

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIX.—No. 50

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
[POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWES AND OPINIONS

The Social Causes of Christianity

THE Christian Religion, like all other historical phenomena, had its roots in the social conditions which prevailed at the time of its origin and of its rise to the status of a world-religion. It is always a mistake to judge a religion, like any other creation of mankind, exclusively in terms of ideas. As Goethe has reminded us: "In the beginning was the act," the Thing.

Early Christianity appeared at a moment of extreme social tension. Throughout the two centuries prior to our era, the classical world had undergone an evolution from the age of the city-state to that of the metropolitan world-empire, one not dissimilar to the present-day evolution of the modern national state to the World-Federation of the Future. And, again, like our own age, the Era which immediately preceded the Birth of Christianity was one of "storm and stress," of violent uprooting, of wars and of social upheavals. The psychology which accepted and transformed Christianity was moulded in this age of hitherto unparalleled social strain.

The contemporary "World Empire" was Rome. "The Crowned Harlot" seen through a mist of blood by the messianic Zionist whose "visions" were enshrined in the Apocalypse. And whilst the enforced unification of the world by Rome had its beneficent and progressive aspects, yet it was not entirely so, it could not have appeared to its contemporaries under this guise. For Rome conquered the classical world of the Mediterranean with a ruthless "real-politik," compounded of "Blood and Iron," worthy of Bismarck and Hitler. An orgy of blood, terror, and the wholesale uprooting of nations transferred at a blow from freedom to slavery marked the passage of the legions, as even the greatest of Roman historians himself tersely phrased it: his countrymen "make a desert and call it peace." In the long history of "Man's inhumanity to Man" there can have been few more terrible periods than the grim two centuries which witnessed the conquest of the Mediterranean world by Rome, and which immediately preceded the rise of Christianity.

What, in actuality, was the connection between these two events? Though the blood-stained underworld of the conquered Mediterranean has left us little tangible evidence of its inner feelings, it is certain that it represented a subterranean world in which fear was the dominant motive and despair the prevailing sentiment. Deprived of their traditional liberty and oppressed by a yoke of slavery which the historian, Theodor Mommsen, declared to be the most productive of misery that recorded history has to show, the conquered masses were sullen, revengeful, and broken in spirit: "without hope in this world," as Paul was to declare.

They had not always been so. For the previous two centuries had marked a veritable cycle of wars of liberation and of would-be social revolutions. Twice in Sicily, "the granary of the Empire," had the slaves risen in

arms to procure their liberation and, on both occasions, it required a long and costly war to suppress them. Tacitus records a speaker in the Roman Senate actually saying about the slaves: "these scum must be held down by terror." In Asia, the philosopher-king, Aristonicus, founded a "City of the Sun," the symbol of social equality throughout antiquity: "the Sun which shines equally on the just and on the unjust," as the Gospels have it. And barely a century before the first Christian apostles began to spread their message, the great Slave-Revolution of Spartacus shook the Roman Empire to its foundations and was only drowned in an orgy of blood. Six thousand surviving slaves were crucified alive on the Appian Way, a ghastly symbol of the terror that, henceforth, hung over the servile masses in the ancient world. Under the dictatorship of the Cæsars which followed, the ancient underworld fell into a stupefied coma of helplessness and of utter despair.

It was to this underworld and to this psychology, which found no expression in contemporary classical literature that reflects exclusively the social and mental outlook of the ruling circles, that the earliest Christian propagandists appealed. From the success with which they met, it can hardly be denied that they gave their converts what they wanted. The emotional, socially-frustrated, and salvation-starved Mediterranean underworld "fell" for Christianity—with a vengeance!

Why was this so? It has always seemed to us that modern critical historians of Christian origins have under-estimated the tremendous part played by the Cross itself in the propaganda and early expansion of Christianity. We have it on the high authority of the social psychologist, Dr. Serge Chakotin, that, of all the traditional symbols associated in the past with political and religious propaganda, the Cross is the most direct, the most simple, and the most effective in its emotional appeal.*

Nor was this all. We are often apt to think of the Cross as, pre-eminently, a *religious* symbol, but that it not how it could have appeared to the servile or subject masses of the Roman Empire amongst whom Christianity made its converts during the first three centuries of its expansion. Quite the contrary! For *them* it had a grimly practical secular significance: the Cross was the tangible and terrible symbol of the Roman Terror that so effectively enslaved the conquered non-Roman world—and few of the early Christian converts can have been "Roman Citizens"—i.e., members of the narrow privileged political caste who ruled the Empire and were alone exempt from the fear of crucifixion. For the slave, the Cross was the ever-present terror, to which he could be, and, as we know from contemporary literary allusions, very often was consigned, often for the most trifling causes, to a death of lingering agony, and for the rebel against Rome, he, too, could look forward only to the Cross.

* cp. *The Rape of the Masses*.—S. Chakotin.

It appears to us that the appeal of early Christianity to the disinherited masses of the Roman Empire was, ultimately, rather psychological than theological. We can say, in fact, that the secular fortunes of Christianity were made at the precise moment when some unknown propaganda genius hit upon the truly brilliant idea of transforming the Cross, the symbol of terror for the slaves in *this* world, into the symbol of their triumph in another. Whether the "Princes of this World" who, as Paul declared, "crucified the Lord of Glory," had relation to any actual historical event is, in this connection, quite irrelevant.

It was a stroke of psychological genius and it made the secular fortune of the new religion by giving the physically-enslaved masses a vicarious spiritual salvation in place of the temporal salvation that they were too weak to secure for themselves, the instrument of their punishment became the instrument of their redemption. This identification gave Christianity a flying start: chance, the economic exhaustion, and the spiritual debility of the old pagan culture already declining into gross superstition, did the rest.

F. A. RIDLEY.

OSCAR WILDE'S "EPISTOLA"

(*De Profundis: The First Complete and Accurate Version of "Epistola in Carcere et Vinculis" by Oscar Wilde. With an Introduction by Vyvyan Holland. Methuen; 10s. 6d. net.*)

AT long last! Here is the book for which the world has waited for years—the complete, unexpurgated edition of Oscar Wilde's long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas from Reading Gaol, known for years in its *ersatz* truncated form as "*De Profundis*" and now called "*Epistola in Carcere et Vinculis*."

(Readers of *The Freethinker* may have a special interest in the Douglas-Wilde tragedy. For Lord Alfred, though a devout converted Roman Catholic, on one occasion, at least, contributed to this paper. And his father, the 8th Marquis of Queensberry—the real villain of the piece—was a proclaimed atheist, although an atheist of the very worst type; a violent, offensive, evil-tempered, stupid creature whom Bradlaugh would have blushed to acknowledge and whom his fellow-atheists could not but regard as a dishonour to their cause.)

In their old age I knew three of Wilde's friends—Lord Alfred Douglas, Robert Harborough Sherard and Frank Harris. They talked much about Wilde to me, and indeed Sherard gave me the famous letter which Wilde wrote to him from prison after Sherard had been to see Sarah Bernhardt—which original letter I still possess, and which itself is some evidence by Oscar Wilde himself against his own accusations.

Mr. Vyvyan Holland's introduction deserves praise for its restraint and for its factual and objective character in general. But twice I think he errs, and once unjustly, in speaking of Lord Alfred Douglas. I will deal with the latter only. He states categorically that Douglas got "a handsome sum of money" from the sale of all the other letters which Wilde wrote to him.

This is quite untrue. I concede that Douglas did sell some of his personal letters, including some written to him by Bernard Shaw, in his last years, but he did not sell "all" or nearly all of Wilde's. He destroyed many, perhaps most, of them, some when received and others later on legal and spiritual advice (as he once told me over lunch) and regretted their destruction because of their artistic (not their monetary) value and because his memory could not recall a multitude of good things in them. He told me that he had possessed a

portmanteau full of Wilde's letters and that there were over 300 documents altogether.

