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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Notes on Man

ORDINARILY, we all live in a crowd. That is one of the conditions of a man's development. By himself man is not a man, he is only a rough sketch, a mere outline of the finished article. To be complete he must live with others and he must be with others, not in the sense that a number of separate objects are together in a heap, but rather in the sense in which the constituents of a chemical compound cover a special and individualised whole. In the story of animal evolution the formation of the herd was one of the most pregnant of facts. But in the higher stages of animal life, it carries along with its tremendous advantages, a number of disadvantages. For the paradox of group life is that it must strive to be at once both conservative and progressive. Man must live with the group, he must be strong enough to think, and sometimes to act, apart from it. And at that point trouble commences. For only the few are proof. To most, the fact that an opinion is held by the majority, endows it with an overpowering authority. The fact that it is held by only a few is enough to make them keep it at arm's length. The first thought of the average man or woman, when brought up against a new idea is, how many accept it? They are like politicians preparing an election manifesto where probable voting strength determines the character of the ideas that are to be set forth. If a few accept it, then it must be approached cautiously. If an unfashionable few, then the safest plan is to damn it outright and offhand. It will prove that you are "practical." That is, that you are unable to see an inch in front of your nose, that you possess "sturdy common sense," that is, you will not stand to lose anything for so idiotic a thing as an opinion, that you are neither a dreamer nor an idealist, that is, you are a good all-round, self-seeking kind of a fool.

If what we have said be true, then it follows that the better type will always be in the minority. The majority is a heavy weight, and is a dead weight. The minority is at least a living force. And, strange as it may appear, the minority always conquer in the end. All the great triumphs which the world has witnessed are so many triumphs of minorities. The Reformation, the Education Acts, the attempts to make a man rule his own soul were all efforts of minorities. A minority animated by clear and sound ideas can only be destroyed by one thing, and that is its own success. For by that a minority becomes a majority and is so exposed to the bombardment of a body similar to its old self. Thus a movement stimulates life, not in proportion to its size, but in relation to its vigour, its clearness of ideas, and purity of doctrine. It is true that every movement aims at success, but it is also true that every movement is nearest defeat at the moment of victory. It is not that victory is gained by adulterating the purity of the teaching, so much as when conquest arrives compromise sets

in, and to hold the crowd, much of what has been fought for is given up. And there is the important fact, already noted, that the struggle for existence, which had despised opinion, is compelled to make exercises a kind of selection. It attracts only the strong, the courageous, the comparatively incorruptible. It makes no appeal to the cowardly, self-seeking, or the time serving.

Looked at rightly, the golden age of movements is never in the future, but always in the past. The lot of the reformer, the real reformer, is always to work for complete success but never to attain it. There is one reason why those who are reformers in their youth are so often found to be Conservatives in their old age. It is not because they have forsaken their early ideas, it is because they have witnessed the triumph of their old ideas and have not advanced to the point of acquiring new ones.

All reforms are born of a minority, that is part of the glory of belonging to it. One may go further and say that reforms are really born of a minority of one, they are taken up by the keen-brained few, and if they are lucky, they see their ideas spread to the many, and then they can watch them being corrupted and robbed of much of their value. That is really what one who understands evolution, instead of merely talking about it, would expect. In psychology and sociology the principles remain the same. A new idea is as strictly a variation, and the individual to whom it comes is as strictly a "sport" as anything that occurs in the world of biology. And it is subject to precisely the same dangers. It may occur in an environment that will not permit it to reproduce its kind, it may be swamped by inter-crossing, it may be crushed by the irruption of an antagonistic idea. But so far as it can establish itself it becomes the starting point of a new theory or of a new social order. All improvements, all reforms, have commenced in this way. The benefits to society have been conferred by the few, and society has crucified them as an expression of its gratitude. And this, also, is unavoidable. In the nature of the case, society must be organised for the average character, not for the exceptional one. At the worst, the exceptional character has a disruptive influence, and at the best, a disquieting one. And in the interests of its own peace, society is urged to suppress the very type through which it benefits most. One may put it that society lives on the usual, but flourishes on the exception. When the reformer is dead, society may erect a heavy monument upon his grave, but whether that is because by that time his ideas have become part of the established order, or because it wished to place difficulties in the way of his rising again, may be left an open question.

We are back again with the problem of the average character, and that explains why there is a reversion to the normal type in the case of so many of the children of reformers, and also why it is that when the opinions of the reformer become the property of the average mind,

the tendency is for them to become corrupted. This is simply that the power to stand out against the dual influences of established ideas and social pressure is possessed only by the comparative few. There may be many who can stand out against the first, but their are few who can withstand the second. When the weakness of established ideas is apparent, the usual method is either to remain silent concerning them or to seek cover by the invention of a number of halfway phrases which shall disguise the fact of their non-acceptance. I have no hesitation in saying that a very large proportion of our public men have no more belief in a God and in a future life, than I have. But how few of them ever say so? And when the leading men are silent one can expect little more from the rest of the people. To-day we have little to fear from the sincere religionists. The dangers lie more in the camp of those who should be its friends, those who are afraid that an open avowal of Freethought should sacrifice some little social advantage for themselves or their family.

