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IEWS AND OPINIONS

The Fight for Truth

It was the great Heinrich Heine who said that his period would be known as the "Sickness Period of Humanity." With equal truth the behaviour for many centuries of the governing Christian rulers might well describe the rule of the Christian Church as "The great lying period." There was the lie direct, the lie by implication, the lie by suggestion, the lie by suppression, and many, many others. The poor amateur liar finds himself with an army of experts of all shapes. Everywhere he finds the great army of the pious has forestalled him. If ever an enterprising publisher wishes to issue an Encyclopædia of Lying, his staff need do no more than make a detailed study of Christian records to render their work complete and final.

One writer has given the opinion that mankind has a natural tendency to falsehood. As usual the word "tendency", like the word "instinct", is used to cover hazy or inaccurate thinking. If there is a tendency anywhere, it is in the opposite direction. For people always lie for a purpose. It may be from the fear of consequences should they tell the truth, for the purpose of gain in order to assume a certain possession before their hearers, or for various other objects; but there is always some purpose in lying. True, people may go on misstating events because they are utterly careless whether they are giving a correct version or not; but in this case we have an instance of the effect of training, of education, and our search for the purpose of lying is only pushed back a step. Another writer in one of our religious weeklies—in order presumably to diminish the part played by religion in what he calls "the epidemic of lying"—says that our teaching institutions have been among the chief propagators of lying. But this hardly expressed the truth. The school of science may have taught things that later knowledge dismissed as inaccurate, but they have never manufactured evidence or deliberately falsified the facts. Nor have they taught that men should turn away from the search for truth or decline to put accepted teachings to the test of verification. Religion alone has persistently done these things; and of all religions the records of Christianity in this direction are the very worst.

It has been said that the damage has been done because the Church preferred the wonderful to a plain statement. There is, however, much more than this in it. When one starts with a belief for which there is no procurable evidence, there is only a limited number of ways by which such a belief may be preserved. It must be held as above examination, beyond criticism, and evidence against it can be set aside. The Church did what it could to prevent the truth, and indeed it is still doing that. We do not know, we shall never know to what extent the early Church

succeeded in stamping out hostile criticism. Some of the writings of the Church's enemies are known to us only by stray references to them in Christian polemical writings. The very vigour of Christian writers is thus made to furnish indisputable testimony against their creed. How much Christians invented we have a more certain knowledge, although our knowledge is often wanting in much. But in the inclusion of passages in the accepted New Testament writings, and in the number of Gospel writings that have been rejected, we have unimpeachable evidence of the unscrupulous lying practised in the interests of religion.

To please the credulous and induce belief, miracles were manufactured by the hundred and saints by the thousand. Stories to the discredit of non-Christians were invented and circulated. Some Christians may now reject these and express their horror at their circulation, but they all benefit by their existence. For they all served their purpose in inducing belief, and they gave to Christianity a sacred belief that brought power. It may also be observed that this manufacturing of heavenly power gave much to the position of the Churches. The Church lived on that belief, and its gross superstition only weakened when compelled to. And we must remember it was not for the benefit of one Church, but for all Churches. Advanced Christians to-day may reject the Resurrection, the miracles of the Old and New Testaments, and those of the early Church. But it was these, with other impostures, that made people believe, and but for these there would be no Christian faith nowadays for our liberal theologians to work on.

These practices had an influence in a much wider sphere than that of religion. They affected the whole of life. It is poor psychology which pictures the mind as composed of a number of detached qualities in such a way that their use or disuse on matters of religion will not affect their exercise in other directions. The same qualities of mind used in relation to religion are precisely those that are exercised in relation to other matters. One cannot discourage criticism and independence of mind in one direction without discouraging them in all. No small degree of our social and political troubles might be properly set down to the forming of mental habits which, while favourable enough to religion, are fatal to efficiency in general life. Christianity had thus an adequate purpose for the dissemination of falsehood, and for the suppression of examination and verification. It was an expression of its struggle for self-preservation. But, in addition to this, it was entirely lacking, as a system, in the incentive of mental cultivation. It is true that there has been much talk with Christianity of the necessity of getting truth, but it was the truth that was meant, the truth, that is, as laid down once and for all in the Christian faith. Of the desire for truth, careless whether it conflicted with accepted teaching or not, it has always been strangely lacking. Such a

sentence as the following, reported of Buddha, and, at all events, part of the Buddhistic teaching, is quite foreign to the Christian temper and teaching.

"Do not believe in traditions simply because they have been handed down for many generations; nor in anything which is rumoured and spoken of by many; or because the written statement of some old sage is produced. Do not believe that is truth simply because you have been attached to it by habit, on the authority merely of your teachers and elders. But after observation and analysis, and when the thing agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of all, then accept it and live up to it."

One simply cannot conceive such a teaching as this finding a place either in the New Testament or in orthodox Christian teaching. There are indeed very few books on behalf of which the claim to be a moral guide for man is made that pay less regard to intellectual culture than does the New Testament. Nowhere is the disinterested search for truth inculcated, and nowhere does independence of thinking receive less encouragement.

Belief in a prescribed teaching is the essential thing, and disbelief in it is the one unforgivable offence. Had the Buddhistic teaching as given above been the teaching and practice of the Christian Church, the history of the last fifteen centuries would be far different from what it is. The world would have been spared the sight of scientific men afraid to give the results of their labour to the world, often minimising the implications of their labours, or paying the penalty of months, or years, wearily imprisoned for the crime of instructing their fellows. All the energy, too, that has been spent in breaking the power of an organised mass of fraud, imposture and superstition, would also have been placed at the disposal of a humanity that stood so sadly in need of it.