I deplored the act, and Lord Alfred agreed; but said that he was genuinely persuaded at the time that this course was right and wise. If further evidence of the truth be needed than my first-hand testimony it lies in the fact that at one time Wilde wrote brief scrawls to Douglas almost every day and the number of Wilde-Douglas letters that have ever been on the market are (compared with the total output) relatively few.

But to the Wilde book. The new part is a sustained attack, bitter, cruel, and at times even venomous, upon the character and behaviour of Lord Alfred Douglas by his "affectionate friend" Oscar Wilde. At times—chiefly when it digresses from the all-pervading Douglas obsession—it scales the very height of genius but at other times it reminds one of the most contemptible passages of Hazlitt's passion for his servant-girl in "*Liber Amoris*." The style is sometimes iridescent with the hues of the rainbow and sometimes it is iridescent with the slime of the snail or snake. In short, like Burke's, Wilde's genius at its best is "such we scarcely can praise it or blame it too much." At its very worst it is soul-sickness, a verbal vomit.

This book is a love letter, neither more nor less. Nobody—not even the recipient—should believe the contents of a love letter. For "at lovers' perjuries they say Jove laughs." Certainly this love letter is incredible upon the subject of "Bosie" Douglas. It is filled with female and feline spite; with childish reproaches; with the infantile jealousy of the punished prattler for the unpunished. And, as invariably and inevitably in such accusations, the writer betrays his own character in his portrayal of his victim. The composition has its ridiculous side, for after Wilde has denounced his youthful dominator and destroyer in the most unsparing terms, he eagerly begs for a meeting and for letters and remains his affectionate friend. The merciless denunciation of Douglas is thus rendered absurd.

It just will not do, therefore, to accept Mr. Holland's verdict that the great writer was "not defending but explaining himself." The truth was that he was exculpating himself at the expense of young Douglas—an odious attitude known to the Bar as a "cut-throat defence." "Let it rest at that," says Mr. Holland. But can an explanation be allowed to rest when that explanation is false and one-sided?

Lord Alfred is dead, and can no longer inspire the fear that a Douglas, and this Douglas no less than his ancestors, always inspired in those who attacked him in life. But dead, Douglas still has his own superb answer to his friend's denigration of his abilities and character. His immortal sonnets live. They certainly were not written by the vicious, heartless degenerate and profligate prodigal whom Wilde depicts. The Sonnets of Douglas may outlast all Wilde's plays, even "*The Importance of Being Earnest*," for sonnets by their very nature are less ephemeral than the most brilliant comedies. Who except scholars and students, cares for Congreve to-day?

I knew Douglas. Decidedly he was not—and I feel certain never was—the cad of Wilde's letter. He was a lesser Shelley—with Shelley's faults of character (and others too, I daresay). There was much more of Ariel than Caliban in him, and, essentially, he was the most sensitive, quivering spirit I have ever known. This gross world irritated his sensitivity almost to madness and then it complained of his response in litigations and offensive writings. The animal was naughty; it defended itself. If he had died in his golden youth what a legend he would have become!

Unfortunately for his after-reputation he lived to "cut capers in Fleet Street," as Arnold Bennett said and to go to prison in his turn for libelling Winston Churchill. Yet his poems are a sufficient answer to everything; even to his Puckish naughtiness which led him in old age—I remember—to sell a Shaw letter for £20 to bet with, his youthful part in the classic tragedy of Wilde and all the rest. For his sonnets all his sins shall be forgiven him. He was not a saint, but we have too many alleged saints and too few authentic someteers of his calibre. Bernard Shaw thought highly of "Childe Alfred." And Bernard Shaw is not exactly a fool. Who would not rather trust Shaw's judgment than Wilde's? And Shaw's judgment that Douglas was "a remarkable and unfortunate" poet, is exactly right.

I read Wilde's picture of Bosie and ask: "Can this be true?" To me Douglas was kind, courteous, hospitable and charming, a tragic figure deserving of "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends and all that should accompany old age." No doubt a man's character changes with the years and no man can be converted to Catholicism and go to prison without being unchanged. Doubtless the young Douglas was different—he must have been to rouse the amiable Oscar—but need Wilde have thrown his dimmers in his friend's face or sneered at his mother, Lady Queensberry?

The best and all-sufficient answer to Wilde is Wilde himself. This I have in his own handwriting. He writes from Holloway Prison: "Only Alfred Douglas' daily visits quicken me into life—and even him I only see under tragic and humiliating conditions." Daily visits! Where is the alleged heartless neglect during imprisonment here?

It is a great pity no better biography of Douglas exists than Mr. Freeman's superficial and utterly inadequate compilation done by one knowing nothing of his subject at first hand.

And what essentially does Wilde's indictment amount to? To this: "I spent money on and gave dimmers to, and wasted my time on a young man who is heartless and heedless and enjoying himself while I rot in prison." Prosaic commonsense may reply, "If so, the more fool you." There would be no importance in this, except that Wilde has the eager ear of the literary world and a most persuasive pen to make trifles light as air equal to proofs of Holy Writ.

And poor Douglas is dead.

It is pleasanter to read Wilde's picture of my other friend, Robert Sherard, "the bravest and most chivalrous of all brilliant beings." Sherard, that fine old Corsican bandit of letters, was loved and honoured by me in life as in death. Certainly he was brave and brilliant and could be chivalrous; but even I, his loyal friend, while welcoming Wilde's tribute warmly, am constrained to find it a trifle overdone. I recall that Wilde also eulogised Frank Harris's "nobility and chivalry"—that Frank Harris of bad reputation—to whom that fine writer Arthur Machen would only introduce me reluctantly, on the terms that I "should never return and reproach him for doing so," and that I should never trust Harris particularly over money.

The truth is that Wilde exaggerated and romanticised everything and everybody. When the world saw him as miserably sitting in the dock between his co-defendant Taylor and his gaoler Constable Smith, he saw himself as magnificently seated in Hell between the Marquis de Sade and Giles de Retz. Romantic hyperbole is at once Wilde's weakness and his strength.

Rather than take sides let us take pleasure in the writings of both these remarkable men. If I seem to be pro-Douglas let me not be anti-Wilde. For if Douglas

ruined Wilde's life it is equally certain that Wilde ruined Douglas's. It was indeed the most tragic and fatal friendship in literary history. Should anyone sufficiently youthful, unsophisticated and unversed in the human capacity for self-deception be tempted to believe, with Mr. Siegfried Sassoon, that Wilde's fearful indictment contains the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, let him go to the poems of Douglas. They are a complete and triumphant defence. Reading them one can only return a verdict of "Not Guilty."

The real crime of Alfred Douglas lay in wasting his life on political polemic and sterile litigation when he should have been writing more poetry.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

"VATICAN AIDS POOR"

Under this caption it is reported in a newspaper that the "Holy Roman Rota," the highest tribunal of appeal in the R.C. Church, brought a suit for libel against *Unita*, the Italian Communist paper. *Unita* had published an accusation of corruption by stating that the "Rota" gives marriage annulments not according to Canonical Law but on the financial capacity of the applicant.

The Vatican announced that it provided free legal advice for applicants unable to meet lawyers' fees and gave as examples of those helped a poor peasant in central Italy and a negro of Central Africa, who were able to contribute only 17s. towards legal fees. Because of legal fees paid during the past year for applicants who could not pay costs, there was a deficit of about £12,000 in the "Rota's" funds.

We wonder whether the poverty-stricken Vatican were any poorer, had they foregone the 17s. of the poor negro. They have to pay their officials anyway, whether or not they pass judgment, so it seems to us that His Holiness simply removed the money from one pocket into the other and then claimed that one pocket suffered from a deficit.

