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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### "A Feather Bed for Falling Christians"

IT was Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of the great Charles Darwin, and himself a scientific writer of repute in his day, who described Unitarianism as "a feather bed for falling Christians." His original reference was to the contemporary Unitarian Church, but with the wide diffusion of more or less definite Unitarian views in all the Reformed Churches, included under the term "Modernism," the above definition has a much wider current application than it had in Erasmus Darwin's day.

The Unitarian Church came into existence as the theological "extreme Left" of the Reformation. (The communistic Anabaptists were its extreme Left, socially, as the "Thirty-nine Articles of Religion" of the Church of England plainly testify.) The historic founder of Unitarian theology was an Italian theologian, Socinus, after whom Unitarianism was for long styled "Socinianism."

Unitarian ideas were in the air at the time, and duly attracted the attentions of the more orthodox Churches, both Catholic and Reformed. The Spaniard, Servetus, pioneer of the theory of the circulation of the blood, was burned at Geneva by Calvin for holding Unitarian views. For the same crime died the last religious martyrs in England under James I, and it goes without saying that the Holy Inquisition of Rome burnt Unitarian "heretics" as fast as it could catch them.

So fierce was the persecution of anti-Trinitarian doctrine that it took refuge in Poland and Transylvania, on the borders of the Unitarian world of Islam. Students of European history in the seventeenth century will recall how the great General Bethlen Gabor, the Unitarian Prince of Transylvania, took a prominent part in the "Thirty Years War" (1618-48).

However, with the growth of toleration in Western Europe and America, the Unitarian Church became, what it still remains, a respectable and active Nonconformist Church, which has played, on the whole, a progressive role in social affairs, and has produced its quota of distinguished men: such names as the scientist, Joseph Priestley, and the American, Dr. Channing, are the best known. Amongst the lay adherents of the Church may be mentioned a famous political figure of the Victorian era, Joseph Chamberlain. It still has a distinctive Church organisation in Britain and the U.S.A.

Unitarianism was originally an attempt to simplify Christian theology, and to return to what it believed to be the theology of the early Christian Church stripped of the later accretions of a theology that arose upon the speculations of Greek Philosophy. Beyond such an attempted return to the simpler Creed of the early Church, early Unitarianism did not go. It regarded itself as a legitimate, indeed, the legitimate Christian Church uncorrupted by the later unhistorical Trinitarian

speculations. It believed in an historic Jesus, regarded as the best of men and the greatest of the Prophets, but not as himself Divine. It regarded the Bible as inspired, and the early Socinians believed in the miracles of the Gospels. In short, Unitarianism regarded itself as part of historic Christianity, but relied more on reason and less on revelation than did the orthodox Trinitarian Churches.

To-day, the above description is no longer an accurate version of what Unitarians believe. For here, as elsewhere, Reason has played havoc with Faith. Under the pressure of modern Science, a personal God has retreated into the dim realm of the impersonal, and under the pressure of historical criticism the "Historic Jesus" retreats from the definite personality of the Gospels into a mist of uncertainty. Present-day Unitarianism is not unaffected by these contemporary pressures.

However, the present-day Unitarian Church, whilst an interesting religious phenomenon in itself, hardly justifies a front page article in "The Freethinker." For the Unitarian Church has always tended to be a somewhat small and select body: "three persons and no God" as a witty theologian of the orthodox variety once described one of its chapels. (The Unitarians could legitimately reply by quoting the Japanese convert, to whom the missionaries were explaining the orthodox mystery of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, "Three Persons and One God." "Ah," retorted the perplexed Oriental, "I understand at last, a committee.")

Unitarianism has gone far beyond the Unitarian Church. Thinly disguised as "Modernism," it has spread to all the Churches, even to Rome, and has become a "feather bed" of universal proportions.

Amongst the Protestant Churches of the Continent, views of Christian origins that are Unitarian in essence are widely spread, as also in the Nonconformist Congregational Church in this country. In the early years of the present century, the Modernist Movement of neo-Catholicism shook the Church of Rome to its foundations. Both schools of Modernists, Catholic and Protestant, agreed, at least, upon a purely human origin of Christianity, both the Catholic Modernist, Alfred Loisy (in his "The Gospel and the Church"), and the Protestant, Adolf von Harnack (in his "What is Christianity?"). look for and find a purely human Jesus behind the elaborate scaffolding of speculative theology which the church doctors elaborated in an age of feverish theological speculation, and general intellectual decline.

A closely similar position is taken up by the Modernist Movement in the Church of England to-day, which has been widely commented upon in connection with the books of, among others, Dean Inge, Canon Streeter, and Dr. Barnes. The last named has recently given the world a detailed statement of the Modernist view of Christian origins in "The Rise of Christianity."

In essence, it is a purely Unitarian view: tempered by some obvious "Trade Union" eulogies of the "Jesus

of History," which remind us incidentally, that Dr. Barnes is a Bishop of a Church which is still officially Trinitarian in its doctrine, but which do not seem to have any connection with the learned author's own previous scientific analysis of the literary sources for the life of his hero.

How far, we may ask, is the Modernist "feather bed" likely to continue to catch "falling Christians," and thus to arrest their passage to the full secularist position? The prospect does not appear to be very promising for the theological liberals. For genuine Believers want a full blooded Deity, who answers prayer, and to whom they can look for redemption in this wicked world. The attenuated "First Cause" of the academic modernist theologian does not fill the bill at all: Rome perhaps knew what it was doing when it turned down such a nebulous entity in favour of the blind faith which can still pack Lourdes, and now Fatima to suffocation.

With regard to Jesus, if we accept the reconstruction of Dr. Barnes and his modernist colleagues, and suppose an historic Jesus, who was a rabbinical moralist and a religious reformer, what then? There were plenty of reformers in the ancient, as in the modern world, and moralists also were not uncommon.

What solid reason is there for preferring Jesus to Socrates or Epictetus, not to mention Buddha or Confucius? Even when good, the moral teaching of Jesus, assuming that it was actually his, was not original, and has, in any case, only a limited application to the modern world. That is so, and even if we leave out such obvious puerilities as the fig tree and the Gadarene swine, there does not seem to be any valid reason to single out Jesus for special reverence denied to any other outstanding ethical preacher.

On the whole we think that the "feather bed" of the worthy Dr. Erasmus Darwin will soon itself be in need of the upholsterer's art as it gives way beneath the weight of "falling Christians" bound for the naked ground of Secular Truth.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF AN AMERICAN HUMANIST

DR. RALPH BARTON PERRY, Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, has penned a volume entitled "Puritanism and Democracy" (The Vanguard Press, New York, 641 pp., 36s.). This superb production embraces a wide field of ethical and social science, and its author may be fairly designated as a Christian Rationalist. He submits all assumptions to critical analysis, but while all the conclusions of modern science and culture are fully accepted, our author favours what is commonly regarded as a Christian ethic. Still, he concedes that so-called Christian morality was preceded and influenced by Pagan, Buddhist and other ethicists, while deeply deploring the unspeakable atrocities of totalitarian States, most of which are nominally Christian.

