ahmes (Amôsis), generally considered the same event as the Exodus of the Bible, took place in c. 1580 B.C. There is no doubt that much Hyksôs blood remained in the Delta after their expulsion and the Semitic-looking Ramesside royal family may have descended from Hyksôs princes. Hence this does not corroborate to any particular persecution of the temporary usurpers, after the country was liberated again. On the other hand, if the Israelites should have availed themselves of the occasion of the Hyksôs reign to join them in Egypt, the Biblical account of their oppression by their kinsmen makes no sense.

The widest reception has been given to the theory that King Mer-en-ptah or Menepthah (c. 1234-1225 B.C.), himself a son of Ramesse II, was the pharaoh of the expulsion. In the fifth year of his reign (1229 B.C.) Egypt was attacked by a confederation of tribes from Libya who were utterly vanquished in the Delta, whereupon Mer-en-ptah proceeded victorious into Palestine. He caused a Hymn of Triumph to be cut upon the back of a stele of Amonhotep III at Thebes, and among the peoples of Palestine whom he conquered are mentioned the *Israelites as a tribe settled on Palestinian soil* and become subject to the Egyptian yoke. This is the very first record of the very name of Israel—and, mind you, already in Palestine! The Guide to the Egyptian Collections, edited by the British Museum, on this score has to admit:—

"In any case, the identification of him (Mer-en-ptah) with the Pharaoh of the Exodus or the Oppression is a pure theory, which is now known to be highly improbable. In any case, neither A'ahmes . . . nor Menepthah were drowned in the Red Sea. The mummies of both are in the Cairo Museum. That of Menepthah shows that he was an old man, who died of calcification of the arteries, and no doubt in his bed." (p. 369.)

All the frantic efforts of our pious historians to corroborate the narratives of the Bible will bear no fruit. *Never intended* the Biblical narrators to record *historical facts*. The arrival in Egypt (Mizrayim) and the subsequent return is nothing else but the mystically and astrologically veiled cycle of the sun, standing low in winter and then rising again to the north. Twice each year the sun crosses the border line—the Heavenly River Jordan—which, in this instance, has become the "Red Sea."

The spring equinox, at that time, lay by taurus and a little group of stars called the Bee. When this point is passed—in the Pass-over—the sun as representant of Jacob-Israel, Lord of Heaven, comes into the Land of "Milk and Honey."

Thus, there is no more historical truth in the Biblical episode in Egypt than is in the struggles of Spring—lead by Deborah—the bee (Judges IV)—against the persisting demons of winter.

PERCY. G. ROY.

THE BASIC ANSWER

THE limousine was humming in tune with the sun. The priest was thinking how grand it was—to be a priest and have the petrol to take old ladies in to church. People were mad. Sailors, for instance, were daft. Where does all the water go at low tide? It goes into a hump in the middle of the ocean and the poor devils of sailors have to sail up one side of the hump and down the other. Fancy choosing a rough life like that! And land workers! What do they get for their perishing toil? When the farmer dies, is he likely to leave his men the seeds of his fir tree in his will? Mad! All of 'em, mad!

When they could be priests and spend quiet days gauging the exalted aulk.

While the priest was congratulating himself on the sanity of his good fortune, the limousine spun round a corner and shot slap into the back of a bus. The priest cried out, but his heart beat a little better when he saw there wasn't much damage done. Then the old lady, whom the priest was driving, said gently, "Father, I think you'd better go and apologise to the people in the bus." The priest was abashed, and he went to the side of the bus and started a speech.

But the passengers were strangely aloof. With the first dim awakening of fear, the priest paused and tried again. He heard himself explaining, saying it all for the second time. It made him feel awful, because the people in the bus did not seem to be listening to him. It made him feel he was losing something . . . perhaps the glorious day, and the respect of the old lady who was his parishioner, and perhaps his privilege of having special petrol, and perhaps even his peace of mind. Yet it was all so unreal.

In despair, the priest shouted up to the people who seemed so very high above him in the bus, and they did not deign to glance down at him. He cried wildly, "I'm sorry. Can't you hear? I want you to know I'm sorry."

The priest, the smart fellow who knew how to get himself an easy life, was sweating with panic when the driver of the bus came up to him and said, "It's no good, eh, they're all 'loonies' from the asylum."

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BLOOD CREED.

