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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and his Gods

IF the fear of God is not the beginning of wisdom, it is at least the beginning of religion. According to the Roman poet it was fear that first created gods in the world, and the same view is expressed by the English poet Shelley, who sings of "Almighty Fear, the Fiend-God." It is no less true that fear is generally, if not invariably, commensurate with ignorance. Man trembles before the unknown. His want of knowledge makes him the slave of his imagination. A danger which is understood loses half its terror, while a danger which is shrouded in mystery is so magnified by fancy as to paralyse the faculties. Under this glamour the bravest sink into cowards. If a couple of hardened duellists had to fight a duel in a darkened room, it is doubtful if either would have the courage to begin the engagement. Now savages, among whom religion originates, are always fighting in the dark against the forces of nature. Hence they are frightened in situations in which the civilised man preserves his composure. When, for instance, the lightning flashes and the thunder roars, they crouch in abject terror, precisely as a herd of cows will huddle together in a storm. But the civilised man understands the phenomena, he is acquainted with their causes, and knows the infinitesimal danger there is to himself, and sometimes instead of being alarmed, his whole being dilates with the tempest, and he revels in the enjoyment of a magnificent spectacle.

The difference in this respect between the savage and the civilised is the difference between ignorance and knowledge, or religion and science. The poor victim of superstition—and religion is only the superstition that is in fashion—is smitten upon his knees or even upon his face. The votary of science stands erect and unalarmed. The one trembles, the other is serene; the one prays, the other observes; the one worships, the other reflects.

Out of the terror of ignorance sprang the first gods of superstition. The earliest cultus is the worship of malignant powers. A benevolent God is the growth of a later age. But even then the ritual of religion bears traces of the older strata of belief and sentiment. While prayer against plague, pestilence, and famine, battle, murder, and sudden death, survives in the Church liturgy, we have visible evidence that religion retains relics enough of its older form to indicate to students the ideas in which it originated and the essential character of its influence.

A Christian divine has called it a compliment to religion to say that it originated in fear. "Fear," he said, "in its essential nature is something peculiar to man, something which marks out man from the beast of the field." We believe this assertion will astonish those who have any acquaintance with the lower animals. Nothing is more *animal* than the human expression of fear. We differ from the lower orders of life far more

in the expression of our joy. And the explanation is obvious. Joy, unless it be excessive, stimulates us; it heightens our vitality, and gives free play to our faculties. But fear represses and disorders. It strikes reason torpid and paralyses the will, it throws us back upon the law of self-preservation, and leaves us to the mere instincts of our animal nature.

The same theologian argued that "human fear is a divine thing"—an evidence of unseen spiritual powers and a presentiment of futurity. God planted it in human nature antecedent to experience. Why, else, does a child cry in the dark? Or why does an infant so often cry when lifted by a stranger? Thus the Christian divine argued. But the indisputable fact that fear is antecedent to experience needs no supernatural explanation. It is explained by natural selection and the law of heredity. In the long struggle for existence, through which evolution has operated, a confiding disposition would have made its possessor an easy victim to his enemies. The rule of safety was to regard every other being as a foe until he proved himself a friend. It was thus inevitable that suspicion of strangers should be inbred.

The theologian in question went on to argue that fear was the beginning of moral culture. "You can only teach a child love," he said, "through the revelation of fear." He meant, we presume, that punishment is the first stage of moral discipline. But we deny this. Punishment is a legacy of folly and brutality from the savage past. Repression is not education. Policemen may prevent burglary, but they will not moralise burglars. Prisons may deter from crime, but they do not foster virtue. When punishment makes men moral, strait-waistcoats will make lunatics sane. The law of moral ascent is that, as the powers of life flow in the direction of good, evil weakens and finally atrophies from disuse. When the truth is understood the whole system of supernatural ethics is seen to be false and mischievous. The fear of God is recognised as a relic of ignorance and barbarity, which serves nothing but the ends of priest-craft. Heaven is a bribe for fools and Hell is a threat for slaves. Moral causation and the science of character take the place of those fictions, and man treads the path of progress in the sunlight of truth.

Theologians explain conscience as born of the fear of God, just as some jurisprudents explain it as the residuum of the law. But a wiser man than any theologian or lawyer tells us that "Conscience is born of love." A great poet like Shakespeare not only flies higher, but digs deeper, than the so-called philosophers. He understands human nature better because he has more of it within him.

Evolution explains conscience as easily as it explains fear. Conscience is a product of social life; it is unintelligible in solitude where fear might be supreme. Moreover, it is now a well-established truth that fears of the gods had at first no connection whatever with morality; nor has it any real connection of that kind now—for virtue

is not the dread of a tribunal, but a spontaneous impulse flowing from the natural affections of a sympathetic heart. Such is the teaching of Secularism. But theological ethics is very different. It begins with a child's mistrust of strangers and dread of the dark, and ends with the fear of God, who is at once accuser, witness, judge and executioner.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE

AFTER 18 years, 326 Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England have met in Conference, bold as lions, and have now produced a mouse. As far as serving any useful purpose whatever—except patting each other on the back—they have miserably failed. The world goes on exactly as if they had never met, people are fearing war almost as much as they did in the heyday of Hitler's power, and the utter inability of the Church of Christ to do anything about it is more in evidence than at any time in its history. The Church, which used to interfere in secular affairs with almost unlimited power is now hopelessly futile. No government anywhere takes the slightest notice of any of its pronouncements.

