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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Is Christianity Played Out?

SOME time ago there was a discussion in one of our London dailies on the topic of "Is Christianity Played Out?" The discussion was carried on right through the newspaper "silly season," and several hundreds of letters were published. As is usual with such discussions in our "free press," nothing of a very drastic nature was allowed to appear from the Freethought point of view. But although the correspondence was, so far, edited, one curious result ensued. A very large number of the writers took up the position that Christianity could not be played out because it had never yet been played in. What the world had known as Christianity was a spurious presentment, a caricature of the real thing. One day the original article would appear, and, when it did, society would be transformed, and we should witness what the old lady called the "Aluminium." But they agreed that the record of Christianity had been, up to date, not such that one could exhibit with pride.

Now, from one point of view, I agree that Christianity never has been played in, in the sense of being practised. Society has never acted upon the teachings of the New Testament, and is never likely to do so. The divorce between Christian theory and the practice of Christians is one of the most constant features of Christian history. Individuals may here and there have sought to carry out New Testament teachings, but society, as a whole, has treated them as a mere counsel of perfection quite impossible in practice. Society has never ceased to take thought for the morrow, it has never turned the other cheek when one was smitten, it has never acted upon the principle that faith could move mountains or cure disease, it has never, for obvious reasons, held to the celibate life as a practicable ideal, it has never believed that poverty was a blessing or riches a curse. Not only has society never done so, but if it were seriously proposed that it should, Christians would raise the loudest and most energetic protest. In actual life Christians turn their backs resolutely on the teachings of their "sacred" book, and for this conduct Freethinkers at least find adequate justification.

One explanation offered for this long-standing divorce between theory and practice comes to us in the form of vague generalities concerning the "corruptions" of primitive teaching by later generations of believers. In a sense this, again, is true; but what is not realised is the deeper truth that if Christianity was to live, even in name, corruption was necessary and inevitable. Thus "Resist not evil" had to be corrupted into "Do not encourage the spirit of revenge." "Give to him that asketh" had to be

qualified by "if he is deserving of the gift." "Take no thought for the morrow" had to be corrupted into "Be not over anxious." In every direction Christian teachings needed "corrupting" before they became decently practicable, or in any way applicable to human affairs. Every reform in Christian teaching has involved this "corruption," has meant, that is, a more or less forced interpretation of Christianity, such as would commend itself to contemporary common sense.

Christian in belief (so far as "belief" is understood to mean assent to a number of doctrines more or less non-understandable) the world once was; but here again we are faced with the question of perpetual modification. For the interpretation set upon Christian beliefs has so perpetually varied that in speaking of Christian beliefs one needs to specify a particular century, even a particular generation, in order to get a clear idea of what is meant. The nature of inspiration, of revelation, of the nature of God, of the relations between man and deity, have all meant different things to different generations; one taking as an article of faith what another had denounced as the wildest heresy. Christianity has been, historically, a fluid thing, changing in tardy obedience to external pressure, and about which the only constant feature is the name.

Perhaps the most absurd stage in this process is that now reached by our higher criticism Theologians. Earlier generations of believers had at least the excuse that they were largely unconscious of the modifications that took place. But here we have a number of men who deliberately break with Christianity in any definite historical form. They do not accept the special inspiration of the Bible, they reject the miraculous, they are in some doubt as to a personal deity, the resurrection is not an historical fact, even the divinity of Jesus is not accepted save in the sense that it might be asserted of all of us, although in his case it is claimed that divinity was manifested in a supreme measure. One of these writers tells us plainly, and properly, that the process of criticism that destroyed the historical character of the Old Testament stories must extend to the New Testament, and it must be recognised that "the Christ" is no historical figure. Why, then, do these people call themselves Christian? Religious they may be; they are certainly not Christian. For historically Christianity has taken its stand upon the substantial historic accuracy of the Old and New Testament narratives. And if this is rejected, all we have left is a myth, or a series of myths, that one may use as so many illustrations of social and ethical truths otherwise acquired, just as one may use the legends of Pagan Greece or Rome.

The fact is that any religion is only compatible with complete intellectual honesty so long as the general view of the universe that obtained at its origin remains. For on the intellectual side a religion is a theory

of the world or of life expressed in supernaturalistic instead of in naturalistic terms. And so long as the theory of the world which existed with the people who nursed Christianity to power remained, so long did Christianity manifest signs of intellectual vitality. There were heresies, of course; divisions in the Church, and various theories of the nature of fundamental Christian doctrines. But in its essentials Christianity remained intact, and men might profess belief in it without a number of dishonest reservations, and without a sense of mental stultification.

But the world that men believed in, even so late as the fifteenth century, has now entirely disappeared. The voyaging of travellers increased its size and modified its shape. The calculations of astronomers and mathematicians changed its position in the solar system, and reduced it from a primary to a subordinate position. Geologists gave it a new history. Chemists and physicists explained its nature. Botanists gave an account of its flora that accorded but ill with the "inspired" version. Biologists attacked the problem of animal life, and revolutionised men's minds in that direction. Lastly, man himself was placed under the scientific microscope; his pseudo-divinity was destroyed; he was affiliated to the animal world, just as all life was shown to be organically connected with all other terrestrial phenomena back to the point when we lose the earth in the primitive fire-mists. And in this science could allow no breaks, no gaps, no room for the miraculous or the supernatural. The old earth had indeed been rolled up and cast contemptuously on one side. A new heaven and a new earth had been given us, and it was one that was in hopelessly irreconcilable conflict with the religion that had for centuries governed the mind of man.