Now, as ever, what is needed is greater mental and moral courage. It is these qualities alone which lift a man or woman above the level of the crowd, and mark him or her as one of the real pioneers of progress.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

FATALISM

I HAVE not read Archibald Robertson's "Man His Own Master." But his statement in "The Freethinker" shows that he misunderstands the nature of the problem. He asserts our inability to predict the future as showing the fallacy of "the old doctrine of fatalism."

Now, I wonder whoever put forward such a doctrine! If "fatalism" has any connection with the terms fatal and fate, it could have no such significance. The term fatal, implies death, and fate, inevitability. So, all those who assert that death ends all, are fatalists. The question here is whether death is the end. It concerns what is understood by death. And we have the religious objection that fatalism is a hopeless outlook if there is not another world, an after life; where our desires, hopes and fears find an ultimate realisation. We have a psychological problem concerning frustration and its compensation.

The old concept of Fate does not concern predictability, but inevitability; whether or not there is a life after death. Fate may be capricious, but is none the less inevitable. The character of Fate may be seen in the hideous forms in which it has been portrayed; even in the artistic presentations of the ancient Greeks. It concerns the infinities and affinities of human hopes and fears. Any consideration on physical analogies is false. The problem is psychological. It is not to be answered by metaphysical conundrums.

This so-called "doctrine of fatalism" is merely an epithet thrown at unbelievers by theologians. Why get tied up in metaphysical knots over indeterminacy or a jumping electron? It has nothing to do with our inability to predict which way a cat will jump. And it is absurd to adopt the old theological argument from ignorance; that we cannot foretell the future. We can and do. We may avoid calamity on no surer ground than presentiment or suspicion. On the other hand, we may predict with considerable accuracy, as in astronomy, yet be powerless to change the inevitable. We are not merely concerned with future prediction.

This predetermined plot of dust and soul concerns the past as well as the future. The theologian, in concen-

trating upon the future, is distracting attention from the past; the unpredictability of the future countering the unreliability of the past. He is playing safe, for our fears relate to the future; the past has gone. The moving finger writes and having writ, moves on. But it is absurd analogy to think we can turn the pages of the Book of Life, and go back to a beginning. We live in the eternal now, we can only begin now.

We cannot go back, except in memory or tradition, and we can only go forward into the future in anticipation. The notion of causation as the onward roll of a chariot of fate; or the endless round of a wheel of destiny; or of links in an endless chain; is psychologically false. The relationship of past to present is not analogous to that of present to future. Looking out of our window in the eternal now we are looking out on two vistas stretching away in opposite directions. The idea of predestination implies foretelling the present. It implies theological doctrine, enshrined in tradition.

The tradition is continuous; metaphysics links with theology. As we go back in history we pass by easy stages through the mechanistic self-caused Universe, and the God without body, parts or passions, to the truly personal God. But a self-caused Universe is as absurd as a self-caused God; as also is a personal God without body, parts or passions. With mechanisation we have outgrown the personification, but the removal of the personification still leaves a tradition of a pre-determined Universe.

Buckle argued that determinism is theological doctrine, and that freewill comes from metaphysical introspection. Subsequent research gives much to corroborate Buckle's thesis. Despite metaphysical obscurantism we have learned from men such as Tyler and Frazer concerning religious beliefs and magic practices. And we can recognise in the Creator God an invisible magician who not only predicted but controlled his creation by the magic curse and blessing of his Will. It concerns not only omniscience, but also omnipotence.

It needs but little consideration of the biblical prophets to see that the prophetic utterance was not prophecy as meaning being prediction. We read of prophesying against and being prophesied against. It was not merely foretelling famine, pestilence, desolation, destruction; the wholesale declamation was condemnation of idolatory, sin, sex, mammon, calling upon the wrath of God in the name of righteousness. Calling down the vengeance of God, the curse was crude prophecy, just as vengeance was rough justice.

There is no necessary connection here with an after-life, the Hebrew Sheol was a mere shadow of a shade. The sufferings of man were evidence of sin, and the utterance of the prophet was no less certain. It was the Voice of God speaking through the mouth of the prophet. It expressed the intensest of passion, it breathed intolerance. Enshrined in a Sacred Book it became a model of theological technique, developing into the Christian anathema, and fear of Hell; with compensation in an after-life. Hatred and intolerant pleasure reached its climax in the torment of the damned.

This cry of frustration, this voice crying in the wilderness, this prophetic utterance, has been a model for schism, dissension, revolt. It has been claimed as inspired eloquence, impassioned appeal, protest against suffering, righteousness, indignation, spirit of revolt, moral justice, and the voice of authority. Concentrating attention on prediction, this "doctrine of fatalism"

loses sight of its religious and magic character, the magic curse, the divine wrath. Fatalism not only concerns prediction, it also implies control. Magic tries to control nature. Religion believes nature is controlled.