When the Pilgrim Fathers sought security in America from religious oppression in England, they, after landing on Plymouth Rock, established an intolerant theocracy in their new home under which they persecuted even to death all those who dared to differ from them. But when later settlers arrived, several sects appeared to successfully challenge the Calvinist autoeracy. Later still, when New England rebelled against the mother country and secured its independence, Deism widely

prevailed among American intellectuals. Yet, as early as the time of Charles II, a charter was granted to Rhode Island which ordained that no one should be "anywise molested, punished, disquieted or called in question for difference of opinion in matters of religion, who in no manner disturbed the civil peace."

Prof. Perry selects Paine, Jefferson and Franklin as the protagonists of the American Age of Enlightenment which so greatly influenced the wording of the U.S. Constitution. "Of these," he writes, "Paine represented the Enlightenment in its more radical and polemical aspects. To his contemporaries and to posterity he filled the double role of revolutionary and stench in the nostrils of conservative piety. An Englishman by birth, he came to America on the invitation of Franklin in 1774, and at once adopted its cause as his own. . . His 'Rights of Man' (1791) and 'Age of Reason' (1794) were brilliant popularisations of the general philosophy of the Enlightenment, both political and religious."

Perry holds that Puritanism, despite its narrow-mindedness, bigotry and malevolent deity, paved the path in America for democracy, much as the conflict between Crown and Parliament in England led to *habeas corpus* and the Revolution of 1689. Locke's writings, especially his "Letters on Toleration," influenced the English-speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic. But these were secular benefits which in no way lessened Puritanical concern with the soul's salvation. Moreover, as Prof. Perry observes: "Christianity considered as a body of ideas is an intermingling of Christian experience and tradition with such secular instruments of thought as were available in the Mediterranean world in the earlier centuries of the Christian era; and these instruments were largely forged by pagan philosophers. It is impossible to divest any specific doctrine altogether of this pagan ingredient. This impossible task, the Puritan strove to achieve by purifying the official creed from the "corruptions" assimilated through the Catholic acceptance of the intellectualism of Plato and Aristotle by resting his faith on the most literal rendering of the Bible statements, every word of which was treated as divinely inspired.

Heresy and unbelief consequently became the vilest of crimes and the earlier Puritans justified the imposition of the death penalty on Dissenters by appealing to the Scriptures, where they found directions in the Book of Deuteronomy. For if the children of Belial worship alien gods and corrupt their city, Jehovah commands that: "Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword."

As already noted, the decline of the New England theocracy from the seventeenth century onwards resulted from a constant infusion of new blood, for the later colonists proved more worldly-minded than their predecessors. The Bible was less regarded as a guide in life; indifference increased, and there was a growing reluctance to impose a rigid creed by force. Roger Williams and the Quaker, William Penn, played an important part in liberalising the persecuting Calvinist creed while, still later, emigrants from Europe carried the humanitarian outlook of Milton, Locke, Andrew Marvell, Jeremy Taylor, Stillingfleet and other broad-minded religionists to their new abodes. It is true that traditional Calvinists still portrayed the torments of the

damned, a fate they asserted to be the destiny of the overwhelming majority of mankind, but this revolting idea they derived from their Roman Catholic forerunners. As Perry states: "It was a central element in all medieval Christianity. The Last Judgment and the 'Doom' of sinners was a favourite theme of medieval painting and sculpture; and the brush and the chisel were even more effective in representing its horrors than the rhetoric of the puritan sermon."

If keenly aware of the weaknesses and abuses of past and present applications of democratic principles, Prof. Perry is convinced that a real democracy is by far the best system of government attainable. Freedom of thought and expression, a more equitable distribution of the national wealth, the arming of all peace-desiring peoples against unjustified aggression, with the creation of a sovereign power to ensure universal peace, among other reforms, our author deems imperative if political and social well-being are to be securely established. He also thinks that there now exists too great a tendency to view the world's affairs as hopeless. The Thirty Years War of religion, atrocious as it was, appears a passing phase only when regarded historically. When progress is retarded in one direction, it still proceeds in others, and is doing so to-day despite the terrible experiences of two World Wars.

Perhaps the most moving passages in Perry's volume relate to the horrors and iniquities of war, and he cites Mark Twain's brilliantly satirical "War Prayer" which partly runs as follows:—

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts go forth to battle—be Thou near them! With them in spirit—we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead. . . . Lord, blast their hopes, blast their lives. We ask it in the spirit of Love, of Him who is the source of Love, and who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen."

Very justly, Perry pours scorn on Treitschko's glorification of armed conflict as a biological necessity for the maintenance and development of the heroic character and virility of superior races. As he mournfully notes, "the evils of war have become more evident and more shameless while its probability has increased; so that the whole world is preoccupied with fear, poisoned with suspicion, and disturbed with a sense of insecurity." Armed conflict has thus become more catastrophic than ever before, while peace is not merely an ideal but an absolute necessity, if what we term civilisation is to be preserved.

All modes of faith must be tolerated in any truly democratic society but the freedom granted must be fully reciprocated, and no cult must be permitted predominance, whether secular or religious. While the rights of the individual must be respected, it is well to note that any cult, however singular it may appear, perhaps contains the promise of social enrichment.

The blemishes of our present system are notorious. Public benefits have all too frequently been confounded with self interest and too little attention has been paid to the inborn irrationality of the mass of mankind, for it is commonly assumed that men are guided by reason when they are really victims of prejudice and emotion.

Perry hopefully avers that: "Modern democracy sprang from the Age of Enlightenment, and will be

opposed by its tradition, its genius, and its explicit teachings to any dogmatic or authoritarian restraints upon freedom of thought. It will be opposed to obscurantism, and suspicious of any religious emotions that becloud and debase the reason. It will tend to the rejection of miracles and special providence, or any doctrine out of keeping with the habits of mind inculcated by science. It will subject dogmas to critical scrutiny and encourage their perpetual revision in form if not in substance. . . . It will trust enlightenment and not fear it, and it will therefore lend no aid to any religious cult that rests on ignorance."

*Puritanism and Democracy* is a splendid exposition which should be on the shelves of every circulating library and also in the hands of a multitude of readers. It is a highly welcome message from America, a land that does not entirely confine its admiration to the self-made man or the worship of the almighty dollar. Much is now heard of the Iron Curtain, but we may rightly recall the lines of that now neglected poet, Arthur Hugh Clough:—

And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light,  
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright.

T. F. PALMER.

## THE WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

invites all Freethinkers to its 29th International Congress to be held at Rome, from 9th to 12th September, 1949, to discuss

1. Freethought, the Churches and International Politics;
2. Freedom of the Mind in the Schools;
3. Humanism and Freethought;

and to celebrate the quatercentenary of the birth of Giordano Bruno at Nola in 1548 and the centenary of Garibaldi's Defence of Rome.

The World Union of Freethinkers, formerly the International Federation of Freethought Societies was founded in 1880 at a congress convened at Brussels by the Belgian Freethinkers, then establishing a national federation of freethought organisations. This congress was supported by the National Secular Society, which was represented by Mrs. Besant and Miss Hypatia Bradlaugh. The first congress to be held by the international federation was in 1881 in London, under the presidency of Charles Bradlaugh.

Perhaps the most outstanding international congress assembled was that at Rome in 1904; it is interesting to note in a strong British delegation the following names: G. W. Foote, Chapman Cohen, John M. Robertson, Henry Snell, Charles Watts, Joseph McCabe and Dr. Stanton Coit, and that William Heaford spoke on the work of the Religious Missions. The principal speakers were: Ernst Haeckel, Prof. Hector Denis, député (Belgium), Gustave Hubbard, député (France), Georges Lorand, député (Belgium), Prof. Sergi (Italy).