The reaction of these views on Christian beliefs has been profound, and all things considered, rapid. The now general acceptance of scientific teaching, the common habit we have of looking to scientific men for information concerning man and the world, blinds us to the fact that science, in a popular and general sense, is little more than a century old. Within that brief period, religion has not only been forced back from fields wherein it once stood a law-giver, it has been forced to acquiesce in its own humiliation. And in the light of this remodelled universe historic Christian beliefs became so inherently ridiculous that one after another they have been either modified or discarded altogether. Our ancestors could see the workings of God in the world, because their minds were destitute of any other cosmic conception that could challenge its supremacy. But is it possible for us to see it? At once our minds turn to those theories of mechanical causation, of force, of matter, with which science has made us familiar, and we find we have no room for the more primitive conception of things. Christians themselves, filled apparently with the desire to commit suicide to save themselves from slaughter, point out that nature expresses invariable laws, and that no alteration in natural order is discoverable or thinkable. As a saving clause, they add that there is a God at the back of the whole process. But neither God the creator nor God the sustainer of natural processes gave rise to religious worship. People worshipped God as the constant manipulator of natural forces in the interests of mankind. A God who merely created the world and who now sits up aloft seeing it go, can no more be an object of worship than a parliament that was twelve months in recess each year could arouse enthusiasm at the polls.

A thorough-going belief in a religiously workable deity is rapidly becoming impossible to the modern mind. A mere abstraction such as deity has become with advanced theologians, may live for a while in virtue of the existence of traditional feelings to which it appeals, but its final disappearance is a mere question of time. So, too, the same may be said of all specifically Christian doctrines. The mental atmosphere is no longer suitable to their continued existence. The truth of this is seen in the fact that in every direction the religious interpretation of these doctrines is replaced by social or ethical ones. To not a few Christian preachers, Christian doctrines are avowedly acceptable only so far as they can be made to square with some special sociological theory. It is no longer theology that gives laws to life; life is now laying down the conditions under which theology may be permitted to live.

We are not, then, Christians in the sense that we practise Christian moral teachings. We are not Christians in the sense that we believe Christian doctrines. We are Christian in name; perhaps, too, we are Christian in temper. The modifications in our mental outlook are too recent to have yet permanently affected our emotional nature, and we are liable to carry into life a temper that worked only too actively under the impulse of Christian belief. But for straightforward intellectual conviction, for a confession of belief in Christian doctrines without reservation or modification, one looks in vain. As a profession of belief, Christianity is still with us; expressed in powerful organisations it is still active; and it will continue in both forms just as long as the indolence of one class combines with the interest of another for its perpetuation.

CHAPMAN COHEN

THE RELIEF OF THE PANGS OF PARTURITION

DR. H. W. HAGGARD'S "Devils, Drugs and Doctors" is a very attractive volume. It is strikingly outspoken when dealing with the many follies and futilities of medical practice in the past, while it furnishes a splendid vindication of medical and surgical science as conducted to-day and expresses complete confidence in future progress.

The above book has enjoyed a very extensive sale in the United States and will doubtless do so in Britain. Still, the sun has its spots, and this book has its blemishes. For one author gives the primitive Christians credit for virtues few of them ever possessed, although he admits that had they been less fanatical and more practical, they might have preserved the Roman civilisation from ruin, and thus precluded the poverty and misery of the long Dark Ages that followed. Another misconception concerns the destruction of the Alexandrian Library which Dr. Haggard ascribes to the Arabs when, as a matter of fact, it was burned by Christian fanatics. The Doctor has apparently forgotten his Gibbon, for that great historian, more than a century since, conclusively proved that at the time of the Arabian conquest of Egypt there was no library left to destroy.

The work under review is veritably "The Story of the Science of Healing from Medicine Man to Doctor." Its author is evidently a convinced Rationalist who treats conventional beliefs and customs with scant ceremony. One valuable section deals with child-bearing from the earliest ages to our own. The advances of surgery, the passing of the pestilence, the cure and cure of venereal diseases, the rise and progress of the healing art with its manifold aspects, are all instructively dealt with here.

One of the most impressive studies in "Devils, Drugs and Doctors" is the survey of anesthesia. As Haggard avers: "The use of anesthetics to alleviate the pangs of surgical operations and of childbirth, was unknown before the middle of the nineteenth century. Prior to that time operations were performed only from the direst necessity; the fully conscious victim of the operation was tied with ropes to prevent his escaping from beneath the surgeon's knife and he bore his suffering with such fortitude as he could command. This barbarous state of affairs, formerly accepted as inevitable, shows by contrast with present conditions the humane aspect of the discovery of anesthetics."

Its success in surgery is spectacular but, unfortunately, in cases of accouchment, although its pangs have been lessened, popular prejudice and religious obscurantism have, in this instance, as in the preventive treatment of venereal diseases, arrested the path of progress.

Ether was used as an anesthetic in 1846, but before this, surgeons sometimes drugged their patients with alcohol or opium. Little attention, however, was accorded expectant mothers, although there are a few recorded cases in which women were painlessly delivered while in an intoxicated condition.

As Haggard very justly states: "The introduction of anesthetics to alleviate the pangs of child-bearing and for surgical operations aroused a violent controversy. It was science *versus* theology and progress *versus* stagnation, and would seem amusing now, if it were not for the human suffering involved."