Still, the assumption that the Vatican only aids the wealthy does not seem to be correct in this form. Count Starhemberg, the Austrian feudal *condottiere*, who paid a private army of declassified rabble for civil war purposes, was already bankrupt when the Holy See annulled his previous marriage to allow him to get married to Nora Gregor, the actress. What no doubt made him acceptable and eligible was that he was an up and coming fascist.

Dollfuss, his brother-in-arms, and competitor—the Austrian Milli-Metternich—lavishly garnished his clerico-fascist regime with Christianity of the R.C. pattern. He ordered army guns, blessed by the hierarchy, to shoot into workers' homes, he wallowed in blood and Biblical quotations. And Hitler never missed an occasion to cite God Almighty as the instigator and abettor of his intuitions. And now we have got the Malanazis as the Calvinist variety of clerico-fascism. The more oppressive a regime, the more it feels necessary to parade about in religious attire, since every "power is derived from God." Religion thrives on social injustice.

This truism also applies to the divorce proceedings, and the more a man is a reactionary, the more he is near and dear to the Church. That it is exactly these people who mostly are members of the wealthy society, is another story.

The more the social antagonisms accentuate, the more the Protestant churches strive to draw nearer to the Roman Catholic creed, the unchallenged spiritual leader of world reaction. At the recent Autumn Session of the

Church Assembly, Dr. Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, said it was a declaration of the Anglican Church that divorced persons, in the lifetime of their previous partner, should not be married in a church.

According to the learned witch doctors all men are under a life-long sentence for some blunder committed in Paradise by one of their first ancestors. So why not let them suffer all life-long for a mistake in the choice of their marital partners? Blind with love and unexperienced in life a young person decides to get married in church, and bang the trap goes, never to be opened again.

Generations have fought for the validity of secular wedlock and nowadays in most civilised countries the Registry Office has priority over the church. So if people are mentally lazy enough to trek along in the footsteps of their sentimental forebears, if they consider a church wedding essential to their marital success, if they cannot do without ridiculous pomp and ceremony, if they cannot free themselves from outdated superstitions, if—in short—they do not avail themselves of the advantages of the Registry Office, the great victory of progress, then we cannot pity them if, later on, it dawns on them that they have been caught in a prettily ornamented trap.

P. G. ROY.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSION

ONE of the traits of our time is the apparent need of many otherwise intelligent people to have their thinking done for them, to accept a political or a theological dictatorship. This is one of the many things in common between the average Roman Catholic and the average follower of Stalin—that his will and his power to think things out for himself is handed over to a supposedly infallible outside body, when once the first decision to submit has been taken. The average Freethinker, conscious of breathing the air of intellectual freedom, finds this a puzzling phenomenon, and nothing that a Roman Catholic or a Communist can say will remove this feeling that rigid obedience to a "party line" is something beneath the dignity of an intelligent human being.

A new book may do something to solve this puzzle. "The Road to Damascus" (W. H. Allen, 10s. 6d.), contains brief autobiographies of fifteen prominent people who have, of their own free will, submitted themselves to the papal dictatorship in recent times. Of course, they would not and they do not so describe their actions. They describe themselves as having plunged into the bosom of the Church, of having accepted the love of a supernatural mother, and so on. But, in actual fact, what such people as Mr. Evelyn Waugh, Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, Miss Rosalind Murray, Mrs. Frances Parkinson Keyes, and the other contributors (mostly writers) have done is to hand over all right to private judgment on a wide field of thought to an authority for which, in actual fact, there is not a single shred of evidence to support its claims.

And why has this happened? Mr. Evelyn Waugh, for example, is quite certainly one of the most brilliant novelists of our time. He is not the bombastic critic like the late G. K. Chesterton; he is not a superficial essayist like Mr. Hilaire Belloc; he is beyond all doubt the possessor of a brilliant brain and a delightful prose style. He can look at things with a cynical humour which is all his own, and he can portray human character in a way which few novelists of his generation can hope to equal.

His essay in this book shows the reason for his submission. When he was only ten years old he wrote a long and tedious poem (the adjectives are his) on the subject of purgatory. When he was at school he was keen on religious questions, and the aesthetic appeal of the Church of England was overwhelming. His father was a regular attendant at church, though he had no interest in theology. In other words, Mr. Waugh is the perfect example of the young man whose mind, by the time of adolescence, had turned definitely in a religious direction.

While he was at school a modernist clergyman made the young Waugh temporarily an Atheist. But his mind was so full of theological ideas that Atheism was too difficult, too arid a philosophy for him. He sought certainty, and he has since found it in the Roman Catholic Church.

That is one typical story. Perhaps the opposite is that of Mr. Douglas Hyde, the former news editor of the *Daily Worker*, whose name hit the headlines for a brief spell (in March, 1948) when he announced his conversion from Communism to Roman Catholicism. Mr. Hyde's case is, of course, much simpler. He saw that there were political and moral flaws in the Communist outlook. He was disillusioned by what he regarded as the non-co-operative attitude of the U.S.S.R. in the post-war world. But the position of real freedom was something which was impossible for a man who has been an obedient party-liner for twenty years. When he sees that the Communist Party is doing things of which he cannot approve, such a man does not become a libertarian Socialist, a Liberal, or an Anarchist. His thinking has been done for him for so long that he still wants to have it done for him, though along different lines. And so he joins the Roman Catholic Church, leaving one authoritarian body for another.

Perhaps most misleading of all the articles in the book, however, and perhaps the most pathetic in all its implications, is that by Professor Ross Hoffman, who occupies the chair of European History at Fordham University. Prof. Hoffman tries to show that the facts of history have gradually driven him into a position from which he is unable to take up any attitude but that of orthodox Roman Catholicism. Here is a typical extract when he discusses the early history of Christianity.—

"Even the documentary evidence is much more formidable than most persons appear to realise, the New Testament alone containing four sketches of the life of Christ, a history of the early Apostolic Church, and twenty-one letters from the hands of Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude. I am not aware that any phase of first-century history is so copiously documented."

There is no indication here that Prof. Hoffman has ever heard of the higher criticism, no suggestion that interpolation and amendment have made nonsense of much of the New Testament, no hint that the four "sketches of the life of Christ" have been worked up, at any as to three of them, from one original document, no idea that the vast majority of the documents of the New Testament date from a period long after the events which they purport to describe. One wonders what Prof. Hoffman would say if he had to lecture on Ancient Greece or Rome on evidence no more satisfactory than that derived from the New Testament! He would certainly wax caustic at the expense of anyone who tried to prove that Socrates or Julius Caesar was a God, from evidence no more outwardly convincing than that which is available about Jesus.

The fact that I have devoted so much space to this

book will be some indication to the reader that I consider it an important one. I do so regard it. The volume shows up the Roman Catholic Church in its strength; its weakness must be inferred by reading between the lines, and considering the omissions. Nowhere in the book, for instance, is there any suggestion that the Roman Church is a huge financial organisation, squeezing money out of the pockets of the poor and maintaining huge numbers of parasitical priests and bishops and cardinals, many of them in extreme luxury. Nowhere is there the least recognition that the Vatican, conjointly with the Kremlin, is the centre of a vast political organisation, the two authoritarianisms, between them, making up the most dangerous antagonism of our time.

No; the Church, in this book, is a kindly theological mother, leading individual souls to God. And it is most amusing that one of the articles is entitled "Escaping from an Atheist's Cell." That anyone who has ever appreciated the complete freedom of mind which the ordinary Freethinker knows could voluntarily accept the mental dictatorship of the Vatican is impossible. The lady who wrote that article *thought* that she was an Atheist. But in actual fact she could not have come within a mile of appreciating the philosophy of Atheism.