The modern world prides itself upon its love of truth and its greater freedom from systematic falsehood. The boast may be justifiable, and if so, it is the more interesting to observe that this increased love of truth is coincident with a decline in the influence of theology. It is the spirit which is entering into our schools, our literature, and it is moulding the thoughts of our men. It is creating a future that will be wildly different to what it was. But if that be true we owe no thanks to Christianity on this account. The sane and healthy influence comes, not from our religious teachers, but from non-religious sciences. And it is part of the irony of things that, while the Christian Churches have claimed, and still claim, to be the great moral teachers of the people, it is the often banned and persecuted science that is chiefly responsible for the sweetening and moralising of our lives.

Science has no vested interests in any particular teaching. Its sole interest is to teach, to discover, to verify. Its teaching is not "Blessed is he that hath not seen and yet hath belief." Against this teaching, science has carried on a steady war. For this, Christianity has fought an age-long warfare. And in one form or another, it is fighting that same war to-day. The age-long Christian cry has been "Blessed is he that hath not seen and yet hath belief." The cry of science and commonsense is "Cursed be he that believes without seeing and assents without understanding."

CHAPMAN COELEN.

SYMBOLISM

SO called occult science seems to derive mainly from the cabala, the Sefer Yerizah and the Zohar, through the apochryphal Book of Enoch; connecting with gnosticism and neo-platonism; as well as the Almagest. It is traceable through characteristic terms and phrases.

The word occult comes from the Latin; and apochrypha, from Greek; each refer to what is hidden, the latter implying unreliability. But canonical documents are equally traditional. The Church has never denied "the phenomena" such as necromancy and astrology. It is a question of interpretation and simply raises that of the relationship of oral to written tradition. Folk lore is valuable evidence and we have nothing more than the relationship between orthodox and unorthodox religion; or as Hobbes put it, religion and superstition. The idea of a hidden meaning is clouded by the relationship between esoteric and exoteric doctrine; what is understood by initiates and by the uninitiated.

To suggest that specific signs or words were used as passwords of secret societies seems a distraction, if not an unnecessary assumption. Undoubtedly, driven underground by persecution as for instance, with suppression of the Knights of the Red Cross, the Templars, the condemned doctrines persisted with Rosicrucians; just as, in face of Christian persecution, Hebrew tradition persisted. But the same tradition is there on both sides; Christianity is nothing without Hebrew tradition. The mystery was not based upon exoteric ignorance. We need some appreciation of the technical terms involved. For what was esoteric in the Church, was exoteric to the cabalists, and vice versa. There is esotericism in each case.

The tradition cannot be discredited on the grounds of its contradictions. Though obscure, there was a meaning. There are rules in every game; every craft, profession, branch of science has its technical terms that are not understood by the uninitiated. To give a modern example, any non-member of a Marxist organisation can recognise characteristic shibboleths; these are not secret passwords; the Marxist is equally sharp in smelling out capitalistic idiom. Nor are these to be discountenanced as contradictory, for contradiction is the essence of Hegelian dialectic. This dialectic is itself traditional, reflected in the conflict of the gods; seen in Christian condemnation in the name of righteousness, of magic both black and white; its own esotericism being right, all others, wrong.

The question is one of esoteric and not of exoteric consideration. The mystery was not synonymous with ignorance; it involves a technique. If the scholastics were arguing about "pure being" the mystics and alchemists were trying to find it; each in their own way. Here we have metaphysics; it becomes a question of introspection and not of extraspection. Knowledge was gnosis. The elemental substance was spirit whether appearing as earth, water, air or fire; symbolised in magic as name, word or number. These were fetishistic and totemistic analogues, traditional survivals of pre-alphabetical script. In picto-graphic allegory with alphabetical or numerical symbols, a word might symbolise a number, or a number, a word; at the same time having an esoteric introspective meaning.

If the alchemists laid the foundation of chemistry, that was not their aim. Like the astrologers, they were as mystical as the mystic, with notions of affinity and communion. As Eliphas Levi said, they sought "the central point of transformation where light becomes matter." "It is the fixation of astral light by the sovereign magic of the will." If the alchemists put a cross on their crucible, it seems they did not share the Christian diabolism. Many, like Van Helmont, first to use the word gas, protested; and Paracelsus asked "why give the devil all the credit?" No demons outside humanity was an axiom. An enigma, called a drunkard, a debauchee, a charlatan and a lunatic, Paracelsus, who seems to have summarised the

occulticism of the Middle Ages, has also been called an amazing pioneer and visionary.

In this quaint mixture of sense and nonsense the gods become the little folk. Magic formulæ became memoranda; zodiacal, mystical and magic circles, pentagrams and other configurations were mnemonics; as much symbols as the alphabetical and numeral. It is of interest to note, in view of the analogical introspection, that the magnetic analogy, the combination of the practices of the alchemists and mystics in medicine, and the introspective metaphysical controversy, led to the development of a practical psychology. From the mysticism of the 16th century, the cult of animal magnetism, and mesmerism, came the study of hypnotism, leading to psychoanalysis, psychopathology, and dream psychology, with its unconscious, its fixations and complexes, its inversion, sublimation and projection; as well as suggestion and autosuggestion.

With all this came a more scientific study of symbolism. The mystical character is well seen in Jung's analytic psychology, with its extraversion and introversion. The extravert thinks, feels, and acts, in reference to the object; the introvert is subjective in his orientation. But these are complementary and not opposites; generally constant forms of reaction which may be interchangeable. Unlike extraspection and introspection, these are purposive, even artistically creative. Images, symbols, visions, are activation; active response; dynamic, vital.