Davy, Wells and others made pioneer experiments with anesthetics, but the case of painless delivery in childbirth was fought and won by Dr. James Y. Simpson, the then professor of obstetrics at Glasgow University. He had already administered ether to pregnant women, but its odour and irritating properties induced him to procure a substitute. This he ultimately found in chloroform. As an experiment, he and some friends inhaled its vapour. At first they were exhilarated, but soon sank insensible to the ground. "After recovery they repeated the experiment, and Simpson's niece was inclined to try also. Folding her arms across her breast she inhaled the vapour and to the amusement of the guests fell asleep, crying: 'I'm an angel! Oh, I'm an angel!'"

Shortly after this experience Simpson tested chloroform in a case of childbirth, and he was so impressed by its benefits that he determined to publish an account of his success. His patient had, during a previous confinement, endured three days' agony before delivery. In Simpson's case, her second pregnancy, the pangs of parturition began a fortnight before the infant was born. The patient was placed under chloroform, and was unconscious when the babe was born. The nurse removed the child before the mother recovered consciousness, when she said that she had enjoyed a pleasant sleep which she greatly needed owing to the anxiety arising from the memory of her previous confinement, she had slept very little. "In a little time," wrote Simpson, "she again remarked that 'she was afraid that her sleep had stopped the pains.'" Shortly afterwards the infant was brought in by the nurse from the adjoining room, and it was a matter of no small difficulty to convince the astonished mother that the labour was entirely over and that the child presented to her was really her own living baby."

When Simpson announced his discovery it met with bitter opprobrium. He was denounced as an impious wretch who sacrilegiously desired to deaden the pangs of childbed imposed on women by God himself, when Adam and Eve fell from grace. So violent was the theological outburst that most physicians would have been daunted. But Simpson, like the later T. H. Huxley, loved a battle with the foes of scientific reform.

In Scotland as late as 1591, one, Agnes Sampson, a midwife, who ventured to alleviate the trials of her patients' delivery,

was charged before the king, afterwards James I of England, with the crimes of heresy and witchcraft, and burned alive. "Again," writes Haggard, "in the nineteenth century the Scottish clergy rose, if not to burn Simpson with fire, at least to consume his practices with their fiery indignation. Simpson turned and with their own weapons of religious interpretation silenced the clergy and cleared the way for the more serious controversy with the men of his own profession."

When pulpit denunciations were hurled at Simpson, many otherwise sensible people were intimidated by these fulminations. All opposition centred round the assertion that pain in childbirth was decreed by God. One preacher declared that "chloroform is a decoy of Satan, apparently offering itself to bless women; but in the end it will harden society, and rob God of the deep earnest cries which arise in trouble." Another minister likened chloroform to drunkenness in its degrading influence over women in labour. These men never remembered that women alone endured the agonies of parturition.

Biblical condemnation of the use of anesthetics was constantly averred. For in Genesis iii, 16, occurs the passage: "Unto the woman he [the Lord God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and they conception; and in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." Thus, it was urged that the banishment of the pangs of childbirth "was contrary to religion and the express command of Scripture."

Undismayed, Simpson published a rejoinder to his critics in 1847. In this he contended that if Biblical statements were taken literally, farmers who uproot thorns and thistles which the earth was cursed to bear, or lessened their labour by utilising horses and machines, were plainly flying in the face of Holy Writ. Moreover, as we are all condemned to die, the physician is equally blameworthy in striving to prolong life. As Simpson observes: "Are those who maintain the uncanonical character of using human means to contravene the pangs of childbirth ready then to maintain that we shall not use human means to contravene the tendency to death?"

Simpson noted that nearly all medical improvements had been obstructed by theological considerations, and that even the introduction of agricultural appliances had been decried as contrary to divine will. Then, in his reply, he completely turned the tables on his antagonists when he appealed to Scripture itself as a justification of his medical procedure. For, said Simpson, we have before us "that most singular description of the preliminaries and details of the first surgical operation ever performed on man which is contained in Genesis ii, 21: 'And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept, and he took out one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.' In this remarkable verse the whole process of a surgical operation is briefly detailed. But the passage is principally striking as affording evidence of our Creator himself using means to save poor human nature from unnecessary endurance of physical pain."

Naturally enough, Simpson was far too shrewd to give his opponents occasion to charge him with profanity or impiety. But when dealing with his medical critics he ridiculed them without reserve, and reminded them that the multitudinous improvements upon which modern civilisation rests and which everyone now takes for granted were one and all opposed as impious innovations in their early stages.

Yet, two years had scarcely elapsed after the appearance of Simpson's publication, when it was estimated that thousands of patients in Edinburgh had been treated under chloroform for childbirth and in surgical cases. Unlike most benefactors of humanity, Simpson lived to see his labours crowned with success. He was held in honour in his native Edinburgh—the modern Athens—he received a knighthood, and was accorded an imposing public funeral at his death.

ACID DROPS

The exhibition of the Princess Elizabeth, heir to the throne of Great Britain, etc., has been well done. Her visit to France, however, has led to a serious shock—not to the French people—but to "The Free Church of Scotland and the Lord's Day Observance Society." It seems that the Princess and her husband actually went to a race meeting, a night club, and actually danced on a Sunday! The shock was almost unbearable, and a special meeting of the Lord's Day Observance Society protested against so vile a crime and sent a message to Mr. Attlee to consider what could be done. Alas, we are afraid that nothing will be done. For our own part we hope the Princess had a good day on that Sunday. It is the most human story of her that we have heard.

