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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Our Spiritual Guides

ONCE every year, the leaders of the English Church meet in all solemnity to consider what has been done, or should be done, with regard to the well-being of religion and of the clergy. As to the future of religion, the correct answer would be that there is none. The days for the development of the English Church are gone. It may linger for many years, but to grow—that is almost an impossibility. If "future" means development, then the Churches have no future in civilised centres. Certainly some signs of religion may remain, just as the human body carries indications of its animal structure. It was said of ancient Rome that two priests could not pass each other without a wink. Our clergy have not developed that habit yet, but the germ is there.

So, from archbishops downwards, an annual meeting is arranged, discussing the future of religion. There are many important things happening inside the churches, and the places in which religious leaders gather. From the outset, the leading Christians talk as though the future rests upon them, and the acceptance of God. Historically, there is nothing strange in that. Once upon a time God was called upon to protect his worshippers from too much rain, or not enough, from famine, from disease and war, etc. Now there seems to be little for God to do, and his work gets lighter and lighter.

It is true that when the great war came, the Churches arranged days for prayer. First for one day only, then for a week, and then, as nothing happened, God was set aside and man did his best without calling on the Deity.

Thus matters went on, so far as ordinary men and women were concerned. But if the people are leaving God alone, our clergy are not. You will never please a publican by putting on his windows: "All beer is poison."

The temperance fanatic will argue against drinking beer just as the priest argues against someone who finds no use in going to church. That seems quite fair play, and the parson and the publican are both getting their living—with this difference: that the priest promises terrible results if God is not treated in a particular way. And in this, he claims to give a quite peculiar and authoritative voice in the man's future, not in this world as much as in the next. And yet a priest does not appear to be better than ordinary folk. In economics, in art, in literature, in kindness to one's fellows, no one regards a priest as necessarily better than others.

And his claim to leadership is no more than any common person. But when it comes to religion, his claim is based entirely on a number of doctrines and dogmas. But even the clergy themselves are sometimes ashamed of them. If the clergy really believe the doctrines that lie at the foundations of their orders, the position would be more tolerable. But this is not the case. Many of the clergy, we are convinced, do not believe in the doctrines they are sometimes forced to

profess to believe. Any Church of England man may be "called," but the call comes from a friend rather than from God. The Nonconformist must depend upon his power as a speaker, or the agency of a friend. Civilisation has robbed the medicine-man of the real and only justification for his office, but it has not deprived the office of its emoluments and privileges. Actually, the clergy of all denominations have certain specified sermons to preach. Some preach them, others just discard them.

We remember Karl Marx's comment that "the established English Church will more readily tolerate an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on one 39th of its income." I think that this is one of the truest things that may be said about current Christianity; for while the Church lacks the strength to attract the right kind of man, it demoralises the best of those who enlist in its service. The main efforts of these go to evade genuine Christian doctrines, rather than to preach them. Nine-tenths of modern sermons consist of either a string of harmless, humanitarian platitudes or specious attempts to explain away doctrines that ought either to be boldly accepted or straightforwardly rejected. To anyone but a clergyman, it would appear quite plain that if there is not genuine historic foundation for the biblical stories, if God did not reveal himself to the Jews in a way that he did not reveal himself to other people; if the miracles of the Bible were only mistaken in the interpretation of natural events, then there remains no more reason for calling the Bible inspired than there is for claiming inspiration for any other volume. As it is, the lives of a large number of clergymen seem to be spent in an endeavour to discover how many tricks of speech and interpretation they can use. To-day, the educated layman is as much ashamed of some parts of genuine Christianity as is the thoughtful preacher, and no more believes in the miracles of the Bible than in the magic of the "Iliad."

People cannot be honest to each other so long as they are not honest to themselves. We talk of our progress and civilisation, and at the same time convert our lives into savagery with a few words. We know that the miracle of the birth of Jesus never occurred, and we may add that similar miracles to those of Jesus were in full operation long before Jesus was heard of. And this knowledge is not confined to Christian leaders, it is realised all over the civilised world. We know it. Our Christian leaders know it. What is bothering the clergy is that they know that we know it.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

I have no objection to a fool, although I do not like him to pose as a philosopher. And I like a philosopher, if he plays the fool, to play it with that intellectual distinction which an actor like Sir Henry Irving always gave to a part, no matter how badly he conceived the character or how completely he was unfitted to depict it.

C.C.

ANTIQUATED THEOLOGY AND MODERN THOUGHT

(Concluded from page 299.)

THE unknown writer of the Book of Job, while presenting an upright patriarch, brave in adversity and patient even with his pharisaical counsellors, yet fails to suggest any solution of the problem of unmerited suffering. The author of Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, dismisses the matter as of transient importance only. Man and beast alike are born, live and die, and there an end. For at last all "go into one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

Throughout Christendom Satan persistently appears as an evil spirit with his antecedents in Biblical lore. Much as Mara strove to tempt the Buddha, the New Testament Devil tried his tricks on Jesus. And as Dr. Tsanoff reminds us: "Medieval lore reflects a life infested with devils, in which the least relaxing of zeal might prove fatal to the saint, and sleep was a terrible hazard, for it exposed the godly soul unprotected to the tempter or temptress, in lewd dreams or unspeakably foul intercourse, the reports of which stain the pages of hagiography."