Consciousness must learn the language of the unconscious. With primitives, as in childhood, thought is undifferentiated; there is association and identification; no separation of objective and subjective: projection and abstract thinking are later developments. The language of the unconscious, which is both personal and social, is "picture language" of "ancient sorcery" repeated in "all mythologies, fairy tales, religious traditions and mysteries." This social symbolism has the same general character as the personal and dream symbolism. Whether we are concerned with abnormal psychology, dreams, phantasies, reverie, superstition or sorcery, we find everywhere, the same basic symbolism.

We find it in the "unifying symbol," the "mandala" or magic circle, the ring of enchantment; in the sun circle, the oroboros, the snake which bites its tail." With variations, these diagrams, having the same "symmetric—relations to a midpoint," are found, even in paleolithic times, in the sand pictures, as of the Pueblo Indians, the Chinese Tao, the Hindu Yoga, the medieval mysticism and astrology, and the Hermetic philosophy of the alchemists, whose experiments were "like psychological processes expressed in pseudo-psychological language." The gold, the red tincture, the elixir of life, was as much a symbol as the Golden Flower of the Orient, with a mystic magic meaning. Alchemy was a "halting step towards the most modern psychology."

Whether we trace the tradition back, or survey available evidence there are differences in understanding; primitive, ancient and modern; as well as a common denominator, the psychological factor. We see a development, of symbolism, and in man's reactions to it. Superstitious magic, spiritual power, magnetic influence, hypnotism; we see differences of interpretation, and of complexity; of technical terms and understanding of technique. At one time, imitative, becoming personal and conventional, symbolism is the basis of language, the social memory. But we see what we want to see. The social memory is like the personal memory. Shrouded in moral virtue, æsthetic delight, ideal sentiment and personal feeling; we seek pleasant dreams in the magic of the Arts.

As with music, we are often told, there is meaning, but that its meaning cannot be explained. In compensation, obscured by a new meaning, the hidden meaning, the forgotten memory, is a veritable symbol of illusion. Occultism is the language of the Land of Unfulfilled Desire.

H. H. PREECE.

A WRITER OF GENIUS

THE history of English literature is full of odd figures, who do not seem, somehow, to fit into any general scheme. It is easy for literary critics to sneer superciliously at the individualist in letters and to try to sum up the whole matter by reference to schools of writing, which contain within their boundaries all the writers who matter. This is plainly not so; there are many people who are read with increasing pleasure, but who nevertheless do not belong to any accepted "school." There was Baron Corvo, for instance; many readers of all lines of thought have from time to time come under his spell. And then there was Arthur Machen, who died recently; his work in turn has been admired by a large number of readers who should know what is worth while in literature. And in the same class of unclassifiable writers (if that is not a hopeless paradox) is M. P. Shiel, who died last year. Shiel was a strange character, who—at any rate in his latter years—lived alone in a small bungalow near Horsham. He wrote in "Prince Zaleski" what is possibly the best book of pure detective stories since Poe; and in his later books he produced fantastic tales which have been praised by many of the most eminent men and women of our time.

The special flavour of M. P. Shiel's writing will doubtless be known to many readers of these columns; but now, thanks to the work of Mr. John Gawsworth, his literary executor, who has selected and edited "The Best Short Stories of M. P. Shiel" (Victor Gollancz; 10s. 6d.), it is possible, within the covers of one book to get a truly representative selection of Shiel's work. Admittedly, those who have not read "The Purple Cloud," that Wellsian, or more than Wellsian romance of a time when all life on earth is wiped out by some poisonous emanation from a passing comet, will not know Shiel at his most fantastic and his best. But the volume of short stories now under review provides an excellent introduction to his work.

And what, I can imagine readers asking, has all this to do with Freethinkers? Well, one thing has frankly to be said, and that is that Shiel was not a Freethought propagandist. I doubt whether a man with his abundant imagination could have spent himself in propaganda for any attitude of thought; but there is no doubt that his stories contain so much that is stimulating to the mind and the imagination that they can be enjoyed by everyone who has an open mind. And their style, which is complex and carefully woven, is such that it will have an appeal for everyone who has any idea of what is best in the long heritage of English literature. Certainly no writer of the past 50 years has a more characteristic way of expressing himself. Miss Rebecca West is recorded as having said, "Sensible people ought to have a complete set of Shiel," and Mr. Charles Williams, in attempting to describe the kind of writing which Shiel produced, wrote: "If George Meredith's brother had married Jules Verne's sister, Shiel might have had a brother in art."

I hope that what I have written here will bring a new experience to many readers. There can, I think, be little doubt that Shiel was a figure, though lonely and in many ways unappreciated during his lifetime, who will be continually appreciated by a majority of perceptive readers for many years to come. And among that minority I should like to think that a number of Freethinkers will be included.

JOHN ROWLAND.

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ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Southwell, speaking at St. Stephen's Church, Nottingham, said: "We have reached our turning point in history. It is God that is challenged. The great mass of our people seem to me to be living in an utter fool's paradise. It is touch and go whether the 'Christian' world will go down to utter ruin and enter into a new 'Dark Age.'" We have often commented on the downright impudence of clergymen in prominent places, but this "takes the cake." Of course there were "Dark Ages," and the Bishop of Southwell knows as well as we do that the term was applied to the period covered by the Christian Church when it came to power. The "Dark Ages" existed until the revival of Greek and Roman culture, supported by the science and social theories that came to the Christian world through the development of Mohammedan culture.

