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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Life and Freethought

A FEW weeks ago we wrote an article on the matter of "Freethought." I am glad to learn that it interested one of our readers. We do not always know that what we write pleases everyone. Perhaps this may be the best thing for the writer. For it is of some interest to one who writes to know that he has been appreciated. I do not mean that the article must be good. It may be merely interesting, and even with that one should be satisfied. I remember a story told by Mark Twain. He was in a train with only one other person. Mark began to talk, but after a long time only "Yes" was the reply. Then Mark Twain let loose, and growled to his brother traveller, "For the sake of all that is wholesome, contradict me so that I shall know there is another about!"

I did not drop the subject because there was nothing fresh to say. If that were the case, Freethought would not be of great concern. What I did say was only a phase of a very large consideration. Freethought is something that is far greater and wider than most people imagine. The Christian clings to his God and there he stops.

Of course our intelligent enemies know much better than that. The unrelenting hostility of all religious organisations to our propaganda is a testimony to the deadliness of our attack. They recognise as we do that there is no compromise, and that to control opinion is to control life. That is the chief reason why both Church and Government struggle so desperately to gain and retain control of the machinery which makes for the formation of opinion. It is a confession that in social life it is the play of ideas which chiefly counts. To lose sight of that consideration is to play into the hands of the enemy.

Let us commence by taking a broad view of the subject. The outstanding feature of what may be called the natural history of associated life is the supplanting of the biological by the psychological. We are not here concerned with the nature of mind, it is enough that the emergence of this new force, or of a new form of force, is an event of revolutionary significance in the evolutionary process. It gives a new direction to life. The race is still to the swift and the victory to the strong, but there is a new meaning given to strength and swiftness. The struggle for existence becomes, in a sense, transformed. I remember being impressed by the great thinker, Kropotkin, and his book "Mutual Aid."

In sub-human society growth takes the form of developing or strengthening an organic tool—stronger teeth or claws, the modification of a limb, or a new effort in coloration. The development is a part of the animal, inseparable, and is transmitted by biological heredity. In the case of man the means by which the difficulties of environment are overcome are of a different order. In a sense, his tools are non-personal, they belong to the

race rather than to the individual, and they are transmitted irrespective of the qualities of the individual.

If the substantial truth of what has been said be granted, and it is difficult to see how it can be successfully denied, then there follows one or two considerations of importance. The first is that social history tends to become more and more the history of the group mind, even in its individual manifestations. The story of civilisation becomes a record of the piling up of idea on idea and the transforming power. Our inventions, our institutions, all that we sum up in "Civilisation" are illustrations of the power of mind in effecting a transformation of the environment. It is indeed that which makes man what he is. The child of parents living in the most civilised society, if taken when very young, and placed amid a primitive people, would display little, if any, difference from those around him. He would think the thoughts of the society in which he was living. Had Shakespeare been born among savages he would never have written "Hamlet."

Civilisation is built of the products of human capacities, and it is those that form man's most important heritage, and ultimately shape the character of each of us. What we each have by biologic heredity is a certain structure, but the expression and direction of these qualities and the control they give over our environment are determined by the society in which we are born.

The material of civilisation, whether tools, inventions or discoveries, are facts that may be properly described as psychological. An institution, the Church, the Crown, the Magistracy, is not transmitted from one generation to another as a building or so many sheets of paper, but as a series of mental facts. A piece of machinery is the incarnation of an idea, and is only a physical fact in a secondary sense. And as classes of facts made human society as it is, it follows that the environment to which man must adapt himself is overpoweringly of a psychological character. The world in which we move, with its art, its literature, its teachings, its customs, is actually a creation of the social mind. The houses in which we live, the machines we use to do our bidding, are products of our mental activity. More obviously so are our beliefs about the world by which we endeavour to regulate our lives, and which shape the character of each newcomer.

I have so far been dealing with the distinction between biological and psychological heredity, and there is one instance in which the parallel between the two is complete. This lies in the fact that we can only understand a thing by its history. An organism may be studied, and its peculiarities noted from an example before us but it can only be understood through a knowledge of its history. A king may be honoured to-day because of his personal worth, but the reason why there is a king you must go back to that state of mind in which the primitive priest and magic-workers inspire such fear and awe. When we ring bells to call people to Church we perpetuate the fact that our ancestors rang them to drive away evil spirits.

We wear black at a funeral because our remote ancestors sought to disguise themselves from the ghost, or we strew flowers at a funeral because food and other things were once buried with the dead. Our institutions are born in the shadow of superstition and have played a powerful part in the shaping of our lives. Before an institution can be modified or destroyed the ideas upon which it is built must be cleared of their authoritative power. That is also the reason why, ultimately, all struggles for reform resolve themselves into a fight between antagonistic believers.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE MAGICAL POWERS OF CHURCH BELLS

THE primitive belief that ghosts and goblins could be disconcerted and put to flight by the clashing of cymbals and the clamour of bells survives among uncivilised peoples to this day. That this superstition prevailed in Israel is evident in Exodus XXVIII where it is ordained that the priest's robes must be adorned with jingling bells. For when the Hebrew minister officiated in the sanctuary, both when he entered and when he emerged from the holy place, the failure of the bells to tinkle would cause his death. What more reasonable then, to conclude, that the sounding of his bells was supposed to disarm the malevolent spirits who lurked near the threshold of the sanctuary and were ever ready to pounce upon and slay the priest when he crossed the entrance to the tabernacle? Nor were bells protective to priests alone, as bells worn by Jewish horses (Zechariah XIV 20) appear to have served a similar purpose.

In Pagan Rome, when the ancestral spirits annually revisited their former homes in the month of May, they were offered a frugal meal and then told to depart, an order that was emphasised by the banging of bronze. The ghostly dislike of the ringing of metal did not end with expiring Paganism. It persisted through the Dark and Middle Ages of Christendom and survives in rural retreats even now.

The tolling and pealing of church bells was deemed the most powerful antidote against the spells of ghosts and demons. The Church Fathers opined that, when the bells summoned the faithful to prayer and praise, the evil spirits fled terror-stricken, and the inspirers of the storm were stilled. Indeed, we learn that "the service book known as the Roman Pontifical recognises the virtue of a church bell, whenever its sound is heard, to drive off the powers of evil, the gibbering and mowing spectres of the dead and all the spirits of the storm."

According to the testimony of the poet Burns, his friend Captain Grose, the antiquary's collection of curios included "a cinder of Eve's first fire, Tubalcaim's fire shovel and fender, a part of the anatomy of Balaam's ass and a brass shod broomstick of the Witch of Endor." This discerning antiquary notes that in Scotland, the passing bell formerly served a double purpose, as it petitioned the prayers of all true Christians for the departing spirit, and also served to banish the soul-snatching goblins who watched and waited to delay, or even prevent, the spirit's departure to heaven. Moreover, the louder the vibration of the bell, the more the demons were dismayed and scattered in flight.

