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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Under New Management

It is quite common to find over a shop window a notice "This establishment is now under entirely new management." The notice casts a slur on the previous managers and a promise that the goods offered, and prices asked, will be altogether better than before. A confession of past faults may be accepted. But the change is not necessarily for the better. The new goods—with charges—may be no better than the previous dealings.

Differently worded, but the same in substance, this notice is now being conspicuously shown by many of our leaders who offer better religious qualities than they have given before. Generally they admit that business has been bad, but they hasten to say that is because the public taste has not been consulted, and the wrong kind of goods have been kept in stock, hence the announcement that certain branch establishments of the soul-saving business have had their stock overhauled and much of it has been rejected as unsuitable and unsaleable, and a new management has been installed. Quite a large assortment of new goods are now kept on hand; if people do not see what they require they are invited to ask for it, and they hope to bring back old friends and a feeling that old customers will renew their dealings. Unfortunately, many of the old customers have transferred their patronage elsewhere, while others have learned to use quite another type of goods. So it may happen that the new management will find itself drifting towards bankruptcy instead of arriving at ease and gladness.

It is not, however, quite as easy for the Christian churches to revise their methods and to regain their followers as for an ordinary business concern. In business, supply depends upon demand, and the man who opens a business depends upon the existence of a particular taste for success. He has not to create, but mainly to satisfy. In religious matters things are the reverse. It is not the taste that creates the supply, but the supply that develops the taste. Left alone, the clergy are constantly lamenting that man's "spiritual" nature atrophies. He loses all interest in, and for, the goods supplied by these "spiritual" salesmen, and like the reformed smoker or drinker, often becomes quite intolerant of their presence, and while the appetite for particular wares needs constant stimulation, the wares actually do not admit of very great change. The labels may be changed on the articles, but that is about all that ever takes place, or can take place.

From the Freethinkers' point of view the attempts of the Christian Churches to revise their teachings and to reconstruct their doctrines is a pleasing spectacle. It is an admission that Christianity is unfitted to the times, and also that Freethought criticism contained at least some truth. And it is possible that the Freethought attack evidenced much more wisdom and justice than Christians are at present prepared to admit. Still, it

is pleasing to find *advanced* Christians taking up with the more elementary of Freethought teachings, even though these are propounded with an air of reckless heroism calculated to make one smile. To find Christians recoiling from the charge of orthodoxy as people once did from that of Atheism is strong evidence of the change that has come over a part of the religious world. New theologians look down upon other believers with all the conscious superiority of a fourth standard schoolboy watching an infant's first attempts at pothooks and hangers. Baptists and Methodists protest that the time has gone by for demanding a literal acceptance of time-honoured doctrines. Prominent members of the Church of England are emphatic in their assertion of the necessity of reconstructing Christian beliefs. From one quarter or another nearly every specifically Christian teaching is being either rejected or modified almost beyond recognition. Very soon the only people who will be receiving the pure light of orthodox Christian teaching will be those who provide the material on which our missionary societies operate.

Let us do the clergy justice. They are not in any great hurry to revise Christian teaching. It is not they who discovered the falsities of Christian teaching—at least, it is not they who made these falsities public. The most "progressive" of them say plainly that the reason for revising Christian teaching is that people are not as satisfied with the sacred books as they were. If the people were satisfied, the doctrines might be as false as hell, the clergy would go on teaching them. It is not a question of what is true, it is a question of what is safe or what is profitable. And where religion is concerned, a lie is turned into a pure truth. The main feature of all these annual gatherings of the churches, is, substantially, not the pursuit of truth, but how much of the old worn-out superstitions will the people retain. Some of the truth *must* be told, but that will still be very far from a plain truth. To-day the leading clergy are striving to give—as they say—the truth, what they *do* is to say to their brother preachers:—

Brother priests, science is abroad, and criticism is keen. We have tried hard to crush our enemies, and we have failed. We have tried to ignore the enemy, and failed. Let us take the bull by the horns, let us suggest that we welcome the developments of science and self independence. Let us look as though we welcome the criticisms of science and whatever will bring a better understanding of all religions. Let us also bring all believers into one body of worshippers. Let us live together. It is the only thing that will save us dying separately.

The uninitiated may well inquire, why is it necessary to revise Christian teachings? The correction of Christian teaching must come from secular science, secular ethics, and secular sociology. There is positively no other direction from which correction can come—revelation and inspiration are out of fashion. And if we have to learn

what is the truth from secular science, why waste time in getting exactly the same things served up again as religious doctrines? The only sensible reason for revising and for retaining a religion would be that it contained some important thing that could not be discovered elsewhere. But to revise Christian beliefs with the avowed object of making them square with scientific teaching, places us in the ridiculous position of undervaluing scientific men for their admittedly valuable work, and over-pay religious preachers for offering to the public a distorted presentation of the truth. We owe nothing to them for their existence, and it must not be overlooked that it is the clergy alone who are vitally interested in a *re*-interpretation of Christian beliefs. Their existence as an "order," depends upon the people having truths, not dressed in religious garb. The laymen who take part in the movements are simply pulling chestnuts out of the fire for the benefit of their "spiritual masters."

One would be more impressed if the clergy had ever tried honestly to discover what the people had ever gained from the elaborations of religious faith. But none of them ever seriously do that. None assert that jibe. The consequences would be too disastrous. With the revisers it is not a question of what the creeds mean, but what they may be made to mean, and of course, the human mind is ingenious enough to make them mean anything, just as it was once the fashion to make the "day" of Genesis mean a geological period, or a chance expression in the Psalms teach the whole of Copernicus's astronomy. Apparently it never dawns upon these reconstructors that there is scarcely an ancient legend that could not be converted into forecasts of exact science. Still less is it recognised that social and ethical ideals are no more miraculously created than are forms of life. Human ideals are born of the surroundings amid which men and women have their being, and it is as ridiculous looking for modern theories of life among primitive peoples as it would be to search for a Beethoven or a Wagner among the inhabitants of Central Africa.

"The "new management" with which we started is still with us looking for more, but gaining little, rooted as we are to the past, with our aims often reaching to the future. And yet the area of superstition gets smaller and smaller. The firm's premises may be redecorated and the stock refurnished but the custom is drifting in other directions. Tastes are altering, and other commodities are in demand. The famous old firm is left with a stock of unsaleable goods on hand, watching its former customers hastening to patronise a more up-to-date establishment.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

EVERY time a major political crisis occurs some Minister of Religion immediately pops up like a Jack-in-the-box with his favourite bogey—the Second Coming of Christ.

Pastor C. H. Duncombe of the Elin Church runs true to form and has lost no time in using the present political crisis as an excuse for a little horrific scare-mongering. Beware, ye sinners, lest ye be found wanting!

It is, surely a very poor advertisement for the firm of Christianity and Co., that it is only by the use of threats and the weapon of fear that its customers are prevented from dealing elsewhere.

