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## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Efficacy of Prayer

THE belief in the efficacy of prayer has fallen on evil days. In the language of the street, there is a "slump" in this branch of the great spirit business, investors are wary and vendors are correspondingly depressed, while the former were led to believe in the possibility of material dividends upon their capital business. It is true that the dividend was not forthcoming, but people were told of others who had received splendid returns and by this means their faith was kept whole. But this very old-fashioned "dodge" has lost its power, and people are now informed that it is wrong, even wicked, to expect any material response to prayer. The response to prayer is purely spiritual. Their effect is seen in an altered frame of mind, and as everyone is continually experiencing mental change, the vendors of spiritual wares see it is difficult to prove that the change is not due to the prayers that have been said. In this way prayer is reduced to a mental tonic or an intellectual anaesthetic. You must believe, in the first place, that praying will do you good, and when you have prayed you will experience benefit from the performance. Many people, it may be noted, have been cured of imaginary diseases by doses of bread-pills or coloured water.

As is not unusual, when the Christian states a position he does so in a way that begs the whole point at issue. If Christianity is useful, if it is performing some beneficial function in life, then there is need, before it is removed, that we should have some idea of what is going to take its place. The Freethinker's whole case is that Christianity is, at best, harmless, and normally it is obstructive and dangerous. What will you put in its place? If a man believes that some sort of a god is necessary, he is bound to provide a new sort of god before he destroys the one already established. But the question of putting something in the place of Christianity does not trouble the Freethinker; the Christian really has no right to manufacture a lot of conundrums and then look to the Freethinker to find answers to them.

To be more serious, what is the Freethinker trying to do? His whole aim may be summed up in a sentence. We wish to destroy the belief in, and the influence of, supernaturalism in science, in morals, in sociology. That is the negative aspect of our work. The positive aspect is that of encouraging the growth of true ideas in all these departments. And, of course, if a man believes that you cannot have a sound science, a healthy morality, or a progressive sociology without supernaturalism, he is warranted in asking for something equally effective in its place. But in that case, the discussion obviously turns on whether supernaturalism is necessary or not. We assert that the whole influence of supernaturalism in all these departments is to mislead and to obstruct. It serves no useful purpose whatever. Our function is not that of a surgeon faced with the problem of finding a new leg for a man after he has amputated a useful

one. . . It is that of a physician removing a stricture in the social artery. The physician knows that when the obstruction is removed, the normal recuperative powers of the patient will do the rest. The Freethinker knows that when the poison of Christianity no longer operates, human efforts will freely supply all that is necessary to life and happiness.

Christianity has had a long run, religion has had a still longer one. And during its lengthy career religion has become more or less closely associated with a thousand-and-one things with which it has no real connection. But to ignorance and unreflection, when things are seen together in fact, their separation in thought is almost impossible. Religion has always been associated with morality, people have expressed their ideas in terms of religion, therefore, says ignorance, without religion of some sort our morality and our ethics cannot stand. That is exactly the way we can imagine some fear-stricken savage thinking the first time someone suggested that seeds should be sown without sprinkling the ground with blood as a sacrifice to his god. The two things had always been associated, therefore they could not be separated. But when courage had its way, the blood sprinkling was seen to be useless. The savage did not have to put something in its place. He simply cancelled it, and applied his intelligence and energy to the work before him. Ignorance created the union between religion and life, and is still fearful that when a divorce is pronounced the social structure will collapse.

What then is the use of the providence of God if he cannot guard himself from destruction? If a man is left to reap the consequences of his actions, whether they be wise or foolish, on what ground do we look to God for help? I recall a burst of truth from a well-known Christian champion of religion suddenly bursting out that the action of God towards man looked like "some blackguard kicking his heels in the clouds, not, perhaps, bent on mischief, but indifferent to the fact that he had caused it." That, I think, is a very correct view of God and his activities concerning his dealing with human beings. And with it I may well quote the first Huxley, when he was driven to his position of Atheism. He said:—

"Of all the senseless babel that I have ever had occasion to read, the demonstrations of these philosophers who undertake to tell us about the nature of God would be the worst."

So far, so good, but it is a pity not to have taken a deeper study of history into the origin of gods, which to-day is quite as obvious as other superstitions. Very little is now done which deals with the creation of gods and their gradual weakening; good and evil are veritably no more than aspects of cosmic phenomena in relation to an organism, and their degree of "goodness" or "badness" is tested by standards created by the organism itself. I am not denying the reality of either one or the other. All I am pointing out is their meaning

and their spheres of application. But if we did believe that nature had its own "morality," then the outlook would, indeed, be black, for morality in nature means an analysis of the morality of the intelligence controlling nature. And this means that we are in the grip of an over-ruling force, so callous to human suffering and standards of judgment, so alien to human morality, that disease may easily come from the consequences of a good action as from a bad one. Of course, these things do occur now, but we can be, at least, without the depressing feeling that we are the mere sport of a supreme power that mocks our efforts and sits unmoved.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## DAVID—THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

### II

DAVID himself was a "hero" of the same type. He had physical courage, guile, and, when judged by the primitive standards of his age, was a good soldier, a shrewd politician, and, in his way, an apt enough forerunner of Machiavelli, absolutely unscrupulous, and a master of "real-politik" in the parish-pump politics of the petty Eastern States of his day. All of which above qualities make for success and esteem amongst such barbarians as the Greeks in the time of Homer, the Arabs in the time of Mohammed, and the Hebrews in the time of David.

If, as tradition alleges, he was a poet as well, this would still further enhance his fame, since eloquence has always ranked very high in the scheme of values amongst races in the "upper strata of barbarism," as the Hebrews of 1000 B.C. were. Some of the Psalms ascribed to him are quite bloodthirsty enough to have been authentic compositions of "the sweet singer of Israel," even though he can hardly have written the whole of our present *Book of Psalms*, many of which seem to date from a much later and more sophisticated era in Jewish history, and to have celebrated events long after David's time.

The foregoing catalogue of virtues and vices, amply vouched for, and depicted in the Bible narratives which related his career, are probably adequate to explain David's obviously tremendous reputation in his own age amongst his own subjects, but they do not explain it amongst the more sophisticated Jews of a later age, by which time civilisation had been to some extent imposed upon the Jews by their contact with races of a higher culture. Later, Judaism paid at least lip-service to an ethical code which the biblical hero of innumerable murders, who danced naked before the Lord—and his wife's handmaidens—not to mention the Bathsheba affair, certainly did not. As our author indicates in his preface, it was to the Jewish priests that David owed both his throne in his lifetime, and his enormous posthumous reputation as the national hero of Israel and the ancestor of the Messiah.

The reason for this is clear: King David, the successor of Saul and the conqueror of the Philistines, may be, and is in fact, so congruous a barbaric hero that he probably is an actual creation of history. But "The Man After God's Own Heart," the *religious* hero, is a creation of priestly fiction. He dates from the period of the Babylonian exile several centuries after his reign, when the priestly editors and authors of our present Old Testament set to work to "revise" the original documents written by polytheists into the revelation of the one true God of Israel, Jehovah. The founders of "Judaism" who lived at this time, re-wrote the whole previous history of Israel from their own religious stand-

point. The ancient Kings of Israel were converted into pious worshippers of Jehovah, which they certainly were not in practice, as even the priestly editors had to admit in some cases. Whilst David, the most famous, and probably the most wicked of them all, "suffered a sea-change" into a *religious* saint. Henceforth, the Messiah could only arise from the "House of David".