Now we are to meet once again in Rome; but a Rome much changed from that of 1904. The freethought societies and the freethinking freemasons were suppressed by Mussolini before he entered into an understanding with the Pope. Nevertheless, these societies did not lose touch utterly, and at the first opportunity renewed their organisation. The Italian national freethought society, "Giordano Bruno," can therefore claim to have subsisted since its foundation in 1906, and its present president, Reggiani, took a part in the organisation of the

1904 congress. The link is not lost, but the situation is very different. Now it is not a rising tide of liberal thought sweeping on in great hopes of victory. The Freethinkers in Italy now find themselves between the upper and nether millstones of politics. They have seen the joint authors of the Atlantic Charter, the United States and Great Britain, giving the political power in Italy to the Church, which Mussolini had made powerful and of exceeding wealth. The power of the Church in Italy at the present time is that of the Pope in the Papal States when Garibaldi and Mazzini were young. We shall not expect this year to receive the official support of 94 Italian municipalities as in 1904, nor of such great French cities as Paris, Lyons, St. Etienne, Dijon and Brest. Nevertheless, we expect to draw together a vigorous and vital gathering, inspired by the outspokenness of Bruno and the daring of Garibaldi.

It has been said of Bruno that he did his best work in England. Surely, in return, English Freethinkers should express their debt to him at Rome where, in 1600, he was burned to death in the Campo dei Fiori (the Field of Flowers) after seven years in the prisons of the Holy Inquisition.

It is this year a hundred years since Garibaldi won imperishable renown defending Rome against the armies of Ferdinand of Naples and of Louis Philippe of France; a great adventure ending in disaster. Will you, who read these lines, now read again that thrilling story, and then come with us to Rome and lay a wreath on Garibaldi's statue?

The support of every Freethinker who believes in humanity's need of a freely operating mind, unhampered by any authority other than that of reason, is called on to-day to make manifest his faith and give proof of his devotion to his ideals. Every secularist should henceforward set his eyes on the coming congress—think Rome, speak Rome, and empower the National Secular Society to send as strong a delegation this year as they did forty-five years ago.

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE STRATFORD "BRAINS TRUST"

It was a long way to travel from S.W. to E. London, but as I came back from Stratford Town Hall I felt it had been well worth while. It was a good idea of the Executive Committee of the N.S.S. to arrange such a programme. A conflict, whether in the way of debate or questions, will always draw an audience. Parsons know this, but under their ægis there must be a limit to your questions. You must assume the truth of some kind of Christianity. Thus far and no further shalt thou go—on Church premises.

That the country beyond was *terra incognita* to the two parsons who appeared at Stratford was evident enough. They groped about in regions of thought foreign to their minds like the man who lost his way amongst the tombs in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It must indeed have been an ordeal for gentlemen used to preaching the uncontradicted word week by week to have been so much questioned; to find themselves up against such doughty opponents as Mr. Archibald Robertson and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, and soon to note that they were being encouraged by enthusiastic supporters.

It was amusing—not amazing—when one parson let the other down. Asked whether a man could be a good citizen without being a Christian, the Rev. V. L. Tucker-Harvey declared that he could. It was not surprising

that Mr. Archibald Robertson was quick to point out how fatal this answer was to the Christian case. Unless it could be maintained that a good citizen might be a bad man, the whole claim of Christianity was undermined by such a suggestion. Divine aid was a superfluity. I do not recall that the Rev. Wallace Hadrill commented on the reply of his clerical brother. Like Pepys, animadverting on a sermon delivered at "our Church" (the ruined St. Olave's, Hart Street), he probably wished that reverend gentleman had let it alone. It reminds me of a story of a clergyman whose conscience constrained him to write to the silver-tongued orator, Canon Liddon, and confess that he had preached one of the latter's sermons as his own. In a reply the Canon begged him not to apologise. It was such a treat to hear of two parsons saying the same thing!

How few of them say the same things as their predecessors! It was remarkable to find a frank acknowledgment of this in a leading article in *The Times* a few weeks ago—it was entitled "Ivory Tower."

"How those reprobate old divines who thundered through half a Sunday morning about stiff punishment to come must be chuckling. Their pulpits are occupied by milder incumbents rationed to a few brisk minutes of cheerful sermonising. Threats of future retribution are out of fashion. . . ."

What a sign of the times! Fifty years ago a leader-writer would not have been allowed to call a divine a reprobate, or to treat lightly the subject of the future punishment of the wicked. What the "milder incumbents" dare not say is that their predecessors were all wrong. If they did, perchance parishioners would ask whether their successors were likely to be any more right!

There was the usual circumvention of awkward questions at which the clerical mind is so apt. When it was pointed out that morality had no meaning on a desert island—though perhaps temperance might be called for if a keg of rum was landed from the wreck!—one parson, referring to the egregious Joad (and missing the opportunity to mention that he was now a member of the Church of England!), met this point by saying that to the desert island we should come influenced by the up-bringing of civilisation. True enough, but what had this to do with the question? Social conditions from whence we came, and not divine mandate, had made that morality. Then one of the two clergy thought he had found a fine inconsistency in our champions. They maintained that the man in the street was increasingly indifferent to religion, and yet the scientific professor to play for safety in any pronouncement he made about it. The man in the street, however, does not appoint professors. Their future is in the hands of people patently, if not latently, pious. Those who control public purses are usually convention-bound.

One noticed too that it was *religion* not Christianity, we were asked to believe had no warfare with science. This is always the card played by clergy. Conceivably a scientist may be a Unitarian, but who can conceive of one as accepting virgin birth, atonement, physical resurrection, and ascension? On this last I should like to know if either of the two clerical gentlemen really believe that Jesus went up into the clouds like a balloon? If not what became of his body?

Of course, when great names are cited on the side of freethought, you can expect what comes. Their views are discredited and discarded; in short, they are debunked. The Rev. Tucker Harvey swept aside the reputation of Sir James Frazer as if his monumental work had no more foundation than a piled up pack of cards.

He did not go to the far countries; he relied upon missionaries. Are then missionaries unreliable, some of us asked ourselves? Perhaps the reverend gentleman was thinking of the criticisms of Lord Raglan. If so, he will not help him. His lordship is more devastating in his attitude to religion than Frazer ever was.

The staggerer, as Dick Swiveller might have said, was the Rev. D. S. Wallace Hadrill's statement that Darwin was a Christian! This could hardly be called the *pure* ignorance to which Dr. Johnson once owned. It was rather deliberate myth-making.

In the hopes that the reverend gentleman will not repeat his statement again, let me offer him a few facts.

In the last paragraph of *The Origin of Species* (1859) Darwin used the phrase "the Creator." In 1863, writing to Joseph Hooker about Sir Charles Lyell, he said:

"I feel sure he no more believed in Creation than you or I." A fortnight later he wrote to the same friend: "I have long regretted that I truckled to public opinion and used the Pentateuch term of 'creation' by which I meant appeared by some wholly unknown process."

