

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LVIII.—No. 15

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER.]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Little Thinking

MANY persons are in the habit of thinking of the religious bigot as hard, unyielding, and severe. So far as his relation to others is concerned, he may be; but in relation to his own feelings he is quite the reverse. Here he is all tenderness and susceptibility. The opinions and feelings of others, when they do not run upon lines identical with his own, are assailed with the utmost ferocity and with the least possible consideration. When his own are attacked he demands every gentleness and consideration. He will attack the Freethinker with ridicule, with sarcasm, and— with less justification—with abuse. If the Freethinker retorts in kind he is solemnly reminded that he is dealing with a sacred subject, and has no right to outrage people's feelings by attacking their religious beliefs. He has repeated this so often that he really believes it. Not only does he believe it himself, but by dint of reiteration he has induced many who do not agree with his religious views to believe it also. There are scores of non-religious people who, if they are driven to avow their non-belief, do so as if it were something of which to be almost ashamed. They admit it with an indicated hope that they will be dealt with as mercifully as possible.

The belief that religious opinions are worthy of a special measure of respect is in itself proof of what has been said. It provides a sanctuary for bigotry and an authoritative platform for intolerance. Religious opinions are no more deserving of respect than are opinions about the British Constitution. And they are certainly not so important. My opinion about the British Constitution may lead me to say or do things that will materially affect the lives of all around me. But my opinions about God, whether right or wrong, leave everybody, so far as all earthly purposes are concerned, quite unaffected. We do, it is true, respect our own opinions; but this is because they are our own. And if we respect like opinions in other people it is only by a fictitious extension of our own personality.

Now I deny that any opinion, as an opinion, is entitled to respect. All opinions, as such, are upon an absolute equality—a man's opinion concerning the most "sacred" subject being no more deserving of respect than his opinion concerning the equator. All that does deserve respect is the right of each to hold and express any opinion he or she possesses. There is a clear reason in social utility for this; but there is neither social utility nor common sense in respecting opinions merely because their possessor chooses to cover them with the cloak of religion. And it is precisely this right of each to hold and express opinion that the believer declines to respect. Nay, he does not so much consciously decline this, as the thought of such a thing scarcely enters his head. His opinion that I, as a Free-

thinker, am a source of moral and social corruption deserves to be treated with all deference, and may be shouted from the housetops. My opinion that I am nothing of the kind, but am at least as good as a Christian, must be expressed with all due deference to the feelings of the believer—if, indeed, I am graciously allowed to express it at all. If Freethinkers succeed in inducing the authorities to open a museum or a library, or permit concerts on Sunday, that is an outrage on the feelings of Christians. But Freethinkers may be debarred from all these pleasures, and may have their "day of rest" made hideous by church bells, street-corner preaching, and Salvation Army bands, without it being considered that their feelings suffer to any extent whatever.

The truth is that the Freethinker who "outrages" religious feeling by expressing his opinions concerning religious beliefs is acting upon a much higher moral principle than is ever reached by the average Christian. To him opinion is something that counts for too much in the progress of the race for it to be put aside as of no consequence. Every opinion brings with it its responsibilities, and the responsibilities of unbelief are at least as important as those connected with a set of opinions that have nothing to commend them but their antiquity. I cordially admire the Christian who feels it to be his duty to preach his belief abroad; but it is not a duty that should be confined to himself. It is incumbent upon everyone to brand a thing a lie once they have convinced themselves that it is so. The plea that the time is not ripe for so acting is the evasion of a grave responsibility. "Not ripe" only means not quite safe; nothing more. But the proper time to call a lie by its name is when it is seen to be a lie, not to wait until there are enough singers to make a respectable chorus. Religious belief does not of necessity involve this attitude; but it is deeply implanted in the nature of Freethought.

And just as the Freethinker's attack on religious opinion is dictated by a higher sense of duty than that implied in Christianity, so the Christian claim that religious opinions deserve a special measure of respect is fundamentally an attempt to force a lower morality upon the unbeliever. It is asking him to obliterate his sense of the distinction between true and false, and to treat a lie with the same respect he properly reserves for the truth. The issue has been well put by Dr. Thomas Arnold—the famous father of a still more famous son. He says:—

"To tax anyone with want of reverence because he pays no respect to what we venerate, is either irrelevant or is a mere confusion. The fact, so far as it is true, is no reproach, but an honour; because to reverence all persons and all things is absolutely wrong; reverence shown to that which does not deserve it, is no virtue; no, not even an amiable weakness, but a plain folly and sin. But if it be meant that he is wanting in proper reverence, not respect-

ing what is really to be respected, that is assuming the whole question at issue, because what we call divine he calls an idol; and so, supposing that we are in the right, we are bound to fall down and worship; so, supposing him to be in the right, he is no less bound to pull it to the ground and destroy it?"

The claim that religious opinions are deserving of a special measure of respect is as injurious in practice as it is ridiculous in theory. For in practice this involves the suppression of all opinion hostile to religion. From the constraining of the expression of opinions hostile to religion as undesirable, to the suppression of such opinions by punishing those who hold them, is an easy and natural step. And it is one that Christianity has always been willing and eager to take. It has suppressed opinion systematically, continuously, and by every means within its power. But you can only protect an established opinion from attack at the price of cultivating intellectual cowardice and hypocrisy. Conformity is secured by robbing the nation of that which is most vital to its well-being and development. Religious health is consequently only another aspect of social disease. By making it unpleasant for people to investigate received opinion, error becomes firmly established and hypocrisy the marked social characteristic. Not an hypocrisy that is an expression of a conscious dissimulation; that is a comparatively healthy state, and denotes at least the capacity for seeing the real thing. The hypocrisy generated is of the kind that, although there is a total divorce between profession and practice, there is an almost total unconsciousness of the fact that we are all the time living a lie. It is an hypocrisy that is unconscious, ingrained, organic, secured by a process of elimination that has been at work for many generations.

The nature of this process has been well pointed out by Mr. Francis Galton in the following passage:—

"The policy of the religious world in Europe . . . having first captured all the gentle natures and condemned them to celibacy, made another sweep of her [the Church's] huge nets . . . to catch those who were the most fearless, truth-seeking, and intelligent in their modes of thought, and therefore the most suitable parents of a high civilisation, and put a strong check, if not a direct stop, to their progeny. Those she reserved on these occasions, to breed the generations of the future, were the servile, the indifferent, and again, the stupid. Thus as she . . . brutalised human nature by her system of celibacy applied to the gentle, she demoralised it by her system of persecution of the intelligent, the sincere, the free. It is enough to make the blood boil to think of the blind folly that has caused the foremost nations of struggling humanity to be the heirs of such hateful ancestry, and that has so bred our instincts as to keep them in an unnecessarily long continued antagonism with the essential requirements of a steadily advancing civilisation."

The truth of the above is seen in the light of the calculation that in three hundred years—1471-1781—no less than 32,000 persons were burnt, and 291,000 imprisoned, for religious offences in Spain alone. Probably other countries could not show so heavy a record as this, but substantially the same work was being carried on all over Europe. And, modified considerably by changed conditions, the policy is still pursued. To protect religious opinions from criticism and attack, the Christian Churches have deliberately

depleted the race—so far as they could—of the finer and more valuable types of mind and character. And beyond those actually reached by the arm of persecution, there has been the benumbing effects upon the rest of the population. And when the record of Christianity's misdeeds is finally and accurately written, this will stand out as its greatest crime against civilisation. Its greatest crime has been, not the burning of men at the stake or the imprisonment of others in a Christian dungeon. Its crowning crime has been, in the lower type of mind and character it has encouraged, in the hypocrisy that it has made almost a second character. In Pagan Rome it was said that one priest could not meet another without a smile. If Christian can meet Christian to-day with a grave face, it is only because the selective influence of Christianity has developed a type that lacks the wit to perceive the absurdity of the current creed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE RAVAGES OF DISEASE IN WAR

IN his stimulating and suggestive volume, "Rats, Lice and History" (Routledge), Dr. Hans Zinsser, the eminent bacteriologist, surveys the history of typhus fever. Other destructive ailments are incidentally dealt with, and the devastating part played by epidemics of contagious and infectious diseases in shaping man's destiny is stressed.

