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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Religion and Adaptation

ADAPTATION is a law of life. An organism that is ill adapted to its surroundings disappears, or what is the same thing, a gradual relation is established that has dangerous effects. There is no exception to this principle, and there is no escape from its operations. Moreover, it is as true of institutions and beliefs as it is of living human beings. Institutions and beliefs that are not suitable to the character or mode of life gradually die out. In this respect there is no vital difference between the conditions that determine the existence of an organism, in either case a suitable environment must exist.

But while there is this fundamental resemblance between the two processes, there is also a very important difference. In the animal the best process is, so to speak, automatic, it goes on independently of the conscious action. But in human society activity itself becomes a formidable power. Man's environment is mainly a social one, and this is formed by his own social ideas. In this way all the formative forces of human society—the home, the State, etc., come into operation. Their perpetual play creates the real continuity of human existence. In that stage preservation is at once a help and a hindrance to progress. Moreover, once we have established belief in an institution we have arrested something that will struggle hard for existence, and to resist threats of a dangerous type.

Taken altogether we think there is an explanation why, with hardly an exemption, the weight of religion is carried against the reformer.

If now we were to ask an educated man to-day to draw up a brief statement of his ideas about the universe, it would not be difficult to deduce from it a definite idea of the nature and character of his social environment. If, however, instead of taking a man of to-day, we were to take—by a miracle—a man of 500 or 1,000 years ago a similar result would follow. In other words, given the best ideas of an age we can draw a picture of the general character of the environment. Or if, instead, the whole circle of knowledge be taken as an indication of the nature of the environment, we were to take special ideas, it would be as easy to deduce therefrom the kind of environment in which those ideas were born, and to what they are adapted.

Now, using this as an instrument of investigation, there can be no reasonable doubt as to the character of the environment that gave birth to religious beliefs. The belief that religion or God was something that was the result of the outcome of supernatural or "spiritual" powers is just nonsense. Religion—gods, spirits and angels, never

had their beginning in developing human society. So far as we can dig deep enough, it is more likely that forms of godism commenced with the weakness of man, not with his strength, and there is good evidence that for a long time angels and gods and similar curious characters were all unknown for some considerable time after "humans" made their appearance. I am inclined to think that something in the nature of "magic" took the precedence of heavenly angels. It is surely the heights of absurdity to believe that while uncivilised men were in error in so much of every branch of life, they were able to understand all about gods, devils, and angels, and so forth.

What we can say, definitely, is that religious beliefs carry with them the marks of uncivilised people. That early Man feared the dead is pretty certain, and that had no clear connection with the idea of gods. Here the matter that seems responsible for most errors, is that primitive Man was unaware of "death." Creative gods may be set on one side as of a late appearance. Scientifically there is no need to fight over gods, for there are none to fight.

But the growth of this mental attitude threatens the security of religion, not only by effecting a change in the environment at the time, but by altering it for succeeding generations. Heretical ideas once established become as much environmental forces, moulding the lives of the next generation, as do changes of climate in relation to purely animal life. For its very life's sake, therefore, religion is bound to resist all change in the nature of the human environment. It must keep this intact at all costs. It strives to keep things as they were because its life properly belongs to the past. It resists the introduction of new ideas because these represent modifying influences that put the religious mind out of harmony with its surroundings. The long struggle of religion against progressive ideas has no other and no deeper significance than this. It is only a working out on the conscious plane of a principle that is expressed throughout the animal world. And when religion can no longer control the whole of the social environment, it strives to create and maintain an environment suitable to itself. The maintenance of a religious atmosphere in the home, the cry for a religious atmosphere in schools, the boycotting of Freethought literature and speeches, the maintenance of a special language, dress, and mental attitude in church and chapel, even the division of things into sacred and secular, are all illustrations of the same principle. They all contain the admission that if people are subjected to the full and uncontrolled influence of modern life and knowledge, their religious beliefs inevitably decay. Religious belief, in a modern environment, represents an artificial culture. It only continues to the extent that it is possible to perpetuate an environment that properly belongs to the past.



Religion not only operates on the environment; it operates also on the organism itself. By a process of sheer selection, by a misinterpretation of human activities, and by controlling many of the avenues of social promotion, it manages to secure an amount of belief, or when belief is lacking, of conformity that would not otherwise be possible. It is not difficult to trace, in general outline, the work of religion in each of these directions. To commence with, all heresy represents a case of mental variation. In the animal world, whether a variation possesses survival-value or not, is determined by the character of the environment. The same principle applies here, only in this case the survival value of heresy was determined by the power of religious organisation, and is still so determined to a very considerable extent. But in earlier times the heretical variation was eliminated, almost as soon as it appeared. From savage times onward all the deaths and punishment for heresy have in sum had one significance—the elimination of a progressive, critical, inquiring type of mind, and the perpetuation of a docile, credulous, and conforming religious type. If, on the one hand, religion has striven to create an environment to suit the religious animal, on the other hand, it has striven not less energetically to breed a type of human being suitable to a religious environment.

In modern times, at least in most civilised countries, religion is no longer strong enough to follow this direct method. But it can still in every country exert sufficient power over social forces, and sufficiently control the avenues of social advancement to secure a considerable degree of conformity. One can neither mistake nor deny the fact that there is not to-day a single avenue of public life in which a man may make a plain and open confession of Atheism without practically bringing his career to a close. In political and municipal affairs it means practical extinction. In the public services it means, at least, lack of promotion. In the journalistic world it counts as a serious handicap. And in social life it involves the most demoralising of all forms of punishment, boycotting. In a thousand and one ways, people are driven to silence, and the silence of some not only induces hypocrisy in others, it encourages a kind of religious belief that would not otherwise exist.

Left to the operation of purely natural conditions, with no other help or hindrance than those conditions which aid or hinder all opinion, religious beliefs would by now be dead in all civilised countries. Its life is now purely artificial, maintained by a purely artificial culture. Religionists who prate of the ineradicability of religion forget, perhaps they are ignorant of, the means by which it has been perpetuated. Let it stand absolutely alone and unhelped, and then see what will happen. Let the next two or three generations be brought up—not with definite anti-religious teaching—but brought up subject to the full force of modern life and knowledge. Let the children be educated neither in religion nor anti-religion, let young men find their way in life unhindered by an absence of religious belief, let men in the public service and in public life find an absence of religion no bar to their career. Let all these things be, and what would be the result? Prophecy is a dangerous game, but if this were done I do not hesitate to say that at the end of a hundred years there would not be enough religion in any civilised country to make it worth fighting by any serious-minded man or woman.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## RELIGION AND THE B.B.C.

IT is often remarked that the B.B.C. gives undue prominence to religion (if that is not too absurd an understatement); but since the recent very slow and cautious steps which have been taken by the Corporation to give religious unbelief, both of the Atheistic and Agnostic schools, an occasional hearing, it may be thought by many listeners who do not observe what is going on that this wrong has been righted, and that now religion gets as impartial treatment on the air as politics.

A glance at the issue of the "Radio Times" for the week preceding Easter will rapidly disabuse anyone labouring under such a delusion. Of course, we all know that "Holy Week" is the great occasion in the Christian year, and as such should be the B.B.C.'s great moment; but at no time does it seem to be acknowledged by the powers that be within the Corporation that the people of this country are in no way generally religious, and that there is, in fact, no general demand for religious broadcasting on a large scale.

It is clear enough, indeed, that Good Friday, and the Easter week-end generally, is a welcome break to the hard-working people of Britain as of other countries; but the break is not in any way regarded as a religious one. Thousands of people get out in the country, walking, cycling, or (when basic petrol is available) motoring. Thousands more go to see their favourite football team. Indeed, Christmas and Easter are the great football festivals of the year, and must, I imagine, be dreaded by the professional footballer, who usually has to play three gruelling matches in four days. But as a religious festival Easter seems no longer to exist in Great Britain.