To think we can force our will on other things is magic, to think we are under control of some invisible "power" is religion. In social life we have both—the magic "control" of power politics, and the controlling "power" of some unknown economic "boss." There is still much power in the magic curse. There are still many trying to control. But to judge by the evidence the world seems completely out of control. We know there will be another war. We know who this war will be between. We know on which side this country will be. It is absurd to say we cannot foretell the future. It is equally so to say we are powerless.

We may not always predict with precision, but anticipate the future we most certainly do. But this has nothing to do with "fatalism." Nor is it a question of indeterminacy, or of freewill or of choice. It concerns the relationship of intentions and actions and their consequences. In magic, consequences are conceived as the result of intention. But, whatever our intentions may be, our actions have their consequences.

We live in fear of war. It seems unavoidable. We are preparing for it; carrying on a war of nerves; we feel frustrated. But is it not a logical consequence of attempts at control? The idea of control seems an obsession. Is it not the logical consequence of the prejudices and animosities of dialectic conflict and political realism? Is it not dialectic in action?

Man as his own master, bossing himself, seems quite mystical. But, it is certain, with "hate" and "intolerant pleasure," he becomes the author of his own fate.

H. H. PREECE.

MATERIALISM

J. S. HALDANE commits himself somewhere, apparently in a transient mood of "take it or leave it," and in answer to an implied question. (I quote from memory.)

"I am a materialist, insofar as I believe that cosmic events will continue to take place after I am no longer here to see them, and that when a man is dead he is dead."

It is clear what Haldane means in his second proposition at the level of ordinary language, but the first has for years given the writer much food for thought. And insofar as what follows strikes at the very root of contrary philosophies, especially those concerned with the true nature of perception, I will try and treat it as objectively as possible.

What does Haldane mean by "Cosmic events?" Presumably the orderly march of all that takes place in the vast known emptiness of space, from the spiral nebulae to the little understood activities within the atom. Thus, after every sentient being has vanished from this or indeed any other planet, new stars will be born, age, and die; vast cosmic accidents will shake the Heavens from time to time, and the whole of space continue to expand as before. Even after all organic life has ceased to develop and multiply, the great symphony of the inorganic world will presumably continue to reverberate and fill the Heavens for ever.

There are few who would quarrel with this speculation, but does it encompass the whole and the true picture? That after all seeing eyes are finally closed, the stars

will continue their appointed courses, and the many suns continue to pour out their life-giving heat and light, is not difficult to imagine, but in the absence of human and animal observers will they still be what they were? Of this I see some considerable doubt. For with no animal eye, evolved and with great limitations to see the Universe as *we* see it, is there any reason whatsoever that the elemental and unknown "stuff" of which the Universe consists will continue to assume the arbitrary divisions into which we unconsciously divide it in order to survive? Who will be there to examine familiar conformations of (for example) the now abandoned ether, and to call them *matter* or to differentiate in any way whatsoever between what we are now beginning to see as "space time events" and the like, and their particular and perhaps temporary relationship which constitutes the matter we know and of which we consist?

There are many hints. In phonetics, it is well known that the cat, and more particularly the bat has so evolved that he is able to appreciate a cosmic activity quite beyond our reach, namely the ultra high periodicity of sound waves, which in the case of the bat actually provides it with a natural "radar" service used in its struggle for survival.

Such deviations amongst species from the normal equipment of mammals like ourselves are slight, and so to speak accidental. And the fact that we can now produce delicate instruments which often far extend them (the supersonic whistle and radar?) in no way alters the situation.

Every wireless receiver is at present tapping sources of cosmic activity which less than 100 years ago could not have been included in man's speculation of "Haldane's continuing cosmic events." How much more remains?

Narrowing Haldane's conception of "continuing cosmic activity" to, for instance, the apparent rise and setting of the sun, one can clearly envisage an almost indefinite continuance of the solar cycle as we see it, but *will it still be the sun?* or, viewed from the angle of some non-human observer whose perceptual equipment bears no relation to our narrowly evolved senses, may this particular phenomena be merely an insignificant function of some far vaster and quite different cosmic machinery on to which we have focussed our senses?

Take heat and light. It seems probable that both are without any ultimate meaning apart from how they affect the organic world and that of course includes any apparatus and measures we have been able to devise as tools of our natural senses.

When we look at the sky, by virtue of our sensual equipment, we divide what we see into aggregates of "matter" and call them stars. But it is *we* who do this.

Feurbach says somewhere, that whatever cosmic manifestation may be under observation at any given time, it is "*we who see it,*" and to postulate an observer who sees things differently is simply to "write man in the Heavens, larger and awry."

But all this is for many of us, familiar, and perhaps unprofitable ground. It can but lead in the present state of our knowledge to a healthy and humble agnosticism in which theology and much of what has passed for philosophy up to now, must be regarded as largely the reflection of one's own personality and subconscious longings to bring order out of the terrifying chaos which seems to surround us. At our own level of organisation we are intelligible. One step enough for me.