And of later times? "The Renaissance," what of that? Well such a phrase as that tells its own story. The "Dark Ages," historically, belong to the Christian period. Its awakening meant the revival of the culture that the Church did so much to destroy, and which, right up to the days of Darwinism it attacked. The Bishop should not be forgotten. We have not many quite like him.

When we read the opinions of such men as we have criticised, and then realise that this type of human is looked to for intellectual help, we think of the comment made by a very great man, J. G. Frazer, to whom we owe much, and he was always a helper even when one could not follow him. The quality of a writer is not only to be measured when the reader agrees. He may teach much where there is difference. Here, then, is a passage from Frazer, which we agree with right through:—

"The common inherited scene of conceptions which is all around us, comes to us naturally and unobjectionally as our native air, is none the less imposed on us, and limits our intellectual movements in countless ways. And from the structure of our language we can hardly even think of escaping. Tens of thousands of years have elapsed since we shed our shells, but we are still in communication with a medium developed to meet the needs of arboreal man. And as with sounds and marks bear witness to their primeval origins, so the associations which have grown up with their use and with the structure imposed on them by our first parents, are found to bear an equally significant continuity."

That soldiers dislike Church Parades is evidenced by the many letters to the Press, and we should not be surprised to learn that "cusses" are more common and fervent over praying time than on any other occasion. An officer of the Glencoe (Edinburgh) Depot Royal Scots reports that men "will simply not go to Church" and adds that this is a tragedy. We are hoping that one of these days it will be realised by the authorities that soldiers are men, and should be treated as "grown-ups." They should have the right that every civilian has, that of staying away from Church if they feel so inclined. Men and women joining the Forces should insist on their right to register as of no religion.

It will be interesting to many to know that every Sunday the B.B.C. gives two hours and forty-five minutes to religious matters. Also Evensong is broadcast in full every Thursday. We believe there are other religious hits here and there that crop up, and as the B.B.C. has a monopoly, and as many of the Churches are complaining that they ought to have more, it is likely they will get what they want.

We believe that there is soon to be another exhibition of what the B.B.C. calls a daring discussion on all kinds of religion, and what is more important, there is to be a "show" of people who have no religion. On the surface, this looks quite nice.

But the B.B.C. is apt to do things that do not make allowances for real discussion. And a real discussion means that each party shall be able, not merely to say what he believes, but also what he does not believe, and the reasons determining his opinions. In other words, a discussion should be a discussion. That is the practice in the Houses of Parliament. Where religion is concerned, the B.B.C. is at present warding off any real discussion between people of conflicting opinions. We think there are still some on the religious side who would welcome a proper discussion. There are still men—and women—who have enough courage to test their religious opinions in a sincere discussion.

Through the medium of "The Torquay Times," we made the acquaintance of the Reverend Fred Sparrow, whose business it is to introduce people to God, or to introduce God to people—we are never quite sure which is which. But in the issue of the paper mentioned, it seems that Mr. Sparrow has ceased—for the moment—introducing God to man and is introducing Man to God. Mr. Sparrow's first item is, quite properly, "What is God Like?" That is a good start, we have often wondered how humans will recognise God, but hitherto have had no help in that way. But having said that the first thing is to know what God is like, our preacher drops it, and here we are still not knowing what God is like, and while that is the case, we are quite in the dark. Mr. Sparrow says that the way to act is to "sit down humbly and say, 'show me the father,'" and at that the entire job of knowing "the Father" stops. All we are told is that if you have seen the Son you have seen the Father. That seems to be going round in a circle. We know the Son because he is like the Father, and we know the Father because he is like the Son. We think we will let the matter rest at that! We are getting a headache.

Turning over a lot of books, without being tied to a particular part, and just dipping here and there, is a fine pastime. And somehow one seems more likely to pick up gems in that way than in any other. For example, take this from a Dean of Llandaff of some years ago. Says this unusual Dean:—

Mystery is a thing which so far as it is possible should be done away with. A large portion of the clergy has got to be very mysterious, and a delicious thrill goes down their backs when they talk about the mystery of the Church Sacrament and the Trinity like a lot of Fiji Islanders.

Hear! Hear! But fancy a religion without mystery! Why it would not last a year. And just when the clergy are coming back to the position that a certain part of the world must be ruled off from that dealt with by science and reserved for religion. It is not often we find ourselves in whole-souled agreement with a Dean but it is the case now—particularly in comparison of the clergy with the Fiji Islanders—even at the risk of offending the Fiji Islanders. And that raises the question, "How is anyone to believe in Christianity without sinking to the level of the Fiji Islanders?" We mean the original ones, for we believe the present-day ones are very much improved, and it is likely they wink the other eye when the Christian medicine-man spins his yarns to them.

In a way it is interesting to learn that a witchcraft case has appeared in the U.S.A. A woman has been ill-treated owing to her reputation as a witch. We are duly shocked—along with some sincere Christians. The difference is that these particular Christians accept the reality of the "witch," while we can only consider this filthy superstition as part and parcel of the Christian faith. We have a very large number of people in this country who believe in witchcraft, and we feel certain it would not take a great deal of pressure to set "witch-hunting" active indeed. And why not. The command of the Bible that witches are to be killed is plain enough. That women have the power of conversing with Satan is still believed by multitudes of sincere Christians. It was the founder of the Methodist Church who said that you may as well dismiss Christianity and discharge witchcraft. He was a great man in his way.

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MAN A Critical Survey

MAN perches perilously on the topmost branch of the Tree of Evolution, rather like an outsized fairy on a Christmas tree, but not quite so ornamental. There he sits and there he sways; an unsteady, ungainly object only prevented from falling headlong to destruction by his special aptitude for grabbing and grasping everything within his reach. In this way he is able to retain his uncomfortable position although he suffers in consequence from perpetual sickness, dizziness and muddle-headedness.