The Church has produced a report, but it is doubtful whether the public in general will read it, or care in the least about what it says. As ever, it proclaims the good tidings that "our Lord" was against war—as if the common man, who makes up the bulk of armies, just loves to go out and be killed. During my own service in the first World War, I never met anybody, officer or private, who just didn't loathe the army and all it stood for quite as much as Jesus—if that God or Man really lived. We had to do our "duty" of course, but against war we were bitterly opposed. It was not the teaching or the example of a Palestinian God either which made us oppose it—it was the hard fact of having to go into battle, and run the risk of being killed, or being wounded, crippled for life perhaps. In other words, what Jesus said or did not say about war is so much useless verbiage—though it may be argued that when he said to his disciples "he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one," or when he told his devoted followers "I come not to send peace but a sword" it takes a lot of faith to see in him anybody opposed to war. Still, one of the rocks on which Christian faith is built is the fact that so many Christians do not read the Bible, and those that do are ready to believe that some of the words of Jesus always mean the opposite of what they say.

The Conference, of course, opposed the use of Atom warfare—but whether this was because Jesus opposed it, or whether it is, so to speak, a two-handed weapon which can even wipe out a large number of Bishops of the Church of England, is not quite clear. In any case, we are all against atom bombs or even rocket bombs or any kind of bombs. None of us wants any more war—that is, the common people don't want war, whether from bombs or anything else. Lots of people are always ready to "fight" for a cause, and some can be persuaded to fight for a political ideal and die for it. But this has nothing to do with the Lambeth Conference, or any resolutions of the Bishops, or even what Jesus had to say.

At the moment, one of these "idealisms" is Communism and our Bishops, who do not like Communism—though the early Christians were certainly Communists and in this, the "red" Dean of Canterbury is an active

follower—artfully join it with the more hated Atheism so that they can get their fling at anti-religious propaganda by claiming that "totalitarianism" is the direct result of disbelief in God. It is all very cleverly done, and the impression now is that an Atheist must be a Communist and must believe in "soul-less" totalitarianism. I am sure these Bishops would express some surprise if they learnt that many of our finest Freethinkers, like Bradlaugh, Ingersoll and Foote—to mention only three—bitterly opposed Socialism and all dictatorships. And among their followers are many Atheists including myself.

The fact is that long before Communism or any brand of totalitarianism became an "ideal," we Atheists were attacking Christianity with the weapons of science and reason. The Church was helpless for, however much it likes to claim that many scientists are its most fervent followers, the fact remains that science, as such, has no use whatever for a God, or miracles, or immortality in a Divine Paradise, or as Spiritualists prefer to call it, Summerland. Science deals with observed facts, and not a single scientist has ever seen either God, or his Son, or any "miracle."

In a debate held on the radio the other day, a canon had the temerity to meet Dr. Barnes on his book "The Rise of Christianity." I have heard a good many debates in my time but I have never heard so much balderdash in so short a time come from one man as poured out from Canon Richardson. Even the "Church Times" called the debate an "unsatisfactory affair." It certainly was. Here came a live Canon with all the might of the Lambeth Conference behind him telling us that Dr. Barnes was not "modern" enough. He was completely out of date. At the end of the nineteenth century the miracles of the Bible were not perhaps believed in by the "rationalists" of the day; now all "scholars" are agreed that they are all true, for the materialist conception of the Universe has been completely overthrown by science. I have rarely heard a man speak with so much contempt as did Dr. Barnes when he replied to such bilge, and he scornfully asked whether the Canon really believed that at the time of the Crucifixion "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. And came out of the graves after the resurrection . . . ?" Needless to say the cocksure Canon climbed down with a rush and tried to infer that this was only a little "embroidery" on Matthew's part; but he held, I am sure, by all the other miracles including, of course, that beautiful one of Jesus clinging to a flying devil over Jerusalem. Over and over again the Canon mentioned the trained scholars who believed all he did without giving us their names—and the "Church Times" had to admit that "most listeners will be disappointed by the fact that Canon Richardson did not give chapter and verse . . ." Science, needless to say, completely knocks out all religion—the study of Anthropology has shown us *why* people believe in Gods, spirits and miracles, not whether there is a God or not. The only disadvantage Dr. Barnes had in the debate was that he could not square his conception of "our Lord" with his scientific and historical deductions.

In the Conference Report, the Bishops admit that "Marxism by an ironic paradox is at some points nearer the Christian doctrine than any other philosophy in the field and this makes its rivalry all the more formidable." This also explains why some Atheists—like myself—oppose Marxism in all its many forms.