No doubt the clerical historians took a few liberties with their hero's character. The occasional lapses into a maudlin piety which are periodically interposed at appropriate moments throughout the crime-strewn career of the "Holy" King, sound remarkably like clerical glosses. The authentic David was probably a bluff old savage who murdered and raped without remorse and who enjoyed the same healthy immunity from hypocrisy—which is essentially a vice peculiar to civilisation—as did his spiritual blood-brothers and contemporaries, the Homeric heroes, who killed, raped and got drunk with a barbaric absence of all inhibitions.

Such was the genesis of the subsequent clerical legend of "The Man After God's Own Heart," the ancestor of Jesus Christ (through Joseph, not Mary, which is a most significant omission, was this too, "dictated by the Holy Ghost"?). Our anonymous author debunks this legend with shattering force, and lays bare the reality with a devastating pen. As he truly states: "Amongst the *chosen people of God*—the most deprived of all nations—it is pretty certain that the worst and wickedest man of that nation was David, 'The Man After God's Own Heart.' The truth of this proposition will be abundantly proved in this short history."\* It certainly is!

It is impossible to give a detailed analysis of this literary bomb that exploded in the placid camp of Whig theology in 1761, shortly after the death of that pious monarch, George II, to whom an unwary divine had rashly compared "The Man After God's Own Heart." But from the tremendous recapitulation of his argument in his final pages, I cannot forbear to quote the delicious summary of David's most famous exploit: his youthful set-to with Goliath, which started him on his dazzling career: "and by knocking a man down with a stone, whom, if he had missed once he had four more chances of hitting, and from whom, at the last, he could easily have run away; he was advanced to the dignity of son-in-law of the King."

Written from a similarly Deistic point of view to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, *The Life of David, The Man After God's Own Heart*, is certainly one of the most remarkable anti-religious pamphlets in our language. It has lost nothing of its point to-day, and could be reissued with advantage. Thanks largely to the unknown author and his kind, Bibliolatry is no longer the force that it was. But it is not yet extinct, a reissue would fill a gap in Freethought literature, for I know of no more damning criticism of the Bible and its heroes. Many Liberal Christians might, to-day, agree with its contentions, but that was not the case in 1761, and only a Freethinker, and one, at that, who was absolutely fearless, would have then dared to speak the truth about the reputed ancestor of Jesus Christ.

F. A. RIDLEY.

\* Author's italics.

The essential characteristics of all religion is that it presupposes existences and powers which are not subject to the evidence of the senses, and which, therefore, evade all the ordinary tests of truth and falsehood. In such regions, accordingly, the fancy is free to expatiate at will, unchecked and unhampered by contact with the hard realities of life.—SIR J. G. FRAZER.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE POPISH EMPIRE

MOST readers of history are to some extent familiar with the quarrels which arose between the various subject-rulers of the great Slave Empire of Rome as that Empire, long before the Barbarian Invasions finally terminated its existence, slowly proceeded to its doom. The gradual disintegration of the Empire which occasioned those quarrels was not something inevitable, but was due to internal contradictions, the never-ending conflict between the Old and the New, a conflict survived only by those States which are capable of continuously adapting themselves to the ever-changing conditions of the world around them. The Roman State lacked that quality and perished; the Chinese State, much older than the Roman, possessed it and survives. So much has been made clear in the writings of at least one forcible writer of our own day—F. A. Ridley.

These quarrels between rival authorities in territories abandoned by the Roman legions had oftener than not a religious bearing. Hence it happened that on certain occasions there were two Popes, each anathematizing and excommunicating the other; on certain other occasions there were three and even four claimants to the Chair of St. Peter. It was something in the nature of a contest between lonely and haunted ghosts after the central secular arm had ceased to lend its support to any one of them. As Rome's imperial grip weakened, the ecclesiastical grip over her seceding dominions tightened—at first under diverse conflicting authorities, until eventually all Western Europe came under the "spiritual" domination of Rome and so remained until in the 16th century the Protestant Reformation achieved a partial rescue.

In our own contemporary world there is a striking analogy to the above course of development in what is happening now in Southern Ireland. In the early years of the present century it was plausibly argued that with the elimination of British rule Ireland would automatically and speedily disentangle herself from the Roman octopus—the basis of this contention being that Ireland's adherence to the Roman Catholic Faith was only to emphasise her distinctive character from that of Protestant England. As yet, however, there is little sign of any such disentanglement. On the contrary, it seems that as the British grip loosens the Roman grip tightens. In this connection we note the spirit of abject prostration in which the last-elected Administration on its assumption of office addressed the "Holy Father" at Rome. No secular Authority was ever addressed with a more fulsome and cowering obeisance from the leaders of a supposedly independent State. The Jesuistical doctrine that this world is indeed a "vale of tears," to be regarded as a mere passage to a life of eternal bliss or misery beyond the grave, had to be duly impressed on the denizens of the Emerald Isle. Otherwise how was a race distinguished by its unruliness to be governed at all? Some powerful and ready-at-hand narcotic had surely to be administered. In this connection one recalls a sentence from Marx's essay on Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*: "Religion is the cry of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, the opium of the people."\*

As everyone knows, there is always a gap between the outlook of an Administration and the outlook of the people administered. In trying to assess the width of this gap one may examine, amongst other things, the figures on emigration. The jump in these figures for

Southern Ireland in the years since the war are not without significance: 30,000 in 1946, 40,000 in 1947, and still increasing. For the most part, these emigrants make their homes in rationed and regimented Britain. It is worth noting also the main quality of the emigrants: of the 30,000 who emigrated from the Irish South in 1946, 18,000 were young women between the ages of 18 and 25, 12,000 young men of approximately similar ages. One is forced to the conclusion that the eagerness of people to escape from the "Paradise" of De Valera's creation is quite as keen as the eagerness of so many people here to escape from their Home austerity to Commonwealth affluence; even more so, because the emigrants settling here can certainly expect no affluence. Those ardent Left-Wingers in this country who so delight in a section of the Irish people's ignorant antipathy to England delude themselves when they think that under its new and native Administration Southern Ireland is necessarily taking a more progressive line. If it has taken the Southern Irish five hundred years to shake off British rule, it is likely to take them five thousand to shake off the far more pernicious rule of Rome.

There is another interesting parallel in history as to what happens to the nation which, after throwing off the yoke of a secular and alien regime, falls under the yoke of a regime which is much more crushing. We refer to the centuries of struggle which Spain underwent to rid herself of Mohammedan rule. She succeeded in the end. Not many years passed, however, before it was realised that "out of the frying-pan into the fire" has never added to human felicity, and those with eyes undimmed by left-wing illusions can visualise both Spain and Southern Ireland as engaged to-day in a far grimmer struggle than either country has experienced hitherto. Both countries are to-day, with Portugal, the most heavily-garrisoned outposts of the Popish Empire. That the garrisons consist of priests rather than police gives the tie even greater strength.

No one can safely predict what is to happen in the future: far too many unexpected factors keep cropping up. But it is a fair assumption that with the world's forces arrayed as they are to-day, if there is ever to be a second Battle of the Boyne, it is not likely that the Roman Catholic side will win.

HIBERNICUS.

