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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Just a Matter of Birth

WHEN the Jews were in the wilderness, and, under the guidance of the Lord, taking 40 years to do a 40 days journey, they carried round a box or Ark, which contained some very holy things, and upon the safe custody of which the welfare of the people depended. It has been suggested that the contents of the Ark were no more or less than certain phallic symbols. The contents of the ark are certainly described as of stone. There has been much discussion on this point, and we know that stone phalli are very common with primitive religions. At any rate, the Ark was a box in which the God—or a God—was carried about by his worshippers. This served a dual purpose. It enabled the worshippers to keep an eye on their God, and it enabled the God to keep an eye on his worshippers. From what we know of both, neither would be any the worse for that precaution being taken. The Ark, again, was a very powerful piece of ju-ju; its presence secured victory in battle, and its absence brought defeat. What was in the box no one can be quite certain of, but no ordinary person was allowed to see. The touch of unauthorised hands brought death, or plague, much as a tabooed object among savages brings death or disease to those who handle it. The priests knew what was there but they were privileged persons, and kept their knowledge to themselves. The priests of those days knew their business, and the time allowed them to practise it is a safe way. But let no one imagine that the ancient Israelites had a monopoly of superstitions. In the early 19th century, thousands of people believed in Joanna Southcott and her wonderful box.

Altogether, the British public has not been treated well by this wonderful box. It was to hold some wonderful revelation which came direct from God, and it was to be opened in the presence of 24 bishops who were to be there, not by arrangement, but by inspiration. The box was opened, and instead of a number of more or less foolish prophecies, such as one might expect to find, it contained nothing but rubbish, including a medal, some common jewellery, a night-cap, and some cheap novels, under such titles as "Surprises of Love," or "An Adventure in Greenwich Park." Until the box was opened, we must confess that we expected to find some message of the kind that religious ravings have made us familiar with. The contents being what they were, makes one wonder whether the lady was quite so demented as she appeared to be. It is probable that Joanna trusted to the 24 bishops never being simultaneously inspired to meet and open the box, or trusted to its being lost, like the Israelitish Ark, altogether.

Joanna Southcott was born on a Devonshire farm in 1750, and in 1791 declared herself to be "The Lamb's wife, and worried a number of men of position, including some bishops, to get herself officially recognised." She

did manage to get some clergymen, between then and 1804 to recognise her as the "Bride of Christ," and to sign a declaration that her writings mainly contained in a work entitled "The Strange Effects of Faith" were drawn "wholly and entirely from the Spirit of the Living Lord." But her trump card was that of taking the "Bride of the Lord" in the most literal sense. She was visited by Jesus and in 1813, it was announced by her "if the visitation of the Lord does not produce a son this year, then Jesus was not the son of God, born in the manner spoken, to the Virgin Mary, but if I have a son this year, then in a like manner our Saviour was born." The "Morning Chronicle" for September 22nd in that year contained a notice of the place in which the birth might take place. Joanna was "overwhelmed" with presents. She is said to have received over thirty thousand pounds. But the divine baby never came. In the end she was found to be suffering from, and died of, dropsy.

It seems that some of the newspapers were a little bit troubled as to whether they should take the baby from Heaven seriously, but good christians might take this from the New Testament:—

The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women . . . And, behold, thou shalt . . . bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus . . . Then Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

I may say in passing, that the book which I have quoted from was published in 1814 and professed to give an account of the events which was to lead to "Her miraculous conception of Shiloh and of the numerous presents sent to her preparatory to her accouchement." The other account is taken from the gospel of St. Luke. The newspapers write of the vulgar credulity which could place any reliance on the story of 1814. One would like to know in what way does one dose of religious credulity differ from the others? Is a miraculous conception more reasonable in Judea in the year one of this era than in the year 1814? Surely what God has done once he could do again? Surely London is as worthy of a miracle as Judea? Will someone please tell us why, when an event that is inherently incredible to-day is credible if it is said to occur yesterday?

The Christian may reply that the visions of Joanna, how, when alone in her room, she "felt the hand of the Lord upon her," etc., were obviously based upon the

accounts given in the New Testament. Unquestionably, and Joanna would have been the last to deny it. She believed in her own experiences because she first of all believed in the New Testament. And one is tempted to say that present day Christians laugh at the inherent absurdity of Joanna's story, because they perceive the inherent absurdity of their own authorised tale. Joanna believed she was the woman foretold in Revelation, she believed that "the Lord" would come again, and held that he would come in the same way as on the previous occasion. One thing is not more wonderful than another. A few years ago the followers of Joanna were said to number half-a-million. But the spectacle of half-a-million people believing in the delusions of a half-crazed woman is not in itself more pitiable than several millions wrangling over whether a little dough and cheap wine become the actual flesh and blood of a God or not.