Let us examine Pastor Duncombe's recent article in the "Elin Evangel." He gets off to a flying start by referring to some American scientists in Hawaii who

have forecast a cycle of volcanic eruptions and tidal waves to take place in the next five years. A very harmless observation and one to which no ordinary person would give a second thought. But Pastor Duncombe, evidently, is no ordinary person, for in it he sees the *crack of doom!*

It is quite common knowledge that scientists frequently forecast eruptive phenomena—sometimes they happen and sometimes they don't. Meteorologists, who predict the daily weather, are by no means infallible and their forecasts are wrong quite as often as they are right. However, the good Pastor is no doubt always on the look-out for signs and omens suited to his purpose, which is to put the fear of God into all of us miserable sinners. And what better than a few tasty eruptions or earthquakes? To him they portend, without question, the Second Coming of Christ, and he asserts this as a *positive truth.*

Anyone is entitled to predict or to believe anything he likes—but he is *not* entitled to tell people that it is the *truth.* Few followers of religion can be called highly intellectual, the great majority are only too ready to believe that anything uttered by a Christian minister is God-inspired truth. Their religion forces them to such a belief under threats of eternal damnation and hell fire! If they were capable of using what little intelligence they possess they would know that such predictions and assertions have been made by preachers time and time again—and still the Second Coming is not forthcoming! Perhaps there is a technical hitch somewhere.

This time, of course, Stalin takes the role of that Master of Wickedness, the Antichrist. In the first world war it was Kaiser Bill. In 1914 ministers shouted from the house-tops that it was Armageddon. But it wasn't. In the second world war the same old cry went up with Hitler as the Antichrist. And now it is Stalin! Really, it does seem a pity they cannot make up their infantile minds about it.

After being fooled so many times by these false prophets it is amazing that people are still ready to believe such lying rubbish. Apparently there always are fools ready to be fooled once more.

As no member of the Elin Church would ever dare to dispute the Pastor's unwarranted assertions I will be happy to do so myself, and I would also like to ask him a few questions which I know perfectly well he cannot answer.

1. Does Pastor Duncombe expect anyone but a fool or an infant to believe that when Christ's foot touches Olivet at the Second Coming the mountain will cleave in two?

2. If Christ possessed such power what possible object would be achieved by such a demonstration? If Christ can only cause *destruction* it is little wonder he did nothing to prevent the mass slaughter of lives in two world wars.

3. Ministers teach us that God is all-powerful and all-good—then why does not he use his power for good instead of evil? Obviously he must wish Man to suffer or he would prevent all war, sickness, famine and poverty.

4. If the answer is that God is punishing the wrongdoer then why does he punish the innocent as well? And if God could prevent sin, why doesn't he do so? The old "free-will" excuse does not hold water. If we are given the free-will to do as we like then why are we punished for *doing as we like?* If God says as you like—but I'll give you *hell* if you don't do as I

like " there is no free-will about it. Free-will is free choice without any strings attached.

5. Every religion has it's own collection of myths, fables and fabrications—why then is the Bible the only Book of Truth?

6. Belief in all-powerful but *unseen* spirits originated among ignorant and primitive savages. Does Pastor Duncombe suppose that we are still ignorant savages to believe in such superstitious nonsense?

7. Why is Atheism gaining ground so rapidly and Christianity declining? I will give him the answer to this one. It is because of Man's growing intelligence. Man is learning to think and to reason for himself instead of believing blindly just what he parson likes to tell him. He prefers Reason and the evidence of science to un-Reason and superstitious rubbish.

8. Can Pastor Duncombe produce any indisputable and concrete evidence of God's existence? If he cannot do so then by what right does he assert that existence?

Science has disproved the Bible again and again and Christianity has always been the sworn enemy of Science. Scientists have been persecuted, tortured and put to death by the Church for daring to speak the truth, because it was contrary to Christian teaching. Even medical science has had to overcome the opposition of religious leaders. All the benefits mankind has received are due to scientific research and invention but not one single benefit has been bestowed by Christianity. The doctrine of fear and threats of damnation are all the Church has ever given us!

W. H. WOOD.

THE AVERAGE MAN

SOME weeks after the publication of "Parsons and Politicians" I was interviewed in our High Street by one of the young people of the "Gallup" Poll. This in itself was quite an event and of all our friends and acquaintances I appear to be the first, and indeed we have wondered who these people did interview. It occurred to me afterwards that I could hardly be called an "Average Man" since in the first place the "average man" would not read the "Freethinker."

This thought reminded me that each generation has to be taught and hence the work of the Freethinkers has always to be brought up to date and every effort made to enlighten the new generation.

One can assume that the "average man" believes in that hoary old legend, the Story of the Fall and the Atonement and the Life and Death of Jesus. I must confess that in this respect I am the perfect "Cutnerite."

Whilst the young recognise sooner or later that the fairy tales they love in childhood are fairy tales, the Christian story is retailed by the people who make their living by doing so as the absolute truth. True, there are a thousand-and-one variations of the story, just as many in fact as there are sub-divisions of the organisations who carry on the profession, but although people recognise the falseness of the claim of other religions, it is assumed that they are primarily Christians and as such believe in this doctrine.

To me the odds are stated by the fact that whilst all the religions cannot be right, they can quite easily all be wrong. No English Christian would consider for one moment the inanities and improbabilities of other religions since he would recognise only too easily their faults. As a matter of fact, the decay of religion is such that for anyone to argue about it is accepted in some quarters as indicating that you are slightly "touched,"

and it is only in R.C. countries that the Christian religion retains those fanatics generally associated with religion.

In answering the questions put to me by the "Gallup" representative there were none relating to religion, and I remembered the old saying that "Love, Politics and Religion are responsible for most of the fighting in the world."

This reminds me that one of the earliest books I read was Winwood Reade's "Martyrdom of Man," and particularly as the result of the two world wars in a world which the optimists of 50 years ago considered was on the primrose way to peace, people are sarcastic as to the effect of religion in preventing one of the greatest curses of the human race.

The history of the last 2,000 years is one of ruthless warfare. The effect of the Christian religion in bringing peace appears to be nil, and indeed the handle of the sword has been compared to the Cross, and whilst Christians do not profess to go straight to heaven when they die fighting as do other religionists, yet in the past all wars have been carried on with the blessing of the Churches.

One cannot imagine a religion more amenable to the demands of the temporal masters. Indeed, in an argument with a Christian lately, when I pointed out the number of people who had met their deaths untimely, he stated that war was not resorted to until all other means for a settlement had been tried. My retort was that the Sixth Commandment was unconditional. It was quite evident, however, that as a religious fanatic he did not associate the words "war" and "murder." I quite agree that there are many in the Churches who would disagree with him, but then these religious people are always haggling about their religious ideas.

It may be true that to some of the rationalists a good deal of time and paper is wasted in analysing the books of the apologists (such as Bishop Barnes) and in tracing so ably (as does Mr. Cutner) these old legends and their write-up and incorporation in the Bible. Even the appearance of the latest work of Bishop Barnes, however, is a proof that the Christians are always changing their ground as the lies are exposed.