Zinsser cites many instances whereby both the ancient and the modern world's history has been influenced by outbreaks of plague and other epidemics. The plague in Athens, to which Pericles himself was a victim, largely contributed to the overthrow of that democratic State, and ancient Rome's fall seems to have been accelerated by pandemic maladies which, when reinforced by the ravages of barbaric tribes and the deteriorating influences of the Christian Church, became inevitable. A pestilence invaded the Empire in the third century A.D., at a time when the Goths and Parthians menaced the Roman State. Zinsser notes that, "Terror was extreme and phantoms were seen to hover over the houses of those who were about to fall sick. St. Cyprian made many conversions to Christianity by exorcising these evil spirits. Throughout the early Christian period, every great calamity—famine, earthquake and plague—led to mass conversions, another indirect influence by which epidemic diseases contributed to the destruction of classical civilisation. Christianity owes a formidable debt to bubonic plague and smallpox, no less than to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions."

The barbarian invasions, the crowding of the rustic community into the cities, and with nothing but shrine cures and incantations to aid them, the people perished. For the sanitation of Pagan times was frowned on by the clergy. Thus, for centuries epidemics caused the death of countless numbers of the population.

In the capital of the Eastern Empire, Constantinople, bubonic plague devastated the city and countryside in the reign of Justinian. Gibbon notes the extraordinary mortality of this scourge and adds that: "The triple scourges of war, pestilence and famine afflicted the subjects of Justinian; and his reign is disgraced by a visible decrease of the human species which has never been regained in some of the fairest countries of the globe."

Procopius tells us that this plague arose in Egypt, reached Byzantium in A.D. 540, and raged till 590. Its devastation combined with warfare, spiritual and temporal misgovernment, civil commotions and famines, brought the once proud Empire to its knees.

Zinsser opines that as most of us lead monotonous lives, an innate craving for adventure and excitement welcomes military

activity. He does not deny the influence of man's constitutional acquisitiveness which is evident in his "rapacity for territory, commercial rivalry, and all other expressions of that avarice which is as instinctive in the human species as the sexual and intestinal functions and which have always been present as the underlying causes of war." Also, he avers that in the first World War that until "they actually suffered from dirt, lousiness, fatigue, terror, disease, or wounds, most men enjoyed the war."

The presence of disease contributed in no small measure to the defeat of the Carthaginians in their conflict with Rome, for Hannibal's army and fleet were the victims of an epidemic.

In A.D. 425, the Huns were about to capture Constantinople when their hordes were so decimated by disease that they were compelled to retreat. Again, the Crusaders in Palestine suffered far more from epidemics than from the arms of their Moslem foes. For instance: "When Jerusalem was taken in 1099, only 60,000 of the original 300,000 were left, and these, by 1101, had melted to 20,000."

The second Crusade also met with disaster and out of an enormous array estimated at half a million, few succeeded in reaching Antioch and fewer still returned to Christian Europe. Pestilence apparently swept them to painful death.

The third attempt to recover the Holy Sepulchre was another failure when famine, disease and desertions reduced an army of 100,000 to a beggarly 5,000. Later, the Crusading forces of the fourth adventure were so enfeebled by bubonic plague that they never reached Jerusalem at all.

In addition to other destructive diseases, scurvy has played its part in determining the course of history. In 1250, the army of the French ruler, St. Louis, held its own against the Saracens until the Lenten season. Then, as Joinville records, an epidemic, presumably of scurvy, broke out which led to the overthrow of Louis and his generals with their subsequent capture by the enemy. The dead were too numerous to bury "and the agonising pains of the afflicted were so great that they cried like women labouring of child."

Disease evidently decided many of the conflicts between France and Spain in medieval centuries. In 1285, a French army invaded Aragon, but was sadly reduced by a distemper which killed most of its officers as well as Philip III of France himself.

Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, disconcerting outbreaks of fatal diseases constantly recur. In the later 16th century, several epidemics conspired to determine the fortunes and misfortunes of war. As Zinsser reminds us, the siege of Metz by Charles V "was raised by scurvy, dysentery, typhus, and the army retreated from the city, after 30,000 had died."

During its long sanguinary career, the Thirty Years' War of religion was accompanied by deadly disease. Pestilence marched with the contending armies as they travelled to and fro through Central Europe, from first to last. Zinsser notes an occasion when typhus defeated both opposing armies before they could join issue. "In 1632, Gustavus Adolphus and Wallenstein faced each other before Nuremberg, which was the goal of both armies. Typhus and scurvy killed 18,000 soldiers, whereupon both the opposing forces marched away in the hope of escaping the further ravages of the pestilence."

When, in 1708, the Swedes, after a highly successful campaign in Russia found all their efforts frustrated by an epidemic of plague, disease favoured their foes. And, when in 1741, Prague capitulated to the French, this resulted from an outbreak of typhus in the Austrian army with its loss of 30,000 men. Moreover, even Frederick the Great and his victorious troops were driven to evacuate Bohemia when dysentery attacked the Prussians.

Dysentery also played its part in compelling the retreat of the Prussian and Austrian armies who were menacing the forces of the French Revolutionaries in 1792 when, after the loss of 12,000 men, they returned to Germany. Disease proved

disastrous to Napoleon in his ill-starred invasion of Russia in 1812. During the early phases of the adventure, there were few ailments in Napoleon's immense army: Kerckhove, an army surgeon of the invaders, penned a vivid account of his bitter experiences. When the French reached Poland, Kerckhove was horrified by the poverty and misery of that wretched country. He avers that: "The villages consisted of insect-infested hovels, the army was forced to bivouac. . . New hospitals were now established at Danzig, Konigsberg and Thorn, because of the rapidly increasing sick rates, at this time largely owing to respiratory infections, including pneumonia and throat anginas—probably diphtheria. Typhus cases began to appear at about the time the Niemen was crossed on June 24."

Miserable roads and dense forests added to the misery caused by the ruined condition of the towns and villages burnt by the Russians as they retreated where there was neither shelter nor sustenance. Contaminated water aggravated these evils, and dysentery, enteric and typhus increased. By July, 80,000 were on the sick list, and the corps attended by Kerckhove was reduced from 42,000 to less than half that number. With the enormous casualties resulting from the battle of Ostrowa and the constantly spreading diseases the trials of the medical services became unendurable.

Napoleon reached Moscow on September 12, but nearly all of its 300,000 inhabitants had fled and the city was soon in flames. The available hospitals were quickly overcrowded, and Moscow's stores of food had been almost entirely destroyed.

When retreat became inevitable in October, out of the original vast armament it is estimated that 80,000 only were fit for service. This remnant of exhausted men was constantly harassed by the pursuing Russians. The weather was intensely severe and many soldiers were frozen to death. By November, 2,000 only of the cavalry remained, and in the tragic crossing of the Beresina the greater part of the army perished. Zinsser observes that: "While typhus remained the predominant disease, dysentery and pneumonia were ever increasing. Fifteen thousand men were said to have been frozen on the way to Vilna, and when the city was reached, on December 8, the magnificent army had shrunk to 20,000 sick and disheartened men."

