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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Racism and Rationalism

A FEW weeks ago, an imposing ceremony took place in South Africa: the erection of a monument to the "Voortrekkers," the old Boer pioneers who opened up South Africa to the white races about the middle of the nineteenth century. At this official ceremony, both the Prime Minister, Dr. Malan, the present Leader of the Opposition, General Smuts, and other leading personalities were present and made speeches. The purport of Dr. Malan's speech and of those of his colleagues was plain: they celebrated, one and all, the grim God of the old theologian, Calvin. Who, in his inscrutable wisdom, had providentially guided the footsteps of the Boers to lay the foundation of a white paradise in South Africa; a living testimonial to "Christian civilisation" in its Calvinistic and predestinarian interpretation.

The pious platitudes enunciated by Dr. Malan and his colleagues on that auspicious occasion did not have to wait long before being translated into effective action. For, as we write these lines, the radio and the Press announce a new and ambitious policy of racial discrimination. In Dr. Malan's own Afrikaans language, "Apartheid," which is to be translated into legislation during the course of the 1950 session of the South African Parliament, wherein, of course, the Calvinistic Apostles of racial discrimination have held a majority since the General Election of April, 1948, which displaced the Smuts regime.

It is opportune to raise this burning question of racial relations in the modern world for two reasons. Firstly, with regard to South Africa today, we observe the last hide-out, so to speak, of the old racist god of Judaism and Calvinism, with his "chosen race" and Divine Predestination of the Elect to rule over the "lesser breeds without the law." Secondly, because it would be surely to take an altogether too narrow a view of the scope of Rationalism were we to limit its operations purely to the religious field. Politics and sociology have their own superstitions not less irrational than are those of religion; of this last category, racism, racial predestination is perhaps the most absurd and the most harmful. A modern sociologist has even styled it as "the modern superstition." In any case, it is a superstition that is secular only in form, in substance, it belongs essentially to the province of religious psychology of the most primitive kind.

The theory of racism, if we may dignify a crude superstition by such a term, has been trenchantly summarised by a contemporary American anthropologist in her notable contribution to a scientific sociology. In *Race and Racism*, Ruth Benedict writes:—

"Race, then, is not 'the modern superstition.' But racism is. Racism is the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority. It is the dogma that the hope of civilisation depends upon eliminating some races and keeping others pure. It is the dogma that one race has carried progress with it throughout human

history and can alone ensure future progress. It is a dogma rampant in the world to-day and which, under the Nazi régime, was actually made into a principal basis of German polity."

Our author relevantly adds: "Racism is not like race, a subject the content of which can be scientifically investigated. It is, like religion, a belief which can be studied only historically." Let us now proceed to investigate the history of racism in accordance with the above dictum.

The first legislators to define racism in coherent and exclusive terms, as also to embody its theories in written authoritative legislation, were, of course, the ancient Jews, the editors of the Mosaic Law; Ezra and Nehemiah in particular, whose still extant books in the Canonical Scriptures, preach racism in its purest and most exclusive form. On no account was any inter-marriage between Jew and Gentile to be permitted, for it was an "abomination before the Lord." Accordingly, all Jews were obligated, under pain of death, to put away their non-Jewish wives. For the "holy seed" of Israel must not be contaminated with "impure" (i.e., non-Jewish) blood.

Such was the "Nuremberg" legislation of the ancient world, and still to be read in the Sacred Scriptures. But history has a fine sense of the ironic! More than 2,000 years later, Hitler and Rosenberg, the Gentile "Ezra" and "Nehemiah," retorted a Gentile "Chosen Race" theory upon the Jews in almost identical terms.

Christianity in its classical Catholic formulation was not racist. It could not have been so in view of its "universal" pretensions. Whatever the degree of superstition associated with it, the formula of "Paul"; "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek," is not racist, but is essentially cosmopolitan, and to that extent, represents an undoubted improvement upon Judaism with its "chosen race" theory. But the Protestant Reformation which created national Churches, opened the door wide for racist propaganda.

In particular, Calvinism, with its central dogmas of Divine Election and Predestination, opened the field directly for racist arrogance. For Calvin's God was the God of the Old Testament, the precise exclusive Deity of Ezra, Nehemiah and Moses. Racism is the new Calvinism which asserts that one group has the stigmata of superiority and the other has those of inferiority. Under Calvinistic influences, "the chosen race" theory made its way into modern national literature. It even entered English literature in the haughty assertion of Milton, "When God has a good thing in store for mankind, He first reveals it to His Englishman."

The more recent dogmas of an ostensibly political racism as propounded by such modern racist apostles as Gobineau, witnessed his pioneer racist classic (*The Inequality of the Human Races*, 1853-57), Houston Stewart Chamberlain (*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 1889), Adolf Hitler (*Mein Kampf*, 1924) and Alfred Rosenberg (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, 1930), may be presumed as familiar to all Freethinkers.

Under the political and ideological leadership of the "Aryan" Messiah, Hitler—a religious type if ever there was one—and his Japanese Shintoist colleagues (also dubbed as *bona fide* "Aryans" by the ideologues of the Third Reich), racism almost became a dominant world-cult. But the fact that today it is effectively confined to a minor State in South Africa—simultaneously a neo-Nazi State and a professed member of the British Commonwealth—does not mean that this ancient superstition has ceased to be a potential menace on a world-wide scale. It undoubtedly remains so, and as such, rationalists everywhere must be on their guard against it.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE CUCKOO IN THE NEST

MOST people know the phrase used here as a heading, and most people know the extraordinary habit of the cuckoo laying its eggs in another bird's nest to be there hatched with the rightful brood. But there is a great deal more to know about the habits of the cuckoo and, for those who are curious and take an interest in animal and bird life, I can heartily recommend Captain Bernard Aeworth's *The Cuckoo* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946, 10s. 6d. net). The book deals in great detail with almost all we know about the bird, together with Captain Aeworth's theories of bird migration and the way the wind affects their flight—and, as he is a thorough believer in a "Creator" of the Universe and all it contains, he uses the implications of his own observations as an attack on the theory of Evolution.

Some of his chapters I found to be extraordinarily interesting, especially the one in which he discusses the problem, not yet solved, as to how, in many cases, the cuckoo gets its eggs in some of the nests. The egg is certainly deposited in the bird's nest, but very often the nest is found built in most inaccessible places—that is, for a bird the size of a cuckoo. It could not possibly have laid it direct, yet there is the egg, often smaller than the other eggs, though why this should be so is one of the mysteries connected with this amazing bird.

What Capt. Aeworth has to say on "The First Law of Currents," on the way a bird can fly against or with the wind, whether it can or cannot feel wind-pressure, and why he disagrees with other experts like Prof. Patten, I personally cannot discuss. Only specialists in bird flight and their habits of migration can deal with him; though, for my part, I found what he had to say not only extremely informative but very stimulating. It is good to come across almost any writer who is not a "yes" man, and who has something fresh to say, discuss, or controvert. Capt. Aeworth is a practised swordsman, and he knows how to use, not a heavy broadsword, but a finely-tempered rapier. And with good will, amiability, and the feeling that he is nearly, if not quite, right, he thrusts and parries right through his book, certain that a benevolent Almighty is behind him.

His own special theory about the cuckoo laying its egg in very difficult nesting places is that the wife of the other bird is unfaithful with the male cuckoo, and it is she who brings the intruder into the family. Hence the word "cuckold," and the phrase, "the cuckoo in the nest." Of course, all sorts of objections can be brought against this theory, and the reader will find some detailed with good humour by Capt. Aeworth himself. He does his best to answer them and to his book I send the reader if he is interested—as indeed I was.