J. STURGE-WHITING.

ACID DROPS

The National Catholic Music Educators at Rensselaer, Indiana, are having nothing to do with the two "Ave Marias" of Gounod and Schubert, nor with solo singing in church, or such operatic airs as the wedding marches from "Lohengrin" and the "Midsummer Night's Dream." All these things are too frivolous, and they have decided to press for only approved liturgical music in Roman Catholic churches. We think that that renowned religious military man, General Booth, was also faced with somewhat the same problem, but found that unfortunately the Devil had the best tunes. He promptly pinched them, and soon his gallant Army raucously sang "Jesus is My Only Hope" or a similar hymn, to the tune of "A Bicycle Made for Two" or "Any Old Iron." It was a great success—and perhaps the above music educators will have to toe the line in the same way.

The American Cardinal Saliege, writes in the "Catholic Worker" that the "characteristic of Materialism is violence, that of Christianity is love." It really is remarkable how people can dope themselves, or try to dope others with mere words, and yet we cannot imagine that all Cardinals are liars, or hypocrites, nor yet fools. We have great difficulty in placing the Cardinal in his right category. We imagine that if the Cardinal were directly tackled on his assertion, he would find refuge in the usual Christian excuse that what he meant was (perhaps) "spiritual" violence and "spiritual" love. Or can he by any chance *really* mean that all Materialists are violent, and all Christians loving and gentle? No prize is offered for the correct answer.

"Pitifully sterile" is how the Rev. J. White describes the congregation at St. George's, Douglas, Isle of Man. He complained that the services lacked the right atmosphere, and there is a general lack of interest in the whole proceedings. What does the Rev. Mr. White want? How can he expect intelligent persons to work up any enthusiasm over a service in honour of a God whose identity no Christians can agree upon, or whose very being is as sterile as the St. George's congregation. We are afraid that the Rev. Mr. White will have to arrange some of the stunts that his English colleagues have to if they want to fill their churches, and this, we suspect, is the real problem at St. George's.

We Freethinkers never worry much about the "spiritual" side of man in or out of prison—not that there is much need to about Freethinkers in prison, the cases are so very rare. It is otherwise with Christians who always seem to have considerable flocks of believers doing time, and whose spiritual welfare is therefore a matter of great concern for our pious authorities. A Christian ex-inmate, who had to do six months' hard, recently wrote his impressions for the "Church Times," and from our point of view most interesting they are. As in the Army, the newcomers mostly give C. of E. as their religion—which means, we are told, that they have no religion. Here we must demur, for in few such cases, if any at all, would a prisoner admit to have no religion.

They are all obliged to be at a service in the morning which appears to be mostly drab and uninteresting from the account given; though even if the prisoners appear to dislike it, we suggest that this is more because the service is in prison than because the men do not believe

in it. They are given a Bible and a Prayer Book on entering which, since prisoners now cannot afford to buy cigarettes but only loose tobacco, provide excellent cigarette paper. And why not? What better use can be made of the Divine Word than to give—in this way—so much pleasure? Does anybody imagine that the ravings of Jeremiah or Ezekiel will "comfort" a prisoner?

The same correspondent gives the average prison chaplain a good wiggling. Most of these religious officials could do a lot for prisoners but they cleverly manage to evade their responsibilities. They are often busy parsons who in this way augment their incomes and in any case are often quite unsuitable for prison work. They preach badly, conduct their services "without dignity and reverence," and devote as little time to their work as possible. The whole article is a serious indictment, and it is suggested that the post of prison chaplain should be abolished. We agree—and we should like to add so should the post of army chaplain. Perhaps it may not be long before they will be museum pieces of the past.

We are seriously thinking of classifying these columns under different headings which we would label as "Stunt," "Christian Truth" and "Conceit" columns. In the latter column we would include George Glasgow of the "Catholic Times" who, in an article on Freedom, quite bluntly states that Catholics "know all about Freedom." For most of us the words "Catholic" and "Freedom" make us automatically think of "Oil and Water," or "Snowballs in Hell." Maybe the fact that George imagines that Roman Catholics "know all about Freedom" is the reason that R.C.s deny it to others.

Those dear old ladies, our primitive stage censors, had to make a firm decision the other day. They had to decide whether an Italian actor should be allowed to take the part of Jesus Christ in the play "The Man Who Murdered Pilate," and they came to the decision that to portray God Almighty on the stage was almost as bad as sinning against the Holy Ghost. As it was not quite as bad, the actor was allowed to appear on condition that he made no attempt to look like Jesus; so while he was dressed in his rehearsal clothes the rest of the company played in their Biblical costumes. He was, however, allowed to wear a crown of thorns—something had to show a Jesus being tortured by those howling Jews. But one really wonders at the mentality of our official "censors"!

We never thought a parson would agree with the "Freethinker," but recently (in this column) we warned Christians what to expect if we started "Days of Prayer," and here we have a parson—the Rev. J. Griffiths, of Fulham, who states that a "National Day of Prayer" won't be good enough "if war breaks out. There is no need to state that the parson's reason is not quite the same as ours.

