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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Atheism in History

ATHEISM is that philosophy which asserts the universe to be "self-caused" and self sufficient, in distinction both from Agnosticism, which "leaves the question open" as regards the existence or non-existence of "final causes," and from Theism, which positively ascribes the universe to the creative activity of a personal god or gods. Pantheism represents a nondescript category which may perhaps be defined as a form of atheism that uses religious terminology, or, in the words of Schopenhauer, as "an easy going way of getting rid of god."

Using the word atheism in the above sense, the philosophy which it represents is very ancient and goes back to a period probably older than any of our contemporary religions.

Even the Hindu "Old Testament" the Vedas, refer to contemporary sceptics who denied the existence of the gods, and the later Upanishads (of doubtful date, perhaps B.C. 700) interpret the Vedic theology in a pantheistic sense and banish the Hindu divinities of the popular creed to the realm of illusion.

The world religions of Buddhism and Jainism, which arose in India about 500 B.C., may perhaps be dubbed as agnostic rather than atheistic, but neither acknowledge anything that can be called God. Buddha appears to have anticipated Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the "Unknowable."

But prior to the rise of Buddhism, the still existing Sankhya philosophy of Kapila was atheistic: as was also that little known but extraordinarily interesting school of atheistic and materialistic Indian thinkers known as the Charvaka, who aggressively denounced religion as fraud in the style later adopted by Voltaire, and of whom we would gladly know more. (Charvaka seems to have been an historical character prior to Buddhism.)

India had no monopoly of atheism in the Ancient East. The ancient, but still existing Chinese cults of Lao Tse and Confucius which arose in China about the same time as Buddhism in India were, respectively, pantheistic and agnostic rather than atheistic, but gods are superfluous in both systems. And at least one ancient Chinese philosopher, Yang Chu, was positively atheistic.

Amongst the ancient Hebrews, one originally atheistic Book, but now very much interpolated, managed somehow to find its way into the sacred Canon of the Old Testament. The eminent Orientalist, Morris Jastrow has demonstrated that the original text of Ecclesiastes contained no mention of God, the present theistic references are subsequent rabbinical interpolations, and whilst Job does not question the existence of God, he introduces him as a figure of fun who gets thoroughly worsted in the argument. So much for the "naturally religious" Jews.

Amongst the classical Greeks and Romans, the Greek atomists, of whom Democritus was the greatest, virtually excluded the gods, but we do not know whether they were formally atheistic. Christianity saw to it that their writings have not survived, just as Hinduism suppressed the atheistic criticisms of the Charvaka. Theodorus of Cyrene was one of the few ancient Greeks known, to have denied the existence of the gods. Epicureanism was free-thinking but not, at least, formally atheistic: its gods anticipated the present-day British Constitution: they reigned over, but did not govern the Universe.

During the millenium of medieval Catholicism (c. 500-1500) Atheism lived a persecuted subterranean existence only fitfully illuminated by the fires of the stake. But it existed none the less. At least one famous Medieval monarch Frederick Hohenstaufen ("The Antichrist"—1194-1250) was suspected of atheism, and the illegal works of the heretical pantheistic thinkers such as Averroes circulated widely in both the Mohammedan East and the Christian West.

The Renaissance saw the revival of Atheism, first of all in Italy. Such daring philosophers as Pietro Pomponazzi, Giordano Bruno and Benedict Spinoza, whilst, no doubt for security reasons, continued to use the term "God," were essentially atheistic in their fundamental ideas. From the days of the great Renaissance thinkers down to our own day, the stream of atheistic thought has flowed ever more strongly. Such names as Meslier, Diderot, and the "Encyclopaedists" in the eighteenth century, and Bradlaugh, Haeckel, Marx, Feurbach, and John M. Robertson in the nineteenth century are representative names.

Modern Atheism however, differs from its classical and Medieval prototypes in one important respect, it is today a mass movement. In ancient Buddhist India and in Roman Epicureanism there is, perhaps, some analogy with the popular atheism of modern times. But in the main, prior to the French Revolution, Atheism was almost exclusively an affair of the educated minority. The nineteenth century was the first century to witness the widespread circulation of atheistic ideas amongst the, until then, illiterate masses.

A contemporary corollary of this intellectual expansion of Atheism was the simultaneous rise of powerful political movements which were anti-clerical and often atheistic in their ideology. Freemasonry in the era of the French Revolution, and Marxism and Anarchism in modern Europe are striking examples of such associations of ideas. That Atheism can now be suppressed by force as it was by Catholicism at the end of the Ancient World, seems most unlikely. The modern diffusion of knowledge has now spread too far for any modern Inquisition to extirpate it.

It is precisely here that modern Atheism has opportunities denied to its earlier predecessors. For the atheism of, say, Antiquity was confined to the exclusive educated minority. It left the slaves to the Christians,

and Christianity vanquished classical Rationalism precisely because the slaves represented the great majority of the inhabitants of the Ancient world.

There is here an urgent moral for modern Atheism. It is social conditions that ultimately determine the fortune of ideas. The progressive enlightenment of the masses is the prior condition for the world victory of Atheism. The struggle for Atheism is now inseparable from the concurrent struggle for Social Justice and for Intellectual Freedom.

F. A. RIDLEY.

IN MEMORY OF LEONARD HOBHOUSE

SEVERAL eminent publicists have contributed to the "Hobhouse Memorial Lectures," 1934-1940 (Oxford University Press, 1948, 10s. 6d.), concerning themes in which the late Professor L. T. Hobhouse was deeply interested. The social and economic sciences were his favourite studies and, justly enough, the late J. A. Hobson opened these lectures with a discourse on Social Equality. Hobhouse and Hobson were earnest Humanists, consequently, the latter's address was purely rationalistic in character. Yet, while welcoming our many improvements, both mental and moral, Hobson, speaking just prior to the recent World War, reminds us that "our time is clouded by a disillusionment and disappointment with the inadequacy of past procedures. Even among those physical sciences where a generation ago complete confidence in method and laws prevailed, we see an almost craven abandonment of the very instrument of reason itself, while philosophers and religious leaders are engaged in endeavouring to reinstate mind or purpose in cosmic and in human history so as to liberate us from the crushing burden of determinism that gave no scope to the creative impulse which man recognises in himself and imputes to nature." To this aspect of thought Hobhouse to some extent subscribed, but his chief objective was the liberation of the human mind from the thralldom of tradition, with the establishment of a voluntary co-operative community in which the art of living became most completely developed.

Professor Myers, the psychologist's address, on "The Absurdity of any Mind Body Relation" is intensely interesting. In conjunction with Hobhouse he conducted important investigations on the mental powers of cats, monkeys, elephants and other animals. And in his essay he rejects all theories relating to human consciousness and volition which separate mind from bodily functioning. He avers: "There is no separable or vital force; and the mental must be regarded as identical with the vital. The only distinction that remains is between the living or the mental on the one hand, and the lifeless or non-mental on the other hand, in which no directing activity is present, no struggle for existence, no individuality, and hence no life or mind."