For my own part the legends are obviously untrue, whether stressed as history or for their moral value, and it is unreasonable for morality to rest upon a fairy tale. Morality is a social product, but a statement of this kind is quite beyond the religious mentality. The historicity of Jesus is no more reasonable than that of Jove or Venus or any of the thousand-and-one "divinities" which man has created.

We of the present day, however, can congratulate ourselves on the fact that a tremendous change has taken place over the last 50 years. Granted that there are hundreds of religious papers in circulation (and most of them reactionary in a political sense), that churches still rear their spires to the skies and the clergy still draw their easily earned money. The attitude of people to the clergy has changed, however, and they are no longer looked upon as a separate and peculiar people. Anyone can read and study theology, and if it came to an examination probably a member of the Salvation Army would be quite as clever in his interpretation of the Bible as any Bishop, and if it came to declamation as a proof of conversion would win hands down. Even the "dog-collar" and the peculiar clothing ceases to awe people. Their "women's" clothing is smiled at and the common expression with regard to the clergy is that "they have a soft job." Such is the present condemnation of the "Servants of the Most High."

What a part religion has played, however, in the past! All the huge structures of the world in Egypt, Near and Far East are associated with it. The pyramids, huge temples all over the Eastern world are all motivated by the worship in the Unknown, in fact for thousands of years mankind was in thrall to building maniacs who in their anxiety to rear temples condemned untold millions of slaves to totally unproductive labour. Now, apparently, we are so poor that we cannot suitably house the slave labour of to-day, but just as in past ages, I note that the bombed churches have priority.

The mention of bombing and the number of churches which were destroyed may well have made people wonder whether the protection of the Almighty was any good if He could not protect the buildings dedicated to Him, and one has a new slant on the rationalism of the present day.

This article was therefore the product of the "Gallup" Poll, and if these people want to create a sensation may I suggest another question, "Do you believe in Christianity?"

T. D. SMITH.

ABSURDITIES

ONE DAY, while going about my master's business, on the cobblestones of Manchester my glance fell upon one of those advertisements sometimes placed outside churches, by the believers in the Christian God, to threaten or cajole passers-by to enter the holy buildings. Thereby I was warned that one terrible day awaited the atheist—the day when he would feel full of gratitude, and find no one to thank.

The absurdity of that notice is, surely, among absurdities a gem of glorious gleaming. It is not a mere disaster of negligent phrasing, like Francis Thompson's famous description of the setting sun, "panting red pants into the west," nor inadvertent clumsiness, like Meredith's "my fel were nourished on her breasts all night." It rather deserves to be put alongside the crude lines of verse I once read on the cover of a cheap periodical designed to beguile the leisure of adolescent working girls. They were:—

"Youth she had a beauty,
Fatal the dower,
Born to be man's booty,
Just for an hour."

The path of the Christian has, however, led many into the pit of absurdity and here in bleak and stormy Ormesville, the jarring sects comprise one called the "Christian Scientists," which, despite the facts known about disease, assures us that it is nothing but sin. Now this sect have here a display-box in which, among other literature, sacred song is displayed, and thereby we learn that it follows the bold course of adapting the work of others to its needs. The poetic quality of the original is often debased by the operation.

There were recently displayed by the said fraternity some verses drawn from Benjamin Beddome. How much of them, as shown, were of his workmanship, was not revealed. The first stanza read:—

"'Tis God the spirit leads,
In paths before unknown,
The work to be performed is ours;
The strength is all his own."

Most of us would not object to being led into paths before unknown, provided the guide had suitable testimonials, but how we should then be able to perform a task without any strength for it, is a riddle best left to the Sphinx.

We were not surprised at the second stanza, which read:—

"Supported by His Grace,
We still pursue our way,
Assured that we shall reach the prize,
Secure in endless day."

Since, as we have already been told, we have no strength, we ought to have had more than support; we should have been carried. However, the final stanza assured us that:—

"God works in us to will,
He works in us to do,
The power to act is all his own,
His be the glory, too."

If this is true, then the praising of God by the poet is an act of God himself, God praising God. Self-praise is, however, regarded as odious in a man. Why should it be thought otherwise in a God?

The ludicrous, of course, is an expected concomitant of religious inspiration. Did not Simeon Stylites put back the vermin that had fallen from his sores, saying, "Eat what God has given you"? Especially is it to be expected when the said inspiration is mingled with the poetic, for metrical composition has its own difficulties to meet, and to have it convey sense when burdened with a religious theme is to expect much, usually too much.

Many a poet, however, has made use of the name of God as a mere device to bring his lofty, far-ranging flight of song to a fitting finish, just as in ancient tragedy one of the Greek deities was made to descend upon the stage in his chariot, thus providing a climax and appropriate end to a play, which the dramatist otherwise could hardly have completed.

The other evening I, with many others, attended a kind of public dinner, where the chairman, according to custom, said the usual grace: "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful." It is, of course, time that the custom was dropped, but think of the foolishness of it. We thanked God for the dinner, and yet, despite his Almighty power, in comparison with pre-war affairs of the kind, the dinner was poor. Chicken or turkey formed part of the menu, but what tiny portions we had! God could do no better, however, and had someone suggested sending him a note of protest the suggestion would have been laughed at. Everyone knows why things are in short supply, even parsons know, and yet the farce of thanking God for that supply goes merrily on.

This reminds me also of the advice Christians so often give us to thank God for his gift to us of life. Such advisers seem unable to appreciate the fact that no one can be given what is an essential function of his being. A gift, moreover, can be made only to a living being; hence life can never be a gift to any being.

Another absurdity is the request to an unbeliever in God to trust himself to God, as if it were possible to trust without belief.

There is also the absurdity of attributing to God the fact that in certain places where the population is dense the conditions of existence are salubrious, when in fact it is because the conditions are good that the population has become dense. There is, for example, plenty of rain over England and none over the Sahara, as a consequence the inhabitants of the former are numbered in millions, of the latter in hundreds.

Then the possession of the qualities which enable animals to survive in their environment is often spoken

of as if devised by God, yet a little observation will inform us that these qualities are derived by the process of natural selection. The nimbleness of the sheep that feed upon the precipitous bastions of Ormesville Bay is maintained, not by the grace of God, but by the elimination of the unfit; and the good shepherd, who is here a Welshman, finds, at times, one of his charges lying dead upon the road, whence it fell from a height.

J. G. LUPTON.

THE DANCE OF DEATH

"LA DANSE MACABRE," that grim memorial of the feelings of fifteenth century people about death, has been delightfully re-edited by Mr. E. F. Chaney, Headmaster of Manchester Central High School. Mr. Chaney states that his little volume is addressed "to those who love to explore the byways of literature and history." I am sure that there are many such among the readers of this paper.