Finally, as a fitting comment on those who greet the Church as the home of spiritual freedom, one may merely add the fact that in front of the book is the approval of a gentleman calling himself "Censor deputatus." That Roman Catholic writers, discussing their personal religious position, should submit what they have written to a censor is enough to destroy all their pretensions. If I thought that the editor of *The Freethinker* was acting as a censor, stopping me from exercising the right to say what I liked about some subject of interest to his readers, I should no longer write for *The Freethinker*. But I know that he will not do so. The fact that Roman Catholics, apparently quite willingly, submit their work to censorship by an ecclesiastical official is, to my mind, the final condemnation of the Roman Church. "The Road to Damascus" is thus a valuable document. It is a warning where the end of the road may be. The road to Damascus, like another road we have all heard of, may be paved with good intentions; it is nonetheless the most dangerous road of all. Those who walk down it are in grave peril of throwing away their intellectual integrity. And, in a crisis-ridden world that is the last asset which the writer can preserve.

JOHN ROWLAND.

WHY ARE PEOPLE RELIGIOUS ?

BY evolution, a process of survival, most people have a tendency to become "believers" of the traditional religion of the district in which they live. From the very earliest glimmerings of mental activity, the witch doctors killed, suppressed or drove off, dissenters, doubters, independent thinkers. Tribal chiefs, working hand in glove with the witch doctors, assisted in the extermination of the dissenters. As civilisation expanded, the organised religions continued to exterminate and suppress dissenters. Through all history and including our day in America dissenters, doubters, independents have been harassed, exterminated, suppressed, silenced, ostracised. Mohamet murdered millions of dissenters. The Catholic inquisition is reported to have tortured and exterminated six million non-believers. Cortez put to the sword hundreds of thousands of Indians who preferred to follow their traditional beliefs. So, by a process of elimination of non-believers, the great mass of people

are believers, they have that instinct. They have been selected by religious leaders and rulers; they are as much the victims of selection as are the high milk-producing cattle of to-day compared with the primitive cattle from which they have evolved.

There were three classes of people: (1) Believers. (2) Doubters who openly expressed themselves. (3) Doubters who kept their doubts to themselves.

The first class constitutes the mass of humanity.

The second class, the doubters who had the courage to express themselves have been almost entirely exterminated. History only records a handful who have expressed themselves and *survived*. History records the murder of many such as Socrates, Bruno, and hundreds more.

There is a considerable number of the third class, the silent doubters. But the instinctive characteristic of silence is firmly entrenched in their mind. It is as much a part of them as is the colour of their eyes or their hair. Had they not developed this instinct of silence, they would have gone the way of the open doubters. They have learned to pretend to believe to save their lives and property. Humanity's slim hope of progress depends upon the organisation of the silent doubters so that they will be able to overcome their instinctive fear, and so they can become a power. I believe that to-day, if all the doubters were to work together, they could protect themselves fully from suppression, ostracism, personal abuse and financial harassment. Only in the United States is such a bold move possible.

Another characteristic of the "believers" is bigotry. These unfortunate people have been evolved not only to be abject followers of orthodox religion, but to become bitter enemies of doubters; they have the inherited tendency to want to murder, suppress, ridicule and abuse those whom their leaders wish to prevent from expressing their views contrary to prevailing religion. Not all "believers" have this characteristic, but many do.

No man can be elected to public office if he openly expresses his doubt as to prevailing religious beliefs. Many who express themselves suffer loss of wives, friends, family ties, money, or political influence.

A typical example of attempted suppression, bitter personal attack, bigotry and intolerance, is Cardinal Spellman's vicious attack on Eleanor Roosevelt. Instead of making a case on facts or evidence, Spellman hit below the belt by accusing Mrs. Roosevelt of not being fit to be an American Mother. Spellman wants taxpayers' money so Catholic children can be taught to become vindictive and abusive of those who honestly disagree with Catholic dogma—in effect. Had Spellman had the authority the Catholics have in Spain he would probably had her jailed or expelled from the country. There is good evidence to convince many that those Spanish Republicans who were unbelievers, were exterminated by the Franco regime when it acquired power.

Thus it can be seen how the process of elimination and suppression of doubters continues.—(Reprinted from *The Liberal*, U.S.A.)

J. H. JOHNSON.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS—A MODERN DELUSION. By Frank Kenyon. Price 5s.; postage 3d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM. The Great Alternative. By Chapman Cohen. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 3d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

Charles Bradlaugh's old parliamentary constituency, Northampton, has moved far from the standards he laid down when he was their M.P. The Council now expect a religious test from applicants for Council jobs. An issue of the *Local Government Service* asks some pertinent question of the Town Council, and wants to know in what way "the fact that a sanitary inspector is a Roman Catholic, Methodist, or an Atheist, should make any difference to his administration of the Public Health Acts"? The paper also points out that "in the fight for liberty of conscience Northampton bears an honoured name, for it was Northampton that in 1880 sent to Parliament Charles Bradlaugh, a confessed Atheist." Of one thing we can be certain the science of sanitation owes very little to religious influence, nor does it, obviously to toleration.

A statue of the Virgin Mary has, in Rome, "increased the religious fervour of thousands of Italians," reports Father J. Grassi, who explained that throngs of people come to watch the statue every night which, it is claimed, moves. It appears that thousands go to Confession after seeing this, and many Communist membership cards are found torn to pieces. *The Register*, U.S.A., a Catholic newspaper, runs a headline, "This scares the Communists." What a wonderful opportunity to fight Communism; arrange for moving statues to be sent to the U.S.S.R. and all the Communists from Stalin down will tear up their cards—perhaps!

From Augsburg in Germany comes the news that the Apocalypse has been interpreted over the German radio through the use of jazz and dance music. The headline over the report has it that "At last, a use for Jazz"; had we been sub-editor, we would have had it, "At last, a use for the Apocalypse."

The Roman Catholic hierarchy got it "in the neck" from Mr. George Tomlinson the other day. He has at last seen that all the religious education agitation from Roman Catholic bishops and priests was for public funds for their own schools which, in the ultimate, would not be bound by any English Education Act, but by what an Italian Pope with his Italian court, would say. All these people want is money, mostly from English Protestants and indifferentists, to be able to pay for teaching Roman Catholicism; and in the memorandum sent by the Minister for Education he points out that "the strong tradition in England and Wales is against denominational teaching in schools financed from public funds."

Mr. Tomlinson appreciates the "courtesy" with which the Roman Catholic bishops present their case, but we were glad to see he recognised that the Roman Catholic community "were asking for a very substantial further subvention from rates and taxes towards the cost of their schools." And he added, "the effect would be completely to destroy the basis on which the provisions of the 1944 Act were found." For years, the Roman Catholic community in this country have filled their journals with complaints that *they* would have to pay for teaching *their* religion, and we are very pleased to see that this will have to be the case. We only wish the other fancy religions were forced to do the same.

The Pope, the other day, broadcast a talk to the sick people of the world urging them to obtain consolation

by considering the "Passion" of our Lord. The impudence of these religious cranks seems to have no bounds. There never has been a sick person in the whole history of illness who was ever cured by considering the "Passion" of our Lord or anybody else's Passion. We do not mean that "miracles" cannot be produced in proof. We mean that no incurably sick person has ever been really consoled by anybody. God is just as helpless as the Pope or a Spiritualist.

The *Church Times* sadly admits that some people "do not believe in the Devil," whilst others "regard him as a mere joke." We just love to read these propositions solemnly and piously discussed. The subject of the Devil should always be reverently treated, and we quite share the anger of Bishop Talbot who insisted that, as Christians, they had no right to speak disrespectfully of him. Joking about the Devil indeed! In any case, all Anglo-Catholics should be sternly told that there is not the slightest chance of unity with the Roman Catholic Church if they breathe the least doubt about a real horned, tail-and-wing-bearing Devil. God bless him.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop McGrath has discovered that "to-day for the first time in the history of humanity a challenge has been thrown out against the Almighty Himself." This precious discovery will no doubt astonish even the most sheepish of his sheep followers, none of whom, we are sure, can say that the word "Atheism" is one they have never heard. All that Atheists did in the past, according to the learned Archbishop, was to "misinterpret the attributes of the Deity's existence." That's all. And what do we do now? Why, we "take up the attitude of direct opposition to Almighty God." Alas, we do indeed. We even roundly declare that he's a myth—so naughty of us!