Why, then, does the B.B.C. continue to pretend that the religious significance of Easter is the only thing that matters in the construction of its programmes? Even the Third Programme, which is intended to appeal to educated, rational folk, and which is certainly far more intellectually respectable than either the Home Service or the Light Programme, devotes in Easter week a considerable proportion of its extremely limited time to discussion of theology and to religious music of a not especially inspiring sort.

Presumably it is yet again an example of what has so often been noticed in the realm of religion—the Clergy like to assume that religion is still a living force in the hearts and minds of the people as a whole, whereas it is becoming abundantly clear that in reality it has become more or less a hobby of an esoteric few. The B.B.C., of course, cannot admit anything of the sort. It is this that made them give their talk on Herbert Spencer, in the very interesting recent symposium on Victorian thought, to a Jesuit of all people! It is obvious enough, of course, that Herbert Spencer is a figure whose importance needs to be periodically reconsidered; but in our day and age, if someone is required to discuss him, why pick on a Jesuit who is in every way completely out of sympathy with everything for which Spencer stood? Why not Bertrand Russell, or even Dr. Joad? Either of them would have given a far more sympathetic picture of Spencer's thought.

In fact, the policy of the B.B.C. is all of a piece. In the region of religion, it is to pretend that religious belief is the normal state of an Englishman in the year 1948, whereas Atheism or Agnosticism remains the freakish idea of a small and uninfluential minority. This is an attitude of mind which, in the present set up of the B.B.C. cannot be combated, as is the other, equally insidious suggestion that Communists are the only people in this country who owe any allegiance to a foreign power. When the News Editor of the "Daily Worker" announced that he was resigning from the Communist Party, the B.B.C. gave great prominence to the fact that he was seeking admission to the Catholic Church. One wonders if the editor of a Catholic journal left the Church whether he would be given equal publicity. And, as a footnote to that, one wonders why no M.P. pointed out, when the recent regulations as to Com-



munists in the Civil Service were announced, that, if Communists owe allegiance to Soviet Russia, Roman Catholics equally owe allegiance to the Vatican, which, in the opinion of many thousands of British citizens, is at least as dangerous a menace to peace as the Soviet?

The intellectual climate of the time, indeed, is in favour of a regimentation of outlook. Many of the people are unable to think rationally on many of the problems of the day. That is one of the greatest dangers which we have to face. It is impossible, indeed, to believe that the steady deterioration of international relations which recent months have brought would have been possible if the people as a whole, in this and other countries, had been able to appreciate what was going on. In this confusion of ideas (more especially in the matter of Vatican policy) the B.B.C. must take its share of blame. And I fear that until there is some genuine attempt to make ordinary people more appreciative of the influence of religion on politics the condition of the world will not show much improvement. Of course, I do not suggest that the religious influence on politics is all-powerful; but it is undeniable that it does play an important part—and a part that the B.B.C. and the Press systematically play down. To hope for any improvement on the part of the popular Press is almost utopian; but if the B.B.C. would only take its mission in this sphere more seriously we might see, in a comparatively short time, an amazing change in the opinion of the world—which would itself result in a rapid retreat in the forces driving towards a third world war.

JOHN ROWLAND.

## THE NECESSITY OF COMMON SENSE

In replying to my criticism of his essay, "The Necessity of Sin," Mr. Broom complains that I credit him with belief which he does not hold, and denies that, as a clergyman, he must define sin as an offence against divine law. He says: "Though a clergyman, I 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, I believe that the fact of sin is itself an immutable divine law."

In my own justification, I must point out that, in assuming that Mr. Broom was a *Christian* clergyman, I merely followed his lead where, in several places in his essay, he includes himself by implication among "the clergy of the Christian churches," as, for instance, where he refers to "my fellow ministers." In no part of his essay does he expressly state that he is not a Christian.

However, it makes no difference to my argument whether the *Christianism* he professes is of the Christian variety or not. It is clear that he believes in a god; and, to judge by his declared acceptance of Isaiah xlv, 7, in the God of the Bible.

If, as he asserts, "the fact of sin is itself an immutable divine law," it follows, of course, that to sin cannot be an offence against God since it is only fulfilling His law. This being so, how is it that God should have expressly forbidden that which He has decreed as inevitable and immutable. If sin is *not* an offence against Him why did he frame ten explicit commandments against it, and institute a long succession of inspired men to condemn and oppose it? If sin is not an offence against divine law—and it cannot be if "it is itself an immutable divine law"—the Decalogue is a dead letter, and all the eloquent exhortations to righteousness delivered by the prophets and seers of the Bible are in direct contravention of his own decree. How does Mr. Broom, as a believer in Him, account for His manifest inconsistency?

Mr. Broom says that he cannot accept the Atheistic (scientific) explanation of evil. Instead, he repeats his assertion that "moral evil exists because, without it, there could be no moral

good," and he adds, "Why matters were arranged so is unanswerable since the ultimate purposes of God are hidden from us." He refuses to accept the only view of the question for which good reasons can be given in favour of one for which he admits there can be found no reason at all. To say with Isaiah that "God creates evil" is not an explanation; it is an assertion which, in its turn, needs explanation; for, how a God who is "all good" could create evil is a stock problem of theology of which no solution is yet forthcoming. "We have no right to assume," he tells us, "that if there is a God his purpose is to make the good happy and the bad unhappy. Such a notion is extremely naive and quite arbitrary." On the contrary, if there be a God, we have every right to assume that such is his purpose, otherwise, why did he institute a comprehensive code of laws to regulate the conduct of his human creatures? A law which there was no inducement, by penalty or reward, to obey would be a futility; and what other inducement could he design than happiness for the obedient and unhappiness for the transgressor. But, if the fact of his purpose is thus undeniable, his failure to fulfil it is equally so; and it is this glaring discrepancy between purpose and performance which Mr. Broom seeks to palliate by his "naive" and "arbitrary" contradiction of the plainest evidence.

He is quite aware that, judged by his behaviour (and we have nothing else to judge him by), God shows a degree of impartiality that argues complete indifference to good and bad alike. The most elementary justice seems to demand that he should discriminate in such cases, especially as to do so would be the easiest and most effectual way of removing any doubt of his existence. As it is his perverse inaction is a constant source of mortification, disappointment and disillusion to his worshippers while providing the unbelievers with one of his most obvious and telling arguments.

A God that thus persistently refuses to manifest himself on the side of right against wrong should have no claim to the belief of a rational mind; and to urge in his defence that "his ultimate purposes are hidden from us", is to make ignorance a reason for belief, and belief a measure of our gullibility.

In concluding his article, Mr. Broom says: "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, in my view, by no means entirely without justification." In proof that I have not forgotten that such is his view I put the following questions. First, is it from its later and more distant results (assuming that such are good) or from its present effects on the victims that crime must take its character and be judged as good or evil? Take the case of a man who has been robbed and brutally maltreated, would he regard the kindness, sympathy and desire to help which his sufferings excited in others as, in any way, mitigating and justifying the cause of it? I venture to think he would not. Yet, according to Mr. Broom, it is the "kindness and virtue" which it arouses in those who do not suffer from the crime that justify it.

The fallacy of his argument is, that it ignores the *immediate* effect of evil (which cannot but be unequivocally bad) while concentrating on the remote contingent good it may afford to others. There is nothing more certain than that the evil which evil causes is an all-sufficient condemnation of it, and that no good that may eventually result can justify it.

Second, if crime can be justified by any subsequent good why do we endeavour by every means, as individuals and as a community, to guard against it? Not only "the first law of our nature"—self-preservation—but every social law arising from it opposes Mr. Broom's argument and implies its falsity. If, as he contends, most of the virtues and amenities of life could not exist without crime, why not abrogate every law that prohibits and punishes it?

Such is the *reductio ad absurdum* of Mr. Broom's position.