During the Middle Ages and even to recent times the sound of church bells was utilised to scare witches and wizards who, all unseen, travelled through the air on goats and broomsticks to appointed places where they plotted to torment and destroy both man and beast.

Certain seasons of the year were chosen by these miscreants for their unseemly assemblies—their Sabbaths as they were termed. On these unhallowed occasions the church bells were continually jangled, at times throughout the night, for in the hours of darkness the witches and warlocks were most actively engaged in their infernal misdeeds. Both in France and Spain, the church bells clanged continuously throughout the night on the fifth of February. As Professor Frazer observes in his instructive essay, "The Golden Bells": "One of the most witching times of the whole year was Midsummer Eve; and accordingly at Rottenburg in Swabia the church bells rang all that night, from nine o'clock till the break of day, while honest folk made fast their shutters and stopped up even chinks and crannies, lest the dreadful beings should insinuate themselves into the houses. Other witches' Sabbaths used to be held on Twelfth Night, and the famous Walpurgis Night, on the eve of May Day." On these occasions it was customary on the European Continent to make a prodigious uproar to which the clanging of bells and other noises contributed.

Still, at no time was one safe from the bellish contrivances of the invisible witches and their male confederates who unceasingly watched to waylay the nocturnal traveller. And even those who had carefully fastened their casements and doors were not safe from the attacks of night-prowling warlocks, and weird sisters. So it was part of the watchman's duty to ring a bell and bestow a blessing on the sleepers and, if he disturbed their rest, they were compensated by the safety he assured them even when he recited to them the line:—

Oh! mortal man, thou that art born in sin!

It is recorded that during the Middle Ages the bells were rung in all parts of Germany when thunderstorms occurred, in order to scare the goblins who caused them, while the sexton was given a portion of corn for his services in these emergencies. "These dues," it appears, "were paid in some places as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. For example, at Jubar in the Altmark, whenever a thunderstorm burst the sexton was bound to ring the church bell, and he received from every farmer five 'thunder sheaves' of corn for the pains he had been at to rescue the corn from destruction." Various churches were provided with consecrated bells and most people assumed that they were thus insured from evil. Zealous volunteers sometimes assisted the sexton to swing the bells higher and so firmly was superstition entrenched in the popular mind that deaths from lightning seldom occasioned doubt. Again, under certain feudal tenures the serfs and others were bound at specified times to peel the bells.

Church bells were solemnly consecrated and were popularly believed to be baptised by the clergy. Without question they were given saints' names and were sprinkled with holy water, while a bell in Haslen was inscribed in Latin with the appeal: "From lightning, hail and tempest, Lord Jesus Christ deliver us!"

Although the seventeenth century Jesuit, Father Delrio, denied that bells were baptised, he allowed that they were anointed, dedicated to saints, and blessed by the priests. Also, he asserted that the ringing of church bells averted or calmed tempests, was a verity so self-evident that no sensible person could possibly dispute it.

Bells celebrated for their potency in dimaying evil spirits and preventing the destructiveness of thunder-

storms included St. Adelm's Bell at Malmsbury, and the big bell of the St. Germain's' Abbey in France; while Walters in his "Church Bells of England" notes that in the early St. Paul's Cathedral, there was an endowment for "ringing the hallowed belle in great tempestes and lightenings."

From almost every part of our globe may be gathered curious evidences of the sounding of bells, the beating of drums, metals and other materials in order to avert or minimise the powers of evil.

T. F. PALMER.

FROM SOUTH AFRICA

AS from May 26, 1948, this country, our Promised Land by the Grace of God and the Dutch Reformed Church, has been blessed with a Fascist Protestant Twelve Apostle Papacy Government and Dr. D. F. Malan, an ex-Calvinist Priest as its Archbishop, Holy Father or Prime Minister.

This government, as now constituted, has a very much secret society called "Die Broederbond" with its "Twaalf-Apostel" executive behind it, and they must carry out the dictates of this sinister or ersatz Ku-Klux-Klan. An appreciable number of cabinet ministers are members of this secret Protestant Jesuit Camarilla, junta or cabal. Dr. Malan is, was and remains a most devout Calvinist. He forsook the pulpit after having occupied it for ten years and traded it in for the post of a newspaper editor. He found this work rather irksome and entered politics. After a few initial defeats he got elected as M.P. for the Calvinia Constituency in the Cape Province and entered parliament bringing the Calvinist God of the Dutch Reformed Church with him.

Since the Calvinist Jesuit Twelve Apostle Papacy took office various events took place which are one and all indications that this country is fast becoming a Fascist Theocracy of the first order. The district Calvinia, by the way, was named after Jean Calvin, the pious Reformer, who murdered Servetus by burning him at the stake over a slow fire for the greater glory of God because he found it impossible to subscribe to the ecclesiastical multiplication table of three times one are one and once three is also one, more commonly known as the Trinity dogma mystery or impossibility.

In South Africa we have various Afrikaans cultural societies, and the writer until some years ago was a member of one of these bodies. When the Dutch Reformed Church invaded these cultural bodies all meetings had to be opened and closed with prayer. At this point the writer took leave of the branch he was a member of. The atmosphere at these meetings got heavily charged with what is known as Christian Nationalism, in spite of the fact that Christianity and Nationalism are two incompatibles. The slogan, "ONS land, ONS volk, ONS kerk," which is only a variation of "EIN Reich, EIN volk, EIN Fuehrer," became the fashion and now is still more outspoken and stronger than ever before.

In the Orange Free State Province of the Union of South Africa no trains are allowed to run on Sundays. This has been in force for a number of years. Now all sports and amusement events are to be banned under the Sunday Observance Laws, and it stands to reason that under the Fascist Calvinist Theocracy now in power these laws will be hauled out from their dusty pigeon holes in the other three provinces of the Union as well. The Malannazi Protestant Jesuit Twelve

Apostle Papacy will proceed slowly and as unobservedly as they can step by step and bit by bit.

In South Africa the Church is called "Die Kerk" in Afrikaans, which as things now stand, translated into English is *the Church* to the exclusion of all other churches, which will, I presume, in the near future be just tolerated for the time being. The Dutch Reformed Church in this country goes under four names, viz.:—

1. Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk.
2. Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde of Hervormde Kerk.
3. Die Gereformeerde Kerk.
4. Die Hervormde Kerk.

1 and 2 are practically the same, but not 3 and 4. The latter two differ the one from the other and from 1 and 2.

The Afrikaner has thus a choice of one out of three ways of going to Heaven. These pious Christian groups warred the one against the other in the past, but whenever "dangerous thoughts" invaded the body ecclesiastic they all combine to fight the evil threatening their existence.

Natal.

JOHANNA DU TOIT.

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

THE majority of the readers of this journal are people not bound by philosophical preconceptions. They seek the truth honestly, and don't let hope of Heaven or the fear of Hell pervert their judgment. Their confidence is founded upon the essential sanity of the universe, and not upon their ability to obey arbitrary precepts.

What we can see of the universe is in harmony with our reason, coherent and without contradictions. By definition, the laws governing the universe are right laws, and can be defied but not broken.