Lucifer has enthralled the imagination of at least three of the world's premier poets or four if Carducci's "Hymn to Satan" is included. Yet belief in a personal Devil has faded from the minds of the more enlightened laity, if faith and fear of his Satanic Majesty survive among fundamentalists, Salvationists and illiterate Roman Catholics. As Winwood Reade predicted, doubtless the day will come when the Hebrew and Christian mythologies will be treated as we now treat the tales of the gods and heroes of ancient Greece.

One profound philosopher concluded that we are but the pigmy instruments of the giant forces of Nature, while others have failed to find any rational purpose in life. Walt Whitman, indeed, envied the lower animals' placidity and seeming contentment:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained;
I stand and look at them all day long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition;
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins;
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

Leopardi and other pessimistic poets have deplored the pitiful vanity of existence in a dark and doleful world. Others have bitterly indicted an alleged creator and sustainer of human misery. Alfred de Vigny averred that inasmuch as the deity proved utterly indifferent to the prayer of the Son of Man in the Garden of Gethsemane then:—

With scorn and silence, will be my one reply
To God's eternal silence and to God's disdain.

With avowed reluctance, Professor Tsanoff cites James Thomson's defiant outburst in his "City of Dreadful Night":—

The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it has its being, God and Lord!
Creator of all woe and sin, abhorred,
Malignant and implacable! I vow
That not for all Thy power furled and unfurled,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men and such a world.

While welcoming the great discoveries and improvements of recent centuries, Tsanoff pleads for the preserva-

tion of the spiritual aspects of life. "They reckon ill who leave Me out." From long academic experience, he regrets the ever widening chasm between secular life and spirituality. But he would not have children indoctrinated but given accession to the ethical and religious masterpieces both of ancient and modern times. This would enable them to choose and think for themselves. At home and in the school the child should be permitted to select. When reading aloud from Genesis to his own family, a girl of eight, after listening to the story of creation recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, noticed its discrepancy with that of the second. "'Hold on Daddy' she said, 'isn't this a different story?' In the first account God made man after the plants and animals, but here it seems to be just the other way." This point, which marks one of the milestones in modern Biblical criticism—I did not teach it to my little daughter. She observed it herself."

T. F. PALMER

MIDSUMMER MADNESS

A LITTLE over 60 years ago, when Great Britain was witnessing the vigorous growth of freethought, the Rev. William Watkinson attempted, on a certain August evening, to persuade a London audience to remain on the straight and narrow path of Christian faith, by warning it of the harmful influence of scepticism on character.

By "scepticism" the lecturer meant non-belief in the Christian religion. Incredulity as regards other religions was laudible.

What Mr. Watkinson said he caused to be published in an enlarged printed form of 50,000 words, the length of half a modern novel, much too long for a lecture.

This publication, together with copies of the "Agnostic Journal" for several years, was by a private person put between covers, and in the year 1948 came into the hands of the writer at Ormesville. There the composite volume beguiled his tedium on those frequent occasions when the wind, waves and rain of glorious June seemed in their raging like the devil of Job, seeking whom they might devour.

The reverend gentleman rose to rhetorical heights. He reminded his audience, by a quotation from Pike's "History of Crime," that in the most progressive country on earth civilisation was but skin deep. Then he drew a picture of the lovely landscape of southern Italy. Roman poets and orators had celebrated its groves and gardens, its sunlit skies, its blue bays, its nightingales and its roses, and yet that garden of glory was, as it were, within the crater of a volcano. The rocky earth rang hollow when struck, a boiling spring issued close to a still lake, the plucking of a flower from a mass of perfumed foliage scorched the hand, columns of smoke and steam sprang from the heart of vineyards and orange-trees, the hiss of lava broke across the music of summer, and the scents of roses and sulphur intermingled. Out of the earth came bread and from under it fire. Beneath all the wealth of colour, minstrelsy and fragrance, raged a colossal furnace, and occasional earthquake and eruption showed that the fathomless abyss of flame and fury was still to be feared.

This, said the lecturer, was no inapt image of our civilisation. We ought freely to rejoice at triumphs over brutality and barbarism, but we should not disregard the many signs at our feet of the seething gulf below. Our civilisation was a paradise within a crater, and if the thin crust dividing us from raging depths were broken, the slow bright growths of generations could be swallowed in a trice.

Religion was that thin crust, which, according to the minister, prevented the bursting into life of the abominable love of the Sodomite, the bitter despotism of Orientalism, the voluptuousness of the Sybarite, the sickening cruelty of the Amphitheatre, the diabolism of the Renaissance, and the red wrath of the Reign of Terror. These were all potentially with us, and there was needed only a certain change in the atmosphere, such as the extinction of religious faith could not fail to effect, to cause the up-surfing of the ghastliest vices which have ever dishonoured our nature. Then would again be unfolded those most tragic scenes which shock us in the pages of history.