The real lesson of the life of Joanna Southcott, is not whether she was a fraud, or suffering from a sheer delusion, or a genuine messenger from "the Lord," but the evil done by the saturation of the social atmosphere with the Christian superstition. It is this that enables all sorts of frauds and follies to flourish; here an Elmer Gantry veiling intense salacity and greed under zeal for the conversion of sinners; elsewhere the elevation of mediocrities to positions of public importance because of their power to pander to the religious ignorance of masses of the people. The fact of large numbers of people believing in the Judean virgin birth, or the possibility of its recurrence in London, would make no more than an item in an interesting study in popular delusions; it is the reaction of this type of mind on social life that is of profound consequences. For these people have votes. There are two places in which the fool and the philosopher meet upon absolute equality. One is in the field of theology, the other is the polling booth and the rogues know it.

I have been explaining how Joanna Southcott came from heaven to England in 1750 to present Jesus, in the form of her child. In the end she failed in her purpose. But she did develop her body in a way that a child might appear as Jesus, but Jesus never appeared. As a matter of fact, there have been a large number of godly women trying to bring Jesus to the front in that way, but none have succeeded. Up to date, so far as Christians go, there is only the one case of bringing a person from heaven to earth in full form, the one mentioned in the New Testament.

Now, historically, there have been a number of men and women who claimed to be in touch with God and his son. When it came from ordinary people, the Church in power used a very powerful engine of punishment by way of education. People were punished in various ways, but the most popular was by first torturing in private, and then by burning in public, and as late as the seventeenth century James Naylor had his tongue bored by a red-hot iron.

And recently to prove the truth of the Christian religion, on a particular day, the Roman Church gathered together a multitude of people, and before them the Sun danced from its position, and Jesus appeared first as a child in his mother's arms, and then a full-grown boy. I think that is enough, but there is more to tell. Meanwhile a book issued in London (1936), "English Messiahs," by Ronald Matthews, published by Methuen is worth reading.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

LIES AND LIBERTY

NO one interested in the human race and the development of intelligence can ignore the part which lying has played in history. The claim of the Freethinkers that everyone has a right to think for themselves is one which has always been challenged by authority and in our criticism of the Christian Religion first place must be given to the lies which have been forced on people as facts. In the first place we have the theory of the "Fall and Atonement" which is the basis of this religion. Obviously, unless there is a fall there can be no atonement.

Therefore we have the insistence that what is legendary must be taken as actual fact and all the rubbish of the Old Testament and the New foisted on people through the ages. Some of the keenest criticism has been of the alleged miracles which accepted with the mentality of the East have been severely dealt with over the succeeding 2,000 years. For my own part the wonders of "The Arabian Nights" and other similar tales are just as true (or false) as the tales in the Eastern Bible. Many of them have been rejected since they are so obviously silly and false; that is, just too silly even for the advocates of Christianity to swallow.

There is, however, an even more serious aspect of this problem. Every Freethinker will admit that lying, particularly religious and political, plays a very big part in the history of mankind and this is true also of to-day. Nobody can be surprised at this. After all, from the cradle to the grave men and women are taught lies as facts. From Baptism, which is the reception of the child into the Church and the undertaking by the god-parents (note the word "god") that it will be brought up in the faith which it is too young to understand, to the Sunday Schools, the Church, Marriage and finally Death, the individual has a set of formulae to which he is supposed to conform.

Reared in an environment of legends and fairy tales can it be wondered that lying has become a feature of history? As a matter of fact, history itself has always been written by the winners and the disagreeable facts have been suppressed and the ideas of the losers have been misrepresented.

It is not sufficient that lies should be continually repeated until they are accepted as truth. It is also vital that those who expose them as lies should be denied an opportunity of publicising the truth and in this respect Christianity has been one of the greatest curses of mankind. It has murdered its opponents and exalted falsehood. The peoples of the world are the poorer because the thinkers of the past have been treated as if they were a fatal disease rather than those whose every desire was the intellectual development of the race. Rather is it the sycophant that has survived, the mentality that would believe or rather profess anything, religious or otherwise which authority insisted was correct.

Considering the power of the Christian Church as instanced in the Inquisition and also in the social ostracism which has been the lot of every Freethinker it is remarkable that the truth has prevailed to the extent we know it to-day. It has never been my idea that the priestly class were so foolish as to accept as facts the doctrines they preached. As a matter of fact history proves that they were never among the humble and lowly. The bishops, cardinals and other prelates of history have been the spiritual lords ranking with those of the temporal class and the same mentality has

been common to both. The priest who is "called" to the Church must be as keenly alive as his fellow students at the Universities to the real facts of existence as those who later earn their living in the professions.

All of which means that the clergy play a part to get their living. They pretend there is some omnipotent power ruling the Universe, a really magnificent conception but totally silly when it is conceived as an immense man with a beard. That "he" is everywhere and at all time, from the spiral nebulae to the smallest atom. That he can do anything and is susceptible to poor, weak man's prayer. Some of the religious people have taken this at its face value and say that one might get into touch direct with such a power. Granted the truth of the primary idea such an approach is of course quite reasonable but it pays no dividends to the clergy and savours of the radio service, which circulates the idea but cannot take the collection!