### THE CELESTIAL HARMONY

FROM the promenade above we heard a long adult baa. This was not entirely sheepish, for it contained a merry element, and the adult sheep's voice lacks that. The meek creature may show its emotion by a hop, skip and jump, but its voice corresponds to its face, and that is animal, but not animated.

The lamb's voice is better, for the lamb is playful, and so innocent; no wonder Christians use the little dear as a symbol for Christ taking away the sins of the world. Here, however, it is not completely appropriate, for the lamb is a trifle irresponsible for such a task. The adult sheep should have been the symbol, its expression being more fitted to the idea of a man of sorrow acquainted with grief.

The long baa was several times repeated, and by now we both were looking. It came from a human being, but to say from one made in the image of God would, to a theist, be blasphemy, and, to an atheist, a falsehood. The man was being wheeled in a chair, and, having recognised a friend, was baaing with delight. The face gaped with joy, so that the pain at seeing obvious idiocy was tempered by the realisation that the faulty being

\* Quoted from an article in "The Freethinker," by F. A. Ridley.

was capable of intense happiness. God, the Christian would say, had given it this capacity, for all adversity is compensated, either now or hereafter.

Following that day, flooded by sunlight and warmed with that radiance, there came a night and day of thunder and rain. Such a time is unfit for the perambulation of idiots, but in the daytime two atheists were again abroad. They sought and found a series of shelters cut by an enterprising municipality in the cliff, and from one of these they heard the pounding of the sea upon the shore, and watched the heaving waters answering to the forces of moon, sun, and wind. Nearer, the continual stream of rain rushed along one side of their shelter, down from the cliff-top, out to the trees open to the clouded sky, and on to the beach and the billows.

The atheists were delighted to see the bubbles borne along by the stream; how some quickly burst, how others were checked by impediments, then drove on over or around these, and by a circuitous route reached the main stream, and how some burst against the impediments. These were like ships striking rocks. There were others which kept to the chief channel of the little river, and which, racing on strongly and unbroken, were eventually lost to view.

To one of the atheists the race of the bubbles suggested comparison with human existence. Some men are born weak, and swiftly perish, some are born robust, but many of these meet unusual difficulties and perish also early, although the hindrances serve only to check or deflect the course of others. Then there are those well-adapted to the world, whose course is always easy.

The bubbles, however, went out of sight, and somewhere came to an end; the human existences also come to an end. How ever long a bubble lasted its ultimate fate was as that of all other bubbles, and it then mattered not a jot that it had lasted longer.

The bubbles could not help themselves; their course was governed by their structure and the forces applied to them. The atheist could not see how in its end or its course the human being differed from the bubble, until he thought of consciousness. The bubble did not know nor care what was happening to it, the man does. What happens in the end does not matter to man or bubble, but what a man feels does matter.

Since there is so much suffering in the world, man has invented a heaven where he is consoled for every sorrow. He has invented also immortality, so that there is some logic in his idea that earthly suffering doesn't matter. Theists, however, do not shout for joy when their loved ones die; their tears are then as bitter as the atheist's, and the atheist cannot withhold his sympathy.

Beautiful heaven was, however, once not the only state expected. In the middle of the 18th century, the priest-ridden people of North America were crushed beneath a spiritual tyranny of powerful preachers like Jonathan Edwards. "The God," he said, "that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire . . . You are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe and burn it asunder. If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least regard or favour, that instead of that, he will only tread you under foot, and though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, he will not regard that, but

he will crush you under his feet without mercy; he will crush out your blood and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments so as to stain all his raiment."

That period passed, and gentle men of letters came of such stock, such as Bryant, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Emerson, Holmes and Lowell.

Take the life of one of these. It is a pretty, well-made bubble, and goes coursing along the principal channel from eternity to eternity, seemingly meeting little mechanical obstruction. But what about Longfellow as a conscious entity? The man seems fortunate, for he is handsome, robust, and prudent, and very early he is in a favourable social and economic position. He marries a beautiful girl and spends with this refined and affectionate wife four years of happy scholarly and congenial labour. God is perhaps jealous, for then his wife dies; peacefully, but after long suffering. Such a shock must make for some enduring sadness in a man. The passage of time and a deliberate averting of the mind from the event will allow life still to be tolerable.

The poet marries again; his second wife is described as a woman nobly-planned, whose qualities of mind and temper were outstanding, "rising towards the nature of her husband like flame to flame." But again God strikes. Eighteen years pass, and Mrs. Longfellow to amuse her younger children is making seals; a lighted drop of wax falls into her lap, and her skirts of gauze envelop her in flames. Before the eyes of her husband she falls, mortally hurt.

Longfellow's diary remained for long after that day a complete blank; his heart is full of sorrow, but above the grief he sows his thoughts, as the early American settlers sowed the corn over the graves of those fallen in battle with the Indians.

His friends, Hawthorne, Sumner and Agassiz die, and he loses a child. Then the bubble sails placidly and lonely to its end, still believing, it is said, in God. I wonder!

There will be compensation says the Christian. In heaven will be the two Mrs. Longfellow, his children, and his friends. How does the Christian know? He does not; he has a little fairy story, that is all.

There is also the idiot on the cliff, what will his reward be; will he be in heaven with an intellect or without one, and if with one, will he then be the man who was wheeled along the cliff-top?

J. G. LUPTON.

## THE RESURRECTION OF AN ACID DROP

LAST Sunday morning whilst wandering among the churchyard's dead, I came to a headstone inscribed with these words:—

"Here lies a candle that lost its flame,  
It tried to find it and went insane."

Now is there any need to prove where does the flame go when you blow out the candle? You can easily prove it for yourself. I beg your pardon. No sir, I am not one of the regular fellows here even though my clothes are made mostly of fresh air, and my acquaintance with a guinness of an evidently casual character.

You are from the next world, sir? How interesting to those who have ceased to believe in it. But don't let me interrupt your spirit message. . . .

I was born (the ghost began) in the very green isle of Erin, by parents chosen by God, because they were a fair people who never spoke well of one another.

Brought up in the Church no one can be saved out of, I believed, I believed . . . all that, and more.

But a delusion may be as consoling as a reality provided it be accepted as genuine. So at the early age of 17 I began to examine the conditions of the emotions and the nature and power of the thinking equipment, including the thing we forget with and— Ah, Bisto! I became the wisest among the sons of men, for I alone discovered that I knew . . . nothing.

Bound to a profession which was considered good enough for my earthly father, both parents regarded it as flying in the face of the Heavenly Ditto, that their young hopeful could so far forget himself as to follow his own inclinations.

But my allegiance was not to a church, not to a trade, but to the great Spirit of Adventure and to the eternal call of the nonsense that suited my nonsense.

The Christian war to end war came in 1914, with all its glamour of liberty, lies and libels. Soon I found myself in France with the British Army in the place we mentioned in last Sunday's Scripture and conversing in a language that the clergy do not understand. Severely wounded, I crawled back from the mud of Flanders to Dublin, more dead than alive, a sadder, but, I hope, a wiser gossoon, convinced that the only way to get a sensible world is to get sensible men and when men get sensible enough they will get rid of the world altogether.

After many more reincarnations I took possession of the body of a public servant and here I remain, a ghostly figure, flitting through the same old routine day in day out, from year's end to year's end, with scarcely a sustained thought outside it, unwed and unmourned.

Pardon my ectoplasm, but I want to come to a lady over there. Yes, you.