But scattered through the book is Capt. Aeworth's attack on the theory of Evolution, and it may be as well

to examine what he has to say, especially as he has the support of a number of other Fundamentalists who think that, because no answer can be given to some acknowledged difficulties, therefore the theory of Special Creation as outlined in Genesis, must be true. If an anti-Evolutionist were to ask me to show him from what previous form a bug was evolved, I would be obliged to say that I do not know. Nor do I know the ancestor of a flea. And I want to add here that Evolution does not depend entirely on Darwinism. It may be that "the survival of the fittest," Darwin's own contribution to the theory, cannot account for every variation in the species, and that there are hundreds of other causes about which we literally know nothing—as yet. The theory of Evolution—not any speculation how it worked or works—is the only one which can account for the world as we know it in a reasonable way. The theory of Special Creation, with a benevolent Almighty as the Artificer, explains nothing whatever; it has to be accepted entirely on "faith," and even then the problem of the "Creator" himself has to be solved.

Capt. Aeworth really believes that, in showing birds entirely devoid of affection and purely mechanistic, he has proved infallibly that Evolution is not true. He points out that "birds are as happy sitting on a few marbles as on their eggs. A bird has not sufficient sense to draw an egg underneath her if it has been displaced an inch. Move a nest of a ground-bird but a few feet and it will fail to locate it." And he quotes Mr. Douglas Dewar, the well-known opponent of Evolution, as having "completely demolished the possibility of intelligence in nest-building."

As for their lack of affection the evidence, he contends, is conclusive. "Anyone who doubts this seemingly brutal assertion would do well to study Lord Grey's *The Charm of Birds*. Robins never sing more blithely than after the violent death of their brood. Hedge sparrows and other birds are eager in rearing a cuckoo which has expelled their natural children which lie mangled and dead beneath their nest." And Capt. Aeworth goes on to show that the minds of birds are purely mechanical. He even points out that the way in which birds are killed off wholesale keeps the bird population in the world "constant," thus proving the wonderful "balance of nature." We are not, naturally, told the point of view of the birds themselves on this splendid idea of their Creator.

This "mechanical" view of birds he reinforces with the same argument in the case of insects. He takes the bee as an example, "apparently endowed with a brain as great, indeed, far greater than that of the greatest theoretical mathematician and with an apparent knowledge of applied mathematics, which make the architects of St. Paul's Cathedral or the Forth Bridge look clumsy by comparison." Is there here room for controversy, he asks? "Surely," he himself replies: "It is abundantly plain that the perfection of the work of bees, like ants and spiders, is proof that they are utterly without mentality of their own as engineers or navigators." And what does this prove? Why, of course, that "God, as the great 'I Am,' is incompatible with evolution as now taught and believed, because Truth, the very nature of God and all His Works, is unchanging through eternity." That the bee has not changed for a million years I am disposed to believe. But that it arose a few thousand years ago from the Creator's Hand exactly as we find it now is just a fairy tale. Capt. Aeworth has every right to believe what he likes, but merely to transfer the mystery of the bee to a totally unknown Creator solves nothing whatever.

God's "Purpose and Act," he insists, "can never be revealed by any reasoning," and I heartily agree with him. All reasoning must be abandoned when the Light of the World (or his Father) comes into the problem. Everything in the world was "created" from the so far undiscovered virus which is responsible for our colds, to the enormous clusters of stars, so huge that a string of numbers suggested as their size has no meaning. It is a very comfortable thought for believers—but for those who have not yet abandoned reasoning for Faith, it is just nonsense.

H. CUTNER.

THE SHAKESPEARE SUPERSTITION

I DO not know who are the people with a "foregone conclusion" that William Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon did not write the "Shakespeare" plays. The pastors and masters of youth do not allow it. The masters, indeed, if they abandoned the Stratford faith, would have to find another profession. As most freethinkers are converted Christians, I venture to say—with even more certainty—most Shakespeare sceptics once accepted the orthodox theory that is indeed a foregone conclusion almost everywhere. I am ashamed to say I did, not realising how unreliable were the alleged biographers, any more than the average Christian sees any reason to doubt the "evidence" of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It surprises me to find such credulity towards Stratford amongst freethinkers. Happily one of former time—Sir George Greenwood, author of *The Faith of an Agnostic*—set a better example. For myself, in 1934, I published, with Methuen, *London for Shakespeare Lovers*, on orthodox assumptions. Most of us are much more ready to change our opinions when they have been expressed only in speech or in manuscript. When they have got into print, they have a permanence that makes us reluctant to recant. The idea of Shakespeare as "our poor Warwickshire Peasant," as Carlyle called him, suggesting he was an English Burns, naturally appeals to all of us. Unfortunately the evidence is not forthcoming to sustain it.

The testimony of Jonson? Will Mr. Yates explain why Jonson wrote nothing whatever about Shakespeare until he had been dead over six years? It is just what you would expect if the author was a concealed nobleman. Jonson would discreetly wait to be asked. Can Mr. Yates explain how it was that 30 poets contributed to a volume of elegies on the death of Jonson in 1637, when nobody—literary or otherwise—took any notice of his Shakespeare's end?

The mistakes. Mr. Yates might well refer to an article in the current *Baconiana*, dealing with this matter. The author, Stewart Robb, refers to "glaring errors" of Chapman, "who studied at Oxford and Cambridge, capably translated some of Petrarch, and was enough of a Greek scholar to make what is perhaps one of the best translations in the English language of all Homer." This was the one that inspired Keats's famous sonnet. S. H. Reynolds, M.A., editor of an edition of Bacon's Essays (1890), wrote: "For accuracy of detail he had no care whatever. . . Carelessness of detail is certainly one of the characteristics of his essays." This writer was not a Baconian. Let Mr. Yates reflect over the following passage from one who, I think, was of that order:—

"We have often been reminded that Shakespeare committed the blunder of introducing a striking clock into *Julius Caesar*, but why do we never get a reminder that he also inhabited the forest of Arden

with lions? Because it does not fit in with the Stratford point of view, and even presents an insuperable difficulty against the orthodox notion that the poet was recollecting the Warwickshire countryside."

Why forget the king of beasts, Mr. Yates? The coast of Bohemia? Does not Mr. Yates know that countries have been known to change their boundaries? Sir Edward Sullivan—orthodox on authorship—in 1908, pointed out that no period was indicated in the play, and that in the thirteenth century Bohemia extended to the Adriatic Sea. Mr. Yates does not seem to know that *The Winter's Tale* was based on a story called *Pandosto*, by Robert Greene, and that he, who was attached to both Universities, gave Bohemia a coast. May not the clock have been a deliberate anachronism? What thrill would there be in seeing a man consult a sun-dial or, at midnight, a waterclock?

Surely freethinkers admit that theological professors are fallible enough. Are we asked to believe that in all other departments, scholars are immune from error? I will shortly write an article for *The Freethinker* on "The Mistakes of the Learned." I think it will surprise Mr. Yates.

Shakespeare as actor would come into contact with the nobility! Presence does not imply contact. Are the King and Queen of Denmark shown chatting with the players? Actors had the rank of domestic servants. Shakespeare, too, appears to have been acquainted with the sports of the aristocracy. Does Mr. Yates suggest he was likely to have been a fine horseman? As to law, Lord Campbell, Lord Penzance, Judge Holmes, Judge Webb, Mr. E. K. Castle, K.C., and Sir George Greenwood, a solicitor, considered that Shakespeare must have studied it in a regular and systematic manner.

I did not mean to suggest that Prof. Raleigh was other than serious in his reference to a fairy tale. He certainly used an unhappy phrase—from his point of view.