In the Vilna hospitals, the sick lay on putrid straw and their own discharges, uncared for, and shivering with cold. Typhus and other diseases scourged all the adjoining villages and towns. Leather and even human flesh were ravenously eaten. At Christmas some 25,000 of the afflicted were at Vilna, but at the end of June, 1813, only 3,000 of these survived, and it is stated that the few soldiers who returned to France were nearly all infected with typhus fever. Such are the vaunted glories of war!

On a minor scale, this grim story was to some extent repeated during the Crimean War when there were two epidemics of typhus—one in December, 1854, and the other in 1855. We learn that: "The disease began among the Russians, then attacked the British and the French, penetrated into Constantinople and thence spread to the fleets and the merchant ships and was distributed in all directions throughout Russia and Turkey." Then after the battle of the Alma an epidemic of cholera occurred, and when the various diseases were at their worst, 48,000 men were under medical care. Among the French, while 20,356 died from wounds, 49,815 died from disease. The English losses were less, while with the Russians nearly 40,000 were fatally wounded and about the same number succumbed to disease.

Yet, with all these tragical lessons before us, the world's outlook to-day is sombre and sinister in the extreme. For, without the slightest warning, even in the form of a declaration of war, the leading centres of modern culture may be almost instantaneously reduced to a state of irretrievable destruction.

T. F. PALMER.

WRIT LARGE

I

"NEW Presbyterian is but old Priest writ large," says John Milton.

With his knowledge of languages and religions Milton might have followed up this opening with a wide disquisition on the innumerable variants of priest and priesthood.

Highest in the Roman Catholic hierarchy comes Pope, though in the Eastern Orthodox Church the word is used generally for priests.

Next in order, Cardinals, simply means Chiefs. It is noticeable how ecclesiastics arrogate to themselves power and position and wealth, all in the name of humility and poverty. A Papal Nuncio claims ambassadorial rank.

Archbishops and Bishops are scarcely less princely in style and residence and sumptuousness of living. Prelates is another form of nomenclature for these dignitaries, with Prelacy as the noun of multitude, or Episcopacy.

Pope is presumed to mean the same as Papa, hence Papal and Papacy, in Russia, Little Father. All priests seem to like the ascription Father, although celibacy is professed by many. Padre is the Spanish variant of the same word.

Those who revel in the address Father or insist on it, carefully ignore the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew's Gospel: "And call no man your father upon the earth."

For variety some priests call themselves Pastors, that is, shepherds. Cynics should refrain from obvious sneers about simplicity or silliness of sheep and their liability to be fleeced or have the wool pulled over their eyes.

The priest can counter that with the term Minister, which more nobly means to serve. Or Friar, derived from Latin for brother.

Episcopal form of church has to have many orders of Levites, hence Archdeacons as a step below Bishops, and Suffragans assistant to the latter. Clergy in Army, Navy, Air Force and public institutions, officially styled Chaplains, smirkingly enjoy being called Padre.

Parochial duties necessitate Rectors or Vicars and Curates. A cure of souls sounds curious, slightly absurd to-day. To Frenchmen it is a puzzling reversal of roles, because a Curé is a priest in charge of a church and a Vicaire his assistant, in England vice-versa.

Rectors receive the greater tithes and Vicars the lesser. Such a person as a Lay Rector is not unknown, historical relic of the landowner appointing a curate to a religious living, analogous to a private chaplain.

Because of tithes from land and produce Rectors are more often found in country parishes, where there is usually a small school attached to the church. This gave rise to pleasantries among teachers that a country school is managed by a Rector, a Director and a Missdirector; that is, the parson, his wife and daughter.

Regarding incumbent, country people have been known to revise it as encumbrance, which may be either intentional malice or unconscious humour.

II

Religious establishments need further diverse names and titles; novice, monk, Abbot, Prior; while cathedrals involve a multiplicity of officials, as Dean, Canon, Prebendary, and in the diocese Rural Deans.

Hosts of subsidiary individuals exist in connection with religious organisations. Among juniors are deacon, acolyte, server, accensor; on the musical side organist, precentor and choristers, not omitting bellingers. Often there is a school with Headmaster and staff, or Sunday School with teachers. Minor salaried people range down through vergers, beadles, sextons, gravediggers to clerks and cleaners.

More generalised terms for priest are Confessor and Preacher. In Nonconformity Deacon conveys different context from what

it does in Episcopalianism, equating to Elder. Elected chairman of a Presbyterian gathering is Moderator.

Clerics who work abroad are Missionaries; in the home field Missioners: Why this subtle differentiation?

Adjectives Venerable and Reverend are used popularly as substantives, prefixed by the definite article, also His Reverence and His Holiness.

Quakers, the Society of Friends, modestly content themselves with the title Clerk for their unpaid minister.

The Salvation Army runs through nearly the whole gamut of military distinctions. Irreverently it has been suggested that in these British Isles we should have a Salvation Navy, or more modernly a Salvation Air Force.

At universities we discover Professors of Theology or Divinity; also parsons are spoken of as divines. By oblique association of ideas one finds oneself thinking of divination, the old priestly practices of forecasting, prophecy; spiritual fortune telling.

Some female counterparts of the numerous clerical offices and titles subsist. Many use the same names, but distinctively feminine are nun, Abbess, Prioress, Mother Superior, priestess, deaconess. If we ever get women holding high posts in Episcopal churches one wonders about their titling. Imagine a Bishopess. Even Trollope's Mrs. Proudie never envisaged herself as such.

Interesting it would be going through all languages compiling lists of equivalent terminologies for priesthoods. One wonders what sort of guttural sound Congo natives make translated as our crude term witchdoctor.

Historically there are some extinct ones, as Inquisitor. Surprising to most English people is Caliph or Kalif. The Kalif of Bagdad was the Mohammedan parallel of Pope or Archbishop till the modern Turks abolished both office and title.

The Greek Church has Archimandrite for Abbot, and Tibet its swarms of Lamas, with Grand Lama at the head. This must not be confused, as Miss Betty in "Cranford" did with the Andean camel or sheep llama.

Equally or more numerous in India are Bonzes, Buddhist wandering beggar priests or holy men, fakirs, most likely the origin of our fake and faking, deception or petty fraud.

It reminds us how Matthew Paris addressed their medieval compeers as Barefeet, asking satirically: Why, oh Barefeet, do ye run Romeward?

A. R. WILLIAMS

PESSIMISM

I AM grateful to Mr. E. A. McDonald for his appreciative remarks, but I must continue to disagree that anything may be gained by looking on a bright side that *does not exist!*

Optimism in this life is rather like a rainbow in the sky. You exclaim "How beautiful!" and then realise that it is only an illusion; there is nothing real or solid about it. Some people, of course, are quite unable to distinguish between the real and the unreal. Government spokesmen, for instance, are always blissfully optimistic, emulating the ostrich and refusing to see anything wrong with their own administration. The unthinking, too, are serenely happy because they have not the wits to observe the cloudburst about to descend on their heads.

Obviously, much of our present economic distress is due to the Government's lack of caution and to its excessive optimism. We were assured by our leaders that there was no coal or food crisis only a very short while before those crises became evident. The people were lulled into a false sense of security, even as they were by the late Mr. Chamberlain's optimistic speech after Munich—only to be sadly disillusioned later.

Optimism, unfortunately, is a dangerous, and sometimes deadly, drug; and it is too often administered by statesmen for their own ends. In their fear of losing public support they bolster up a serious situation with soft paddings of sweet optimism for which the people have to pay dearly.

