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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Roman Catholics and Education

WHETHER we like to admit it or not, politically in this country Roman Catholics as a force are stronger than ever. There can be no doubt that the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, an Act which was inevitable in any country calling itself democratic, put Roman Catholicism back as a power in England that had to be reckoned with, not only in the religious, but in the political field.

The Church of Rome received, perhaps, its most severe setback when Henry VIII finally broke with the Pope. From then its adherents in England were penalised with increasing severity. Under Mary, it was the Protestants who were persecuted; under Elizabeth, the tables were turned with more than interest, and even under James I, the son of a Catholic mother, who was by no means inclined to intensify any persecution, Papists were not allowed to enter the professions of medicine or law. When James II later tried to soften some of the harsher laws, if not to abolish them, he was given short shrift. England had had enough of Roman Catholicism both of the political and religious kind, and James was hounded out of the country.

Whether the Protestant Georges were much better than the Catholic James may be a matter of opinion, but most of the harsh laws against Catholics were under them rarely enforced, though they remained on the statute book. But late in the eighteenth century, the agitation commenced to remove Catholic disabilities altogether, and gradually some measure of toleration was granted them. Both in Ireland and in England, about the year 1790, saw sweeping changes—Catholics were allowed to enter any profession, take degrees, join the army and navy, have their own schools, and they could worship in their own way as much as they liked.

But not until, under the Duke of Wellington, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829, were Roman Catholics allowed almost the same privileges as Protestants, and ever since they have insisted on their rights as citizens of the country in which they were born. Freethinkers cannot quarrel with this attitude. Religious and non-religious beliefs are private matters, and the State has no right to interfere with them so long as they do not interfere with the rights of other citizens, or with, say, the safety of the State.

There can be no doubt, however, that the wholesale conversion of members of the Church of England following Newman's surrender to Rome in 1845 definitely made Roman Catholicism a power in the land. Of course, Rome did not have it always her own way. Desperate efforts were made by Protestant writers to show the Church of Rome as the Scarlet Woman or worse, and the numerous books and pamphlets published and the sermons preached, against the "paganism" of Babylon (that is, Rome) during the greater part of the nineteenth century, prove how strong was the opposition. Even Anglo-Catholicism, though always vigorously

protesting its opposition to the Pope, seemed to most Protestants only a very little less than Popery in full blast.

The Church of Rome was served well by its English cardinals—Manning, in particular. Unlike Newman who gloried in wearisome dialectics or in cowering under the agonising threat of eternal punishment, Manning took as big a part as he could in social reforms often leaving the Church, as a Church, out of the picture. He was astute enough to know that Protestant England was not to be conquered by any one of Newman's subtle books, sermons, or arguments. There was a whole field to conquer in social reform, and Manning contrived to be well in the front. And since his day Roman Catholicism has never looked back.

The hierarchy know perfectly well the tremendous importance of getting the children young. Our youthful impressions are very hard to eradicate, and very few Catholics ever get rid of the fear or, at least, the awe inspired by priests and nuns. It is of the most vital importance to Roman Catholicism that the young should be thoroughly inculcated in the Faith—hence the desperate insistence that Roman Catholic education should be entirely in the hands of its priests or priest-trained teachers. Not only religion, but every subject taken in school must be thoroughly "vetted." Not a scrap of information the least derogatory to its claims must be allowed to trickle into any subject whatever. But in these days, the hierarchy want to go even further. They insist that their schools so completely under the power of the Vatican should be paid for by the State, though the State must have no say whatever in the selection of the teachers, nor in the curriculum; and they are doing their best to make the issue one of paramount importance in the present election.

The religious education controversy has been going on for about 150 years and it is a pity that, once for all, it was not settled when the last Education Act was passed. Secular Education is the one solution which will settle for ever the bitter religious squabbles in the schools. In the past it was the Nonconformists who resisted the denominational teaching of the Church of England, and who eventually had passed what used to be called "simple Bible teaching," and which satisfied "dissent." It is no solution whatever to allow children to be withdrawn according to the Act, when some particular brand of religion, not liked by the children's parents, is being taught. It marks out the child as something different and is resented by the unhappy scholar.

Then the problem of the fitness of the teacher to give lessons in purely secular subjects is always questioned if it is known that he is an "unbeliever." He is often catechised by the "governors" of the school, and one can imagine the horror of a crowd of Roman Catholics if a fully qualified M.A. bluntly admits that he does not believe in the Genesis story of the "Creation."