The origin of this particular Dance (Holbein's came later) is suggested in the introduction to this book. Medieval people were not quite so enraptured with the idea of joining their Maker as religious historians would have us believe. From Pope to peasant they preferred to cling to this vale of tears as long as they possibly could.

"La Danse Macabre" consisted of a series of paintings on the walls of the cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris illustrating how persons of all degrees welcome the prospects of death. Below each picture was a short explanatory verse. The cemetery was a popular resort of the citizens and Mr. Chaney draws back the curtain of the past and allows us a glimpse of this vanished generation in their bargaining, love-making, swearing, joking and weeping in and about the enclosure that would one day be their last resting place.

Surveying these representations, admirably copied in the book, one senses the gloating satisfaction with which the unfortunate must have anticipated the departure of their oppressors and exploiters. Skeletons, wearing expressions teasingly suited to the moods and station of their victims, act as the heralds of Death. Pope, emperor, lawyer, minstrel, priest and beggar are all, sometimes frolicsomenely, dragged away to join in the Dance.

"You, doctor," says the skeleton, "with your urine; do you see any cure for this?"

"Next, you, grey friar! You have often preached about death so you should marvel the less. You must not frighten yourself about it . . ."

"Pass on, parish priest . . . I think you are forlorn. You were wont to gobble up the dead and the living, but you shall be given to the worms . . ."

Not one of the dying, in that believing age, is portrayed as ending in the proverbial Christian style. Even the holy monk exclaims, "I should much prefer to be still in my cloister doing my duty. It is a holy place and lovely spot . . ."

"Yes," concludes the unknown moralist, "you go on dying day by day. For your days grow less so that all of you, who are now alive, will be dead within 100 years. Alas!—100 years will soon be gone."

Christian preachers, for interested reasons, presented death to their hearers as a loathsome and horrible thing, sometimes not without awkward repercussions, as we see.

E. A. McDONALD.

THE LIVING GOD

I asked of the chaste Antarctic waste
And the fevered jungle bed,
But in totemic stone, silent and prone
The gods of men lay—dead.

No Vesta glows where the Tiber flows—
Quenched is her sacred fire;
Judea's cave but marks a grave
And Yahveh's lonely pyre.

By the sacred Nile gleamed but a while
Khepri's imperial crest;
Osiris sleeps in his reedy deeps;
Ra is gone down in the west.

Great Odin died and no Valkyrie ride
To Valhalla's gilded tor;
Aurora's are limms wan and stark
The corse of mighty Thor.

Sweetest among the Elysian throng—
Venus, Adonis and these
Of Attic grace, a debonair race—
Are but marbled memories.

But one still lives to whom Man gives
His blind allegiance yet;
Whose awful pow'r dictates the hour
When Reason's sun must set.

The cuirassed god at whose evil nod
Clangours the fateful knell;
Swart nihilist whose armoured fist
Strikes wide the ports of hell.

O'er a stricken world in the storm unfurled
His sable pennon streams;
His innocent slaves in myriad graves
Lie strewn with their withered dreams.

"To arms!" he cries, "For he who dies
By the sword alone I shrive!"
Shine, lifeless stars! Shine down on MARS!
The god of war! Alive!

W. T. MORGAN.

THE CHURCH AND THE MAID

Although the Roman Church has canonised Joan of Arc, it should never be forgotten that she was tried by an Ecclesiastical Court presided over by a Roman Catholic Bishop, and condemned to death as a witch—a purely religious "crime." The "Universe" has now had to admit this, but tries to whitewash its Church by saying that the court "was largely influenced by political considerations." But the poor girl was tried by a religious court, condemned to be burnt alive as a witch by the presiding Bishop, and handed over to a "secular" arm exactly as in all these purely religious trials. It is the Roman Church, and only the Roman Church, that should be blamed for the foul death of Joan of Arc—exactly as in the case of the deaths of Bruno, Vanini, Dolet, and countless other "heretics."

ACID DROPS

Truth will out. According to the "Evening Standard" Dean Inge said of the Bible that we may "dismiss the reliance on a divinely inspired and infallible book as no longer cogent except in a *very simple intellectual strata*." (Our italics.) We must admit that the gloomy Dean, as he was once known, has always been outspoken, but doubt whether he has ever caused quite the storm that his latest utterances at Oxford have. Perhaps he feels safer in expressing his true opinions since he left the Church.

We take it that he subscribed to the 39 Articles of the Protestant Faith when he was ordained, and we would be interested to know how he can square his present-day attitude. His assertion looks uncommonly like a suggestion to the clergy that they should preach two different Christianities, fundamental Bible bilge for the "very simple intellectual strata" and a Christianity without "body, parts or passions" for the higher intellectual strata. That this has been done in the past is well known, but we know of no instance where it was advertised in quite such open terms.

There seems to be a minor epidemic of commonsense spreading over our leading Churchmen. But sometimes even a Churchman has to appear *au courant* with world events, and "leaders" have to make a step forward sometimes. We are moved to make the foregoing observation when reading Dr. Garbett, Archbishop of York, in the "Evening Standard." He says: "How can we expect the nations to take very seriously the appeal of the Church for international peace and order when Christians are unable to meet together at the table of the Lord whom they all serve?" We can only add a very quiet "hear, hear," for Dr. Garbett should know his religion. For ourselves, we are fairly sure that the various sects are unlikely to unite, even on such an important question.

The Rev. Idwal Vaughan has told his parishioners that their church may be closed if they do not give more support. He writes in his parish magazine: "If the church's ministrations are not wanted in Weedon, it should plainly say so, and steps could be taken to close the church." We warn the Rev. I. Vaughan that he may be establishing a very dangerous precedent. Try to think of how many churches would remain open, and how many parsons would be needed if they relied on the congregation only. We know of churches with an average congregation of 20, and the Church is kept going on emoluments, endowments and tithes from the past, and subsidies in the form of rate-free assessments at the present day.

Britain's oldest working parson, the Rev. E. Falconer, aged 98, of Old Newton, is to retire. It is computed that he gave over 6,053 sermons during his life. The mind recoils from such figures: think of it, 6,053. Sermons used to take up about an hour of the Church service, but even allowing for modern speed-up, say half an hour each sermon, that is still—as our American cousins would say—a "mouthful."

Three hundred and thirty bishops are to discuss in a secret session the question of a "spiritual approach to Roman Catholicism." It is said that the Pope was approached when he was "virtually a prisoner in the Vatican during the war" by Dr. Temple. Knowing the Catholic Church and remembering its motto—"Semper eadem"—we are fairly sure that the negotiations will be

very one-sided. We cannot see Rome compromising. Union will have to be on the Vatican's terms, and we are sure that the Church of England will not come out best. The Catholic Church claims to be the only true Universal Church, with a mandate direct from God. "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." Perhaps Dr. Temple hasn't heard that limerick about the "lady and the tiger."