The Bishops feel that Marxism is "a secularised form of the Christian hope," and that Communism "seems

to many to have inherited a concern for the depressed and the down-trodden which is the glory of the Church." In fact the Church simply cannot bear any rivalry though, thank Heaven, it can always promise the poor the love of God. "Not even the atom bomb," the Report declares, "can separate man from the love of God." We are not told how the writers have found this out, and without evidence I feel that they have just made it up.

What the Conference has already achieved is to call attention to the utter futility of the Christian Church. Nothing that matters anything to anybody was accomplished by the brilliant galaxy of noble Bishops and Archbishops. They showed literally how completely helpless the Church was against the organised attack on religion by Freethinkers. They could only bleat that "the marriage of true science and religion is one of the most urgent needs of our time"—meaning by "true" science an abject submission to the childish and primitive dogmas of Christianity. They could not put forward a single idea which could help the Church to combat unbelief, let alone the bored indifferentism shown even by believers in their creed. Few Conferences have talked so much, in fact, and accomplished so little.

H. CUTNER.

SOME NOTES ON ARTHUR MACHEN

WRITING in a recent number of "The Freethinker," Mr. John Rowland mentioned Arthur Machen as one of those authors who refused to pander to the prejudices of their day, and who for that reason failed to achieve the reputation that their work merits. It is difficult to explain the neglect of his stories and novels, his best known work being a short story which originated the now famous myth of the Angels of Mons, called "The Bowmen," first published in a London evening paper. It is a sad reflection that such a short piece of work, and by no means his best, should be better known than anything he ever wrote, particularly as his name is seldom associated with it.

For the most part his works are accessible only in editions published years ago, though a selection of his short stories entitled "Holy Terrors" was published as a "Penguin" and slipped unobtrusively onto the market two years ago.

Born at Carleon in 1863, he began writing when he was about seventeen, trying his hand at the same time at a number of other jobs. Early in this century he became an actor in Sir Frank Benson's Shakespearian Company, in 1910 he joined the staff of the London "Evening News" remaining there until 1921. In 1947, he died, his death passing unnoticed, I believe, save for a long and generous obituary notice in "The Manchester Guardian."

His output was large, and included a number of translations from the French. Much of his work was published in various periodicals ranging from the "Evening News" to "Horlicks Magazine," for this reason it is difficult to trace all his short stories, one of the best of them, "The Garden of Avallaunus," being published in the last-named magazine.

Reading some of his stories it is impossible to avoid a comparison with Edgar Allen Poe. A macabre quality is common to parts of the work of both, but whereas with Poe the atmosphere is so often heavy with the odour of corruption, with Machen this springs from a mysticism that is inextricably bound up with his Welsh ancestry, Wales being in fact the scene of many of his

stories. For me also, Machen seems the greater craftsman, and his prose is worthy to rank with that of Conrad or E. M. Forster.

Some of the most moving and effective of his works, notably "The Great Pan" and "The Great Return," are written as "long short-stories"—not a popular medium amongst English writers, and most successfully used by the Germans Gerstaecker and Storm, in whose hands it became an accepted art-form. Machen's handling of this difficult medium deserves the highest praise, and both the tales I have mentioned show his deft handling of it.

Perhaps the greatest defect of his work is that his characters are never sufficiently clearly defined, it is rather as though they are caught in the golden mesh of his prose, and so fail to achieve any individuality. The correct phrases that spring repeatedly to their lips are in effect too correct, and they reach nothing but a shadow existence.

I have mentioned Arthur Machen's Welsh ancestry before, and this provides the clue to the intangible, unworldly quality of much of his work, a quality that is suggested most readily by a comparison with the thread of folk-mysticism that runs through the work of that great Irishman, J. M. Synge. Folk-mysticism is perhaps the nearest description of this imprecise factor; in the hands of a writer this rich vein is capable of infinite variation and subtlety, the light and shade of the prose being the index to the writer's exploitation of it.

These, then, are some of the features of the work of this regrettably too little-known writer, they would have meant little had he not been a man of extraordinary talent who was able to write stories of fantasy with the air of one who was writing of material things. Fantasy? This is not altogether the right word, but it is a measure of his greatness as a writer of English that it is quite impossible to sum him up in a few words, however well chosen.

VICTOR E. NEUBURG.

THE HAPPY MAN

WHO is the Happy Man?

Is it the one who takes a wife

And dutifully rears his brood

For King and Country's good?

Or is it he who can,

Uncaring, use the butcher's knife

To carve himself a slice of Life—

And drain his brother's blood?

WHAT is a Happy Man?

Will daily labour satisfy

The soul, or carping conscience ease?

Does it proudly please

Or merely feed and fan

Ambition, so that Man will try

To soar where Aims and Ideals fly—

And flying, only tease?

WHERE is the Happy Man?

And where will Happiness be found?