The present Government is determined to stand by the Act of 1944, and even a Roman Catholic like Lord Pakenham candidly admits that, though it is against his

Faith, he will loyally support it. Obviously, for him a little religion even of the wrong kind is better than no religion. But his fellow believers, thinking no doubt that they can change the Act, are moving heaven and earth—metaphorically—to run their schools entirely their own way with *State* funds. Their one partly valid argument is that they pay like other citizens the education rate, and therefore have the right to call the tune.

As has been said often enough in these columns the only fair solution is Secular Education. No religion whatever should be taught in schools—though there is no reason why the Bible and other religious works should not be referred to, of course. And all religious sects, without exception, should teach their own particular brand in their own church or other halls. It surely should not be difficult to arrange that the half hour or hours devoted to religion in the present schools could be spent elsewhere by the children whose parents insist on a religious education.

The pity of the matter is that so very few parents really know much about Secular Education. Most would accept the solution as fair all round. Perhaps, if the squabbles are intensified, they will get an inkling of the only just solution—the *only* one, we insist. In the end, it is bound to be accepted by all parties; and we can only hope that that acceptance is in the very near future.

H. CUTNER.

THE PROTAGONIST OF THE AGE OF REASON

THE poet Browning, avers that Voltaire wielded "the sharpest, shrewdest steel that ever stabbed to death imposture, through the armour joints." And it is noteworthy that while no influential Frenchman raised his voice against the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, in the succeeding century, Voltaire's vindication of the persecuted Huguenots, Calas and la Barre, was widely applauded. Indeed, as Lecky observes, Voltaire's terrible indictment of clerical persecution made it appear not only criminal but loathsome, so that ever after, it hid its pestilent head under other names. Again, under Voltaire's inspiration, Frederick of Prussia, and Joseph II of Austria abolished torture in their realms, while the most humane decrees of Catherine II of Russia were inspired by the Sage of Ferney and his fellow-apostles of the Age of Reason.

Somerset Maugham ranks Voltaire as the finest prose writer of modern Europe. Certainly few authors of modern generations have written so much and so well. His works comprise 70 volumes and it may be said that no writer has exceeded him in the scope and variety of his interests, or amassed more information concerning the world's deeds and misdoings. Voltaire rarely touched any theme that he did not adorn. His writings abound in shafts of wit, shrewd judgments, and illuminating illustrations, all presented with a clarity of thought and expression which delight and confound his detractors. Still, with all these gifts, even Voltaire seems somewhat inconsistent, and his critics urge that he lacked that precision of thought which is essential to the stricter canons of science.

John Morley traces the emergence of Voltaire's reformist zeal to the philosopher's English experiences, and Prof. J. B. Black in his study in *French Thinkers of the Age of Reason* (Harrap, 1930), concludes that, on Voltaire's return to France he surveyed every social problem from an ethical standpoint, while reasoning alone, would disclose their solution. As Black states: "He was the greatest publicist of his day, flitting like a stormy petrel across the billows of European politics,

now in the light, now in the shade, tendering advice to monarchs, exposing social and political injustices, or defending the causes of hapless victims of tyranny like the family of Jean Calas. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that, in the scale of values, he placed life above literature, action above contemplation, and right conduct above philosophy. Writing, to him, was merely a means to an end, a vehicle by which his consuming passion for justice might be carried across the footlights, converted into motives for action and transformed into deeds."

Reform in France demanded the destruction of things evil. Before reconstruction could begin, the multitudinous anomalies that harassed France and other States must be swept away. Hence, the complete justification of Voltaire's iconoclasm. Pierre Bayle and other Humanists had preceded him in France, but Voltaire's spiritual ancestry was in Britain, where the teachings of Locke, and the science of Newton were ever in his mind's eye. These philosophies he soon made known to Western Europe with far-reaching results.

When compared with the tyranny prevalent in France until the Revolution of 1789, England, to the intelligent foreigner, appeared the land of the free. Of course Voltaire, during his sojourn in our country, moved among the well-to-do and he therefore had little acquaintance with the privations of the poor. Still, his eulogistic account of English life, when read and considered by his countrymen, became a powerful stimulus to reformers who accepted Voltaire's appreciation at its face value. "The English Constitution," he declared, "has, in fact, arrived at a point of excellence, in consequence of which, all men are restored to those *natural rights* which in nearly all monarchies they are deprived of. These rights are entire liberty of person and property; freedom of the Press; the right of being tried in all criminal cases by a jury of independent men—the right of being tried according to the strict letter of the law; and the right of every man to profess unmolested what religion he chooses." (*Lettres sur les Anglais.*)