Mr. Yates may be surprised to know that there is hardly a point he raises that I introduce in debating on this issue, as I would willingly do with him. Like so many of the Stratfordian—and the Christian faith, he obligingly invents arguments for his opponents—those he thinks he can easily answer. I have 20 questions which I have sent to many, including professors. No answers are forthcoming. Space forbids more than a few. When Mr. Yates answers these, he can ask for more. Perhaps his appetite will be less than *Oliver Twist's*.

1. How is it explained that there is no evidence of a single Shakespeare play being performed at Stratford-on-Avon during the lifetime of the alleged author?

2. How does he explain the fact that his own company did not visit the town until he had been dead six years, and were then not allowed to perform?

3. How does he account for the fact that no First Folio or Quarto has ever been found there?

4. How does he explain the fact that 50 contemporary allusions were found by an American writer to the death of Ben Jonson, and not one to the death of Shakespeare?

5. Why did William Camden never mention him in *Britannia*, even in the edition of 1610, when, on orthodox reckoning, all his best work was done, seeing that he devotes considerable space to Stratford and mentions some of its worthies? Is not the explanation that he never associated the writer he had previously raised as "Shakespeare" with William Shakspeare of Stratford?

6. Why did not Dr. Hall, Shakspeare's son-in-law, who left numerous papers behind him, make no reference to him, or say or write anything to suggest he knew his wife's father was a man out of the ordinary?

Here are two supplementaries:—

7. Does Mr. Yates suggest that the Elizabethans were so slow-witted that a writer could not invent a *nom de plume*?

8. Is he prepared to deny that, if the plays had come down to us anonymously, nobody would have thought of fathering them upon this man?

Question for Mr. Parsons. How does he account for the fact that neither Stratford, nor the Avon, are mentioned anywhere in the plays? Who would have demurred to their introduction? *The Merry Wives of Stratford* would have been a pleasing local touch.

WILLIAM KENT.

PISCATORIAL LEGENDS

PISCATORIAL legends are marvellous stories from earliest times, and are often used as mottoes on coats of arms in heraldry, relating historical facts guised as folklore.

These legends in the chronicles of antiquity may be miraculous religious records down to the modern episodes, which teach the beginnings of ideas to account for the origins of things displayed. World-wide legendary lore is the interpretation of primitive minds in their manifold phases, often amusing and instructive, but sometimes tragic.

There are people who will not believe the things they see, and when expressing their doubts, exclaim in the vernacular phrase, "it's fishy," meaning untrue, doubtful.

Such was the youthful member of Isaak Walton's piscatorial society who, when viewing a large pike, declared that, "The man who caught that fish is a liar!" But in most of our venerable institutions the symbol of the fish is important to those who desire an intelligent appreciation of the fundamental expressions, which alone can interpret the philosophy of history, both religious and secular in the life of mankind. Hence small things count in the evolution of humanity, science and art.

Jesus was symbolised as a fish. The sacred emblem in Christian art, the aureola, is a reproduction of the fish's bladder, known as the vesica piscis, another religious symbol, and classical scholars will realise that the Greek word "Ichthys," fish, has a mystical interpretation, meaning, Saviour.

To what extent can we gauge the utility of this knowledge of legends? To the reader, a teacher, members of select societies and particularly all those keen on research, when touring abroad, only by a knowledge of legendary history, can signs be considered intelligently, like Jesus finding money in a fish's mouth and paid his tax with it. And, was not Jonah swallowed by a whale to save him from drowning, when thrown overboard?

In old churches, and at the south side of the altar, there stood the sacred basin, with its symbolical design, niched into the wall. This basin is the "piscina" into which were emptied the washing of the vessels, after the rites of the sacrament, and that piscina usually contained little fishes, a secret mystery, because the Saints and Church Fathers called Christians "little fishes."

Renowned sculptors and artists voluntarily produced masterpieces depicting the fish in legend. In fact, many of the state churches of antiquity owe their origin and completion to the esteem and reverence of the piscatorial legends as recorded in Ecclesiastical Histories.

The fish itself became sacred. It had its halo, or ring, reproductions of which are Church ornaments, especially upon monuments to the illustrious dead.

Of these, there is a conspicuous example in Stepney Churchyard, with an interesting story explaining the sculptured fish with open mouth ready to swallow an engraved finger-ring.

The foundation of the famous Evesham Abbey by its first Bishop Egwin, circa A.D. 692 is recorded in an illuminated manuscript, deposited in the British Museum. It relates that serious charges of irregularity were brought against Egwin, and to prove his innocence, he journeyed to Rome for examination by the Pope. Before setting out for the Holy City, Egwin had a "vision" which instructed him to go to a certain blacksmith and have a heavy iron ring forged, and fasten it round the Bishop's leg, with a strong padlock, and then throw the key into the River Avon. Egwin thus shackled, commenced his journey to Rome, and His Holiness the Pope, commanded that prayers should be said in thankfulness for the safe voyage, while Egwin and his attendants, performed ablutions, where were some fishermen, who, landing their catch, presented Egwin with a large fish, which, when opened, contained the identical key that had been thrown into the Avon. This "miracle" was sufficient proof of Egwin's innocence and being relieved of his iron band, was sent back to England, and founded his famous church as a mark of honour, and as Bishop of Worcester was eventually canonized "Saint" Egwin to the Glory of God and the Fish and the Key.

Such is the story of apparent trivialities in legends, but they become important when accounting for many of the world's handsome and venerable buildings which perpetuate the course of events from legends to facts; one, a splendid ecclesiastical building in England and the other, a fine monument in Rome, which to the casual observer meant very little, until its history was revealed.

From Italy, A.D. 692, to Egypt B.C. 520 is a long period when Amasis was King and Polycrates the tyrant of Samos flourished with great fortune. Here again the fish story is repeated, in which Polycrates throws into the sea his most cherished seal-ring of gold set with a valuable emerald. This voluntary loss was suffered, to test his fortune, by request of King Amasis. In the course of a few days, a fish was caught and presented to Polycrates, who cut it open; lo! the seal-ring of Polycrates was found inside the fish. This miraculous incident was deemed as an important omen for good or ill, and be it history or legend it became a factor in the turning point of the history of Egypt, for from this time, and by this fish and the ring incident, Amasis was totally beaten and Egypt plundered by Cambyses, who had assistance from Polycrates, by supplying a naval force to defeat Amasis.

There are several other interesting anecdotes, such as the vivid dream by Polycrate's daughter, concerning her father's ultimate misfortune and shameful death, both events the fates determined by piscatorial legends, or fishy oracles.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

STREAM OF TREACLE

I

WHEN I was a boy treacle could be bought loose as well as in tins labelled Golden Syrup. On the counter in the grocer's shop stood a small green-painted tank with a nozzle at one lower end surmounted by a wooden handle. When the grocer pulled this handle a slow stream of amber treacle emerged from the nozzle and flowed smoothly into the jar or basin brought by a customer, more often than not a child, delighted with the duty.

Because that stream of treacle fascinated children. It was so even, so effortless, so steady and unvarying

in its flow, yet lacked force, flaccid in its sluggish ooze. Gleaming with golden lights the tube-shaped stream of treacle had no character but persistence. When cut off by upturn of the handle it ceased reluctantly, with a diminishing drip which ended lengthily.

Looking back on my life I find that stream of treacle symbolic, parabolic. All through a never-ceasing flow of piety, never impetuous or torrential, but never stopping has followed me, as it has done thousands, in fact, millions of other people.

Most of us do not remember being baptised, being infants when that queer rite was inflicted upon us.

At the age of five years, entering Infant School we began the first dosings of treacle without brimstone. This latter was to come later from fundamentalist preachers fulminating on hellfire.