With all this propaganda of the idea of God, we know that it is just impossible. That all the Gods and Goddesses (including the Virgin Mary and the Saints) and Jesus Christ are figments of the imagination. In other words that the idea is a lie but one which has paid wonderful dividends in the past. It is so good a trade that from the Roman Catholic Church has spread the Church of England, all the Nonconformist bodies and the hundred-and-one oddities in the style of the "Four Square Gospellers," the Spiritualists, etc. There has been a perfect mania for setting up offshoots of the Christian Religion which has not been caused by the claim that the religion is true so much as that advantage has been taken of the ignorance of people to set up still another group who, thinking they are in particular touch with the Almighty, are paying for and keeping in comfort still another parasite. That objective, ladies and gentlemen, is the beginning and end of religion. Whatever reason there may be for the legendary history of the Gods and Goddesses.

"The Freethinker," therefore, is carrying on the historic duty of broadcasting new ideas, not only in relation to religion but of those humanitarian doctrines upon which the development of the human race depends. It is only the mentality which exposes reaction in religion that can advocate new scientific ideas. That is the Dialectic of History. New ideas must push out old ones and the upholders of the latter will use every effort to protect them. Given equal opportunity truth would have an easy win but in the bitter and beastly growth of humanity the scales have been heavily weighted in favour of the old and the lie has been an easy winner compared with the truth.

An examination of the Roman Catholic Church shows only too blatantly how much suppression has played in its history and not only the Inquisition and all that it stood for in the way of cruelty but also the Index, that is, the prohibition of certain books, show how well the clergy recognise that given the opportunity mankind will accept truth rather than lies.

After all the human brain is not a mechanical apparatus. It can read new ideas and then proceeds to cogitate upon them and reach certain conclusions. Its peculiarity is such that the conclusions reached and the actions dependent on such conclusions may only fructify years after the original reading. Oft-times even suppression makes persons more determined to get at the truth of things and men have faced death rather than recant. This in turn has inspired others. Religion itself has been modified to the extent that humanity grew more tolerant and even Hell has been given up as a

threat and religion to-day concerns itself more with morality which in itself is a growth of the social conscience and not the particular creation of some almighty power.

One may say that religion has been humanised and with the further spread of knowledge people will no more think of appealing to Heaven for help through the clergy than of dressing up in feathers and paint and dancing round with the witch doctor of the primitive tribe.

"Publicity for Truth" should be one of our slogans. The extension of knowledge is the peculiar heritage of the Freethinkers. The exposure of the lie and also the liars is part of our task. If this exposure relates to subjects other than Religion then we must accept the obligation and recognise that as religion is founded on deliberate lies and suppression of the truth we can hardly expect modern society will accept truth without it is prepared to fight reaction and that as religion is a part of life from the cradle to the grave, so the liar only continues to be respected because of the hold religion has had on people down the ages.

T. D. SMITH (SR.).

LAWFUL AUTHORITY

A little discussion is now taking place in the Church as to what constitutes, or what is meant by the words, "lawful authority," in the declaration which all entering the Church of England have to sign—"I will use the form in the Book of Common Prayer . . . ordered by lawful authority." Dr. Cranage gives in the "Church Times" a short account of what might well be called "squabbling" which the problem has introduced into theological gatherings, and he points out that "the present state of things bordering on anarchy, cannot surely be regarded as satisfactory." So far, we are told, there seems to be only two alternatives, "anarchy or disestablishment," and Dr. Cranage is against the latter. As he doesn't like anarchy either, he can find only one solution—"Let us all earnestly pray that wisdom may be given to those in authority. . . ." This about equals the heartfelt cry, "God help us," when nothing further can be done, and the case is literally hopeless.

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ACID DROPS

An article in the "Church Times" admits that "it is no secret that differences of opinion in the Lambeth Conference ran high, and that the Catholic-minded bishops would have refused to assent to any resolutions that went further in the way of concessions to Protestant opinion than did those that were actually adopted." We are not surprised. The "Catholic-minded" bishops have always resented "Protestantism," in fact, they generally speak of Protestants with the greatest contempt. "High Church" of England simply means Popery without the Pope, and many Anglo-Catholics would gladly be "re-united" to Rome if only the Vatican would relax some of its "principles." To be once again united, however, would mean the end of the Church of England and even its bishops dare not go as far as that.

A reviewer of a book on James II by F. C. Turner, says that "he was probably the most stupid king who ever sat upon the English throne." Not only the stupidest, but certainly the biggest cad, and he was rightly turned out for good and all. It is the fashion of people like Hilaire Belloc to praise him up because in his youth he joined the British Navy—or what was then called the British Navy—but his conversion to Roman Catholicism only accentuated his beastliness. The British people could stand a lot but James II, in spite of his being so profoundly religious, was, thank Heaven, a bit too much even for them.