The Bishop of Newcastle is in trouble. He is in trouble over the state of religion in England. People are steadily refusing to go to church and this must mean a growth of unbelief. He says very definitely that he sees no way of bringing the people into touch with the Churches. He adds, "There can be no miraculous recovery of Christianity." The understanding of the origin of religion, the better education of the people, everything that was in the favour of religion has died away or is steadily weakening. Religion never is at its best when human education tends to greater heights.

The Bishop of Lichfield is concerned considerably over what he calls "The fallen standards of Morality." This is a very common cry from the Churches, and it is backed only by fools and parsons—who are not always as they pretend to be. But let us suppose that we are facing to-day an increase of crime? The first remark we have to make is that behind us lies centuries of Christian domination.

Can anyone say, honestly, that decency of life grew when the Churches were powerful? Or has the improvement of life occurred as men and women grew independent of the teachings of the Christian Church? In all parts of the world mankind has developed as its knowledge of the meaning of life and the power of Man tended to be recognised. After all, it is not the gods who make Man. It is Man who makes gods, and incidentally, develops the strength to crush them.

The Roman Catholic Church in England has discovered that there are not as many children in their churches as they would like. Generally, we are informed of the growing numbers of members of the Catholic Church, while attendances at other Churches are shrinking. The reason for this is that when a man or woman leaves a church his name is wiped out. But with Rome, once a member, always a member. The Roman Church never admits that anyone has left the Church—except in the case of death. It is quite an interesting method of counting more and more followers. It is a fine example of lying in the name of truth.

We have nothing to say in favour of our English Fascists, but could even say a great deal against them. They are most natural when they are brutal, and most stupid when they attempt to be reasonable. We were, however, pleased to see Professor Laski protesting against the suggestion that all advocacy of Fascism should be treated as a criminal offence. That way of suppressing one's opinions generally ends with the evils that we detest, and should be crushed. After all, Fascism is a theory that can be expressed, even though it leaves decent-minded men filled with disgust. We should be able to check the development of English Fascism without losing what small real freedom we possess. We must remember that freedom of speech should embrace things we dislike as well as things we like. Professor Laski understands the meaning of Freedom.

The Reverend David Quin, Vicar of St. John's, Kilburn, has, in full religious dress, been christening the dolls of children with full religious ceremonies. So runs an item of news in the "Daily Mail." When the children are introduced to all the miracles of the Christian religion we see no reason why magical dolls should not be part of the education of children. It may be taken as

intended to make magic on a larger scale when childhood passes to manhood and womanhood. The Rev. Quin may not be so foolish as he seems.

Here is a question asked by one of the many who read the "Freethinker" without being what we should call a "freethinker." The question asked is why do we persist in referring to Christians as "savages?" After due thought the only reason we can offer is because Christians are savages. But when we say that we are forced to go a little further. First, we are not foolish enough to say or believe that the people called "Christian" are as men and citizens just about as good as the best of Atheists. The "Good Christian" is forced by his religion to be of less value as a citizen because there are differences in religion. Thanks to Christians, shopkeepers find it pays not to let their customers know their position about religion. If an Atheist wished to enter Parliament, Christians do what they can to turn him out, not because he is an unfit man, but because he does not bow to the myth of Jesus. And so the matter runs on. Honesty of speech and action is made worse than it might be without religion. The Christian believes that he is serving God, and so is unjust to his fellow men. Finally, the Atheist is a better friend to Christians than most are aware. He urges men to stand up with their fellows, and prove that they are really not mere fragments of men, but men who can determine their own destiny.

The Bishop of Manchester says that it is a very significant thing that Lord Halifax and Sir Stafford Cripps should be standing on the same platform. Of course, the wonder was that they were standing in the same Church, and that the same God looked after the two. The curious thing is that neither believes that the other party is "right with God." Cripps says a special God must be worshipped if there is to be the desired heavenly help. The other says that Cripps has got hold of the wrong party. We wonder if anyone saw them wink at each other. We expect they both have good control over themselves.

One wonders how long it will be before those who stand as the leaders of the people will cease this foolish game of playing to the prejudices of the crowds? What do they hope to get from it? If they are wanting advancement for themselves, well and good. It is a poor aim, but we will let it go. But if they are hoping for the bettering of the people, no other move would be more stupid. No movement gains in real strength by the adherence of wrong thinking. The crowd may be with you to-day, they are certain to be away tomorrow. They love a given ideal to-day, and throw it aside tomorrow. But the religious interests in this country are not easily fooled. They know their real enemies, and also their true friends. We wish that the people were as wide awake to their real interests, as the churches and vested interests are to theirs.

We are told by Gibbon that in the golden days of the Roman empire, peace was maintained in all quarters with an army of not more than 400,000 men. Under Christian rule to-day 400,000 men would be about enough to give a show for one of our Princesses. So much for the Christian love of peace. One begins to think what would have happened to the world had Christianity never existed? Things could scarce have been worse.

Now, we are not arguing which nation is responsible for the fall of Rome, but merely mark the fact that ancient Rome did make better efforts for the creation of human decency than was brought about under Christianity. The truth of the matter is that as a people making religion, Christianity is one of the greatest impostures that has ever been known. Ever since the breaking up of Roman and Greek culture humanity has suffered heavily. For century after century, the nations have plotted and fought how this or that might be stolen. We have measured greatness, not in terms of culture and happy men and women, but by human power and gain. Away from Europe, the missionary zeal for Christ has served to hide greed. We have bred what neither Rome, Greece or Egypt ever possessed—the crime of the colour-bar—one of the greatest of opportunities for wholesale robbery and brutality.