From his tree-climbing ancestors, Man has learned to balance himself not only on his lofty pinnacle, but also on his own two pedal extremities, contrary to all the laws of gravitation. His bodily shape almost defies the imagination. Who would ever suppose there could be any logical or sane excuse for such an awkward, elongated monstrosity? He resembles nothing so much as a length of rubber tubing with a few nasty bulges in it, while surmounting the top of the tube is a round pea-like object that wobbles unsteadily and is known as a Head.

In the first place, why in the name of all that is wonderful does Man choose to adopt the perpendicular position and totter about on two flat and flexible hinges which are called Feet? His natural position is on all fours, which is proved in babyhood, yet his fond but misguided parents insist that he learns to balance himself upright at the cost of uncounted falls, bumps and bruises.

Then again he is not allowed to eat the food that attracts him. Instead of the nice lumps of coal and small objects of wood and metal which he obviously prefers he is compelled to imbibe gallons of milk and powdered chemicals until he resembles a round bladder of lard. He is then called "bonny" and is pinched and prodded by half-witted old ladies who see him in his pram or in his bath. They thrust their ugly faces close to his and if they do not frighten him into a fit they proceed to make strange noises in no known language and expect him to understand. The wonder is that Man ever survives his first entry into this mad, amazing world.

Anyway, he certainly has to endure what no other animal is called upon to suffer. As a direct consequence of his enforced vertical position his internal arrangements are constantly strained and distorted—his belly sags, his back aches, his whole structure is warped, his heart is overworked by having to pump the blood upwards, his feet swell and his arches fall through having to support such an overload of matter on two ridiculously small surfaces. The whole thing is too utterly fantastic and absurd.

Of course, any intelligently designed person would have considerably more than two hands with which to do his hundred and one daily jobs. He would also have four eyes, one on each side of the head and one fore and aft. He would be able to move backwards as well as forwards without having to describe a semi-circle. But obviously Man is *not* intelligently designed and everything is made as difficult and as awkward for him as possible.

THE BRADFORD BRANCH, N.S.S.

The inevitable has happened. We put it thus, for we were never in doubt as to the outcome of the case. The attempt to disrupt the National Secular Society by a handful of malcontents who were foolish enough to bring a court action, ostensibly against the Bradford Branch, but actually against the Executive of the N.S.S., came to an end with a clarification of the Society's position. Judge B. R. Rice-Jones, gave a clear summing-up with judgment (and costs) in our favour. The verdict showed the Judge's agreement with the attitude of the loyal members of the Bradford Branch who had followed the advice of the Executive throughout. In order to be perfectly fair, the Executive have hitherto refrained from commenting on the case, but now that this "unhappy dispute," to quote the Judge, is over a complete account of the proceedings will be published in the next issue of the "Freethinker," or at the latest, April 4. It will probably be a revelation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Let us now examine in more detail the various appendages, excrescences and other peculiar paraphernalia of the human form. We will commence with the Head, that swivelling nodule which sits on the top of the main tube and is attached thereto by a long and scraggy, or short and thick, smaller tube capable of moving through an arc of ninety degrees horizontally and about the same vertically. Why it is not made to swivel completely round on a universal joint we do not know. It is quite evident that Man was never intended to see the back of his own head, though it is usually far pleasanter than the frontal surface. He is like a permanently blinkered horse, yet we see no reason why a man should suddenly shy or bolt if he could see what was coming behind him. If he does not take fright at the sight of his own ugly face in the mirror it is unlikely that anything else would disturb him.

At the top of the head there grows a grass-like thatch called Hair. This forms a sort of mossy lawn and may be cut, clipped and shaped into varying decorative designs according to the owner's whim. Sometimes it receives periodical top-dressings of smelly oil or grease by way of lubricating the sub-soil. For some curious reason, Man begins life bald-headed and often finishes in the same state, so that his age can be more or less accurately gauged by the extent and colour of this hairy growth. The colour, by the way, varies considerably through most shades although green, pink and purple seem to have been omitted.

Dropping a few inches, we come to the Eyes. These may be either bulging outwards or recessed inwards for no special reason. As a means of sight they are miserable failures and artificial aids are nearly always necessary. These consist of a small glass windows which magnify or otherwise distort the view so that we rarely see the thing we are looking at as it really is.

Between the eyes and slightly below them is an elongated protuberance known as the Proboscis or Nose. This is said to act as an air filter and purifier though actually it merely serves as a breeding-place for millions of microbes and is a confounded and everlasting nuisance. It is usually in a state of active eruption due to colds, catarrh or other enemy action; and even when it does behave itself properly it is no ornament. Varying in shape from a Toucan's bill to a bulbous blob, its full-time function is poking itself into other people's private affairs. Altogether a superfluous and most unpleasant organ.

Next we come to the Mouth which is, of course, the human stoke-hole or food hatch. Into it is crammed a variety of messy substances which have to be chewed by means of a set of hard spikes into a still more messy condition before it finally passes into the messy system, where it causes numerous violent dis-

turbances. Here again the grinding apparatus is most inefficient. Not only does it inflict excruciating torture from time to time, but it usually has to be removed entirely and an artificial apparatus substituted. With so many artificial aids, it is really surprising that any of the original design remains.

We now come to the Ears, those large flaps situated on either side of the head enabling us to hear all the horrible sounds with which civilisation has surrounded us. Again, these have a habit of failing us after middle-age. The ears are extraneous appendages and the only really useful purpose they serve is to keep our hats from falling over our faces.