There is an obsessing entity here who has been in possession of a body for the past 53 years with long legs that still carry with them the benefits of a previous devotion to the Cork Hornpipe.

Can you place him?

It is the absence of anything like a material foundation which makes his one small head so secure. His failure sometimes to liquidate himself completely whilst shaving can be traced to the faulty manipulation of a long-suffering safety razor blade on the inside of a glass tumbler, emptied of the other fellow's religion.

Since he joined the innumerable caravan that moves to the pale realms of shade, he has given up drink, including Rome, Reason, Russia and other habits still fostered by modern school methods.

He is one of those wicked vegetarians who preach that man can live on bread alone and does not think much of those Christians who slaughter and devour God's creatures that live in the sea, in the air, and on the land.

Smoking, he says, gives as great a proof of the existence of a world invisible to the non-smoker as the visions of the man suffering from the same complaint.

He does not try to reason with the Sunday social wet-blankets; he leaves them to God, who also ignores them.

His appearance in your own evolutionary series marks an event of profound and revolutionary importance which may not be realised until perhaps you join a developing circle of the N.S.S., which is the great unifying link between the world of matter and the world of spirit.

Again, you are asked to get the diagnosis and advice of the editor on the possibility of a Pen Pal Corner, for all displaced, lonely, and unmarried ghosts, with or without invisible means of support.

Your Spirit Guide from both sides of the border, is a Zulu medicine man called Sugar Plum, who suggests that a stuffed mind cannot see secret things and to leave off thinking or you will break something.

In conclusion, let me tell you that the life of Death is the death of Life and this Death-force gets its sustenance from the Life-force.

The essential value of both is shown not by the number who get on with them but by the number of people who can get on without them. So now you know where the flame goes when you blow out the candle.

I want to come to a gentleman over there. Yes, friend—you.

While you were asleep, I saw an Indian chief with a tomahawk build up over your head. Now don't get alarmed. He was probably your own guide showing himself and— Sorry, I have run out of protoplasm. I shall call back and do you later. . . .

And that's how I first met the Acid Drop Ghost. Now it is not for me to agree or disagree with all of these findings, but after reading "God and Beauty," by your brilliant Peter Cross, I came to the conclusion that perhaps this ghost comes from "The people who have not had love from their families, not had love from their fellow men, in fact, those who have suffered either by their own fault, or because they have not been lucky enough to experience real love."

PATSY FAGAN.

## EDUCATION AND HUMANISM

THE schools should teach only that which is known. Freedom of opinion is incompatible with instruction in particular and controverted opinions. This is true not only of religious opinions but is equally true of moral, political, aesthetic, and historical opinions and interpretations. The secularist cannot avoid the conclusion that formal education should be confined to technical instruction, and preferably I think to instruction in subjects of communal utility. I use the word communal in the strict sense of a local and particular communality.

Reading, writing and mathematics should be taught as essential and intelligible parts of a general technical apprenticeship for all. The present specialised apprenticeships, deliberately restricted to a few, are a bigger disgrace to our claims to equality of opportunity than the monopolising of the "public" schools by the wealthy. Nor ought this education to be abstract, but should be related to useful and necessary communal demands; making use of communal laboratories and workshops which should not be used merely for instruction, but serve the whole community. It is obvious that this demands more than a few alterations to the school curriculum. It would be part of a fundamental social change in which the modern centralised state was replaced by federations of local and regional communal units in which production, education and administration formed an integrated whole. The solution of this country's economic problems lies in the wholesale application of modern chemical knowledge to the aim of increasing our independence of imported food and materials. This will not be done by scientifically illiterate politicians, but by the integration of science and administration under popular control.

I would hope, in conclusion, that no one will jump to the conclusion that the restriction of formal education to technique is a slight to the glories of Literature, Art, Philosophy, etc. Nothing of the sort is intended. But I stress that the former is properly a subject for instruction and authority, while the latter subjects are the sphere of discussion and private judgment.

JAMES R. HOWES.

## ACID DROPS

Whenever the *Holborn Recorder* has space to fill, it manages to do so with a thoroughly "uplift" article—one of those typically boring and very pious ones which either appeals to "our Lord," God Almighty, or "the Greatest Book of all." "You will feel the better" for reading it, we are unctuously told. It is the Bible which is going to help us, according to a recent article—a piece of sheer unmitigated nonsense. We don't for a moment believe that the editor himself has read the Bible, or any of his staff, and we wish that we could catch him unawares, and ask him what was the precious message of Habakkuk or Obadiah?

The *Recorder* wants people to write to the paper and state their "spiritual" difficulties, and it is a pity that any letter which ridiculed pious twaddle, whether from a Pope or an Archbishop, would find its way into the *Recorder's* waste paper basket. Let us turn the tables. We invite the Editor of the *Recorder* to tell us why he believes in the Greatest Book of all and whether he imagines that a world without the Christian Hell, Devils, and Miracles, would be a worse place to live in? And is a belief that Jesus and a crowd of Jewish saints rose from the dead going to re-value the pound?

Inveighing against slot machines selling contraceptives, the Archbishop of Canterbury says it makes it "too easy for youth to sin." No one need be surprised to hear this from him for if the Archbishop were logically to follow his Master, he would be dead against marriage, and even advocate horrible mutilation, as Jesus did, "for the kingdom of Heaven's" sake. All true-believing Christians must insist that sex is nasty, naughty, and, of course, "sin." The actual reason—which even Jesus shared—that religious people have against sex is an old one. Macaulay put it clearly—the Puritans were not opposed to bear-baiting, he said, because of the animals, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.

The only real object that "baptism" can bring about is to make the baptised person a little cleaner. This was necessary in hot countries, especially where there was little water; and one cannot always blame the most holiest of saints if he carried about with him a sacred effluvia which in these days would be characterised by another word. Still, as the faithful insist upon their children being baptised, and as the ceremony binds the chains of Christianity somewhat tighter, we are not surprised to see that the Committee of Baptism appointed by Convocation now insists that "No minister shall refuse or delay to baptise any infant . . ." The Church no longer dares to refuse this, even for Nonconformist children.

The coming of television ought to give, says the *Church Times*, a glorious opportunity for the Church to provide the finest spiritual television plays, sermons, and other religious amenities, direct to one's fireside. There ought to be a "competent" television chaplain (with a first class salary) to direct the programme and a director of Religious Television. Given every opportunity and, we are told, "the possibilities of evangelisation are without limit." Especially, of course, if all competition is rigorously excluded, and such infidel horrors as Free-thought, Evolution, Mythology, and blatant Materialism, are not even hinted at. We think the matter could be properly settled if the whole of the television studios were handed, once for all, to the Italian Pope. He

would at least insist on the Christian ideal—all for the Church, and to Hell with everybody else.

The Holy See (the Vatican) is getting tender-hearted. True, somewhat belatedly, and we think, too late to be of much effect. The Pope is contemplating banning boxing matches, because of two "brutal deaths in recent matches." Somehow, this tenderness sits oddly on an institution that has been directly responsible for the death of millions.

A good method of diverting suspicion from oneself is to accuse one's opponents, and when Bishop Hallsall at the opening of St. Colombia's School in Huyton maintained with all the pomp that bishops are in the habit of displaying, that "history and almost all the sciences receive a false twist from those who deny God his place" is so transparent as to be farcical. For the Roman Catholic Church does not stop at false twists but alters facts to fit in with Catholic ideas. Joseph McCabe, in a very useful pamphlet, proves that Roman Catholic authorities have deliberately altered out of all recognition parts of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. However, Bishop Hallsall is safe, for no Roman Catholic is likely to question his assertion.