A. YATES.



## UPLIFT

THE moralist of the "Saturday Reflection" in the "Evening News" of May 1, 1948, wrote that we feel all the power of the Christian mind and spirit in the noble passage from "Paradise Lost," by John Milton, who, blind and broken, living in the remoteness of his tiny cottage in the Chalfonts, was yet able to declare:—

"What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield."

He did not assert that the words were put by Milton as from the mouth of a Christian, but a simple brother, unstudied in literature, might assume that they were. Such an innocent might, in his artlessness, wonder also how to fit the conception of the study of revenge, mingled with hate, into that of Christian humility, but, suddenly recollecting Jesu's scourge for the money-changers, and the mill-stone to be hanged round the neck of the offender of "one of these little ones," and of his being cast, so impeded, into the depths of the sea, he might consider the problem of the reconciliation of such contraries unworthy of further thought.

John Milton, of course, did write the words, and he was a Christian, so the mind and spirit that functioned to fashion the declaration was certainly a Christian's, just as the silly, the wise, the ignoble, and the worthy utterances in the plays of Shakespeare are the mintage of Shakespeare's mind. In this connection, G. W. Foote reminds us, in one of his essays on Shakespeare, of Dr. Johnson's perturbation on dreaming of a severe defeat he suffered in a verbal encounter with an adversary. Old Sam comforted himself on considering that he had in reality supplied his opponent with the winning argument.

Now in the dramas of Shakespeare the ignoble speak and act ignobly, the noble nobly and the merciful mercifully. The fierce and narrow Shylock, identifying himself with his long insulted co-religionists, and burning with bitter hatred, demands his pound of flesh. Are we to say that we feel the mind and spirit of a great humanist in this demand? We do, in fact, perceive his mind and spirit in the portrayal of Shylock, as much as we do in the reminder of Portia that "the quality of mercy is not strained," but only inasmuch as we perceive his understanding sympathy with the angry Jew. We do not identify flesh. It is to be observed that we have been compelled to refer not to a Christian, but to a humanistic mind and spirit. We ought to refer also to mind or to spirit, not to both. The Christian likes them in duality, although he cannot demonstrate their separateness.

The case with the quotation from Milton is similar. The words reveal the power of the mind of a poet, who happened to be a Christian, but the power revealed is not to be identified with any Christian attribute. The declaration forms part of the speech of Satan to Beelzebub, the lord of flies, whom he discerns in the darkness weltering by his side, after they had been cast out of heaven. It reveals the mind of God's great adversary, who, even in defeat, defies with the pride of unconquerable will, studies revenge, nurses immortal hate, and seeks to stimulate in his fellow rebel the courage that will not submit or yield. Christian indeed! The attributes are intended to be opposite to Christian ones.

Our individual moralist has a cultivated literary gift, but in trying to marry common sense with Christianity, he becomes guilty of "trahison des cleres." Read again:—

"Fortitude is very much a Christian quality, as indeed, are the two kindred qualities of loyalty and friendship." He then quotes Sir Thomas Browne's "Christian Morals": "where true fortitude dwells, loyalty, bounty, friendship and fidelity may

be found," and then he asserts that we can be certain that all these four are centred deeply in the Christian character.

But at what time did we not find in abundance men abounding in fortitude, loyalty, bounty, friendship and fidelity? Did we not find them among the contemporaries of Pericles, during the agony of the Peloponnesian war, and were they not ingredients in that character which bespeaks the greatness of ancient Rome?

Our moralist refers specifically to the fierce persecution endured by the early Christians, and asserts that ever since then Christians have gone to their deaths with so much bravery that they have ever earned the admiration of their persecutors. The last "ever" is inaccurate if it means that all persecuted Christians have so died. If it does not imply that, the proposition is puerile, in that it asserts, as if special to Christians, what is true of any class of earnest men, that is that some of them have so died; for also some Mohammedans, pagans and freethinkers have so died.

It is the stringing together of similar puerile propositions, constituting an appeal to an ignorant multitude seeking to be comforted of trahison des cleres, the essence of such offence being the surrender of the unconvinced superior mind to the credulous inferior. In view of Professor Clifford's remark that the rustic in the village inn, speaking his slow, infrequent sentences may help to kill or keep alive the superstitions that clog his race, we might further generalise, and state that it is the submission of any person, while unconvinced, to the views of his opponent.

The popular moralist tends to be conditioned to quackery. To use a simile derived from Darwin, the moralist scatters his good thoughts around just as the pine trees scatter seeds in their neighbourhood, but we do not perceive the noble thought of the moralist who writes for a popular paper, for as the cattle eat up every little pine-tree seedling, so the editors, lurking in the offices of popular newspapers and periodicals, continually devour all the worthy seedlings of morality. Moreover, these editors, more percipient than dumb cattle, observing a moralist who habitually producing fruit unsoothing to the multitude who provide the daily food of editors, issue forth, and root up the good moral tree, and plant another tree, whose fruit, they judge, will be of a more pain-assuaging character.

J. G. LUPTON.

## PLOTTERS IN THE HOLY SEE

### II

SINCE the downfall of the Axis Powers, the Vatican has tried hard to make believe that—far from being a collaborator of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and their underlings—it has always been a resolute opponent of Nazism. Papal encyclicals with their obscure and deliberately ambiguous wordings and the persecution of the Church are cited in proof, but of course no mention is made of the fact that for many years prominent representatives of the German, Austrian, Italian and Polish clergy were among the most outstanding eulogists and policy-makers of the Fascist and National Socialist régimes.

The totalitarian claims maintained by both Fascism and the Roman Catholic Church resulted in some nagging between them in general, their married life, nevertheless, centred around their mutual aim to crush Progress; and to this end they were always reconciled and re-united their efforts, but the turn of events forced Mother Church to openly disclaim her spouse. This, however, only amounts to a mock divorce in order to serve the common interests.

It is true, that sections of the lower clergy and very large numbers of Catholic laymen did fight the invaders in France, Italy and other countries; but they did so as individual patriots, not as Catholics, whilst their cardinals and bishops urged



to rally around the respective Quislings; and a Pastoral Letter declared in respect to Pétain:—

"We revere the head of the State . . . We appeal to all Catholics to stand by him in the task of reconstruction he has undertaken. We are anxious that the Church should co-operate in this common cause."

Only by donning the coat of enmity towards Fascism can the Church now come forward in defence of her Fascist husband. In his 1945 Christmas message the Pope, referring in passing to the "distressful war brought upon mankind by unjust aggression," evades stating explicitly who exercised aggression against whom. And since when is there any *just* aggression (unless one directed against Socialism)?

In November, 1945, the Pope appealed for an amnesty for two hundred war criminals and in particular of Arthur Greiser, former Gauleiter of Poznan!

In the New York "Nation" of February 3, 1945, Gaetano Salvemini, the well-known anti-Fascist, wrote:—

"As long as Mussolini was in power, the Vatican tried to rescue him from ruin. Since his collapse, the Vatican has been trying to rescue the Royal House, the conservative social classes, and the concordat of February, 1929."

With the impending collapse of the Fascist régime in sight, the Vatican became feverishly active, with the object of painlessly replacing overt Fascism by some other reactionary régime; but in view of the mood of the peoples, it was thought appropriate to disguise the Catholic political parties. In Italy the Catholic Church styled their political instrument, the Christian Democratic Party, in France the firm was formally changed into the Popular Republican Movement (M.R.P.). The French magazine "Horizons" (November, 1945), admitted secret leadership of the M.R.P. by bishops, supporters of Vichy, who are subordinated to Rome. It is, therefore, not surprising that one of these Catholic leaders, replying to a reproach that the M.R.P. had done very little, said: "We must not be judged by what we have done, but what we have *prevented* from being done."

In Austria, the Vatican operates through the Catholic organisation which calls itself the People's Party. Cardinal Innitzer, a Sudeten German, after the occupation of Austria, made a personal appeal to the population to vote for the Anschluss, for all that, he has been resurrected and is expanding his activities for the protection of arrant Nazis. The Catholic Press in Austria demands that denazification be discontinued, whilst a campaign is being led against nationalisation and all democratic reforms in general.