London's "down-and-outs" on the Embankment have a treat in store for them next year, they will have their own church and canteen." A £1,000 vehicle ordered by the London Embankment Mission will broadcast sacred music and sermons. We offer no prizes for guessing which will be the most popular, the church or the canteen end of the vehicle.

The case of Mabel Slocombe of Ogmere Vale (Glam.) a cripple since birth who was miraculously cured, has all the earmarks of the usual "miracle." Miss Slocombe wrenched herself and then found her back which had been displaced, suddenly straightened and "even her squint was rectified." We have the usual Christian phrases—she had never given up her faith or hope, she had prayed every day—extra on Sundays! never forgetting her Bible, and naturally the usual peans of praise to God for "curing" her followed. That, logically, God was also responsible for her condition did not shake her confidence, nor does the medical explanation that bone displacements can be cured by natural means. This is a too reasonable explanation, and Miss Slocombe and her pastor prefer to thank God.

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Was a religious burial service held over Simon the "Amethyst" cat, who was buried in a cotton wool-lined coffin?

Why did not Our Lady of Fatima perform a useful miracle for once, and save, at least, the lives of the passengers when the plane bearing her statue crashed?

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.

Telephone No.: Holborn 2801.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S. The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of ten shillings from the Birmingham Branch N.S.S.

O. L. DAVIES.—Thanks for "Fatima" cuttings.

E. LECKIE, O. L. DAVIES.—Thanks for cuttings.

L. F. BRAILEY.—For references to brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ see Matt. xii, 46-49; xiii, 55-56; Mark xv, 40; Rom. 1, 3; James 1, 1. Biblical commentaries on these texts will perhaps convince you one way or the other.

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).

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning. 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.

SUGAR PLUMS

Saturday, January 7, is the date of the National Secular Society's Annual Dinner in the Holborn Restaurant, London. At 6-30 p.m. there will be a reception at which old and new friends can meet. After the dinner there will be a first-class musical programme, and speeches from well-known speakers. The whole proceedings take the form of a large and happy family party. Tickets are 15s. remittance for which must accompany applications. Those who intend to be present must remember that it will be the late applicants who will be disappointed. Applicants should state if vegetarians, and if any hotel accommodation is required. Tickets from General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.

We cannot remind readers too often that leaflets on "Sunday Cinemas" for free distribution in any locality where that question is being tested can be had from the N.S.S. General Secretary.

No better seasonal gift can be given than a good book, and we hope readers will choose something from the Pioneer Press list this year. The gift will fulfil two functions—to remember a friend and, if he is not already in our ranks, to help him to become a Freethinker.

Apart from books, however, there is still one gift which will be thoroughly appreciated, and that is, a year's subscription to *The Freethinker*. This will give pleasure not only to the recipient but will also help to add to our growing circle of enthusiastic readers. The subscription, post free, to any address is 17s. a year.

Books have always been ideal Christmas presents and we are sure that Mr. Royston Pike's *Round the Year with the World's Religions* will be much appreciated by most boys and girls—particularly in Rationalist families. Mr. Pike describes the customs, the festivals, the songs, myths and legends, which take place or used to take place every month, and a very fine collection they make.

Here is all about Christmas Day, about April Fool's Day, about the Devil, about two-faced Janus, and New Year's Eve and Easter eggs, Morris Dancers, the May Queen, and dozens of other stories familiar to most adults but more than fascinating for those children who are continually asking the eternal "why"?

Mr. Pike takes his journey through this maze of legend, myth and custom, with keen zest himself, and has contrived to write with ease—and with scholarship. We can fancy no better introduction to the subject for young people—especially those who at school are smart enough to see the disparity between religious and history lessons. There are a number of excellent illustrations and four colour plates. *Round the Year with the World's Religions* is published by Watts & Co. at 10s. 6d.

Much ado is still being made over the use of the word "forename," in place of "Christian name," on official forms, and much ink has been spilled to point out that the new practice is "causing irritation and offence to Christians." How truly Christian! Their susceptibilities are so easily hurt, and, of course, they never think that the words "Christian name" may cause irritation to a non-Christian.

The Debate between the Rev. T. Crombie, B.D. (Church of Scotland) and Mrs. M. Whitefield on "Is the Christian or the Secularist better equipped to face life?" arranged by the Glasgow Secular Society, brought another fine audience to the highly successful session of indoor meetings at the McLellan Galleries. The hall was filled to overflowing on this occasion, and the clergyman, a capable speaker, who put up a very good case, had a rare tussle with Mrs. Muriel Whitefield, the energetic and experienced secretary of the Glasgow Secular Society, who answered his arguments in the best Freethought manner. An altogether successful evening which should considerable help the Cause. The literature sales were excellent, and, what was particularly important, many of the audience made contact with Freethought for the first time.

"Has Man been selected to work out a Plan?" That is the question to be debated this evening (December 11) in the Kings Hall Cinema, Whalley Road, Acerrington, Lanes., between Mr. J. Wells, F.R.H.S., and Mr. J. Clayton. Whatever the answers may be we can reply upon Mr. Clayton to defend man against an affirmative. The contest begins at 6-30, and admission is free.

It is not only with Christians that *The Freethinker* sometimes gets into hot water. We have to watch our steps so as not to hurt the feelings of even Rationalists. For example, when we said at the time of the Freethought Congress in Rome that Mr. Charles Smith, the Editor of the *Truth Seeker*, represented American Freethinkers there, we did not intend to be taken absolutely literally. Of course we knew he could not possibly have represented every society and its members in such a huge country as the U.S.A.

We received, in fact, a large number of disclaimers, and so we thought it best to point out that he represented his own paper. Alas, we now find that he was sent as a delegate by the National Liberal League and by the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, in addition, and so we are pleased to put the matter right, and hope we are amicably pardoned for any unintentional mistake.

THE R.101 SEANCE—A SUMMING-UP

READERS who have been following my little discussion with Mr. Wood will remember that he started it by first pointing out that Freethinkers ridiculed "that which they do not understand"—meaning Spiritualism and he asked "scoffers" to read works by a number of writers like Paul Branton (whom I have read). And he instanced, "the remarkable demonstration of mediumship" by Mrs. Garrett, two or three days after the disaster to the R. 101 airship, the commander of which was one of his friends.

I accepted the challenge and asked Mr. Wood to help me to investigate this case; and I particularly wanted to do so without "scoffing." He claimed that Mrs. Garrett "gave a detailed account of the disaster and its cause in highly technical terms," and at the official inquiry held afterwards, the details given by Mrs. Garrett "were found to be absolutely correct." In the subsequent exchange of letters and articles, I made Mr. Wood admit that he never saw the first verbatim report of the seance and, as far as I could gather, he never saw the report of the official inquiry either. He therefore never made the necessary comparison to see whether the "details were absolutely correct" and I was obliged to charge Mr. Wood with "bluffing." He took this (as I knew he would) very badly, and went post haste to the *Psychic News* with fresh complaints. The *Psychic News* therefore took up the case as it was bound to do.

I was asked to comment by Mr. A. W. Austen, its Editor, first on an account of the seance which we are told was taken from notes made by Miss Beenham (who was then the late Mr. Harry Price's secretary) and on an account written by a Mr. W. Charlton, who was the Mr. "X" to whom was shown the "protocol" of the seance (whatever that was, for I have no idea). Readers will have read my comments which were published also in the *Psychic News* with a reply by Mr. Austen.