Yes, I am a pessimist—and I am not ashamed to admit it. I definitely believe that it is more honest to draw a picture that is ugly, if it is a reasonably true likeness, than one that is a rosy-coloured misrepresentation. After all, if everything in the garden was lovely there would be no need for me to write these articles. My purpose has always been—and always will be—to draw attention to life's many injustices and to endeavour to find remedies for them. If my writing is, in consequence, pessimistic, then it is the fault of present-day conditions. So if I am accused of gloominess, at least I am gloomy for a good reason; it is because I am hoping things may be changed for the better—not because I derive any satisfaction from being a Dismal Jimmy! If, eventually, the gloom gives way to a New Dawn then pessimism cannot be such a bad thing.

As for the *Byronic pose*, surely any deep thinker must agree that there is very little in this life of continual struggle calling for any measure of elation. Poets and Idealists have become lyrical, we know, over the beauty of flowers, the song of birds and the glorious golden sun-sets; but they conveniently forget to mention the strangling weeds, the poisonous insect pests, the tempests and earthquakes, which destroy life ruthlessly.

No. Let us be honest and admit that things are indeed far from well in this little sphere of ours and that the evils far outnumber the blessings; but let us also admit that it is both useless and purposeless to dwell on those evils unless we are prepared to do something about them.

My article, "To be or not to be", should not be misread as expressing the utter futility of living. Though life to-day is a nightmare of fear, hatred and lust for power, I have at least offered some suggestions that might lead to an improvement; and when such improvement has been effected then, by all means, let us go forward with our all-in breeding programme—but *not before!*

As for our own little private troubles, we must try to overcome them, too. I have never advocated throwing up the sponge, nor committing suicide—though I do not agree that the latter is necessarily a cowardly act. There may even be occasions when it is noble and unselfish—the circumstances alone must decide that. However, I do hold with Nietzsche that the thought of suicide is a great consolation; but means of it one gets successfully through many a bad night!

Life could be beautiful—but is not. If men were not so blind, so stupid and so miserably helpless—thanks to the Christian teaching that we must always lean on an invisible support—we might get somewhere. But so long as we cling ignorantly to superstitious belief we shall make no headway and might just as well have remained primitive savages. Even Science, which could help us, is used to destroy us horribly. Instead of killing one man at a time we can now kill hundreds; and may, in the near future, wipe out *thousands* at one blow. Such is the March of Progress!

Believe me, Mr. McDonald, if there were any reasonable cause for optimism I would be only too glad to say, "Life is grand! Life is good!" instead of restating the dying words of Socrates: "To live, means to be ill for a long while."

W. H. WOOD.

"THE NECESSITY OF SIN"

MR. A. YATES' criticisms of my article "The Necessity of Sin" in the "Freethinker" of March 28, are to a large extent irrelevant, since he credits me with beliefs which I do not in fact hold, and then proceeds to show that they are inconsistent with my main thesis.

He begins, for example, by stating that I as a clergyman *must* define sin as "an offence against divine law." But I, though a clergyman, do nothing of the kind. If I did, I would, as Mr. Yates so truly observes, be committed to the absurd view that

God had made the breaking of his laws a necessary condition of human life. On the contrary, however, I believe that the fact of sin is itself an immutable divine law and the whole of my essay was intended to make this clear.

Mr. Yates claims that I only manage to make out my case by not giving a precise meaning to the term sin. But if we consider his own definition—the violation of a natural or social law—my case remains unaffected, as he himself demonstrates in his fifth and sixth paragraphs. If there were no "violations of the social law," life would still be the purely animal existence I pictured, and whether we call such violations sin or evil does not, it seems to me, make any difference to the main issue. And even those who regard sin as the violation of a divine command must admit that the command has to be violated on occasions to make life bearable. I continue to maintain then that sin is a necessity whether we regard it as having theological implications or not.

It apparently surprises Mr. Yates that atheists should be as vehement as theists in their condemnation of an essay such as mine. But the mere fact that infidels reject the theistic explanation of sin does not make them hate it any the less. On the contrary, they are the most moralistic people in the world. They never tire of attacking violently the "lying tactics," the "hypocrisy" or the "cowardice" of their opponents. Indeed, in his last paragraph Mr. Yates himself waxes eloquent over the cruelties to which Christianity has given rise. Thus when anyone ventures to stress the indispensability of such sins, it is perhaps not quite so remarkable after all that atheists should protest as loudly as theists.

"How does Mr. Broom account for moral evil?" asks Mr. Yates next. Moral evil (and this also holds good for pain and suffering) exists as I tried to show in my essay, because without it there could be no moral good. The further question, why were matters arranged so, is unanswerable since the ultimate purposes of God are hidden from us. But the fact—that good and evil, both in the moral and physical spheres, are thus interdependent is in no sense a disproof of God's existence as Mr. Yates seems to imagine. We have no right to assume that if there is a God his purpose can only be to make the good happy and the bad unhappy. Such a notion is extremely naive and quite arbitrary. Holding to a strictly monistic philosophy, I believe with Deutero-Isaiah that God "forms the light and creates darkness: makes peace and creates evil" (Isaiah xlv, 7). Any other explanation of the origin of evil (apart from the Atheistic one which I cannot accept) lands us in the quicksands of dualism.

The comments of Mr. Yates on my remarks concerning Jesus appear to rest on the assumption that I am a clergyman of the Orthodox Christian Church. Such, however, is again not the case, and this particular part of my article, which was intended to be ironical, was simply written to try to show that the orthodox conception of the atoning mission of Christ implies sin's necessity. I do not myself share that conception, nor do I believe that Jesus was God, and so I am not guilty of imagining that he "died for his own fault."

Not being a Christian, I am not concerned to deny that the appearance of Jesus on earth has been responsible for rousing the worst passions of human nature (though I would claim that it has at the same time roused some of the best). But I would remind Mr. Yates that any event which helps to maintain the supply of cruelty and crime, without which kindness and virtue could not be, is on my view by no means entirely without justification.

JOHN L. BROOM.

While a healthy body helps to make a healthy soul, the reverse is yet more true. Mind lifts up, purifies, sustains the body. Mental and moral activity keeps the body healthy, strong, and young, preserves from decay, and renews life.—JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

ACID DROPS

Cardinal Griffin, of Westminster, is doing his best to work hard now that labour is needed. Thus, he comes out with the beauties of labour—to other people. The Pope has called on all people to labour, and tells everybody that work is a noble thing, and all should work hard, etc. We deny that kind of talk. The truth is that, owing to the world war, what we want in this country is labour, and more labour, and still more labour. That is true, but why pour out rubbish of that kind? Toiling down a pit, or working hard day after day, because it is needed for the country is not something to love. It is something that must be done, and the more the better. There is no dignity in mere labour. It may be very hard, very dirty, and most tiring. The pleasure of labour comes—it sounds curious—when the labour is liked, when the workman works irrespectively of whether the labour is needed or not.

The Vicar of Harefield says that at the meeting of the Uxbridge religious conference, Sir John Shaw—a lawyer, we believe—said, not that England was an Atheistic nation, but that it was *no longer* a Christian one. If Sir John Shaw will look the matter up, he will find that England never was a Christian country, although the English rulers helped the Church. Most certainly the Roman Church, when it first came to Britain, did not give up its religious powers to the State. Right through the history of England the same tale can be told. We repeat, the State helped the Churches, it even acted in a way that looked as though England was a legally Christian body. The real situation was told by Lord Sumner in the case of *Bowman v. Bowman* and the *Secular Society*, that to call England a Christian country was not law, it was simply rhetoric.

The Vicar of the Parish Church of Saint Mary and all Saints, is rather upset. He should not be because he has called to his aid, not merely all the saints, but also the mother of Jesus. There should be a very large and important gathering. What the vicar complains about is the conduct of the people who do not attend church as well as those who come to the Vicar to be buried.