In Germany, the Vatican is energetically working to restore the Centre Party. It is also working within the Christian Social Union, which has taken up the heritage of the Catholic Bavarian People's Party, and Von Papen is preparing to assume a role similar to that of General de Gaulle in the service of the Clerical reaction. In Slovakia, where the Quisling Government was headed by a prelate, Tiso, Catholic priests were members of a subversive underground organisation on the lines of the Nazi organisations. The founder of this terror organisation was Kolakovic, a Jesuit priest.

TOM HILL.

(To be continued)

## PIETY

We all know the theological countenance—cold, unsympathetic, cruel, lighted with a pious smirk—no line of laughter—no dimpled mirth—no touch of humour—nothing human. The face is a rebuke, a reprimand to natural joy. It says to the happy: "Beware of the dog"—"Prepare for death." This face, like the fabled Gorgon, turns cheerfulness to stone. It is a protest against pleasure—a warning and a threat.

## THERE IS ALWAYS A BOGEY-WORD

"COMMUNIST" is an easy winner just now, but it was only the other day when "Atheist" provoked a shiver in "respectable" circles. Timid atheists sheltered under the designation "agnostic." I like the late Professor Bury's definition: "The difference between an agnostic and an atheist is that the atheist positively denies the existence of a personal God, the agnostic does not believe in it." Just as the definition of a communist as "a socialist in a violent hurry" strikes me as neat.

History has never been a popular study, so that the lessons of the past are lost on most people. Only a few historians have attempted to present events impartially, for the simple reason that it is usually too risky for them to do so; for freedom, about which we are all shouting, still remains a dream. Old Burton dismissed most histories as works "which fools have written about fools," and their authors as "partial and parasitical scribblers." Burton wrote more than 300 years ago, but his criticism applies to much of contemporary so-called history.

In the days of pagan Rome it needed some moral courage to avow oneself a "Christian." For the early Christians were mainly recruited from the "botched and weak" Jewish slave population, repugnant alike to haughty patricians and fashionable philosophers. But the Romans were mere tyros in tyranny and bigotry compared with the triumphant Christians. Christians believed that Jesus would separate the elect from the damned on the Day of Judgment. They were reconciled to a permanent division of mankind by the will of God. The tragic division of the world to-day, certain precursor of another terrible war, could not have come about so quickly if Christianity had not debauched the spirit of Europe through the centuries.

"Materialist" is a bogey-word on a rather different plane. It is used by Joadian theists and their friends to mark the intellectual decrepitude of Freethinkers and other pathetically uninstructed folks! The word carries more odium now because of its possible identification with the dialectical materialism (whatever that means) of the Marxists.

We are probably living at a time when events will determine the equilibrium of the forces active in human society for centuries to come. Modern man seems to be incapable of diagnosing his social and political ills and, like an individual stricken by a mysterious sickness, is slowly but surely losing grip.

Lollards, Hussites, Anabaptists, Lutherans, heretics, infidels, papists, witches, quakers. We cannot imagine how many human beings have been persecuted, tortured, murdered, because of bogey-words which have excited the multitude to frenzy. It is so much easier for the average Christian to rally to a cry than to seek to understand.

The smaller religious fry, such as the Christian Scientists and the Spiritualists, are almost as intolerant when their convictions are challenged. A good friend of mine, an enthusiastic spiritualist, persuaded me to go with him to a seance. I asked the medium to tell us what was happening behind the "Iron Curtain", surely a most topical and practical question, and easier for the spirits to answer than many inquiries about individuals in the thickly populated Summerland? But my friend thought my question frivolous and we left the meeting early. I have also met intolerant Freethinkers. There are more things on earth than religious obscurantism. Reason, it cannot be too often repeated, is the only life-line strong enough to save us from this sea of prejudice and misunderstanding. It will not be used while the vestiges of Christian teaching linger in our minds. To quote Bagehot: "So long as there are honest believers in the world, they will always wish to punish opinions, even if their judgment tells them it is unwise, and their conscience that it is wrong."

E. A. McDONALD.

Johannesburg, South Africa.



## ACID DROPS

There is in the House of Commons a small body of men who have adopted the title of "Parliamentary Christian Socialist Group." They were not solely selected on the ground that they were Christians; no one, in fact, takes much notice of them, but they are there. The curious thing is that this body does not function as a party in the House of Commons, and no one in the House would look to the group for information of how to vote. Indeed, if the leader of this group said that God had directed them to do this or that, it is probable that they would be called to order. So we are left wondering, what does it all mean? Perhaps the "Parliamentary Christian Socialist Group" is just having a lark.

"Stands Scotland where it did?" Not by a long shot. In Kilmarnock at one time famous for its strict carrying out of the sacredness of the Sabbath, young men now play cricket on Sunday, and—oh, the shame of it—there are more people come to watch cricket on Sunday than go to church, and the clergy can do nothing but moan.

But at Saltoats the younger people do not appear to play games on Sunday, but neither do they go to church. So the poor parsons do not know what to do one way or the other. No doubt someone will suggest that Sunday games must take place and we shall not be surprised to find that eventually the clergy will advocate Sunday cricket, and other games, as long as religious services are attended early in the morning.

Liverpool has a Bishop—Dr. Clifford Martin. Before he was the Bishop, there was another Bishop, and before him another, and so on. And each one of these great religious leaders was called by God to teach the people to be kindly, and to guard them in religious matters. One would think that in such conditions Liverpool would be a city full of godliness and love. But to one's surprise the present Bishop, and all the other bishops before him, have said that the lives of the people they were guiding were full of lying, drinking, stealing etc. Really, it looks as though it is time that Liverpool turned out its clergymen and shut up the churches. On their own statements, God and his followers have made a mess of things.

In the "News Chronicle" for May 13:—

"Almighty God saw fit in His infinite wisdom to segregate the races in the beginning, and we earnestly believe that the Will of God will be best served by the continuation of the total segregation of black and white races."

With this declaration the conference of the Southern Methodist Church at Columbia, South Carolina, to-day made the colour bar "part and parcel of the discipline of the Church."

Now that clearly gives us the value of religion. There is not a mean action or an exhibition of cruelty or narrow-mindedness that has not the blessing of some Christian group or other. We are not surprised that so fine a man as Paul Robeson said that he was fearful of his people sinking to the level of some of the whites he had come into contact with.

There is another thing to bear in mind regarding this maltreatment of coloured people. It was unknown until the Christian religion established itself. The coloured man might be a slave, but so also might the white man. R. H. Barrow, in his fine book published in 1928, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," says plainly that "Within slavery were possible virtues, happiness, culture and wealth. Neither the crushing of individuality, nor the refusal of personal growth was necessarily inherent in Roman slavery." It was under Christianity that the brutalities, and the brand on the coloured man, came into being. If all the evils that found a home under the Christian flag were made public, Christianity would be dying at a greater rate than it is at present.

"The next war will end the world itself," said Cardinal Spellman, speaking on Sunday in Melbourne. "Followers of Christ are being persecuted because they refuse to do the bidding of anti-Christian nations and anti-Christian men." He adds:—

"Devotion to democracy is confounded with devotion to God, but he who loves God loves right, and right is the basis of any true liberty and the foundation of peace."

This comes straight from one of God's representatives. Now why does not God send for the Angels and saints direct from Lisbon and prevent the breaking up of the world?

In his weekly lessons, the Rev. W. H. Elliott cries aloud: "Let us go all out for God." Well, that does look rather business-like. It used to be God's job to save men. Now we are advised to save God. Well, both seem to be in difficulties, and God has done so much for man, that he might well, in turn, do something for God. If something is not done quickly action may be too late.