Mr. J. L. Hammond's lecture on "The Growth of Common Enjoyment" is of the excellent quality one would expect from the mouth of the part author of several important works dealing with the Industrial Revolution. His ideal social structure is that in which the amenities of life will be available to all serviceable citizens. "We are trying," he states, "to build up a civilisation in which the want of money shall not cut people off from the pleasures and interests of a civilised society. We no longer regard leisure, music, picture galleries, good literature and other amenities as specially reserved for the rich. The line drawn between rich and

poor does not separate them sharply, as it did a century ago, by the range and character of their pleasures. This, he regards as a veritable revolution, which brings the modern Demos within the range of the citizens of ancient Athens who appreciated and applauded the plays of the immortal Attic dramatists both in comedy and tragedy.

Certainly, the distinguished historian Rostovtzeff, like his predecessor, Hume, questions whether the spread of culture would sustain civilisation. The former considers that the collapse of Roman culture coincided with increased popular education. Rostovtzeff inquires: "Is not every civilisation bound to decay as soon as it penetrates the masses?" Hammond remains unconvinced by this gloomy suggestion and, while regretting that art is given so spare a place in our educational system, he claims that "we can make a happier society to-day when our industrial supremacy is gone than we ever created when we boasted that we were the workshop of the world."

Prof. Mannheim's address: "Rational and Irrational Elements in Contemporary Society" is entirely free from metaphysical assumptions. Herbert Spencer once inquired as to who is to examine the examiners in educational tests. And, as Mannheim reminds his readers, we live in an age of unsolved problems and he leaves them to decide whether they prefer to ask: "Who plans the planner?" or to inquire: "Which of the existing groups will plan us?"

Dr. Ginsberg's essay "The Unity of Mankind" dismisses with scant ceremony the racial theories, still widely accepted, which exalt certain selected stocks above all others. "The problem of the role of race in the history of humanity is so complex and its discussion has been obscured by so many political passions and prejudices that there is little that can lay claim to scientific certainty." While all authorities accept Darwin's conclusion that men, apes and monkeys are descended from a common ancestor, there remains a divergence of opinion among experts as to the precise origin of modern mankind, some, indeed, regarding the problem as insoluble.

Prof. Dawes Hicks' contribution to the symposium, "Thought and Real Existence," is a notable survey and criticism of Lotze, Kant and other metaphysicians. Dr. Stocks' address on Materialism in Politics, despite H. J. L.'s—presumably Prof. Laski's—praise of the lecturer as a leading intellectual light of the Labour Party, is of little account. Materialism has been slain many times, yet the late Dr. Stocks found it more alive and vigorous than ever. He claims that it offers a theory of the world which is irrational. Yet it dominates the world of science and many allege that contemporary laxity is mainly due to the decline of religious influences. "How far this may be true," comments Stocks, "I do not know, but it seems to me that the modern world wants to arrest its rake's progress in two things, which are really one, a belief in the efficacy of ideas, and a belief in the freedom of the human will. This is the faith that under the spell of scientific materialism we are in danger of losing, and I doubt whether any revival of religion could be guaranteed to win it back to us."

As was to be expected, Prof. Tawney's "Thoughts on the Economics of Public Education" form an impressive essay which no preceptor can afford to neglect. This is the longest essay in the volume; brimful of sage reflections, and of facts. Tawney concedes that the cost of training in economic and social efficiency will be great, but as a public investment it

would in the long run prove highly remunerative to the community. "Objectively regarded the preparation of the young for life is among the greatest of common interests."

Dr. Arnold Toynbee's lecture entitled "The Downfalls of Civilisations" is both suggestive and provocative. While admitting that Gibbon is still the greatest of English historians, he questions his conclusion that the overthrow of Roman civilisation was due to the triumph of barbarism and religion. Toynbee, on the contrary, contends that its decline commenced in 431 B.C., and that the Roman Empire was merely "a belated cure for four hundred years of destructive warfare between parochial states." The golden age of Greco-Roman civilisation, he asserts, was not the age of the Antonines, but the period of Pericles in the fifth century B.C. Gibbon, he avers, "mistook an autumnal 'Indian Summer' for the month of June." Moreover, the eclipse of ancient culture was occasioned, he contends, not by the barbarian invaders, or theological obscurantism, but by the shortcomings of its own children. Toynbee even suggests that, as recently as 1939 A.D., the Christian Church was in its infancy. Poetically enough he wonders whether the Church is the legitimate heir of all departed civilisations. "If it is," he meditates, "there is a bow in the cloud; and with our eyes on that, we can confront with a better courage, the appalling social tribulations that may be still in store for us."

Prof. Laski completes the volume under review with an excellent essay dealing with "The Decline of Liberalism" in recent years.

T. F. PALMER.

"ATTACK UPON CHRISTENDOM"*

ON the 18th December, 1854, the Danish author and religious thinker, Soren Kierkegaard, published an article in the periodical "Fatherland," which heralded his violent polemic against the Danish State Church. Because of the similarities existing between the Church of Denmark at that time and our own Church of England, I believe that Kierkegaard's attack is of interest and significance, not only for Christians but also for Free-thinkers to-day. However, it must constantly be borne in mind that this attack was launched from within the Church, that it was not conducted in a spirit hostile to religion, but was, on the contrary, thought by Kierkegaard to be necessary if what he conceived as "True Christianity" was to be saved from the wreck of a false "Authoritarian" church, with its paid officials who had a financial interest in keeping alive a misconception of what Christianity is. It is also significant to note that the articles and pamphlets which constituted his attack were the first of Kierkegaard's works to be translated into German, where they found a ready appeal among those hostile to religion and clerical interests.

Although the idea of an attack against the established Danish State Church had been simmering in Kierkegaard's mind for some time and material for this attack had been accumulating in his Journals, he held back until the death of Jacob Mynster, Bishop of Zealand, who had been a close friend of Kierkegaard's father, who had prepared Kierkegaard himself for confirmation and for whom he had a great admiration. Mynster died on the 30th January, 1854, and the following Sunday Prof. Martensen, who was to succeed Mynster as the Bishop of

Zealand, preached a service of remembrance for Mynster in which he referred to the dead bishop as "a witness to the truth." This was the occasion for which Kierkegaard had been waiting and he wrote his first article to the "Fatherland": "Was Bishop Mynster a 'witness to the truth?' one of the genuine witnesses to the truth—is this the truth?" Mynster died 30th January, the article was written in February, 1854 (which was the date it bore when published on the 18th December of that year), but S.K. allowed it to lay on his desk until after Martensen's appointment to the vacant bishopric lest his polemic should prejudice Martensen's chances of preferment.