The Vicar says, "I am one of those clergy who are expected to consume a considerable amount of time in burying the dead. But they are people whom I have never seen, and who rarely, if ever, frequent a church, and who certainly neither received nor sought the sacraments before passing." We agree that the way people treat the priest is scandalous. But we do not blame the people. We think the faults lie with the Saints. They can do so much, but actually they give us nothing. Children are born and live and die, and, so far as they are concerned, they enjoy life without even thinking of the Saints, and it is monstrous for God and his Saints to watch the badly treated parson and do nothing. Really we should like to see this Vicar. We could surely have a pleasant meal together. In the past some great wits were priests. But the Churchmen of to-day; one does not laugh *with* them, one just cries for them.

Quite recently we called attention to the fact that the Supreme Court of Washington, U.S.A., had declared that the teaching of children religion in State Schools was "quite unconstitutional." It must be remembered that religion was not incorporated with the foundations of the U.S.A. Religion could be taught, and favoured, because there was no law *against* it. And there has been religion in the schools for many, many years. It was not illegal. Now a step has been taken by Washington declaring that the teaching of religion in State Schools is definitely non-allowable. Whether this decision will affect all States we do not know: our knowledge of American law is not good enough. There, no freedom of religion will be interfered with.

What will happen will be a more rapid growth of Freethinking than has existed up to date. It should also have some effect on other countries.

Already there has been in Illinois a lady, Mrs. McCollum, who has set a declaration that State Schools are prohibited from teaching religions as part of the work of the Schools. There are many others that are working along the same line. The difficulty of separating the State Schools in England from religion will be far greater than in the U.S.A., but the development in that direction in the U.S.A. will help considerably. There are already signs of concern shown in this country by the Roman Church. And in the U.S.A. the heads of the Catholics are much concerned.

Mr. Graham Stanford has been trying to give his readers an idea of the number of people who do not go to church, or to other places of Christian worship. He claims that 5,000,000 go to church once a week and adds that although 5,000,000 do go to church, there are 35,000,000 who go to see the films, and pay more than is paid to the Church. That looks very gloomy as it stands. But Mr. Stanford reminds us of a book just issued by Collins, with the title "How Heathen is Britain," where the author asserts that after young men leave school, they believe very little of the evidence for Christianity. Of course, these few last words are just bunkum. The real facts are that the new generation, for some considerable time, has been aware that Christianity is common-place where it is good, and unmistakably bunkum in most of the rest.

But there appears to be one Church at least that is making a good show. This is the Church of St. Michael's, near Canterbury, but the reason for this is not a religious one. It appears that the vicar is not merely a preacher, he is also a great lover of flowers, and year after year, people who are fond of flowers, readily rush to the spot, not to hear the preaching, but for the floral display. This show explains everything, and we feel sure that so long as the flowers are on show people will put up with praying. A Roman Catholic Church, a little while ago, had on view some flowers that were claimed to be keeping fresh for months without water and care, and remained fresh—so long as the money at the doors appeared to keep coming in. It is a surprise to us that some of those people who thus risk exposure to make money do not create a new religion. It has been done before, but there are fresh fools born every day.

The Archbishop of Canterbury complains, "We have become pained with the horrible modern and most poisonous idea that religion is a private thing between a man and his Maker." Of course we cannot complain as to what will happen when a man deals direct with his god, instead of going through an Archbishop first. In fact, if every Christian went direct to God, what on earth is an Archbishop for? If each man is to go right with God on "his own," the Archbishops will be out of a job. It is a matter that affects everyone who is not in the habit of talking to God direct.

There is another way of looking at the situation, apart from the views of the Archbishops. Dressing is mainly a matter of fashion. Of a number of people who go to Church, probably half go because others go, or because they wish to set an example. The truth is seen when people are away for a time. Most of them stay away altogether, and they often explain why they do so—it is because the church is not theirs, which, being explained in clear English, comes to "For God's sake let us have a rest. The Church can wait until we get into a new place." Moreover, even an Archbishop himself delights in getting away from "his people."

The Roman Catholic Church in London has won its way with regard to their own hospital. It now means that the expenses for running it will remain with the Roman Catholic Church. There will be Catholic dressings, etc., and the atmosphere will be as of old, and when at all possible, the priests and attendants will take care to drive into the patients that their return to health is due to the Saints. They will, in fact, be just drenched with Roman Catholicism as they always were.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
 Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, W.C. 1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

R. PETERSON.—We are not surprised that outspoken letters to the daily press are "blue pencilled." We can only urge you to continue writing and hope for the best.

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Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

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I am just and honest, not because I expect to live in another world but because, having felt the pain of injustice and dishonesty towards myself, I have a fellow-feeling with other men who would suffer the same pains if I were unjust or dishonest towards them. Why should I give my neighbour short weight in this world because there is not another world in which I should have anything to weigh out to him? I am honest because I don't like to inflict evil on others in this life, not because I am afraid of evil to myself in another. It is a pang to me to witness the suffering of a fellow being, and I feel his suffering the more because he is mortal, because his life is short, and I would have it, if possible, filled with happiness, and not misery.—George Eliot.

The panegyrist of war places himself on the lowest level on which a moralist or a patriot can stand and shows as great a want of refined feeling as of reason. For the glories of war are all blood-stained, delirious, and infected with crime; the combative instinct is a savage prompting by which one man's good is another man's evil. The existence of such a contradiction in the moral world is of nature whence flows every other wrong. He is a willing accomplice of that perversity in things who delight in another's discomfort or in his own, and craves the blind tension of plunging into danger without reason, or the idiot's pleasure in facing a pure chance. To find joy in another's trouble, is, as man is constituted, not unnatural, though it is wicked; and to find joy in one's own trouble, though it be madness, is not yet impossible for man. These are the chaotic depths of that dreaming nature out of which humanity has had to grow.—GEORGE SANTAYANA in "Little Essays."

A REPLY TO DR. BARNES

1

SIR FREDERIC KENYON, a former Director of the British Museum, has long been known as the author of "Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts," and a "Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament," both excellent works, and of great use to any student of Bible origins. It was evident from these books and others that Sir Frederic was a fully believing Christian, and it is not surprising that he has at last been induced to cross swords with the formidable Bishop of Birmingham whose "Rise of Christianity" has been such a bombshell in the Fundamentalist camp. His reply to Dr. Barnes is now published by Messrs. John Murray at 3s. 6d., and is entitled "The Bible and Modern Scholarship." That Sir Frederic thinks it an adequate answer to the positions put down by Dr. Barnes is—to me—astonishing, for indeed it is one of the poorest pieces of controversy I have come across in the course of many years' study of similar discussions on the Bible.

It is true Sir Frederic disclaims any liking for controversy—and this being so, he should have left replying to Dr. Barnes to someone who does like it; but there is no excuse for such a poor show in spite of the fact that the publisher insists that "any work on Bible Chronology by so high an authority as Sir Frederic Kenyon must command attention and respect." One can pay such a distinguished scholar both attention and respect—if his work really commands this, but what if it does not?

There was a simple way in which Sir Frederic could have answered Dr. Barnes. All that it was necessary to do was to tell us, first, where was the evidence that such a person as Jesus Christ the God existed at all? I emphasise "the God" because it is "our Lord" who is defended against the mere "Man" of Dr. Barnes (for whatever the Bishop of Birmingham may say he does or does not believe, his book only just manages to save Jesus as a "Man" and nowhere as a God).