Although he admitted he could see no improvement in international affairs, the R.C. Bishop Amigo still asked his sheep to pray to God for the conversion of Russia. The point to note in this is the undoubted fact that the mass of Russians are still members of the Greek Orthodox Church—that is, they are quite as genuine Christians as the Roman Catholics. As for praying we all know what happened during the war. Almost without exception our own days of National Prayer were followed by awful disasters. Still, if our R.C.s did not pray what would become of their bishops?

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Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning

SUGAR PLUMS

An excellent audience listened intently to Professor J. B. S. Haldane's lecture on October 14 in The Conway Hall on "Technical Progress and Moral Progress." The interest aroused can be judged by the flow of questions, which were not exhausted when the time limit had been reached. Mr. Seibert was kept busy at the bookstall and a good deal of literature changed hands. The Executive of the N.S.S. thanks the band of voluntary workers whose help made for the smooth running of the meeting. The Executive is arranging a Freethought demonstration in the Stratford Town Hall, London, E., on Thursday evening, December 9. Further details will appear later.

The Blackburn Watch Committee have decided to take no action after considering a letter from the Blackburn Branch National Secular Society urging that machinery be set in motion for the opening of Cinemas on Sunday. We are certain that the local N.S.S. Branch will not be disheartened. Freethinkers have always had to work hard in their many efforts at reform, and we are equally sure that the Branch will return again and again to the fray. Offers of help and co-operation will be welcomed, and we will be pleased to send further supplies of our Sunday Cinema leaflets.

The R.C. Canon Daniel made some piquant remarks to his audience the other week. He insisted that loyalty to individual priests was as necessary as loyalty to the "Holy Father." "Do not criticise your priest," he added. "he is God's choice. We priests have nothing but pity for the poor soul who goes so far as to criticise priests. . . . Keep your criticism to yourselves. Even if you think you can do better—obey." Canon Daniel must feel it is a great pity that he is not living in those glorious Catholic Golden Ages so much publicised by the late Mr. Chesterton, when the penalty of criticising priests was having one's tongue torn out, or eyes put out, to say nothing of other gentle and similar means of persuasion. Nowadays, one can only give a mild rebuke. Times have changed, and the fact that Canon Daniel talks like this is proof that priests are being criticised—and by the Roman Catholics, too.

In the Leicester Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture to-day (24th October) on "God or Man?" A warmth of feeling has existed for many years between the N.S.S. and the Leicester Secular Society, and Mr. Rosetti is looking forward to meeting old and new friends of the local Secular Society. The lecture begins at 6.30 p.m.

TABOO

I.

IN art, literature, music and drama criticism has free play, as it has nearly as much in the kinema, and indirectly radio, with the exception of religious broadcasts. One cannot imagine any of these functioning without criticism, which acts as the intermediary between them and the public.

At its highest, criticism is itself an art linked with those it examines, while at ordinary levels or its lowest, it is publicity for the productions under consideration; also information for the picture gazer, theatregoer, reader, listener and whatever other seeker of intellectual pabulum or entertainment may like to read it.

British forms of government, both national and local, are based upon the existence of criticism and its necessity. By it we avoid dictatorship as well as lesser evils, as nepotism and graft. Recognised in Parliament by the persistence of an Opposition criticism is an essential of democracy, a safeguard of liberty, practised freely in speech and writing.

This being generally accepted, any man or woman entering public life or practising the arts having to be prepared for criticism, and scientists and doctors nearly as much so, it is curious to find certain aspects or departments of life which escape criticism, or are regarded as above or outside it.

The word criticism has suffered deterioration in meaning, being under suspicion in some minds as identical with fault finding. This is no derogation of its value. Engineers and builders, among many others, regard the finding of faults as necessary in their professions. For those who dislike the term criticism it may be equated with information, explanation or exposition, choosing from a large body of work, details which might remain unnoticed, annotation by experts of essentials which should be known to ordinary men and women.

Neither need criticism always be serious. There is room for humour; as parody, satire, mordant irony or other forms.

Criticism being a concomitant of all creative work it is surprising the number of features which escape it. Almost we seem to be suffering from that mentality supposed to be peculiar to South Sea Islanders, African negroes and other superstitious people, who avoid mentioning certain aspects of nature or life for fear of bringing bad luck, presumably by exciting the wrath of gods or arousing evil spirits to malignancy.

II.

One such is the King and Royal Family. Remembering the large and vigorous criticism of the earlier Georges and the republican movement of the nineteenth century, one wonders what has happened since. Which has changed most, the King or his subjects—or the propaganda among the latter on behalf of the former?

Granted modern English kings are strictly constitutional and their private lives above reproach, there is yet room for criticism of fundamentals: the influence of the theory of kingship upon our social and political and religious organisation, and the general principles of hereditary monarchy and government when such are crumbling the world over. But never a word is written; the topic is taboo.