Kierkegaard had studied the New Testament and in answer to the question: "What does it mean to be a Christian?" had formulated a reply based upon the teachings of that book. But he also observed that the Christian ideal as portrayed by the current teachings of the Church was a perversion of the teachings of the New Testament and Kierkegaard saw the reason for such a perversion. Christianity is not a passport which guarantees the holder an easy passage to heaven while at the same time allowing one to indulge fully in the pleasures and ambitions of this world. A Christian is not a man who attends Church on a Sunday and then forgets all about it until the next week. Christianity is a way of life which demands the total involvement of the whole man, neither is it an attractive way of life. In fact, as Kierkegaard himself states, the life demanded by the New Testament is *repugnant* to man—in his book "Fear and Trembling," Kierkegaard describes Christianity as "a desperate way out." Thus men who want to fill their Churches—and incidentally their own pockets—are not going to preach such a doctrine, on the contrary, they are rather going to pervert those doctrines to make them attractive, to pretend that through Christianity one can get the best of both worlds, comfort and ease in this and eternal blessedness in the other, rather than tell the truth and say that Christianity demands the renunciation of this world with all its glories. Furthermore, a man who did preach such a doctrine must himself set an example in renouncing the comforts of this world, an act repugnant to the priests because they are preaching Christianity in order to make a living, in order to enjoy as fully as possible precisely those comforts.

Thus, in a manner befitting a "Master of Irony"† Kierkegaard attacked the idea of Christianity as preached by the Church. In his first article he drew a picture of the true witness to the truth. Such a man ". . . in poverty witnesses to the truth—in poverty, in lowliness, in abasement, and so is unappreciated, hated, abhorred, and then derided, insulted, mocked—his daily bread he did not always have, so poor was he, but the daily bread of persecution he was richly provided with every day . . . A witness to the truth . . . is scourged, maltreated, dragged from one prison to the other and then at last . . . crucified, beheaded or burnt. . . ." Are men such as Bishop Mynster, who live in luxury, have an assured income, are universally respected, die in their beds and have a service of remembrance preached for them "Witnesses to the truth?"

Kierkegaard warns the people to "Beware of the Priests" and not to expect to hear Christianity preached by them. The priests want to see men ". . . kept in the state which he understands as that of a Christian, a sheep good for shearing, an inoffensive mediocrity." Kierkegaard wrote in a style designed to be understood

* "Attack Upon Christendom"—the collected articles and pamphlets comprising this attack Tr. Walter Lowrie, Pub. O.U.P.

† S.K. submitted a thesis on "The Concept of Irony" for his Master's Degree, and in his book "The Point of View" he referred to himself as "The Master of Irony."

by even the most simple (a style which sharply contrasts with his earlier works, which are extremely difficult to read), and in order to continue his polemic published a series of pamphlets, "The Instant," which were widely read and commented upon. Kierkegaard himself died in 1855 and the final pamphlet, No. 10, was published after his death. He incurred the rancour of the priests—and his own brother, a bishop, was one of them—but he did enjoy a tremendous popular appeal. It may be objected that his attack was too one-sided, too bitter and prejudiced. That is so, but just as the minute organisms which attack the human body have to be studied under the microscope in order to understand them better for preventing and curing the diseases which they cause, so did Kierkegaard magnify and show in all its horribleness the canker which is gnawing at the heart of society. True, Kierkegaard was doing this in the interest of something which we as Freethinkers may oppose, may even regard as the canker itself, nevertheless, by virtue of our very position—Freethinkers—we can to a great extent ally ourselves with a man who is protesting at an "unauthoritative" foisting of doctrine upon the mass of people and agree with his idea that religion is a matter for each and every individual, something which each individual has to work out for himself, a battle of the solitary individual towards his own salvation.

L. W. SMITH.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PRIEST AND A DYING MAN

(Written at Vincennes prison in July 1782; first published by Stendhal et Cie, Paris, 1927.)

THE PRIEST: So you do not believe in God?

THE DYING MAN: No. For a very simple reason, namely that it is quite impossible to believe what one does not understand. There should be a close relation between understanding and faith, for understanding is the chief source of faith; where there is no understanding, faith is dead, and those who may claim under such circumstances to have faith are deceiving themselves. I defy you, yourself, to believe in this god that you preach to me—for you are incapable of giving me clear evidence of him, you are unable to define him and consequently you do not understand him, and since you do not understand him you cannot advance me a single reasonable argument. In one word, everything which goes beyond the limit of the human mind is either a chimera or mere foolishness. Since your god can only be one or the other of these things, I should in the former case be insane to believe in him, in the latter case an imbecile. My friend, prove to me the inertia of matter and I will grant you your creator, prove to me that nature is not sufficient unto herself and I will allow you to presuppose a master. Until then, expect nothing of me—I am convinced only by evidence which I absorb only through my intelligence, and where my intelligence is balked my faith remains dormant. I believe in the sun because I see it; I think of it as the centre in which all nature's inflammable matter is concentrated, and its regular course pleases me without astonishing me. It is subject to the laws of physics, laws perhaps as simple as those of electricity which, nevertheless, it is not given us to understand. What need have I to go further? After you have set up your god on top of all this, shall I be better off, or will it not require yet greater effort to understand the creator than to define what is created? Consequently, you have done me a disservice in building up this chimera of yours, for you have troubled my

mind without clarifying it and I owe you hatred, not gratitude, for this. Your god is a machine which you have constructed to serve your passions and move according to their will, but it is a machine which obstructs my own passions and I have smashed it. So at this moment, when my enfeebled heart has need of calm and philosophy, do not come to terrify it with your sophisms which frighten without convincing and irritate without improving. This heart of mine, my friend, is what it has pleased nature to make it—in other words, the result of those impulses which nature has chosen to implant in me following her precepts and needs; and since she needs vices as much as virtues, she has impelled me towards vices when it has pleased her, or if she has required virtues she has inspired in me the desires for these and I have surrendered to such instincts. Nature's laws are the sole cause of human inconsistency and the only principles behind her laws are her own wishes and needs.

THE PRIEST: Then all is necessary in this world?

THE DYING MAN: Assuredly.

THE PRIEST: But if all is necessary, all is then regulated.

THE DYING MAN: I do not dispute that.

THE PRIEST: Who, then, can so regulate all things if it be not an omnipotent and omniscient hand?

THE DYING MAN: Does it not follow that, if fire be put to gunpowder, the powder will burn?

THE PRIEST: Yes.

THE DYING MAN: And what wisdom do you find in that?

THE PRIEST: None.

THE DYING MAN: It is possible then that there are things necessary without being wise, and possible, consequently, that everything is derived from a primary cause without there being either reason nor wisdom in that primary cause.

THE PRIEST: What are you aiming at?

THE DYING MAN: At showing you that everything may be what it is and what you see it to be, without being guided by any wise and reasoning cause; and furthermore, that natural effects must have natural causes, without it being necessary to presuppose the existence of any antinatural cause such as your god would be. This god of yours would need a good deal of explication, but furnishes none; and so since your god is good for nothing he becomes perfectly useless. As there are good grounds for supposing that what is useless is a mere cipher, and that a cipher represents nothingness, you will appreciate that I need no reasoning to convince me that your god is a chimera other than that which shows me the extent of his uselessness.

A. D. F. DE SADE.

(Translated by SIMON WATSON-TAYLOR.)

(To be Continued)

THERE WAS ONCE—

A BEGGAR. The World called him a worthless parasite. Every day he sat on a bench in the park eating dry crusts of bread, but never forgetting to feed the hungry birds with his crumbs. They were his only friends and would perch on his shoulder or eat from his hand.

Rich and prosperous men passed by in their motor cars, but they were too busy enjoying life on the labours of others or robbing their fellow men in the name of big business to care whether the tramp, or the birds, lived or died.