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SUGAR PLUMS

It is very fortunate that most naval officers have more common sense than a few of them display with regard to religion. For example: We are told by Admiral Sir Robert Burnett that during the war he was asked to take a large convoy to Russia. He was badly bombed and sadly puzzled and worried. So he explains that he went down to his cabin, prayed to God, took the Bible, and saw therein the text: "When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee." That settled it! He got his convoy through all right, and after that did not lose a single ship.

But hold a moment! The admiral might have looked at the matter from another point of view. First, there were a number of British ships sailing about. All of them were exposed to attack, and a large number of ships were sunk, and one wonders that if God could rescue ships in distress why did he not save the other vessels. If a British Commander refrained from helping a ship in distress there would be a devil of a row. But there are things, and a good level-headed sailor is a far better companion when danger threatens than all the gods we have heard of.

Visitors to Bradford will be interested to know that a complete range of Freethought literature published by the Pioneer Press, and including "The Freethinker," will be on sale at Mr. Cousins' Bookstall in John Street Market, Bradford. Mr. Cousins will be pleased to accept orders for literature. Bradford Freethinkers can help the "Cause" by patronising the bookstall.

WHERE STANDS SCIENCE?

In the Foreword to Dr. C. D. Darlington's Conway Memorial Lecture, "The Conflict of Science and Society" (Watts & Co., 2s.), Sir Richard Gregory defines Science which, he says, "in the sense in which the word is now commonly understood, means organised and formulated knowledge of natural objects and phenomena derived from verifiable observation and experiments." Most of us, if not all, will, I think, agree with this very clear definition; for most of us, in giving up religion, have appealed to science in this sense as man's "saviour," if he had to have a saviour.

Of one thing we all felt we were sure, and that was the absolute integrity of science and scientists. They would lead us to the truth come what may—not one inch would science deviate from the straight and narrow path. I am afraid that Dr. Darlington has sent us, not just an ordinary bomb, but an atom bomb to shatter our complacency.

New methods, new discoveries, new ideas, have always disturbed our old society, frightened, or at least nervous, at anything which tends to change the current order. It cannot be denied that science in making new discoveries has made old ways of living, the older economics, the older war strategy, and many other things, quite obsolete. But it has done something worse—in the eyes of the older scientists. It has even disintegrated not only the older science, but a good deal of the newer.

To quote Dr. Darlington:—

"Scientific discovery is often carelessly looked upon as the creation of some new knowledge which can be added to the old knowledge. This is true of the strictly trivial discovery. It is not true of the fundamental discoveries, such as those of the laws of mechanics, of chemical combination, and of evolution, on which scientific advance ultimately depends. These always entail the destruction or disintegration of old knowledge before the new can be created. And it is this destruction, or the fear of it, which arouses the opposition of the well-trained and well-established scientist, as well as those outside science whose beliefs the new ideas threaten to disintegrate."

To prove his point, Dr. Darlington gives some concrete examples, and it is good to find big names do not frighten him. When they realised where their own particular discoveries led them to, the "misgivings" of Newton and Darwin prevented them from publishing "the awful fact" for fifteen or twenty years; or, like Priestley, scientists did not like to admit "the revolutionary consequence"; or, as in the case of Mendel, "half fearing that someone may notice them," bury their experiments "in the proceedings of a provincial natural history society." And all this was not of trivial but of the greatest discoveries. In fact, "in the embattled ranks of discovery, to-day as of old—

... those behind cried 'Forward'
And those before cried 'Back.'"

An interesting example is the discovery of the planet Neptune which was first recorded by the French astronomer Lalande in 1795, and who saw it again two days later. Yet Lalande "crossed out the first observation and marked the second as unreliable." Fifty years later, the Englishman Adams predicted Neptune from the movements of other planets but he was "unable to persuade either his respectable professor at Cambridge or the busy and important Astronomer Royal to undertake a wild-goose chase, involving a whole month's work, merely for the sake of verifying the prediction of a, doubtless, very irritating young man."

Many more and later examples are given by Dr. Darlington of the way men of science obstruct or resent new discoveries—and, of course, they have always resented the way in which "interlopers," that is, men who were not exactly professional scientists, have made so many great discoveries. To find that the theory of evolution was made "scientific" by a man "unfitted to be a university instructor in either botany or zoology," that oxygen was first isolated by a Unitarian minister, that the theory of infection was first established by a chemist and the theory of heredity by a monastic school teacher, proves that a regular academic training is not absolutely necessary—or as Dr. Darlington points out, "Training does harm to great discoverers, because with rare exceptions it is inadequate to their needs."

Space forbids me to quote further on these points, and the reader should ponder over the cases given in "The Conflict of Science and Society" where science or rather scientists do not particularly shine. But those for whom Marxism is the limit of progress will not like Dr. Darlington's scathing criticism of Marxian "equality." He considers that "the notion of equality is one of the three chief illusions promoted by the great

Semitic religions, and is, perhaps, the most comforting." While Marx and Engels "were building up their system, the biological basis of the differences among men was completely unknown to biologists (such as Darwin)" so, of course, one can understand that nobody bothered about it. If there were any differences they were due to our environment; "and so," comments Dr. Darlington, "an edifice of political and economic theory, including the materialistic interpretation of history, has been built up and lately brought to perfection in Moscow." Now that we know so much more of heredity than Darwin or Marx "it is possible to establish a materialistic account of the whole of Nature of the kind that Marx and Engels dreamt of but could never achieve. . . . Indeed, Marxism turns out (tell it not in Gath!) to contradict materialism in its very foundations."