We ought to start a "Believe It Or Not" column, to include items such as the following notice which was recently exhibited at a Boscombe church:—

"O, Come all ye Faithful—to our Harvest Thanksgiving. Gifts such as Bovril, Ovaltine, Bengers' Food, soups, etc., should be placed by the organ."

God's tastes are becoming more sophisticated, as he used to prefer roast ram.

Ex-Nun Miss Monica Baldwin took more than 28 years to realise that she was not suited to a religious life! And we are still wondering why she went to such pains to defend her erstwhile sisters, "few of whom," she says, "were saints, though they tried terribly hard to be as good as they possibly could. Immorality was unthinkable." One would imagine that her only reading matter for 28 years was *Maria Monk*, or perhaps Garibaldi's discoveries in various Nunneries in Italy. It is interesting, if only for the record, to note that the medieval practise of flagellation is still in force. Miss Baldwin admits that the nuns flogged themselves with whips or chains 60 or 80 times at certain times. Truly, in some respects Catholicism lives up to its motto "forever the same".

This is really awful. The Indian paper *Adibasi* "ridicules and slanders Christianity," complains the *Universe*, and Catholics simply cannot do anything about it. Of course, it is fully in order to send missionaries to India and to criticise and even slander Hinduism; but then did not Jesus pour slander and invective on his opponents? Besides, is not Christianity a much superior religion to Hinduism? We hope that *Adibasi* will keep up the good work.

## THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Would the Red Dean be particularly welcome amongst the Protestants who will be allowed to make the pilgrimage to Rome during "Holy Year" (1950)?

Is Cardinal Spellman, at present in Rome, "scrounging" only for more Cardinals' hats for his American colleagues?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

The *Evening Standard* (London) on October 17 informed its readers that Avro Manhattan had been elected a member of the International Mark Twain Society in America of which Truman is the President. The statement goes on to say that Avro Manhattan went to prison in Italy for his anti-fascism and afterwards fled to London. He is the author of a number of books, perhaps the best known being *The Catholic Church against the 20th Century*. On Tuesday, November 1, Mr. Manhattan will lecture in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London, on "The Vatican in World Politics". The lecture is under the auspices of the National Secular Society, admission is free, and it commences at 7-30 p.m.

The Library Committee of the Welwyn Garden City Public Library have withdrawn a number of periodicals from the reading room on the ground that they are definite sectarian, political, or controversial. Of course, "The Freethinker" is in the list. What we would like to know is, are there now any periodicals of a sectarian, political or controversial nature in the reading room of the library? Is the Library Committee carrying out the wishes of the local residents or exercising its own desires? It is kind, indeed, for the Library Committee to shelter local citizens from the rough and tumble of sectarian, political and controversial views, but some must be there tough enough to face opinions differing from their own and we suggest they take the matter up with their Public Library Committee.

Mr. Glanville Cook's lecture on "The Roman Catholic Church in Australian Politics" in the Conway Hall was interesting, instructive, with plenty of detail, and many personal anecdotes. It was well received and there was a ready response to the invitation for questions. These were dealt with in an able and thorough manner by the speaker, and appreciated by the audience. Mr. Glanville Cook has been, and is having a busy time in this country on platforms advocating progressive and reformist ideas. He has a pleasant manner and personality and should return to Australia with a wealth of happy memories of his visit to this country.

There must be many among our readers who have spent holidays in the West of England. To them, and to all who can appreciate good writing, we can recommend *West Country Book Number One*, a volume just published by Westaway Books Ltd., at 10s. 6d. It contains contributions by eminent West Country writers, such as Sir William Beach Thomas, V. Sackville-West, L. A. G. Strong, Anne Treneer, John Rowland and Eden Phillpotts, as well as from others with West Country associations, like Ivor Brown, John Betjeman and Richard Church. It is, in fact, a fine tribute to the attractions of a part of Great Britain that has unusual characteristics of its own.

## ON TELEPATHY

### III

ONE of the greatest difficulties we have in investigating all psychic phenomena—including telepathy—is that in almost all the cases we read of, the investigators are "professors" of some kind. I have more than once pointed out in these columns that these people are about the last who can be trusted in such investigations. I have seen some of them, and people like Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell, for instance, and I say without hesitation that they are the most easily bamboozled people one could meet. Any conjuror would laugh at their "stringent" tests. When a trained illusionist like the late Harry Houdini came on the scene, the problems immediately took a different shape. What looked like perfect "investigation" from professors was shown up as almost infantile attempts to catch wary and accomplished "mediums."

If the reader has any doubt on the matter, he should read *Revelations of a Spirit Medium*, a work which, when it appeared, was eagerly bought up by spiritualists and promptly destroyed, with the result that copies became very scarce indeed. The late Harry Price edited an edition, and he must have roused the wrath of many many mediums in consequence. Another book which was never liked by the spirit profession was *Behind the Scenes with the Mediums*, a most devastating exposure by David P. Abbott of the many "phenomena" so implicitly believed in by spiritualists. But the doyen of these exposures is Hereward Carrington's *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*—and it is all the more valuable because Carrington certainly is something of a believer himself in the phenomena. It is true that he wipes off the slate about 98 per cent., but as he cannot account for the other two per cent., he obviously feels there must be "something in it."

But for Freethinkers the question is not to explain difficult cases of abnormalities of the "mind," but for believers to prove the existence of survival. And it is quite amusing to read the way in which complete—and quite credulous—believers in telepathy (like Mr. Tyrrell) actually claim that it proves the existence of spirits in a spirit world. Or if they do not, then I am quite at a loss why they shriek with delight if, in telepathic experiments, somebody in one room can write down the name of a colour somebody else is thinking of in another room.

The real test in telepathy is one I have never so far seen described, though something like it is always trotted out. Let me read to myself a line from a back volume of "The Freethinker" and concentrate on sending it to either of the Piddingtons. If they can read that line wherever they are—in the next room or 30 miles away—then I must confess that telepathy has been proved. But the way the Zancigs and the Piddingtons do the "book trick," as it is called among conjurors, is known to all who have made a study of white magic. Of course, when I say "known" I do not mean that the precise method is known in individual cases, but there are methods which give the same results.

Carrington believes in "thought transference" but he claims that we cannot "command the phenomena to appear at our beck and call, or summon them at will, and consequently, anyone who does so at once stamps himself as an impostor, or possibly merely as a self-deluded person. The only thing we know about telepathy is that—we know nothing about it!"

This rules out the Piddingtons who can produce phenomena at will—they must do so to keep their theatrical contracts.

Houdini was, of course, an adept as he was with crystal gazing, and many other "psychic" wonders, though he always claimed that as far as he was concerned he was a "gay deceiver." And there was nothing he liked better than to be "investigated" by "professors". They never discovered how his tricks were done; in fact, Conan Doyle actually believed that Houdini could de-materialise himself and thus get through a brick wall.