To the little sparrows they were the worthless parasites and the tramp was the rich and prosperous man.

You see, everything depends upon the point of view.

A NATURALIST. He loved all living things. That is why he captured harmless little insects and imprisoned them in glass bottles so that he could observe their dying agonies.

W. H. W.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

I HAD occasion to listen to a broadcast to Sixth Form classes dealing with the twin subjects of "Religion and Philosophy" under the sub-title "Personality in God and Man." The lecturer, the Rev. H. H. Farmer, indulged in special pleading of the kind which might be expected from an interested party who is handsomely paid for propagating certain ideas, beliefs and opinions. To my mind, it is preposterous that he should be permitted to propound as established truth and fact, the hypothetical propositions which he was obliged to admit are quite incapable of proof or substantiation.

If it be the function of the B.B.C. Education Department to develop the critical faculties of our future citizens, so that these future citizens should be clear-minded, practical, and free from misconceptions, prejudices and superstitions, why is not some other qualified educationalist permitted the same facilities in the same programme as the reverend gentleman to dissect and to reply to the Rev. H. H. Farmer's specious argument?

Why is not someone allowed to point out the obvious fallacies of the Rev. Farmer's analogy in using the personality of "my friend Smith" to explain what the Rev. Farmer calls the Personality of God? My friend Smith is a man, 5ft. 11ins. tall, 12st. 10lbs. in weight, of erect carriage and military bearing; he has square shoulders, thick dark hair, brown eyes, a ruddy complexion, wears size 15 in collars and size 8 in boots; he has a job, a wife, two charming kiddies, of which he's very proud and fond; smokes a pipe, drinks a glass of ale now and then, lives in a house, eats and drinks, talks intelligently on many subjects, plays a useful game of billiards, a fair hand at cards and reasonably well at chess, dominoes and draughts; he's a quite respectable citizen, a devoted husband, a fond father, a reasonably conscientious worker, a loyal workmate, a genial companion, an all-round good sport. Taken all round, he's a very decent sort of fellow and a chap to be trusted and relied upon. If he were not he wouldn't be my friend Smith. I know my friend Smith so well that I would wager to pick him out of a crowd of 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000 or 100,000 people by his general appearance, his manner and his mannerisms, his voice and general bearing. I should have no difficulty in recognising him in a brand new suit.

How can the personality of such a man as this be used to describe the "personality" of a something which the Rev. Farmer calls by the name of God, but hasn't described or defined? How can personality be associated with that which is not a person? What exactly and precisely in simple terms is this thing, or phenomenon, to which the Rev. Farmer gives the name, or title, God? How does he define "it" as a person? If "it" is not a person, how can it have a personality? How does the Rev. Farmer establish as FACT the miraculous birth, the perfect life, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension of the legendary figure pictured in the New Testament and now referred to as Jesus Christ and the revelation of this thing called God through this same Jesus Christ?

Since hearing this broadcast, I have listened to the later schools talk in the Evolutionary Series on the subject "How Things Began" under the sub-title "Brain, Eye and Hand," which I have found interesting, informative, practical, constructive and, in fact, everything which the earlier talk was not. I am entirely at a loss to understand and/or to reconcile an educational policy which prescribes two such talks for schools within the space of two hours on the same day. It is to be hoped that those

who heard the first talk were also allowed to hear the second and it is opined that those who did listen to the practical commonsense and logical presentation of the second, will, as a natural consequence, challenge, criticise and ultimately reject the mystical imagery and hypothetical fiction of the first.

Even so, it is profoundly regrettable that the B.B.C. should sponsor and confer its apparent approval and authority upon the debatable and unverifiable pronouncement of the Rev. Farmer and should allow such to pass unchallenged.

H. DAY.

A NEW CHRIST MYTH

I BEG to endorse the statement regarding the position in India by Mr. Venkatadri in your issue of November 28. All the noise that is being made about the secular character of the Indian State is just cover for the building up of the biggest Theocratic State that ever existed in human history. All the power and the prestige that the leaders command is derived solely from the charm that the name of Mahatma Gandhi still exercises over the masses of illiterate and ignorant people. We have in India, before our very eyes, the growth of a new Christ myth, the Saviour who was crucified, and a Church usurping the functions of Government. India to-day suffers from the most hopeless mix-up of religion and politics that ever was. Here is an extract from the "Mail," a daily newspaper published from Madras, giving the report of a Press Conference held by Mr. Ramaswami Reddiar, the Prime Minister of a territory with a population of sixty millions:—

MADRAS, December 22.

"The Premier of Madras to-day at his first Press conference for two months—he has not been well—when asked about the food situation expressed concern at the failure of the monsoon. He added that the more wicked people became nature also failed in her operations.

He attributed the failure of the monsoon to the growing wickedness of the people.

Speaking at Vellore on June 27 this year the Premier said: 'The failure of the rains should make them think that it is also in a way due to the excessive sins committed by the people. In olden days there were at least three days' rain in a month, because it was believed that people were virtuous.'

It is true there is a tradition in our country that there should be three days of rain every month if people are virtuous. But the proviso applies to the Government as well as to the people, so much so that in the olden days whenever the rains failed, the king, who was always the embodiment of virtue, went out on a procession; and the skies on sight of the sacred body of the king were reminded of their duty and yielded up the rains hitherto withheld. Why the Premier and his lieutenants, who have succeeded to the holiness of the Mahatma and should be presumed to be free from all wickedness, do not march out under the skies and bring down the rains passes the understanding of the man in the street—probably due to his wickedness.

This extract will show your readers what the people of Independent India are in for. It should give food for thought for Rationalists in England like Lord Chorley, who in his address at the annual meeting of the Rationalist Press Association in July last claimed kinship with the religious spirit of Mahatma Gandhi.

S. RAMANATHAN.

ACID DROPS

When it suits Dr. Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, England is a Christian country, and when it does not suit him, then England is no longer a Christian country; in fact, the only consistency about Dr. Fisher is his inconsistency. He deplors the "serious decline in truthfulness and honesty" which, so we are told, *ad nauseam*, are Christian virtues, yet if the statement that truthfulness and honesty are declining is true, the Archbishop, to be logical, ought to blame Christianity, but then "no fisherman cries stinking fish."

We conducted a private "Gallup poll" the other day, in order to find out whether the statement by Mr. R. Trueblood, that schoolchildren prefer the Bible to "Penny Bloods" is true. Readers will not be surprised to know that of the six schoolchildren questioned, three preferred Dick Barton, one Sexton Blake, one Paul Temple and one had no opinion, except that he thought us mad to ask questions. The Bible most certainly describes some particularly bloody affairs, but we wager that Dick Barton interests more adults (as well as children) than General Joshua.

Belfast was the scene of extraordinary religious fervour when protests were made against the new Grammar School syllabus of religious instruction at Wellington Hall. Thousands were reported to have signed a petition to the Minister of Education that the Syllabus should be withdrawn because it attacks the "reliability of the Scriptures." Belfast parents still want their children to be taught in schools that Adam and Eve were historical characters, and even that the Garden of Eden had an exact geographical location which the Syllabus, it is said, questions. Plenty of work ahead for Belfast Freethinkers.