School walls were decorated with religious pictures, hideous and impossible representations of improbable individuals doing unlikely actions. Scripture lessons, Bible reading and morning prayers became daily features of our young lives.

In Church Schools evening prayers, midday graces, Prayer Book study and instruction from parsons were added. At Roman Catholic Schools the unfortunate youngsters sit beneath larger showers of religiosity, but under the 1944 Education Act, all schools have become propaganda platforms for Christianity of very varied interpretations. Public Schools boast their aim is production of Christian gentlemen.

Christian gentlemen! No. On second thoughts we make no comments, leaving them to our readers, who no doubt can discover many Christian gentlemen.

For numbers of children there are Sunday Schools, Bible classes, Confirmation, and Communion classes. Grown-up people have more choice, but suffer considerable indirect pressure to attend places of worship—it is so respectable—and may be made subtly profitable.

II

It is not as though religious people kept their opinions and practices to themselves. Far from it. They aim to spread the tidings regardless of whether we wish to hear them or not. The comparison with treacle holds good. Like it, religion exudes and stealthily expands over everything, a sticky, nasty mess.

So Church bells ring not once, but many times a day. Salvation Army bands, itinerant preachers and various types of hot-gospellers proclaim their beliefs in streets and on open spaces. Leaflets and pamphlets are thrust into one's hands, or door-to-door vendors try to sell Christian literature. Organisations like the Religious Tract Society and Student Christian Movement exist to push religious books in the literary market. Wayside pulpits, posters and notices extol religion by Bible texts, moralistic aphorisms and invitations to come and hear preachers, revivalists and missionaries, or attend Men's Own Brotherhoods and Pleasant Sunday Afternoons.

Worse is that priests get such a good Press. No matter what their rank, from bishops down to deacons, if they utter pious and ethical opinions in their pulpits there appear to be admiring journalists ready to report them in Monday morning's newspapers. Previous Saturday issues very likely contained a sermon, for no matter how severe the paper shortage Saturday sermons by parsons are established features of many newspapers, especially provincial. Matter of scientific or economic value may be omitted or relegated to a few obscure lines.

In weekly and monthly journals pious laymen cavort and opiate in favour of some brand of religiosity.

Piety permeates popular literature, both poetry and fiction. The poorer the literary quality the greater assistance authors require from religion. Minor poets would be incapable of versifying without calling upon God or apostrophising Christ. Public speakers have a weakness for religious and moralistic rhetoric in their appeals for popular support.

"The island is full of noises,

Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not."

It should be, but the British Broadcasting Corporation early fell victim to the taste for treacle spreading. So from Broadcasting House and its Regions we get first the ineffable "Lift up your hearts" to discourage us. Then at intervals during the days and weeks, are vain repetitions such as the heathen use of hymns, sermons, prayers, and other variations of piety, rising to a height on Sundays and reaching orgiastic intensity at Christmas.

Like sentimentalism in poetry, literature, art, music, and drama, pietism is deadly. It permeates insidiously into human intellects, gradually extruding the keener aspects of thought and wit, leaving minds soggy and unresilient.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

ASK YOUR CANDIDATE

IN view of the fact that every religious organisation will use the pre-election meetings for their own particular propaganda, Freethinkers should not miss any opportunities to do likewise. Roman Catholics have already trained the "big guns" and are working steadily to influence candidates, especially with regard to the question of religion in schools, and the endeavour to get a hundred per cent. financial support for their own schools, whilst leaving the control in Catholic hands. At a monster meeting in the Lewisham Town Hall, the galaxy of stars on the platform had seven M.P.s, including Herbert Morrison, and a couple of Bishops. We suggest that Freethinkers should put the case for Secular Education and general Freethought principles in the form of questions on similar lines to those listed below. It should not be forgotten that "Secular Education" was once an important plank in the Labour Party Programme, nor that the Conservative Party is closely allied to the Church of England.

Is it democratic to expect the non-Catholic majority to be taxed for the benefit of the Catholic minority in connection with religion in schools?

Will the candidate support any agitation for the repeal of the Sunday Observance Acts?

Will the candidate urge that religious instruction in State schools be eliminated altogether, and thus exclude religious sectarian squabbles which must be detrimental to education?

Will the candidate support agitation for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws?

Will the candidate support a Bill for the disestablishment and particularly, disendowment of the Church of England?

Will the candidate demand a public inquiry into the condition of Church property which, it is alleged, includes slums and brothels?

Will the candidate oppose any move by Roman Catholics to "sell" their schools to the State, whilst retaining the right to appoint their own teachers and managers?

Will the candidate do all he can to abolish religious tests for teachers?

Will the candidate demand that Freethinkers be allotted more time on the B.B.C., which is partly supported by taxation?

Needless to say, we are not at all optimistic as to the results of these questions, but all interested in genuine Reform, apart from sectarian and political propaganda, should do their best to get affirmative answers.

ACID DROPS

The "Catholic Times" is slowly warming up for the Election, and the editorial lays it down in unequivocal language that "no Catholic should vote on secular issues only," but should be guided by what he thinks will "direct him towards a Christian society, and more likely to fulfil the moral and social teaching of the Church." In plain words, vote under the guidance of the Roman Church. It has already been laid down that no Catholic should vote for a Communist, and it will not be long before they are ordered to vote specifically for this or that candidate, particularly for any "son of the Church" who will promise to support the Catholic Education demands.

There is great joy in Liverpool at the Cenacle Convent, for since the campaign for converts was started two years ago, 50 people have joined the Catholic Church. The *Catholic Herald* notes that most of the converts were "practising members of non-Catholic churches, several came as Atheists." This appears to be a case of robbing (St.) Paul to pay (St.) Peter. It is worthy of note that "to avoid a controversial atmosphere, there were no oral questions at the lectures. This is much safer!

Banning the sale of all books published before 1945, is the latest decree issued by the Czech Government, and even the stocks of second-hand books are being purged. The Catholic Church has its Index, Hitler burned and banned books with which he did not agree, Dublin has its Roman Catholic censorship, Argentina has banned 56 newspapers and periodicals, and the hands of the U.S.A. are none too clean in this respect. The "Liberty of the Press" is surely more than a mere form of words, but perhaps not to totalitarians—that is, Catholics, Communists, and Fascists.

The Rev. Leslie Weatherhead is to be commended on his brilliant idea that people should use a "blue pencil" in their Bible reading. The trouble is that if the pencil is used correctly there would be so little left of God's Holy word, that Christians would have to look around for another book. Imagine, for instance, cutting out Bible obscenities (there are quite a few), then the absurdities, contradictions and other nonsense. The residue would certainly not be as the Rev. Mr. Weatherhead maintains: "a message of relevance and power."

It must have been with some heart-searching that the Rt. Rev. E. Priestly-Swain, Bishop of Burnley, settled down to write his will, for he attempted to disarm in advance any criticism of his wealth by stating that his fortune of £23,738 was not the result "of his office or preferment, but was bequeathed to him by his family." We have no reason whatever for doubting this, but he is going to have an uncomfortable time trying to explain to the lowly Nazarene why he did not sell all he had and "give to the poor." Of course, Jesus may not have meant *all*, any more than he meant that it was extremely difficult for a rich man to enter Heaven.

Seven hundred children heard Police-Sergeant Kemp read the Lesson at Norwich Cathedral during a service of thanksgiving for safety on the roads. It looks as if God has lost yet another job, for according to the *Daily Express*, the children "gave thanks for the guidance given us by the Police and others who helped to keep us safe." Not a word about the Protector of little children this time.