This may seem a little romantic to-day, but it was penned when Protestants and Rationalists were broken on the wheel or roasted alive in France; when the Press laboured under a strict censorship and when, without warrant, trial, or any form of defence, those who offended the autocratic officials or influential personages were flung into the dungeons of the Bastille. There existed also the shameful system of taxation borne by the middle class and serfs, from which the clergy and nobles were exempt. Moreover, the bitterly oppressed peasantry who formed the bulk of the population, were driven to forced labour on the roads, in addition to the onerous salt tax—the *gabelle*—salt being essential as a preservative of all perishable foodstuffs. Therefore, the conditions of English life, as experienced both by Montesquieu and Voltaire, when they dwelt among us, seemed almost ideal when compared with the lives endured by the people of rural France and the slum inhabitants of her cities under the *ancien régime*.

Passionate as was Voltaire's devotion to toleration with his hatred of any form of cruelty, whether inflicted by Church or State, he entertained a very poor opinion of the intellect or character of the populace. To him the Church constituted the "infamous," minus the faintest redeeming feature, while his contempt for the motley multitude is clearly expressed in a letter to Frederick the Great, himself an apostle of enlightenment. Voltaire tells the Prussian King: "Your Majesty will do the human race an eternal service by extirpating

this infamous superstition [i.e., Christianity.] I do not say among the rabble who are not worth being enlightened, and who are apt for any yoke, I say amongst honest people, among men who think, among those who wish to think . . . 'tis for you to feed their minds; 'tis for you to give white bread to the children and to leave the black bread to the dogs." Clearly, the letter of no democrat or revolutionary.

Unlike Holbach, Diderot, and other Encyclopædists, Voltaire was a Deist or as he preferred to regard himself, a Theist. His divinity designed and created the Universe, set its mechanism in motion, and ever afterwards remained a passive spectator of its multitudinous activities. This Voltairian concept of the Creator, unconcerned with the world's affairs, noticeably resembles the indifferent deities of Lucretius who disregard human cares, follies and woes, and who dwell eternally in what Tennyson terms "their sacred everlasting calm." Nevertheless, Voltaire's aloof divinity has placed within man's breast a moral sense, which he cannot disregard without danger to himself and others.

Voltaire avows the view that in every department of secular life the State must stand supreme. As Prof. Black notes: "Voltaire proposes to withdraw from the province of the Church the ceremony of marriage, wills and testaments, education, registration of baptisms, marriages and deaths . . . In short, he proclaimed a vast secularisation of human life, tantamount to what the Reformation had accomplished in Protestant countries." Moreover, he claimed that the immense wealth accumulated by the Roman Church should, in accordance with equity and social requirements, be utilised for the benefit of the community as a whole.

T. F. PALMER.

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

A JESUIT priest once explained to me how that Order has regular debates, where intricate questions are put to test the ability of the fathers to explain and defend their Faith. That, however, he remarked, is easy; what is more difficult is to answer questions shot at you in Hyde Park, for there you have to enter into the mentality of the questioner before you can frame a suitable reply. These remarks occurred to me when, at a party, a superstition-imbued young woman flung triumphantly at me the question, "who, then, started it all?" (the "all" being the material universe). Such a question is difficult to answer, because the questioner is thinking in the terms of her own response—the one word "God." If we could reply in similar vein—the Devil, Stalin, the Mighty Atom, or what not, we should at least satisfy her standards of the form the reply should take. But scientific explanations cannot normally be couched in a single word; that is the prerogative of "revealed" superstition. The answer that nothing "starts" and that the Universe wasn't "started" nor had a beginning, is usually derided as an evasion and admission of defeat.

Perhaps the best way to deal with this question is to counter it with another question, "when, where and how did you start?" True, there is a certain dialectical objection to meeting an inquiry by posing another inquiry, but when logic becomes as formal as that it ceases to be an engine for ordinary conversation.

When did you start? At birth? Assuredly not, for you were a living organism in the maternal womb for six months prior to that event. At the quickening, then? Equally not, for that would imply that the mother was carrying lifeless matter within her, which obviously is untrue. At the conception? Hardly. The male

spermata seeks out the female ovum, both very definitely living organisms. And for the juncture to be effected and conception to follow, there necessitates the whole being of a male and a female parent capable of performing the act of copulation and having the capacity for fertility.

And so the process goes on, back—through parent, ancestor, primitive man, sub-man, ape, fish, rocks, the conditions of our planet, our sun and the development of the whole universe. Beyond that our present knowledge does not take us; after all, it was but yesterday that we learnt of the descent of man.