Equally free from the cleansing winds of criticism appears to be the British Empire. Foreigners do not respect this taboo, either in stating the history of the Empire or its present functioning. An Empire lacking an Emperor or other central authority, scattered over the globe, acquired by diverse means and still more

diversely ruled, varying in government from abject dependence on the Colonial Office to a self-control which is little removed from autonomy, in some cases showing antagonism to Britain; here is a phenomenon inviting criticism, which it does not get. If not criticism, then explanation fuller than ever yet given, if the British Empire is to be justified in the eyes of the world.

Desperate conditions will sometimes break a rigid taboo. Such was the prevalence of venereal diseases, known to the medical profession and the authorities, but not nice to discuss in public. Early in the last war, increase of this plague, and the need for guarding the health of young soldiers led to open revelation and discussion of V.D., to the benefit of all concerned.

The wide practice of abortion remains hushed up, as does the large and growing incidence of mental deficiency in our town population. Increase they will, as long as mention of them is forbidden, either officially or through prudery or mistaken delicacy of feeling or sentimental reticence in any shape. Both these evils will have to be dragged into the light of day, publicly debated without reservation before cure is possible.

The latter, the staggering amount of mental inferiority, varying from dullness down to sheer idiocy, is closely linked with education.

This is one of the great taboos of Britain. With all the talk and writing about education there is little criticism. Yet most of those engaged in it professionally are dissatisfied. Those officially outside it, but interested or concerned, are no more content. They say or write naught of a penetrating nature because of some miasma of sentimentality which seems to spread over the subject.

It appears to be taken for granted that any sort of formalised instruction is better than none, no matter what other chances of acquiring knowledge and experience children have. In a spasm of despair at making up our minds what is best for youngsters we dump them in crowds into buildings and hope or pretend that results are going to be good.

So far that is doubtful. Everything about education, from infant schools to universities stands in clamant need of criticism, a freshening of the atmosphere, a revival of methods and style and curricula, as well as a clearing away of lumber with which our educational system is cluttered. But the necessary criticism remains unuttered.

III.

As much as anywhere, taboos extend to religion. The British Broadcasting Corporation allows no speaker antagonistic to Christianity in its religious broadcasts or at any other time. Reading popular periodicals and fiction one might gather the impression the whole population is pious and prayerful. Yet students, specialists, controversialists, all whose business it is to know definitely, are aware of the rising tide against religion, both a larger mass of indifference and smaller but growing campaigns of attack.

Churches themselves know it, and are organising resistance. But it seems agreed the common people shall not be told. That there is unbelief of many grades and direct enmity to religion is suppressed; taboo. Only by great effort were the churches compelled to admit the startling decline in attendance, now less than 10 per cent. of the populace.

Similarly the pretence is kept up that priests, parsons, pastors, monks, nuns, religious officials and workers of every sort are gentle, kindly, helpful and self-sacrificing. It is taboo to represent them as human beings, with the faults and failings of such.

Equally avoided is telling the truth about the Bible: that it is a collection of eastern literature, a varied assortment of fable and legend, myth and magic, poetry and fantasy, largely the fruits of vigorous imagination and oral tradition as well as ignorance, history repeated with a national bias as its biography is told with a personal bias, unscientific in origin and unverifiable in fact.

More dangerous, because likely to be more widespread, is a taboo upon criticism of governments. This has been seen in action, and a terrible thing it is, injurious almost beyond repair. Eternal vigilance is necessary to prevent politicians and officials setting themselves up as beyond criticism.

Kipling warned us:—

“Holy king or holy state or holy people's will—
Have no truck with the senseless thing.”

A. R. WILLIAMS.

SHADOW - BOXING

I FOUND the discussion on Buddhism extremely interesting, and I admit that I myself was greatly attracted by the genuine doctrine of Buddhism, particularly during my five years' stay in the Far East. But the original doctrine has as much to do with reality as has the Christian dogma of Poverty with the Churches to-day.

The institutions of religion always correspond to the stage of development of a given society. The history of religion is an interpretation of the causal connections of various religious institutions to be found in the different communities at different stages of their development. Religious institutions, principles, taboos and emotions undergo changes corresponding to social changes. So first of all, we have to find out the particular set of social conditions in a particular historical period in which a given religious system came into existence, the different historico-social factors responsible for its rise or change, and the social purposes which it served.

Even the ideals of happiness or salvation have undergone changes in the course of history, and together with the expansion of our scientific horizon the old supernatural explanations grow obsolete. The “other world” is born out of the futility or weakness of the worldly life; if the latter improves, religion is on the wane. On the other hand, in periods of political or social troubles, religion offers an increasing compensation for the prevailing inferiority complex.

Early Christianity appealed to the poor and wronged classes, especially the slaves. In the time of India's political awakening, Buddhism represents the rebellion of downtrodden castes against the prerogative of the Brahmins and their mechanical ritual. Had Buddhism remained the elevated philosophy of its inception it could never have survived as a mass movement, nor could the Vedic Brahminism without proper adaptations which lead into the Hinduism of the Upanishads and Vedanta. And this holds good of every religion in the world, including Mazdaznan or Parseism.