There has always been a great deal of speculation as to what occurred when Joseph found out that his betrothed, Mary, was "with child." Now the "Universe" makes it quite plain. We are told that "Joseph and Mary made a mutual agreement to abstain from married relationship during their married life. Scripture never mentions any other children of the blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, and those persons called the 'Brethren of Jesus' were cousins." This "reply" makes everything clear. Those who doubt now should consult the "Universe." No wonder Joseph was straight away declared a "Saint."

A man who describes himself as a casual reader of this paper wishes to know whether we ever think seriously about God? We can assure him we do. In fact his letter really set us thinking about God in a very serious manner, for if the question of God is of the profound importance that our clergymen say it is, we ought to try to understand just where we are. We think that a God who is everywhere should be located somewhere. A God who is all-wise ought not to permit his warmest advocates to be so generally otherwise. A God who does everything occasionally to be discovered doing something. A God who is really concerned in his creatures' welfare might have stretched forward and prevented a great world war. This neutrality on the part of heaven is not calculated to prevent brutality and murder among God's children. Finally, if man can get through present hardships without God, he is not likely to bother him any more.

A man writing in one of the Western papers, says that "The sceptical spirit, in the sense of refusal to accept the old theology, saturates the most earnest and religious literature of the age and pervades the very atmosphere of our social life." We take it that, after all, what he means to tell us is that he does not like what we write. We were cast down, but almost at the same time we received another letter telling us that "The educated classes have long since outgrown the theology of Christendom and now the masses of the people are throwing it aside like a worn-out garment." Thus one rules out the other—or does it?

But after all the praise and its opposite, how does it happen that in every country, no matter what the particular creed may be, reaction is always allied with the extremely religious portions of the people? This is something that cannot easily be swept away and the truth lies much deeper than is indicated by the explanation that is usually given.

The bottom fact, we think, is that religion by its very nature appeals to a type of mind that is hostile to progress. Every religion belongs to the past, lives upon the past, and fights to perpetuate the conditions that give it strength. The result is that all the sinister reactionaries in a country look for religion to help them. In a country where Roman Catholicism holds an obvious supremacy, the position is quite plain. The Roman Catholic priest is only wielding a power that others would wield if they could. In this country certain circumstances act as a check on religious bodies. They wield power so far as they can. But that should never blind us to the fact that religion upheld by a strong and visible power is one of the greatest evils that can overtake the modern State.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

The Bishop of Liverpool suggests that he has discovered something that had been kept dark by some vile Freethinkers. So he announces that there is a "violent, partly concealed struggle between faith in God and materialistic godliness." What a daring wide-awake fellow the Archbishop is! Atheism was recognised as very tough long before Christianity—and the Bishop writes as though he is straining to meet the Atheists at once in deadly battle. Well, it would be a pity for so daring a fellow to fail to meet the enemy. So we offer him the pages of this journal to put a case. That should be better than preaching inside a church where people already believe.

According to the "Daily Mirror" there is to be another "show" of religion which is to cover every town and workshop. We grant that if a number of well-known men can be induced to come upon the platform, there should be a fair number of holders-on. But to take a "show" of politicians of standing, and two other characters, and then to try the trick of passing it over as an awakening is a kind of manoeuvring that is as pitiful as anything could be. A little while ago there was a procession of Christian teachers who drove round the towns—but there has been no increase of church going. In all these manoeuvres the decline of religion goes on. The travelling shows, and the bringing of two or three principal men to pretend that they are deeply impressed with religion is simply just bluff.

We are pleased to state that "Christianity and Ethics," the latest Pamphlet for the People by Chapman Cohen, is selling extremely well. Freethinkers who have not yet seen a copy should send for one soon. The price: 3d post free.

Glasgow Freethinkers and all friends who are interested should make Brunswick Street their rendezvous to-day (Sunday) 3 o'clock, when Messrs. S. Bryden, E. Lawasi, and J. Humphrey will speak on Freethought. A welcome is assured, and these meetings should be made a rallying point for further propaganda during the summer. The above will speak every Sunday throughout the summer.

## THE DELUSION OF THE DELUGE OR A DRUNKARD'S DREAM

ONE of the acts in the drama of Christianity is the Deluge, enacted by Noah, the hero of that tragedy.

It is a legendary tale taken from Chaldean—Babylonian mythology and other sources far anterior to Genesis, and made an integral part of the bible as a fact, to support the claim of its being a special act of Jehovah.

This tale displays the ill-temper of that distinguished Jewish gentleman, deploring the fact that he had created man and the lack of control over his creatures he sought to govern.

This story is one of the most infamous ever imagined in the wild brain of barbarism, but the fact that the deluge never occurred, exonerates the Almighty from the guilt of such an act of cruelty. Let us examine this ancient legend and prove that it was impossible ever to have happened.

The ocean to-day has an average depth, which we mark as sea level, covering about two-thirds of the earth's surface. The deluge covered the entire world to a depth of approximately 29,000 feet., submerging the highest mountains, pouring and piling an ocean of that depth upon the present one.

The miraculous feature of the flood ceased with the downpour and after the fountains of the great deep were broken up. Just what those were we do not know, but they lent their aid in supplying the necessary water on that tragic occasion. After that time Nature was left to her own resources. Then the Sun got busy after forty days, working overtime for a period of about ten months, when dry land appeared, the waters having subsided to that point by that time, as related, enabling Noah to disband his flocks, his herds and swarms and shoo them homeward bound.

But here is the rub. With no rainfall during that period of ten months, there could have been no great diminution of flood water by evaporation sufficient for dry land to appear. The Sun could absorb only a small portion of the water during that time, for without precipitation, there would have gathered an ever-increasing cloud of such volume and density, to have enveloped the world in a blanket of darkness; strangled the laws governing evaporation, condensation and precipitation, depriving the Sun of further power to perform its natural function as an agency of evaporation, long before the above stated period, with the new sea level still at 29,000 feet, with no dry land in sight.

On the other hand, if there was a downfall of rain at intervals to restore the Sun's power of evaporation, the Sun would then absorb such downfall, as there is an even balance between evaporation and precipitation, as proved by the constance of the present sea level, and the new ocean have remained unchanged at 29,000 feet.

Mr. Noah and his Ark and all the occupants therein, would have perished and frustrated the design of Jehovah to perpetuate the human race (as the story relates) from the seed of Noah—a family of eight, tainted, however, with original sin.

To eliminate the story of the Deluge from the inspired account would leave quite a gap in the subsequent Biblical narrative, because what follows is based upon this story being an historical fact, the story must stand as written and be accepted as true on "faith," regardless of the sinister reflection it casts upon the character of a merciful Almighty Father.

The only probable incident in the life of Noah—this creature of fiction—was his inordinate thirst, and his addiction to the use of strong liquor to allay it. This may account for the part he so well played as the Hero of this tragedy, which may rightfully be called "A Drunkard's Dream." He makes his final bow, retires from the stage, and though living to the tender age of 950 years, is heard no more. What a dizzy piece of fiction, which still remains essential to the Christian doctrine as proof of its divine right from an inspired Bible with a tale like this.



It is remarkable that Christians use their sense and reason on every subject known to man, except that pertaining to the follies of their faith. Would they believe such a story as a fact if it were not related in the Bible?

They do not believe the miracles recounted in other religions that have the same basis for belief, because they use their reason and say they are but fictions. Yet they refuse to reason when it comes to dissecting the absurdities of their own miracles, but accept them as true and hug them to their bosoms as members in good standing ought to do, to be rewarded in the hereafter, thinking there is virtue in professing or pretending to believe the absurd and impossible.

But some Christian Divines of eminence—feeling ashamed of the story as written—to save face have said that the *better opinion now* is that the flood was a local affair, trying to save the fairy tale and thus dispute the word and act and purpose of God.

This blasphemy they will have to answer for, but feel safe, depending upon Jesus to intercede for them at the proper time and square the account with God, for the sin of having partly exercised their reason.