Dr. Darlington treats the Soviet attitude to science—and the truth—with devastating irony. "They had already discovered that first rule of government, that you need not practise what you preach. Or to use the Marxist idiom, that the unity of theory with practice can suffer negation in practice without suffering negation in theory. As men were becoming more and more unequal in Soviet practice, it had become more and more desirable to proclaim their equality in Soviet theory."

But he goes even further: "It became necessary to reduce fundamental biological research to submission to Marxism. This policy, the absolute State had in fact already embarked upon. The scientific research department and the labour camp had become acquainted with one another, under the first five year plan." The upshot of this was that when investigations into heredity problems at the Biological Institute in Moscow brought results which did not square with Marxism, it "was suppressed, the leading members of its staff were put to death for espionage or treason." And "the same methods of suppression are applied by the Soviet Government in all fields of scientific research. It is never by the newspapers but always by illicit personal contact that one hears of a Director of an Institute removed, or an Institute as a whole (whether of psychology, physics, or economics) liquidated. In other fields, however, downfall has usually come from personal intrigue. In genetics it came primarily from high policy."

There are a number of similar attacks on the raw deal science is getting at the hands of doctrinaire Marxists as well as from people who ought to put the pursuit of truth above everything else; but the reader should get a copy of this memorable Conway lecture for himself and decide, however small a cog in the wheel of progress he may be, what he is going to do about it. It is not nice to think that in the West the conflict between science and society results in "obstruction or defamation, penalisation or blackmail," and that Western science as a consequence "is continually moving back towards the Middle Ages," while in the East, "Russian science has already got there."

One word more. Dr. Darlington scathingly criticises, among other things, Professor Arnold Toynbee's exposition of "race theory" in the first volume of his "Study of History"; and as Professor Toynbee is coming more and more to believe in the Christian remedy for all our ills, it should prove infringing to have his reply. In any case, I think it is a long time since the Rationalist Movement has provided its members with such an explosive charge as "The Conflict of Science and Society"—and it should jolt us out of every scrap of complacency we may have. It is, indeed, in my opinion, a most necessary "atom bomb."

H. CUTNER.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT. By Chapman Cohen. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

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

PLOTTERS IN THE HOLY SEE

III.

THE international clerical camp centred around the Vatican is the oldest of the reactionary political groupings; its origins going back to feudal society, it is a living anachronism to-day. Down to World War I, it derived its support from powerful, although declining, political factors, such as the feudal land-owners in a number of European countries, the aristocratic and military castes, and the backward sections of the peasantry, who were ground down with the help of the clergy.

Some of these positions were lost after the first World War; the second World War, however, had even more drastic consequences for the Catholic Reaction. It had staked on fascism and lost. But for all that, it has not given up its aspirations to political hegemony in Europe. The Catholic reaction has been working for it a wide network of agents and its political parties, old and new, in various countries—led by "peasant leaders" so-called, and leaders of the Christian trade unions, who take their cue from Rome.

The political and financial resources of the European Catholic reaction, however, are inadequate in the changed conditions of these post-war days. It needs influential allies to support the Catholic parties and governments, loans with which to strengthen their position, armies and strategical bases with which to bring pressure to bear on their opponents. Such support it can only hope to receive from a great outside power.

After the collapse of the fascist regimes, this ally can only be the U.S.A. Unscarred by the war, but enriched by it, she is the only World Power capable of and interested in still more war, and this must be a war against anything that stands in the way of monopolistic super-profits and imperialist penetration. And so we find the forces of American atomic democracy and ultra-reactionary feudal theocracy joining hands and supporting one another. American imperialist circles afford the European Catholic reaction political protection, economic assistance and military support. In return, they get the solidated agency, with a ready-made political platform, which they lacked in Europe.

The alliance between the Dollarocracy and the Holy See was concluded amid due pomp and ceremony. In the latter part of August, 1947, Myron Taylor, the personal representative of President Truman and leading figure in the United States Steel Corporation (Morgan Concern), handed Pope Pius XII a personal message from the President of the U.S.A. In his message, the President recalled the fundamental tenets of his doctrine and expounded his views on the purposes of the alliance between the "First Protestant" of the United States and the head of the Catholic Church. Besides vague proposals for a joint fight in the "defence of religion", the message contained a quite definite proposal for a combined crusade against "Collectivism."

The Pope hastened to send a personal message in reply couched in the usual ornate style of papal effusions. Pius XII agreed to common action by American capital and the Holy Church against the forces of Progress, thereby fully endorsing the aspirations of the U.S. monopolies to world supremacy in Europe advanced by the Catholic and American reaction. Before dealing with the plot, let us have a look behind the scenes.

In all its essential details, this plan was worked out in Rome long before it was approved in Washington. Its real author was a Polish count, Włodzimierz Ledochowski, who, until his death in 1942, was the General of the Jesuit order.

The Jesuit order—or the Society of Jesus, its proper name—has existed since the sixteenth century with the object of combating the "enemies of the Vatican." The names of its Generals or "Black Popes", as they are often called, are rarely mentioned in public. Yet it is they and their organisation of plots

clerical politicians and secret lay members of the order that have for centuries guided the Vatican's international policy. Their appointees direct the activities of nearly every Catholic party, association and enterprise.