A terrific and momentous decision was taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury the other day. At the insistence of Mr. Peter Winckworth, Dr. Fisher agreed to change the title page of the Shorter Prayer Book from "according to the use of the Church of England" to "The Shorter Prayer Book, being an abbreviated form of the book of Common Prayer with some additional matter." This now satisfies Mr. Winckworth, the "Church Times," the "higher ups" of the Church of England and of course God Almighty. What joy now must there be among the angels in Heaven!

The angelic influence of an English Christmas does not appear to have extended to Germany for the "Church Times" quotes a letter from a young soldier serving there who wrote, "Christmas here is most unpleasant. Rather like a pagan Bacchanalia. Most of the personnel in barracks have been continuously drunk since last night, from officers downwards. They come crawling into the barrack rooms and sick it all up. Add to which a more liberal sprinkling of contraceptives than usual. My barrack room literally stinks." Needless to say the Archbishop of Canterbury assured all parents with serving sons in Germany that they "are being well looked after."

From January 18 to 25 there is to be a week of prayer for Christian unity. God knows that it is necessary. There seems to be no end of holy dissension in the various Christian sects and Churches with the Roman one claiming to be not only the oldest but the most reliable firm of Jehovah and Co. in the business. Days of prayer

during the war were almost always followed by disaster; perhaps some of the prayer-mongers will be sorry they spoke.

The Tory "Recorder" which published recently an impudent forgery purporting to be a description of "our Lord" as if by someone who knew him has received a number of congratulations from pious readers delighted that it was published. We are not surprised. Christians who can swallow the fairy tales of the New Testament as "Gospel Truth" can swallow anything; and papers like the "Recorder" are only too happy to pander to such readers.

The Rev. H. Bickley endeavours to answer the question "who destroys religion?" But in three long columns of the "Christian World" he only informs us about who does *not* destroy religion. Neither Scientists nor Freethinkers, nor Voltaire, nor Ingersoll, not even Bradlaugh can destroy it, in fact opposition only strengthens it. Freethinkers seem to be on the wrong track, we had better change our tactics. But perhaps we had better leave it to Rev. H. Bickley, B.D. (the abbreviation perhaps stands for balderdash.)

We commend to the Rector of Hesketh Bank, Mr. A. P. Thorne, and his wife, a quotation from their own fetid book, "... but the greatest of these is Charity. Perhaps they will think over it when seated in their comfortable Rectory whilst their erstwhile tenants are lining up to sign on the Housing list. The Rector has given his tenants notice to quit because he cannot stand their babies crying. We strongly suspect however, that the real reason is another instance of "Christian" tolerance, for the Rector's wife could not resist saying to a "Daily Mirror" reporter, "Do you know we have found out that our tenants are Roman Catholics."

Well, well. Protestants need not despair. With such doughty fighters for the Lord, the Papists will not advance in Lancashire. If Mr. and Mrs. Thorne would like a few more quotations from the good Book, we will be happy to oblige. Jesus was particularly fond of children, so we are told. He is supposed to have said, "Whoso receiveth one such little child, receiveth me," and "suffer little children to come unto me." But perhaps in Mrs. Thorne's opinion, J.C. did not mean Roman Catholic children.

"Laymen must sell Christianity" declared Sir John Shaw, R.N., at a conference in Chertsey. We are moved to ask what is wrong with the professional salesmen, or the goods, that it has got to be pushed? The old firm has been in business since the year 1, it has branches all over the world, its advertising department has included some of the world's most famous names, it publishes every year millions of catalogues and advertising matter (the figure reached millions, anyway, according to the British and Foreign Bible Society). Even the B.B.C. advertises it every day, and yet Sir John wants *laymen* to start selling.

£5,000 is to be set aside for the purchase of religious books for use in the schools by the Lancashire Education Committee. We hope Lancashire Freethinkers will not let this pass without a protest. If the system of Local Government makes any pretence of Democracy, we could ask, how would the Lancashire Education Committee like it if we insisted that they should also buy £5,000 of anti-religious books? What about the "Age of Reason" for a start?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

For "The Freethinker."—F. Greene (Dublin), £1. In Memory of Edward Payne, 5s.

BESEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations: Mr. and Mrs. S. Miller, £10; T. A. Skeate, £1 1s.; W. Hawley, 10s.; H. Brown, £1 1s.

A. W. COLEMAN.—Thanks. We may act upon your suggestion to publish F. A. Ridley's articles on the "Evolution of the Papacy" as a pamphlet.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

The dining hall reserved for the N.S.S. Annual Dinner at the Criterion Restaurant should be well filled on Saturday evening, January 29. Tickets have gone very well and there have been many expressions of pleasant anticipations of this first Annual Dinner since the outbreak of the war. Diners are reminded that the entrance to the Banquet Rooms is at 24, Lower Regent Street.

We are publishing this week the first part of a translation by Mr. S. Watson-Taylor of the Marquis de Sade's "Dialogue"—one of his many Atheistic attacks on religion and one not very well known. Though it was published in France 22 years ago, a translation by Samuel Putnam had appeared in America earlier this century made from the, as then, unpublished manuscript. De Sade was a fine forceful writer whose greatness has too long been obscured by his "sexology."

Readers in the Woodford (Essex) district can attend a debate in the Memorial Hall, South Woodford, on Thursday evening, January 27, between Miss Ruby Ta'Bois, F.R.A.S., and the Rev. H. Hunter on "Atheism v. Christianity." Admission is free and the debate begins at 7-30. Miss Ta'Bois is a member of the N.S.S. and her very pointed letters are often to be seen in the local press. The debate is to be followed by a Brains Trust.

Mr. F. A. Ridley lectures for the Merseyside Branch N.S.S. to-day (January 23), in the Coopers Hall, Shaw Street, Liverpool, on "The World Strategy of Political Catholicism," at 7 p.m. Merseyside readers can help by making Mr. Ridley's visit and subject known.

"A RATIONALIST ENCYCLOPAEDIA"

I.

THOSE of us who have been in the Freethought movement for many years must, from time to time, have cast an anxious glance at our ever increasing library of Rationalist books. The old days of spacious many-roomed houses have gone, perhaps for ever, and many of us must be content with either very small ones, or even smaller flats—and in each case books become a veritable problem. Yet we are forced to be right up to date in our war with religion, and that means, not just a hasty glance at a library book, but books to study, to "live" with. I can give no adequate answer to the problem, for buying books becomes, to some of us, a necessity—we simply cannot let this one or that go by, we may never have the chance of getting it again. I fancy a good many book-lovers will know what I mean. I can only say that I have often regretted not buying some volume forthwith when I had the chance; that chance never has come again.

That is why some sort of Freethought encyclopaedia became more and more a vital necessity. We wanted a book, just one volume, containing the *essentials* of Freethought; and where to go if we wanted to enlarge our knowledge on any particular aspect of a question. An American publication entitled, "A Handbook of Freethought," was almost useless. It was badly arranged, the author's knowledge was quite inadequate, and in any case, it was out of date and out of print. But here, in Joseph McCabe's "A Rationalist Encyclopaedia" (Watts, 21s. net) is the volume which is almost ideal. It contains 1,800 concise articles and they are right up to date.