It is a matter of common belief that under ideal conditions living organisms tend to be right: a plant in its proper environment—unless attacked by disease or other outside force—tends to grow into a perfect specimen of its kind. But man is not thought to be included; Man, through Original Sin, has an inner tendency to go wrong.

The emotional and sociological considerations that tended to establish and perpetuate this doctrine must still to some extent persist; even among the enlightened and erudite it is still tacitly assumed to be true. Almost all the educational systems, and, of course, the religious systems, are based upon it. By habit and a profound ignorance of the nature of heredity, people think of education as a means of setting wrong tendencies right.

This concept has so far completely dominated parental, scholastic and ethical education for more generations than we can count back. If its domination continues a very little while longer, its total failure will be demonstrated very convincingly. Let us be quite clear about it: if a tendency to do wrong is inherited, and if we have to rely upon our teachers and preachers to turn the hearts of the coming generation towards righteousness, then we are finished. We are finished because quite literally there isn't time. Only the simple-hearted or the extremely ignorant imagine that wars are made by individuals or nations. Wars are part of the social and economic and emotional conditions produced by the great majority of people thinking wrongly. I am saying that before the preachers of original sin can hope to save the world, the world as we know it—the intellectual achievements of man's residence on the earth—will not be there to save. Unless there is going to be a physical and sudden second advent, the creators of original sin will find it has overtaken them.

"The creators"—because original sin has been created and does indeed seem to exist. There would be few Christians in the world if Christianity were offered for voluntary acceptance to people of mature age instead of being woven into their minds all mixed up with the facts of earliest experience. Similarly, there would be no tendency to go wrong if the going right were not petrified into an arbitrary and inflexible code of ethics, obedience to which is neither desirable nor possible, being against the fundamental nature of man.

Religion, ethics without religion, codes of behaviour, things that are "done" and things that "aren't done"—how little faith we have in the organisation of the universe that we start loading these chains on the infant while it is hardly out of the cradle. As though man were by nature a wild beast with ravening passions, out to destroy. As though his measure of consciousness had reduced him far lower than the beasts, so that unlike them he is no longer able to fulfil his function! People are frightened—frightened of their children. They don't seek to let them grow, but will cut off arms and hands and put out eyes, on the principle that it is better to go maimed into Heaven than whole into the pit. Yes—even those who don't find it necessary for their personal comfort to spend long sessions on their knees imploring their creator to overlook the things they can't by their nature help doing.

I am sufficiently optimistic to believe that mankind is fundamentally good, and that all the new people born into the world—all the children—are still perfectly all right with no inherited tendency to destroy themselves and one another. This belief—this knowledge—means that we have a mathematical chance of survival. There is a chance that just enough of the coming generation can be educated wisely—just enough to influence the course of the world.

How?

Perhaps at some time in the future I may be permitted to give an account in this paper of the work of the educational organisation known as the Horsley Trust. For now, I will confine myself to a description of the sort of education that will allow children to grow into wise adults.

It will be understood that if man is like all other living things and tends to grow right, then freedom to develop is the first requisite. This does not imply absence of protection, but it does necessitate equality of status. In an artificial and dangerous environment, protection in the early years of a child's life is essential. If you live in a house full of gadgets useful to yourself but dangerous and incomprehensible to a baby, then it is right to see that the baby doesn't hurt itself. This does not give the right to decide what the child shall think, how it shall think, nor how it shall behave.

Reading this, it is quite possible that you feel misgivings already: you fear, perhaps, that unless the child is taught how to behave it will behave "badly." This terrible fear of our children must be overcome if their lives (and with them the world) are not to be wrecked by over-anxiety. The natural tendency of a child is towards independence of thought and action, and towards self-protection and the attainment of personal happiness. It is a purely religious concept that sets any of these objects at variance with the good of others. No child, unless its natural behaviour has been interfered with, will over-eat, over-sleep or over-masturbate, any more than it will under-do any of these things.

What are the anti-social qualities that make people anxious to restrain one another? Desire for ownership or the desire for power; desire to inflict pain; indolence;

violence . . . But all these qualities are acquired. A person who is completely happy behaves in a manner that makes other people happy. It just isn't true to say that some people naturally get pleasure at the expense of others. Even under our fantastic social order, taken just as it is, the most that is true is that after corruption by religious or other ethics some people will derive some happiness at the expense of others, and this only because they have lost sight of the source of maximum happiness. They are neurotic, and the product of what we now condemn.

What are people afraid of, then? That a child won't know how to behave in our mad society, where a man can be imprisoned for writing in a book a word that can be heard a thousand times a day; a world of clean and dirty, pure and impure, thou shalt and thou shalt not? It's a nice state of affairs when we have to corrupt our children so that they can live happily in a corrupt society. But they can't live happily. No one—no one at all—can live happily under our present social system. Besides, what crimes can a two- or three-year-old commit? Play with its genitals in public, perhaps.

Are we to interfere with a child's development for fear of what the neighbours will say if we don't? And be quite sure of this: the only things that a free child will do wrong are violations of senseless taboos. It will not break windows, scream at the top of its voice, or pull the cat's tail. I speak, of course, of a child who has known freedom from infancy, and not a child subject to repression and freedom alternately.

When a child's vocabulary is sufficient for it to carry on a conversation, all sorts of modifications of behaviour can be suggested. If I live among savages and a stranger visits me, I shall have to advise him perhaps, that if he sticks a ring through his nose, or says Happy Thursday every time he meets anyone, or shaves off his hair, or eats only on alternate days, then he will be conforming to their conventions and they will be happy. I shall advise him, and unless he has good reason to do otherwise he will accept my advice. However, I shall not seize hold of him and stick a ring through his nose or kick him in the behind every time he omits to say Happy Thursday. Moreover, were some great genius of international fame washed ashore among my savages, I shouldn't presume to stick a ring through his nose, or make his first wandering thought and his faltering lips frame the senseless imbecility "Happy Thursday." I should protect him from the savages—with my own life if need be—until he was sufficiently possessed of his faculties to be able to realise the situation and choose his behaviour freely for himself.

And so with the potential genius in the cradle—what right does parenthood give you to inflict upon it the primitive taboos of the barbarians among whom you live? Dare you take advantage of its brief helplessness to stamp on its plastic mind a conformity to the pattern that approves wars, and exploitation and national ownership?

And whose side is the parent on? Does the mother or father feel shame when saying "Don't do that . . ." Or anger, perhaps, against the wicked system that makes it necessary? Do they take care that their voice is gentle, apologetic? or is it possible that they've so lost sight of reality that they think the way they live, working, most of them, for long hours at something they don't want to do and that is of no particular use to anyone, is a good way to live? That the social customs of our civilisation are good customs?

Every day many children are born. It is our own faults that make us so afraid of them. They are our only hope. Let us overcome our fear.

ROBERT COPPING.

A BOOK WORTH WHILE

"The Revolutionary Tradition in England" by F. A. Ridley. Published by National Labour Press Ltd., 318, Regent's Park Road, London, N.3 (price 15s.).