We have now dealt with the external surface of the head; but what hidden mysteries are contained inside? In most cases, we believe, there is a complete vacuum or void where only echoes play. In others, it is said, there is some small amount of grey matter called a Brain. This is the Office of Works which is supposed to direct all our thoughts, words and deeds. But like any other Office of Works, it is extremely inefficient. It closes down completely during the hours of sleep and opens again for business as soon as we wake—at least that is the main idea. At any suggestion of working overtime it immediately gives us a violent pain, known as Headache. Fortunately, very few people bother to use their brains at all, which saves them a whole lot of needless suffering. To be really successful in life, it is far better to let your tongue do all the overtime. The louder you shout and the more nonsense you utter the more will you impress others with your ability. Politicians, of course, have developed this method into something approaching a fine art.

Perhaps it is as well that time and space will not permit us to deal at length with the rest of the human body. But the outstanding thing about it is that it is so repulsive to the eye that it has to be completely shrouded and encased in artificial material called Clothing. Civilised Man is the only living animal that is too disgusting to live in his natural state. He must conceal himself in drab and funereal coloured cloth which makes a delightful depository for dust, dirt and disease germs. Upon the top of his head he places a curious little box called a Hat and he spends most of his time when out of doors lifting and lowering this useless article to satisfy the vanity of his lady friends.

Such is Man, the self-styled Lord of Creation. As a hideous example of Nature gone wrong he has no equal in the entire animal world.

W. H. WOOD.

SYMBOLS IN RELIGION

EGG SUBSTITUTES.

IN our zones, egg and ball are chiefly substituted by all sorts of apples and nuts. Therefore, the Tree of the Knowledge in the Paradise bore apples and it is Eve who was tempted by this female symbol. After eating the apple* they knew "that they were naked" (Gen. iii, 7). There were golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides of the Greek mythology, guarded by a dragon (a big snake).

Of nuts, incidentally, there is only one single mention made in the Jewish scriptures, i.e., Solomon's Song c.vl., 11: The lovers "go down" into the "garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley" and whether the "pomegranates budded". According to Aigremont I, 89, the newly married couple had to praise God that he allowed the nut tree to grow in the garden of Eden. Maidens who used to perform a particular sensual dance were transformed into nuts by the goddess Artemis Karyatis, whilst the Teutonic goddess Iduna—connected with apples—returns in the shape of a nut. The Talmud will have

*The eating up of herself in the form of the apple means a temporary death for Eve (Gen. II, 17), or Snowwhite; yet, when leaving the dwarfs, seven months of "dwarfish" light, Snowwhite rises again to public glory.

it that the Devil prefers nut groves, and in such a one Adonis the youthful god, had been buried.

Five nuts (5 is the "lunar" number, connected with Venus) play a part in a Bulgarian village wedding. According to a Christian tradition, St. Mary, on her way to Egypt, met with a thunderstorm and took shelter under a hazel bush. In Central Europe, the peasants have a saying that a year abounding in nuts will produce the birth of many baby-boys.

The Law of Solon decreed that a newly-wed couple had to eat a quince; Strabon xv, 3. 17, testifies to a similar custom with the Persians.

The apple is the symbol of Aphrodite, so it must be given to her in the judgment of Paris, the Trojan shepherd who was called upon to decide the beauty contest between three goddesses. From this the term "the apple of discord" is derived. When in the Realm of the Shades, Adonis was asked what he liked best on Earth, he answers: "The apple". Considering the identity between the apple and Aphrodite (Venus) with whom he was in love, this is self-evident.

Freya, the nordic Venus, in the shape of a big crow, drops an apple to the sterile wife of Rerir; after having eaten it, she gives birth to Volsung, the ancestor of Siegfried. Iea (=pain, meaning the moon), the sterile woman of Jakob, takes refuge to the same remedy, though she chose a pomegranate, the multiple kernels (=seed) seemed more fruitful. The ancient Persians called the pomegranate "the magical herb of Hadhânaepata" in Hebrew it is "Dudâ'im" and was valued as a means for love-spells.

The chapters of the Temple of Solomon were covered with pomegranates (I Kings vii, 18-20, 42; II Kings xxv, 17; Jer. LII, 22-23) and were even found on the hem of the High Priest's ornate robe (Ex. xxviii, 33-34, together with bells as ball symbols and for the warding off of devils!). And on front of the Temple there stood twin pillars, the sexual meaning of which will be dealt with later on.

Highly indicative are Yugoslav wedding customs as preserved in the villages.

The bridal procession is being bombarded with apples, myrtle and bunches of roses and violets — all symbols of the Love Deities. Then, the bride in particular, is showered with nuts, dates and figs by her mother-in-law; after that she is given a quince to eat. And whilst she is crossing the threshold, water from above is poured down on her.

IN THE FIELDS.

Pelting—and birching—is considered highly efficient as a magic rite. In the spring of 1905, C. J. White witnessed a fertility procession in Sikkin. Women in a watered paddy field were assaulted by the lads, and in the splashing water and mud a mock battle developed, in the course of which mud balls were used as missiles.

The exposure of the sexual organs and even promiscuity in the fields is a widespread custom in order to make the fertility spirits understand what is expected of them. In the "Song of Songs" the pudenda are described as the "vineyards"; other synonyms prevalent in oriental language are: the garden, grove of love, pasture, field, etc., the ploughing of which means the act (the Hebrew "kharas" has this double meaning, cf. Gen. r., c. 83a, 85). Frequently naked women had to draw a plough whilst being showered with water; or they had to dance in the fields (or vineyards, as in ancient Jerusalem) with ensuing intercourse. By this, scholars (like Bachofen) were frequently shocked; in primitive thinking, however, sexual orgies are considered part of the divine "enthusiasm" and, therefore, even occur with sober people like the ancient Romans or the Yoruba in Africa.