A religious writer declares that "standing and kneeling are two of the most common postures allowed in divine worship." Kneeling is not quite the right word—it should be grovelling, as anyone can see entering a church with its primitive atmosphere. "Standing," continues the writer, "is a posture of respect, readiness and attention." When we read the "holy Gospel," we must stand up, otherwise how is the Almighty to know that we are not respectful, or even respectable? "Kneeling," he adds, "is a gesture of humility." Of course. We ought to show our humility to our betters, especially to our religious betters and, of course, to the Lord. We have many counts against religion but such abject subservience is surely one of the worst aspects of this primitive and credulous cult.

Among the many headaches the Church of England has to suffer is its "teaching colleges." A correspondent to the "Church Times" gives a delightful picture after three years residence in one of them, and it proves once again how hard and slippery is the path of the true believer. It appears that few of the lecturers at this training college are Church of England men—once they had to be; later, membership of the C. of E. was not necessary; and soon perhaps it will be "No member of the Church of England need apply." In fact, one of the lecturers—on health education—is actually an Atheist. Few of the lecturers attend the annual Church Training Colleges Conference, and they rarely discuss chapel matters; and most of them attend service only as a "duty." In fact "there was in our college no sense whatever of a Church of England community." On the other hand, "I know personally three colleges for women where the Church of England atmosphere is very present," which is probably quite true. Only these women can never be ordained. In any case, do our bishops really imagine that the products of such training colleges can meet the attack of modern science and reason?

Another headache—which however all the Churches have to face—is, what exactly is a Sin against the Holy Ghost? The Catholic Catechism gives six of these "sins"—presumption, despair, resisting the known truth, envy of another's spiritual good, obstinacy in sin, and final impenitence. But "blasphemy of the Spirit" which is what "our Lord" said it was, is so hopelessly destitute of meaning that even the spiritual adviser of the "Universe" can only say that it means "probably" final impenitence. Most of the readers of this journal, we hope, have thus sinned against the Holy Ghost—and needless to say, we are not a whit the worse for it.

Mr. T. O'Brien, who is the Catholic Labour M.P. for West Nottingham, said the other day that "the real issue before the modern world is not whether a person is a member of the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Party—although these things must not be set aside altogether—but whether or not a person believes in the existence of the soul." We wonder whether Mr. O'Brien would vote for a member of the Labour Party if he were an Atheist, or would give his vote to a Conservative if he were a Catholic? Mr. O'Brien is not likely to answer, but we note that he does not like Communism "especially the Moscow brand." It would prove interesting to learn if he is against Moscow's Communism merely because it is called "Atheistic," or if he would be entirely for it if it threw in its lot with Rome—or even with the Greek Orthodox Church?

"Brutus" in an article in the "Recorder" that was to "shake the world's conscience" ought to be more careful or his own complacency may be shaken if he realises the full implication of his assertion that we have "the priceless heritage of Christ's words because the world was so much more civilised under the Romans than now." Perhaps "Brutus" did not realise that the decline of the Roman civilisation coincided with the rise of Christianity, and that for the ensuing centuries, Christianity was in power. If the world is not as civilised as it was, we do not have to look far for the cause, and this on Brutus's own words.

In the same article, "Brutus" tries to forestall criticism by commencing with an apology. He is "well aware that writers or politicians who venture in the realm of religion must face the charge of expediency or hypocrisy" with which sentiment we agree and with much foundation. "Reduced to materialistic value," Brutus says, "the Sermon on the Mount endures as the greatest contribution to political thought" and proceeds to quote "Blessed are the Meek," and "Blessed are the Peace Makers." We can safely leave it to the reader to assess the real value of the Sermon. By and large, political writers are in the same class as religious writers.

We are aware that world conditions are grave, but did not think that they were so grave as to warrant a National Day of Prayer. We do hope that a reader's letter in the "News Chronicle" will not be acted upon. We still have memories of the extraordinary reverses we suffered after the National Days of Prayer during the last war. We give the warning with all appropriate seriousness, and remind readers of that old story of the Captain of the sinking ship who had done all he could possibly do, said, "We are now in God's hands," and the parson replied, "My God, is it as bad as that?"

"THE FREETHINKER"

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For "The Freethinker."—W. J. Gough (South Africa), 3s.;
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F. Terry.

JAYCE.—Many thanks; will be useful.

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ing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One
year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

We are not certain if the following can be considered
as "news" but no doubt the "Daily Mirror" knows
its readers. We are, however, a little doubtful whether
many tears were shed when it was reported that one of
the Princesses missed her Sunday morning service at
Crathie Church recently. People are being murdered in
Palestine, Berlin riots, the whole world seethes, but the
"Daily Mirror" informs us that the Princess missed
Church on Sunday. 'Tis a mad world . . .