In 1876, in his *Autobiography*, and in 1879, in a letter to a German student, Darwin proclaimed himself an agnostic. In September, 1881, seven months before he died, he confirmed this in the presence of Edward Aveling and his son, Francis Darwin, and added that he had given up a belief in Christianity at the age of forty. Asked why he did so, he answered, "Because it was not supported by evidence." So this "Christian" had abandoned Christianity thirty-three years at the time of his death! If I am asked why then did they bury him in Westminster Abbey, I answer because a refusal advertises a heresy.

We were cheerfully told by one clergyman that Christian belief was not on the decline. In one case it was because a Penguin volume said so. In another because the parson had a good congregation at *his* church. Well, the clergy in general do not seem to take this rosy view. It is unfortunate for them that the *Official Year Book of the Church of England*, just published, does not either. Referring to figures of church attendance, it says they "give ground for grave uneasiness." One can be sure that the reverend gentleman who does attract a crowd does so by offering *small* rations of religion. It is a pearl of great price, but a very little of it will suffice! I delighted recently to find a passage in an orthodox book written so long ago as 1870, which made this point admirably. It was *Religious Life in London* by J. Ewing Ritchie. Referring to the lectures given at Cleveland Hall, "at the rear of Tottenham Court Road Chapel," then the headquarters of secularism, the writer said:—

"They set many of the clergy a good example. The people at Cleveland Hall do not call out for quarter of an hour lectures. Nor do they require anything in the way of music or choral performances, or floral decorations, or altar lights to make the service interesting. For children, whether they go to church or chapel, you must provide shows. To a man nothing more is needed than logic and the human voice."

It was amusing to notice that whilst the two atheists (of whom the N.S.S. could justly be proud) were able to sustain themselves without such material comforts, the flesh of the exponents of the life of the spirit needed much support from My Lady Nicotine. One of the clergymen smoked almost continuously. In this he followed the Archbishop of Canterbury. A friend of the writer who was on a committee with him found that the first official Christian in the country could hardly put down his pipe

even to speak! It was reported recently that an old lady in Pennsylvania, having taken to smoking at 96, had decided to give it up at 103 before "it got a hold on her." Here is a hint to our clerics who I am sure cannot imagine "Our Lord" smoking on his long delayed second coming. A question I should have liked to have asked was what would be the effect on recruitment for the Anglican ministry if abstinence from tobacco was required as in the case of the Salvation Army? In a few weeks time these clergymen—as also the Archbishop—will be lustily singing a hymn by Isaac Watts—the bicentenary of whose death has just been celebrated. One verse runs:—

"Were the whole world of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

But there are limits. The Lord must not ask for tobacco. What a satire on the Church is that!

WILLIAM KENT.

### PROFESSOR TOYNBEE AND CHRISTIANITY

IN the issue of January 23, Mr. T. F. Palmer, in an appreciative reference to Dr. Toynbee's lecture entitled "The Downfalls of Civilisation," writes, "Poetically enough he wonders whether the Church is the legitimate heir of all departed civilisation . . ." "If it is, there is a bow in the cloud; and with our eyes on that, we can confront with a better courage the appalling social tribulations still in store for us."

If I understand English this would be, for Dr. Toynbee, a consummation devoutly to be desired. Reference to a lecture he delivered in 1940, under the auspices of the Student Christian Movement, has increased my suspicion. The lecture was on "Christianity and Civilisation," and was published as one in a series of Burge Memorial Lectures by the S.C.U. I am indebted to an article in the January, 1949, issue of the "American Freeman" for most of the following:—

"If," said Dr. Toynbee, "our secular Western civilisation perishes, Christianity may be expected not only to endure but to grow in wisdom and stature, as the result of a fresh experience of secular catastrophe. . . ." As he says that, "the Roman Church will outlast all secular civilisations," there is no mistaking the trend of his thought. He denies the claim that it is the place of religion to improve civilisation. Accordingly, "the continuous upward movement of religion may be served and prompted by the cyclic movement of civilisations round the cycle of birth-death-birth . . ." "men will still go on sinning . . ." and there is no reason to expect any change in unredeemable human nature while human life on earth goes on. In a word, religion is not for civilisation, but civilisation is for religion.

American freethought publications frequently criticise the historical writings of Dr. Toynbee for their mystical bias, and it is surprising that no contributor to "The Freethinker" has yet seen it. Dr. Toynbee is, apparently, quite serene in face of the prospect of the collapse of our present secular civilisation; just as was St. Augustine amidst the ruins of the Roman Empire. For will the City of God not then be built?

I suggest that the judgments of this historian, expressed with such literary elegance, be carefully analysed by freethinkers before they accept him for an authority. He is certainly no friend of secularism.

E. A. McDONALD.

## ACID DROPS

The Rev. J. B. Phillips of Redhill is another cleric who has made up his mind that the Church's decisions on divorce are quite out of date, and in a recent number of the "Church Times" he was not afraid to say so. He smites the Mothers' Union and their nonsense about the indissolubility of marriage with commonsense and fiery words, and we must give him every credit. In any case, however, the battle for divorce has been won—just as it has been for secular marriage.

The inaugural meeting of the Women's Peace Movement was held at the Central Hall the other week. Ten speakers from Co-operative Guilds, Women's organisations, and Pacifist groups put the case for peace. The "Christian World" comments that only one speaker, the Rev. Elsie Chambertin, "gave the only direct Christian approach." That is not a bad percentage, the other nine-tenths no doubt realise that the history of Christianity is not exactly peaceful. Perhaps we are too optimistic and the true position is that the majority of the speakers realised that people would be more likely to co-operate without the disturbing influence of religion.

How thrilling it must have been for the team of thirteen young men and women who toured the back streets of Birmingham looking for shops selling "risque books." Their Secretary, a 24-year-old school teacher, bought two, and with a glow of self-righteousness heard the magistrate fine two booksellers for selling obscene books, and ordered them to be destroyed. We could save the team a lot of touring about the City, there are a few off-colour stories in the Bible, and we would even send the "Bible Handbook" to save further trouble in hunting up references. This team of youngsters, whose purity of mind is proof against contamination are, as you may have guessed, members of Catholic Action.

The reading of "risque" books is considered a sin and must be confessed, so unless there was a dispensation from the Archbishop of Birmingham we can imagine quite a queue at the Confessional after an orgy of book-hunting and reading.

The "Sunday Express" reports that for the first time within memory churches in Suffolk have offered prayers for rain in February. Their incantations would have had some result if they had waited a little longer as it was bound to rain soon. Other churches in the same district are asking that the War Office should send tankers. It seems to be all right to trust in the Lord, but a water tanker is much more satisfactory. We only hope that the prayers specified how much rain was required, for God has a nasty habit of turning on the taps too full and swamping the countryside.

Time and time again that hoary old cliché that the Bible and the Prayer Book are best sellers is trotted out. This time it is the wife of the Bishop of Derby who tells us the old, old story. What has always puzzled us is that we often hear of people who are going to buy the latest novel, or a Pelican, but never have we heard of someone just popping round the corner to buy a Bible. We realise that publishers do not issue Bibles and Prayer Books for fun, and it is reasonable to expect that prisons, police courts and religious organisations have to keep plenty in stock. We know that prisons are good customers, for the wear and tear on Bibles in these places is terrific.