THOSE acquainted with Mr. Ridley's writings will expect to find anything from his pen worth reading, and in this book they will not be disappointed.

Original thinking and fine scholarship are the two dominant notes here. The books on English history most of us have had to study at school are debunked for what they are—a tissue of falsehoods in which history is perverted: a fairy tale in which the ruling classes are portrayed as noble, brave and brainy, a trinity just as fake as the Christian God trinity. We are told that the British people have always been averse to revolution, and always loyal to their rulers which, in so many cases has meant being subservient. The very opposite is the case as the author shows, and although many of these revolts were crushed and the causes for which the "rebels" fought were lost as far as actual armed conflict was concerned, each one of these insurrections did result in some measure of amelioration of the lot of the wretched common people who were little better than slaves. The rulers made concessions, not from conscience but from fear, and although the Wat Tylers and the Jack Cades were defeated, their spirit and the ideals that they died for still lived on.

The reader will not find in this book pages devoted to the Field of the Cloth of Gold or the romantic career of the Black Prince, but he will find a story dealing with the struggle of the people to obtain some measures of decency and dignity in their lives. In this fight—the fight of the common people—we find right throughout the history of our country, as indeed in every country, that the Church has always been the implacable foe of the workers. Church and State combine to crush with appalling brutality any effort of the masses to liberate themselves from the morass of ignorance which was their lot. Given the power, the Church would do the same to-day but their talons have been clipped.

Oliver Cromwell, as the author points out, although not a revolutionary in the accepted sense, did more to curb the power of the king and the nobles than any other man.

Charles I or, as he is styled by a section of intensely stupid people, "Charles the Martyr," is shown for what he was—an overbearing tyrant imbued with the idea encouraged by the State Church, of the "divine right of kings" which toppled to the ground when his head fell.

These events are touched on by the author from an historic standpoint, but it is with the people of England, not their rulers, that this fine book deals. The long weary fight of the masses for elementary justice persisting right down to the industrial age—that golden age when money flowed into the coffers of the few exploiters while the millions of exploited who produced the wealth lived, if it could be called living, under ghastly conditions and died at an early age. Even the wretched hovels the workers lived in were owned by a handful of industrialists who, to salve their consciences, supported missionary enterprises abroad (which, by the way, frequently resulted in new markets) and neglected the savages in their own country. All this and much more comes within the scope of this book.

This book contains 316 pages and the author must have spent much time and research to obtain his facts. It cannot be read like a novel—there is food for thought

in every page. It is the greatest debunking of current history ever written for British readers. It is never likely to be adopted as a text book at Eton or Harrow or any of our public schools.

The motto of the Freethought Movement is "We Seek the Truth." Freethinkers will certainly find it in this volume. There is not a hypocritical line in it. Mr. Ridley gives us facts and still more facts and his opinion of what he thinks the future will be when we have to depend on ourselves and not, as in the past, on the Empire which is now rapidly slipping from us. Whether we agree or disagree with the writer we must admire his honesty and fearlessness. This book costs 15s. and it is well worth it. If it is beyond the reach of the purses of some of our readers, ask for it at the library, and keep on asking for it.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

THE recent outburst against this, one of the newest social scientific achievements of a scientific age, by the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission, is what everyone of course expected. It is even suggested that the practice should be made a criminal offence. But surely the Church should be satisfied? For until now, there has been no known technique of procreation available which completely avoids cohabitation, and reduces the whole contract to a level of cold unemotional procedure which would have delighted the hearts of the mediaeval saints.

In a community where even adultery is no longer illegal, the Church now suggests that this latest and often extremely expedient and harmless "operation" should be forcibly prohibited. What possible reason can there be for this?

If assailed on the grounds of sexual morality, artificial insemination by its very nature is calculated to avoid just those acts for which from time immemorial the Christian Church have held a particular horror. Parties to the contract need not even know each other's identity. The only other rational objection would seem to be that of emotional content supposed to be necessary to the well-being of children, who were presumed at one time to suffer if not conceived in marital felicity? The science of genetics knows nothing of this.

The real complaint would seem to lie much deeper. For here, in the march of progress, which started with the cutting of our hair and nails, and bids fair to give us planned control of ever greater and greater fields of human physiology, lies yet another reminder of the dead past—a past in which the Church still lives and has its being, though, happily no longer its ancient power.

"We inveigh against the tyranny of the totalitarian States," writes Dr. Norman Haire, "the tyranny that the Churches would exercise if they had the power would be no less totalitarian. It is for all thinking men and women to be ever on the watch that the Churches do not obtain that power."

But there need be no anxiety. The futile croaking of the ever weakening voice which has failed completely to prevent birth control and all its benefits from being universal amongst all the literate races, will make no headway here. Society, with its penchant for the practical and the rational will take its own council.

J. B. STURGE-WHITING.

ACID DROPS

We are not surprised that the now famous broadcast in the U.S.A. on Atheism last year has had repercussions. The National Council of the American Episcopal Church has already begun a programme which will try to reach people who do not as a rule listen to religious broadcasts; and they have produced a pamphlet, "Finding Your Way," for listeners, which describes the faith and practice of the Church. In fact, desperate measures are being taken to get religion "over"—though there is bound to be a clash between the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians, and the Roman Catholics, as to which religion should be given top place. They will, of course, try their utmost to "hang" together, and may even invite the Jews to join them in their frantic anxiety to save religion—but the end is inevitable. It may take time, there may even be "revivals," but every competent observer must know that the decay of religion has not only set in, but death is bound to take place. And no broadcasts whatever can succeed in obtaining more than a brief reprieve.

Prayers are regularly sent up for religion to be saved, but the triumph of Freethought is only a matter of time. Yet if prayer cannot save Christianity, how can it save the United Nations? The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have set the last Sunday in October as a National Day of Prayer for the United Nations, though actually it will have as much effect as if the Chief African Witch Doctor had ordered his flocks to appeal to their totems. Even the "Church Times" puts in a gentle protest—these National Days of Prayer "tend to encourage in men and women the quite erroneous conception of the use of Christian intercession." In addition, "prayer simply becomes a method of escape." We quite agree, but what about the two Archbishops? Are they going to sit quietly while the "Church Times" thus "tells them off"? To be fair, the same journal, it is true, wants a "far more sustained intercession." And one can only hope that, as in the early war days, some terrible disaster won't follow the prayers.

We have said before in these columns that the rights or wrongs, for or against artificial insemination, do not concern us, but we are concerned at the latest attempt by the Church to influence legislation in their favour; and the suggestion by the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission that legislation should make the practice a criminal offence is a monstrous one, in line with some of the Church's other efforts. The Commission's report runs: "In our view the evils necessarily involved in artificial insemination (donor) are so grave that early consideration should be given to the framing of legislation to make the practice a criminal offence." We are solidly behind Dr. Norman Haire, who, in a letter to the "British Medical Journal," writes that it is "intolerable" that any Church "should attempt to compel citizens who do not belong to its membership or acknowledge its authority to conform to its standards of behaviour." Freethinkers will not need to be reminded that the Church misses no opportunity or occasion to re-assert its power.