Mr. McCabe quotes hundreds of authorities and there is hardly a subject vital to Freethought which he does not clearly and concisely explain or comment upon. In addition, there are hundreds of biographies of the most notable men and women in the movement, past and present, and the names of many who have been known to hold Agnostic views but who never actively identified themselves with our cause.

Any reader, for example, who is in the smallest way impressed by the modern cry against "Materialism," mostly uttered by scientists who are still in the thrall of the Church, or who still like to think that there must be "something" behind the phenomena in Nature (call it what you will, but "God" is as good a term as any other, is generally their cry) should read the article on Materialism. Or there are some on Evolution which, once mastered, should enable any Freethinker to provide the answer to our modern anti-evolutionists.

I have picked out two of the subjects dealt with in the book but I should have liked to deal literally with hundreds, for Mr. McCabe is devastating in his criticisms of religious claims. Whether from the scientific or the literary angle he is equally destructive—and also constructive, of course—and the Encyclopaedia can be confidently consulted on all sorts of subjects—Excommunication or Spiritualism, Lenin or Leo X, the Canon of Scripture or Rationalism, the Dominican Monks, Purgatory, the Universe, the Golden Rule, and crowds of others.

Many new names of famous people who have more or less given up religion or are unorthodox will be found carefully detailed, and I have been certainly astonished to find some included which required a wide range of reading to ferret out. Let me give just one example—the

well known Victorian artist, Walter Crane. His confession of unbelief will be found in his "An Artist's Reminiscences," but it is not many Freethinkers who would make a point of reading such a work, fascinating though it is for artists. Yet Mr. McCabe knew of it, and he mentions other artists like Alma Tadema and du Maurier. All the same, he omits the greatest of them all, the famous Spanish painter Goya—an unaccountable omission.

Where Mr. McCabe has to deal with facts which can be put down without comment, his Encyclopaedia will be found most invaluable; but it was only to be expected that in a good many instances his own point of view would be stressed. It is almost impossible to write without bias, and particularly on some special subject. There are quite a number on which Mr. McCabe is "eccentric"—to use the word with which he characterises Robert Taylor. (Incidentally, while he admits that the "Syntagma" and the "Diogenes" were "valuable quarries for Rationalist critics for over half a century," he insists that Taylor's "quotations should be checked before using them." I am sorry space, no doubt, prevented some examples of these being given. I have tested quite a number myself and found them to be accurate; and it should not be forgotten, that Taylor was fond of giving his quotations in the original language—Latin, Greek, French, etc.—and making his own translations. As he wrote his books in prison, where he was sent by a pious Christian government for "blasphemy," the marvel would be if every quotation was absolutely correct, not that there were so few (if any at all) which had to be checked.)

As readers will no doubt have surmised it was what Mr. McCabe has to say on the Jesus problem which particularly interested me. In my own small way, I have tried to deal with it in these pages and elsewhere—and have been obliged to cross swords with Mr. McCabe at his fiery best—that is, from his side, not on the impersonal argument, but against personal belittlement. I am, however, quite unrepentant.

I have read everything on the side of those who believe that there was a man Jesus that I could get, and I have been staggered at the credulity shown by eminent scholars. What has amazed me also is the readiness with which the antimythist will make statements for which there is no scrap of evidence, as far as I can judge—always taking care to bespatter his work with authorities on points that hardly matter. It is generally the vital questions which should be supported by evidence and it is just here where proof is missing. I shall give one or two instances relied on by Mr. McCabe from Dr. F. C. Conybeare who, curiously enough, seems to be Mr. McCabe's chief authority, for his name is more than once given as if that settled the matter. It may do for Mr. McCabe, but not for me.

Dr. Conybeare's work is called "The Historical Christ" and he tries to prove that it was "Christ"—the Anointed, the Messiah, who could only be sent by God—who was historical. It was not just the man Jesus, but "Jesus Christ" who really lived, he claimed, and as far as I have read Conybeare, he seems to believe almost everything in the Gospels. He was obliged to admit, of course, that the miracles may be "myth" or at least suspect; but any writer who really believes in Jesus, "the Christ," "The Historical Christ," seems hardly worth arguing with. In any case, every statement he makes should be regarded as suspect. Mr. McCabe wants us to check the statements made by Robert Taylor—no doubt because Taylor said flatly that Jesus was a

myth, and was hated in consequence not only by Christians but by Rationalists. I suggest he would have done better if he had checked Conybeare; but, of course, he agrees with Conybeare.

H. CUTNER.

THE SWORD OF CIVILISATION

"THE WORLD," said Schopenhauer, "is beautiful to look at, but terrible in reality," and Winwood Reade in his best-known work, "The Martyrdom of Man," aptly expressed, in the title thereof, what he thought of the process of civilisation. Another thinker, and a clear-minded one, the Dean Inge of his time, Thomas Hobbes, referred to the life of man as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. His reference was, however, *secundum quid*, as the logicians say, that is, he meant man only in one particular condition; living under no governor.

A certain Irishman of my acquaintance, persuaded by experience that the English were not so black as his native political and religious bias had conditioned him to believe, could, however, not fully suppress his primitive feelings about them. He it was who first introduced me to the well-worn gibe that the Pilgrim Fathers, immediately after landing on Plymouth Rock, fell upon their knees, and then upon the Indians. One would have to be very biased to have read the history of the Spanish conquests in America, and yet reserve criticism of that kind for Protestants.

J. G. Kohl, the German writer of "A Popular History of the Discovery of America" (Chapman and Hall, London, 1865), remarks that the history of the subjugation and destruction of the red race by the white forms one of the most horrible chapters in the annals of mankind.

In his opinion nowhere had less value been placed on human life, nowhere had nations, possessed of superior power, so pitilessly inflicted on their weaker fellows such fearful acts of cruelty and oppression as in America. He thought, too, that nowhere has a race been seen weaker and less capable of offering resistance to its oppressors than the aborigines of that country. They were mowed down like grass, or melted away like snow in the hard grasp of the iron knights of Spain.

He suggested that possibly the circumstances that the latter found themselves in such small band amid the teeming population of the new world contributed to their so terribly severe conduct, and so bloody wars. They were often able to save themselves only by the most unflinching courage. They had everywhere to gain their ends by desperate means. Theirs was Danton's motto, before Danton: audacity always. In their situations of difficulty they gave way to the passion of merciless destruction.

They accustomed themselves to exterminate the Indians like birds of the forest, utilising as auxiliaries those fearful blood-hounds, some of which were so distinguished for their worrying capacity, that the kings of Spain granted them pay and rations like their warriors, and whose names, "Berecillo," and others, have been handed down to posterity in the annals of Spain, like the names of their masters, the Pizarros and others.

The Indians came in hundreds of thousands to a dreadful end, writes Kohl; as food for cannon in the sanguinary battles, or by the sword, or under the axes of their unlawful executioners, or by the teeth of the savage bloodhounds, and if all these did not work quickly enough in the flames of huge pyres. Others met their death in cruel bondage, as slaves, driven to harder work than any they had previously known.