As an example of a politician's assumption of the low level of intelligence of the people, Mr. Ernest Bevin's statement is supreme. He said that the Mindszenty affair is symbolic of the struggle between "the freedom of the spirit" and the supporters of materialist doctrines. Surely, Mr. Bevin, who has reached his exalted position the hard way through the Trade Unions, does not really believe that? He is surely not ignorant of Catholicism's role in history, which is certainly not that of freedom of the spirit. Insofar as Freethinkers are concerned, the Mindszenty affair is a bitter struggle between two systems—the Church of Rome and the Church of Moscow.

Archbishop Downey has been letting off steam again. According to his latest effort, it appears that "the man who does not and will not pray is not only dishonest but foolish. He is a man who is not on speaking terms with his Maker, Preserver, Benefactor and Father." Well, well. It is good to know that the Archbishop is obviously on speaking terms with his Maker, and no doubt his Maker is delighted to be on speaking terms with the good Archbishop. And we must admit that similar conversations with other Archbishops, to say nothing of Popes and humble Priests, no doubt keep the Almighty from suffering intolerable boredom. For what can an All-perfect God do all day but chat gaily with his adorers? All the same, we wonder if he is not sometimes just a little bit bored to listen to the same old praise day in and day out for centuries? Or is he?

Archbishop McGrath is another priest who simply cannot stand unbelief and infidelity. We are "Satan's dupes," he cried out recently. "We wage war on the Father Almighty himself," and we take no account of 'Christ's divinity'—we even want to crush all religion 'supernatural and natural alike.' It is an awful indictment, though somehow or other we don't seem any worse for it.

The real reason for the Archbishop's outburst is, of course, that we are responsible "for the bestial atrocities and the innumerable and horrifying cruelties enacted in the East of Europe these last thirty years." Yet the curious thing about this is that Hitler was a son of his own Church, and remained a Catholic, as were nearly all his henchmen. Hitler, in fact, appealed to God much in the same way that Archbishop McGrath does now, and was just as certain that God was on his side.

Those "reprobate old divines who thundered through half a Sunday morning about the punishment to come must be chuckling," so runs an opening paragraph in "The Times." We think this an understatement. They must be "laughing their blooming heads off" at the efforts of modern parsons to fill their churches. The Methodists at Hably called at 13,000 houses and the net result was an increase of their congregations to 80% a third of whom, it is estimated, were non-churchgoers. The attraction was not "duty to God," or sermons on "Hell," but a chance to put questions to the parson, and refreshments afterwards. The idea that a parson would allow questions on his "home ground" is an indication of the lengths the Church will go in its attempt to keep a hold over the people. Of course, Freethinkers will not get the credit for this change of attitude.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2801.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

S. HEWISON.—Thanks for cuttings.  
R. MASON.—Books sent. The best means of propaganda is to send "The Freethinker" or books.

*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.*

*The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).*

## SUGAR PLUMS

It is announced that the Bible is being newly translated into modern English—the Church having at last recognised that the very reverent, special kind of English in the Authorised and most other Versions is completely out-dated. But does the Church really believe that using modern English and American idiom will add to the "holiness" of God's Word? Surely the people responsible for this move are aware that it is Bible English which gives the "revelation" of the Lord its special character? Once God is caught speaking to Moses as people do in a modern detective novel, it spells the death of the Holy Book as a Holy Book. By making its contents intelligible, the Church will simply turn it into a book of tales, folklore, and legends; for that is precisely what the Bible is.

Manchester readers are informed that Mr. R. H. Rosetti lectures in the Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, to-day (March 20), for the local N.S.S. branch, at 6.30 p.m. His subject is "An Evening with the Gods." Admission is free, and all readers and friends are invited to the reception.

The Rev. Chas. A. Haig, of the St. James Congregational Church, Newcastle, and Mr. J. T. Brighton, will debate the question "Does God Exist?", at 7.30 p.m. on Monday, March 21, in the Socialist Hall, Royal Arcade, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne. There is sure to be a full house and an early arrival is advisable. For details see advertisement.

The National Secular Society financial year closes on March 31, and subscriptions not already sent to the General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, should be forwarded before that date for inclusion in the Annual Balance Sheet to be presented at the Annual Conference in Nottingham.

Next Saturday, March 26, the Glasgow Secular will hold its Annual Dinner in the Grand Hotel, Charming Cross, Glasgow. The reception is at 6.30 p.m. Tickets, 11s. 6d. each, from Mrs. M. Whitefield, 351, Castlemilk

Road, Glasgow, S.4, should be secured without further delay. The General Secretary N.S.S. will be the guest spending an evening with the saints in the Grand Hotel, on Saturday, and "An Evening With the Gods," in the McLellan Galleries on Sunday evening at 7 p.m. Admission is free to the Sunday evening lecture, with some donation tickets.

The West London Branch N.S.S. will conclude their very successful 1948-49 Indoor Season in the Laurie Arms, on March 27, when that well-known N.S.S. speaker, Mr. L. Ebury, will speak on "The Best Way to Fight Religion." The branch intends to revive that very pleasant function, the Annual Dinner, and the first post-war dinner will take place at the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1, on Wednesday, April 13, at 7.30 p.m. Tickets, 8s. 6d., are available also to non-members, and can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Mr. H. Cleaver, 29, Dunraven Road, Shepherds Bush, W.12. The West London's pre-war dinners were always successful, and this opportunity of meeting old friends in a congenial atmosphere should not be missed. Make this event as widely known as possible. An early application for tickets is advisable.

How important Christians have always felt it to be to capture the children is again proven by the publication of the "Children's Church Newspaper," now issued by the Church Teaching Fellowship. It is a monthly, full of stories and pictures and articles, and has a circulation of 28,000. It is such a success that other publishers are planning papers on similar lines. What with religion first taught "at mother's knee," continued in school at an early age, followed up by almost compulsory Sunday School, church and chapel, and encouraged by gift books all about Jesus, or the Church, or the work of missionaries—is it strange that the average person comes to believe implicitly that "there must be something in it?" Freethought has still a hard road to travel—especially in the face of such an intense drive and in spite of the oft-repeated "You're flogging a dead horse."

The way the cinema attracts its tens of thousands where the Church only attracts its tens has at long last caused priests and parsons to burst out in angry protest. They blame their own methods—as does, for example, Mgr. R. Smith when he had to confess that "we cannot afford to ignore these modern weapons." He is certain that with the aid of the cinema, the Church "can reach millions who would never hear the truth." He added, "We should write the best novels, the best plays, the best scenarios, and radio scripts." Well, why don't Catholics? After all, God Almighty is behind them, aided on one side by Jesus, and on the other side by Mary. Surely a mere radio or script writer, generally quite indifferent to religion, would have no chance if the Lord took a hand?

The joke is that all the Church seems able to do is either to protest against the crowds who go to the cinema, or produce "apparitions" of the Virgin for some ignorant peasant children. And the Virgin herself appears to prefer to call herself the "Immaculate Conception," and leave it at that, rather than produce a heaven-sent script which the Methodist, Mr. Rank, would pay thousands of pounds for. Surely, the Pope could lecture the Almighty on this point? As Mgr. Smith says, "We should disdain no ally in the service of Christ." Then why does not Christ do something?