And it is scarcely reasonable to ask us, having traced the process back so far by the evolutionary method, to interpose at this point the quite inconsistent intervention by an arbitrary *Divine Architect*, producing something—to wit, the Universe—out of nothing, like a conjuror producing rabbits out of an empty top hat.

Evolutionary development must surely be regarded like our planet, as "finite, but unbounded." Just as we can circle our globe as many times as we like without ever finding its beginning or end, just as the universe is likewise "finite but unbounded," space curving back upon itself, so the processes of nature, of birth and decay, of continual change, may be regarded in the same light. Besides, science tells us that we live in a four dimensional continuum of time-space, and to explain the origin of the universe by one of its internal factors is like defining a locomotive as something made out of steam. Beginning and end are convenient terms of definition, not realities, just as the infinity sign is a convenient symbol in mathematics, not a fact.

But, it will be argued, even if our beginnings seem a bit vague, our ends—death—are the most definite and foreseeable of events. Death is so final, as the American road warnings put it. It is the one date we cannot dodge, nor even be late for. And death is indubitably recognisable; its occurrence can be fixed almost to the instant. To the individual mind death is the one decisive event; it is the end.

Yet even the individual knows it is not the end, except for his consciousness. The world, he knows, will go on without him. It is, in fact, but one tiny incident in the process of continual changes, which characterised our time-space continuum.

Life can be divided into the two general forms of plant life and animal life. The main difference between these two forms of life is that plants can, through the chlorophyll in their leaves, obtain their food directly from the sole source of energy, the sun's rays. Animal life, on the other hand, has to obtain that energy second or third hand; either, that is, by consuming the plants, as the herbivorous animals do, or by devouring other animals, as the carnivores do. But as we are assured on the highest authority that the animal, man, cannot live "by bread alone," so the plants, rooted in the earth, require the decaying matter of dead plants and animals to form the fertilising element on which their well-being depends. And the body of the dead human animal has no more significance than that of other decaying animal or vegetable matter, apart from the sentimental value that his society attaches to it.

Thus the circle has come the full cycle—from plant to herbivorous animals; from herbivore to man, from man back to the plant. This is "the resurrection and the life" of man, who dies that another generation may live. And it is at least as noble a conception as the egoistic phantasy of perfect self-satisfaction and of the sycophantic adulation of a god-creator—this continuity of the "finite but unbounded."

P. C. KING.

ACID DROPS

A big "Mission" has been taking place in Oxford, the object of which is, naturally, to further the cause of Christ. Tea parties were arranged to which the lapsed and unbelievers have been invited, and we are told these parties have been "of enormous value." We note that the Chief Big-Wig—that is, the Chief Missioner—is our old friend Dr. Cockin, who, some years ago, literally wiped up a number of unbelievers on his radio programmes. He did this by the very simple expedient of preparing all the script himself—including that of the unbelievers. In this way unbelief was given a terrific defeat, and the unbelievers joyfully accepted Christ as their Saviour. It was a famous victory.

The Egyptian Minister of Education has startled the Catholic Hierarchy by his recent circular, which insists that all free schools in Egypt will be obliged to teach the Islamic religion and the Koran to Moslem pupils, and also erect a place of worship in all schools. Catholics are immediately up in arms and protest that under no circumstances will Catholic free schools conform with the order, and point out that no Moslem children are forced to attend Catholic services, but are free to leave during religious instruction. We are against the teaching of any religion in schools, and deplore the undignified religious squabbles as much as the infringement of the liberty of the individual; but note how quickly Catholics will claim freedom, not on their own, but on the principles of their opponents.

Out of about 2,000 films shown in Eire, the *Universe* is delighted to announce that only 16 were rejected by the censor and only 253 were cut. It looks as if this Catholic journal expected many more. Sixteen out of 2,000—who says that the Roman Church is intolerant?

After the Proclamation inaugurating the birth of the new Sovereign Democratic Republic, the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad took the oath in Hindu in the name of God, and in a short speech offered thanks to the "Almighty Power that has enabled us to see this day." "The objective of our Republic," continued Dr. Prasad, "is to secure justice, liberty, and equality to all who follow different religions." Well, well! The God of the White Raj has had a good innings; it is now the turn of the God, or Gods, of India.