Moreover, this is borne out by the fact that the offspring of such communions are considered divine children (the "Song of Songs" deals with such an occasion); they had to do service in the temples, and the Holy Paramours with the Temple

Jerusalem were styled "kâdêsh" and "kedêshâ" respectively (the holy lad and girl).

May it be mentioned in passing that, as a means of symbolic interpretation to the fertility spirits, little children play an important part in the wedding customs, be it in the attendance on the bride or by being put on her lap.

PERCY G. ROY.

CORRESPONDENCE

PIETY AND PERSECUTION

Sir.—Your "Views and Opinions" expressed under the above caption in the current issue of the "Freethinker," contain a most remarkable and undeserved eulogy of Bishop Bossuet and the Roman Catholic Church, coupled with a belittling of Protestantism by way of comparison. You inform us that Bossuet "had a breadth of view . . . which few Protestants could rival." It is a false criterion to judge the Roman Catholic Church by "breadth of view" expressed by a member of its hierarchy. "What you do," wrote Emerson, "shouts out so loud that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary." In pursuance of practical and widest possible practice of Freethought, I read weekly, three Roman Catholic papers, to keep in touch with the Vatican cunning against non-Catholic movements. Every week these three papers contain enough "breadth of view" to fill a gasometer. But all this "breadth" is merely verbal, and should not deceive any Freethinker. But from the same papers is furnished sufficient evidence that there is nothing the Church would not do to shackle all mankind in the interests of the Church.

"Breadth of view" my foot! You further inform us that Bossuet "belonged to a church that claimed to be universal, and so had to think in continents where Protestants thought in conventicles." It seems that the alliteration of "continents" and "conventicles" is so alluring as to be irresistible. It seems to me, however, that the right way to judge these two Christianisms is not in terms of "continents," "conventicles," but in the light of their basic ideas. And the practice of the Protestant basic idea, "the right of private judgment," led me, 33 years ago, from the Baptist ministry to Atheism. And the Roman Catholic Church has no principle at all comparable with that, but has always been the world's worst opponent of private judgment. Doubtless the Roman Catholic hierarchy does a lot of thinking, thinking what the laity must believe; not for their exercise of private judgment.

You write of Bossuet as being "kindly in disposition." Doubtless. "Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly," in dulcet tones. Further, you say of the Roman Catholic Church that it is "the most logical of the Christian Churches." Granted. Once admit Roman Catholic premises, their conclusions are indubitably "logical." The snag is that these premises are only "claims," and are totally illogical and devoid of any vestige of historical foundation. Again, by the same token, once admit that twice two are five, twice four must be ten! It's "logical," isn't it? As to your sample of sarcasm from Bossuet, one sees only the snake in the grass winding towards its victim. Surely a specimen could have been selected a less polluted source. In giving the Roman Catholic Church a gratuitous boost you are encouraging the worst and longest enemy that human freedom has ever known, or will know. Doubtless you are well acquainted through literature of the history of Protestantism and Catholicism and what they have. But having never believed either of them, I feel that you have missed a valuable aid in understanding them. With the rest of your essay I am, of course, in full agreement. Being an Atheist, you will, of course, realise that I have no connection with Protestantism. While knowing that the hands of Protestantism have at times been anything but clean, the difference between it and Catholicism is the difference between one and a thousand, and for you to be taken in by Bossuet's fair words and smooth speech, is, to say the least, surprising.— Yours, etc., J. NICHOLAS.

PESSIMISM

Sir,—That was a very sensible as well as brave letter in your March 7 issue, from E. A. McDonald. Our valiant friend condemns pessimism, saying: "There have been times (fortunately transitory) when suicide seemed logically inescapable; but just when the future appeared blackest, I have managed to thrust a hopeless situation into the background and see myself in a less tragic light."

Friend McDonald is right! Let us look at the problem from the point of view of pure logic. Either reality (that is, all that exists) is "monistic" or it is "dualistic"—in other words, either there is no God, and everything that exists is a simple chain of inevitable cause and effect, or else the universe was created by, and is guided by, a Deity. If the former of these alternatives is true, then nothing that exists or happens could be possibly other than it actually is. To put it in plain words, all that exists or occurs must be right—for it is the inevitable product of the very nature of things. Therefore, however sad or bad any given thing or event may seem, we know that really it is the right and inescapable thing in its place. On the other hand, if there be a God, such Deity will guide things rightly, however gloomy they may seem to us. So in either hypothesis, pessimism is illogical.

Like McDonald, I have experienced, and am at present experiencing, great troubles; but they have never turned out quite so tragic as they seemed. Here is a good motto: "Cheer up! To-day is the to-morrow that seemed so awful to you yesterday!"—Yours, etc., J. W. POYNTER.

Why have we memory to retain the minutest circumstances that have happened to us; and yet not enough to remember how often we have related them to the same person?—LA ROCHEFOUCAULT

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Anarchist Federation of Britain (London Group) (The Trade Union Club, 12, Gt. Newport Street, W.C.2, Room 7).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Spartakus Insurrection, 73-71 B.C." Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 23, 7 p.m.: "The Child and the Future." Mrs. COUNCELLOR CLARK.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Difficulties of Democracy." Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Intolerance—Past and Present." Mr. J. G. LURTON (N.S.S.).

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "What is Democracy?" Mr. LEN CROMPTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Annual General Meeting. Important business.