Well, vice, despotism, and bloody destruction, have not only accompanied Christianity in the course of its history, but they have been practised by sincere believers in it. Indeed, tyranny and persecution have been and still are the instruments of specifically Christian policy.

The romancing lecturer then brought forward examples from foremost modern men who had rejected Christianity, just to show how defective their characters had become.

He began with Goethe, telling us the stories of his loves, just as if many a Bohemian Christian had not lived a similarly wayward life.

Then he picked upon old Carlyle, who, unlike good wine, grew sourer with age. Leslie Stephen had written of one who was pre-eminent in telling his fellow-creatures that they were unmitigated fools and liars. Carlyle was worse. His mouth was full of cursing, his arrogance, pride and intellectual tyranny indescribable, his ingratitude extraordinary. His conduct to his wife for sustained selfishness and bitterness was without parallel, so that his married life was one terrible study in black, and he was the wretched artist altogether responsible for the picture.

All these wretched traits of Carlyle were the effect of scepticism.

The moral mentor now turned his attention to George Eliot, for her life once again demonstrated the ethical importance of mere philosophy. She possessed large knowledge, a powerful reasoning faculty, an imperial imagination, a philosophic temper, and a passion for peace, yet all were unavailing when the moment of temptation came, for then she broke that law which a woman ought to sustain with special jealousy—the marriage law.

Then there was George Lewes, her companion in sin, who, for his own selfish pleasure was ready to drag a pure woman's name through the dirt.

We are not surprised now to learn of Mary Wollstonecraft, who, carrying out her theory that marriage should not bind after the death of love, cohabited in unhallowed union with a gentleman named Lulay. Shelley's desertion of his wife Harriett, is, of course, not left out of the picture.

Then we have the portrait of James Mill. He is constitutionally irritable, and of a never-mastered unamiability, the most impatient of men, whose entry into a room where his family was assembled operated as an immediate damper.

John Stuart Mill is described as of a nature distorted by atheistic culture, and as one affecting to repudiate Christianity on moral grounds. He, it is stated, entered the home of Mr. Taylor, and came between him and his wife, visited the latter almost daily, was her companion in the absence of her husband, and even travelled on the Continent with her. More cruel, inexcusable conduct than that of the infidel philosopher it was impossible to conceive—nothing was sacred that came in the way of his selfish pleasure.

The preacher should have finished with his examples there, but, although he thought J. S. Mill more cruel than Nero or Torquemada, he continued to paint the faults of unbelievers with scarlet. The blind vanity, despotic arrogance, presumptuous pride, petty resentment, indiscriminating and bitter censoriousness of Harriet Martineau again defeated the power of his imagination.

Auguste Comte and the bad-tempered Schopenhauer completed his list.

Had the reverend minister been himself of a judicial temper, he would have perceived that some of the faults of unbelievers which he so lovingly pointed out, had no dependence on belief, but sprang rather from dyspepsia, overwork, and possibly from the ostracism which was the lot of the sceptic, when there was no worse one.

As for the alleged faults concerning extra-marital sexual relations, as a clergyman he could not, of course, regard it as other than blameworthy. Nevertheless, he might have called to mind the thieving, swindling, bribery, and the purchasing of profitable sinecures under government. Bribery had been indulged in freely by that Christian monarch George III, and those who then were bribed were the Christian gentlemen who represented in Parliament a Christian populace.

After all, there were worse things even in Mr. Watkinson's time than unhallowed love, or even disorderly amours.

There were crying social injustices, and there was the habit of scurrility, a scurrility which baffled a certain lecturer's imagination.

J. G. LUPTON.

CALLING ALL CATHOLICS !

Here is news to cheer the Nation—
By a special Dispensation
Catholics, when feeling hollow
In their in'ards, now may swallow
Orange Juice or Lemonade,
With an egg that's newly-laid
And lightly boiled, when they awake—
And before Communion take.

O what joy and jubilation!
No more ex-communication!
With uplifted hearts then sing
Praises to the Heavenly King!
No more aching, empty spaces—
Just expand an inch your braces.
"All Hail the Pope!" And make it lusty—
Unless, of course, your egg is *musty*!

Aye. Methinks this mastication
May give rise to some inflation
Of the tummy. Who can tell
If an egg will mix too well
When partaking of the blood
And the body of the Lord?
Just a passing thought, my masters—
Heed it, lest there come disasters!

Great would be our consternation
If this extra, tasty ration
Should give rise to windy sounds
When the mixture goes its rounds!
Even *cannibals*, I question,
Are not free from indigestion.
Or will each priest, beneath his garb,
Conceal some tablets of—*bi-carb*?

W. H. WOOD.

ACID DROPS

Cardinal Griffin, addressing the fatuous Walsingham pilgrims the other week, said that "prayer and penance is the answer to the materialism with which we are surrounded to-day." It is rather curious that for centuries the cry to all believers has been "Repent!" and the more they prayed and repented the more materialism has spread. It is now surrounding the faithful and still the cry is to "Repent!" Actually, the Cardinal's "materialism" is not so much the scientific materialism which most men of science profess, but the political materialism known more or less as "communism"—the Cardinal's great difficulty here being that so many true believers are socialists or communists. We wonder whether he really believes that "prayer and penance" can do the trick?