Christianity would have fewer adherents if the clergy would become brave and honorable enough to tell their flocks the truth about its miracles, one of their favourites being that they were specially chosen and granted authority to act spokesmen for the Great Unknown.

Methinks I hear a clergyman exclaim with tears in his voice: "If you take away this story so essential to our faith, what have you to offer in its place?" Nothing, brother. Our duty ends when we afford the satisfaction you ought to feel, to know that the Deluge is a myth, and its origin, history and relative incidents are proved to be untrue.

ARTHUR BERSCH.

St. Louis, U.S.A.

## LIVERPOOL AND THE SLAVE TRADE

THE stock claim that Christianity abolished slavery is still urged by all classes of Christian apologists, and in other directions many writers in the course of their historical or sociological studies repeat the claim, obviously without ever having troubled to test its accuracy. The mere persistence of slavery in Christian countries until a very modern date should alone be enough to show the falsity of such a statement. True, vague generalisations concerning the equality of mankind may be cited from Christian writers, but as the same may be cited from non-Christian writers and pre-Christian writers, the honours here are equal. True, also, that slavery existed in pre-Christian times contemporary with teachings that, apparently, made for the destruction of slavery, but it also continued to exist in Christian times—and under worse conditions—so that the claim that Christianity either abolished slavery or bettered the condition of the slave is again negated. Moreover, wherever Christian people went they carried slavery with them, as, for example, the early North American settlers, who established slavery in a land where it was previously non-existent. And, finally, it has to be always borne in mind that the modern African slave trade, which most people have in mind when they talk about slavery, was of Christian creation. It was begun by Christians, carried on by Christians, and if some Christians at last worked for its abolition, it was the opposition of other Christians that made their work necessary and difficult.

Many years ago I wrote a couple of articles in "The Freethinker" dealing exclusively with the relations of the Methodist Church to slavery, in which I showed that its members were among its most enthusiastic supporters. On the present occasion I propose dealing exclusively with the Christian City of Liverpool, one of the strongest centres of the British slave trade.

This has been suggested by an article on slavery in the "Syren"—a journal devoted to the shipping interests. The anonymous writer of the article appears to have derived his information—although he fails to make due acknowledgment—from a work on "The Liverpool Slave Trade," by a writer who veils himself under the pen-name of "Dickie Sam." But both writers leave much unsaid that deserves to be said, and it is partly to make these necessary additions that I am now writing.

It must, of course, be borne in mind that the English slave trade did not originate with either Liverpool or the other slave port, Bristol. The buying and selling of slaves has existed in all stages of English history. Green, in spite of his obvious Christian bias, is compelled to record that the Church promoted emancipation on all estates but its own, and there was a very obvious policy in the Church advising other landowners to liberate their slaves. So also he points out that in the time of Henry the Second, Ireland was filled with Englishmen that had been kidnapped and sold into slavery, while more than one great English noble during the Middle Ages added to his wealth by breeding slaves for the market. No one felt that in so doing he was outraging either the spirit or the letter of Christian teaching, and whatever the Church may have advised as a matter of policy in particular cases, it never denounced slavery as un-Christian or anti-Christian.

The English participation in the Black Slave Trade—inaugurated after the discovery of North and South America—dates from the time of Elizabeth. A monopoly of the slave traffic had originally been granted to the Belgians; but it was afterwards acquired by the Genoese, who shared it with other nations. All this was with the direct sanction of the Christian Church. "She," says Lecky, "reorganised the accursed institution of slavery on a gigantic scale, and in a form that was in some respects, worse than any that had before existed." Sir John Hawkins was the first Englishman to engage in the traffic. One of his ships was supplied by Queen Elizabeth, who engaged pocketed her share of the profits, while salving her conscience with advice concerning the traffic which she perfectly well knew was unheeded.

The next important step in the history of the English slave trade came with the revocation of the monopoly of the Assiento Company in 1698, which threw open the African trade. From that date the traffic advanced by leaps and bounds, and it was evidently considered of great importance, as it was specially stipulated in the treaty of Utrecht (1713) that England should be allowed to supply her own colonies with slaves, and also the Spanish-American colonies. For some years the two ports engaged in the slave trade were London and Bristol. Gradually Bristol—always a very pious city—took the lead over the metropolis. At the commencement of the eighteenth century, London had over a hundred vessels in the African slave trade. About five years later only fifty, and a little later only thirty. On the other hand, from 1701 to 1732, the number of ships that left Bristol for the slave coast, annually averaged about sixty.

The first slave vessel that left the Mersey was in 1709, and carried only fifteen slaves from Africa to the West Indies. But the profits—judging from the rapid increase in the traffic—must have been very great, for by 1714, only five years later, more than half the vessels engaged in the trade belonged to Liverpool, and it was calculated that Liverpool ships imported three-sevenths of all the slaves carried by Europeans. The following figures were soon after officially laid before the House of Commons, detailing the number of slaves imported from Africa by the subjects of various European States—Great Britain 38,000, Holland 4,000, Portugal 10,000, Denmark 2,000, France 20,000—thus giving slightly more than half to Christian England. Later in the century, the figures appear to have undergone an increase. Thus, in 1795, one-fourth of the ships belonging to the port of Liverpool were engaged in the slave trade, the actual increase being from 15 ships in 1730, to 136 in 1792. The traffic underwent a still greater increase prior to its abolition.



From January, 1806, to May, 1807, no less than 185 Liverpool-owned slave vessels left Africa with a slave-carrying capacity of nearly 50,000.

I have said above that the traffic yielded enormous profits. The actual cost of a slave on the West Coast of Africa—the cost, that is, to secure; because a very large part of the business was pure kidnapping—ranged from £15 to £35. The selling price would be anything from £50 to £100, depending upon the age, health, and general condition of the “goods.” The net gain on the slave traffic appears to have been upward of 60 per cent. From a contemporary calculation, cited by “Dicky Sam,” we learn that in 1786, “The town of Liverpool returned a net profit of £298,462 sterling, and that during eleven years the gains on 303,737 slaves was £2,361,455 6s. 1d., or, on an average, two hundred and fourteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-seven pounds, fifteen shillings, and one penny per annum.” It is small wonder that G. F. Cooke, the tragedian, on being hissed by a Liverpool audience, retorted “I have not come here to be insulted by a set of wretches, of which every brick in your infernal town has been cemented by an African’s blood.”

At the commencement of the British slave trade there does not appear to have been any regulations concerning the carrying of slaves. It was, on the face of it, to the owner’s interest to lose as few slaves as possible by death, and to get them to their journey’s end in as good a condition as possible. But the obviously sensible course in such matters does not appear to have been always—perhaps not generally—followed, and legislation on the subject appears. A ship of 300 tons was allowed to carry 500 slaves, with a crew of 50. But these regulations seem to have been only nominal. Thus the work from which I have already quoted gives the actual dimensions of a famous slave ship, the *Brooks*, with a large folding plate illustrating the stowing of the slaves. The vessel was of 297 tons, and was allowed to carry 450 persons. As a matter of fact, she had carried 351 men, 127 women, 90 boys, and 41 girls—a total of 609. The length of the lower deck on which the slaves were carried was only 100ft., and in this space the slaves were packed without regard for health or decency. It was customary, says the writer in the “*Syren*,” to allow 6ft. by 1ft. 4ins. for a man, 5ft. by 1ft. 4ins. for a woman, 5ft. by 1ft. 2ins. for a boy, and 4ft. 6ins. by 1ft. for a girl. Had they been measured for coffins, not much less space could have been allowed; and coffins these ships often were. In fact, in some cases it was only possible for the slaves to lie down to sleep by arranging them alternately head to foot.

“So close were they, you could not walk without treading on them; but they were only slaves. One kind-hearted sailor, when passing over them, would remove his shoes, so as not to hurt them. So close and foul was the stench arising from the negroes, they have been known to be put down the hold strong and healthy at night, and have been dead in the morning. A trader stated that, after remaining ten minutes in the hold, his shirt was as wet as if it had been in a bucket of water.”