## THE ETHICS OF CONTROVERSY

AT the risk of boring some readers, I feel a reply to the recent letter by Mr. Howell Smith is necessary. And first, may I say that I should be sorry indeed to lose his good opinion, whether in private conversation or in the controversial field. He himself is always courteous, and particularly to opponents; and it may well be that sometimes I have no patience with writers like Dr. Conybeare and say so forcibly.

The word "pilatus" means, as Mr. Howell Smith says, "armed with a javelin," though Dr. Conybeare says "javelin-man," and it is as "javelin-man" that he disputes the meaning. He strongly opposed, as far as I can see, all mythical interpretations of the Gospels except his own, and he jeered throughout his book, the "Historical Christ," at solar and astral myth theories in connection with Jesus.

I have unfortunately not read the work of Niemojewski, and I never like discussing a book I have not read; but in his "Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus," Prof. Drews says that, according to Niemojewski, "the Pilate of the Christian legend was not originally an historical personage; the whole story of Christ is to be taken in an astral sense, and Pilate represents the constellation of Orion, the javelin-man *pilatus*, in Latin), with the arrow or lance-constellation (*Sagitta*), which is supposed to be very long in the Greek myth, and appears in the Christian legend under the name of Longinus, and is in the Gospel of John the soldier who pierces the side of Jesus with a spear (*longche*, in Greek). In the astral myth, the Christ hanging on the cross, or world-tree (*i.e.*, the Milky Way), is killed by the lance of Pilatus. Hence, according to Niemojewski, the Christian populace told the legend of a javelin-man, a certain Pilatus, who was supposed to be responsible for the death of the Saviour."

Now at the moment I am not concerned with this interpretation—though I have my own ideas on the solar myth theory which, in the main, I think is right. For Conybeare the whole theory, as put by Drews, John M. Robertson, and W. B. Smith, was so much fantastic nonsense which he did his best to discredit, as, indeed, he had a right to do. But he became so angry that he did his best also to dispute even the meaning of the word "pilatus" in a passage which I gave in my article, and which Mr. Howell Smith repeated. "What evidence is there," he jeers, "that Pilatus could mean a javelin-man even to a Latin? Many lexicographers interpret it in Virgil in the sense of *packed together or dense*, and in most authors it bears the sense of bald or despoiled."

Dr. Conybeare is too clever to say outright that "pilatus" does *not* mean "javelin-man" and it is here that Mr. Howell Smith comes in. In his "Jesus Not a Myth," he says that "Pilatus has no connection with *pilum* (javelin)," though if the reader takes the trouble to look at some Latin dictionaries he will find that it has. Cassell's Latin dictionary gives its definition as "Pilatus—armed with the *Pilum* or javelin." He says that "pilatus" means "peeled, bald, serried." Cassell's gives for bald head, "calvitium" and for bald place, "glabreta."

The truth is that Mr. Howell Smith was so awed at the superlative scholarship of an Honorary Fellow of University College, Oxford, that he did not think it at all necessary to check his Latin; with the result that he wiped away in one fell swoop, so to speak, the meaning

of "pilatus" as "armed with a javelin." For Conybeare, such a meaning showed that Niemojewski was a credulous ignoramus; for Mr. Howell Smith, humbly following in the great man's footsteps, it showed to what stupid lengths believers in the sun and astral myth theories could go if they had to *invent* a lying meaning to a word because it resembled Pilate.

It now turns out that Niemojewski was right after all in his definition of the word and that Mr. Howell Smith, due to "a slight carelessness," was wrong; but there still remains the question as to whether Prof. Drews endorsed Niemojewski—perhaps Mr. Howell Smith will tell us? If he did not, then almost everything arising out of this point, when directed against Drews, falls to the ground—or does it?

In any case, I still hold to my opinion. I say quite deliberately that either Conybeare was ignorant of Latin, or else he hoped that his readers would not test the meaning of the word "pilatus" for themselves; and I cite Mr. Howell Smith as a proof that I was right. Even he, a classical scholar, when he was writing "Jesus Not a Myth," did exactly what Conybeare was hoping intelligent readers would do—trust him implicitly.

But let us inquire a little further and see how Conybeare can be trusted on a few other points.

On page 34 of "The Historical Christ," he says that J. M. Robertson "asks us accordingly . . . to believe that the canonical book of Joshua originally contained this absurd tradition. . . ." Robertson says (in his reply in the "Literary Guide") that "This is absolutely false."

On page 185, Conybeare says "Everywhere else in his books he has argued that the 'myth' in question was founded on the signs of the Zodiac." Robertson says, "This again is absolutely false."

On page 32, Conybeare makes further statements about "Drews and Robertson" who were "not altogether capable of the breezy optimism of their instructor, Mr. W. B. Smith," and enlarges on this on pages 35 and 37. Robertson in his reply calls these statements "three concrete untruths." If I were now to call Dr. Conybeare "an unmitigated liar" would that show that I cannot "controvert like a gentleman" what the same he said of John M. Robertson?

In an earlier work, "Myth, Magic and Morals," Dr. Conybeare said "that Jesus was a successful exorcist we need not doubt, nor that he worked innumerable faith cures." Will Mr. Howell Smith tell us if he agrees with this, and if so, does he claim that the various illnesses which Jesus cured were due to devils, and that Jesus chased these devils out of the sick people? Or does he think it most ungentlemanly for me to refer to this kind of hopeless credulity?

On page 14 of "The Historical Christ," Conybeare tells us that "in these earliest documents (that is, Mark and the other early documents out of which Matthew and Luke supplemented Mark) Jesus is presented quite naturally as the son of Joseph and his wife Mary. . . ." On page 44, he says that "the Gospel of Mark" contains no hint "of the supernatural birth of Jesus. It regards him quite simply and naturally as the son of Joseph and Mary." On page 176, he says that in the "two basal documents . . . Jesus first comes on the scene as the humble son of Joseph and Mary. . . ." Will Mr. Howell Smith give me the precise chapter and verse for these statements from Mark? Or if he can't, am I no gentleman to say that Dr. Conybeare was either ignorant of the contents of Mark, or was



saying things "absolutely false," or giving us "concrete untruths," even though he was an Honorary Fellow of University College, Oxford?

And a word on Mr. McCabe's former opinion of this fine classical scholar. In the review he wrote for the "Literary Guide" in 1911, Mr. McCabe criticises Conybeare for "too much talk about sanity and insanity"—"Was there even an author so hopelessly uncritical in his methods," said Conybeare, apropos of Robertson. "At this," says Mr. McCabe, "those of us who know Mr. Robertson can only smile." He quotes, "The speculations of Messrs. Drews and Robertson" are "as far removed from truth and reality as the Athanasian Creed, and from sane criticism as the truculent buffooneries of the Futurists from genuine art." To which gentlemanly critique, Mr. McCabe replies, "These things will no doubt be cordially welcomed in orthodox circles, but they are grossly unjust and unworthy of Dr. Conybeare." Also "Apart from this subservience to clerical scholarship, Dr. Conybeare, in his haste stumbles, occasionally. No one would think, reading Mr. McCabe's constant references to Dr. Conybeare since these passages were written, that the great Oxford scholar could be in any way "grossly unjust" or that he "stumbles occasionally." He is the great champion now of all Historicists.

Whether I have vindicated myself from the charge of being "no gentleman" in controversy, I now leave readers to judge. But in any case, I do hope Mr. Howell Smith will be good enough to deal with the points I have raised. And of course, I do not class him in any way with Dr. Conybeare.