It is announced that the Vatican may end the centuries-old ban on co-operation with other Christian Churches, and the Roman Catholic clergy will be allowed to join friendly discussions of "a serious and deep nature." It is fairly obvious that this permission will apply only to those countries in which Catholicism is in a minority; where they are in the majority no such concession would be entertained. The leopard does not change his spots. However, the other Christian Churches know enough of Catholicism not to treat the overture as a serious step towards "unity." That will only be achieved when they sink their identities in Rome.

The "News Chronicle" reports yet another case of a Testament being "borrowed" from a police court. Apart from the ridiculous idea that people will not lie after swearing, it must be rather annoying to have the proceedings held up whilst search is made for another magic book. Can we suggest that the authorities chain the Bible to the witness box? Or better still, dispense altogether with this archaic procedure, for, after all,

people do commit perjury, and will do so even with a whole library of holy books.

The Children's Council according to the *Church of England Year Book*, will advise parents on what comics to buy; the report does not say so specifically, but presumably it means comics for children. For the parents there is still the Bible!

The Vatican deplores the fact that out of the 144 million Negroes in the U.S.A., only 362,427 are Roman Catholics. Missionaries are therefore exhorted to make an all-out effort to convert their "black brothers" to the true faith. The new Catholic "line" will now, no doubt, be that the Roman Catholic God is not, as previously, white, or even off-white, but black, perhaps even with frizzy hair. That ought to fetch 'em!

The Press published many photographs of the thousands of people who massed in Trafalgar Square to hear Cardinal Griffin speak at the meeting in support of Catholic schools. In the pouring rain, thousands of fanatics knelt on the ground to receive the Cardinal's blessing. The weather was so inclement, that even that most hardy of birds, the London pigeon, sought shelter. The sight of our fellow-man grovelling on his knees, and of so many men and women with bowed heads, looking for all the world like camels waiting to receive their loads, surely must produce in us a feeling of shame and a pessimistic outlook for the future of mankind.

Although George Kelly carried a rosary throughout his trial, went to Confession, received Holy Communion for 16 weeks, "and knelt at the altar rails," he was found guilty of the Cameo Cinema murder and sentenced to death. There must be a moral in all this, but only a Catholic would see it. We were, however, informed by a Catholic acquaintance, that if George Kelly is genuinely sorry for his "sin," he will serve only a short spell in Purgatory before he goes to heaven. Regarding the ultimate fate of the victim of the killer who had no time to "make his peace with God" before he was shot, our Catholic friend made no reply.

Austria is still, we believe, thoroughly Catholic—but here we have the Archbishop of Salzburg protesting that Austria "is the only country where pornography and immoral literature can be sold and produced without punishment." He even thinks that Austria is "a menace to the neighbouring countries." We cannot see, for the life of us, any recommendation here for the Church of Rome which has had the spiritual welfare of Austria in its hands for centuries. Will some Catholic tell us?

The Communist candidate for Preston North, Mr. Pat Devine, was not allowed the other day to hold his meeting by the Catholics present, who "overwhelmingly outnumbered Communist supporters." The report says that what with the clapping, cheering, whistling and stamping, poor Mr. Devine could not get a word in, and with the Catholics singing "Faith of our Fathers," the meeting broke up. Strange how people hate totalitarian principles—when held by the other side!

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Is the Rev. E. Thorpe, who, in his anti-Socialist sermon recently referred to the Labour Party as heretics and Atheists, still furious because his stipend was cut by £37 when the mines were nationalised?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. BAILEY.—Re your query on the question of tithes—would it not be advisable to ask the Ecclesiastical Commissioners? They would give you an authoritative answer.

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.

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance.

SUGAR PLUMS

We were pleased to see the *Daily Express*, so noted for its completely religious attitude to most questions, quote a famous passage from the *Crisis*, by Thomas Paine. It surely is intriguing to find that the foul lies, the bitter hatred and calumny so assiduously propagated by the Christian Church against Paine, one of the greatest of Englishmen, have been so utterly unavailing against the greatness of his name and fame. There are many dozens of quotable passages in his writings, and we trust the *Daily Express* will avail itself again and again of them. Thomas Paine's Rights of Man were never more needed than now.

The Pope feels that the world needs more humour and more laughter—at least that is what he is reported to have said to the well-known comedians, Olsen and Johnson. We wonder whether he would have said the same thing to Jesus Christ had they met, when that world-famous Man of Sorrows went about dolefully and unmirthfully predicting the early dissolution of the world. But perhaps the Pope thinks that Jesus was, after all, the greatest comedian that ever lived. Or does he?