As a rule, people go on talking about Persian dualism—the principles of good and evil—as represented in the last stage of the Zarathushtrian creed. That is an utter fallacy. This stage evolved in the period of the disintegration of the former Persian world power, when the genuine scriptures of the Zend-Avesta were all but destroyed and forgotten. What we have come to know

of them pertains to exactly the opposite of those later dualistic writings and speculations (Vendidad).

Thus all this haggling pro and con a fictitious Buddhism is of no use; we have to deal not with high-sounding writings from various epochs but with to-day's facts.

PERCY G. ROY.

NO MISSIONARIES

The Bishop of Nyasaland is heartbroken. He is going back there in the cause of Christ without a single new missionary. He has appealed in vain for young men to give up the dismal pleasures of secular life, their sinful cinemas and theatres, their occasional bit of fun at the dogs, even their mild losses at football pools and racing, to say nothing of a little inevitable love-making in the dark—in short, to throw over these and many other things, and devote themselves entirely to bringing over pagan natives to the blessings and eternal love of Christ. The Bishop did not get a single reply to his many urgent appeals. Or, to put it another way, the Lord failed to get over even one sacred call to duty. It is a sad, sad world.

CORRESPONDENCE

MARRIAGE LAW REFORM

Sir.—Collusion, lying and perjury flourish in the divorce courts of this country. Magistrates every year make over twenty thousand orders effectually separating husbands and wives who may not, however, remarry. Thousands of couples denied divorce often because of a bigoted or vengeful partner, form extra-marital unions and their children are in law illegitimate.

These and other aspects of our marriage and divorce law cause this committee much concern. We have our programme of proposed reforms but at this stage all we are asking the Government to do is to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the divorce law and make any necessary proposals for a change. This request is a very modest one, but the Government will not move without public pressure.

We therefore ask all individuals and societies, who support our request for a Commission of Inquiry, to write (a) to their M.P. (at House of Commons, S.W. 1), and (b) to the Lord Chancellor (at House of Lords, S.W. 1), and ask for a Royal Commission. Sufferers from the present law should give details of their cases and ask that they be placed before a Royal Commission in due course.—Yours, etc.,

ROBERT S. W. POLLARD, Chairman,
CHARLES SKILTON, Secretary.

Marriage Law Reform Committee
(The Progressive League).

ARE WE ADVANCING?

Sir.—I hope that Mr. Nicholson may have realised upon reading his letter in print that abuse is no argument and that to describe a believer in Marx as "half-mad" is an insult to Freethinkers who hold a different opinion to himself. For my own part I became an Atheist forty, and a Marxist thirty, years ago. Both beliefs have lost me time, money and preferment, and had I been wise (or shall we say careful), I should never have confessed to either. Nevertheless both would still have been true.

Surely "Superstition" is a false, religious trust in something, but then as an Atheist I do not believe in anything false or religious.

Marx's theories were: (1) The Materialist Conception of History in which he explained that the method whereby people got their living determined the structure of society and hence Primitive Communism, Slavery, Feudalism and Capitalism. (2) The Theory of Surplus Value, which accounts for the gross disparity between wealth and poverty in an age of plenty and the persistence of wars in modern society.

I suggest these theories are scientific and not superstitious and that both Tories and Socialists are united in endeavouring to suppress those who hold them.

Marx did not defend evils and miseries but exposed their cause. Neither he nor his followers are responsible for the conditions which arise in the course of historical development. All they advocate is a remedy for the disease.

As a Freethinker I can hardly excuse another Freethinker who suggests that I am mad because I differ from him. This has been the attitude of authority down the ages. Bereft of argument it has turned to abuse and then to force to protect itself against new ideas.—Yours, etc.,

T. D. Smith (Senr.).

OBITUARY

ROBERT ALLEN

With sorrow we announce the death of Robert Allen, an old and respected member of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. His death took place on October 13th after a short illness, and the local N.S.S. Branch loses one of its most faithful friends. We offer sincere sympathy to the widow and surviving members of his family in their great loss. His remains were cremated at Perry Bar Crematorium on Friday, October 15th, when a Secular Service was read by Mr. C. H. Smith, the Secretary of Birmingham Branch N.S.S. R. H. R.

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. WOON, E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, October 26th, 7 p.m.: "Crime and Punishment." Mrs. A. BLANCO WHITE, O.B.E.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W. 1).—Monday, October 25th, 7 p.m.: "Reconstructing the Remote Past," 4th lecture: "The Development of Life," 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.: "Some Modern Concepts of God," Mr. GEO. O'DELL.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7.15 p.m.: "The Way to Fight Religion," Mr. PAT SLOAN.

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.: "Day—and Right: The retort courteous to the Blunt Bishop and the offensive Editor," Mr. HAROLD DAY.

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

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Rooms, St. James Street).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "A Hundred Years of Communist Manifesto," Mr. HARRY BURDEN (Batley).

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "God or Man?" Mr. R. H. ROSETTI

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Marxism as a Guide to Action," Mr. D. ELLWAND (Liverpool).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "A Visit to the U.S.A.," Mr. J. W. ROBBINS.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d; postage 1d.