Since then, however, I have been in communication with two lady members of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research, on the telephone and by letter, and it was most amusing to learn a few things from the inner or esoteric circle in these matters.

First of all, I asked what qualifications had Miss Beenham for taking down highly technical stuff delivered at terrific speed. The answer I got from one of the aforementioned ladies was that she had *no* qualifications for such work. On the contrary, she was quite unable to take down the seance, and came out of the room for this reason *very distressed*. I have no means of testing this statement, but I should say that it is just what might have happened. That something like it really did happen we get from Mr. Charlton who wrote in the *Psychic News* that he spent some hours, after a report of the seance appeared in *Nash's Magazine*, explaining to Price and Mrs. Goldney the "full import" of the seance—in case they were too ignorant to see it, I suppose, though Price must have been well paid by *Nash's*—and Mr. Charlton was actually naive enough to add that Mrs. Goldney took down careful notes, and that it was from these notes that "the R. 101 seance story was subsequently compiled." Mr. Charlton now says that he did not mean this but something else; though why Mrs. Goldney should have taken careful notes if he did not mean exactly what he said is beyond me.

I have since been asked to explain the presence of "Achy" in the seance—the name of a town I was assured was *not* on any map. I was glad to see that Mr. Charlton now admits that it *was* on the map used by the unfortunate Irwin. The presence of Achy, how-

ever, may be explained in a number of ways. If the word is clearly shown in Miss Beenham's indecipherable notes and she managed to decipher it, we could have something to go upon. But until I am convinced that it was in her notes, why should I be called upon to waste my time?

As was only to be expected, the Editor of *Psychic News* is quite angry, and charges me with being concerned "mainly with scoring debating points," and also, "that I am not averse to extracting a sentence from its context to give a completely false view." This is a piece of deliberate impudence, designed to impress his readers. Here is the extract as given by him:—

"There is no evidence that it was the discarnate Irwin speaking. But it is possible that the information came from the dead Irwin, telepathically, and was 'picked up' by the entranced medium. This hypothesis may be the *vera causa* of all genuine trance communication."

What may or may not be possible is obviously the way Harry Price tries to soften his emphatic declaration that there was "no evidence" that it was the spirit speaking. But Mr. Austen, knowing his credulous readers, actually imagines that he has now proved to them that when Price says, there is "no evidence," he means the very opposite—that it is perfect evidence. It reminds me how Christians who are always boasting that Jesus taught love for everybody, reply when asked to deal with his emphatic declaration that you must hate your father and mother to be his disciple. They have an easy answer to that one. When Jesus says *hate*, he really means *love*.

Then there is the disconcerting problem posed by Mr. Paul Tabori—Harry Price's literary executor. After Mr. Wood had hurled his *Sunday Dispatch* account of the seance at me as infallible proof of the existence of spirits, Mr. Tabori sailed in with, "I think it would be best for both gentlemen [Mr. Wood and myself] to ignore the newspaper version; this was edited and *changed* for the purpose of Sunday circulation and *Harry Price had little to do with it.*" [My italics.] Mr. Austen now tells us that Mr. Tabori didn't mean this but something else; and that all he wanted to say was that we should go to Price's book for a proper account of the seance. Yes, but we were given a newspaper cutting to discuss, and it is only after I had exposed it as an arrant fraud that we are sent to the book. And what was the conclusion of the book anyway? Why, "There is no evidence that it was the discarnate Irwin speaking!"

Then there is the deliberate statement made by Mr. Charlton that after he met Price and Mrs. Goldney, it was from his emanations "that the R. 101 seance story was subsequently compiled." Did he mean this? Not on your life. He meant something quite different—it was merely "an analysis of the evidence."

For my part I am a little tired of this deliberate fraud. Almost everybody concerned with the story now wants to take back what was originally said. Price didn't mean it, Mr. Tabori didn't mean it, Mr. Charlton didn't mean it; but it was only after I had examined what they said that we are now told they didn't mean it.

If what I have been told about Miss Beenham's qualifications by a member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research is true, she was quite unable to take down the Garrett seance and, if that was the case, then the *Sunday Dispatch* account of the seance is one of the most deliberate impositions ever made on behalf of Spiritualism.

The only way to authenticate the account given by Harry Price in his books is to test what is there said

with the help of Miss Beenhäm's notes—and that seems quite impossible. The "revised" version of Mr. Charlton and Mrs. Goldney is obviously not what was said by Mrs. Garrett.

If the reader imagines that this exposure of a complete fraud will have any effect, he does not know his Spiritualists. The R. 101 seance will be always acclaimed as "one of the classics of supernormal communication," as Mr. Austen says. The bigger the fraud, the more it will be defended. I have shown more than once in these columns the humbug of D. D. Home's "levitation" in the presence of three members of the aristocracy who are always acclaimed as witnesses, but who actually never saw any levitation. Yet this piece of sheer humbug is constantly repeated as proof of Home's "supernormal powers," and will be, so long as Spiritualists swallow anything put before them. It will be the same with the R. 101 seance—nothing I can say here, nor indeed any criticism, will have the slightest effect. The miracles of Christianity and the miracles of Spiritualism can shake hands—they both depend on "Faith" and the will to believe. And we are forced to leave both Christians and Spiritualists holding their miraculous babies.

H. CUTNER.

FREETHINKERS OF INDIA

"FREETHINKERS" is a name which may very appropriately be given to the Chárvákas of India, although their own name for their brand of free thought, which describes it accurately and precisely, was different. And a very militant and pugnacious breed of Free-thinkers, these Chárvákas of ancient India, were. They would appear to have believed in the use of a sledge-hammer to kill the proverbial fly. The language they used was far from being moderate. The main target of their vigorous attacks at the time was naturally the twin system of Vedic ritual—burnt offerings (*hom*) to the ancestors in heaven, and bloody sacrifices of animals (*yagya*) to the gods; there was little else to attack. Here goes an atomic bomb of theirs:—

"The authors of the three Vedas were *cheats*, *buffoons* and *ghouls*."

(*Trai Vedasya kartarah dhurta-bhanda-nisacharah.*)

Now each of these three "sweet epithets" (*chárvákas*) was specifically aimed at a point in the target. The authors were called "cheats," as it was taken for granted that the whole system of *hom-yagya* was intentionally elaborated by the Brahmanas, with a view of personal gain. The "dánstuti" hymns in the Rig-Veda, wherein sacrificers (the *Yajmánas*) were highly praised for their generosity in offering to the officiating priests large guerdons and gifts (*dan* and *dakhshina*), were picked upon as a convenient peg to hang these authors from. One King Sudás is stated to have given away a hundred thousand cows, besides a *swarna* or a gold mohur to each.

In calling them "buffoons," the Chárváka had in his mind the indecent ceremony in which the *mahishi*, or the principal queen, took a part to secure a blessing in the Horse Sacrifice.

They were "ghouls" for the apparent reason that they gorged themselves on the flesh of the sacrificed animals. That is how the seed of "*Ahimsa*" was sown as a reaction to the overworked system of blood-letting.

Compared to this blow-out stroke, the following gibes were mere pin-pricks: "You say that the animals killed in sacrifice go to heaven, then why not kill your father and send him to heaven" and "If the victuals burnt in fire reach the ancestors in heaven, will you try to feed

a guest sitting on the flat roof by serving meal on the ground?" or "You will not, I believe, provide food for consumption on the way, to your brother starting on a long journey."

It will be seen that only three Vedas are mentioned, the reason being that the fourth, or the Atharvan-Veda, had not yet been compiled or canonised by the concensus of opinion among the priesthood.

So successful were these virulent attacks, that the Brahmanas quietly acquiesced, and the Upanishads, coming soon after, made the whole system of *hom-yagya* symbolic. Heretical sects, like that of the Jains, laid great value by this strong criticism and treasured the sayings of Chárvákas in their religious books, and made "*ahimsa*" the central doctrine in their teaching. Even the learned author of "A Symposium of All Schools of Philosophy" (*Sarva-Darshan-Sangrah*) could not ignore them, as they were so popularly cited.