Next, Sir Frederic should have told us who wrote Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and when and where they were written—for one of the charges made by Dr. Barnes was that no one can answer these questions. I will come later to what Sir Frederic has to say about John. He should then have shown that the Virgin Birth, that the various miracles attributed to Jesus actually occurred, that the Crucifixion was an historical fact, and that the Resurrection and the Ascension all took place exactly as written. If this had been done with all the scholarship Sir Frederic is famous for, his small book would have been worth—well, at least reading; but, alas, these were points that could not possibly be defended against the Bishop's attacks, so the question of Bible Chronology is artfully introduced as if the question of dates could possibly prove a miracle. Surely even a tyro in these matters could see how hopelessly fogged Sir Frederic was when he read "The Rise of Christianity" in detail.

Some older readers will remember the famous controversy which the publication of "Supernatural Religion" aroused, and which Christians who had never read that famous work—I honestly doubt that even Sir Frederic has read it—fondly imagine was answered by Dr. J. B. Lightfoot. Actually Dr. Lightfoot shirked every position that mattered, and concentrated on points which were a mere matter of opinion. Cassels' book was "An Inquiry into the Reality of Divine Revelation," and there is not a line in Lightfoot which deals with Revelation. Cassels denied miracles, and there is not a word in Lightfoot in defence of miracles. Cassels showed that the "evidence"

for the Resurrection was a tissue of nonsense, and Lightfoot resolutely refused even to mention the Resurrection. And this is the man whom Sir Frederic claims to have blown "Supernatural Religion"—"to pieces!" Really the more one reads some of these Christian "scholars," the more one marvels at their impudence. And it is made even worse because Sir Frederic gives his readers the impression that on all these points Dr. Lightfoot had brought "the artillery of a much sounder and more learned criticism." This statement is absolutely untrue. All Dr. Lightfoot could do was to try and find a few errors in Greek tenses, or in dates given by various authorities on the works of some of the early Christians—and on most of these points one guess is as good as another. He filled pages with irrelevant bibliographical details and *never* touched upon the reality of Divine Revelation.

I stress this matter because, in a very small way, Sir Frederic has merely followed the path of Dr. Lightfoot. Dr. Barnes made a wholesale attack on the authenticity and credibility of the New Testament, particularly on its miracles; and in doing so was forced to show that the evidence for the "divine" interference of the course of Nature rested on documents which were late and anonymous. In an ignorant and superstitious age, it was not difficult to make people believe that God came down from heaven and performed miracles—we can actually see even educated and intelligent people in this year of grace, 1948, believe the same balderdash—and Dr. Barnes proved that the question was made easier because the documents relating these marvels are all comparatively late, written long after the events they are supposed to describe. And this is where Sir Frederic comes along. You are quite wrong, he cries; seventy years ago Biblical critics thought so but modern scholarship has vindicated the New Testament and has shown that the tradition of the Church is thoroughly justified.

Let the reader reflect on this point and marvel that a scholar of Sir Frederic's reputation should show such disingenuousness. We have a series of miracles related in a number of anonymous documents. Seventy-odd years ago these were believed to be written something like 100 or more years after the period assigned to the miracles; now this period, in the opinion of some Christian writers, must be shortened, say, by 40-odd years—therefore, cries their champion, Sir Frederic Kenyon, this proves that the miracles must have taken place! If this is not what his book was designed to prove—then I do not understand it.

Let me put it in another way. In one of the Gospels there is a very detailed story of how Jesus was tempted by the Devil who carried him over the streets of Jerusalem in the air and placed him on the pinnacle of the Temple. This story is so silly that even believers in Christian miracles fight shy of defending it. Yet here comes Sir Frederic Kenyon who maintains that the fact that it was written before the year A.D. 100 makes it more credible than if it were written in the year A.D. 150! Take the story of the Virgin Birth which the Bishop of Birmingham refuses to believe, and bases one of his objections to it because it is a late addition to the Gospels. Sir Frederic comes forward and "shows how the Bishop, in attacking the traditional views about the life of Our Lord . . . far from being supported by recent discoveries, is really basing his theories on critics entirely discredited now . . ." The "traditional views" contain, among others equally funny, the stories of the Virgin Birth and the adventures of Jesus with the Devil, and it is these that Sir Frederic Kenyon actually defends as authentic and credible because instead of being written after A.D. 150, they were written before A.D. 100. And this is the best modern Christian scholars can do with the Bishop of Birmingham!

H. CUTNER.

"MAGIC AND SCIENCE"

IT seems, nowadays, anyone can read up a subject and write a book. "Witchcraft in England" by Christina Hole, recalled to mind some of the B.B.C. modern scientific "miracles." There is the same sort of mis-statement of scientific knowledge. With "the power of suggestion" and "will power" our author seems to be trying to prove that witchcraft was not traffic with the supernatural, but a form of knowledge that could be acquired by sufficient "concentration" and "careful study." It is not merely that people called witches existed, witchcraft and magic actually did and still does exist.

"The new scepticism is unquestionably better than the old faith," but "a delusion so strong cannot be lightly dismissed." The "outlook" of the magician or witch "was not religious but scientific." He worked "by a careful study of certain definite rules." As for the scientist "the Universe was governed by unchanging laws." "By following the laws of similarity and contact he could injure or benefit whomsoever he would." The witch's "faith was supported by that of his victim," "faith could kill as well as cure." Although "neither good nor evil" in itself, magic "was dangerous." And so "the magician had to be placated and his enmity avoided."

It is difficult to say which is the more interesting, the facts given or the ignorance displayed, in the book. What is one to make of so much confusion? The magic of witchcraft was a delusion, yet magic is scientific. Is science a delusion? The magician is scientific, yet both he and his victim have faith, to which scepticism is unquestionably better. What have "belief" and "faith" to do with science? What is the difference between faith in witchcraft and faith in religion? We are told that "in some primitive religions" the gods "were regarded as magicians whose superior knowledge rather than their divine nature enabled them to perform wonders." But why only primitive religions, is not the Christian God an omniscient wonder-worker?

This book seems to be what J. M. Robertson called learned ignorance. What on earth is meant by "the laws of similarity and contact"? Frazer's idea was that the sympathetic and contagious aspects of magic correspond to the psychological and physical aspects of science but that coincidence was mistaken for cause. This does not mean that magic was a primitive science. Frazer's conception was a new way of considering magic. It did not mean that the magician was consciously following Frazer's principles. Frazer's idea gives a convenient way of classifying types of magic, and was based upon the theory known as the association of ideas. It did not mean that the magician carefully studied this method.

Not only has our author a quaint notion of magic, but also has an equally peculiar idea of scientific law. A scientific law is not a divine fiat or magic spell. The scientist knows nothing about laws governing the universe. Science only knows laws framed by scientists as explanations. A scientific law is a descriptive generalisation; a useful formula. The scientist is engaged in finding more accurate ways of describing what happens. The purpose of scientific experiment is to find out what happens under given conditions. The so-called "assumption" of "unchanging law" is a necessity of thought. If *anything* could happen, science would be impossible.

It is absurd to talk of the magicians "understanding of immutable laws," the idea of unchanging law is foreign to the magician, who, by his spells, endeavoured to change the course of events. If it were a question of understanding or knowledge there would be no room for belief or faith. We, with our increased knowledge, can see the absurdity of so much of his magic, and we should also see that, whereas, to the scientist, so much was impossible, to him, anything was possible. His faith and that of his victim, was born of ignorance and not of knowledge.

The recognition of similarity and coincidence shown in magic is undoubtedly a basic necessity of thought. But there is also a lack of differentiation. The appreciation of differences is a characteristic of science. Thinking in terms of analogy is also a characteristic of metaphysics. Instead of thinking of magic and science as analogous, we should appreciate the difference. If we begin with magic as science we will end with science as magic. Not only is it absurd to think of magic as a form of science, it is equally so to separate magic and religion; for what distinguishes magic from science is characteristic of religion. There is evidence of this in quotations here given.