Prof. J. B. S. Haldane will lecture in the Conway
Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London, W.C.1, on
Thursday, October 14, at 7-30 p.m., on "Technical
Progress and Moral Progress." The lecture is under
the auspices of the National Secular Society and all
Freethinkers within range will no doubt make a point
of attending with interested friends. Admission is free.

The Manchester Branch N.S.S. opens its indoor
season in the Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, to-day
(October 10) with a lecture from Mr. R. H. Rosetti on
"God or Man?" Mr. Rosetti is looking forward to
meeting many old friends, and to making new ones.
The local saints will see that the hall is well filled. The
lecture begins at 7 p.m., and admission is free.

Liverpool and District Freethinkers are reminded that
the Merseyside Branch N.S.S. starts its indoor season
with a lecture from Mr. J. V. Shortt on "Where Are
We Going?" The Cooper's Hall, 12, Shaw Street,
Liverpool, 6, has been engaged up till the end of March,
1949, and the lectures begin at 7 p.m. Mr. Shortt's
lecture is this evening (October 10).

The West London Branch N.S.S. had a very successful
opening to their indoor session last Sunday, Mr. E. T.
Bryant being the speaker. To-day (October 10), Mr. L.
Ebury is the lecturer and his name is a sufficient
promise of an interesting and instructive evening. The

lectures are held in The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place,
Edgware Road, London, W.1, and begin at 7-15 p.m.
Messrs. Bryant and Ebury are both members of the
N.S.S. Executive.

The open-air season is closing and the movement is
indebted to Messrs. Brighton, Clayton, Ebury, Mosley,
Day and Barker for their untiring and very useful work
from their respective platforms during the season. We
have received letters from many quarters commenting
on the good work they have been doing, often under
trying conditions. The Executive of the N.S.S. adds
its appreciation.

THE FEAR OF DEATH

SPINOZA has said that all the meditations of the wise
are of life, not of death. Nevertheless many men reputed
wise have discoursed of death, some so that, after
attaining clear ideas as to man's destiny, they might
enlighten their fellows, whom they considered confused
by the traditional notions of their time. These were
concerned chiefly with the attitude of the living to death,
not with the state of the dead.

Such a one was Lucretius, the Roman poet, who was
born B.C. 95, and died about B.C. 52. This Atheist tried
in his famous poem, "On the Nature of Things," to
disburden the minds of his contemporaries from belief
in the supernatural.

With death, he said, we were in no way concerned,
since the mind itself was mortal, so that when we no
longer existed nothing could happen to us to excite
sensation. Were time again to gather up our body after
death and put it once more into the position it now
occupied, and interfuse it with life, that would concern
us not at all, for the chain of our self-consciousness had
once and for all been snapped asunder.

Look back, said he, on the whole past course of
immeasurable time, and consider how manifold are the
shapes taken by matter in motion. Is it not probable that
they have previously been placed in the same order as
they now are? Yet this cannot be recovered in memory,
as a break has been interposed in our existence. Moreover
he to whom evil is to befall must exist at the very time
it comes, if the misery and suffering are to have any
place at all, but since death precludes this, and prevents
his being, upon whom the ills can be brought, we can
be sure that there is nothing to fear after death, for he
who does not exist cannot become miserable.

Men, however, although they profess to believe that
death is the end of all, bemoan their lot as hard, in that
after life is over, they will rot with their body in the
grave, or be consumed by fire, or wild beasts. The mind
of such men betrays a flaw, and they do not really grant
the conclusion they profess, but imagine something of
their self to survive them. When such a one in life
suggests to himself that birds or beasts will rend his
body after death, he thereby gives way to self-pity, and
does not in thought rightly separate himself from the self
he considers dead, nor withdraw himself fully from the
body thrown out, but he fancies something of himself to
survive and to stand by the corpse, and be impregnate
with his own sense. Hence he makes lamentation of his
mortality and does not see that after death there will
be no other self remaining alive, and bemoaning to

itself that his own self has died, and grieving that such own self is lying there mangled and burnt.

Men also pity their dead friends, saying to themselves that no more does the house of such friends admit them with glad welcome, nor virtuous wife and sweet children run to be first to snatch kisses and touch the heart with joy. No more are they prosperous and a safeguard to their own, for one calamitous day has bereft these luckless ones in luckless wise of all life's prizes. Men, however, forget to add that their friends are no longer beset with a craving for such things.

If they rightly perceived this they would release themselves from great distress. They say that the dead will continue as now, in the sleep of death, for all time to come, freed from all distressful pains, but that themselves with a sorrow, never to be quelled, weep for them, when close by they turn to ashes on their appalling funeral pile, and length of days will never root out their grief. Such speakers should be asked what there is in death so bitter, if it come in the end to sleep and rest, that anyone should pine in never-ending sorrow.