They were yoked to the plough, forced to penetrate to the bowels of the earth for gold, to dive to the floor of the sea for pearls; some, abused as beasts of burden, were compelled to carry Spanish officers, their baggage, their cannon, over endless mountains, across marshes, and through vast forests. Thus hosts upon hosts met their death, and to those who did not perish by the deliberate act of the conquerers there came disease to destroy.

The Spaniards had again and again been received in friendly fashion by the Indians. Cortez, for example, ruled in Tenochtitlan along with Montezuma, the Mexican monarch, and in the latter's name he issued whatever decrees he pleased. He was regarded with admiration by all, and a kind of awe; from all sides came envoys, with presents, and assurances of friendship. The Mexicans, states Kohl, were so taken by surprise, and so fascinated with their visitors, that they listened with composure when told that the gods they worshipped were in fact demons. They allowed the Spaniards to forbid their sacrifices in the temples, and even to erect an altar to the Virgin Mary, and perform ceremonies in her honour, in the centre of the principal temple in the capital.

Such a series of concessions, the first impression of fear and astonishment by the Mexicans at the sudden appearance of the wonderful strangers, were experienced by all the European discoverers on entering the new world; in Peru and Guatamala as well as in Mexico. But everywhere, too, the first calm gave way to a storm. A general conspiracy and uprising of the natives, and a period of conflict which brought the Europeans to the verge of ruin, out of which they came at length victorious, but only after great losses, and recourse to monstrous and bloody deeds. Then they finished the work they had begun, but with disaster to the states they had found, and on the graves of the exterminated natives. Cortez, for example, was obliged to quit Tenochtitlan and the lovely valley of Mexico, after that grievous night, in which the Spaniards, surrounded by the infuriated populace, were like an isolated rock amid raging surf. Then he had to recommence, and in another and more laborious fashion, the work of conquering Mexico.

When he came again to the city of Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs had chosen a young and patriotic king as their leader and were determined to assert their independence. The siege and gradual subjugation of this city occupied three months. Cortez had previously cut off all the canals from the city, and the campaign forms one of the most extraordinary and terrible events in the history of American discovery. The conquest has been compared to the conquest of Jerusalem under Titus in A.D. 70.

Day by day Cortez made his way into the town, in which every temple and house had been fortified. Every day he drew out thousands from these buildings, dead or alive, delivering up the latter to the fury of his allies. As more thousands were ready to take the places of the slain, he was compelled to commence the systematic destruction of the town. This work of destruction lasted one hundred days, during which time one quarter of the town after another, with its streets, temples and houses, was razed to the ground, and the rubbish used for filling the canals. In these canals the Mexicans had found their chief protection, for the canoes of the citizens could move freely about them in all directions, while the large brigantines of the Spaniards were unable to enter them.

When the end was near, the Indian allies of Cortez, whose passion for vengeance had been raised by the

stubborn defence to the highest pitch, rushed headlong and regardless of their lives into the streets yet filled with their enemies; fifty thousand of the latter were slain, and the town so transformed into ruins and ashes, that, as Cortez himself said, in this old metropolis of the Aztecs not one stone remained upon another.

The world then, if beautiful to look at, is terrible in reality, and the life of man, even under monarchs, can be, if not solitary, often poor, nasty, brutish and short.

J. G. LUPTON.

OBEDIENCE

I

OBEDIENCE is one of the so-called virtues which are neither natural nor social in origin and development, but are artificially created by persons in authority for ulterior motives; not for the good of they who are expected to obey, but to make things easier for those who command, in hopes that unreasonable orders will be unreasoningly obeyed.

It starts early in life by parents expecting children to do everything in ways their elders declare are good and right, driving rather than leading, dictating to youngsters instead of letting them experiment and discover.

Cultivation, persuasion and encouragement, the process of drawing the best out of a child, allowing latitude for mistakes and idiosyncrasy is slow and often tedious, requiring much patience and considerable sympathy. Quicker and easier is it to scold, nag and punish.

So from parents we hear "Do as I tell you" or "I insist" or "You must do it," innumerable variations in rising degrees of loudness and fraying temper, with "Don't do this, that and the other" a thousand times repeated. To enforce juvenile obedience, slaps, smacks, cuffs and a variety of other corporal corrections are practised, with much talk, all more often than not ineffective.

Because, and anyone who values the future of the human race should rejoice that it is so, children very young begin disobeying, not of perversion or wickedness but to find their own road, unconscious pioneering, without which no infant can hope to grow up better than its parents, or at least different from them, an integer instead of a cipher.

Further to enforce the moral values of doing what they are bid children have reiterated to them the aphorism: Who would command must learn to obey. Grown up its hearers realise the foolishness of that injunction. Those who learn to obey remain so; they who command are in a different position, aware of character and capacity superior to the acquiescent ones.

At school there is constant warfare of pupils against rules and regulations, old traditions and new orders, with varying results. Actually it is impossible to make anyone do what he will not if the determination to refuse is strong enough, and the victim prepared to endure penalties. Some amount of consent, even if grudging, lies behind every carrying out of behests. This is known to the best types of parents and teachers, who shape their policy and methods accordingly, trying to get cooperation from scholars. In the case of older ones by formalised school government handed over to the concerned parties, some form of commune, parliament or republic.

Hence the State policy of compulsory education is amusing. Adjective and substantive are contradictory. Education is either voluntary or it is mental and ethical

distortion. The work of schools is not to make children obedient without good cause. Those who enforce mechanical obedience are misreading education, perverting it into tyranny or breeding hypocrisy or creating resentment, incipient rebellion.

II

Enforcement of obedience does not cease with childhood or youth, nor the preaching of it as a virtue.

Living a comfortable free life himself Tennyson was enthusiastic for it:—

"Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule."

The latter statement is correct, but does not justify blind obedience or giving of dictatorial orders. Obedience without thought on the part of subjects is the essence of dictatorship, the state of mind which creates dictators, who are not so much to blame as those who fall into servitude under them.

Again Tennyson:

"Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs but to do and die."

Pestilential teaching, productive of untold harm, to be repudiated by intelligent adults as Felicia Hemans' egregious boy on the burning deck should be by healthy children.

It is told of an African tribe that when its warriors returned defeated in battle they marched over the edge of a high cliff, falling to death. This is obedience exemplified, the spirit of conscription. Devised in its modern form by Frederick of Prussia compulsory military service was an ingenious device for bringing the whole population into obedience.

Napoleon Bonaparte carried it farther and its results in Europe and effects on the world have been disastrous, holding threats of more evil in the future as obedience becomes the gospel of powerful and predatory governments. Small wonder many thoughtful people regard obedience as one of the slave virtues, perhaps chief of them.

A difficulty of toppling obedience from its eminence is the support it gets from religion. Not for nothing are pious people classified as sheep. Poverty, chastity and obedience may be a brave-sounding threefold vow for novices devoting themselves to lifetimes of abnegation, but they are negative incentives. The first is unhealthy, the second unnatural and the third unhuman. Full-blooded men and women need more robust ideals for development of their personality.

Milton starts:—

"Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that
forbidden tree;
Sing, heavenly muse."