Our very religious contemporary, the *Holborn Recorder*, still keeps up a column of religious slush. The other week, it talked about "Mercy in Punishment," and tried to show how much of the "mercy" was due to Christianity. As a proof, it cited the case of "not much more than a hundred years ago of a girl of 17 who was hanged in public for stealing a loaf of bread for her starving child," a piece of unmitigated nonsense. Justice may have been pretty rough about 1850, but not quite as monstrous as that. In any case, this was the period of the most intense Christian activity, and perhaps the *Recorder* will tell us how such a sentence could have been passed in a Christian England in which blasphemy was considered almost a greater crime than murder?

The "Church Times" appears to get upset almost to the verge of tears if the Bishops at Convocation alter any Canon more in accordance with present needs than those in the time of Henry VIII. But, of course, one must agree with it that, owing to these and other alterations. "People just do not know where the Church of England stands." With Bishop Barnes at one end, and Sir Stafford Cripps at the other, both proclaiming the beauty, if not exactly the infallibility, of the Church of England (or is it the Church of Christ?), believers are certainly "faced with disagreement, uncertainty, vagueness, and wooliness." Why not plump for the Church of Rome where everything, from the tiniest miracle to the simplest word of a divine priest, has the full backing of God Almighty? Did not this bring John Henry Newman into the fold?

Roman Catholics who seem to despair of converting England, in spite of the suggestion that priest-trained visitors to every home in the land would bring in a bountiful harvest, are now certain that they can convert the hundred million inhabitants of Japan—if only they act quickly. What is wanted are missionaries and funds—and no doubt more funds than missionaries. In any case it looks like a tough job, for so far only 130,000 have been converted—and even an all-powerful God can't always work miracles. But let us have plenty of funds first, please.

The well-known film actor, Emil Jannings, was "converted" on his death-bed like so many other people on the verge of passing over; but the *Universe* claims that he was, for most of his life, a "freethinking Protestant," which looks so very suspiciously like a "Christian Atheist." If Jannings was in his senses when he was converted, then he probably never had given up religion. Of course, there are a few cases of Freethinkers getting religion, but they are precious few, and the Church is welcome to them; they are no good to us. But it should be noted that Jannings was a favourite of Hitler.

In one way the Church of Rome in England is feeling the pinch and that is, in obtaining recruits for the priesthood. God is not calling quite as many men to this "vocation" as formerly—or perhaps it is that the young men themselves do not see quite where the fun lies in life if wine, women, and song have to be completely given up. The number of priests and helpers at present in the country is about the same as was here before the Reformation, when there were about the same number of Roman Catholics as there are now. But if the supply is beginning to dry up, what is going to happen to the Faith? God knows—we don't.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. CRICKMAY.—For *The Freethinker*, 3s.

A. G. BEDANE.—A short answer cannot be given to your query re the revenues of the Church of England. Voluntary gifts, rents, and money paid by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners all are included. The other matter will be attended to.

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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (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), 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.

We regret to have to announce the death of Mr. E. C. Saphin. The cremation will take place at Golders Green Crematorium on Friday, February 3, at 3-30 p.m.

SUGAR PLUMS

In the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, London, W. 1, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook will lecture this evening (February 5) for the West London Branch N.S.S., at 7-15, on "The World's Greatest Danger." Mr. Hornibrook is chairman of the branch, well-known as a speaker and writer on Freethought, and by his forceful way of presenting his case leaves nobody in doubt as to his meaning. Admission is free and questions are invited.

Irish Freethinkers should make a particular note of the first public meeting of the newly-formed Irish Rationalist Society. Mr. Lawasi, the speaker, and Mr. O'Connor, the Secretary, deserve all the support possible for their courageous attempt to spread the light of Freethought. The last attempt to form a Rationalist Society ended disastrously when the second meeting was broken up by Catholic hooligans who threw some of the organisers into the River Liffey. The victims were arrested and charged by the police. Those interested should make themselves known to the Secretary. Full details in the Lecture Notices column.

According to Archbishop de Provenchere, of Aix, France, Bethlehem "is a city of the destitute." What ever is he complaining about? His master said, "Blessed be ye poor," and advised a wealthy young man to sell all he had and become destitute as a wonderful example for all bishops, archbishops, and cardinals; and they have shown their gratitude by always dressing in the costliest skirts, laces, and flounces, and are running the finest and wealthiest business organisation in the world—the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican should take over Bethlehem as a "show piece" for all Christians—for what is money but vile dirt?

PRAYERS FOR GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

The following paragraph from the Australian *Sunday Visitor* (October 6, 1949) explains itself:—

At the end of July, some Irish newspapers had a paragraph to the effect that Bernard Shaw said "that he wants no more ceremonies in his honour, but would like the Irish people to pray for him." The editor of "Indui" ("To-day") wrote Bernard Shaw, saying that he wondered if his request for prayers was a Shavian joke badly assimilated, and added, "would you care to comment?"

Mr. Shaw's reply, which is too long to quote in full, indicates his preference for "prayers rather than for gifts that can be bought for money." The editor of "Indui" comments, "It appears from this that Shaw was not joking when he asked us to pray for him."

So why shouldn't we?

The Freethinker wondered, however, if Mr. Shaw really was "joking" or not, and wrote to ask him. Here is his characteristic reply:—

Shaw on Prayers

I never "required" anyone's prayers. But when friends began sending me from all over the world parcels of food and clothing that they could ill afford imagining that here in England we are all starving and in rags, I had to stop them somehow. I told them to pray for me, as I wanted and needed nothing that money could buy.

Modern psycho-analysis has taught us that prayer is a first-rate prescription for despairing pessimism, and that the therapeutic value of confession is enormous.

Whoever does not know this much science is not an up-to-date Freethinker, only an outmoded anti-clerical, as full of Secularist superstitions as Jehovah's witnesses and Plymouth Brothers are of Bible superstitions.

(Signed) G. BERNARD SHAW.

INTERNATIONAL FREETHOUGHT CONGRESS AT ROME, 1949

Report of the Proceedings

IV.

MONDAY afternoon and evening were devoted to the alteration of the Statutes, election of officers and the voting of resolutions.

The Statutes now read:—

1. The World Union of Freethinkers assembled in Congress at Rome, 9th to 13th September, 1949, reaffirms the declaration of aims and principles proclaimed by the Congress of Rome, 1904, and reaffirmed by subsequent Congresses.

2. The Union is administered by a General Committee. Each section affiliated and of paid-up subscription may nominate a candidate for the Committee.

3. The Committee consists of eleven members together with two extra-European members, in all thirteen; and is elected for the period between one Congress and the next. The Committee meets as often as is necessary and possible. It should convene a Congress every two years if possible (i.e., if international conditions and the financial situation of the Union permit). A quorum of the Committee is a majority of its European members, i.e., six.

4. The Executive consists of five officers elected by the General Committee from its members; viz., President, Vice-President, Hon. Treasurer and two Secretaries.

5. The Committee decides the place of the coming Congress, and its programme (after consultation with the affiliated sections) and appoints the reporters.

6. The International Council of the Congress is the legislative machinery of the Union. It consists of a delegate from each section with a right to vote, and his deputy. The right to vote is determined (1) by admission by the General Committee, (2) by full payment of subscription before the opening of Congress. For every complete 500 members paid for, one vote can be cast. No single society or federation may cast more than one-third of the votes in any one voting.

The voting is for (1) The election of the General Committee.

(2) The revision of statutes.

(3) Congress resolutions.

(4) The rate of subscription.

7. All applications for affiliation must be submitted to the Executive.

8. An extraordinary Congress must be convened if half the affiliated and paid-up national sections request it; also if the General Committee decides it to be necessary.

9. The General Committee will make decisions on all matters arising which are not covered by the preceding rules.

10. Alterations in these statutes can be made only by the Congress in council on the recommendation of the General Committee.