Sir,—I have been an optimist all my life, but I am coming to the conclusion—if not already come—that this world is one in which the decent people will go down, if not already there! I listened intently on Friday night to the broadcasts of Attlee and Cripps. They were brave attempts at optimism, but it was obvious what they really felt! Cripps especially so, but he went out of the political way to offer the one and only sure and certain hope—the blood creed known as Christianity. It was, in fact, the leader of this creed who proclaimed himself as bringing not peace but a sword. He certainly did, and it has been in action ever since. Yet this outstandingly clever man, Sir Stafford Cripps, not only falls for it but uses his important and eminent position to advocate this hoary oriental superstition. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." No wonder we are where we are! Even such an eminent ecclesiastic as Dean Inge says of it, "It is strange that Christianity has tolerated an eschatology more savage than any other religion!" The Dean is never wanting in courage and candour. And yet this survival relic of a revolting barbaric rite is now to be more insistently taught in the schools. Recently, in the "Bradford Telegraph and Argus," there was a representation of three men being tortured to death, each one being crucified on a cross. That was bad enough, but brought to witness it were some young boys under the tutelage and direction of the Bishop of Bradford. Chapman Cohen never said truer than when he wrote: "Religion is the last thing that man will civilise!" It would, of course, be put to them as a "glorious sacrifice"—the redemptive efficacy of bloodshed! Who were the three nations which involved this long-suffering earth in the second world war? Catholic Poland, Protestant Germany, Protestant Britain. The only major Power which refused to join in the fray was Atheist Russia. She persistently refused to come in, but she did not escape for it went into her under the leadership of the Roman Catholic Führer Adolph Hitler! And now there is the dark shadow of the third world war for Christian civilisation!

Well, Sir, I felt that somehow I must get that off my chest. It is much better off than on. And so now I'm going to the dogs!—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR HANSON.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held February 12, 1948

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

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

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Halifax, Manchester, Chester-le-Street and West London Branches. Bradford Case notice of hearing on 11th March was reported. The invitation from the Manchester Branch N.S.S. was accepted and the necessary instructions given for holding the 1948 Conference in Manchester. A leaflet entitled "Christian Ethics" was ordered to be printed for circulation. A grant was made towards the expenses of an International Freethought Congress to be held in Rome in September next. Following a request, "The Freethinker" is to be placed in the Public Libraries of Lewisham. Correspondence from the B.B.C. Bradford, Halifax, Kingston, Glasgow and London was reported and dealt with.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for March 18th, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 24, 7 p.m. "That Humanism Is Not Enough," At the Rev. Patrick McLAUGHLIN; Neg. Mrs. A. BLANCO WHITE, O.B.E. (Chairman, Mr. CONAN NICHOLAS).

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Bentham and the Law." Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Rd., W.1.).—Sunday, 7.15 p.m.: "Talmudic Literature," Dr. DAVIS.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: "Why I Became a Roman Catholic," Mr. H. A. J. PEARMAIN (A.L.C.D.).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Case Against Determinism," Mr. GEORGE GILGOWR, M.A.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Social Evening. Buffet Supper. Members and Friends cordially invited.

Halifax Branch (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Wednesday, February 25, 7 p.m.: "Why I Believe in the Bible," Mr. JOHN HANDSIDES (Evangelist).

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: "From Jesus to Atom Bombs," Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (Gen. Sec., N.S.S.).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m.: "Palestine—The Land of Broken Promises," Rev. Dr. S. GOLDMAN.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d.

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST. By C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; postage 1d.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST. By J. M. Wheeler. Essays on Human Evolution. Price 5s.; postage 4d.

PIONEERS OF LAW AND ORDER

THE story how law and order were brought to the "Wild West" by the early pioneers of America makes thrilling reading.

They were faced not only with the problem of how to prevent men fighting among themselves, but also how to settle disagreements between the different communities or States without bloodshed and war. We are faced with the same problem to-day, but on a world-wide scale.

We must not allow ourselves to be appalled by the enormity of the task: the whole world to-day is much smaller than America was 150 years ago, if we consider the ease and speed of modern communications.

Though the democratic peoples are well on the way towards the prevention of fighting among individual citizens, by the almost complete abolition of duelling and by making them settle their disagreements by peaceful and legal means, they have neglected the other side of the problem—how to make the different countries or States settle their disagreements by going to Law instead of going to War.