Not in begetting humankind,

And not in wealth or daily grind.

Yet simple is the plan.

Look not for it on earthy ground—

True Happiness is built around

Contentment of the Mind!

W. H. WOOD.

ACID DROPS

It must be gall and wormwood for the primitive type of the church mind to find—as does the "Church Times"—the Bishop of Truro following in the footsteps of the Bishop of Birmingham. Dr. Hunkin said, in his sermon before the Conference of Modern Churchmen, that "parts of the Gospel narrative have probably been embroidered by piety." They were not "literally historical." As for the Virgin Birth narratives, they "may be regarded as Christian Midrash rather than authentic history"; while "the speculative Christology authoritative in the fifth century is no longer adequate." So that, in spite of the Lambeth Conference, a live Bishop again is beginning to see the light—or should we say the red light? He is beginning to realise that true Christianity is nothing but a mass of silly fables and legends, and wants to see his brothers in Christ recognise this before it is too late.

Somebody has sadly pulled the "Cambridge Daily News" leg. It actually accepts the idiotic yarn of some Russian airmen locating Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat during the First World War; a typical Christian lie and, like all Christian lies, very difficult to catch up with. On the strength of this incredible hoax, Dr. Smith, the Dean of North Carolina school, is arranging for an expedition finally to locate the Ark and prove once and for all the truth of Gods' word. There is, of course, no limit to the gullibility of Christians, but one hardly credits the average reporter with sheer stupidity. Noah's Ark is in the same class as the many bottles of the Virgin's milk—and both raise a hearty smile even in religious circles.

"Science and religion must come to terms" says the "Yorkshire Evening Post." This profound observation was provoked by Dr. Inge's latest outburst on the occasion of his speech to the Modern Churchmen at Oxford. No realist can deny that religion is no longer what it was. But when theologians with a scientific background like Dr. Barnes, and Scientists with a religious background talk as they do, it proves that religion must be in a parlous state and Churchmen are at their wits end to stop the rot. Slogans, however, will not help. Religion and Science by their very nature are contradictory, and the theme of Draper's famous classic still holds.

"Eusebes" of the "Record" has it that the events in Palestine are testimony to the impending fulfilment of prophecy. It really is amusing (were the events in Palestine not so tragic) how Biblical students of prophecy can be so unblushingly wise after the event. The alleged prophecies in the Bible can be made to fit any occasion—from football to flying. We are still hopefully waiting for someone to find a prophecy foretelling the atom bomb. Strange that with all the knowledge of the world from the "beginning of time" through the present, to the future, that is stored between the covers of the Bible, no one discovered these things until they were discovered by modern science.

The "Teachers' World," from which we expected something better, writes in connection with the Butler (Education) Act, "We have got back to sincerity in the religious field, if we can get back to fundamentals—the three Rs in the schools will be as efficient as ever." What has religion to do with the three Rs? Twice one are two, whatever is God's ruling on the matter, and

despite the Christian dogma that three persons in one equals one. Reading without the critical habit is valueless, and it is certainly well known that the critical habit is not encouraged where religion is concerned. There is only one sane attitude to take in education and that is to ban religion altogether from the schools, as has been done in Russia and recently in the U.S.A. For once we agree with a parson who said that if Christians want religion they should support it and pay for it. As for the schools, secular education is the only sane attitude.

Some of the Lambeth Conference discussions call to mind the famous aphorism "They have sat on the fence so long that the iron has entered their souls." The Bishops have decided that "war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ," and in the next breath say that there are, however, occasions when war is necessary. Even atom bombs may be used in certain circumstances. The Bishops are obviously good politicians—and contortionists.

Dr. A. G. Lowndes is very upset. He has even written to the Bishop of Chichester about it. He has suddenly discovered that there will be no official religious service at Brighton on the occasion of the meeting there of the British Association this year, no solemn warnings by a priest if the scientists who are going to speak ignore the Church and God's Word, no reverent prayers to God Almighty imploring to save them through His Son Christ Jesus. It is an awful thought—that a meeting of scientists should thus ignore, nay, they are even perhaps hostile to, the Lord of all Creation.

The point to note, however, is that it is precisely these scientists who are always quoted as having annihilated the old fatuous, blatant materialism of the nineteenth century, and have now come to believe that, after all, the miracles of the Bible, and particularly those of the New Testament, are literally true. Dr. Barnes with his rejection of miracles is called completely out of date. And yet here is this body of scientists getting on with their job completely without any God—or even any miracles! No wonder Dr. A. G. Lowndes is very, very upset.

Yet another terrible thing has happened to God's own Church. It appears that a "sacred" vessel, a "consecrated" chalice, was seized by Custom officers and will be released only when the required taxes have been paid. A Member of Parliament felt it was his duty to find out why such holy articles had to have duty paid on them, and that devout Christian, Sir Stafford Cripps, has now replied. "The character of those articles," he declared, "does not affect their liability to duty and purchase tax and they can be released only on payment of these charges . . ." This "secularisation" of holy vessels, even by pious members of the Government, is a real smack in the face of the Church, but what can be done about it? Even fervent prayers by the Pope can't change a hard secular fact.