It might be said that science is neither good nor evil, science is impersonal. But with magic, there is the personal equation. The magic spell is just as personal as prayer. The book gives evidence of connection between spell and prayer. Giving supplication and humility as characteristic of religion, our author seems equally hazy on that subject. Surely no magician ever claimed greater power than the priest who commands the presence of omnipotent deity in the eucharistic ritual! And the Christian witch persecution mania showed no sign of humility. One gets tired of this arrogant boast of humility, for here we see, not meekness, but the expression of personal feelings and passions.

That witchcraft was so widespread, and involved so many different types and classes of people, shows that it is not an individual or personal, but a social question; it is one of cultural development. The difference between magic and science is one of accumulated knowledge; especially knowledge concerning psychology. Without a doubt, suggestion and auto-suggestion can explain much. But there is also the absurdity, the credibility and credulity, as well as the ill-feeling and inhumanity that has to be explained. These are not the expression of knowledge but of ignorance.

It seems the nature of the problem has been mistaken. The "power of suggestion" is neither explanation nor proof. With so much confusion and misunderstanding it also seems that our author still believes in the "power" of magic.

H. H. PREECE.

MASKED DANCERS' RITUALS IN EUROPE

IN the dark, primitive man felt all the anxieties of insecurity owing to strange noises and sounds. In winter, when light becomes dimmed, in the subconsciousness of men still lingers in the fear from the dead and other evil spirits that are supposed to surround us; they have to be chased away by means of ritual dances and a lot of uproar. This is the inner meaning of Carnival and a range of traditional customs deeply rooted in the masses, particularly among the peasants, since, at the same time, these ancient rites were considered to guarantee fertility to women, cattle and fields.

On December 5th, the ancient Romans used to celebrate the "Pannalia" in honour of their fertility god Faunus = the Propitious One. Corresponding to the Greek Pan (the Grazier), Faunus was thought of as a shaggy he-goat and considered the protector of the herdsman and his flock. On the day of the "Lupercalia"—the Wolf Festival in memory of the mythical she-wolf who nursed Romulus and Remus—the priests of Faunus, all naked but for a loin string, raced through the streets with a blood-stained knife and a scourge of goatskin thongs in their hands. Such women as wanted to become pregnant allowed themselves to be lashed on their body, so that Faunus may show himself propitious to them.

Again on that 5th of December, in Austria, the "Krampus" (Lumping Devil) is playing his pranks, howling and rattling with an iron chain. Mostly he is accompanied by a white-bearded Santa Claus who presents good children with apples and nuts (fertility symbols), whilst the naughty ones are lashed—or birched—by Krampus. This is a man in a black shaggy

costume (deriving from the goat-skin of olden times), with an ugly, two-horned mask. His origin having been obliterated, people now take him for the Devil who strikes the children instead of the mothers.

In Holland, Santa Claus comes on horseback as the old Teutonic god Odhin—the Rider on the White Horse—now "devilified" into the leader of a host of dead souls. Here, the Krampus is called "Piet," in the Rhineland he is "Hans Muff," etc.

A once famous masquerade was, until at least A.D. 1539, the Nuremberg "Schembartlaufen"—The Running of the Phantoms with Goat-Beards. There are still scattered survivals such as the one celebrated every third year at Imst in North Tyrol: uninterruptedly from 11 a.m. until 6 p.m., the dancers have to be on the move with dancing, jerking and jumping steps! Besides a great number of "witches" with broomsticks and shaggy berets (the so-called "Fozzlhauben"), the main figures are the "Roller," "Scheller" and "Spritzer" (sprayers of nasty fluids). They wear carved wood masks and a headgear of artificial flowers and leaves with a big mirror among them. Evil spirits, beholding their own ugliness in that mirror, would take to their heels.

On his waistbelt, the "Roller" carries a range of sleigh bells, whilst the "Scheller," with his thick goat beard, has attached to his body 8-10 heavy cow's bells. When leaping and jerking around, these ritual dancers commit the hell of a din as is the purpose of the ceremony.

The "Schuddig" of Elzach (in the Black Forest) tinkles with the aid of snail shells in his straw cap. In funny verses the Schuddigs make public the sexual lapses of the inhabitants, whilst beating the floor—amidst gruntings—with a pig's bladder fastened to a whip. They are clad in shaggy garments and wear wooden masks. In the country, their procession is headed by the "Fool's Sperm"—Baby Carnival.

In the medieval town of Villingen the "Hansele" go about. Their "Fool's Jumps" make their little bells tinkle. Passers-by are heckled or even insulted ("hanseln" means "to chaff") in a way that highly contrasts to the smooth and smiling face-masks of the "Hansele." Representing the Winter Demons, the "Wurscht" (Punchinello), with protective boards and straw paddings inside their white costume, race through the streets, attacked by children with snowballs.

The third famous "Fool's Town," in Baden, is Ueberlingen, on the Lake of Constance, where the "Hansele" are all clad in fringed black costumes, with masks ending in a pig's snout. These "Hansele" carry a long whip on a short stick; from their early boyhood the youngsters learn how to properly strike with this scourge so as to perform a real drum-fire of whip-lashings.

Much gloomier is the "Perchtenlaufen" in Bavaria and Tyrol. In heathen days Bertha or Perchta (the Shining-One) was the Virgin of the Skies, now she goes as an ugly witch together with Wuotan (the blowing One) or Odhin, the leader of the Host of Ghosts. During the "Tweilthnight," e.g., between Christmas and Epiphany, the dead have leave from their graves and come up in storms raging through the winter nights. So they must be conjured away from the homesteads of the believers.

PERCY G. ROY.

FARRINGDON STREET

Books in boxes and rows,
 Authors nobody knows;
 Pamphlets and plays,
 Lyrics and Lays,
 Dirt and Divinity,
 In propinquity;
 Sermons as heavy as lead,
 Lectures that never were read,
 Reason and romance and rancour and rhyme—
 All of them going at sixpence a time. A. C. W.

AN OPEN MIND ?

"THEY tell me you're an atheist, Victor," said Ted, as we walked along the side of a Surrey hill at the back of Mickleham, two of a party of some sixty ramblers on a recent Sunday. "That's right," I replied. "Are you?"

"No, I can't say I'm anything definite, except that I can't stand the way parsons have of trying to get people like me and my wife to join a church." And he went on to tell me of a local vicar, who had called at their house, into which they had just moved, and had invited them to come along to the local church, if so inclined. It seemed to me that this was quite unobjectionable and, indeed, something that some people in like circumstances would appreciate as a neighbourly gesture, and I said so. Ted seemed rather surprised.

"Well, I told him that, while I had nothing against religion, church-going had no great appeal for me. I had heard arguments for and against, and as far as I could judge there were some very clever men on both sides. So I preferred to keep an open mind on the subject.—All he could say to that was to suggest that we should pray together, and I said no, thank you." According to Ted, the vicar then went off in a huff.

Now I have a great deal of sympathy for that vicar. Ted and the millions like him, who say they have an open mind, have, in reality, only an ill-informed and timid one. They quietly drop the practice of religion when it no longer fits in with the social life of the day, but avoid a mental decision by pretending that the subject is a very "deep" one, upon which it is rash to make any definite pronouncement. The position is that they at one and the same time reject the church and all its ways and refuse to face the facts that would justify their attitude. These facts, existing in an overwhelming mass of evidence garnered by students of anthropology, make it quite clear that religious faith is no harder to understand and deal with than the belief in fairies; but the exponents of "the open mind" will have nothing to do with them.