Men too, often when reclining at table, with cup in hand, love to say that such pleasure is brief for poor weak man; presently it will have been, and never after be called back. What folly! For no one feels the want of life when asleep, and for all we care our sleep may be everlasting. Death should then concern us less, if less were possible, for no one awakes upon whom the chill cessation of life has once come.

If nature could speak and rally us, would it not ask why we bemoan death at such length of sickly sorrow; for if the past life of anyone has been pleasant, why should he not depart like a guest, filled with life, and resignedly enter into untroubled rest? If, however, his life has been grievous, why should he seek to make any addition, which may again be grievous? Then if one of greater age should bewail his death more than is fitting, would she not rally him more sharply and bid the rascal dry his tears and cease complaining. Such a one is decaying after full enjoyment of the rewards of life, but because he yearns for what is not, and despises what is, life has slipped from him unfinished and unsatisfying, and in surprise he has found death suddenly at his pillow. "Resign," would she say, "all things unsuited to thy age, and with a good grace up then and greatly go: thou must."

Then there are the fables of Hades. These do not appertain to what happens to us after death. They appertain only to this life. No Tantalus, numbed by groundless terror, fears, poor wretch, the huge rock hanging in mid-air; but in life a baseless dread of the gods vexes mortals. The fall they fear is the collapse of the luck that chances to each. Birds, forsooth, do not eat into Tityos lying in Acheron; for how could they feed eternally from his breast? He, however, is in life a Tityos who is rent and devoured by base passions. There is in life also a Sisyphus, the man of disappointed ambition, for to ask for power which is never granted, and in striving to endure severe toil is, as it were, to force uphill a stone which rolls back again from the summit. Cerberus, too, and the furies, and the privation of light, and Ixion's wheel and black Tartarus belching hideous fires are idle tales. But there is in life a dread penalty for evil deeds, signal as the deeds are signal, and as atonement, the prison and the fearful hurling from the rock, scourgings, executioners, the dungeon of the doomed, the pitch, the metals plates, and torches. If these are wanting, yet the conscience-stricken mind,

through boding fear, applies to itself goads and whips, and fears lest the evils of punishment may be increased after death. The life of fools becomes, at length a hell on earth.

How Lucretius himself died is unknown, but there is a well-known story that he was driven mad by a love-potion, and perished by his own hand. The "Everyman" Smaller Classical Dictionary remarks of this that it is not improbable that it was an invention of some enemy of the Epicurean philosophy expressed by Lucretius.

Death-bed canards about wicked atheists had an early start in history.

J. G. LUPTON.

A MOULDY OUTLOOK

ONLY a poet can write the best prose. Listening to the radio reading of John Hewitt's story "Mould," I wanted to halt the narrator to admire the structure of a sentence or applaud the use of the *mot juste*. For Mr. Hewitt uses words with selective artistry and an elegant economy.

"Mould" can be briefly summarised. A retired schoolmaster, recently bereaved, lives alone in a well appointed, well cared for, house. One morning he is surprised to see a spot of mould where it ought not to be. He rubs it off. Next day mould is on one of his books, and, as time goes on, the malevolent green face leers out from all points, and is increasingly obsessive.

Mould on the mouldy master's mind accumulates, and the last entry in his diary conveys the impression that he has gone scatty or is about to kick the bucket. His writing finger moves—to bed, and we are left with our thoughts.

As written by a poet, it is a little masterpiece. One does not grumble because a pencil drawing is not an oil painting, but some elaboration may be suggested by a sketch, some amplification or continuation of the central idea. I take the liberty of following the schoolmaster to his bedroom.

Now then, you old pedagogue, sez me. After writing all that bilious stuff and frightening yourself till your very face is green, you're not sleeping. And as the moon shines on your pillow, turning your scant white hair to a mouldy green, I'll give you a lecture.

Mould signifies age, decrepitude, dissolution, disintegration, death. That is the idea underlying all your recent literary activity. It is the commonly accepted, mouldy idea about mould. Now, you have still sharp eyes, but you were old before you saw things that set you thinking. Sixty years ago Rontgen discovered the X-rays. It is a scientific commonplace now that one can see things through objects normally opaque, if one is equipped with the essential apparatus. I believe that man can acquire a soul vision, and see things which are overlaid—shall we say by mould. But your sight is superficial and not introspective. You are unaware that mould has long since formed a cataract on the eyes of your mind. You do not see, Whackford Squeers, that the book for whose cover you were so solicitous, has mould on every page, has done deadly damage to the soul of man, and still has an evil influence and sinister potentialities; all the more so, that few can see the mould, and many cry out that the book is the book of life. You pity the binding, but preserve the living word.

The most important thing in life is education. You, my friend, were in the noblest profession. The most important thing in education is to know what is going on

in the world to-day. It might be said that for fifty years you moulded the lives of the young. Ah, don't smile, I mean no *double entendre*. For you were devoted to routine, to custom, precedent, tradition. Daily you rubbed mould from your blackboard—so that you might chalk up some more. Rarely did you think that the history, the philosophy, the science books you dealt with were mouldy, that mould was everywhere in the world of ideas. True, you frequently had your tongue in your cheek as you taught some particularly mouldy lie. Yes, yes, bread and butter, cannot touch mould without being reviled.