The General Committee and officers elected under the new rules consisted of:—

President, C. Bradlaugh Bonner; Vice-President, A. Lorulot; Hon. Treasurer, L. Courtois; Secretaries, Mdle. P. H. Pardon and H. J. Blackham; J. Cotereau, J. de Ronde, G. Rausch, A. Boulanger, E. Bartalini, T. Bartosek and W. Glanville Cook (Australia) and C. Smith (U.S.A.).

The resolutions voted were:—

1. On the Scholastic Problem. The W.U.F. assembled in congress at Rome on September 9-12, 1949, resolves that it must be the aim of Freethinkers in all countries to work and press for the emancipation of the schools from all theological or political doctrine and convention, and deplures unscrupulous or misguided efforts to bias unformed and uninformed minds.

2. On Humanism and Freethought. The Congress denounces the abuse made by Churches and by certain governments in recent years of scientific theories, and reaffirms the independence of human thought, in particular, of science, and of all religious or political authority. It declares that the aims of the World Union of Freethinkers have ever been constructively humanist as shown by the declarations of the Congresses of Rome, 1904; Luxemburg, 1929; London, 1938; and that this Congress reaffirms these declarations.

Noting with regret that freedom of thought is still far from being realised in the world, the Congress affirms this unalterable resolution to combat all powers of tyranny, moral, political, religious or economic; and hopes that when international relations may be at last purified that true democracy will reign in all countries without exception.

3. On the Religions, the Churches and International Relations. This Congress, believing that peace, freedom, and the co-operation of mankind are promoted by the separation of church and state, and by a scrupulous respect for the individual conscience, denounces as reactionary the policy of those churches which seek to control political action and the policy of those powers which seek to gain the alliance of churches; and declares itself uncompromisingly opposed both to the religion as an instrument of politics, and to the politics as a mask of religion.

4. That the principles and activities of the Humanist Associations deserve the complete approval of all Freethinkers in so far as these principles and activities are implied in the definition of freethought principles and aims.

The World Union of Freethinkers therefore invites all its adherents to appeal for concerted action to develop a better human society and to emancipate the individual, and with these aims in view to collaborate with the Humanist Associations, without in any way relaxing their anti-clerical and anti-religious efforts which are now more urgent than ever before.

5. That this Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers records its opposition to all forms of racial hatred and prejudice and stands for the unity of all mankind.

The General Committee considered the invitation made by the American National Liberal League and American Association for the Advancement of Atheism (the societies represented by Mr. C. Smith) to hold the next International Congress in New York in 1951. It was considered that unless sufficient financial support to allow of the presence of the members of the Committee were forthcoming the Union could not be properly represented. It was therefore decided to refer the question of financial support to the sections, and when it was known that funds could be counted on, to reconsider the invitation.

[NOTE.—The devaluation of most European currencies since the Congress has adversely affected the project.]

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

(To be concluded.)

KINGSHIP

WHATEVER one's views on kingship in England, few would deny that it is a highly expensive form of superstition and when one considers the enormous amount of money, the waste of manpower and material expended on the upkeep of the royal households of those who have, by the accident of birth, inherited the "gifts of the crown," it becomes not merely stupid, but immoral.

Superstition, as defined by Chambers, is "excessive reverence or fear based on ignorance, excessive exactness in religious opinions, irrational beliefs," etc. Objection to this definition will, of course, come only from those suffering from that nauseous form of idiotic sentimentalism that perceives "something different" in the conception and the birth of a baby prince, in the same way that there are millions of people ready to believe in a virgin birth. There is no doubt that if the same claim were made for a royal birth it would be believed. Divorced from the sensationalism of the Press, the birth of a baby prince would have the same natural significance as thousands of other births occurring daily.

This ridiculous adulation shown by so many of "His Majesty's" subjects whenever a member of the Royal Family makes a public appearance is nothing but a gross superstition of the ignorant and a suave form of hypocrisy on the part of those who ought to know better, but who benefit by their acquiescence.

The Bible shows that the title of King is given equally to the powerful monarchs of Persia or Egypt as to the petty rulers who governed little more than desert tribes. In our own time the title King is given to the figure-head ruler of a (once) world-wide British Empire as well as to a ruler of a small, self-contained Scandinavian State. It is not, therefore, a question of the size of the inheritance, but of the headship of a people, whether or not their achievements be great or small.

The word King implies sovereignty, but in no special degree or sense.

A. E. Freeman said: "There is a common idea of Kingship which is at once recognised, however hard it may be to define it."

Freethinkers will recognise a very familiar ring about that sentence, it can, and has been used in relationship to witches, ghosts, goblins or gods. It is clear that the "common idea" theory does not prove the validity. In fact, it is a well known "priestly proof" of the existence of God; and as such, is completely without value. Kingship is among the remaining superstitions associated with the supernatural that remain with us.

The purpose of this article, however, is to show by clear demonstration that Kingship is a superstition based on religion.

A word in common English usage in connection with the King is the word "Monarch," a word derived from the Greek "Monos," meaning alone, from which same derivation, it is interesting and significant to note, came the word "Monk." It is a word demonstrating the close connection of Church, King and State, under Christianity, and of the ruler, half King, half priest, which was the ancient and medieval principle.

The curious and significant custom of touching for the cure of the King's evil, was obviously inspired by the priestly character of Kingship. Pepys mentioned having seen Charles II touch thousands of scrofula sufferers. Queen Anne was the last monarch recorded to perform this superstitious rite, when she "touched" (among others) Dr. Johnson.

The advent of Christianity served to enhance even further the priestly character of Kingship, the King was not only elected and acclaimed, raised upon a throne (like God, the Father) crowned (like God, the Son) with a Royal Emblem, handed the sceptre, he was also anointed and *achieved divine ratification and benediction*.

These details anent the Regalia and the Coronation Ceremony clearly demonstrate the superstitious character of all factors in connection with Kingship and show beyond all doubt that the authority of the King is of supernatural or religious origin.

St. Edward's Chair and the Stone of Destiny is the chair in which the Kings of England are anointed and invested, is of thirteenth century British oak; in a ledge under the seat of the chair rests the "Stone of Destiny," which is described as originally an altar and throne of the Kings of Ireland. It was taken to the Abbey Church of Scone, in A.D. 850, where it remained for some 400 years. It was later used as a coronation throne of the Scottish Kings.

Monks at Scone declared it to be the identical stone which served the Biblical character Jacob as a pillow when he saw the heavenly vision of Bethel.

The Ampulla is a vessel of gold, in the shape of an eagle with expanded wings, in which the holy oil is kept. Thomas of Walsingham, recording the Coronation of Henry IV, said the King was anointed with the identical oil which the Mother of Christ had given to St. Thomas of Canterbury, when in exile at Sens.

Prince Edward, the Black Prince, is said to have deposited it in the Tower of London, having received it from Henry, first Duke of Lancaster, to whom a "holy man" had revealed its place of concealment in the church of St. Gregory at Poitiers.

It is said that the "holy oil" was secured in a box, and left in the Tower until 1399, until Richard II found the jar containing the "holy oil," with a document in the handwriting of St. Thomas of Canterbury, describing the blessings that would fall upon every King of England who was anointed with this "holy oil."

The golden spoon into which the "holy oil" is poured at the ceremony, has a shaped bowl intended to receive the fingers of the officiating archbishop.

St. Edward's Crown, the Crown of England, is thus called after Edward the Confessor. There are several crowns usually adorned with crosses and doves, the religious significance of which is obvious.

The Sceptres. There are several sceptres used. The sceptres are specially mentioned in the Old Testament. They were formerly, without doubt, pastoral staffs.

The Orb (with cross), sometimes called the Mound or Globe, denotes faith because God in the Flesh was nailed to it.