IMMORTALITY

- (1) Consideration can now be focussed on the essential basic factor of this inquiry, *viz.*, human immortality.
- (2) On this subject one finds a curious and interesting collection of vague views and vestigial traditions.
- (3) All through human history there have been tales of "spirits" revived or re-embodied in other forms.
- (4) Immortality involves more than that somewhere, somehow, someone experienced "spirit manifestations."
- (5) The only hypothesis which fulfils requirements is that of the transmigration or resurrection of all humans.
- (6) So-called "conditional immortality," while intellectually more reasonable, does not meet the case.
- (7) Any qualifications or variations of "total immortality" introduce unknown and arbitrary distinctions.
- (8) Also from a religious standpoint any limitation would render "moral obligations" indefinite.
- (9) The hypothesis presumably maintains complete immortality and not merely temporary extension.
- (10) Immortality may include pre-existence as well as post-existence, as it does in some religions.
- (11) Theories of Immortality have developed and altered with the evolution of human thought.
- (12) It is difficult to frame any coherent ideas common to all these varied hypotheses.
- (13) They all appear to maintain that there exists some intangible immaterial entity termed "spirit" or "soul."
- (14) The "soul" in primitive religions seems to be very similar to the "spirit of life."
- (15) In some hypotheses of transmigration it is, presumably, this "spirit" which is transferred.
- (16) Later religions, of which Christianity will be taken as the type, use the words "spirit" and "soul."
- (17) Whether these are synonymous terms is not obvious; but "soul" seems to mean a personal entity.
- (18) In Christianity each human is alleged to have a separate "soul" as an essential factor.
- (19) Presumably this "soul" is closely allied with, or partakes of the nature of, each personality.
- (20) It is difficult, however, to define the demarcation line, if such exists, between the two.
- (21) When and where the "soul" begins does not seem determinable in view of biological difficulties.
- (22) Individually it may begin at conception; in history it may extend back to the Java man.
- (23) If this is so, it is obvious that these separate "souls" will amount to countless millions.
- (24) Human egotism is sufficient to account for this belief in immortality for humans only.
- (25) Science has not produced any evidence to justify the belief in their exclusive continuance for ever.
- (26) For centuries the subject of this dual, or triple, nature of humans has been discussed.
- (27) The hypothesis seems to be that "soul" denotes a separate and immaterial entity.
- (28) One may infer that primitive minds were unable to separate ideas of body and spirit.
- (29) Subsequent thinkers seemed equally unable to separate the objective from the subjective.
- (30) Here scientific methods will be followed in terming the objective "matter" and the subjective "energy."
- (31) In modern times some philosophers and some scientists have renewed attempts at a solution.
- (32) Leaving the more tangible fields of objective empirical research, they have become amorphous.
- (33) In endeavouring to "spiritualise" scientific knowledge their theories have become "etherialised."
- (34) In searching to define human knowledge they have sunk, logically, into Solipsism.
- (35) In denying the reality of both time and space they have dissolved themselves, and others, away.
- (36) These abstract hypotheses need not be followed further here, since they enter but little into religion.
- (37) Most religions, including Christianity, postulate objective reality and separate body and "spirit."
- (38) This seems to be so with the vast majority of nominal Christians and with their leaders and teachers.
- (39) The general belief appears to be that a human is composed of three entities, body, mind and "soul."
- (40) Though it is not obvious where the differentiation between them is in space or in time.
- (41) These conflicting views in Christian thought can be referred to later; here the consideration is general.
- (42) The questions are these: Is there any scientific, tangible, objective evidence of three such entities?
- (43) Is there any such evidence for the separate existence of mind as an entity in itself apart from body?
- (44) Still further: Is there any such evidence for the existence of this hypothetical entity "soul" at all?
- (45) The answer to all three questions is that there is not the slightest such evidence for either.
- (46) Science is not an explanation of life, or mind, or the universe; it is a method of investigating all three.
- (47) As mentioned previously in the first section, scientists put forward tentative theories as a working basis.
- (48) These statements are open to criticism or amendment by anyone, at any time, in any direction.
- (49) Science finds no need for religious hypotheses; instead of explaining they complicate subjects.
- (50) The hypothesis of human immortality seems merely an unjustifiable assumption due to human egotism.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

THERE WAS ONCE . . .

A HUNGRY MAN. Starving for Truth and Enlightenment he looked upon the Pantry Shelf of the World for something to sustain him. His eyes beheld a massive bowl containing the Froth and Christianity, and eagerly he lapped it up not knowing that it was composed of a noxious mixture of Pagan Ignorance and Superstition and already polluted by the Blowflies of Biblical Bloodlust and Cruelty.

Sometime later he became horribly sick—and he wondered why!

A POOR ARTIST. One day a party of gentlemen came to his Studio. After looking at his pictures without understanding them, they said: "Why waste your time painting in such poverty when you might earn a good honest living like us and become wealthy?"

"And what do you do?" enquired the Artist.
 "I am a Business Man," said one. "I am a Stock-broker," said one. "I am a Politician," said one. "I am a—"

But the Artist had swooned.

W. H. WOOD.