America solved her international problem by a system of government which in George Washington's day was a new invention. It is now known as "federation." Later, Switzerland, Australia, Canada and the U.S.S.R. adopted it as a means of enabling their respective national communities or States to live together in harmony, without interfering too much with each other's private affairs.

Present-day pioneers for law and order are now carrying the federal tradition into the world at large. They believe that those comparatively small-scale experiments proved that federation can solve the problem of world peace.

The term "federation" is on many lips nowadays, and the danger is that it will be used as a sort of magic password to mean almost everything or practically nothing, ranging from families of nations, like the British Commonwealth, to alliances like the United Nations and confederations like the old League of Nations or the American League of Friendship which in 1789 the Americans scrapped as a dangerous nuisance in favour of the federal union which has endured to this day.

A federation is a commonwealth of peoples in which each member-State has a parliament and government to look after its own national affairs, but in which international affairs (mainly defence and foreign policy) are dealt with by another parliament and government, called the federal government, elected by the citizens of the federation as a whole.

The federal government cannot interfere in the affairs of the national governments, and the national governments cannot meddle in federal affairs.

Disputes and borderline cases are decided by a Federal Supreme Court, or sometimes by a referendum of the people.

The "rules of the game" are written down in the federal constitution. The way in which a democratic community sees to it that the rules are kept is too complicated to be discussed in this short article, but it works rather like a see-saw, with the federal government at the one end and the States governments at the other, with the Supreme Court and the conscientious citizens in the middle, keeping the balance by transferring their influence from side to side as required by the merits of each case.

Another difference between a federation and the confederations, leagues and other systems I have mentioned is that in a federation, the central authority has *governmental* power; it makes laws, not pious recommendations which may or may not be carried out.

Even on those few occasions when the old League of Nations managed to come to a decision it was never certain that the States members would act upon it. In the more important questions, the same is true of the United Nations Organisation.

A so-called "law" becomes a farce unless it is obeyed, and obedience is unlikely unless the laws act directly upon each individual citizen, not indirectly through his national parliament.

Thus, if a Hitler were to arise in a federation, federal police (like G-men or Canadian Mounties) would step in before he got powerful, and arrest him for conspiring to commit a breach of the Federal Charter of Rights; there would be no need to wait until the peace-loving peoples had to make war on an entire nation just because it was dominated by gangsters. When Al Capone got control of the State of Illinois, the American Federal Government put him in jail without having to make war on his victims.

There is a great deal of talk nowadays about an international police force. Policemen should seldom need more than a truncheon, or sufficient arms to tackle the criminals individually. If we can only stop a criminal by blowing hundreds of thousands of people to smithereens with an atom bomb, it is time we stopped talking as if international law was a game of murderers versus policemen.

A police force must be controlled by a government, otherwise it will degenerate into a gang of SS-men, as in Nazi Germany. The international police force would have to be controlled by a democratic international government, since the democratic peoples would quite naturally refuse to obey laws which they had not made themselves.

Those of us who wish civilised life to continue on this planet beyond the next twenty years should denounce the criminal folly of statesmen who ask us to put our trust in an organisation which can only enforce peace by waging war. Alexander Hamilton, writing in 1789 in various New York newspapers, showed that the American League of Friendship was ominously similar to our present-day UNO. He wrote: "If military action is the only means with which to secure obedience, such a state of affairs can certainly not deserve the name of government, nor would any prudent man choose to commit his happiness to it."

And George Washington, answering those who trusted in the "peaceful influence" of their American League, wrote: "Influence is not government. Let us have a government, by which our lives, liberties and properties will be secured, or let us know the worst at once."

These words are as true to-day as they were 160 years ago.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

A MODEST PRAYER

(After *Petite Prière sans Préention*, by Laforgue)

OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN—You, up there!
Infinite, all-wise, incredible Father,
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. Nay, rather
Permit us to enjoy Your tastier fare.
Come, do you think us children here below,
From whom the Facts of Life must still be hidden?
THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH—on slaves priest-ridden—
AS IT IS IN HEAVEN? I beg You, let us go.
LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION by Your guile
To kiss the chains You've fashioned for our guiding.
Leave us in peace, that, Paradise deriding,
We eat and drink, make love, and laugh a while.

B. R.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball
Price 3s.; postage 2½d. Ninth edition.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.