In the past, when miracles occurred at Lourdes almost every day, hundreds of thousands of sick pilgrims made the journey to the shrine every year. Nowadays miracles have to be checked and documented and the fall in their number has been phenomenal. Catholics—that is, the Catholics in charge—are always ready to explain when things go a little wrong, and the other day they had a complete answer to a number of surprised reporters and camera men assigned to give the story of the first post-war Liverpool pilgrimage to Lourdes. The newspaper men found 500 fit pilgrims and only 24 with minor ailments. "The fact is," they were told, "Lourdes is primarily a shrine of prayer." There may be miracles of course—but don't expect them; you can never tell what "our Lady" is going to do. Perhaps the real reason is that the "controls" have been too much for miracles and "Our Lady" has given them up in disgust. Or has she?

Field-Marshal Montgomery, who is very religious and appears to be very angry why other people are not, spoke the other day on the "Youth of Britain," and said that "Youth to-day was suffering from a sense of disillusionment and lack of faith which amounted to disease." We might just as well say that the Field-Marshal's "faith" appears to us to be also a "disease"—and a very stupid one at that. But the interesting thing about this is that he had to admit that "the youth of Britain was splendid material; the bravery of our soldiers was ample evidence of that." Thus the young men of Britain, though without faith, proved courageous, enterprising and self-sacrificing—and without these qualities F.M. Montgomery would not have been the victor in the war. What more does he want?

It is remarkable how religion can see victory in defeat; it reminds us of some of the War dispatches. For example, the Rev. J. R. Peacock agrees with Mr. Rowntree that church attendances have declined in the last 50 years, but pretends that this is all to the good, and even finds comfort in the fact that the B.B.C. broadcasts full religious services, and addresses by "experts." The fact that people would rather "listen to a service over the radio" is taken as proof that people are more religious now than ever they were. The Rev. Mr. Peacock shows how the churches can be filled, and mentions that the Methodists have over 4,000 Youth Clubs. He also thinks that Women's Meetings, Boys Brigades, etc., should be encouraged. To suggest however, that these various movements are religious because they are attached to a church is just nonsense.

One of those unaccountable mysteries which so often baffle the erudite heads of the Church occurred the other day. An Ipswich invalid, paralysed in both legs, was making a wheelchair pilgrimage to Lourdes when he collapsed by the roadside and died later in hospital. No one would have any difficulty in understanding the sad event if it had been an Atheist on his way to a Freethought meeting dying on the road—it would have been explained as the case of a merciful and loving God refusing to allow His Name to be blasphemed. But an all-believing Catholic on his way to Lourdes! . . . Truly the ways of Providence are inscrutable!

England has at last been honoured by a statue of "our Lady of Fatima," and all the more so because the statue has been "blessed" by the Bishop of Leira. It was carried in procession through Scarborough a while ago, and will head many other processions before being permanently installed here. One can understand ignorant and superstitious Portuguese peasants believing anything, but it is difficult to understand how English people can fall for such a piece of religious balderdash. Or perhaps one can understand it if we take into account the terrible influence for the worse religion always has on believers. Are we wrong in asserting that the work of Freethought is as vital and as necessary as ever?

At the first "mass healing" demonstration in London, the Very Reverend J. Beswarick demonstrated on Mrs. Williams, who had been partially blind for several years. The Rev. Mr. Beswarick "touched her eyes, rubbed the back of her neck" and—according to Mrs. Williams, all she "got was a headache". The credulity and gullibility of people used to have the same effect on us, but we are no longer surprised. About 200 blind and crippled people were treated at the demonstration, and despite the 100 "healers" and suitable religious atmosphere, the "Sunday Pictorial" reports in a short and succinct sentence, "We saw no miracles of healing."

We feel constrained to ask has the "power" of prayer diminished, and can "Faith (no longer) move mountains," for the Rev. H. Rokeby of Norfolk has for the last two years held a special service with a special prayer for the exiled villagers of the Stanford Battle Area to have their land returned. The prayer was dropped at the last service, for the hearts of the Government were hardened (like that of Pharaoh), and the land will not be released. Rev. H. Rokeby suggests that the villagers continue with the prayer "in private," but whether that will succeed where the mass attack failed remains to be seen.

Princess Margaret addressed the leaders of the Church of England Youth Council, the other day, and she informed the Council that "many people were put off (religion) for fear of being laughed at," and to be ashamed of their religion wronged both the Founder and Christianity. Our Princess does not seem to realise that it is precisely because people are ashamed of their religion that the grosser practices of religion have been discarded. The people's better feelings were a contributory factor in the abolition of the Slave trade, Witch trials, Autos-da-fé, etc. We repeat that the individual is always better than his religion.