The Coronation Ring, called "The Wedding Ring of England." Tales of the origin of the ring include the story of Edward the Confessor having given a ring from his finger to an old man who asked for alms, who later was revealed to be John the Baptist.

The Spurs are a symbol of Knighthood.

The Swords are: The Curtana, or Pointless Sword of Mercy; The Sword of Spiritual Justice; and The Sword of Temporal Justice.

St. Edward's Staff is carried before the Sovereign in the procession to the altar.

The Vestments consist of the Imperial Mantle, or Open Pall; the Super-Tunica, or Close Pall; the Armil, which is really a stole.

The Armilla are bracelets attached to the stole, all of which have very well known religious connections.

It will be seen from the foregoing that the Coronation Ceremony of a King of England is simply a religious ceremony; the performance is, from beginning to end, on the same intellectual level as the acclaiming ceremonies of a West African tribal king.

The office is one which has been filled at various times by children and even with idiots; and what can anyone think of an office which children and idiots can adequately fill? To be a mere workman a man must have some talent; to be a king it is sufficient for him to have the figure of a man—to be in fact a living automaton.

We are amazed at the folly of the Ancient Egyptians who enthroned a stone and called it their king. Yet such a king was no more absurd and much less fatal than that which certain of the moderns regard as the First Gentleman of the Land.

Royalty, its fanatical show, its idolatrous worship, the false belief by the slightly better educated of its being a necessary evil, have all been invented for the keeping of men in subjection.

The Power of the King and that of the Pope constitute one and the same thing, and they are both supported by a series of artifices dependent entirely for their success on the credulity and superstition of the people.

They will both be finally expelled when knowledge has reached the mass of the people.

E. W. SHAW.

TRIBUTE

IT must be 40 years or more since a young man, leaving his apartment house in Bayswater, picked his way across the Gardens one Sunday afternoon and strolling by the Serpentine crossed over into Hyde Park.

He was dressed in a manner suitable to his status in life—morning coat and top hat—and sauntering eastwards decided it would be nice to listen to a little tub-thumping near the Marble Arch before catching a bus back home. Buses at that time were few and horse drawn, and one could sit on the open top and converse with the driver who always seemed to be enveloped in several overcoats and wearing a glossy bowler hat. But the bus had to go without me (yes, it was me, ungrammatically speaking).

Actually, as I soon found out, Hyde Park Orators do not speak from soap boxes, and they have as a rule, a policeman standing by to see that they get fair play. I found a speaker who fascinated me. What a man! What an orator! I can see him now. A very short man with a broad pair of shoulders, an intellectual face and the mouth and chin of a humourist surmounted by a large brimmed black hat. And what a grand voice!

I have since wondered many times, whether it would be possible to let this speaker know what a profound impression he made on me and how grateful I am to him even after all these years. I have since heard other speakers, but this first freethinker remains most clearly in my mind. How can I reach him now, to pay belated tribute to an orator? One thing perhaps I remember more clearly than anything else. He said that most people have their eye on some one thing that looks good to them—business, ambition, fame, money or what-not. "Well," he went on to say, "I also have my eye on something that looks good to me. What would I like most in the world? Money? No. Give me the voice of Stentor that I may reach the further with my voice and I shall be a still happier man."

Now it is too late for me to pay him deserved tribute. He must have been enjoying the Elysian Fields these

twenty years or more; but he opened for me a quite new world of thought, and no doubt for others also, praises be! He closed once and for all and for ever, a nightmare of fancied eternal punishment. I went again and again to Hyde Park to hear this enthralling speaker and eventually discovered a new philosophy which has remained with me for life. Well, Mr. Hyde Park Orator, I am afraid you will never know how many young men like me you have helped to a fuller grasp of life. I don't even know your name. If you are listening in the Elysian Fields, I lift my glass to you!

Some few weeks ago, musing as above, I wondered why it is that your modern speaker seems to lack the fire of this man. Surely there should be someone somewhere with sufficient enthusiasm to drive him out on Sundays (the best day for the job) to try in some small way perhaps to rid the minds of fellow men of the nonsense which passes for religion. Where is the speaker with humour, with devastating argument, to compare with the men of the past? So once again I went forth, this time as far as Hampstead. No silk hat and striped pants—an open shirt and no hat at all.

I had seen an announcement of a speaker (he seems to spend all his Sundays speaking) near the White Stone Pond; conveniently near that pond as many a speaker has found. However, a ducking cannot even damp real enthusiasm. Yes, I have heard of speakers having a compulsory ducking in the pond so conveniently at hand. But then, they were dare-devils who actually had the audacity to be pacifists speaking against killing. Away with them to the pond!

Well, the speaker mounted his ladder, and for me the years fell away. Here was a speaker indeed. I felt that he ought to know or be told what an impression he might be making on his audience as his forerunner years ago made on me. But it is impossible to realise the effect of one's speaking. It cannot be otherwise. We go away impressed, and hours afterwards maybe, we recall a telling expression, a witty point made and then the weight of rhetoric. Here was humour indeed. One man showed me more than forty years ago a new life. And here is another with a merry twinkle in his eye, a firm chin and a humourous mouth. A man who knows his job—and doesn't he enjoy being heckled! Surely a man worth climbing a hill to hear.

If at the finish he retires to the local to partake of Holy Communion, well, let us join him and raise our tankards to the Trinity, the Holy Trinity of Man, Woman and Child. Glory to Man in the highest.

STANLEY ROBERTS.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE REV. L. D. WEATHERHEAD REPLIES

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to your article in your issue of January 8. I am sure that you will allow me to correct two mistakes:—

1. In referring to the sermon preached in August last on "The Tyranny of Secret Fears," you charged me with being unfair in giving no warning to the congregation of what to expect.

On the contrary, I indicated at the morning service that I should deal largely with sexual fears.

2. You charged me with giving members of the congregation no opportunity for discussion, and of making the pulpit a "coward's castle."

On the contrary, I continually make it clear from the pulpit that at the Friday Fellowship Gathering, anyone may raise a question and challenge any statement made in sermons from the pulpit.—Yours, etc.,

LESLIE D. WEATHERHEAD.

A CORRECTION

SIR,—A slight error crept into the excellent letter of Mr. A. D. Corrick in your issue of January 22. Mr. Corrick wrote that I had lived in Russia 40 years. I have been associated with Russian affairs for 40 years, but I lived in the country only twelve years.—Yours, etc.,

SIR PAUL DUKES.

THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM

SIR,—I am amused and somewhat flattered to find myself half invited to controversy with Mr. Cutner—and perhaps to provide him with material for a further exposure of the absurd claims of "Shakespearian"—over the Shakespeare problem.

But, no: my interest in the question is that of a general reader, not that of an expert.

I must refer Mr. Cutner to any good Shakespeare glossary. I opened one at random this morning and almost the first words I came across, familiar to me since childhood, were "affy" and "boggle."

And surely he is acquainted with the delight of Ben Jonson in Shakespeare's "honoured memory," with Greene's jealousy of him, and the latter's charges of plagiarism against him.

Curiously enough, Shakespeare's friends were charged with neglecting "academical studies."

I prefer as a general reader, the statements of Shakespeare's contemporaries to the dogmatic assertions of modern Baconians and cryptographers.

Milton's "What needs my Shakespeare?" is also evidence, because he was nearer to him than we are.

Would Jonson have praised dry-as-dust Bacon? Would Greene have attacked him?

On the other hand, would Bacon have poked fun at the learned euphuists? I doubt it.