But, you know, I'm not too sure that we are being just to old mould. The men of science say—but what say they, let them say! My view is that the world was at its best in the Glacial period. With no perturbing element of life, all was serenity, calm and beauty. Then the lusty young sun violated the pristine innocence of ice, and with heat there was growth of a kind. But the glacier fought for her honour, fridity froze ferns, all vegetation rotted. The sun, ashamed at his impotence in another cold "period," hid his warm face. And everywhere was decay, sicklied o'er with the stale crust of mould. Then the evil thing happened, life appeared! Putrefaction, fungus, maggots, that's the sequence. Life is the product of rotteness. We all know that when we put the food in the refrigerator. And so it was "in the beginning." But for our mouldy ideas on birth and death, we would see things clearly. In the kitchen, fungus is father of the maggot. In the Cosmos, mould was the mother of protoplasm.

But I perceive you are falling asleep. So good-bye, Mr. Chips.

It was a bright morning when the schoolmaster rose, and decided to spend the day out of doors. He reached in the cupboard for his heavy boots. He was not surprised that there was a coating of mould on them. As he smeared black synthetic slime on them he reflected that he was replacing the green, emblematic of life, with black, the symbol of death. As he finished the polish with a cloth, he saw himself again in the schoolroom; he was cleaning the blackboard before chalking up a lesson. He thought he wrote "Wipe mould off the mind."

"Goodness, I'm thinking queer things this morning," he said to himself as he made for the potting shed to collect his implements.

"It's time I turned over that leaf mould."

J. EFFEL.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. ROWLAND ONCE MORE

I am not concerned with Mr. Rowland's Anarchism, but with his criticism of my book, and I am concerned with that only so far as it misrepresents me.

He persistently tries to make out "Man His Own Master" to be mere Communist propaganda. Now the fact is that I wrote the book at the request of the R.P.A. to answer the prevalent pessimism and defeatism so religiously peddled by the Communist Party. I did not consult a single Communist body or individual in writing it. I used my intelligence and accessible sources of information, and the result may be a poor thing, but it is my own.

That being so, I strongly object to Mr. Rowland or anyone else representing me as a *bot* who doesn't think for himself. Still more do I object to his backing up his misrepresentation by a garbled version of what I say on causality. Anyone who wants to know my views on causality can read them in my book. He will not find that I say anything there about "acting on the Soviet side"; nor will he find anything about causal laws holding good in physics, but not in psychology or sociology, or the rest of the farrays of rubbish that Mr.

Rowland attributes to me. Pages 77-81 give my real view. Nor have I anywhere said that Mr. Rowland is a tool of warmongers. I have given him an answer on the philosophical issue between us, but I am afraid that, as Dr. Johnson said, "I cannot give him an understanding."—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

OUR SIMIAN ANCESTRY

"How I hate the man who talks about the 'brute creation,' with an ugly emphasis on *brute*. Only Christians are capable of it. As for me, I am proud of my close kinship with other animals. I take a jealous pride in my Simian ancestry. I like to think that I was once a magnificent hairy fellow living in the trees and that my frame has come down through geological time *via* sea jelly and worms and Amphioxus, Fish, Dinosaurs, and Apes. Who would exchange these for the pallid couple in the Garden of Eden?"—From "Diary of a Disappointed Man"—BARNELLION.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. ENURY.

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

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 12, 7 p.m.: "Recent Restatements of the Christian Faith," Mr. H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A.

National Secular Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Thursday, October 14, 7-30 p.m.: "Technical Progress and Moral Progress," Prof. J. B. S. HALDANE. Doors open, 7 p.m.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, October 11, 7 p.m.: "Reconstructing the Remote Past." 2nd lecture: "The Geological Record," W. E. SWISTON, Ph.D. F.R.S.E.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Religion and the Law—The Middle Ages," Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The National Secular Society—Its Critics Refuted," Mr. L. ENURY.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

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

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright St., Room 13).—Saturday, October 9, 7 p.m.: Whist Drive. Tickets, 2s.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-20 p.m.: "Scientific Thinking," Mr. W. G. K. FORD, M.Sc.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "That Spiritualism Proved Arrival," Mr. McISNOE.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (L.L.P. Rooms, St. James Street).—Sunday, 6-30 pm.: "Crime and Society," Mr. BACKHOUSE.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Freethought in a Changing World," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "God or Man?" Mr. R. H. ROBERTI.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Where Are We Going?" Mr. J. V. SHORTT.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Who Was Shakespeare?—The Stratford Myth Exposed," Mr. W. KENT, F.S.A.