"THE FREETHINKER"

REFORMATION

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 6s. from S. J. Barker, Natal, to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

Owing to the exigencies of publishing over the holidays, we regret having an 8-page paper this week. We shall follow with two 12-page issues.

During the absence of the General Secretary N.S.S. on a short vacation, only matters of urgent importance will be dealt with.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

Readers may be interested in the following names quoted by G. Seldes in his work "1,000 Americans," who fully endorsed and supported financially the Oxford Group, and Dr. Buchman: Heinrich Himmler, Rudolph Hess, Henry Ford, who sent his own physician in his own private plane to Dr. Buchman when he was ill, William Randolph Hearst, who in 1930 published signed propaganda articles by Hitler, Goebbels, and Mussolini, Harvey Firestone (Rubber Baron), Harry Chandler of the Los Angeles Times, noted as the "most violent enemy of labour in the American Press." George Eastman (Kodak etc.), Paul Shoup, and Elmer Howlett (both enemies of labour).

A message to be read in every Methodist Church in the country will warn Methodists that spiritual unity is one of the grounds for a successful and happy marriage, and that happiness cannot be achieved in the marriage of Protestant with Catholic without sacrifice of vital principles and faith. This is cock-eyed reasoning, but quite in line with Christian tradition. If spiritual unity is necessary for a happy marriage, that unity can only come from two with the same sectarian belief, the sacrifice of vital principles and faith between Catholic and Protestant would not be spiritual unity—it would be merely a mongrel and unhealthy compromise.

We are in good company (see this column July 11). Lord Horder complains in the British Medical Journal, that "No Government has had the courage to translate the findings into action" when referring to the Ministry of Health report on the increase of V.D. Lord Horder, however, does not mention that the greatest force against the dissemination of the knowledge of prevention and cure is religious bigotry and intolerance, and that all governments have trimmed their sails to religious pressure.

The Rev. E. F. Woodward, vicar of St. Mary and St. Chad, Longton, condemns cremation as pagan and un-Christian. His objection is quite silly but eminently Christian. To reduce a dead body to ashes in a crematorium offends the Vicar because it is un-Christian, but he can tolerate the idea of bodies burning for eternity in Hell because it is Christian. A twisted intellect seems to be a certain symptom of Christian belief.

AS a result of the protracted agony of Feudalism, aristocracy in Europe broke up and the peasants, uprooted in their turn, were driven into desperate riots. Trading Capital, having taken root between the 14th and 16th centuries, offered unlimited expansion and was an incentive to greedy profiteering. Socially, aristocracy, so far, had been necessary as the protector of the tillers of the soil; now the latter wanted protection against their erstwhile protectors themselves.

In the economical respect, the feudal nobility was a heavy brake on the historical development; the lower aristocracy turned robbers and highwaymen.*

Everybody was drawn into the whirlpool which endlessly multiplied the existing antagonisms; yet this enabled absolute régimes to establish themselves on top of those opposing interests by playing up everybody against everybody. And at a time when the Church regulated all notions and ideas, it was no mere chance that all disputes—social and economic—were fought out under the cloak of religion. It was during the French Revolution that, for the first time in history, the opponents dropped that religious façade and carried profane banners proclaiming their purely mundane aims. Since then Christendom had become incapable of serving as the field-badge to any progressive movement.

Prior, nobody could have the faintest doubts about Christianity being the sole truth. Still, the fact could not be denied that, for all that, mankind was continuously beset with calamities and evils. How could this seeming contradiction be explained? Quite obviously the reason was that mankind, including the clergy up to the Pope himself, had departed from the creed in its original purity, otherwise all and everything ought to be right. Least of all the various reformers ever intended to oppose the medieval Church by something else, they merely meant to restore the doctrine to what it supposedly had been like. If the world could be "reformed" into going back to the genuine simplicity of Christ, they maintained, order and peace would reign on earth.

Yet conditions had profoundly changed since then, so nobody was able to turn the wheel of progress back and reinstate Classical slavery. Reformed Christendom could be nothing else but the religious cloak of a new class—the burghers and merchants—and it was this exactly that caused the rift with Rome as the ideological centre of reaction and feudal conservatism.

Martin Luther himself was greatly alarmed when he noticed the effects of his doctrines, and was not hesitant, therefore, to back the princes against the peasant insurgents. With Germany torn up into numerous tiny principalities, there was no social community which could grasp a great and unifying idea, a clear-cut progressive aim such as there was in the—economically far more advanced—West.

The Church itself had readily embraced the new Gospel of Money: Simony, Peter's Pence and the selling of indulgences were the chief means of bleeding Europe (firstly backward Germany). The countries further economically developed were far less exposed to the insatiable greed of the clergy—so why should they break away from Rome? The more funds accumulated in Rome and the more the production of goods increased in Italy, the more the Italian population stuck to Popedom, the rule of which was tantamount to ruling Christianity at large.

* Tory is derived from Irish *toraidhe*=persecutor, someone living on looting.