We read some time ago of Magistrates attending a course of lectures in order to brush up their knowledge of the law. This is an admirable arrangement, for many of our magistrates are appointed, not for their knowledge of law, but rather as a "reward for civic virtue," or even, let us whisper it, for political reasons. As a safeguard, at

most Magistrates' Courts a qualified lawyer is on hand on points of law, and we have, up till now, always taken it for granted that a magistrate's clerk would possess a modicum of common sense. We will have to revise that opinion.

Consider the following, culled from the "Manchester Evening News," and note that the issue is for September, 1948, not 1748:—

Conversation between magistrate's clerk, Mr. J. Mitchell, and a 12-year-old girl witness at Eccles Juvenile Court today:—

"Do you go to Sunday school?"—"Yes sir."

"Do you what the truth is?"—"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what the Bible is?"—"Yes, sir."

"You go to Heaven when you die if you tell the truth—you know what happens if you don't?"—"Yes, sir."

Mr. Mitchell handed the girl the Bible and said: "Well try to get to Heaven this morning."

The difficulty of putting religion on the screen is shown particularly by a recent example. Anglo-Catholics have produced a film called "Your Inheritance," and there are two versions. In the one, you get High Church "vestments," and in the other you get the Low Church ones; in this way a true believer will have no difficulty in being saved according to his conscience. With a few more alterations, 600 films of "Your Inheritance" could be produced, each representing the other Christian sects. But what would happen if the wrong film got to the wrong congregation? We shudder to think.

The "Universe," in a notice of an exhibition of Christian Indian Art, reproduces an Indian artist's conception of the Virgin Mary and her lawful spouse—Joseph. We were not surprised to see that they look exactly like the average Hindu girl and her bewhiskered father—and both have dark complexions. If they had ever lived, they would certainly have been, not white people, but as dark as the average Arab. And so would Jesus. His portrait as painted by European artists is that of a blond European, a manifest impossibility. He must have looked exactly like a Mahomedan Arab priest. No wonder some of his pious followers have written books and articles to show him as a pure "Aryan"—without even a trace of Jewish blood.

Sir Stafford Cripps is at it again. This time he wants "some form of personal religion" in order to bring about more harmonious relations in world affairs. Religion, "personal" or "impersonal," has had quite an innings, and we have no hesitation in saying that for centuries, its influence has been a disruptive force in world affairs. We agree that the world is in a sorry mess, but religion is not likely to improve matters.

We wonder what is the true reason for the Vicar of Eastbourne refusing the proceeds of the production of the play "Robert's Wife"? One of his colleagues says "it is because the play conveys the impression that all progressive clergymen support birth control and that only reactionaries oppose it. This is nonsense." Perhaps his Church is rich enough to refuse funds, or perhaps the Vicar is really sincere and subscribes to the general feeling of his Church which has never ceased fulminating against what is known as this pernicious doctrine of soul murder.

"THE FREETHINKER"

THE MYTH PROBLEM AGAIN

II

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London, W.C.1.

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

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SUGAR PLUMS

This issue of "The Freethinker" will be in time to remind many London readers that Professor J. B. S. Haldane lectures in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, on Thursday, October 14, at 7-30 p.m., on "Technical Progress and Moral Progress." Admission is free.

There must be great rejoicing among the doughty champions of the Lord in Southport when they voted by a three to one majority that "without God there is no hope for man." 'Twas a famous victory over the Freethinkers who maintain that man can get on much better without him. The "Southport Guardian" disclosed the gloomy picture drawn by the Rev. K. Mackenzie of the "last survivor of the human race dying in cold and darkness," and pointed out that Mr. G. Thompson, President of the Merseyside Branch N.S.S., was not disheartened and added that the Last Day "won't be so bad if the two survivors shake hands and decide to face it together." We can imagine Mr. Thompson's smile as he said this.

The West London Branch N.S.S. has been fortunate in securing a lady speaker for to-day (October 17). Ruby Ta'Bois, F.R.A.S., will speak on "The Myth of Christ" at 7-15 p.m. in the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, London, W.1. In her quiet but effective way Mrs. Ta'Bois puts in some good work for the movement, including some pointed letters in her local press. Mr. Cleaver, the Branch Secretary, is an enthusiastic worker and we wish him, and all others concerned, a very successful evening.

Those branches of the N.S.S. arranging indoor meetings are getting into working order. Glasgow, Manchester, Bradford and West London have made promising starts, which should result in very useful work as the season develops. The question of halls is still a difficult one and prevents many branches joining in the winter campaign. We are pleased to add that Mr. R. H. Rosetti had successful meetings in Glasgow and Manchester.

IN his pamphlet, "Did Jesus Really Live?" the Rev. G. Maurice Elliott asks, "Is the New Testament Authentic?" and answers it by quoting the Bishop of Ely's claim that both the Old and the New Testament, after undergoing a "vigorous scrutiny," remain "in their spiritual power, their grandeur, and their essential accuracy." It would have been better had Mr. Elliott carefully told us what he meant by the word "authentic" in connection with the Bible, and what the Bishop meant by "essential accuracy"—for certainly they mean something quite different to a parson than they do, say, to a historian or scientist.

Even the Bishop would find it hard to apply "essential accuracy" to the story of Elijah going up to Heaven in a fiery chariot, or the more beautiful one of Jesus going to the same delectable abode unaided by anything so warlike.

It may come as a surprise also for Mr. Elliott to learn that neither he nor any parson in the world could produce a scrap of evidence that the Gospels in the form we have them were known before the year A.D.150; and this means, if words have any meaning in theology, that they are *not* authentic. Certainly we do not know who wrote them, where or when they were written, or even if, for example, Matthew was first written in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. And would Mr. Elliott be prepared to show that the Gospel of John was absolutely "authentic"? That every speech therein made by Jesus is "authentic" to the last dot and comma?

Some inkling of this kind of criticism appears to have trickled through to Mr. Elliott—for he is obliged to point out that Aristotle's works "have come down to us in a sadly defective condition," that "the interval between the date of Livy and the earliest manuscript of his works is 500 years," and so on. I do not doubt that this argument will have the desired effect on Mr. Elliott's sheep, but as a reply to the massive works of the Mythicists, it has about the same validity as the flowers that bloom in the spring. The whole point about the New Testament according to priests and parsons is that it is *inspired*, that it is a "revelation" from God Almighty (including, as Dean Burgon so powerfully urged, every comma), that it gives us God's Divine Message to Man, that every page is stamped with the love and the grace of the Lord who is himself Jesus Christ, the hero of this part of the "Holy" Bible. Nobody claims that Livy or Aristotle was "inspired," or that God Almighty *revealed* their work to erring mankind. The argument, in short, is just silly.