Talk about dogmatism! Pro-Baconian literature abounds in it. We are told that Bacon was the son of Elizabeth. Because he wrote plays he was disinherited! Shakespeare omitted to write a play on Henry VII, but Bacon wrote a history of Henry VII and so filled the gap between "Richard III" and "Henry VIII," and therefore Bacon wrote Shakespeare.

The fact is that the Baconians cannot produce the slightest evidence, external or internal, that anybody wrote Shakespeare but Shakespeare.

Personally, I would rather believe that the poor playwright, with a poor Englishman's innate reverence for the aristocracy and not being able to write clearly himself, dictated his plays to a scrivener.

I hope I have provided Mr. Cutner with further material for an article on pro-Shakespearian dogmatism.

As I have written again, I may correct two misprints in my "last" due to my bad writing. "Johnson" should have been "Jonson," and "I know not," "I trow not" (another Shakespearian rustic root).—Yours, etc.,

F. C. PARSONS.

P.S.—I note Mr. Cutner says, "In most cases his 'rustics' are laughed at or treated as 'clowns'." Of course they are. The peasant who wrote or dictated "Shakespeare" knew them inside out and they are just as shrewd, humorous and smart to-day as they were then. Bacon knew nothing about them.

(Mr. Cutner writes: "I asked Mr. Parsons certain questions to which he has made no reply. What he thinks about Bacon or not is a matter of complete indifference to me—though he hasn't the ghost of an idea of the Baconian case—for I am not a Baconian.")

ATHEISM

SIR,—Mr. Smelters, in his article "On Defining Atheism" ("Freethinker, January 8, 1950), complains that the definition of an Atheist now in vogue indicates nothing but a psychological fact of the Atheist's mentality. Then he puts forward a definition which he claims will overcome this difficulty—in which the state of mind of the Atheist is still indicated!

But what I am really concerned with is his statement "... that it is the personal God, Yahveh, that is being denied, on valid (to him) anthropological and zoological grounds." How these "grounds" can explain away certain "feelings of awareness" that religious people claim to have, is quite beyond me. One may just as well claim that one's experiences of the outside world are explained away. To say

simply that these people are primitive minded will clearly not do, for many highly educated and scientifically trained minds claim to have these experiences. How can an unbeliever say what are and what are not "valid grounds"? (Unless he has had a divine revelation to that effect.)

I fail to follow Mr. Smelter's chain of reasoning when he reasons that "immaterial (not anywhere) = nowhere." It appears to me that at the present moment the contents of my consciousness are "immaterial." Yet they are certainly not nowhere—although Mr. Smelter's logic appears to be "any old where."—Yours, etc.,

VERNON CARTER.

HAS SOCIALISM BEEN TRIED?

Sir,—In this controversy as to the nature of Russian society I am not particularly concerned with the hostile propaganda given out on the one hand by ignorant and misinformed capitalists, and on the other by equally mistaken "communists." With those brief remarks I can safely dispose of nine-tenths of Mr. T. D. Smith's remarks ("The Freethinker," January 22).

But I am concerned about the perpetuation of this myth of Russian socialism.

Mr. Smith tells us that due to peculiar commercial circumstances he knew what was happening from the beginning in Russia. If that is so, he certainly knew more than Lenin and the Bolsheviks who were frequently confounded in their anticipations, and accordingly modified and adapted their programmes to meet the demands of a social historical change quite beyond their control. Whole social systems, historically necessary in the development of society, cannot be avoided by a series of legal enactments. No country, such as pre-1917 Russia with its semi-feudal economy, could produce a socialist system of society upon the basis of an ignorant, superstitious and illiterate peasantry. Thus while Mr. Smith seems to think I claim that socialism has failed, my case is that it has never been tried. The social and historical prerequisites just have not existed. If scientific socialism has taught Mr. Smith nothing else surely it has shown him that systems of society grow out of preceding ones—capitalism from feudalism, socialism from capitalism. Bold leaps in which whole social and historically necessary epochs are avoided, are impossible.

Mr. T. D. Smith appeals to readers to consider his visits to Russia as support for his claim to understand scientific socialism. But he has shown no evidence of being able to understand what a *system of society* is, and is careful enough to offer no refutation of my definitions of socialism and capitalism ("The Freethinker," November 13 and December 18), and I can only conclude that he considers rent, interest, profit, a Stock Exchange, State ownership of the means of production, and an elaborate wages system are something to do with socialism. Or does he deny that these conditions prevail in Russia? I am still left wondering what Mr. Smith understands by the terms "capitalism" and "socialism," and increasingly convinced of his lack of socialist knowledge.—Yours, etc.,

R. BOTT.

COMMUNISM

Sir,—My objection to Alfred Corrick's letter was based upon the fact that I consider his use of the term "Communism," when referring to the present régime in Russia, is erroneous. I cited the names of Marx, Morris and Kropotkin as being advocates of the central idea of communism, meaning by this term a classless and non-governmental system of society in which the means of the production and distribution of social wealth are commonly owned and controlled. Such is not the system operating in Russia to-day. It is, therefore, I contend, incorrect to refer to the rulers of Russia or their followers as communists—perhaps the most apt, if somewhat ugly title, is that of "Stalinist," since their movement appears to be founded upon faith in the omnipotence and omniscience of Joseph Vissarionovich. If, therefore, H. Pointer is one of those persons who "are quite capable and accustomed to looking out for themselves what words and names really stand for," I suggest that he finds out what the term "Communism" really stands for and applies it to those social systems corresponding with its correct meaning. To write of "present-day communists" merely confuses the issue. Who does he mean? The followers of Marx (or his modern interpreters such as Lenin or Rosa Luxemburg, of Kropotkin or Tolstoy, or such religious sects as the Dukhobors?—Yours, etc.,

S. E. PARKER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held January 26, 1950

The Acting President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Seibert, A. C. Rosetti, Morris, Griffiths, Ebury, Woodley, Barker, Johnson, and Mrs. Venton.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

Ne members were admitted to Birmingham, Kingston, Glasgow, Manchester, Lewisham, West London, Fyzerabad Branches, and the Parent Society.

Permission was given for the formation of a branch of the Society in Fyzerabad, B.W.I., to be known as the Fyzerabad Branch.

A report of the Annual Dinner was presented and a similar function for 1951 agreed upon.

The receipt of £100 as a legacy to the N.S.S. under the will of the late G. D. Hobson was announced.

Further correspondence with the B.B.C. Broadcasting Committee was noted.

Manchester Branch application for a lecture visit from the Acting President was agreed to. A matter concerning the display of a Christmas tree and religious play at public expenses in Nelson was examined and instructions given.

Mr. Barker raised the question of revising some of the Immediate Practical Objects on the application forms, and the matter will receive further consideration.

Correspondence from various parts was dealt with. The next meeting of the Executive fixed for 23rd February. Last reminders of Prof. Flugel's lecture in the Conway Hall given, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room Mechanics' Institute). Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "The Path to Hiroshima." Lantern Lecture. Mr. R. J. STEELE, M.B.F.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 7, 7 p.m.: "Contemporary Psychology," Mr. A. E. BONNETT, M.B., B.Sc.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Sex Life of the Unmarried Adult," Dr. NORMAN HAIRE, Ch.M., M.B.

Irish Rationalist Society ("Singing Kettle," 13, Lower Leeson Street, Dublin, Eire).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Can Dubliners Go to Heaven?" Mr. E. LAWASI.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Black Man's Burden in South Africa," Mr. G. PADMOOR.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Is There an Alternative to a Labour Government?" Mr. WILL NALLY, M.P.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers' Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Influence of Catholic Action," Mr. G. COLEBROOKE.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Literary Horizon," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—7-15 p.m.: "The World's Greatest Danger," Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK.

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).—Lectures every lunch hour, 1 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING and G. WOODCOCK.

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

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

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