Nor did France or Spain want to secede from Rome; contributions to the Pope were subject to the permission granted by the absolute Monarch at whose disposal Rome placed that cheap and useful police machinery, the Inquisition. Far from being exploited by Rome, these Empires used the Pope as their tool, hence they did not dream of breaking away from him.

Barred from unrestrictedly looting those countries which were at that time developed highest both economically and culturally—the popish leeches diverted to overflowing and bleeding poor Germany. Before long, even the ruling castes were upset about the immense riches that, instead of contributing towards the expenses of their aristocratic display, year after year were diverted to the Pope's household.

The unspeakable misery of the German peasantry was at breaking-point, accentuated through the transformation into monetary economy of the former natural economy; through being separated locally, their rebellions always remained restricted locally and were quickly drowned in blood.

Prior to the discovery of the New World, trade was concentrated along the sea routes of the Mediterranean basin; thus the countries to the west and north of Spain-Portugal were in a dead area. It was in exactly those countries that the Reformation actually took root. The economic antagonism presented itself under the veil of a religious antagonism. Yet, whilst Lutherism was the ideological expression of the most backward North—economically least penetrated by Italian trade—Calvinism with its strict discipline became the battle-cry of the Huguenot merchants against absolutism and of the Netherland towns against Spanish oppression.

PERCY G. ROY.

SIN AND RED HERRINGS

MR. YATES writes powerfully, but his arguments might be more convincing if he kept to the subject at issue. The question which I originally raised and answered in the affirmative was "Does moral goodness necessarily entail moral evil?" In place of this, however, Mr. Yates (at least, in the main part of his article in "The Freethinker" of May 30) has substituted an entirely different question which he evidently thinks he can answer better, namely, "What is the origin of moral evil?" Fascinating and difficult though this problem is, I must regretfully decline to deal with it now, since it is not relevant to the present discussion. I cannot resist stating, however, that the atheistic explanation of the origin of sin is exposed to at least as many difficulties as the theistic one, in my view. Unfortunately, to outline these would be out of place now, but subject to the courtesy of the editor of "The Freethinker" and to the patience of his readers, I may do so at some future date.

Having recommitted Mr. Yates' red herring to the waters, let us return to the present problem which is concerned with the fact of sin and not with its origin. I do wish Mr. Yates would refrain from trying to tell me what I believe. Though I quoted one statement from Isaiah with approval, it does not thereby follow that I believe in all, or even most, of the reputed actions of that somewhat unpleasant character, the God of the Old Testament. However, a code of laws, whether human or divine, is not superfluous from my standpoint, for the simple reason that if there were no such regulations, the evil in the world would soon outweigh the good; and a surplus of sin is as dangerous as a surplus of virtue. We do not need to make laws prohibiting excessive goodness,

since the temptation to err in this direction is negligible. We may credit the Almighty with the intelligence of having seen this—hence the Decalogue (assuming, for the sake of argument, that it is historical) and the succession of inspired prophets of righteousness continued even to this day. The fact of goodness is as surely a divine law as the fact of sin. Human nature is such that sin can only be kept within its proper bounds if consistently denounced. That is why we very properly do not "abrogate every law that prohibits or punishes it."

Crime is not justified either by its immediate or its ultimate results but simply by the fact of its indispensability. If no crimes were committed, no virtuous actions could be performed, for the word virtue would then be emptied of all meaningful content. This conclusion may horrify both Mr. Yates and his hypothetical victim of assault and battery, but neither of them can escape from the brutal reality of the situation. Surely it is abundantly clear that such terms as virtue, goodness, integrity and so on, have significance for us only because we are familiar with their opposites. How can Mr. Yates deny that the statement "Mr. A is a good man," would have no sense if we did not also have experience of Mr. B, who is a bad man? I would repeat, however, that this does not mean we must not continue to bring criminals to justice and condemn their evil deeds. Abolish anti-vice laws and goodness and decency will be submerged. But the same fate would overtake them were crime unknown.

Up to now, Mr. Yates has, with great energy, refuted beliefs which I do not hold, and introduced subjects irrelevant to the main discussion. But he has as yet completely failed to show that sin is unnecessary. He has dealt with none of the contentions of my original article to the effect that the disappearance of sin would sound the death-knell of all great literature, drama and polemics (including those of atheists against the sins of theists). Will he please now proceed to remedy this omission and show precisely how I err in imagining this life without sin would be little better than an animal existence?

So far from effecting a *reductio ad absurdum* of my position, Mr. Yates has not even begun to attack it.

(Rev.) JOHN L. BROOM.

EARLY ENGLISH FREETHOUGHT

III.