Mr. Elliott thinks that by quoting Harnack: "The primitive literature of the Church is in its main lines, and in most details, from the point of view of literary history reliable and worthy of credence," he is helping his case. In this argument, what Harnack, or Sir F. Kenyon, or some other "authority" says is just mere opinion, and unless backed up by evidence, can be taken for opinion and nothing else. Neither Harnack nor Kenyon nor anybody else is an authority for the Virgin Birth—and I think that I am right in saying that this particularly childish "dogma" was even too much for Harnack and he was obliged to give it up; in fact, I doubt whether he believed in any miracle. In any case, I am by no means clear as to what he means by "literary" history, and I am quite sure that Mr. Elliott does not know either. A "literary" history,

that is, a history of the way we have received certain documents and the work of certain writers is quite a different thing from the history of the events recorded in these documents. Even if Matthew was clearly shown to be the author of the Gospel that bears his name, this does not authenticate his recital of the Devil carrying Jesus, or of the saints coming out of their Jewish graves after having been dead and "appearing unto many."

Arguments like these, however, have little or no effect on the mentality of people like Mr. Elliott; all he does is to ignore them, loftily pointing out that the case for a live Jesus Christ, miracles and all, has been badly put to the stupid Mythicist, implying at the same time that at least he has put the case so unanswerably that all we can do now is to hide our ignorant heads in shame.

Let us look at the "historic" evidence he produces for the existence of Jesus.

Like almost every other believer, Jew, Rationalist, and Christian, Mr. Elliott's first witness is Josephus—though, unlike some of the others, he hastily gives up the passage in which Jesus, Pilate, and the cross, are mentioned. It is, of course, one of the rankest forgeries ever perpetrated, and it was done by a fellow believer in Christ Jesus for the Glory of the Lord; but the pious apologist's contention has always been—or nearly always—that though a Christian could forge one passage he would be quite incapable of forging another. In the second passage, Josephus points out that the Jewish Sanhedrin had James, "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ," brought before them. No doubt they might have had somebody called James brought before them, but the same forger or another one deliberately inserted the words in quotes making it as rank an imposture as the other.

First of all, did Jesus have a brother called James? The Gospel stories say he had "brethren," but the Roman Church has always (I believe) denied it. Some of the early Fathers claimed that the "brethren" were Joseph's children by a former wife; others argued that they were his cousins. The problem has been fully discussed in innumerable books but the fact remains that the Roman Catholic Church as a Church claims that, as Mary is a Virgin, she could not have any child except the Divinely born one—and if Mr. Elliott is a true believer, he is obliged to take the same view. The addition therefore of the phrase "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ" is, if anything, even a more clumsy forgery than the other, and writers on Josephus have for the most part admitted this.

But the case of Josephus is a problem far more serious for believers in Jesus than these passages prove. He was writing a history of his people and, as his father (who was a priest) lived through the stirring times when Jesus was stumping the country "doing good," including, of course, the Trial, Crucifixion and Resurrection, as well as the early history of the Apostles when they were spreading the Gospel, when Peter, Paul, and Barnabas were "contending" against each other, when hosts of Jews were being converted, when Stephen suffered a martyr's death, when "fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done by (or through) the apostles"—how is it that we never get a line about such wonderful happenings in a history packed with the most trivial details? Christian writers shirk answering this most important question—just as does the Rev. G. Maurice Elliott.

The answer is not far to seek. Josephus—and his father—knew nothing of a Jesus going about "doing good"; nothing of the Apostles, the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The "history" of the book of Acts is mostly unadulterated fiction; if there is any truth in it it has been garbled and edited out of recognition. It has no more call to be declared "authentic" than the dozen or more of the other Acts—the Acts of Pilate or the Acts of Peter or the Acts of Philip.

These things are naturally quite unknown to the simple and pious folk who read such childish and naive pamphlets like that of Mr. Elliott, or listen to the precious sermons of people like the Rev. Canon Campbell. They would even shrink from reading a book like that of Dr. Barnes on the beginnings of Christianity—a book which, if they understood it, would for ever unsettle their faith.

But then if that happened there would be little use for raw parsons like Mr. Elliott.

H. CUTNER.

UNO SLAYS BERNADOTTE

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." (Genesis, chap. 22, v. 10.)

IF a man is sent inadequately equipped into the midst of two rival packs of wolves, it may seem logical to blame the wolves when he is torn to pieces, but it is childish to give them *all* the blame. The world has been shocked to learn that one or the other of the warring factions in Palestine has assassinated a Swede instead of one of their "official" foes. We rightly condemn the dastard who wielded the fatal Tommy gun, and the clique of petty power politicians whose *orders* he was obeying. But it is not enough to blame the wolves.

I was privileged to read only a few weeks ago the latest instalment of Count Bernadotte's memoirs, with a view to their eventual translation into English. I was immediately impressed with the admirable character of the man, and his fine philosophy of life. On my way to Luxembourg in preparation for the annual congress of the World Movement for World Federal Government (WMWFG), I discussed with a prominent Belgian federalist how to get the Count into our movement. The Belgian pointed out that Bernadotte could *read* and that he was intelligent; if at this late hour he had still not signed up as a federalist, therefore, he was *too* slow for our purposes, and should not be approached *cap in hand*. In Luxembourg the following day I was informed that Count Folke Bernadotte, U.N. Mediator in Palestine, had joined the Council of Honour of the World Movement for World Federal Government. So far as I could gather he had enrolled on his own initiative.

The implication was obvious: like Sir John Boyd Orr, former head of U.N.'s World Food Organisation, now president of WMWFG, he had seen how futile is the misnamed "Security" Council, and how unworkable is the U.N. Charter from which the Council derives its duties and by which it is deprived of the ability to carry them out.

The world allotted to Bernadotte a task without the power to perform it. When one is given a job to do without the proper implements there are two alternatives: one is to say: "Give me the tools and I will do the job, but not otherwise." The other is to try to "make do" with what lies to hand. Count Bernadotte was too great a humanitarian to refuse the high duty

placed upon him. But the world should not demand two martyrs when one will suffice. His successor, if any, will have more altruism than sense.

There is war in Palestine, sometimes overt, sometimes covert, because there is no alternative means of settling disputes and enforcing the settlement. This requires a superior agency that can arrive at decisions (which UNO cannot), and enforce them without war (which UNO cannot). The only way to avoid deadlock is to adopt the majority vote in a voting procedure by which the votes cast truly reflect the political power behind them; the only way to enforce decisions without war is to enforce them directly upon the individual citizen, not upon states and governments *as such*. (The only way to coerce communities or their governments is, in the ultimate resort, by war.)

Bernadotte died because the "United" Nations is based on the pernicious principle of keeping the peace by making war. He died because its "Security" system is an evil sham, a death trap for peace-loving nations and for idealists who love their fellow men.

Count Folke Bernadotte died on the altar of a false god, because the blind leaders of the blind worship the perverted principle of a league of sovereign governments, and because their noisy self-congratulations drown the voices of those world citizens who support the only constructive alternative: international federal government.