One other point should be noted. In books on magic, many secrets are always being exposed, but conjurers are, at the same time, always discovering new methods. Given the determination, the practice, and the knowledge, any reader of this journal can become a "thought reader" and mystify not only his immediate friends but also any number of professors. Take the late S. J. Davey, for example. He was an amateur conjuror who thought at first that the slate-writing tricks of Slade, Eglington, and others were genuine till he came to experiment himself. Soon he gained such a degree of proficiency that he was hailed in spiritualistic circles as a genuine medium. He completely fooled Alfred Russell Wallace to such good effect that even when Davey "exposed" himself, Wallace insisted that he was a "renegade" medium; and Podmore points out that long after the "exposure," spiritualists continued to think the same.

Davey was a master of "mis-direction," and was thus able to fool professors like Wallace at will. And a good deal of what passes for telepathy no doubt is the same. At the displays of the Piddingtons we were undoubtedly led to believe that certain things happened—but Mr. Kingsley Martin, the editor of the *New Statesman*, who was one of the "judges," wrote an article in his paper and showed how cleverly the listeners were fooled.

Those who believe in telepathy—even of a mild kind—claim that there is nothing wonderful in the "mind" giving off "waves" of some kind which are picked up by another mind ready to receive them. This may be so, though so far it has been difficult to get concrete proof. But how it proves "survival" is utterly beyond me. Often, as a proof, we are told of extraordinary stories of "precognition". Someone whom you dearly love has died far, far away, and you see him or her standing for a moment at the precise moment of death in your house against a window or on the staircase. There are numerous stories of this kind in books on spiritualism. How do "blatant" materialistics account for them? The answer is not always easy—especially if one knows the people concerned, and is sure that they can be trusted to tell the truth. But even here I can see no evidence of "survival" in the sense used by spiritualists. For in dozens of cases the explanation has been proved to be merely hallucination of some kind and in any case it is always very difficult to check up on these stories.

In the course of evolution, the "mind" may take on new qualities and telepathy become as common a fact as letter-writing. But that time has not yet come, and it may take thousands of years—who knows? Let us in the meantime rather believe that an act on the stage or radio is "entertainment" than something from a living "spirit".

H. CUTNER.

## RATIONALISM

MY old friend F. A. Ridley has argued that the Catholic Church claims to be rational and Freethinkers should face up to this fact. But the matter goes far deeper. To the early Christian Christ was Logos, Divine Reason. He worshipped Reason with human reason as a spark of the divinity. Though we use the same word, our understanding is different; with different people and at different historic periods; and the transition is of intellectual as well as historic interest. The historic aspect may be very briefly noted, for here, the meaning is more important than dates, periods and persons. What do we mean or understand by reason?

There are few words more ambiguous than reason. One might find a dozen definitions; and among the ancients J. M. Robertson found sixteen different meanings to the word Logos in Philo. In the controversy over rationalism and intuitionism among the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, reason had a different meaning to what it has to modern rationalists. But it is not enough to claim reason as a human faculty as against its being a Divine attribute, for it is a peculiar fact that whereas modern rationalists do not study logic, Catholic theologians do, with the angelic doctor St. Thomas Aquinas as their teacher. If the modern rationalists believe in reason, to the medieval rationalist it was a matter for study.

In this respect, we have an historic paradox. The Age of Faith was an age of the theological study of logic, and the Age of Reason that followed the Middle Ages was one in which logic was discredited, even ridiculed. Not only was reason not divine, but as it was human to err, it was an untrustworthy guide. It was replaced by the empiricism of modern science; the appeal to experience in experiment and test. To-day, on one hand, science is being discredited, on the other, logic is again coming to the fore. Since Poincare and Bertrand Russell expounded the logic of mathematical symbolism, the latter has been hailed as the philosopher who has reinstated logic. And incidentally, we have a revival of Thomism.

This brings in another paradox. Bertrand Russell has pointed out a very close affinity between mathematics and logic. But our modern age is one of a wide interest in mathematics but not logic, and history shows an antithesis between these two subjects. The present age is denounced as materialist and pagan, and a violent antagonism is seen in the historic conflict of religion with materialism, which, as Chapman Cohen said, began with the "calculable necessity" of Democritus. Likewise, pagan astrologers were disparaged as "the mathematicians" and the medieval merchants were denounced as "the calculators." Not only in the historic conflict between religion and science but always and everywhere, evil intentions are associated with being "cold and calculating" but not with "cold logic".

This antagonism illustrates the dialectic character of reason as understood by the early Greek philosophers; with sophistry involving a variety of modes of argument; as exemplified in the platonic dialogues and the Socratic method. But Aristotle used a scientific inductive method in his *Logic*; collecting and classifying all modes of argument and framing general rules; so that logic is strictly a science. It gives a systematic method of checking reasons or arguments although dry as dust and abstract as Euclid's geometry. Aristotle, more than Plato, is essential to a universal or catholic religion, for whereas dialectic dualism is more primitive, logic is more comprehensive. Aristotle's method of checking arguments, more so than the Socratic method of putting the question-

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was an integral basis of theology, called the queen of the sciences.

We need to appreciate Aristotle's *Logic* as well as his *Politics and Metaphysics*. The ancients found reason in law and in nature but the Christian found it also in tradition and in the "motives" of men. They were intensely and passionately curious in their belief in reason. Concern with "the Passion" goes together with the study of "formal logic" and "universals." Ancient concern for reason led to the impeccable logic of St. Augustine and Scholasticism was entirely a matter of logic and axiomatic assertion. Search for reasons in justification of belief goes together with that of methods for testing belief. The dialectic method of "putting the question" and the method of logic is extended not only to that of law but also to that of the Inquisition.

The schoolmen, like Albertus Magnus, accepted "universals" from Aristotle as well as scripture. But in the need for logical consistency St. Thomas Aquinas devised a method, which, "as a sustained intellectual effort" is said to be "the most remarkable and fatiguing" ever. To avoid complications, William of Occam devised the method of systematic exclusion of unessentials known as Occam's Razor. Roger Bacon suggested experiment to check nature, art and fraud "just as logic tests argument" and not to "employ argument to prove imperfect conclusions." The failure of reason to attain knowledge was argued by Nicholas of Cusa; knowledge is conjecture, wisdom is to recognise that man can know nothing, except by intuition. The final blow to logic came from Leibnitz, the last of the scholastics, with his constant refrain, "what is contained in the conclusion is there in the predicate."

The experience of the middle ages shows the falsity of belief in reason. This led to Descartes' philosophy of doubt and Galileo's scientific demonstration. But to doubt is to question and demonstration is no answer. As Locke rightly saw, it concerns understanding, and the logic of Leibnitz rightly saw that Locke's major proposition was memory, not reason. But reason was reinstated by Berkeley, and we might follow the bishops' "cloud of dust" through the metaphysical discussion with the sceptic Hume, on to the consideration of reason in Kant's failure; and the political confusion arising from Hegel's dialectic with history as reason; then continue in Schopenhauer's fourfold root of reason, involving memory, insanity and dreams. Or we might follow medieval mysticism through the cult of animal magnetism and hypnotism to modern empirical psychology, and the latest idea of rationalisation as justification or excuse.

And now, having briefly surveyed the historic transformation of the notion of reason, where stands the Church? To quote Loyola from Ridley's *Jesuits* "a wounded animal is dangerous." A keen eye is needed on the nature of the animal and of its defensive tactics. The Church adapted itself to ancient rationalism by supplying the logical need for definition in dogma. It adapted itself in medieval conflict and controversy with the Socratic method of putting the question and Aristotle's method of systematic inquisitorial interrogation. It used St. Thomas's system for avoiding logical inconsistency and Occam's method of systematic exclusion. And it adapted itself to post-medieval empiricism. As with science, the Church learns from experience. It not only claims to be rational it still claims theology as a science, and it uses a scientific method. Its theologians not only study and use logic, they study and use empirical method in the systematic casuistry in the appeal to mystical experience.