In the case of one Liverpool ship, the *Thomas*, carrying 630 slaves, 100 died on the voyage; but as the remaining 530 sold at Jamaica at £60 per head, the owners were doubtless well satisfied with the trip. In some cases, however, the mortality was much greater—running to fifty out of every hundred. All the slaves were not sold abroad; some were disposed of in Liverpool. Thus, an old “*Liverpool Chronicle*” advertises:—

“A fine negro boy, to be sold by auction. He is eleven years of age; the auction will take place at the Merchant’s Coffee House, Old Church Yard. By order of Mr. Thomas Yates, who hath imported him from Bonney.”

The “*Liverpool Advertiser*” (of 1765) also announces:—

“To be sold by auction, at George’s Coffee House, betwixt the hours of six and eight o’clock, a very fine negro girl, about 8 years of age; very healthy.”

Also, under date of September 8, 1766:—

“To be sold, at the Exchange Coffee House, Water-street, at one o’clock precisely, eleven negroes, imported per the *Angola*.”

In the colonial papers long lists of runaway slaves were advertised, most of them branded like so many cattle. The following will serve as specimens: “Robert, R.P. on each cheek, and Kingston, marked ‘Yorke’ on each shoulder and breast.” Another is branded with “a cattle mark.” “An old woman with her two sons and two daughters, one of them a very big child.” One man is to be recognised by his having had “both ears cropt”; another by having had “his nose and ears cut off.” Another advertisement runs, “Escaped on Sunday last with a chain and collar round his neck, a negro man, marked T.Y.” Another, after carefully describing a runaway slave girl, concludes by saying, “Whoever will apprehend the said wench, alive or dead, receive two moidores reward from Joseph Charles Howard.”

C. C.

## THE EARLY LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE

### VII

THE greatest factor in moulding Paine’s character during his youthful days appears not to have been his schoolmasters or his schoolfellows, or the general public life of the small borough in which he resided, but rather the Quaker beliefs of his parents, the atmosphere of the meeting-house of the Society of Friends in Cage Lane, and the persecution to which they had been subject. For the early history of the Friends in Thetford was a record of tyrannous persecution on the part of their enemies, and unwavering adherence to their convictions on the part of these early Nonconformists.

The Society of Friends was founded by George Fox in 1647, and on February 20, 1660, thirteen persons were committed to Thetford Gaol, most of them having been taken out of their meeting at Kilverstone—a small parish adjoining Thetford on the north-east—by a captain and ten armed men, who came in upon them with their swords drawn. The names of those thus committed to prison were Henry Kettle, junr.—probably a son of the Henry Kettle who was Mayor in 1640, and possibly a descendant of a Danish Ketel—Anne Kettle, Elizabeth Winter, Mary Goddard, John Cockerill, Edward Rack, Susan Taylor, Robert Elding, Margaret Elding, Elizabeth Day, Joseph Whitlock, Edmund Burnham, and Andrew Bucknam. Their sole offence was “meeting together.” Of the punishment on this occasion I have no record, but it did not act as a deterrent, for on March 20, 1666, at the Norwich Quarter Session, Henry Kettle, junr., and Robert Eden, of Thetford, Richard Cockerill, of Snareshill, and Edmund Rack, of Kilverstone, were convicted of meeting together for religious worship. It was the third offence of each of them, and they were sentenced to be carried to Yarmouth and thence to be transported for seven years to the Barbadoes. Cory, the Recorder of Norwich, Dean Crofts, and other justices tried the case, and the sentences evoked considerable outcry. Dean Crofts, answering the appeal that these men had met to worship God, observed that “the Common Prayer doth not allow people to worship God but by it.” The prisoners memorialised the Judge of Assize, but all in vain.

In 1660, some three months after the Kilverstone raid, Thetford was visited by an itinerant preacher of the Society of Friends, one Henry Fell, a member of the Lancashire family of Fells, one of whom George Fox married. He was taken before the Mayor, who had him imprisoned, whipped, and expelled from the borough bounds. The document, which was subsequently passed from hand to hand from Norfolk to Lancashire, was worded as follows:—

“Burrow of Thetford.—Henry Fell, an idle vagrant person, and a seducer of the people, a very suspicious



Jesuitical deluder, and one who denyeth ye Oathe of Alleageance and Supremacy, a man of middle stature, of thirty yeares of age, with browne curled haire, was this 28 day of May, in ye twelke yeare of his Maties. reigne of England, openly whipped in Thetford afforesd. according to law, for a wandering rogue, and is assigned to pass from psh. to psh. by ye officers hereof, straightway to Olnerstons, in Lancashire, where as he confeseth he last dwelt, and he is lynited to be at Olnerstons aforsd. with in 20 dayes next ensuing the date hereof at his p'il. Given under my hand and seale of office the date of above sd.—John Kendall, Mayor.—To the Constables of Croxton, and to all other Constables and other Officers whom these presents may concerne, for the due execution thereof."

This ill-treatment did not deter Henry Fell from doing what he believed to be his duty, for in a subsequent letter written from Aldeburgh to his sister he says that he will "next First-day be again at Thetford."

The Toleration Act of 1689 relaxed the severities of the Clarendon Code, and the Society of Friends apparently increased in influence in Thetford. From a Trust Book preserved at Norwich it appears that "a messuage or tenement in Thetford, called Chandlers was purchased, in order to form a meeting-house, of William Clark, as appears by a deed bearing date the 1st of the 1st Month in the year 1696." That building is the present "Quaker Chapel" in Cage-lane—by far the oldest Nonconformist building in the town—and the first Trustees were William Hawes, Thos. Hawes, Geo. Gibson, Abraham Howse, Jacob Howse, and Jacob Miller. Mr. John Paul, of Thetford, asserts that his great-great-grandfather, who was a Friend, first allowed the meeting-house to be used for worship. He was a miller, and previously used the building for the purposes of his trade. That may account for its being termed "Chandlers" in the Trust Deed.

It is improbable that its appearance changed much between 1696 and 1906, when it was partially demolished on account of the dangerous condition of the roof, and now consists only of the walls. It was an insignificant, single-chambered building of brick, flint, and chalk, and thatched roof springing from the walls at a height of ten feet above the ground, with two tie-beams in the interior. Freestone blocks and worked fragments from some of the ruined churches and monastic establishments in the town were built into the walls, an eloquent commentary on the vicissitudes of religious sects. Three windows abutting on the street were blocked with chalk, probably at the time it was made into a meeting-house. The entrance was first into a small porch, and by a door in the south-westerly gable, each door being 1½ inches thick. The building was 42 feet in length and 25 in breadth, lighted by three windows by day and eight gas jets by night; there was no pulpit, and the platform at the Guildhall end was nine feet wide. Two small sliding windows provided ventilation. Forms only were used, and there was seating accommodation for between 150 and 160. The fact that ingress was purposely made difficult indicates the disadvantages under which Nonconformists had to labour until quite recently. It may, perhaps, be mentioned as a curious coincidence, but perhaps nothing more, that in the latter part of the seventeenth century towns in New England were directed to erect a cage near the meeting-house (usually Puritan), and in this all offenders against the sanctity of the Sabbath were confined. In Thetford the cage adjoined the Quaker meeting-house and gave its name to the lane in which they both stood. A year after they secured this building as a meeting-house, that is, in 1697, the Friends were sufficiently influential to have the births of their children inserted in the register of St. Cuthbert's Church, and it so continued until 1710. This was for legal purposes, to prove descent in cases where property was left. We know nothing of the hundreds of saintly men and women who worshipped in the old meeting-house. By some

strange paradox the only Thetford Quaker who attained any distinction was Thomas Paine. Dr. M. D. Conway says:—

"There are various indications that in one way and another Thetford and Quakerism together managed to make the early years of their famous son miserable. Had there been no Quakerism there had been no Thomas Paine. Remembering the extent to which Paine's Quakerism had influenced his political theories, and instances of their bearing on great events, I found something impressive in the little meeting-place in Cage-lane. This was his more important birth-place."