A heartfelt cry from a Catholic shows how the wind blows sometimes. He writes to a religious journal that he cannot get a home for himself in England, or for his family in Ireland, but "though we can look forward to reunion and eternal happiness in the next world, please God, we would like a little home on earth as well." Perhaps he would be really astonished to learn that the little home on earth for "weans and wife" as Burns once said, is—just Secularism!

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SUGAR PLUMS

You can now get, for 1s. 6d., in the Pelican Books, another "Life of Jesus"—this time by the Protestant, the late Dr. Cadoux. Needless to say, it is based on the Gospels, but Dr. Cadoux does not always agree with current interpretations, and gives his own of many "obscure" passages. He does not believe in the Virgin Birth, and therefore points out that "neither Paul nor Peter nor Mark (nor, incidentally 'John') knows anything about a virgin birth." All these modern "biographers" appear to know exactly what Paul, Peter, Mark, or John knew—though there is not a scrap of evidence that, outside the New Testament, they had a real existence.

The New Testament documents we have were, of course, written by somebody, but even Christian scholars have to admit that, in the form we have them, they are edited versions of older writings, the authors of which are quite unknown. Who, for example, was the writer of "Q"—the supposed first "original" of our Gospels, or of one or two of them? In any case, the Church, as a Church, does not agree with Dr. Cadoux, and will never give up the Virgin Birth so long as it can impress its followers with such a wonderful miracle. And the same goes for the Devil. Dr. Cadoux prefers to believe that the encounter of Jesus with the Devil was merely a question of "moral evil", but no Christian imbued with the original primitive doctrine would ever give up belief in a real personal Devil—horns, tail and all.

Freethought has always played an important part in the fight for sex education—which has now become comparatively respectable. We are pleased to note, therefore, the appearance of "The Journal of Sex Education," edited by one of the foremost sexologists of the day, Dr. Norman Haire. For those interested in sexual problems, such a journal is a necessity, dealing as it does with a much tabooed and much discussed subject—especially in the fearless and outspoken way for which Dr. Haire is famous. Articles by the editor and experts like Lotte Fink, M.D., R. B. Kerr, M.A., Richard Aldington, Charles Berg, M.D., as well as "Questions and Answers" and some excellent book reviews are part of the contents of the first number. At the moment the "Journal" is published every two months; single copies are 2s., yearly subscription 10s. 6d. (12s. 6d. abroad). The editorial offices are at 127, Harley Street, London, W. 1.

THANKS

I have received from all quarters congratulations on reaching my 80th year, 63 of which have been spent in the service of Freethought. I greatly appreciate the more than friendly letters received, and I shall take it as a great favour if my friends will accept this as an acknowledgment. My life has been a glorious one, and I hope to strike a few more blows for the Best of Causes before the light goes out.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

FALLACIES OF DETERMINISM

MAN is an incorrigible rebel. He rebels against the gods. He rebels against nature. He rebels against man himself. Say that he is the sport of the gods, then, to hell with the gods. Assert that he is the victim of circumstances, then, so much the worse for circumstances. He cannot restrain himself. He is determined and his determination knows no bounds. He persistently re-asserts himself. The soul of man is invincible. Needs must, when the devil drives, says the old saying.

The old doctrine of determinism is turned into one of economic determinism. Base it upon a doctrine of materialism and it is met with one of dialectic materialism. Assert a doctrine of necessity, it is followed by one of economic necessity. Assert that determinism is a necessity of thought and the reply is that thought without action is useless, that determination is a necessity of action. But there is fallacy in such a determinism, for dialectic in action is conflict, not with the gods, nor with nature, but with man himself, man against man.

Doctrine is contradicted by doctrine, yet remaining doctrinaire. But negation of negation is neither synthesis nor compromise, and a balanced judgment is not a combination of exaggerated idiosyncrasies. Contradiction in action is dangerous, but in thought may be useful. Critical analysis in words is useful; is part of the educational process. We may learn from such a process without danger to life or limb. If thought is abstract, so also is man. In identifying oneself with man, we are faced with self-contradiction. The ideological conflict is both interesting and vital.

We are vitally interested in the relatedness of thought to action. But the need here is for reconsideration, not restatement nor reinterpretation. Nor is it perversity or duplicity that leads to this contradictory change in meaning. The necessity is vital.

It is clear that our concept of the atom is no longer the indivisible particle or unit of matter. It is equally clear that the matter or material of dialectic materialism is not the matter of the old materialism. But these changes are not the result of dialectic argument, but arise of necessity from actual experiment, from actual experience. It is not simply that we have left the old concept of matter behind, but that we have learned that we need different standards or units for the subject matter of different fields of inquiry.