To understand the Church involves reason, but the primitive dialectic method is child's play to the Church's

wide experience. We need to appreciate Loyola's method of mysticism and the empirical psychology of Jesuistical casuistry as well as the system of Thomism.

H. H. PREECE.

## SYMBOLISM IN THE BIBLE

THE development of the hypothesis that the Bible is symbolic, and not literal, paves the way for a more rational understanding of apparently illogical statements. International scholars have drawn attention to the fact that when the cult of Christianity first made its appearance, a reaction had already set in against certain established traditions of the early civilisation, which the later philosophies of Greece and Rome were endeavouring to supplant. The statement reputed to Aristippus, that the wise must not give up their liberty to the State—of Zeno's repudiation of the regimentation of the State—and the conception of Aristotle, of a mind unaffected by impulse—amongst others—tend to show that conscious thought was rebelling against the influence of priestly dogma. The aim of all Freethinkers, from the dawn of civilisation, has been to uncover the naked truths of creation, and to determine the functions of those immutable laws which have, and will exist, until the final revelation. There has existed, throughout history, two distinct classes of active thought—the one concerned with a static system of society, of which the Church is the most illuminating example, and the other, of a progressively evolutionary change, consistent with the discovery of those empirical laws which have destroyed the suppositions of supernatural benevolence or malevolence.

It has already been shown how the cult of Christianity, by the parable of the destruction of the fig tree, endeavoured to correct the falsity of the practise of concealing the truth, as symbolically shown by the adoption of fig leaves by Adam and Eve, to cover the truth of natural creation. In the same manner, the building of the tower of Babel, and its destruction by the "gods," which resulted in the dispersal of the builders and the confusion due to the development of different languages, can be interpreted symbolically.

The ruling class of the early civilisation had, through the original ignorance of the masses, governed those masses by means of their own credulity, and had endeavoured to maintain the regimentation of thought to a static system of credulous superstitious ignorance. The extension of this civilisation would naturally attract both protagonists and antagonists—and the building of the tower is symbolical of the co-operative efforts of all thought to the attainment of a common Utopia. Which would have reacted detrimentally to the interests of the hereditary ruling classes, and so the gods—in the persons of their human creators—applied the closure. The co-operative efforts were frustrated, and the different schools of thought pursued their own multiple lines of reasoning towards an assumed common goal, without a common idea of what that ultimate goal was to be. Hence the multiplicity of tongues, or ideas. With the advent of Christianity, this diversity of opinion was to be co-ordinated, so we have the mythological descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost—enabling its recipients to talk with other tongues. Pure Reason, symbolised by the Holy Ghost, enables mankind to dispense with the worn-out shibboleths of a static dogmatism and to intelligently pursue, and amalgamate, the various theories in accordance with proved laws for a higher civilisation. In every age, despite the persecutions of the dogmatists and the ridicule of the ignorant, mortals have discovered, and

made known, various truths—but no revelation is final. As the human race progresses, so these revelations are seen in a true perspective, as stepping stones towards a fuller measure of that many-sided jewel called TRUTH.

In this connection, history teaches how the exponents of a static dogmatism have cunningly kept the masses of common people ignorant of their natural rights and privileges, by superstitious teachings in which Reason has been abolished—and have zealously persecuted all those who have endeavoured to advance the science of civilisation. The Church, whether divinely appointed, as the Church of Rome, or State supported, as the various national churches, stands convicted on its own professed teachings, and in their white robes approximate to the epithet of their reputed founder—whited sepulchres. Whilst the exponents of Reason are, in the words of that selfsame Freethinker, who described himself symbolically as the Truth—persecuted for Truth's sake.

As Thomas Paine wrote: "These are the times that try men's souls"—and, just as civilisation has emerged phoenix-like from previous catastrophies, so will it rise again. Pioneers of the Freethought movement have left their accumulated efforts for our inheritance, and on their foundation we can surely build that perfect superstructure, ruled by Reason alone.

"ISHMALITE."

### IS "NOTHING" THE ANSWER ?

THE problem as to "what is to be put in the place of Christianity" is an implied question as to what will be put in the place of all that Christianity stands for. Whether we approve or not, Christianity does stand for very many things in the minds of very many men—many things which we Freethinkers see as being entirely apart from its religious and supernatural features. Morals and Ethics especially come to mind, and it is futile for me to attempt to repeat the arguments showing how false is the attachment between Christianity and Ethics; this subject has been so ably covered before. But the fact must be faced that Christianity and Ethics are interwoven in the minds and actions of millions of people, and to answer "nothing" to the leading question is a futile and useless response. It is facile and pert but like many facile and pert quotations carries no weight and less truth.

The analogies of water in the foundations and smoke in the chimneys are incomprehensibly unintelligent. Christianity has been a part of the foundations of civilization and no purpose is served in closing our eyes to the facts. The true question is, therefore, "what shall we put in place of the rotting foundations?" "Nothing"? Mr. Cohen says the original question may be properly put by one Christian to another but not a Freethinker! "Why?" we may ask. To answer "nothing" (to a Freethinker, of course) is to preach to the converted, but since the question has meaning to a Christian our reply must also have meaning, otherwise no point is made; or are we to ignore Christians and, resolutely preaching to one another, compliment ourselves on our forceful arguments being so readily accepted by our listeners?

The correct answer to the question, I suggest, is another question: "What do you mean by Christianity?" On the definition received a true answer may be given as it will then be possible to split the association between Christianity and Ethics, consign the supernatural religion to its own eternal flames and release the moral truths for clear-sighted judgment. The question then becomes "what shall we put in place of (Christian) Ethics?" The answer to this question is profound and lengthy and to

which no satisfactory reply has yet been made. It requires an ethical system embracing millions of different types of human beings and which must be simple and easily understood yet at the same time covering the numerous complications of human conduct. Many varied systems have been devised and many books laboriously conceived on this subject, yet none have touched the imagination of the common man, none have inspired him with the exclamation "Yes, that's it!" when at last he sees the guide for which the world is waiting. Freethinkers, in their unique position, should be better able than any others to fulfil the task of creating an "ethical Guide" (forgive the phrase).

DAVID MOORE.

The Rev. J. Cartwright complains that if people see him sitting in a railway carriage they quickly move away to another carriage, and deduces therefrom the "gap that yawns between the Church and the People." Well, well, if it really worries him, why doesn't he wear his collar the right way round, and go about in Harris tweeds? He may then get company on his railway journeys.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### COMMUNISM

Sir,—The controversy in your columns between Mr. Gallagher and myself appears to have wandered far from the original issue involved. Permit me to point out that my original contention had got nothing whatever to do with dialectical materialism, the war-time policy of the I.L.P. or the present Foreign policy of Mr. Bevin—which I dislike as much as Mr. Gallagher, though not, perhaps, for quite the same reasons—or the other numerous red or pink herrings which the Honourable member, deprived of the Speaker's restraining guidance, has strewn so liberally over the columns of *The Freethinker*.