Lord Milverton, according to *The Times*, is moved to a feeling of nausea when he regards the attempt by Ministers of the Crown to "exploit the religious feelings of the electorate," and considers it shameful that Mr. Strachey should speak from St. Paul's pulpit. Why? Are not politicians concerned mainly with vote-catching and will exploit any circumstance, from baby-kissing to "Christian Action" Zinoviev letters, and free petrol?

Although the Irish Rationalist Society has got well under weigh, it is by no means having an easy time. It cannot be expected that any society attacking the fundamentals of Catholicism in a Catholic State will be allowed full toleration. We can only hope all who believe in liberty of thought and speech will do their best to help the I.R.S. to carry on its fine work.

THOU ART PETER

(A History of Roman Catholic Practice and Doctrine.)
A. D. Howell Smith, B.A.; Watts & Co., 21s.

ON reading this immense work, one's first and inescapable duty must be to congratulate the learned author upon his erudition and upon the vast reading that must have gone to assist in its acquisition. In his indictment of Roman Catholicism, Mr. Howell Smith has given us what is obviously the work of a lifetime, and many years will probably pass before a volume equally weighty (in every sense) is added to the critical literature upon the Church of Rome.

In *Thou Art Peter*, the author takes as his province the whole vast corpus of Catholic doctrine, ritual and history. Many of the matters treated in this scholastic survey are of interest, primarily to specialists in comparative religion, and in particular, to students of Roman dogma. It would, we think, be flattering the man-in-the-street to suppose him capable of mastering the many recondite matters of which this work treats, and we think that the publishers of this highly specialised work might seriously consider issuing an abbreviated edition for the benefit of a wider reading public than are likely to be reached in its present form. For specialists, and indeed, for all advanced students of Catholicism, this is obviously a "must" book, and is likely to remain so for a considerable time.

Whilst the author includes a sketch of the evolution of Church History, the book is mainly a study of dogma rather than of history. In which field, as he repeatedly acknowledges, Mr. Howell Smith's massive volume of some 300,000 words owes a great deal to the *Histoire des Dogmes* of the French ex-Catholic theologian, Joseph Turmel, whom the late J. M. Robertson described as the greatest theological scholar since the Renaissance.

Mr. Howell Smith methodically goes through the immense corpus of Catholic dogma, doctrine by doctrine, devoting a separate chapter to each. His chapters contain much to instruct, a good deal to horrify, and even something to amuse. In the latter, our author's chapter on Catholic conceptions of creation and immortality are, by turns, comic and grotesque. The ingenious hair-splitting of Catholic apologists who seek to reconcile the traditional Garden of Eden with modern evolutionary theories, belong essentially to the comic category, whilst the doctrine of the fiery torments reserved for unbaptised babies propounded by St. Augustine and other theologians which were for long accepted by the Church as canonical dogma, are calculated to make the blood of any normally humane person run cold with horror. In a character at once comic and grotesque are the early theories of the death of Christ as a "ransom" to the Devil, which prior to Anselm were universally accepted in Catholic theological circles. The "seven sacraments," a strange medley of cooked history and rationalised folk-lore, are minutely analysed in separate chapters.

To quote in detail from this omnibus survey of the most elaborate of all religious syntheses would be both impossible and impertinent in a brief review of this kind. Whatever it is that you may want, doctrine, theory, history, critical commentary from a rationalist angle, you will find it all here. We will merely add two general comments: the idea held by many Protestants and not a few Freethinkers, that Rome relies purely on authority and despises the use of reason in religious matters, will not survive a careful perusal of the evidence so carefully mustered by the author.

Far from this being so, Rome prides herself on her intellectual credentials and on the edifice of logic which

a whole army of theologians have been steadily constructing from the 'days of Peter' to Pius XII. St. Thomas Aquinas's "five proofs" of the existence of God, lucidly analysed, represents in Catholic estimation the logical corner-stone of a gigantic web of rationally interpreted relationships which binds together the entire Cosmos, from the Holy Trinity on its Throne to the demons in the Inferno, and includes every conceivable aspect of human existence.

Indeed, Scholastic Theology claims to be the only true Rationalism. Actually it represents a monument of misapplied logic based upon misread history and scientific guesswork. "The Angelic Doctor" and his colleagues constructed a vast medieval castle of logic which must command intellectual respect. However, in the modern universe of Copernicus, Darwin, and Einstein, it proves to be only a castle in the air without visible means of support!