In mathematics we have ideal units and symbols and methods of their combination in comprehensive systems of calculation. In physics we need measureable quantities in the computation of observable fact. Whereas, in biology we have actual living forms as the subject matter for observation. But man, as a social animal, needs more than mathematical, physical or

biological consideration for a comprehensive understanding. We have different subject matter.

Just as mathematics does not supply the needs of biology, so also is biology insufficient in the field of social inquiry, for man changes his environment. Survival implies the persistence of customs and beliefs, institutions and ideas, but evolutionary development involves the actual cultivation of wants and wishes, hopes and fears, as well as the inheritance of old fallacies, preconceptions and prejudices. And we ourselves are the subject matter. The development of human personality involves dangerous as well as survival value propensities and idiosyncrasies. We are personally involved in the Old Adam.

We are concerned, not only with methods of production of the means of livelihood, nor even of instruments of destruction, but also the production of mental and emotional states. The pains and penalties of discipline in the interest of progressive social integration, involve personal reactions to it. And it is clear that the necessity that gives rise to the schizophrenia of the paranoiac or the mass hysteria of social insomnia, is not the same as that of mathematical, physical, or even biological science. There is not only a difference in the subject matter but also the needs of the case.

The primary term in our doctrine seems to be necessity, but in retrospect we can see a continuous change in our concept of necessity, following the acquisition of scientific knowledge. And this involves a persistent reaffirmation and self-assertion. If God is a magnified soul, the self is the ghost of a god.

The law of the jungle, tooth and claw, was a matter of life and death. Everything happened through the curse or blessing of some magician, known or unknown. Blood feud was a sacred duty and vengeance was rough justice. Self-preservation, self-determination, self-expression; the savage discovered the animistic soul. His needs, wants and wishes, hopes and fears, were expressed in magic, totem and taboo. Sleeping or waking, it was a timeless, immeasurable, fantastic, miraculous world, in which the dead lived and anything was possible; a dream world in which necessity was incalculable, unavoidable, inevitable caprice.

But a change came with methods of calculation; in the concept of necessity; an attempt to escape the illusion. But the calculable necessity of Democritus; his atomic mathematical point; was confused by multiplicity in unity, the All in One; by the identity of opposites of Empedocles, the affinities of love and hate. Nature was a paradox. To Heraclitus, there is neither beginning nor end to a circle, all comes from, and returns to, the divinity. To Pythagoras, the apparent certitude and permanence of number magic was divine wisdom; and evidence of Plato's Eternal Verities; a world of shadows. With Epicurus' incalculable atomic swerve, even the physical realm was uncertain. Necessity was still the incalculable, unavoidable, inevitable caprice of Fate.

With the pros and cons of philosophic dialectic came a new necessity; reason, logical necessity and Aristotle's logic. But with the personal appeal of ethic and rhetoric, of Stoic duty and Epicurean pleasure, dialectic became Manichean conflict. Neo-Platonic meta-physics and Gnostic mysticism lead on to the Christian Mystery. Lost in personification and identification, in the mysteries of communion and incarnation, Divine Reason was sacrificed in the Person of the Logos. To the impeccable logic of St. Augustine, all was predestined by the Will of God. Necessity, the caprice of Fate, was Divine Grace, inevitable, incalculable, incomprehensible.

Man's impotence in face of the inevitable is a cornerstone of theology. But mechanical and physical science brought another concept of necessity, physical necessity. And with it, a change, from the religious power of possession to the political possession of power; the Machiavellian means to ends of power politics, and Hobbes imperial Leviathan. The political machine brought the dialectic conflict of the gods down to earth. But in physics, action and reaction are equal and opposite. The Berkeley-Hume controversy ends in Kant's categorical imperative. In domination and submission, necessity is still the caprice of Fate, the dynamic force of circumstances; unavoidable, inevitable.

With the biological necessity of the struggle for existence we are back in the jungle. The materialist conception of history is not mechanistic, nor even Darwinian. Marx's personification of economic categories is as personal as the Christian God and its identification as mystic as that of the Gnostics. Its profit motive is as personal as the seven deadly sins of Christian theology, using the method of wholesale declamation of the biblical prophets. Its technique of revolution is a heritage of power politics, and its dialectic, a heritage of philosophic and theological appeals to age-old antipathies. Economic necessity, equated with personal needs under force of economic circumstances, involves historical and primitive misunderstandings of personal relationships.

The incalculable, unavoidable, inevitable consequences of paranoiac inconsistency; this megalomaniac determination to determine determining conditions, needs a conception of psychological necessity. In the personal relationships of social life, man's environment is man. In the concept of personality the animistic self is confused in the mystical communion of self with not-self; and the psychological necessity of self-assertion in self-contradiction arises in the persistence of coercive practices. The problem of personality is both psychological and social. This ideology of the jungle, conflict and force, may be historical. But is it a social necessity?

H. H. PREECE.

MARY'S MOVING MIRACLE

QUITE a lot was said and written about the pre-election tactics in Italy; but even stranger still was that American tanks and warships were supplemented by a regular series of electioneering "miracles"!