We Atheists have been saddled with some peculiar allies and friends throughout our history, but doubt whether a religion has ever blessed us. "D.R.D.", in the "Record," asserts that "the action of the Moscow Patriarchate has given Atheism its blessing because of its co-operation with Soviet policy," and adds, "how can we unite with a Church that has such a cynical leadership?" Not a very good start to the much-advertised appeal for a unification of all Churches, but certainly not more than we expected.

The General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance, in an article in the "Christian," said that "The Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches are historically infected with the spirit of intolerance and persecution, and know little or nothing of the spirit of religious liberty and freedom of Protestantism." Shades of Luther and Calvin. Has the "Christian" never heard of the Puritans and the Covenanters? A good story is told of Spurgeon when, during one of his sermons, he stated that the Baptists had never been guilty of persecution. The statement was received with an air of complacency and smug self-satisfaction by the congregation until Spurgeon continued: "because they have never had the chance." The story may be apocryphal, but it is good enough to be true, and true enough to illustrate the very essence of all religions, intolerance. For each religion asserts that it is the only true religion, and all others false. As for our opinion, all cannot be right, but all can be wrong.

A Nottingham vicar, Canon R. Hawkins, seems to be perturbed that his church is under-insured. The obvious text to quote him is "O ye of little faith," or "Take no thought for to-morrow." But it is, too easy. But it is so obvious that Christianity is no longer the serious matter it was, and to a vicar his work is no longer a "call from God" but a job like any other, and usually a very " cushy " one.

Mass Observation have carried out a survey on behalf of the "Daily Graphic," and it appears that two out of three people think the Church has failed. It is strange that of the many thousands of people questioned, no mention is made of any Atheists. All questioned were Christians of one brand or another, which makes the survey a little one-sided, to say the least. We are, however, not surprised, people will talk frankly on all questions, except religion, and for this reason Mass Observation in this connection is valueless.

We used to maintain that the Roman Catholic Church was—granting its premises—about the most logical of the Christian sects. We must reconsider this on noting a leader in the "Catholic Times," wherein it is asserted that because no other Church claims infallibility, therefore the Catholic Church is the one and only true Church. "She is infallible because no other Church has dared to make this claim." By the same token, a lunatic must be Napoleon because no other lunatic has made that claim. Aquinas will bow his head before such logic when he reads the "Catholic Times."

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

D. WIPER.—Pleased to hear from an old friend. We well remember the debates which you mention. If you are ever in London do give us a call.

W. A. ANDON.—Shall be pleased to see you by appointment any Monday.

BENEVOLENT FUND.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of £2 from Mr. Bedane.

H. HOLT.—Thanks for cutting. Will be dealt with.

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Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning

SUGAR PLUMS

There is one point in the biography of the late Dr. C. G. Coulton just published by his daughter worthy to note. She insists that her father was a "deep, a true, an honest Christian," though he "frankly acknowledged the contradictions of the Christian faith." But though brought up by such a Christian, she herself was "an unbeliever and an infidel where all organised religions are concerned." This confession has quite upset one religious reviewer who "regrets the publication of this painful and disturbing book." We have always felt that, whatever he may have called himself or what his daughter thought he was, Dr. Coulton had very little more belief than the average Rationalist. One would never credit him with being a Christian from his formidable clashes with the Roman Church.

According to the "Universe," God's hand was very manifest in the recent floods on the border of England and Scotland. Two busloads of Catholic women risked crossing the flood-menaced Whitadder Bridge and managed to get safely across. Needless to say, the women immediately burst into prayers of thanksgiving. The sequel being that the next bus trying to cross "crashed and fifteen people were injured." Possibly the third bus contained a party of non-Catholics, and God found it a golden opportunity to show his loving power and grace. We wonder what the fifteen injured people thought about it?

We note that Dr. Wand, the Bishop of London, is preparing a "great" Mission for London in 1919—consistently "towards a saner way of life." Well, if Christianity is to survive, periodical Missions are a stern necessity—though the complete failure of the Christian Commandos two years ago does not give one much hope for optimism. Dr. Wand is very Anglo-Catholic, and believes in the fullest Ritual, and he thinks he can easily convert the "bewildered and lost" people of London,

including, of course, those who are "outside the Church altogether." We hope he will have a good try converting the readers of this journal as a start.

London is to be divided into centres each with its own Missioner and helpers, and to get a good send-off there will be an opening procession to St. Paul's—naturally designed to impress unbelievers. After which there is going to be "systematic representation of the Christian faith," no doubt entirely from the highest Anglican standpoint. And we are assured "every effort will be made to reach all sections of the population." In particular, Dr Wand wants "to break through to those who have been till now untouched by the Christian way of life and thought."

If by these he means Freethinkers, the answer is that almost all Freethinkers were once Christians, and know as well as Dr. Wand what is the Christian way of life and thought; and if they reject it, it is because they have found it out—because they know it to be based on sheer primitive superstition and ignorance and credulity. We should be sorry for any Freethinker who could not—metaphorically—wipe the floor with any Christian missioner, particularly one trained by Dr. Wand.

Mr. J. Clayton reports a decided liveliness at some of his recent meetings around Lancashire. By tact and good humour, a challenge to fight, a very angry clergyman, and some rowdy hecklers were all made to serve as examples of religious influence on character. Mr. Clayton is well able to look after himself and is doing good work.

Mr. T. M. Mosley, at Nottingham, and Mr. A. Samms, at Sheffield, are also putting in some hard and very useful work at their respective stations. It is a labour of love and enthusiasm, and they deserve all the support local saints can give them. Details of their meetings will be found in our "Lecture Notices" column.

DETERMINISM

READERS of the "Freethinker" who dabble as little and as infrequently in philosophy as the writer, will probably have selected for their particular plaguing certain philosophic "betes noires" which the philosopher proper takes comfortably in his stride. And it would surprise me if the general problems of determinism were not one of the most frequent sources of mental exercise in this category.

Some months ago, quite unexpectedly, I thought I had at last stumbled on one of those complete answers in Langdon Davis's fine book, "A Short History of the Future," which from time to time come suddenly to light in unexpected places. But it was not to be. After a hopeful start, the author fell back on the old escape of facile sophism—that one of the things determined in a completely deterministic universe, was the fact that human minds must act as though they were free.

Chapman Cohen's "Determinism and Freewill," almost succeeds, but falls down in my opinion on certain shaky passages which seem to call for a bracketed question mark. The arguments he uses are satisfactory when considered piecemeal, but somehow fail to round off the answer to the problem as a whole.

The late Susan Stebbings' chapter on determinism, like so many others, starts out well, but ends in an unconvincing vacuum.

The best comment I have yet read on this topic occurs in a recent book of essays "Yogi and the Commissar." And this appropriately enough deals with the indeterminist's most modern argument arising out of the apparent "freewill" exhibited by the electron in its behaviour within the atom (the Heisenburgh principle of uncertainty) from which has been deduced all kinds of arguments which appear to support the capacity for "freewill" in man. Readers will know that, in non-technical terms, this principle is attributable to the fact that though in large aggregates the behaviour of sub-atomic structures is determinable and predictable, it has as yet been found quite impossible either to determine or predict the movement of *any particular electron* in its peregrinations within the atom, or in other words, certain isolated electrons appear to act spontaneously as though possessed of "freewill." And if this is so within the atom, why not also within the mind of man, etc.?