THERE is abundant evidence of the extent to which the Lollard heresy took hold of popular thought. It is on record that in the parts where Wiclif had preached you could hardly meet two men without one of them being a Lollard. Consequences from which Wiclif shrank were boldly drawn by his disciples. One Wiltshire gentleman, who had received the sacramental bread from his parish priest, took it home and lunched upon it with wine, oysters, and onions; others put images of the saints in their cellars. "They called," says Knighton, "our Lady of Lincoln and our Lady of Walsingham the Witch of Lincoln and the Witch of Walsingham." "Good Queen Anne of Bohemia," the wife of Richard II, was favourably disposed to the new views, and through the instrumentality of her courtiers the works of Wiclif had great influence in producing the Hussite reformation in Bohemia. In 1394 the Lollards presented a bold petition to Parliament. It set forth that the celibacy of the clergy produced moral disorder, and that the belief in transubstantiation caused idolatry. It protested against

exorcisms and the benedictions of lifeless objects, against masses for the dead, pilgrimages, auricular confessions, and against the holding of secular offices by priests. To these points was added a protest against war as contrary to the spirit of the gospel, probably incited by the recent preaching of a crusade against the antipope by Hereford, Bishop of Norwich, who, in 1389, had vowed to burn or behead any heretic who dared to preach in his diocese. The touch of Socialism which always appeared in Lollardry was represented in this notable petition by a protest against needless trades exercised only for the satisfaction of luxury. His spiritual advisers induced Richard II, whose two good qualities, according to the monkish chroniclers, were his love for religion and his regard for the clergy, to consider this petition dangerous. An oath of abjuration was exacted from the chief men of the Lollard party. Not satisfied with this when Bolingbroke usurped the throne with the assistance of Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Scroop, Archbishop of York, the clergy to whom he was much indebted for his position induced him to pass the infamous statute (2 Henry IV, 15) generally known as *de heretico comburendo*. This statute sets out by declaring that certain false and perverse people, damnably thinking, did preach and teach divers new doctrines and wicked erroneous teaching, contrary to the determination of Holy Church. "And of such sect and wicked doctrine and opinions they make unlawful conventicles and confederacies, they hold and exercise schools, they make and write books, they do wickedly instruct and inform people." Wherefore it orders that all heretical books are to be given up within forty days before the diocesans, who are empowered to arrest all heretics. If they refuse to abjure their errors, or, after abjuration, relapse, then the mayor and sheriffs shall, in some high place, burn them before the people, that such punishment shall strike fear in the minds of others.

The Rev. J. H. Blunt, in his *History of the Reformation*, 1882, declares that by this law "the English Parliament, not the English Church, introduced into our country the practice of burning heretics"—an assertion unwarranted by fact. The law, it will be noticed, leaves the determination of heresy to the bishop, but the execution of the heretic to the civil power, thus seeking to divide the responsibility. But it was not grounded upon any petition from Parliament, but on one from Convocation. Both the petition and the statute were in Latin, then beginning to be unusual. It was afterwards styled by the Commons, who petitioned to have it modified, "the statute made in the second year of your Majesty's reign at the instance of the prelates and the clergy of your kingdom," which, says Hallam (*Middle Ages*, chap. viii, pt. 3, p. 89), "affords a presumption that it had no regular assent of Parliament." Several historians are of this opinion. At any rate, the Church cannot be exonerated in the matter since the statute was passed upon the petition of Convocation. The Rev. Dr. John Cunningham Geikie, in his work on *The English Reformation* (p. 56), says: "The unutterable shame of such a law rests on the clergy of those days, and on Henry, their tool, alone."

J. M. WHEELER.

"GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD"

A Prayer for To-day

O Lord, beholding from above
The sufferings of Thy stricken world,
Send us some token of Thy love
To keep the flag of faith unfurled.
Thou, who turned water into wine,
And fed the multitudes upon the shore,
Who blessed the loaves and fish with heavenly sign,
Can surely do what Thou hast done before.
So send Thy bounteous gentle rain
Where drought has burned the fields of wheat,
That shrivelled crops may stronger grow again—
And little children may not starve, but eat.
And, if it please Thee, where the floods have drowned
The maize and barley, send the good warm sun;
And if this prayer should fall on barren ground—
Give us the strength to say, "Thy Will, be done."
B. FRANCIS-JUPP.

CORRESPONDENCE

CONCERTS AND RELIGIOUS MUSIC

SIR,—Like Mr. Colebrooke, I also have noticed how religious music is being "slipped" into secular concerts—though, perhaps unlike him, I have noticed this taking place for many years. But I am not quite clear what Mr. Colebrooke is complaining about. Does he want me, because I'm a Freethinker, to object to Schubert's "Ave Maria," or the beautiful German Christmas carol, "Heilige Nacht"? Have I never to hear such music? Does Mr. Colebrooke also object to religious pictures being slipped into our modern "secular" art exhibitions?
H. CUTNER.

OBITUARY

GEORGE WILLIAM VASPER

We regret to record the death of G. W. Vasper at the early age of 48. A man of unusual personality and charm, his friends and fellow-workmen will mourn the loss of a stimulating and delightful companion. For some years he worked in the shipbuilding yards of Messrs. Cammell Laird's, Birkenhead. He leaves an aged mother, wife and two sons—one adopted. Acting on his wishes a secular service was carried out by Mr. Walter Parry, who paid Mr. Vasper a fine tribute.

A.M.P.

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.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, JAMES HART, G. WOOD, E. PAGE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

Great Harwood.—Saturday, August 7, 6.30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Leyland (Market).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Mersayside Branch N.S.S. (on Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. G. THOMPSON, W. PARRY, W. C. PARRY.