In his summary of Church history, Mr. Howell Smith takes a more objective and, on the whole, more favourable view of the Papacy than does, say, Joseph McCabe in his well-known *History of the Popes*. (Is it, however, correct to describe Joseph McCabe as "impartial" as is here done? We hardly think that the veteran rationalist would claim to be exactly that.) We think that the Vatican may be more accurately described in mixed colours than in sharp black and white. Freethinkers will, of course, hold that its predominant influence has been evil. However, such a remarkable institution could hardly have survived an unbroken sequence of knaves, dolts, and perverts as the cheaper kind of anti-Romanist writer seems at times to suggest. Mr. Howell Smith also attaches less importance to Catholicism's alleged "borrowings" from other religions than do probably the majority of anti-Catholic writers.

A few, not very important criticisms may be permitted. An archbishop is not the automatic equivalent of a metropolitan. Odoacer, who deposed the last Roman Emperor in 476, was not a "Visigothic King." The Emperor Julian could not, even on Catholic logic, have "apostatized" from a faith which he had embraced under compulsion. To describe the Patriarch of Lisbon as "chaplain-general of the Spanish Army" is surely a slip of the pen.

On a broader level than the above trifling errors of fact, most readers of this journal will, we think, regard our author's Biblical exegesis as unduly conservative, as for example, he ascribes most of the "Pauline Epistles" to the historical Paul, thereby describing these essentially Gnostic theological works of evolving Catholic theology to the first generation of Christianity: in our submission a very improbable view.

"Mythicists," and even many who would not describe themselves as such without reservation but have read their Robertson and Couchoud, may think it rash and even a trifle uncritical to assume throughout, as is here done, the historical existence of Jesus. Could not Catholicism which, on the author's own showing, has forged so much of its doctrine, also have forged the biography of its God?

The reviewer would also indulge in the more general criticism that, throughout, the Church of Rome is treated primarily as a *religious* body, whilst, in fact, its nature is equally political, and its most influential leaders have been politicians rather than theologians. But this is a suggestion rather than a formal criticism.

In his conclusion, Mr. Howell Smith predicts the final demise of the Church allegedly founded by Peter. But whether it goes soon or late, the Church of Rome will always be remembered as the most extraordinary

manifestation of religious psychology in the social sphere. As such, the historians of a post-Catholic era will long continue to study its amazing evolution. The able and exhaustive work before us will, we feel sure, remain an authoritative text-book upon the historic evolution of the Church and See of Rome.

F. A. RIDLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

COMMUNISM

SIR,—The Communists I am writing about are those who are exercising tyranny and persecution in Russia and other parts of the world where they are in power. So was Alfred Corrick. That is the point, not which particular brand of Communism they belong to.

Mr. Parker's statement on the meaning of Communism is one to which *all* Communists will agree. So will a great many people who are not Communists. It is in their interpretation of this meaning that their differences arise.

If we follow Mr. Parker's line of argument we are wrong in speaking of the present day followers of Jesus Christ as Christians.

Now, Sir, one thing more and I have finished. Mr. Parker will want to reply to this, of course, but I intend writing no more on this subject. One way and another we have had enough of Communism in these columns during the past few months to last us for a very long time.—Yours, etc.,

H. POINTER.

[We hope to end this correspondence on Communism next week.—EDITOR.]

WHAT IS MECHANISTIC MATERIALISM?

SIR,—“Undiluted Nonsense” is Mr. Chapman Cohen's trenchant stricture on the common view that mechanistic materialism asserts that physico-chemical laws can be extended to cover not only the phenomena of life but also those of conscious behaviour. Mr. Cohen's own exposition, so cogently adumbrated in his little book “Materialism Re-stated,” stresses with marked emphasis that the materialist, notwithstanding the contrary dicta of Prof. J. S. Haldane, Dr. Davidson, and others, “does not say that life is a property of matter, nor that life is to be explained in terms of physics or chemistry.” Which of the two definitions, however, has the greater etymological and historical justification? Is it not perhaps Mr. Cohen and those of his persuasion who require a new label of differentiation?

I was prompted to raise this question upon the realization that Dr. John Lewis, who, as a philosopher, one would expect to be correct with his terminology, defines the mechanistic materialist in his book “Marxism and Modern Idealism,” as one who “sets out to prove only that mind does not exist—that there is nothing properly to be called real but matter, which is limited to predictable chemical and physiological effects. For him, if consciousness occurs at all, it is either a sort of shadow cast by the brain or in some other way consistent with the complete dependence of mind on matter. . . . This, for most materialists, is the conclusion of the argument and it is the classical position of what is often called mechanistic materialism, but more generally known simply as the materialist philosophy. Marxism has always strenuously opposed this form of materialism on the ground that it is in flat contradiction of the evidence to reduce life and consciousness to chemistry. Marxism does not deny the reality of either life or mind. It asserts, however, “that they are functions of highly organised matter on the organic level.”