When the Vedic cult, as such, was thus completely swept off the battlefield, the Chárváka guns were turned on the Shaiva and Vaishnava cults, which had replaced the Vedic. The Chárvákas were well aware of the origin and history of the Shiv-Shahti worship, and of the orgies indulged in, in the name of religion. They also knew how some of the Vaishnavas, like those of the Sahjiya cult of Bengal, had fallen and were sunk deep in the same sort of dirty ditch. The Chárváka bombshells were selected accordingly. Mr. A. Troyer, the translator of "*Dabistan-i-mazahib*" (the School of Religions)* translates the Chárvákas' lurid remarks into Latin, but even thus, they are too naked to be copied here.

Now all this was destructive work. Had they no constructive programme then? What did they put in the place of all that they destroyed? They pulled down religionists' fine castles in the air, and godists' heavenly mansions, and they salvaged nothing. Not a stone out of the debris did they re-use, not even the key-stone; they had no eye for the celestial nymphs, the *Apsaras* or the *houris* of Indra's heaven, and no taste for the divine wines, *soma* and *surá*. "No soul, no God, and no next world," said they. On the very extensive site they cleared, they just put a post-war structure, a simple prefabricated house, a strictly utilitarian unattractive cottage, which their discomfited opponents heartily laughed at; these people gave the Chárváka teaching a coarse hedonistic appearance, and parodied it in a short sentence of four words: *Bnam, kritvá ghrítam piv*—"Live a luxurious life, even if you have to incur debts, for you shall never have to repay them." Good humour of this repartee is patent, for religious intolerance, which is a marked feature of all the Semitic religions, was conspicuous by absence among the Hindus. This is not to say that the Chárvákas were quite the pets of society; like their brethren in the West, they had their dose of tincture of opprobrium, and their share of obloquy. Consequently they never were a strong organised body, and their number was always small. Another reason for this was, that their philosophy of life was purely and rigorously ethical. Before long, they had changed into Ethicists or *Niti-vádins*. A school of philosophy by that name existed even in pre-Buddhist times, and formed one of the 62 schools, over which the Buddha is said to have gained victory in debate.

The Chárváka's stock-in-trade was brief. According to them, what really exists is the physical body; there is no soul as apart from this body; what is called mind, evolves out of this body somehow, just as the effect of

* A book in Persian on the subject of the Comparative Study of Religions, written by Mohsan-Fani, about the middle of the 17th century; perhaps the first book on the subject.

intoxication is produced by the mixing of certain ingredients, or as milk descends into the udder of the cow on the sight or touch of her calf.

All our positive and exact knowledge we gain through the senses. The knowledge thus gained produces five *Skandhas* or types of patterns in us: (1) direct sensation and perception; (2) due to association with names and words or sounds; (3) consciousness and memory. (4) emotions, passions and desires; (5) feelings of happiness and unhappiness, likes and dislikes. Revealed words, or the sayings of sages, and analogy, have no validity and furnish no proof of the existence of things.

The world with all in it is an agglomeration of atoms of four elements, earth, water, fire and air, in various permutations and combinations, which take place in accordance with an eternal *dharma* (i.e., natural law).

Our life is limited to this earth, for death is the end-all; we have therefore to derive all the happiness we can while we are on this earth. *Niti-vākas*, or wise sayings which past experience of generations has shown as beneficial for stable society, are our best guide in this matter.

Besides these *Niti-Shāstras*, the *Chārvākas* are supposed to have had at one time, a regular book of aphorisms of their philosophy, in imitation of the other schools, and called the "*Bṛihaspati-Sūtras*." As these *Sūtras* could not have covered more than a page or so, they were soon lost.

Where Mohsan got his information from, he does not say, but it must have been from some *Chārvāka* whom he met. Only 150 years ago, a *Chārvāka* teacher lived at Hathras (near Agra) and composed a book in Hindi verse on the doctrines of his school.

G. B. SINGH.

THOUGHT AS A FINE ART

THE compact size of "Thinker's Library" volumes gives them an air and illusion of easy readability, the sort of thing that might be slipped into the pocket and read upon the daily journey between the suburbs and place of work. A strap-hanging companion, in fact. Some of them do fulfil this requirement, while others like the present book ("*The Art of Thought*," by Graham Wallas. Watts. Thinker's Library, No 136, 162 pp., 3s. 6d.) do not come into this category at all. Although shorn of four chapters and a number of the footnotes, this reprint does not make easy reading. It demands an attention that is becoming more and more difficult to give in an age of noise, and where lack or minimum of effort has become almost a virtue.

This is not to disparage a book that deals clearly with a human activity that most of us take for granted, and it is not difficult to see why earlier editions were described as "a standard guide to the mechanism of thought." As such, it should have a place upon the booklists of Teacher Training Colleges, and similar institutions. It is precisely the lack of such books in places where they would be of the greatest value that causes much incredible woolliness in the framing of curricula for training teachers and others practically engaged in the art of thought.

Mr. Wallas' argument is persuasive, and if at times he allows his Fabianism to overcome his scientific approach, then at least these occasions are rare, and do not greatly detract from the soundness and cogency of the general thesis. First published in 1926, the freshness of the author's approach has not lessened during the almost quarter of a century that has passed, and one is left with the feeling that this book has a force that is often

entirely lacking in more recent and topical publications. Perhaps the most questionable feature of the present edition is the omission of the four chapters that I have mentioned above. The same thing was done in an edition of 1945, so that an abridged version of this work is nothing new. Granted, abridgement is always a tricky business, and to find fault with it seems at best niggling and at worst wilfully captious. Moreover, the volume has an air of completeness, and the argument in no way suffers through this curtailment. Still, the finished result fails to be completely satisfying. Chiefly, I suspect because the author's synopses of these chapters has been included as an appendix and they serve to whet the appetite for more rather than merely adumbrate more of the author's argument. It would have been better to have left them out altogether.

The first part of the book is taken up with a discussion of the problems that appear as preliminary and fundamental to the formulation of an art of thought. These are, in the author's words "first, what conception of the human organism and human consciousness best indicates the general facts with which such an art must deal; and, secondly, which is the 'natural' thought-process which such an art must attempt to modify." The remainder is taken up with the various stages in the development of the art, and with the training of thinkers. Mr. Wallas appears to have had few illusions about the last point. He talks about educational policy being guided "by at least a half-hearted desire that every citizen should have the opportunity of developing all his powers." It is this half-hearted desire that has given rise to a vicious circle. Practitioners of an art of thought will not be produced by the present system, yet until there is a developed art of thought on the lines suggested by the author, the system will not be changed.

One of the most striking features of the thesis is the wide range from which the illustrations and enlargements of the stages of the argument are chosen. They range from personal experience to Baron Liebig (of cooking fame), Blake, Robert Graves, and Mr. McLaughlin of California, who "set a new standard of intensity in the service-stroke at lawn-tennis." There seems to be a moral underlying the use of this eclectic gallery of illustrations, namely, that the art of thought outlined in this book, far from being a highly theoretical and purposely abstruse subject, is one of concern to us all, that has its roots within our own experience, untouched by the clouded mysticism of "divine will."

It is a piece of absurd "blurb" to say that all Freethinkers should read this book. Of course they should! And so should everyone else who cares for the values of integrity and clarity. This book is a clear statement of the workings of the human mind, and how it can help in solving conclusively the problems of our own times. It is more. It is a forthright counterblast to those who believe the humbug that a return to Christian values will put right the world.

VICTOR E. NEUBURG.