In another place Mr. Conway says: "His whole political system is explicable only by his theocratic Quakerism. His first essay, the plea for negro emancipation, was brought from Thetford meeting-house."

Paine himself, writing in later life of the Quakers, indicated that though he attended the meeting-house, his inner self protested against some of the Friends' assumptions. He said: "Though I reverence their philanthropy, I cannot help smiling at the conceit, that if the taste of a Quaker had been consulted at the creation, what a silent and drab-coloured creation it would have been! Not a flower would have blossomed its gaieties, nor a bird been permitted to sing." Yet Paine could never shake himself free of this austere training. On the general subject of religious sects, he wrote:—

"For myself, I fully and conscientiously believe that it is the will of the Almighty that there should be a diversity of religious opinions among us; it affords a larger field for our Christian kindness. Were we all of one way of thinking, our religious dispositions would want matter for probation, and on this liberal principle I look on the various denominations among us to be like children of the same family, differing only in what is called their Christian names."

Dr. Conway, writing on "The Story of the Declaration of Independence,"\* says: "Strange destiny that this humble Thetford Quaker should be borne by the cyclones of the last century into the thick of the American and French Revolutions and write works on which a thirty years' struggle was fought in England for freedom of the Press." Just before his death Paine requested permission to be interred in the burial ground of the Quakers at New Rochelle, United States, saying that they were the most moral and upright sect of Christians. The request was refused, and Paine was buried on his own farm.

It is very evident from his writings that Paine's youthful environment affected him strongly throughout life, and that, in addition to the atmosphere of the Friends' meeting-house, the public life of the borough of Thetford helped to mould his intellect and character. All the evidence tends to show that at the time of Paine's birth the town, which had then probably less than 2,000 inhabitants, was in a very neglected condition, insanitary and unpaved, corrupt politically, and with no staple industry. In 1715 Thomas Martin, the historian of the borough, though obviously in a despondent mood, tabulated the reasons why he should not be an attorney, one of which was as follows: "It was always counted ruination for young persons to be brought up at home, and I'm sure there's no worse town under the sun for breeding or conversation than this." As Thomas was then but nineteen years of age, and had probably been in no other town, unless it might be Bury St. Edmund's, too much stress must not be placed on this. But the Earl of Oxford thither on December 31, 1737, and said that it was "poor and mean, much decayed, as I was told, of late year many houses dropping down not worth repairing."

Once a year, however, Thetford was a scene of active rendezvous of the fashionable and the vicious, and furnished evidence of the pomp and severity of the law, for the Assizes for the county of Norfolk were always held there, partly in continuance of ancient custom, and partly to save the judges

\* "Manchester Guardian," July 4, 1891.



the long journey to and from Norwich at an inclement season of the year. Four years before Paine's birth a man and woman were tried at Thetford Assizes, the former for murder, the latter for petit treason. The woman was servant to a lady of property at King's Lynn; the man was her follower, and with her connivance murdered her mistress. He was hanged, and she burned at the stake at Lynn. At the same Assizes six other men were condemned to be hanged. During the first fifteen years of Paine's life the number of persons tried at Thetford Assizes was 217, of whom no less than fifty were condemned to death. Only three of these were for murder, a barbarous penal code allowing sentence of death to be passed on 15 persons for horse-stealing, 14 for theft or highway robbery, 11 for burglary, 1 for assault, 1 for forgery, and 5 for cattle or sheep-stealing. Two horse-stealers were executed at Thetford in 1740 and a sheep-stealer was ordered to be whipped three market days at Thetford. A man who was convicted of poisoning and other offences in 1742 was sentenced to death and also to be hanged in chains on Diss Common, while two men for uttering false coin received the triple punishment of a fine of £5, twelve months' imprisonment, and to stand in pillory at North Walsham and Yarmouth. Jeremiah Pratt, who was sentenced to death for horse-stealing at the 1746 Assizes, confessed to four highway robberies, and asserted that he had stolen more horses than Turpin, offering to give information as should lead to the recovery of those he had stolen, to people who had lost horses and would visit him in Norwich Castle. In 1755 Edward Thurstin was ordered to be detained in gaol until bail was forthcoming, the charge being of "dispensing and delivering to divers persons three pamphlets tending to promote the religion of the Church of Rome." At the following Assizes, Jane Shuin was ordered to be branded on the hand for highway robbery. Some of the leading legal luminaries of the country visited Thetford either as judges or counsel. Lord Chief Justice Willes being present in 1739, Lord Chief Justice Baron Parker in 1747, and Justice Denman in 1753. Sometimes they made a ceremonious entry to the town, and always on "Size Sunday" attended one of the three parish churches—usually St. Peter's—in state, when a sermon was preached by the High Sheriff's chaplain. There was also in Thetford a large prison, probably on the site of the present one, and adjoining the Friends' meeting-house in Cage-lane were the pillory and stocks. Memories of his youth were doubtless strong when Paine wrote: "When in countries that are called civilised we see age going to the workhouse, and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government." Other occasions when many of the inhabitants would indulge in an orgy of excitement and dissipation were the elections of two members of Parliament for the borough. Thetford Corporation, in which the power of election was vested, was a corrupt body, under the dominance of the Duke of Grafton, who lived at Easton Hall, about four miles distant. At the election of 1740 two of the Duke's relatives, the Hon. Charles Fitzroy and Lord Augustus Fitzroy, were elected, and in 1747 and 1754 those chosen were Charles Fitzroy Scudamore and Lord Henry Beauchamp. Some of the doings of the corrupt corporation in the half century preceding Paine's boyhood would doubtless be common talk in the town. There was a petition with reference to the election of 1685 and Parliament resolved that the Mayor could not be elected, as the right of election was then vested in the mayor, ten burgesses, and twenty commonalty, a total of thirty-one out of approximately 2,000 inhabitants. An agent of James II reported in 1688 that "The town is under the power of the Duke of Norfolk and the Lord Chief Justice Right. They will choose whom your Majesty will name." In the same year there was complaint of a wrongful election, the question arising upon the illegal surrender of the charter, the petitioners claiming the right by the new charter, the member insisting that the old was still in force. The latter secured the victory.

W. G. CLARKE.

(To be continued)

## CORRESPONDENCE

## MARXISM

SIR,—Referring to several remarks recently, may I point out that this is a financial doctrine that progressive, increasing industrial production and hence prosperity is impossible except in a society like Soviet Russia.

Hence past and present crises. If anyone has an alternative theory he should be a millionaire in a short time by "selling" it to the manufacturers and peoples of the rest of the world! —Yours, etc.,

T. D. SMITH.

## REPLY TO PROTEST

SIR,—An American correspondent, "Lucifer," protests against remarks of mine to the effect that we should judge the Roman Catholic Church less harshly, as it has valuable contributions to make in these times.

I have now returned to Catholicism; even if I had not, I think my remarks justifiable. I would recommend two books—"The Catholic Church Against the Twentieth Century," by Avro Manhattan (Watts, 1947), and "The Key to the World's Progress," by C. Stanton Devas (Longmans, 1908). They survey Catholicism from opposite points of view.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. POYNTER.

Let us be austere to ourselves, but do not let us impoverish life. Let us not deprive humanity of its joys; let us take pleasure in beholding its enjoyment. The joy of others is a great part of our own; it constitutes that great recompense of a good life, which is gaiety.—RENAN.

## LECTURE NOTICES. ETC.

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Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWRIE and J. HUMPHREY.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Portsmouth (Todmorden Valley).—Wednesday, June 2, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. A. SAMMS and G. L. GREAVES.

Whitewellbottom (Rossendale).—Friday, May 28, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Positive not Negative," Mr. GERALD BUNN (Birmingham Ethical Society).

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