In passing, it might be well to note here a crude analogy on the human level. The staff at Northolt are able year by year to predict within very accurate limits the number of passengers likely to travel from the airport in any one month. This number is determined by holiday conditions, fares, general economic conditions and advertising. And it is not difficult to conceive that were *all* these factors assessable with complete accuracy, the exact number of passengers could be known in advance. It would nevertheless remain for ever impossible to ascertain the arrival or non-arrival of any *particular* passenger, and to attribute this to the fact that he or she was a being with "freewill" would be to beg the question at issue.

Returning to the atom, and its complement of electrons and protons, I would recall the penetrating remark of Joseph McCabe on this subject, to the effect that much error is bound to occur if one attempts to think either of electrons and protons, or even atoms themselves, as *real*, or of electrons and protons as actual "spheres" on the model of the heavenly bodies with which they are so often compared. Such conceptions are of course the legacy of our instinctive concrete thought forms. They are aptly illustrated, I think, by the universal tendency of mechanically minded people when examining electrical apparatus, always to seek knobs and switches to twiddle and manipulate, rather than attempt to grasp the *electrical* significance of the machine.

In considering the microscopic or the super-microscopic (the infinitely small and the infinitely large) the human mind reaches its absolute limit. Thus in stretching abstract conceptions beyond the powers normally available and inherent in brains evolved primarily to deal with environment applicable to survival, a vital area of error must be expected. There are few Einsteins, and few Max Plancks, and neither are necessary to normal survival in the animal world. The problem seems well summed up in the quotation referred to above:—

"Microscopic events cannot be adequately described or explained in terms of our *macroscopic* experience of space, time, and causation. The framework of experience on the human level is inapplicable beneath that level. Freedom of action of sub-atomic structures does not indicate any divine influence, but freedom from such determinants as are experienced on the man-sized scale. This freedom cannot be defined or explained in terms of quantitative measurement, nor by the thought-forms based on the elements of human experience."

Whilst this does not get one very far, it has at least a satisfactory negative approach, and goes some way to avoid the far-fetched "conclusion" attempted by eager theists, anxious to find "divinity" at work. It at least suggests that the problem may lie in our present inability to understand various levels of organisation within the universe which operate in terms inapplicable to ordinary experience.

In this general connection, I found a passage in Bertrand Russell's recent article "The Sense of Sin" ("Thinker's Digest") a little disturbing to one who, like myself, is ever attempting to rationalise an instinctively perceived and desired monism—embracing everything:—

"While therefore as a philosopher I hold the principle of universal causation to be open to question, as a commonsense individual, I hold that it is an indispensable postulate in the conduct of affairs."

J. STURGE-WHITING.

NON-POLITICAL OR A-POLITICAL.

IN general, the Anglo-Saxon Freethought Movement tend to evade political or even economic issues. For several reasons, they do not always succeed, yet even if they could this attitude ought to be revised lest we lose the impetus of a movement and restrict ourselves to a mere debating society.

There can be no denying that politics must of necessity permeate everyday life; disgusted by its obvious meandering, many people try to keep aloof from politics with the result that the Hitlers and his abettors had easy play and could doom the lives and fortunes of hundreds of millions all over the world. So that, even if individuals can indulge in that "escapism", a movement cannot. In fact, there is nobody that can claim not to be affected by politics however hard he may try to stand aside.

The way in which men earn their living is the key to social history. The existing relations of production—who owns the means of production, who creates the wealth and who distributes it—these are the powers which determine the political, religious and cultural modes of any given stage of civilisation. The final causes of all changes, social or political, are to be sought, not in men's better insight into "eternal" truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. It is not Man's Conscience that determines his existence, but, on the contrary, it is his social existence that determines his consciousness. Material changes that bring about great historical changes in social conditions have always been accompanied by corresponding changes in man's ideas and view, including his religious conceptions. Incidentally, this mental development is usually slowed down by the tradition of all the "dead generations" that weigh like an alp on the brain of the living.

Under the present social conditions, religion is the natural outcome of mundane despair and fear with the corollary of the hope of redress in a future life. By attacking religion on a purely intellectual basis we do nothing but apply a palliative, without getting down to the root of the evil.

At a recent conference on the Unity of Western Europe, the speakers dealt at great length on prescriptions as to what ought to be done, without the slightest attempt being made to suggest *how* it could be attained. This Labour Conference reminded me of the way in which many Freethinkers mean to tackle the religious problem. In striving to change the intellectual out-

look, we have got to change the world and its social composition first.

Incidentally, it was the German delegate who went further than merely scratching the surface of the problem when he stated that before any progress towards unity could be made, capitalism must be overcome: the United States of Europe is a great ideal, but the basic question is to be asked: Unity to what ends? For the monopolist's profits and another world war? Or for Socialism and Peace? We favour the latter and reject the former.

This basic statement, however, was quickly buried among a heap of phrase-mongering and the old trick of red-baiting worked again as a means of diversion from the real issue. This "red herring" freely serves at preventing a united front against the arch-enemy Capitalism. If it is not the Black Devil, it is the Red Bogey that scares the masses into obedience, yet if we allow ourselves to be cheated and misled by one or the other, we can never attain our aim nor can we claim to be rationalists.

What is the hall-mark of a Rationalist or Freethinker? That we are Truth Seekers? But "truth" in itself means nothing, even the Churches claim to possess the "Eternal Truth", therefore the search for truth is not something we can lay particular claim to. Obviously, a Freethinker is one who keeps his thinking free from superstition of every description, religious or political. Utter *scepticism* is the touchstone of the Freethinker. For example, in these days one cannot avoid being asked one's opinion about Soviet Russia. I, for one, decline to be influenced either one way or the other, since I lack *personal experience* and entirely disbelieve anything served up by the Press, knowing that they pursue their partisan ends. A sense of balance must be the guiding principle for all.

Our cultural and political aspects are the reflections of the existing conditions of material life. Broadly speaking, the political parties represent well-defined social sets in the political sphere, i.e., in their striving to maintain or destroy exploitation of Man through Man. The political parties are mostly not concerned with cultural problems, least of all with the attitude of the individual towards religion; this has to be our task, but we have to work within our limits as strictly as do the political parties. This means that party politicians must attend to their own line, whilst we, on the other hand, will not allow political parties—as bodies or individuals—to interfere in our realm. In the task of preparing the soil for Freethought we co-operate with every party not allied to the Churches, and this is only possible if we ourselves are not party-ridden.

It is common knowledge that the Russian Orthodox Church has been able to still further get a firmer hold on the masses, and if it is possible for religion to stage such a comeback, I consider that Socialism in Russia must still be very far distant.