To the millions of federalists throughout the world, and to our myriads of sympathisers and supporters, Folke Bernadotte's death is a call to action. He died a martyr to our Cause.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

MORALS AND ETHICS

THERE have, in the long history of philosophy, been many attempts to construct a satisfactory system of ethics. Indeed, what are all the religions, looked at from one point of view, but experiments in ethics? And many of the philosophical systems, from Kant to the modern advocates of Scientific Humanism, are likewise attempts at building ethical systems. Miss Ian Freed, in her new book, "Social Pragmatism" (Watts; 15s.) is thus only the latest of a long and varied list of names. For though she might not regard herself as being the builder of a philosophy of ethics, that is in effect what her book amounts to; and it stands or falls by its success or failure in that direction.

And what is Miss Freed's philosophy? That is not altogether easy to express briefly. It is, indeed, easier to say what it is not, since she spends almost half her book in discussing the traditional philosophies, and attempting to show that they are all mutually or individually inconsistent. Her main criticism of these traditional philosophies, especially those which have some connection, direct or indirect, with religion, is that they lay far too much stress on self-denial. Thus, at the very beginning of the book, she quotes Emerson's statement: "Every experiment, by multitudes or by individuals, which has a sensual and selfish aim, will fail." She considers that this is representative of the religious attitude, even though Emerson was in many ways aloof from orthodox religion. Miss Freed, in fact, holds that all such philosophies are philosophies of self-denial, and must therefore fail. This point of view might, perhaps, have been wholly acceptable fifty years ago; but nowadays, in a world where selfishness,

enlightened or otherwise, has had its way for a few generations, it looks as if there may, after all, be something in Emerson's generalisation.

"The pure moral imperative," says Miss Freed, "is still universally revered, and is still regarded as having claims upon us superior to those of any self-regarding principle or motive. We on our side are assumed to be capable of acting in response to its demands." This is the basic assumption of what she so strongly attacks as "Moralism." She holds that there is no real basis for the assumption that any kind of pure morality is responsible for right conduct, and advances in its place what is called a pragmatic approach to the problems of conduct. In other words, she considers that what matters in conduct is pure expediency; and that this is derived from ideas of universal desirability.

Now, there is no denying that in some respects this is quite obviously true. A society, for instance, in which there was no rule against murder would not for long survive, since its members would kill each other without any kind of restraint, and would in consequence wipe themselves out in a comparatively short time. Similarly some sort of rule for the protection of property must exist in any stable society; otherwise the workman will not have the tools of his trade in any secure fashion; the writer will not have regular access to his pen or his typewriter; the housewife will not be able to depend on having the cooking and cleaning implements necessary for the running of her household.

That, as I have said, is obvious. And it is equally clear that the ethical and moral rules applicable to man in society have varied from time to time in the world's history and from place to place on its surface. But to say that is not to admit the whole of the case made out by Miss Ian Freed. If we accept expediency as the rule, if we do not agree that there is any exact concept of moral good and bad, we are at once faced with the problem of doing something with the questions of international ethics. Miss Freed would probably retort that she is dealing primarily with the actions of individuals; that is true enough. But the actions of countless individuals have their reactions on the fate of the nations which are built up by these individuals. And the state of the world to day is a sufficient commentary. I feel, on the rule of expediency in the life of nations.

Of course, Miss Freed will not expect the assent of all her readers to all her assumptions and arguments. Bertrand Russell, in an interesting broadcast discussion with a Jesuit not long ago, said that he held that the actions of the Nazi commanders of concentration camps were wholly bad, in a completely moral sense; but he could not advance any arguments as to *why* this was so. Miss Freed might, of course, take the attitude that the rule of expediency or pragmatism would show us that the actions of rulers of concentration camps were bad; but I do not think that this could be deduced from her premises, provided that the inmates of those camps were people who were socially useless or harmful. But supporters of religion as well as believers in most of the more orthodox of traditional philosophies would, I think, hold that the actions were evil.

It is, of course, possible to argue round and round this point. But I feel that the weakness of Miss Freed's position lies in her more or less tacit assumption that, because some actions are quite obviously beneficial, taken purely as a matter of expediency, it can therefore be agreed that all actions which are valuable can thus be considered good and advisable.

I am not, I need hardly remark, trying to defend the pure moralism, say, of the Presbyterian Church, with its leanings towards sabbatarianism and all the other restrictions on human happiness which it would apply. But I do not feel that Miss Freed has made out her case in a wholly satisfactory way. The "pure" morality of the more extreme schools of religious thought is impossible to defend; but it is equally difficult to destroy the belief in some moral and ethical basis for our actions, as against the pure pragmatism of Miss Freed. In fact, here, as so often in the realm of thought, we are faced with the necessity for compromise between two extreme schools.

Any adverse criticism which I have here put forward should not, however, dissuade any prospective reader from embarking on "Social Pragmatism." It is an interesting book, and it is (as I hope is obvious to any reader of this discussion of it) provocative of thought on its subject. While it may to some people appear that the matter it deals with is a highly theoretical affair, this is not altogether so. In its applications, as any rate, it is of the greatest importance.

JOHN ROWLAND.

RELIGIOUS BLACKMAIL

IT HAS often been pointed out that Roman Catholicism in Ireland or Canada is not quite the same thing as it is in England—though ostensibly the theology is the same. The following letter was sent out during the war to "Catholic Mothers" in Winnipeg and other Canadian towns—the kind of letter which our own R.C. Archbishops would think twice about circulating in England. We would like to hear what some of our eminent converts—even from Rationalism—think about it. Could any letter to bereaved parents be more despicable? Could anything be more heartless than this grasping greed for money filched from sorrowing parents by infamously foul pretences?

Archbishop's House,
363 St. Mary's Ave.

Winnipeg, Man., March 1, 1944.

My Dear Catholic Parents,—

I have received from the pastors of the different parishes a list of those who have boys overseas. Some time ago, as you are aware, I called on Catholic mothers to enrol their boys as Perpetual Members of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. I said: "What better guarantee for any boy exposed to all the hazards of war! A guarantee, should he be killed, that he will go at once to his Maker, to be with Him for all eternity. A guarantee, should it be God's will, that he will return to his dear mother and to those who love him." This has been explained to you over and over again from the pulpit, and you have been urged to enrol your boys. A few, who have been personally contacted, have answered the appeal, but all the others have maintained a stolid indifference. If I were to conclude that you are indifferent to the safety of your boy, I would be doing you a grave injustice. You are not indifferent. What then, can be the reason for the inaction! Some say, in fact, many say that they cannot afford it. That is not a reason, that is a specious excuse, unworthy of a Catholic mother. You receive a portion of the boy's pay, and what better use can you make of it. "Oh," you answer, "I am trying to have a nest egg for my boy when he returns." When he returns. Wouldn't it be better to take the best means you know to

ensure the boy's return. If he does not return, what good, under Heaven, will the "nest egg" be to him. I am not advising you to take the boy's money, I would much prefer that you use your own money. But, if you must take the boy's money, take it as a loan. Surely you will be able to make it up in the years to come. Do you not think, with a little economy, and a few less shows, you will be able to set aside one dollar a month, until the full amount is paid up? It is not necessary to pay the \$40.00 at once. You can pay any sum you wish by instalments. You can pay, say, \$5.00 a month, or \$10.00 every three months. You can take a year, you can take two years, you can take even three years. Three years, that is almost the equivalent of one dollar per month. The important thing is to ensure the boy's safety, as far as we can do so—his safety in time and eternity.