The files of the B.B.C. appear to contain particulars of many such minds at the present time, and the Corporation is the recipient of a great deal of praise for permitting them to express themselves at the microphone. What service it is to listeners, however, to be told by eminent speakers that they do not hold the beliefs of the churches, even that they are atheists, is something that I just cannot see. Nor do I find it easy to understand how the speakers concerned can allow themselves to broadcast statements which represent them as the holders of opinions for which they seem to have no sufficient reason, since they give none. It has been said that broadcasting is the most powerful form of publicity for anyone seeking the limelight, but those who are willing to take part in controversial religious discussions under the proviso that they will not "spill the beans" should remember that this publicity can damn a reputation just as easily as it can make one. I cannot imagine the public rushing to buy the books of recent broadcasting upholders of "unbelief." May they learn wisdom from falling sales!

Meanwhile I shall live in hopes that one day we shall hear some honest broadcasting of the freethought point of view, but I doubt if it will be very soon. Maybe freethinkers have first of all to lead people like Ted to take a step further than "the open mind" that is merely non-churchgoing, on to a desire for a firm basis for their position, a basis that will enable Ted to deal courteously and confidently with the vicar next time he calls and suggests a little co-operative prayer. A made-up mind is by no means the same thing as a closed one. The chances are in favour of its being much more open and honest than the mind that stops short of a decision because it fears to follow an argument to its conclusion, or because it fears being labelled with a name that is intended to carry a stigma. Until "the

open mind" ceases to mean "the lazy mind, the fearful mind and the compromising mind," as it so often does, and comes to mean "the active, independent and courageous mind"; and until such a mind has been achieved by very, very many more individuals than possess it to-day; until then the opinions that will be given the widest expression "on the air," in the press and on the cinema screen, are those that a large section of the public is so heartily sick of in this year of progress, 1948.

The remedy is not in the hands of the relatively small number of honest and outspoken freethinkers. The B.B.C., the press and the cinemas do not depend on their support, and can afford to ignore their protests. The remedy lies with the vast majority of partly-emancipated minds—the people who always switch off their wireless sets when religion is being broadcast, who never read the religious articles regularly published in their newspapers, and who tolerate the most unblushing Roman Catholic propaganda in a film containing a song or two from Bing Crosby. These are the people who could revolutionise the attitude of the great organs of publicity towards freethought in every department of life. If they, the masters of the situation if they only but knew it, were aware of the abuses of power practised upon them, if they felt a proper indignation at the state of things, and if they began to make their protests felt, a fresh, clean wind would blow through the dusty strongholds of broadcasting, publication and entertainment, clearing away all the cobwebs of censorship, boycott and misrepresentation by which they have for so long been disfigured.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

MAN AND HELL

"MADAME, you can have no idea of Hell? We have very few officials who return from that place. Still, it is rank calumny to say that all the poor souls are compelled to read all day long the dull sermons which were printed on earth. Bad as Hell is, it has not come to that—Satan would never invent such refined torture. On the other hand, Dante's description is too mild, I may say, on the whole, too poetic. Hell appears to me like a great town kitchen, with an endless stove, on which are placed three rows of iron pots, and in these sit the damned and are cooked. In the next row are Jews, who continually screamed and are occasionally mocked by the fiends, which sometimes seems odd enough, as, for instance, when a fat wheezy old pawnbroker complained of the heat, and a little devil poured several buckets of cold water on his head, that he may realise what a refreshing business baptism is. In the third row sit the heathen, who, like the Jews, could take no part in salvation, and must burn for ever. I heard one of the latter, as a square-built, burly devil put fresh coals under his kettle, cry out from his pot: 'Spare me, I was once Socrates, the wisest of all mortals; I taught Truth and Justice and sacrificed my life for virtue.' But the clumsy stupid devil went on with his work and grumbled: 'O, shut up there. All heathens must burn, and we can't make an exception for the sake of a single man.'"

HEINRICH HEINE.

Some people would like to know whence the poet, whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is sweet and pure, get his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan."—THOMAS HARDY.

To say that God, if he exists, is stupid is blasphemy. To say that if he exists he is wise, is worship. The difference between worship and blasphemy is thus the difference between flattery and intelligent criticism.

SEEKING FOR TRUTH

ALL the writings of Mr. J. W. Poynter breathe the spirit of an earnest seeker for truth, and I have time and again read his articles with pleasure as well as profit.

He mentions that his friendly references to the Roman Catholic Church have already drawn protest, but I could imagine that he might be led to be his severest critic.

He expresses a desire to be able to return to the sheep-fold of Rome. That is honest, but he should be aware that the dallying with such a wish suggests a regression to infantilism. If he can recognise that, the wish ought to start fading.

Then, if he carries out some further analysis of the position of the R.C. Church, he should see how impossible it is for that position to be reconciled with his own intention "to advocate fullest open-minded freedom of mind and the greatest possible degree of mutual understanding as the best way of reaching truth by reason."

He instances the rise of State absolutism, subversive of the bases of our historic culture, as a reason for a more friendly examination of the claims of Rome.

Now Mr. Poynter knows as well as any that the Roman Catholic Church does not believe in the fullest open-minded freedom of mind. It believes in as severe a muzzling of opinion as any State absolutism, and its censorship is at present milder only because, or where, it lacks their power.

How he is able to feel there is much force in his suggestion of support for Rome in order to prevent the "subversion of the bases of our historic culture," is a difficult question.

A particular state of intellectual development is, like every other social phenomenon, the result of natural selection. Some other culture than what now exists would have been historic had not the Roman Catholic Church done so much fell work in destroying the works, and cutting short the lives, of many celebrated men, and intimidating many generations of more ordinary people.

Perhaps Mr. Poynter will one day enumerate the specific bases of culture which the secular absolutisms are menacing with destruction, and which we might best turn to Rome to save.

Mr. Poynter is like a man who has come to a place where three forward roads branch. He has to go along one. He persists in saying that there are only two roads, religious absolutism or secular absolutism. But he has another choice, the road of freethought. It is really a well-trodden road. Bruno went along it, and was murdered by those who had forbidden its use. His is a significant name in our historic culture.

J. G. LUPTON.

[Mr. J. W. Poynter has now definitely rejoined the Roman Catholic Church.—EDISON.]

CORRESPONDENCE

INGERSOLL'S DEATH.

SIR,—I was very interested in the article "The Death of Ingersoll," March 14, 1948, and relating various stories about the late Colonel. I have been an admirer of Ingersoll from my youth (I am now 81) and to any man who is really acquainted with his works it is impossible to believe that this great man embraced the "Christian faith" at his death. "Those idle tales of dying horrors" have always been the stock-in-trade of revivalists and others of that ilk to cast fear over the credulous and weak-minded where Christianity is believed.

Hardly any Freethinkers have escaped from their tentacles. Voltaire, Paine, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, Foote and scores of others have been calumniated whilst alive and cursed after they were dead by those who profess to "love their enemies." But

here is a story of Ingersoll whilst he was alive and published in the "Matlock Register." A certain Mr. H. Hudson Rugg of 1, Grove Road, St. John's Wood, London, writing to another religious brother, Mr. Loveland, that "Colonel Bob Ingersoll, along with his 5,000 followers, had been converted and joined the Episcopal Church."

Ingersoll having received a copy of the "Matlock Register" replied, "Who made up this story? Who had the impudence to publish it?"

"In this article it says I have been converted to Christianity by Mr. Hine, a lecturer on 'The Identity of Lost Israel with the British Nation.' As a matter of fact, I never saw Mr. Hine in my knowledge, in my life, and what he lectures about the lost tribes does not interest me. But let me say here and now—nothing is so prolific, nothing can so multiply itself, nothing can so lay and hatch so many eggs as a GOOD HEALTHY RELIGIOUS LIE."—Yours, etc.,

JOSEPH CLOSE.

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