Count Ledochowski was a scion of the most aristocratic Polish families, linked with the Potockis, Radziwills, Lubomirskis and other feudal dynasties of old Poland. In 1915, he became the head of the Jesuit order, he had charge of the Ruthenian (West Ukrainian) and German provinces of the order. Maintaining closest contact with the feudal circles all over the world, he was an intimate adviser of the Austrian Habsburg dynasty. The keynote of all his activities was the idea of creating an European Catholic-fascist bloc—under the ægis of the Habsburgs, if possible—and launching a crusade against the Soviet Union, which was to be partitioned.

Ledochowski's chief collaborators in these schemes were two criminals: Pacelli, the Italian, and Faulhaber, the Bavarian. Pacelli was papal nuncio in Munich from 1917 to 1930; Faulhaber was the Archbishop of Bavaria (and virtually of all Germany). The political activities of the German clericals in the years 1918 to 1933, which cleared the way for Hitler, were directed by Faulhaber and Pacelli from Munich, "City of the Nazi Movement."

The head of the German Catholic "Centrum" Party, Kaas, a prolate, and his protégé, Reich Chancellor Brüning—who were both educated in Jesuit schools—were puppets of Ledochowski, Faulhaber and Pacelli, as were also Adenauer, leader of the Rhineland Catholics, and Dolfuss, leader of the Austrian clerical reaction.

Faulhaber still heads the Catholic Church in Bavaria, Kaas resides in Rome as official adviser to the Vatican on German affairs. Adenauer leads the Catholics in the British zone of occupation in Germany, whilst Brüning is his agent in America. Ledochowski died in 1942, and the head of the Jesuit order is now a Belgian, Janssens; Pacelli, since 1939, occupies the papal chair in Rome under the title of Pius XII. And the Ledochowski plan still lives on, although in a form slightly altered to suit modern conditions.

TOM HILL.

(To be continued)

PRIESTS AND MIRACLES

In all ages most priests have been heartless and relentless. They have calumniated and tortured. In defeat they have crawled and whined. In victory they have killed. The flower of pity never blossomed in their hearts and in their brain. Justice never held aloft the scales. Now, they are not as cruel. They have lost their power, but they are still trying to accomplish the impossible. They fill their pockets with "fools' gold" and think they are rich. They stuff their minds with mistakes, and think they are wise. They console themselves with legends and myths, have faith in fiction and forgery—give their hearts to ghosts and phantoms and seek the aid of the non-existent. They put a monster—a master—a tyrant in the sky, and seek to enslave their fellow men. They teach the cringing virtues of serfs. They abhor the courage of manly men. They hate the man who thinks. They long for revenge. They warm their hands at the imaginary fires of hell.

It may be that all the miracles described in the Old and New Testaments were performed; that the pallid flesh of the dead felt once more the thrill of life; that the corpse arose and sat upon his smiling lips the kiss of wife and child. Possibly water was turned into wine, loaves and fishes increased, and possibly devils were expelled from men and women; possibly fishes were found with money in their mouths; possibly clay and spittle brought back the light to sightless eyes, and possibly words cured disease and made the leper clean; but of this we have no evidence.—INGERSOLL.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

Sir,—The articles on Thomas Paine and his early life, by W. G. Clarke, I find most interesting and worth keeping by one for reference. In article (1) Mr. Clarke says, re the Declaration of Independence, "that Cobbett is justified in asserting that whoever wrote the Declaration, Paine was its author." Anent this statement, which should be more widely known, I herewith mention further particulars. Some 66 years ago, I received from America a present of 41 of Colonel Ingersoll's Lectures, political speeches and addresses bound in one volume.

Referring to this volume to-day, I find Ingersoll speaking at a huge gathering and saying: "The claim that Paine was the real author of the Declaration of Independence is well founded. It is now claimed that the original document is in Paine's handwriting. It is certainly not in Jefferson's. Jefferson could not have written anything so manly, so striking, so comprehensive, so clear, so convincing and so faultless in rhetoric and rhythm as the Declaration of Independence." Ever since the "Age of Reason" first appeared, Paine—the man who sacrificed his life in both hemispheres—has been slandered and vilified by priests of all denominations, who profess to "love their enemies." He lived a long, laborious and useful life. The world is better for the work he accomplished.

At the age of 73 death touched his tired heart. He died in the land his genius defended under the flag he gave to the skies. Slander cannot touch him now—hatred cannot touch him more. A few more years, a few more brave men, a few more rays of light, and mankind will venerate the memory of him who said, "any system of religion that shocks the mind of a child cannot be a true system"; "The World is my Country, and to do Good is my Religion."—Yours, etc.

JOSEPH CLOSE.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon; Highbury Corner, 7 p.m.; Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "A Remedy for Despair." Prof. A. E. HEATH.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

Burnley Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3-15 p.m.; Debate; 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

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

Nelson (Chapel Street).—Wednesday, June 9, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Saturday, June 5, 7 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Scotbottom (Rossendale).—Friday, June 4, 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.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

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

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

THE FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION. By Chapman Cohen. New Edition. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

THE EARLY LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE

VIII

DEAN PRIDEAUX wrote:—

"At Thetford all is sould. Ye elections there is among the magistracy and 50 guineas for a vote is their price. One Mr. Bayliss a stranger was their last chapman to whom they have sould themselves much dearer, for it hath cost him £300. to get a return from thence the next Parliament and that is but a litigious one, for Sir John Woodhouse will be petitioner against him."