That theological concept of man being disobedient to God has been a disruptive influence throughout the ages. Only slowly are we shaking it off. The fruit of the tree of knowledge must be tasted, if sometimes bitter in the mouth and sour in the belly.

Think what disobedience has accomplished in the world. The Puritan rebellion against Charles the First; the English Revolution of 1688; the revolt of the New England Colonies eventuating in the present United States of America; the French Revolution; the Russian Revolution of 1917; instances innumerable can be presented. Often the only way to get rid of bad laws or corrupt governments is by large, preferably wholesale disobedience. Successful it becomes the dominant power.

Consideration must also be given to the right of private judgment in cases where deep personal issues are involved, and the exercise of conscience, which may drive

a man to disobey to the degree of suffering martyrdom rather than surrender.

To disobey may be regarded as the first commandment with promise: the promise of fuller knowledge, wider experience and richer environment in which to live more daring life.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

FACTS v FUNDS

With Sentimental superstition
I really can't agree;
I hold aloof, I have no proof,
Of tales of mystery.
Those promises that when I'm dead,
I'll have a glorious time;
I'd much prefer them now instead,
Things would be jolly fine.

But that of course would never do,
They'd never stay the course;
The Parsons, like the Jockeys,
Would ride a losing horse.
And so they keep the game alive,
While income still rolls in;
Certain it will always thrive,
Their certain winner, Sin.

If every one of us were good,
They sure would lose their job;
Do something useful, if they could,
To earn an honest bob.
The evidence would then be there
For anyone to see;
No need for them to ask you where
You'll spend Eternity.

E. W. JAMES.

SENTIMENTAL DIALOGUE

"MY child, I must be just. I have divided up all my personal possessions. I have two missals—one of them shall be yours; I have four holy pictures—you must take two of them; I have two pipes. . ."

"Oh, you're so cruel, father! What would I want with a pipe?"

"My child, must I explain it all over again? You have been a good housekeeper. You're in no way to blame. But . . . but now I feel called to higher austerities. You wouldn't want to stand in the way of my spiritual progress, would you, my child?"

"I suppose not, father. . . Goodbye. . . Charles!"

"Jane! . . . I mean, my child, I have thought of something—the canary."

"I gave him to you, father."

"But if I kept him it would make me feel unjust. It wouldn't be fair to me."

"We can't split Robert in two, father."

"And, my dear, I am sure he would die of a broken heart if we gave him to some stranger."

"Then, father. . . then. . . perhaps you will let me stay? For Robert's sake?"

"Jane. . . my child. . . I'll take a special collection tomorrow in church. As a priest, I promise you that our parting will be equitable. I'll buy you a canary, my child, with the collection."

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

CORRESPONDENCE

ROMAN CATHOLICISM AND MONEY

SIR,—While we are all grateful for any exposure of the Vatican's political and financial machinations, some of us would be glad for more concrete proof. With all due respect to your contributor Tom Hill, merely to give a list of financial trickeries, without a particle of evidence, seems out of place in the "Freethinker." How does Mr. Hill know, for example, that certain financial operations "netted very considerable profit for Cippico"? Did he see two billion lire go into the Vatican exchequer? Did he see the bank pass books? I feel some sort of evidence is necessary.—Yours, etc., J.R.

COMMUNISM AND RELIGION

SIR,—Surely your leader of the 2nd January does less than justice to Mr. Gallagher. There is no reason to suppose that Mr. Gallagher is not fully aware of the relationship between Christianity and Capitalism, but like his famous predecessors, St. Paul and Hitler, he no doubt takes the view that if his lie redounds to the glory of Soviet Communism he is not to be censured. St. Paul, of course, said "God" instead of Soviet Communism, and Hitler, "The National Socialist State," but the principle remains the same, and should make some of our so-called Marxist Freethinkers think.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

SIR,—Why is Mr. W. Gallagher, M.P., presumed to be a religionist when he displays a knowledge of the Bible in his article which was obviously intended to point out that a most sanctimonious Cripps was not practising what he preached?

The Radicals of yesterday have become respectable and could call Tom Paine, Owen, Bradlaugh and the rest of that ilk "a bunch of Communists" if they were alive to-day. The Communists of Russia and the non-Communists who compose the elected leadership of that country allow a freedom of thought in all spheres—even the belief in superstition and religion which is discouraged by educational means. Totalitarianism and dictatorships when used in reference to Russia display only political bias more in keeping with the Kemsley and Beaverbrook papers and the "gutter press" of America.—Yours, etc.,

WALTER ALEXANDER.

TOTALITARIANISM

SIR,—I have no doubt that F. A. Ridley is able, if he so wishes, adequately to reply to the charge of inaccuracy levelled at him by F. H. Walker. There is, however, one point I would like to raise concerning his letter. With a naïveté which must be very gratifying to the Kremlin, he contends that accusations of totalitarianism against the Soviet Union are irrelevant because of the 1936 Constitution. What nonsense! On that criterion, the rulers of the U.S.A. could quite rightly claim that inequality and racial discrimination do not exist in their country since the American Constitution condemns them as wrong.

But the fundamental fallacy which underlies this attitude is the quite prevalent one of erroneously assuming that because Russia opposes America and America is capitalist, then it follows that Russia, being "socialist," is therefore the only country which holds out the prospect of progress to the world. This reasoning is about on par with that displayed by certain Christians who consider that since (to them) Christianity is the repository of all that is good, then everyone who disbelieves its validity is necessarily evil.

Perhaps it would be better if your correspondent were to study descriptions of conditions in Russia, as he so nobly advises other people to do. And I suggest he studies the works of such people as Anton Ciliga, Voline and André Gide, rather than panegyrics by bourgeois intellectuals playing at being revolutionaries.—Yours, etc.,

S. E. PARKER.

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OBITUARY

ELIZABETH PUGH

With sorrow we have to announce the death of Elizabeth Pugh, of Newtown, Mont. She was one of a family of Freethinkers whose sincerity and loyalty to the cause have remained sound and stronger with the passing years. A member of the N.S.S. and reader of "The Freethinker," she was proud of her association with the organised movement. Her remains were cremated at Perry Bar Crematorium, Birmingham, on Monday, January 10, where, before an assembly of relatives and friends, a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. C. H. Smith, Secretary of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBRY and Mr. J. G. LUTON.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 25, 7 p.m.: "Purpose." Mr. BERTRAM HENSON.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, January 24, 7 p.m.: "Intuition and Reason." 2nd Lecture: "Comparison of Human and Animal Behaviour," MAURICE BURTON, D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The International Congress for Mental Health," Prof. J. C. FLUGEL.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Same Thoughts On V.D.," Mr. R. O'NEIL MONTGOMERY (National Society for Prevention of V.D.).

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "Religious Intolerances," Mr. A. H. WHARRAD.

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "A Short History of Secularism," Mr. GUY ALDRED.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The World Strategy of Political Catholicism," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (London).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Robert Burns—Poet of Freedom," Mr. W. PAUL.

South Woodford, Essex (Memorial Hall).—Thursday, January 27, 7-30 p.m.: Debate: "Atheism v. Christianity," Miss RUBY TA'BOIS, F.R.A.S., and the Rev. H. HUNTER, D.D.

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