The papers of the Vatican and De Gasperi put out reports about a blasphemer, member of the Democratic Front, who was punished by the Virgin for his lack of faith: he fell down a staircase and promised to mend his ways. On the other hand, a cripple, staunch follower of the Christian Democrats, was miraculously healed before the eyes of the populace. And a blessed nun, after the 13th day of her death, gave off an odour of violets—and so on.

The reactionary press babbled in all earnest about all these medieval frauds and printed them alongside with the latest horrors of Bolshevism in Czechoslovakia, Malaya or What-have-you.

One fine electioneering day, some benighted pilgrims claimed to have perceived the stone figure of a Madonna to have begun moving over the portal of a church in Assisi. The news was at once given roaring publicity. Dutiful reporters penned colourful accounts of the "miracle," the weekly newsreel got hold of the Moving Madonna and a crowd of pilgrims flocked to Assisi.

The papers came out with glaring headlines:—

"ASSISI MADONNA CONTINUES TO MOVE

Assisi, March 21 (*Ansa*).—As usual on Sunday, over 20,000 pilgrims were in Assisi to-day, 6,000 of them from Tuscany. The movements of the statue over St. Mary's Church were particularly clearly discernible."

If you bear in mind that ANSA is the official News Agency of the Italian Government, you can smell the rat. The Left retorted by a cartoon showing De Gasperi talking to the Secretary General of the Italian T.U.C. and saying: "If you start your metal workers moving, I am going to make all our Madonnas roll their eyes!"

At the same time the Right wing papers carried such captations as:—

"Secret Communist Army Organised in Lombardy by the Russian Military Mission"

(that is a verbatim quotation). And there are still a lot of credulous people who believe in everything they see in print. Not only in Italy; so that, time and again, you are reminded of Father Tertullian's dictum: "Credo quia absurdum est" (I believe however absurd it be).

TOM HILL.

CORRESPONDENCE

ON SIN

SIR.—Mr. Yates noticed the omission of a definition of sin in the Rev. Mr. Broom's article "The Necessity of Sin," but in trying to supply one, failed to see the character of his undogmatic modernist Christianity. Mr. Broom asserts "sin" as necessary. Certainly it is necessary to the Christian scheme of salvation, whether that is in this world or the next. And many Freethinkers have asserted the same in saying that sin is whatever is natural.

He says that we know sin by comparison with good. But do we? By the same logic we know good by comparison with sin. Certainly comparison shows a difference, but which is which, is an age-old controversy that has split the Church.

What is good for the tiger, is not good for the deer. One man's meat is another man's poison. What is good to the Nazi, is not good for the Communist. There are vital differences of opinion on the subject, and Mr. Broom in his evasion is as wise as the Church in leaving his readers to assume that they know the difference, and that their own ideas and interests are good. But in his crusade against sin, Mr. Broom is perpetuating the old Manichean conflict, there is not only the absence of a definition, but also of any criterion.

One cannot conduct intelligent discussion in antiquated theological terms.

H. H. PREECE.

OBITUARY

HARRY HASSELL

It is with a feeling of deep sorrow that we announce the death of Harry Hassell, President of The Leicester Secular Society, which took place on August 29, in his 65th year. His health had not been good for a number of years due to his service during the first World War, but he was always cheerful, always hopeful, and a sincere Freethinker in every fibre. Next to his home where he had the blessing of a loyal, understanding, and helpful wife, came the Secular Hall and the Freethought movement, and nothing could slacken his enthusiasm, his work, and hope for the cause. For fifteen years he was Vice-President of the Leicester Society. He will be sorely missed in those circles. He and Mrs. Hassell were both members of the N.S.S. and readers of "The Freethinker," and the relations between the two organisations are very cordial. The immediate cause of death appears to have been a collapse following a serious operation from which he seemed to be recovering. The cremation took place at the Gilraes Crematorium, Groby Road, on Wednesday September 1, where, before a large number of members of The Leicester Secular Society, and friends, a Secular Service was read by Mr. F. J. Corina.

To the widow and members of the family we offer our deepest sympathy.

R.H.R.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held 2nd September, 1948

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair.

Also present Messrs. Rosetti (A.C.), W. Griffiths, L. Ebury, J. G. Lupton, R. J. Woodley, E. J. Page, P. V. Morris, G. H. Taylor, J. W. Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Bradford, Crewe, North London branches, and Parent Society.

Instructions were given for the completion of the N.S.S. Handbook. Edinburgh Branch was promised help when more details of future work were to hand. On reported information that German Societies were not to be invited to the International Freethought Congress in Rome next year, a question is to be directed to the Executive Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers. Future lecture arrangements were reviewed.