There was further trouble in 1690, the Mayor under the old charter returning two members, and a rival Mayor under the new charter doing the same. Parliament resolved that the old charter was not legally surrendered, and that the Mayor who acted in accordance with its provisions acted correctly. In 1698 there was another petition, when it was stated that the Mayor had refused to allow several legal votes to be polled, had admitted others who had no right to vote, and "by many partial proceedings and unlawful practices" secured the return of his friends. One of the members then returned was declared incapable of sitting in that Parliament. Knowing of these things, can it be wondered that Paine wrote of Parliamentary elections: "A man of moral honor and good political principles cannot submit to the mean drudgery and disgraceful acts by which such elections are carried."

The people generally had no power, and the rights of the corporation were jealously guarded. In the second part of the "Rights of Man," Paine deals with charters and corporations, and the influence of Thetford is very manifest. "Charters and corporations," he says, "are sources of endless contentions in the places where they exist." And furthermore—"Rights are inherently in all the inhabitants, but charters by annulling those rights in the majority, leave the right by exclusion in the hands of the few." Though but a small town there are three ecclesiastical parishes in Thetford—St. Peter's, St. Cuthbert's, and St. Mary's—and residents in one were debarred from participating in the charities, etc., of the others. Owing to the amalgamation of ancient parishes, the parochial boundaries also seem ridiculous and arbitrary. For instance, the top part of White Hart-street, including the house in which Paine was born, was and is in St. Cuthbert's parish, the lower part in St. Peter's parish, though St. Peter's Church is much the nearer to any part of the street. Not improbably Paine had this in mind when he wrote that a man's rights are "circumscribed to the town, and in some cases to the parish of his birth; and all other parts, though in his native land, are to him as a foreign country."

To his native place he also referred when he wrote that "The generality of corporation towns are in a state of solitary decay, and prevented from utter ruin only by some circumstance in their situation, such as a navigable river, or a plentiful surrounding country." The river Little Ouse had been made navigable as far as Thetford towards the end of the seventeenth century, and it was doubtless this fact which, at the time of Paine's boyhood, prevented it from utter decay. So recently as 1833—though in pre-railway days—the income of the corporation was £1,054, of which £955 was derived from navigation dues.

On his way to the Grammar School, Paine would see several of the big coaching inns. Only a few yards away from his home, at the junction of Croxton and Norwich roads, stood the "Fleece"; nearly at the bottom of the street was the "White Hart" inn, then there was the "Bell," with its huge courtyard, and near the bridge over the Little Ouse the ancient "George"; of these the "Fleece" and "George" are now disused. This street was on the main road from Norwich to Newmarket, and thence to London, and Paine

as a schoolboy would doubtless see many of the equipages of the aristocracy. In White Hart-street he would pass a very ancient half-timbered house and also St. Peter's Church, as it was before the tower was rebuilt in 1789, with a clock projecting over the roadway. Paine would go to the meeting-house either by Earl-street (then Alice's-lane) and the present market-place, then surrounded by houses and not used as a market; or by White Hart-street, King-street (passing the King's House, which had been used as a country seat by James I), Tanner's-street, Raymond-street, and Cage-lane. The churches appear to have been sparsely attended, and the only Nonconformist body in the town was the Society of Friends. John Wesley did not pay a visit to Thetford until 1757, and Paine had then left the town. The Rev. G. Burton, rector of Elveden—four miles from Thetford—writing to the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D., on November 17, 1757, says* :—

"Heaven only knows where the present degeneracy will end, for I fear the common people are as much sunk down into superstition and fanaticism as their betters are in folly and atheism. We have amongst us a Methodist preacher, just come hot from one of your London tabernacles. He has made so deep an impression upon our common people already, that it becomes a fashion amongst them to be almost one and all, cross-eyed, by rolling their eyes about in their fits of religious madness. I have had some conversation with him, and, amongst many questions, I asked him how many regular Methodists he supposed there might be at this time in the kingdom. His answer was he was certain there were at least forty thousand—too formidably a number to be permitted of any sect, much more of one of such dangerous principles, who assume to themselves the power of the keys of heaven and hell, and deal out salvation or damnation by caprice or humour. For my own part, I must confess these appearances give me many gloomy apprehensions, but still, I hope there are many thousands in this unhappy nation that have not yet bowed the knee to Baal, that may prove the glorious means of averting the vengeance that is consequentially due to prevailing wickedness."

A few months later, on April 14, 1758, the Rev. G. Burton was even more pessimistic. "We have got," he said, "a furious hot Methodist come amongst us, who has already scattered so much of his hellebore as to raise a conventicle of about fourscore, and a love-feast once a week. . . . If some stop is not put to the proceedings of these people, they will in time throw us into confusion, for they attack us very forcibly by stealing into Orders; and under a sanction of that, and by the help of the Act of Toleration they bid us defiance, and even promise salvation to their converts, and defame and misrepresent us and our best performances. In short, I know not what you do with them in London, but we have a melancholy prospect from them in the country, for what with fondness for novelty, their encouragements to sloth, and reliance on Providence for support, and their largesses to the poor, as our poor where they come are no longer in danger of being starved, there is likely to be nothing but psalm-singing cobblers and spiritual taylor amongst us shortly; and a cobbler's bastard will by and by be employed upon the bench in splitting a text instead of an hair to lengthen out his end with."

It seems probably that this reference to the conventicle must be to the one in Pike-lane, which was formerly known as Old Meeting-lane, and of which all the early history has been shrouded in the utmost mystery. — W. G. CLARKE.

* "The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D., and the antiquarian and other correspondence of William Gale, Roger and Samuel Gale, etc.," issued by the Surtees Society.