EVIL

- (1) The subjects of Evil and Design are closely connected and the "problem of Evil" is as old as human history.
- (2) It is desirable, as usual, to define, in general terms and as accurately as need be, what is here meant by Evil.
- (3) Good and Evil are terms for the valuation of occurrences which affect existence according to the valuer.
- (4) Good and Evil are not entities but qualities of the occurrences, relative to some presupposed ultimate objective.
- (5) These terms vary with the valuer; whether extra-natural, individual or corporative and with time and place.
- (6) That which may be considered good or evil by an individual may not be considered so by a community.
- (7) What may be immediately expedient may not be ultimately beneficial; time is an important factor.
- (8) The criteria which enter into these valuations of Good and Evil are many and infinitely complex.
- (9) Evils may be classified, broadly, as natural and artificial; though this is arbitrary, as they overlap.
- (10) By natural evils is here meant events in nature which are beyond human control.
- (11) Such events as earthquakes, tornadoes and other natural convulsions are examples of natural evils.
- (12) Included in this category are all those evils to sentient non-human life which humans cannot control.
- (13) By artificial evils is here meant all those which it is supposed humans can control.
- (14) Some systems of thought seem to deny that any occurrence is intrinsically and ultimately evil.
- (15) Here, however, events which are generally considered evil are not in dispute as to their occurrence.
- (16) In religion it is necessary to distinguish between Natural Evils and the term Sin.
- (17) While Natural Evils are, in general, comparatively definite, the term Sin is indefinite.
- (18) Sin is a religious term usually indicating supposedly wilful infractions of the Divine Will.
- (19) Sin may be terrestrial, i.e., by humans; but it may also be extra-natural, i.e., by angels, etc.
- (20) In some religions, such as Christianity, Sin can also be vicarious by natural transmission, i.e., Original Sin.
- (21) Hypotheses of Sin, therefore, are varied and complicated and must be considered with each religion.
- (22) It may be noted forthwith that Sin is often connected with natural Evils with vicarious results.
- (23) All Evils are not Sins and Sin has, in this sense, a limited application.
- (24) In primitive societies Sin and Evil are believed to have comparatively immediate consequences.
- (25) As societies evolve from Animism this connection becomes restricted and indirect.
- (26) Another hypothesis, that of the transmigration of Souls or Spirits on a terrestrial plane, presents difficulties.
- (27) This applies to such religions as Hinduisim with its consequent effects.
- (28) If human souls are transferred to the bodies of lower animals, do the latter commit sins?
- (29) For present purposes it is not necessary to follow the implications of these changes further.
- (30) Christianity does not appear to contain similar hypotheses and that religion can be considered later.
- (31) Valuations about life, its purposes and objects vary greatly and are considered under Ethics.
- (32) Whatever these variations of opinions, it seems usually agreed that this is not the ideal life.
- (33) Those who believe in religion, and those who do not, mostly have some ideals of a better life.
- (34) Anything which tends to bring about that ideal life here, or hereafter, is, for them, relative Good.
- (35) Those events, physical or psychological, which are considered to be opposed to that ideal life, are for them, relative Evil.
- (36) For those who do not believe in the extra-natural the "problem of evil" has a different aspect from that of those who do.
- (37) For them Good and Evil are individual or collective movements towards or away from their objectives.
- (38) To those who regard the Universe scientifically Good and Evil are qualities of natural events.
- (39) From primitive times to the present religious minds have postulated "powers" of Good and Evil.
- (40) Presumably these "powers" are entities in themselves, with varying degrees of personification.
- (41) This personification of the qualities of Good and Evil seems typical of religious development.
- (42) Whatever the theological bases may be, in practice they all resolve into some form of dualism.
- (43) The essential thing in such a universe is this struggle between "God" and "Devil" or human "Souls."
- (44) In primitive religions these rival "powers" seem to be numerous, diffused and semi-natural.
- (45) In more modern religions, such as Christianity, they seem to be rival extra-natural entities.
- (46) The "problem of Evil" can be considered from three aspects, each of which has adherents.
- (47) Firstly, it can be regarded as a purely natural phenomenon and a consequence of existence.
- (48) Secondly, some consider Evil appears to be so only because human knowledge is limited.
- (49) Thirdly, others consider there are two rival principles in the Universe, one Good and the other Evil.
- (50) These aspects vary with different religions and those of Christianity can be considered later.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

THE USEFUL WASP

One wasp in jam may often be
An English Summer's single hint,
Oh dear, oh dear, if out he
Were the one blot on God's blueprint!
OSWELL BLAKESTON.

SAVED FROM SACRIFICE

German police raided a frenzied religious meeting in a village near Oldenberg just in time to prevent the sacrificial slaying of two children. The sect, described as the "Everlasting Prayers," had been praying continuously since last Saturday. They intended praying until Monday next, when they expected the end of the world.
The children, who were lashed to chairs, were to be sacrificed to prevent this happening. The father of the children was the leader of the sect. He and 13 others were arrested.
"Daily Herald."