I may be wrong, but if anyone with better knowledge could inform me to the contrary, I would not dream of decrying him as a "Communist" (this abuse is no valid argument).

The so-called "Iron Curtain" is eagerly erected by both sides. East and West, so why pretend to actually know what is going on "behind"? He who allows himself to be misled by Press propaganda is no Freethinker, but as naïve as the religionist.

In our struggle for the emancipation of the people's minds we cannot shirk the social and political aspects. Not we can, at the same time, keep out of party politics.

We must not allow our ranks to be split and weakened through petty partisan quarrels, which are inconsistent with the true aims of Freethought: we cannot be unpolitical, yet we must be a-political. These two things must not be confused, for that way lies confusion twice confounded.

PERCY G. ROY.

EARLY ENGLISH FREETHOUGHT

VII.

HUMAN action and passion are the great themes of William Shakespeare, as indeed of all the other great Elizabethan dramatists, and they treat it without reference to dogma or bias to any system of theology. Mazzini remarks:—

The divine power has scarcely ever any direct intervention in the Shakespearian drama. The fantastic element, so frequently introduced, if closely examined, will be found never to depart from the individual sphere. His supernatural apparitions are all of them simply personifications of popular superstition, or, like Caliban and Ariel, symbols of the duality of humanity; or, like the witches in *Macbeth*, the incarnations of human passions.

No student of that period who compares the state of England, with all its persecuting High Court of Commission and Star Chamber, with the devastating wars of religions which occupied France and Germany, can fail to see that in England there were a number of men of worth who cared little for the differences of Catholics and Protestants, and much for the honour and safety of their country, and who were ready to acquiesce in prosecution of either Jesuits or Separatists whose teachings tended to endanger the peace and order of the realm. Outward conformity to the religion of the State was the desideratum.

The Elizabethan age, nevertheless, showed signs of free speculation. In 1572, we find grave Burleigh complaining of the queen's own household as "a coverture for no small number of *Epicures* and *Atheists*, because the court is not comprehended within a parish, but seemeth to be a lawless place." When Giordano Bruno visited England he numbered Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Fulke Greville among his friends. In 1584, Reginald Scot published his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, the first rational treatment of that question. Sir Walter Raleigh and Thomas Harriot, the mathematician, who accompanied him to Virginia, and who wrote the account of that country in Hakluyt's *Collection of the Early Voyages*, are set down by Aubrey in his *Lives* as Deists. Although Raleigh's writings abound with fine expressions of religious sentiment, it has been noticed they contain no allusion to the positive doctrines of Christianity. As Aubrey says, it was concluded "he was a A-Christ, not Atheist."

Bacon, writing to Burleigh, speaks of his philosophic studies as "my religion," and in regard to those studies bows theology out of court with an excessive graciousness which almost suggests a lurking mockery. In his essay, morals are founded on human wants, and, though he cannot believe the universe is without a mind, he says:—

Atheism leaves a man to reason, philosophy, natural piety, laws, reputation, and everything that can serve to conduct him to virtue; but superstition destroys all these and erects itself into a tyranny over the understandings of men; hence, Atheism never disturbs the government, but renders man more clear-sighted, since he sees nothing beyond the bounds of the present life.

Even Hooker, the master mind in the Church at that period, shows signs of rationalism, and links the laws of ecclesiastical polity as well as those of scripture to the unwritten laws which lie in human nature itself.

In 1605, Dr. John Dove wrote a *Confutation of Atheisme*. By his classing Holofernes Sennacherib and "Olimpius the Arrian" as Atheists, along with Lucian, Julian and Doletus (Etienne Dolet), "which called Moses, Helias, and Christ the three deceivers of the world," it does not appear that this doctor of divinity was very exact in his definitions. He would have Atheism rooted out of the land:—

And since the Church hath no other sword now but the censure of excommunication, which is so greatly depised, if it would please God to put it in the hearts of princes to strengthen excommunication with their princely authority, to add the sword of the kingdom to the key of the Church, not to suffer any person that is noted of impiety to dwell in the land, but to deliver him over to the hangman, whom the Church hath delivered to Satan . . . and then I may use the phrase of the Holy Ghost, "Let his house be made a jakes" (Dan. 3).

That sanctified person, James I, was inclined to follow this advice. The Arminian treatise of Vorstius, *De Deo*, was burnt at St. Paul's Cross, and James hinted to the Dutch States "that as to the burning of Vorstius for his blasphemies and Atheism, he left them to their own Christian wisdom; but surely never heretic better deserved the flames." On 18th March, 1612, Bartholmew Legate was burnt at Smithfield, and in the following month Edward Wightman was burnt at Lichfield for antitrinitarian heresy, Wightman being the last person burnt to death for his opinions in England. "God," observes Fuller, "may seem well pleased with this seasonable severity, for the fire thus kindled quickly went out for want of fuel." It, however, appears that these executions excited murmurs and sympathy: "Wherefore King James politickly preferred that hereticks hereafter should silently and privately waste themselves away in prison, rather than to grace them and amaze others with the solemnity of a publick Execution, which in popular judgments usurped the honour of a persecution"—so that the fires went out rather from policy than for want of fuel.

The reign of James was marked by an increased assertion of the divine right of kings joined with episcopal supremacy, ripening to a rude downfall under Cromwell. The royal enemy of witchcraft turned in the direction of Arminianism towards the end of his reign, and a school of Latitudinarians arose, assembling at Lord Falkland's, of which Hales and Chillingworth were the most distinguished members. Hales, at the Synod of Dort, "bade good-night to John Calvin." Chillingworth, converted first to Romanism and then back again to Anglicanism, in his *Religion of Protestants* contended that it was only necessary to believe what was plainly revealed, and ended so confirmed a Latitudinarian that he was looked upon by all the orthodox as a Socinian. Among those who, amid the conflict of sects, sought for a tenable position by discarding the disputed points and retaining only the elementary traits common to all faiths, must be mentioned Lord Herbert of Cherbury, usually called the father of the English Deists.

In his work *On Truth* he suggests that true religion must be universal, and he finds its attestation in truths intuitively perceived. Of such truths he enumerates five: the existence of God; the duty of worship; piety

and virtue as the means thereof; repentance; and the existence of rewards and punishments both here and hereafter. His book on *The Religion of the Gentiles*, interesting as an early essay on comparative religion, betrays an equally crude conception of the primitive universality of Monotheism.

A far more vigorous thinker was Thomas Hobbes, the thoroughly English philosopher of Malmsbury. Hobbes was the first to place the basis of moral and political obligation in the experience of the race. His principal works, written amid the turmoil of the Commonwealth, show his love for order and stable government, and are chiefly noticeable to us by their deliberate subordination of religion to absolute civil power. Hobbes, as a man of the world, had noticed how the fanaticism of the Puritans and the sacerdotal claims of the hierarchy were alike opposed to national welfare. He interpreted literally the saying of Christ, My Kingdom is not of this world. That he did not openly break with religion arose from the circumstances of the time. His principles tended to undermine it. Civil power was to determine all religious worship, and even the canonicity of books. He questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch before Spinoza, denied eternal punishment, questioned the personality of the devil, with argument which equally apply to God, and pithily summed up the theological position by saying that superstition was religion out of fashion, religion superstition in fashion.