Permit me to remind my Honourable friend that this journal is not one of a party-political character, and that writers of all shades of political opinion contribute to its columns. Consequently I would never dream of starting a political controversy here, nor have I ever used them to broadcast my own political views: in the present case, this would be quite superfluous, since both Mr. Gallagher and myself are tolerably well-known in the International Labour Movement and there are other organs open to us both for political controversy.

All that I did here was to raise the vital issue of Freethought and its relations with the Totalitarian State, whether Catholic or Communist. This is a philosophical question of, in my submission, urgent practical importance for this journal and its readers. I assert that Totalitarianism in any form, and Freethought mix as well as oil and water and are absolutely and at all times incompatible. Mr. Gallagher has produced no evidence that a Communist State permits an individual to indulge in fundamental criticism of the official ideology nor do I think that he will ever be able to do so. In short, Freethought and Communism are permanently incompatible, and that is all that we set out to discuss in *The Freethinker*. Yours, etc.,

F. A. RIDLEY.

Sir,—Mr. J. Plimmer describes my letter as "an hysterical piece of mud-slinging." This is an erroneous idea of the sober statements of facts which I placed before your readers. Mr. Plimmer makes no attempt to question the absence of freedom and the rule of tyranny which is inherent in the communistic system of government.

I readily agree with Mr. Plimmer that what I wrote has been said so much better by others. Here is a quotation from *The Land of Look Behind* by Mr. W. J. Brown, M.P. for Rugby, published this year:—

"The House of Commons is positively fond of Willie Gallagher and it is difficult to think of Harry Pollitt as a torturer. Whatever the Communists have done elsewhere, Communism in Britain couldn't possibly be like that! This argument ignores the lessons of history. Revolutionaries do not start by being torturers and murderers. Often they start as high-souled reformers who couldn't hurt a fly. I do not suppose that most of the men who wore Lenin's colleagues in the first Bolshevik

Government consciously willed the conditions which exist in Russia to-day, or foresaw that Stalin, their comrade, would one by one murder or exile them. The point is that at each stage the struggle becomes more fierce. Historical necessity imposes harsher and harsher methods of operation. Instruments which were mild and even idealistic at the beginning have to become harsh and ruthless. Or else they are superseded by other instruments less inapt for the savage work which the struggle imposes. I was in Moscow immediately following the assassination of Viokoff, the Russian Ambassador, in Warsaw in 1927. In Moscow that assassination evoked the decision to reimpose the Terror, which, after the end of the civil war, had been relaxed. It was not a decision reached without much debate and heart-searching. Many Russian Communists in those days hated the Terror. But it was reimposed nevertheless. Since those days it has been ruthlessly, savagely used. To-day no one questions whether it should be continued or not. It is part of the normal working of the totalitarian Police State. And it has no difficulty in finding suitably ruthless agents and instruments. Nowadays it does not only work in Russia and the satellite States. It stretches out its repressive hand within the democratic countries. A Trotsky is not safe even so far away as Mexico. Stalin's murderers reach him even there."

A book which I advise Mr. Plimmer to read is *Enough, No More* by Mrs. J. Wells, published in September, 1948. Mrs. Wells and her husband left Berlin after having lived there for seven years, at first under the Hitler regime, then under the Russians, and finally under the English. Evidence and proof is given that Soviet methods were similar to those of the Nazis, and horrible in the extreme.

The moral of all this is that we should encourage democratic ways in obtaining fuller freedom, and reject the Communistic system, which is the negation of freedom.—Yours, etc.,  
ALFRED D. CORRICK.

SHAKESPEARE AND GENIUS

Sir,—I do not define genius as mysticism. What I say is that the attitude of people like Mr. Barnard towards the god of Stratford is much the same as that of the Christian mystic towards the God of theology. I have intuitive knowledge; I do not argue. Mr. Barnard seems to know much more of the Stratford actor than his contemporaries did, which is something to wonder at.

I note with interest Mr. Barnard's citation of Sir Walter Raleigh's monograph on Shakespeare in the famous English Men of Letters series. It was nearly thirty years after the launching of this fine venture before a book on Shakespeare was included. How surprising! One would have thought that our great national bard would have led off instead of Johnson. Was it that the literary pundits shied at the difficulty of the task?

Here are a few passages in Raleigh's book that Mr. Barnard should mark and digest.

"Shakespeare was 'to the manner born'. From the very first he has an unerring sure touch with the character of his high-born ladies."

"There can be doubt that Shakespeare was minutely acquainted with all the lore of field sports—the hunt of the hare and the stag, and the capture of smaller game by the falcon."

"He certainly had a remarkable knowledge of the processes and technicalities of the law."

"All that we know testifies to Shakespeare's familiarity with the life of the Court."

"Certain of his allusions in *Hamlet* and the Italian plays show some detailed local knowledge of Elsinore and of Italy."

How do these fit the Stratfordian? Here is one more passage:

"He went to London to seek his fortune, and when he had found it there, returned to Stratford, and established himself with his wife and family in peace and prosperity. It is as simple as a fairy tale."

The italics are mine. The sentence seems unconscious irony.

As to books, far fewer were then published. There were no public libraries, so that one writer has satirically said that Shakespeare must have got all his vast knowledge from the light of nature!

Touching Buckle and Tolstoy, Mr. Barnard indulges in that address of statement that is nourished by the Stratford myth. By way of illustration, this year three writers on Shakespeare—Hesketh Pearson, F. E. Halliday, and Ivor Brown, have fallen into the same error. They have quoted

Sir John Mennes, on Shakespeare's father without knowing that he was four years old when the latter died!

Buckle had remarkable linguistic ability and there is reason to believe that he had knowledge even perhaps of nineteen languages, but twenty thousand books read by a man who died at forty! If Mr. Barnard refers to the article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* he will find that owing to ill health Buckle did little serious reading until he was eighteen. So after that—reading eight hours a day as we are told he did—he must have got through nearly a thousand volumes a year! The books he listed as quoted in his *History of Civilization* number less than a thousand. Of course, more were read.

Tolstoy—doing nothing else for three months—appears to have learned Greek in that time. This was remarkable, but the time was twice as long as Mr. Barnard says.

I have read and quoted in the Shakespeare Fellowship *News Letter* Archbishop Whately's *Historic Doubts Concerning Napoleon Bonaparte*. There is one great difference. There is plenty of evidence for Napoleon's career. Where is the evidence for that of William of Stratford?—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "I Met a Witch," Mr. JOHN F. BINNS.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. ("Satis Cafe," 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Problem of Changing Social Values," Mr. EDMUND TAYLOR (Notts).

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 1, 7 p.m.: "Is there a Moral Authority?" Mrs. IAN FREED.

Leicester S.S. (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Vatican in World Politics," Mr. AVRO MANHATTEN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (The International Club, 64, George Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

National Secular Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 1, 7-30 p.m.: "The Vatican in World Politics," Mr. AVRO MANHATTEN.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Baha'i—A World Faith," Mr. REES-DAVIES.

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 1, 7 p.m.: "Reason and Belief in Social and Moral Behaviour." Fifth Lecture: "Reason and Morals," Mr. MEYER FORTES.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Beautiful and the Good," Dr. HELEN ROSENAU-CARMICHAEL.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Should an Antiquary be a Christian?" Mr. WILLIAM KENT, F.S.A.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Bombed site, St. Mary's Gate).—Every day, lunch-hour lectures, 1 p.m.: Messrs. BILLING and WOODCOCK.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING.

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

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

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