H. CUTNER.

"LIFE AFTER DEATH"

MR. WOOD's article of 20th February, "Life After Death," blows both hot and cold upon the problem, and leaves one in doubt as to his position. While admitting "there are, of course, many impostors" amongst mediums, who, however, "are mostly among the smaller fry," he yet declares that "those who have seen the best mediums will dismiss any suggestion of trickery and fraud." Since every major medium has been, at one time or another, found guilty of fraudulent practices, this is an astounding statement. For an exposure of clairvoyance, Mr. Wood should read McCabe's book, "Is Spiritualism Based on Fraud?"

Many properly-conducted tests of the pretensions of mediums have already been carried out by men of knowledge and scientific ability. Chief amongst these I would place the investigations of the late Harry Price. His considered judgement is given in the foreword to his book entitled "Leaves from a Psychic's Case Book," and runs as follows: "I have received no scientific proof that we survive the grave. . . . Ninety-nine per cent. of the (psychical) phenomena are due to fraud . . . self-deception, natural causes, mal-observation or sheer lying. . . . Practically every major physical medium has been caught cheating. . . . There is no scientific evidence that the dead have ever communicated with the living, or that a person, once dead, has ever come back."

The most recent inquiries by a Committee were those instituted by the late Archbishop Lang, the majority report of which was published in 1917. Of the Committee of ten, four clergymen and three laymen signed this report, the three other members being represented by a

minority report not yet made public. The conclusions reached by the majority were, as might be expected, not unfavourable to the probability that Spiritualism had something to recommend it, since it filled certain gaps in the faith. Here are a few excerpts:—

"Many alleged communications . . . fall below the level of spiritual insight and mental capacity shown by the communicators while still in this life. . . . There is no satisfactory evidence in favour of any paranormal physical phenomena (materialisations, apports, telekinesis, etc.). . . . The hypothesis of unconscious mental activity in the mind of the medium . . . is a strong alternative to that of the action of a discarnate entity. . . . On the other hand certain outstanding psychic experiences of individuals . . . make a strong *prima facie* case for survival and for the possibility of spirit communications."

A community of interest thus compels the Church to acknowledge the existence of its successful rival, while avoiding a whole-hearted embrace, and once again it displays its historic attitude of suppressing the evidence.

I would call Mr. Wood's attention to three evidential considerations which, in my view, go far to discredit the affirmation of survival. (1) The fact that in no instance has a sealed message, left before death by a well-known student of Spiritualism, been correctly read by a medium. (2) The fact that no trustworthy case has yet been adduced of a message from a dead genius, e.g., a poem by Shelley or Tennyson; a passage of prose by Dickens or Ruskin; a speech by Pitt or Gladstone. Spirit messages never rise above the level of a medium's vocabulary. (3) The fact that no person resuscitated after drowning has been conscious of continuous psychical survival.

W. HAWES.

HUMAN ECOLOGY

IT is perhaps a truism to say that each age brings forth new sciences, all of which are to be viewed with a critical, not to say sceptical eye. The number of books dealing with the problems of our times makes it imperative that each one is scrutinised thoroughly. The science of Human Ecology here presented\* in a large volume of five hundred and thirty-four pages demands more attention than most, owing to its length and comprehensiveness. "The new science . . . here presented, is merely the extension of already accepted biological practice in the field of sociology," say the publishers, having first described the book as courageous and challenging.

Both these adjectives are accurate, and for parts of the book at least, "eigent" might have been added. Most of this work is taken up with a scientific analysis of society under the following headings arranged in order of dominance: Finance, Industry, Sanctions, Administration, Politics, Education, Religion. Despite the order with which it is easy to disagree, the general picture of society is an accurate one, and the question posed in the Introduction, "Does human development necessitate the use of force to coerce men along certain predeterminate paths?" is vital, the answer having a special and tragic significance to-day.

The book does much to answer this question and is particularly outspoken in its discussion of the Church as one of those factors in this coercion. Its greatest fallacies, says the author, are "the mythic conception of an abstract and distant deity," and the confusion

\* Human Ecology," by Thomas Robertson. (William Maclellan, 21s.)

caused through "the conception of abstract morals." The consequences, it is argued, are the intolerance and persecution that have marked the progress of the Church throughout the ages, together with social intolerance of those guilty of conventional sins. So far so good. We should agree, too, when Mr. Robertson says of religion that "the passage of time only serves to corrode and decay it." But to dismiss evolution as a fiction in this context is to understate the case seriously. Mention is also made of the connection of the Church with the slave trade, and the fact that it has rarely championed the cause of human brotherhood or justice.

The function of the Church, it is concluded, is "to mediate 'reality' at the Supra Mental levels." With its tacit assumption of the nature of "reality" and Supra Mental levels, this function develops into a formula to which much or little meaning may be attached, according to the reader. This mediating "reality" will, it is claimed, dispel the myth of action which vitiates the attempts—if any—of the Church in setting up a reasonable society, since its inspirations are merely principles and abstractions.

Education is discussed at some length, and in the main, constructively. It is certainly true to say that much work in schools to-day is directed towards inculcating obedience (of an unquestioning nature) to external authority, though to say that the objective of education is "to mediate 'reality' through mind, emotions and body," is to say at once too much and too little. If education can be said to have one objective, it should be that of fostering the habit of thinking critically, but it is probably true, to say that education has no one end, and that in this field, ends are so diverse, as to be merely means to other temporary "ends."

The other sections are stimulatingly developed, and the argument is, as I have indicated, in a large measure cogent. At the worst, this book will cause fresh questioning of motives and ideas; at best, it will cause discussion of a concrete nature. If it fails, as I believe it does, to provide a complete blueprint, it does clear the ground, and should obviate much woolly and unscientific thinking.

The publishers are to be congratulated upon the strong and serviceable binding, as too many books of this size fall apart with little more than ordinary handling. The lack of an adequate index prevents the book from being as useful as it might otherwise be, and this defect should be remedied in future editions. An index of quotations is not sufficient. The glossary provided is a great help in following the author's terminology, and the several appendices shed much light on certain portions of the text.

VICTOR E. NEUBURG.

### HIS HANDIWORK !

Flies delight  
To buzz and bite,  
But never stop to think,  
All rotten meat  
Is sweet to eat—  
They thrive on things that stink!

On putrid muck  
They'll sit and suck—  
Then poison human food;  
But One above  
Their ways must love,  
For God made all things good!

W. H. WOOD.

### A TRIBUTE TO A GENIUS

READERS who have paid me the honour of studying what I have written in these columns from time to time will be aware that I have, as a critic, one possibly unfortunate trait—the trait of real enthusiasm for writers whose work I feel to be worth while. I have written articles in praise of writers not often mentioned in such journals as this, mainly because I feel that to appreciate the great men of the present and the past is part of a liberal education—because, in short, I feel that there has sometimes been a tendency in our time to over-stress the scientist at the expense of the artist, and that is a tendency which I feel should to some extent be counteracted.