J. M. WHEELER.

MARLOWE

THE greatest of Shakespeare's immediate predecessors was Christopher Marlowe, familiarly known as "Kit." The son of a shoemaker, and born at Canterbury in 1564, his unmistakable genius seems to have gained him friends, who looked after his early education, and sent him, at the age of 17, to the University of Cambridge. He was intended for the Church, but the Church had, as may readily be imagined, no attractions for such a mind. The study of theology only succeeded in making him a determined enemy of religion in general, and the Christian superstition in particular. Marlowe's statue is fittingly erected *outside* the gates of Canterbury Cathedral. There was no element in Marlowe's untamable nature favourable to the growth of religiosity. He was, indeed, one of the proudest and fiercest of intellectual aristocrats. Scepticism in him naturally took the form of contempt rather than of mere negation. From the statements of Richard Bame, the informer, we may assume that he occasionally gave vent to Rabelaisian pleasantries on the subject of the Christian dogmas.

Before the age of 23 we find Kit Marlowe in London, an actor and a playwright, and the author of "the great sensation work" of his time—the tragedy of *Tamburlaine*—in which Greene perceived Marlowe's attempt at "daring of God out of heaven." This portentous melodrama, a strange compound of inspiration and desperation, has the hall-mark of real genius equally in its absurdities and its sublimities. In the first play, written in blank verse for the popular stage, the versification has an elasticity, freedom and variety of movement which makes it as much the product of Marlowe's extraordinary mind as the thoughts and passions it so finely conveys.

A SHEET OF MS.

(Found in a ditch near Shoreditch)

Bacon, accordin' to the cyclopeedee:—
And I mean "Lord", not "lard". Better to get
the subject correct in the beginnin'; because about
"the beginnin'" there is a lot of lard.
So it's Lord Bacon we're tarkin' about, matey . . .
I'm a rum chum.

"Your trouble, me lard," says my militant comrade
Joe Doakes, "is to keep from mixin' British and
American argot. You oughta know the two langwishes
are different . . . you, the great Post-Impressionist of
1946!"

"You're jealous." I retort, "you miserable creature
of the ancient lowly, you!"

"Oh, yeah!" he snarls. "If you could straighten
that crick in yer neck, from looking up to yer Lards,
ye might see we ALL like bacon. What's there else to
say? Nuttin'!"

So, I guess that settles it.

I was going to explain that Bacon was Shakespeare;
but shucks! what's the use? Why waste effort on a
base churl like Joe Doakes? I think I much prefer an
afternoon with Reverend Fud Duddle, with good wine
and cigars; with whom I have not yet settled the
perpetual question he always asks: "But my dear
friend . . . I saw it in *The New Yorker* . . . it's eating
into my very soul . . . if it weren't for SIN, where would
I be?"

This time I think I'll tell him. Selling pencils on a
street corner, maybe.

EARL CORNWALL.

CORRESPONDENCE

ON POE AGAIN.

Sir.—It is a pity that Mr. Rowland did not read my article
more carefully. I did not ask him for his or Woodberry's
opinion of that prize Christian liar, the Rev. Rufus Griswold
incidentally, I question whether Griswold knew of Baudelaire's
"satanic excesses" as early as 1850; nor what J. A. T.
Lloyd wrote in 1931. Mr. Rowland called Poe, a drunkard, a
wastrel and a weakling—and I am not surprised he could find
no contemporary evidence to support him.

Since writing my article, I have come across Prof. W.
Minto's in the 9th edition of the "Encyclopedia Britannica"
and the following extract may prove interesting:—

Edgar Allan Poe is the most interesting figure in
American literature and his life furnishes the most
extraordinary instance on record of systematic misrepresen-
tation on the part of a biographer. The greater part
of his short working life was passed in intense and un-
remitting literary toil, and no poems or romances were
ever produced at greater expense of brain and spirit than
his . . . the current statement and belief were that his
strange tales were flung off from a distempered imagina-
tion in the intervals of degraded debauchery. This myth
was studiously floated . . .

Prof. Minto knew well the kind of "biography" relied on
by Mr. Rowland.—Yours, etc.,
H. CUTNER.

TWO POINTS OF VIEW.

Sir.—I have recently been startled by the inclusion of some
quite uncalled-for anti-Socialist or anti-Soviet propaganda in
"The Freethinker."

Mr. Wood presumes that the leaders chosen by the Russian
people constitute a distinct class similar to the leaders in Old
Russia, or for that matter even here . . . The distinction
that gets a Molotov or a Vishinsky to the top is ability, not
class. Mr. Wood concludes by a quotation from Dr. Goebbels,
I refer to the "Iron Curtain." Mr. Wood and Mr. Churchill
have both quoted from a source which precludes them from
being classed as Freethinkers. . . Racial and religious perse-
cution is punishable by law in Russia. That country gives
freedom to an Atheist in his disbelief and prejudice does not
hamper him at every turn. Perhaps for that reason many

Freethinkers may not agree with your contributor or the
popular press from which he apparently gets his mis-informa-
tion. The rest of Mr. Wood's article is quite worth reading.—
Yours, etc.,
WALTER ALEXANDER.
(This letter has been slightly abridged.)

Sir.—I was most interested in your remark that all the
political Liberals in the world couldn't prevent the extinction
of organised religion. Quite a lot of us don't want to. In
fact, the association of political Liberalism with Freethought
has always been remarkably close. The first Englishman to
call himself a Liberal—Shelley—was expelled from Oxford
for writing "The Necessity of Atheism." Charles Bradlaugh
was a Liberal M.P. The incidence of Freethought among
Liberals to-day is probably considerably higher than among
most political parties.

The enthusiasm shown by quite a number of your corres-
pondents for Communism and for the Soviet Union is, to say
the least of it, remarkable in a paper that calls itself, not
"The Atheist" but "The Freethinker." For, whatever
exists in Russia, Freethought certainly doesn't. The slightest
deviation from the official line, not merely in politics, but
even, as we have seen recently, in literature and science, is,
quite literally, a mortal sin. For Freethinkers to venerate
a society which persecutes alike Social Democrats and
Trotskyists, Liberals, independent men of letters and even
Mendelian biologists, while receiving the blessing of the
iconodolous Orthodox Church, is palpably absurd.—Yours,
R. M. DOUGLAS

(Prospective Liberal Candidate, Merton and Morden).

(We print the above two letters in support of our reiterated
claim that "The Freethinker" is an open Forum. It is
difficult to avoid reference to politics and we give our con-
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neutral though actively anti-authoritarian whether from the
Right or Left.—Editor.)

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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