CORRESPONDENCE

STATE-CAPITALISM

SM.—I would reply to Mr. T. D. Smith who (27th November, 1949), questions another correspondent's description of the U.S.S.R. as "State-capitalism."

First, what is capitalism? I accept the definition of Marx that it is a system of society based on private property under which the majority of the means and instruments of production and distribution are owned by a small minority of the population whereas the majority of the people own nothing except their ability to work. This they must sell in return for wages in order that they may live.

Do these conditions apply to Russia? I would say that they do. The State owns practically all the property in the U.S.S.R.—and State-ownership means that it is still "private," since it is owned to the exclusion of all but the owners. The State employs workers and pays them wages: a worker in Russia who doesn't work has the same alternative as a worker in Britain or America—he can starve.

Where are the capitalists in Russia? I advise Mr. Smith to read *Soviet Millionaires*, a pamphlet by Communist Reg. Bishop, in which he attempts to explain away the existence of millionaires in Russia. Judging by the average wages of Soviet workers, published from Soviet sources, it would take a worker many hundreds of years to accumulate a million roubles—even if he didn't eat or pay rent! Where did these millionaires get their roubles? The Soviet Government pays interest on State loans, unearned income, Mr. Smith, and where does it come from?

The reasons for increasing conflict between Russia and America since the war is the same as between Britain and Germany in 1939. Rival capitalist countries are in competition for markets in which to sell their goods. During the war our capitalist class were willing to forget the rivalry with their Russian equivalents in order to jointly defeat Germany—a choice of the lesser of two evils only.

Perhaps all my arguments are in vain, for perhaps Mr. Smith's definition of "Capitalism" differs from the one I have given and on which all my arguments are based—in which case I think he cannot have taken his study of Marxian economics very seriously!—Yours, etc.. (Miss) LISA BRYAN.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HEADMASTER OF THE CHISTLEHURST AND SIDCUP GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Sir,—I read a report in the local paper of a speech that you are supposed to have made to a Free Church body. It is probably a very garbled and inaccurate medley of what you did say but it states that you emphasised the long connection between religion and education. As it was a Christian gathering presumably you meant the Christian religion and, by inference, the influence beneficial.

When a man has views to air he ought I think, have it clearly understood whether he is talking as a common member of community or in his capacity as a local dignitary if he is one. A headmaster of a council school might be reported as if he were speaking the mind of the employing body and should be careful of his facts. The churches are artful and influential, they know that if they can get a parish bigwig to say some words on their behalf, it will influence many people who feel incompetent to explore problems and, coming from a headmaster, will accept as gospel that the Church has had an effect upon education of which Christianity can be proud. But is this so?

Though I am a person of little schooling, and not much education, I realise that there is a distinction between the dissemination of knowledge and education, though I should like to lump them together here as I think you have done in your speech.

I was taught that the period that succeeded the downfall of the Roman Empire, which lasted some 600 years, and in which religion, untorn by major schism, dominated European life completely, is known to all historians as the Dark Ages. Here, surely, was the golden opportunity of Christianity to prove its Zeal for Learning. But no, it was an age of gloom and superstition eventually dispelled by a rebirth of the culture of Pagan Greece and Mohammedan Arabia. This caused a recession of religion and led to a setting up of the Inquisition by means of which the Church hoped to stem the advance of knowledge. One has no need to mention, I hope, Giordano Bruno, whose statue in Rome Mussolini refused to demolish even at the repeated demands of the Pope; or Da Vinci, whose study of anatomy upset our educational zealots. Why, Sir, it was only in about 1822 that the greatest of all Christian Churches decided it was permissible for a Christian to believe that the world was, in fact, not a flat disc with Jerusalem as its centre.

Burckhardt notes particularly in his *Civilisation of the Renaissance* that there were Latin schools in every town of the least importance in Italy and that they were the charge not of the Church but of the Municipality.

To come nearer home, however. In 1807, after 18 centuries of Christian zeal for education, it was stated in the House of Commons that more than 90 per cent. of the population was illiterate. The Church opposed every effort to establish a national system of schools, its chief spokesman in the House of Lords (the Bishop of Exeter) saying "Looking at the poor as a class, they could not expect those who were assigned by Providence to the laborious occupations of life should be able, largely, to cultivate their intellects."

In 1833, the Government of this Christian country voted a £20,000 grant for education (the Royal stables were costing £70,000) and the money was handed over to the religious bodies to be spent. The Government, upon consideration of the problem, later decided that even then it did not get value for this pitiable sum.

The names of the great educationalists include Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi and Robert Owen. None of these were Christian, and I can only recall one fact that would justify such a statement as you are reported to have made, and that is, that Oxford University, which excluded Shelley from its precincts, conferred upon General Booth a Doctorate.

I don't believe for a moment that your boasted Corporate Act of Worship daily is exercising any Christian influence upon the boys at your school. Maybe a schoolmaster doesn't get very near the boys to learn their opinions, and you know I'm sure how difficult it is to get a master who will administer the subject.

No, Sir, I don't believe the two subjects are in close affinity.
—Yours, etc.,
F. R. WISE.

OBITUARY

It is with regret we record the death of Mrs. Helene Simmons.

After many years of suffering she died in her 86th year. An avowed Freethinker she was a regular attender at the Manchester Secular meetings before illness prevented her doing so. A Secular Service was read at the Manchester Crematorium. We extend our sympathy to her family in their sad loss.

M. McC.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

- Accrington Discussion Group (Kings Hall, Whalley Road).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., DEBATE: "Has Man been Selected to Work out a Plan?" Aff.: Mr. J. WELLS, F.R.H.S. Neg.: Mr. J. CLAYTON (N.S.S.).
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: BRAINS TRUST. Mixed team of experts. Have your questions ready.
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.1).—Tuesday, December 13, 7 p.m.: "Some Implications of Psychological Research," Mr. GUILFOYLE WILLIAMS.
- Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Who are the Persecutors?" Mr. HARRY McSHANE.
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: A Lecture.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (The International Club, 64, George Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Morality of Spiritualism," Mr. J. F. MORLEY.
- Sex Education Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.1).—Monday, December 12, 7-30 p.m.: "Contraceptives and Automatic Machines—Wowers on the Warpath," Dr. NORMAN HAIRE, Ch.M., M.B.
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Why Patriotism is not Enough?" Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Moral Alternative to War," Mr. STUART MORRIS (General Secretary, P.P.U.).

OUTDOOR

- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING, G. WOODCOCK, C. McCALL and KAY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Bombed site, St. Mary's Gate).—Lectures every lunch hour, 1 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING, C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. ENRY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

SEASONAL GIFTS

BOOKS ARE ALWAYS APPRECIATED

AGE OF REASON. By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s., paper, 2s., Postage 3d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price, 2s. 6d. each, postage 3d.

PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS. By J. M. Wheeler. Price, 2s., postage, 2d.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth, 5s., paper, 3s. 6d., postage, 3d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED. Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price, 4s. 6d., postage 3d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. By Chapman Cohen, An Appreciation of two great Reformers. Price 3s., postage 3d.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. By Chapman Cohen
What is the Use of Prayer? Did Jesus Christ Exist? Thou shall not suffer a Witch to Live. The Devil. Deity and Design. Agnosticism or . . .? Atheism. What is Freethought? Must we have a Religion? The Church's fight for the Child. Giving 'em Hell. Freethought and the Child. Morality without God. Christianity and Slavery. Gods and their Makers. Woman and Christianity. What is the use of a Future Life? Christianity and Ethics. Price 2d. each. Postage 1d.
COMPLETE SET OF 18 CLOTH BOUND. Price 5s. Postage 3d.



THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S New "Christmas" Greeting Card

Printed in two colours, this attractive design will be heartily appreciated.

As an alternative, may we suggest last year's Greeting Card? We still have a few copies left.

6d. each ————— Postage 1d.



From all Booksellers or direct from the
PIONEER PRESS