Last year I wrote one article of the type which I have been just mentioning. It was in effect a review of Mr. John Gawsworth's selection of the best short stories of that wayward genius, M. P. Shiel. Shiel was one of the oddest of modern literary figures, and he wrote, in "The Purple Cloud," what is possibly the best of the scientific-fantastic novels in the vein of H. G. Wells' scientific romances. Shiel had, however, a highly characteristic style of his own; a page of his book is so specially peculiar to himself that it would be instantly recognised by any sensitive reader. The selection of his stories published by Victor Gollancz was, in effect, a memorial to him here. But in America they do these things more elaborately, and I have just received Mr. A. Reynolds Morse's "The Works of M. P. Shiel" (Fantasy Publishing Co., Los Angeles; 6 dollars). This is described by its author as a study in bibliography, and it is a noble book, which will be appreciated by all who are in any way enthusiastic about Shiel's work. It gives a most exhaustive account of every edition of every book of his which has appeared; it describes Shiel's life and work in brief compass, reprinting two essays by Shiel himself; it even gives a list of the books in the great man's library (in which, I must admit, I was gratified to find two books of my own included). And the volume ends with a touching tribute to Shiel, delivered by Mr. Edward Shanks at the Golders Green Crematorium on February 24, 1947, when a small number of Shiel's admirers gathered to say goodbye to him.

This note is really only a recommendation of Mr. Morse's book (which is obtainable in this country, at 32s. 6d., from Mr. E. J. Carnell, 17, Burwash Road, S.E.18). I can, therefore, I think, best conclude by quoting Mr. Shanks' final message:—

"His existence on this earth is not at an end. We are here to pay tribute to the poet and prophet, but not the last tribute. We ourselves will honour his memory not only now but hereafter in the most practical way—by reading what he wrote. And others will come after us who will from time to time demand that his work shall be made available for them to read."

That is a sentiment, I am sure, which all Free-thinkers will share. And those of us who have appreciated the very real genius of Shiel—especially those of us who knew him personally—will be deeply grateful to Mr. Morse for having erected this really fine monument to him, which will make the position of all future students of Shiel comparatively easy.

JOHN ROWLAND.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTIAN RATIONALISM

Sir,—In defending his use of the phrase "Christian Rationalist," Mr. F. A. Ridley says in his letter ("The Freethinker," February 20) that he used the word "Rationalist" not in its "literal," but in its "technical or theological sense," and that in that sense "a Rationalist is one who accepts the use of scientific, literary and historical criticism in relation to the Bible."

Just so: but the point at issue is not the meaning of the word "Rationalist," with which we are all familiar, but his application of the phrase "Christian Rationalist."

I assume that, as a Freethinker, Mr. Ridley will agree that to rationalise Christianity—that is, to subject its doctrines to the test of reason by means of scientific and historical criticism—is, more or less, to discredit it. In that case I would ask him whether those who, by such rational methods of inquiry, destroy faith in historic Christianity can, with any consistency, be called Christians? Yet he cites them as examples justifying his use of the phrase "Christian Rationalist."

To apply to a Rationalist an epithet so obviously at variance with his views as "Christian" is an abuse of words which no authority should sanction; and I maintain that in no sense can so incongruous a combination be justified.

Mr. Ridley says that I do not "appear to question 'The Gloomy Dean's' right to be called a Christian." I am surprised that (in Mr. Ridley's case) I fail to make my meaning clear. If he will favour me by a re-perusal of my article, he will surely see that it is mainly written for the purpose of proving directly and by implication, that, as a believer in the scientific theory of evolution, Dr. Inge cannot be a Christian.—Yours, etc., A. YATES.

THE MINDSZENTY TRIAL

Sir,—I thought "The Freethinker" claimed primarily to be logical and reasoned. But when your contributor F. I. Gould states Mihailovitch, Mamui and Petkov were murdered and then: "Masaryk, I am firmly convinced was murdered," I begin to wonder. It would have been far better to have given an odd fact or two to convince readers.

The trials were witnessed by plenty of independent people who could have reported to the world any "frame-up." Why didn't they?

Dimitrov fought back against his accusers in the Reichstag trial and beat them. Why didn't the innocent Mr. Mindszenty? Don't tell "Freethinker" readers that he was suffering from the "truth-drug," Mr. Gould.

If "The Freethinker" wishes to examine the merits of the trials of priests accused of plotting against their homeland under the cloak of their religion, I suggest it be factual. There are enough newspapers and periodicals catering for ignorant minds, peddling anti-Communist dope issue after issue ad nauseum.—Yours, etc., AUSTIN FORBES.

"The Freethinker" does not want to examine the merits of these trials; our contributors have a free hand in expressing their opinions.—EDITOR.]

Religious fanatics of the Russian Orthodox Church staged a mass baptism. Led by a "warmly clad priest," a group marched down to the River Volga and plunged through a hole in the ice (not the "warmly clad priest" though). The fanatics had been told that baptism would cure all diseases, but most of the group ended in hospital with pneumonia and deafness. The report adds that a child of three was immersed three times. "Pravda" denounces the officials concerned for allowing this Christian group to stage a baptism in the nude, and protested against the ceremony "dictated by the idiocy of a former age," and urged that extreme measures be taken against those concerned. In the event of "measures" being taken, we suppose that it will be instanced as a further proof of persecution against Christians.

OBITUARY

HELEN RITCHIE

The death of Mrs. Helen Ritchie, of 62, Elderslie Street, Glasgow, took place on March 6, at the age of 80 years. At her request a Secular Service was read by the Secretary of the Glasgow Secular Society who expressed sympathy with her sons, daughters and grandchildren, and hoped that this family—a line of Freethinkers associated with the local movement for over 100 years—would continue to play an active part in the work Mrs. Helen Ritchie so sincerely sponsored. M. I. W.

JOHN MacKAY

Our very sincere sympathy goes out to Mr. and Mrs. MacKay, of Worcester Park, on the death of their son, John, at the early age of 17 years. A strong intellect enabled him to battle against the misfortunes of poor health. As a lover of nature and culture he had no need or use for gods anywhere, and the whole of his outlook was based upon an Atheistic foundation. He often felt the keenness of Christian spite to which he responded with a finer touch of character. The remains were cremated at Croydon, Surrey, on March 9, where, before the sorrowing parents and other members and relatives of the family a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary of the 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.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 22, 7 p.m.: Conway Memorial Lecture. Prof. L. HOBBEN, F.R.S., D.Sc.: "The New Authoritarianism."

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, March 21, 7 p.m.: Course of Three Lectures by J. C. FLUGEL, B.A., D.Sc., "Psychology and the Problems of Peace." Tickets, 6s., R.P.A. members, 4s.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: George Eliot Reconsidered, Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Socialism and Parliament," Mr. R. H. ROBERTS.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-15 p.m.: "What is Agnosticism?" Mr. H. L. SEARLE.

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Debate: "That Communism Will Benefit the Workers." Aff. Mr. HAURY McSHANE (C.P.), Neg. Mr. H. W. HENDERSON (Ind.).

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Church and Politics," Mr. F. A. HORNINGBROOK.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "An Evening With the Gods," Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (General Secretary N.S.S.).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Religion and Politics," Rev. KENNETH WRIGHTS.

Newcastle (Socialist Hall, Pilgrim Street).—Monday, March 21, 7-30 p.m. Debate: "Does God Exist?" Aff. Rev. CHARLES HYG (St. James Church), Neg. M. J. T. BRIGHTON (N.S.S.).

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