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

Preston (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Whitewellbottom (Rossendale).—Friday, August 6, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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HISTORY

- (1) History is a word which covers three different meanings in relation to world events.
- (2) It seems originally to have meant an interpretation of the sequence of these events.
- (3) It soon came to mean a record of this sequence, i.e., recorded history in the usual meaning of the term.
- (4) In modern times it has come to include the events themselves, e.g., we are living (making) history now.
- (5) Here only the second of these three aspects need be considered, i.e., history as recorded in some way.
- (6) The investigation and consideration of recorded history can also be divided into three categories.
- (7) Firstly, history can be investigated from evidence of the past which still exists in the present.
- (8) Remains of ancient towns, churches, and even middens are definite evidence of how people lived.
- (9) Ancient coins are evidence that they had a monetary system; arms and equipment show a military system.
- (10) Here this aspect will be called Archaeological evidence and it can be dated fairly accurately.
- (11) Secondly, in ancient times history was entirely, or very greatly, confined to oral tradition.
- (12) Before the age of writing, tradition was the only method of passing on oral historical records.
- (13) For thousands of years before the general use of printing it continued to be an easier method than writing.
- (14) Tradition was transmitted in legends, in folk-lore and music and was generally anonymous.
- (15) Here this aspect will be called Traditional evidence and is obviously the least reliable of the three.
- (16) Thirdly, there are pictures, inscriptions and writings which, when collocated, form a record.
- (17) The drawings in caves of early men are, so far, evidence of their art and conditions of life.
- (18) The hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians and others give an account of some aspects of their lives.
- (19) With the introduction of writing world events were recorded increasingly; this was much more so with the advent of printing.
- (20) Here this aspect will be called Documentary evidence and will be the one mostly referred to.
- (21) There is a third classification of history which has to be allowed for in addition to those already mentioned.
- (22) Anyone with an appreciable knowledge of history will realise that its methods have developed.
- (23) History as a careful and accurate record of actual objective events is comparatively modern.
- (24) In quite modern times the accounts of these events are recorded and cross-checked endlessly.
- (25) This meticulous collocation of history is a modern method which may be termed Factual History.
- (26) Previous to about the last three centuries the purposes and objects of historians were different.
- (27) The purpose of ancient history was to present a picture, not to give an accurate account of events.
- (28) Generally this picture was arranged around a person whose adulation was its principal purpose.
- (29) Ancient history was mainly a species of hero worship; not a narrative of objective events.
- (30) This aspect will here be termed Fictional History in that it is partly or wholly fiction.
- (31) Finally, there is that aspect of history which is increasingly stressed by contemporary historians.
- (32) It is maintained that history is not merely a statement and record of objective events.
- (33) It is contended that every real historian is not only a recorder but an interpreter of history.
- (34) This may be true, indeed to some extent inevitable, but interpretation is personal exegesis only.
- (35) This aspect of the subject; this attempt to explain events; will here be called Interpretative History.
- (36) What should be realised is that history is a very variegated subject and partakes of all these characteristics.
- (37) Modern history is so repeatedly reported and cross-checked and documented that it may be classed as factual history.
- (38) But the further one goes back in time the less this is so; especially before the era of printing.
- (39) The world has many detailed accounts of recent wars; less of the Norman conquest; and so on.
- (40) Generally it may be said that factual history decreases and fictional history increases in retrospect.
- (41) It is not necessary to attribute motives of accuracy to modern historians and deception to ancient ones.
- (42) What should be realised is that their motives and purposes were different, even though both were sincere.
- (43) The purpose of ancient historians was not to distort history but to describe it artistically.
- (44) Many modern historical records would have seemed to them tedious; and this they often are.
- (45) But White Papers and Hansard do summarise parliamentary statistics and speeches.
- (46) A scientific student of history first endeavours to separate facts from fiction in records.
- (47) Secondly, he realises that the further back he goes in time the more unreliable are the data.
- (48) Thirdly, he recognises that interpreters are only commentators with personal viewpoints.
- (49) Fourthly, he will know that ultimately he must distinguish things and thread his own way.
- (50) Fifthly, he is not a scientific student if he allows his own prejudices to bias his judgments.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

BURNING WITCHES

Mr. Tom Johnston, Secretary for Scotland, quotes the following from "Justiciary Records" of the Scottish History Society in his "History of the Working Classes of Scotland":—

"Silently the nightmare rose from Scotland: by the year 1702 we can only find one witch being burnt in Edinburgh; and the last burning seems to have taken place at Dornoch, in 1722, where, on a bitterly cold day, a poor old grandmother was brought out to the faggots; the arrangements were scarcely complete, and, as a special favour, the poor old body was allowed to sit beside the fire which was to consume her while the other instruments of her death were being prepared."

It appears that during the process of burning, Almighty God was present in Person, but it is not reported that He took any active part in the proceedings.—A. H.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 3s.; postage 2½d. Ninth edition.
THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.