The death of Harry Hassell, President of The Leicester Secular Society was reported. A warm tribute to his character and work was paid by Mr. Cohen, and a motion expressing sympathy with his widow in her great loss was passed.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, October 7, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Influence of Religion on Law" (I), "Ancient Times," Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch (Market).—Sunday, 3-15 p.m. and 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Crawshawbooth.—Monday, September 13, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Great Harwood.—Saturday, September 18, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

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

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

ARMY OFFICER now in Cyprus, requires comfortable lodgings in Woolwich or Blackheath District from the first week in October. Offers to Box 107, "Freethinker," 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C. 1.

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DESIGN

- (1) Design is so important a subject in the theory of religion that one can continue its consideration.
- (2) In a previous section three alternative hypotheses were stated, but one should realise there are others.
- (3) In Western Christianity it is generally postulated that the Designer of the Universe was benevolent.
- (4) But the hypotheses are equally valid that He may have been malevolent, cynical, or even sadistic.
- (5) There is evidence of as much evil as good in the world; indeed this constitutes the great problem of evil.
- (6) The hypothesis that God is benevolent, i.e., that God is love, is a later, comparatively modern, innovation.
- (7) Primitive gods seem to have been arbitrary, jealous, vindictive and very anthropopathic entities.
- (8) In the monotheism of the Jewish Old Testament this type of God is nationalistic and partisan.
- (9) The conception of His disappointment, anger or vengefulness as exhibited through some tribe, is typically primitive.
- (10) Then, as now, by our anthropopathic standards, there was, and is, as much evil as good in the world.
- (11) Christianity, like Buddhism which preceded it, professed a new gospel of Love, superseding the old teaching.
- (12) But this is no evidence that God's attributes changed, either then or at any time, nor is this probable.
- (13) In spite of the change in teaching the general behaviour of humans continued much as it was before.
- (14) Many old ideas were carried over into the new religion in such anthropopathic beliefs as Providence.
- (15) A belief in Providence is arbitrary, personal and inequitable and wrecks any hypothesis of a perfect plan.
- (16) The essential dualism of the religious standpoint is exhibited in this belief and its corollaries.
- (17) If the hypothesis of God implies that He is omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent then Design should be perfect.
- (18) To alter perfection destroys it: yet the suggestion is that God frequently intervenes to change Design.
- (19) If any change were made it would demonstrate that God's design was not perfect.
- (20) The belief that alterations in nature are made in response to human prayers is anthropopathic.
- (21) Is there any scientific or objective evidence of any perfect Design, or of any overall Design at all?
- (22) In details Nature exhibits adaptations to ends, but these are invariably imperfect and complicated.
- (23) Such adaptations are often the crudest forms of survival evolution at the expense of other forms.
- (24) A tiger's teeth may be well adapted to hold its living prey, but the latter might not approve the Design.
- (25) The poison apparatus of a cobra is an interesting example of evolution, but none the less dangerous.
- (26) Scientific evidence of natural processes shows the most elaborate and wasteful methods in every direction.
- (27) So far from the processes being perfect they appear to science as tortuous, involved and extravagant.
- (28) If there is any purposeful Design in Nature this seems the most cumbersome method of accomplishing an end.
- (29) Never within the range of human imagination was such an elaborate process devised to accomplish so little.
- (30) Nowhere within the sphere of human understanding can one find such blind groping after unknown ends.
- (31) No hypothesis of a perfect system can be justified by any human thinking which is scientific and rational.
- (32) The changes which have occurred seem to be a clumsy sequence of undesigned trial and error.
- (33) The higher up the evolutionary scale one pursues investigations the more striking this becomes.
- (34) The results to-day are a heterogeneous collection of archaic structures and non-functioning remnants.
- (35) At the end of the process humans have added their own incongruities to the grotesqueness of Nature.
- (36) Do humans generally, indeed does any human in particular, regard this world as the best of all possible worlds?
- (37) If so, then there is no reason for endeavouring to alter it and amelioration and redemption are alike needless.
- (38) The fact that most humans hope it will be improved is sufficient proof that they do not consider it perfect.
- (39) The hypotheses maintained by all religions raise insuperable difficulties for their own explanations.
- (40) The hypothesis of the "fall of man" is a particularly incongruous attempt to find a solution.
- (41) Even if one subtracts humanity from the totality of this world's history the problem of Evil remains unsolved.
- (42) Millions of years before humans evolved there was strife and struggle between sentient creatures.
- (43) What was the purpose of all this pain and suffering which occurred before man's advent and continues still?
- (44) Evil of this and many other kinds existed before and apart from human actions, but was no less real suffering.
- (45) Man's relations to his Creator could not have affected this; was this evil therefore all part of the Divine Design?
- (46) If one gives up the problem as insoluble then one has no rational right to build hypotheses on it.
- (47) That this world is regarded as imperfect by religionists is shown by their arguments for religion.
- (48) They endeavour to explain the problem of evil by theories which result in contradictions and confusion.
- (49) Yet they do not realise, generally, that they make many of their own problems by postulating incongruities.
- (50) No hypothesis has yet given a solution of this Design problem which is at once rational and logical.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

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