One Catholic mother in this Archdiocese enrolled her boy on February 20, paying \$20.00. He was killed on February 22. Do you not think that the mother's heart found some consolation in what she had done?

I have placed this matter in the hands of the Franciscan Fathers, at 233 Carlton Street (Telephone 29-136). If you want further explanation, see them or get in touch with them. If time permits, they will probably get in touch with you.

Dear Catholic parents, we have a chance to do something that will live long in the annals of the Church in Western Canada, and let us merit God's blessing by doing it.

Yours very devotedly in Xto.,

Alpho A. Sinnott
(Archbishop of Winnipeg.)

LAST WORDS ON SIN

I AM delighted to learn from his article in "The Free-thinker" of September 19, that Mr. Yates is, after all, a believer in the necessity of sin. I am sorry I have misunderstood him for so long, but I think my mistake in "drumming on so obvious a truth" is pardonable in the light of the following considerations.

In his article of May 30, Mr. Yates ridiculed my standpoint on the ground that if sin is a necessary condition of human life, we should logically "abrogate every law that prohibits or punishes it." Further, in reply to my statement that crime is not without justification, he produced the case of a man who had been brutally maltreated, and asked sarcastically if this crime were justified by "its immediate or its ultimate results" (thus revealing, incidentally, that atheists as well as theists can regard my thesis "with amazement and horror"). And, in conclusion, he announced triumphantly that by these tactics he had effected a "reduction ad absurdum" of my position. In other words, he did everything in his power in that article to show that my contention that goodness and sin are interdependent is false. I tried to answer his objections on August 8, and now, in his reply, he calmly states that "it is a condition of existence that everything has its correlative or complementary opposite" and that "if there were no bad, there could be no good" and so on, just as if his remarks of May 30 had never been penned. What can be made of a man who, at one stage of an argument expends all his energies in trying to prove that a certain viewpoint is untenable, and, at the next, reveals that of course he himself shares the very viewpoint he was previously attacking?

However, if we are to take his articles of March 28 and September 19 as furnishing the correct account of Mr. Yates' position, and ignore that of May 30, I think we may profitably bring our controversy to a close. It seems clear that the truth of my original thesis has been established, though whether Mr. Yates has been converted to a belief in sin's necessity or has held that opinion from the beginning is, as I have tried to show, a difficult question to answer. I continue to maintain that the problem of the origin of moral evil is a red herring. The passage from my first essay which Mr. Yates quotes as his excuse for devoting so much space to this question occurs in the last paragraph and includes, at the most, four sentences out of the 70-odd which the article comprises. My original intention was to show that sin is necessary. Mr. Yates, in spite of his article of May 30, appears to agree with me, and at that I am content to leave the matter. In conclusion, I should like to thank the editor of "The Freethinker" for his patience, and Mr. Yates for a highly stimulating discussion.

(Rev.) JOHN L. BROOM.

CORRESPONDENCE

A CORRECTION

Sir,—The report in "Sugar Plums" of September 26, of the incident at the White Stone Pond, Hampstead, between Mr. Ebury of the North London Branch and the British Union Fascist meeting, the loudspeakers and the police was not quite correct.

The meeting was at Highbury Corner, and the matter was much more serious. Highbury Corner is a well established meeting place, where a number of rival organisations have held meetings simultaneously for many years.

Some months ago the B.U. appeared on the scene, and on our arrival we were told by the police to go away. They offered us an alternative pitch, and on our refusal to accept ordered us to take up a position so far away from the main road as to make our propaganda efforts futile. The reason given was that if they allowed us to take the pitch they would have to allow rival political meetings—and why not?

Had we yielded it would have meant in effect that wherever the B.U. set up a platform all other societies would be driven off the pitch by the police, and therefore we refused to compromise.

The N.S.S. having won its point and scored one more victory for freedom of speech, the Jewish Ex-Service Men, The Islington Trades Council, and finally the Roman Catholics, came out weeks later to do battle: in safety.

We remained on our old pitch for a number of weeks while the B.U. at one end, and the I.T.C. at the other, blared at each other through loud speakers across our meeting.

After a number of protests, and I believe a signed petition from nearby residents, this nuisance has now ceased and the meetings have been conducted with proper dignity.—Yours, etc.,

L. EBURY.

THE "VIRGIN" MARY

Sir,—In "The Freethinker" of October 3, 1948, I noticed, under the heading "Sugar Plums," the following statement, "there never was a scrap of evidence outside the New Testament that Mary ever lived."

May I, to the best of my ability, correct that statement? A book called "Sepher Toldoth Jeschua," the author is unknown to me, mentions that Mary did exist! It says that she was a disreputable person, and nothing more than a "street walker"!

As a matter of interest, the book tells of the parentage of Jesus, or Isi bin Yusuf or Isi bin Miriam! "Josephus Pandera (Joseph) a Roman officer of the Calabrian Legion, which was in Judea, seduced Miriam (Mary) of Bethlehem, and was the father of Jesus!"

This ought to put in the shade the Christian idea that the father of Jesus was a spirit, as there could be nothing more material than a Roman soldier!—Yours, etc.,

JAMES COBETT (age 16).

[The evidence required is for Mary of the New Testament. The Miriam of the Sepher Toldoth Jeschua was flourishing before the year 90 B.C.—EDITOR.]

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held October 7, 1948

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A. C.), Seibert, Bryant, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Woodley, Morris, Taylor, Barker and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Kingston, Bradford, Nottingham and to Headquarters. Permission was given for the formation of a branch at Nottingham, to be known as the Nottingham Branch N.S.S.

Lecture reports and future arrangements were dealt with from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Nottingham, Stratford, Conway Hall and Messrs. Brighton and Clayton. A grant was made towards the expenses of the International Freethought Congress to be held in Rome in 1949.

The General Secretary reported proceedings at the London Committee Meeting of the World Union of Freethinkers.

It was agreed to make arrangements, if possible, for renewing the Annual Dinner in the early part of 1949.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for November 4, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, October 19, 7 p.m.: "New Frontiers for Rationalism," Mr. GUFFOYLE WILLIAMS.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W. 1).—Monday, October 18, 7 p.m.: "Reconstructing the Remote Past," 3rd lecture: "The History and Interpretation of Fossils," W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D. F.R.S.E.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Materialist Tradition in Ethics," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Myth of Christ," RUBY TAHOIS.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Riddle of the Gospels," Mr. H. L. SEARLE (Branch Treasurer).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: a lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Freethought 1948 Style," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "World Government," Mr. LESLIE STEVENS, M.A.

SECOND-HAND BOOKS. Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 21 Rosslyn Hill, N.W. 3.

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