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

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "A Schoolmaster on Frog Island." Mr. W. C. CLEMENTS.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday 2-30 p.m.: "Christ and Karl Marx." Rev. F. T. COPPLESTONE.

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TRUTH AT LAST

I HAVE lived a most disreputable life during most of my grown-up years. I have sinned, blasphemed, supported wicked movements, consorted with jail-birds (interesting people), lived in a caravan, and, indeed, committed almost every offence against the public respectability. Now, however, seeing the error of my ways, so to speak, I try hard to reform. As part of my tuition on the road to respectability I read "The Times" daily, especially Saturday's issue, because on that day a man of God writes spiritual uplift for the respectable to absorb.

This man of God (he calls himself a correspondent), excels himself in the issue of Saturday, February 21. He has found the true end of Man. He knows "Man's place in God's plan." He begins by asking "What is Man for?" He says the Christian faith has a decisive answer. Listen to him.

"Each human being is thought of as a part of that body with a place and a destiny for himself within the fatherly love of God." I am puzzled! I can understand humans being thought of, but *by whom?* I cannot comprehend human beings thinking of each other in the way indicated. Part of what body? Oh dear! I try hard to be respectable, but really, in my disreputable days I would have called that explanation "tripe superlative." My cleric goes on. "Man's chief end in human life is to give glory to God, not only in public worship, but in private life, and that purpose must be founded on the true idea of God." Is that *all* a respectable man has to live for? Ah me!

And I, in my innocence, have thought that the Christian Church already the idea from God himself. I am sorry I must live up my whole life to the glory of God, and in quest of the true idea of him. A little time off, to help me in, say, cancer research, music, fine arts, invention, etc., would be so nice. But it must not be! I fulminate against the wicked who played truant to experiment with electricity, x-rays, penicillin, vaccines and surgical appliances! Accused by those who sneaked away to evolve locomotives, radio, and ocean liners! Vengeance descend upon the heads of those who neglected their duty for the mere trifles of alphabet and numeration, printing and literature, and on those evil men who made sound a thing of symphonic beauty!

And what is this? "To understand Man's place and purpose, God himself must be first seen and loved." I am confused! Oh, Mr. Correspondent, please tell me where I can see God! How will I recognise him when I do see him? What a task is before me!

But wait! "How bracing is the Christian view of Man—that from birth he is within the family of God and that by growing in 'grace and truth,' through the Christian gospel he realises progressively his relationship to God as his Father." Well, I'll be —!

My heart wilted that I should fail to get the true idea of God, see him, and love him, and now I find he is my father! Well! Well! Well! But then, who was that gentleman who boxed my ears and kicked my pants years ago? Who was he who taught me so much that I found so useful during my chequered career?

"To preach the truth that 'God comes on earth to dwell' is still the most searching activity of the Christian Church, and the chief answer to the question about Man and his problems." My breath is gone! I must give up!

Respectability, where is thy sting? This last piece of wisdom is too much for my poor brain to grasp. What profundity! What language! What erudition! So, the "most searching activity of the Christian Church" solves my problems! No hope! Can't be done! Respectability is still afar off! If the Christian correspondent had honestly admitted that "God comes on earth to dwell" answered the question of *the Church and its problems*, I might have a little more faith in his wisdom.

He concludes. "That is a sure and certain way of understanding the purpose of God, his love for men, and his purposes of dealing with them." No! I cannot continue! That half-column of inanity fails to expound even *its own* purpose, let alone the purpose of a God who destroys as he creates, creates hideousness to mar every beauty, and plans with such lack of judgment that there exists no two things alike.

And "The Times," Britain's most honoured newspaper, gives space to such drivel. How satisfying it is to know that one's mind and outlook can remain unwarped by it! Thanks to Freethought training! Let Man's real purpose be to purge his mental make-up of all that incites credence in such a gospel. Long after many of us are dust, Freethinkers will be respectable and respected, and we shall be remembered by all and sundry as "the dear, dear departed!"

But away with this childishness, this fodder for fools, and let us turn to the much despised little "daily" I receive inside "The Times," the language there I *can* understand, tho' it be not "quite" respectable.

G. L. C.

MAN AND GOD

How great is the difference of the association of man and God of a few centuries ago, with that of to-day? In the first man looked for something from his gods—even if it was merely unpleasant. Generally we may say that man looked for the orders of his gods and obeyed—after a fashion. Now it is actually God who obeys man, and in doing so he is marching to his end. For example. The other day an ordinary scientist gave warning that there was every prospect of a short water supply, and that is grave indeed. But having delivered this warning the scientist said no more. No one seems to consider what God ought to do in the matter; it seems that no one expects God to do anything at all. God gave no warning to His preachers and bishops for they said nothing and did nothing. They did not even inform God. This ignoring of God is very striking.

We suggest that God ought to be told. In the "Book of Common Prayer," are two prayers, one when God sends much water, and another when He has not sent enough. Evidently God needs watching. Here is one the prayers:—

"O, God, Heavenly Father, who by thy son Jesus Christ has promised to all them that seek thy kingdom and the righteousness thereof, all things necessary to their bodily sustenance, send us, we beseech thee, in this our necessity, such moderate rain and showers that we may revive the fruits of the earth to our comfort."

That is quite clear: it is also to the point. The quiet hint to God that all we want is a *moderate* quantity of water is nicely put. It may be dangerous to tell God exactly what he should do, for no one likes to have his faults exhibited. Gods are very human; they love flattery, and it may be that God will be hurt when an ordinary scientist plainly puts God and his doing out of the world and just says that a rain shortage is ahead. Gods are used to better treatment.

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