We have the strange paradox therefore, of Mr. Cohen arguing *for*, and Dr. Lewis arguing *against* “mechanistic materialism,” yet both arriving at what is substantially the same conclusion. Which of the two is using wrong terminology?—Yours, etc.,

FRANK F. VINNEY.

AWARENESS

SIR,—Your correspondent, Mr. Vernon Carter, appears to be somewhat confused. I fail to see how a “feeling of awareness” can be admitted as evidence for the existence of anything and it certainly seems to be quite illogical to appeal, not to one's own awareness, but to somebody else's as Mr. Carter does.

May I ask Mr. Carter to demonstrate the logical validity of his proposition:

A feels aware of B; therefore B exists; and then to demonstrate the falsity of the proposition.

X is not aware of B; therefore B does not exist.

The second fallacy in Mr. Carter's letter is connected with his attempt to draw an analogy between the existence of an outside world and the existence of Jahveh. Mr. Carter may be able to show that human knowledge of the world can be analysed down to mere awareness, but it is significant, surely, that while people can live quite satisfactorily and disregard the existence of Jahveh, they would have a very difficult task if they tried to disregard the outside world.

A final point with regard to contents of consciousness. "Somewhere" and "Nowhere" are spatial terms: one of the characteristics peculiar to material objects is that they are extended in space. The contents of Mr. Carter's consciousness are immaterial, therefore they are not extended in space, i.e., they are nowhere. If Mr. Carter disputes this, will he inform me of the precise location of those contents, how he determines this and how I can similarly locate the precise position of my own contents of awareness.

May I offer a final word to Mr. Carter? This is the first time his name has appeared in your columns; he will find that rational argument will have far more appeal to the readers of *The Freethinker* than abuse and "slick catch phrases."

—Yours, etc.,

L. W. SMITH.

THE LABOUR PARTY AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Sir,—I put the following written questions to Mr. Herbert Morrison, at a meeting he addressed at St. Augustine's Roman Catholic School on February 14.

Other speakers present were Dr. Stark Murray and R. J. Mellish, Labour Candidate (a Roman Catholic) for the Rotherhithe and Bermondsey constituency.

"If Mr. Morrison is returned to Parliament, will he and his Party support the Roman Catholic proposal in connection with their schools, as enunciated by Mgr. Beck and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Southwark, at a recent meeting which he (Mr. Morrison) attended?"

If so, would Mr. Morrison give the same privileges to members of the National Secular Society who desire their children to be educated on rational atheistical lines: with teachers who are themselves opposed to Christianity?"

Mr. Morrison replied:—
"If I attempted to deal with such a question at length, I should find myself in serious trouble. However, I will say, that I must abide by the legislation of 1944. It may be possible at some future date to do something about the matter, at least in the case of the Catholics who are much more stronger numerically than are the Atheists, which may be a very good job, as otherwise it would be quite impossible to even consider legislation on the subject."

Mr. Mellish opened his speech with the affirmation that he was in the Labour Party, and a Socialist, solely because he was a Christian, etc.

Mr. Mellish thanked his God at least eight times during his speech for the advent of the Labour Party in 1945; and the writer was moved to ask Mr. Mellish what God was doing during the period of "Wicked Tory Rule"; the answer came back as if from the pulpit of Farm Street, that the Tories did not carry out the will of God.

The only conclusion any Freethinker can arrive at after hearing the speech, is that, assuming Mr. Mellish to be representative of the new Labour Party—we are to be blessed with a new form of priest rulers who will preface all their legislation with prayer to the Most High, for divine guidance in carrying out his will.

No! Mr. Mellish, it will not do. It is of no use emulating your master, Sir Stafford Cripps, and putting prayer in the place of economics.—Yours, etc.,

E. W. SHAW.

THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM

Sir,—I was interested by one "aside" in the note appended to my last letter, viz., "he hasn't the ghost of an idea of the Baconian case," because it reminded me of a question I used to put myself when as a youth (I'm an octogenarian now) I was fascinated by Shakespeare-Baconian literature—"How on earth does he know that?"

I still have an ample pro-Baconian library available. Much of it is sheer dogmatism. But I owe it a debt. It made me take an interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, and, incidentally, in cryptograms. It also, for a time, gave me a strong liking for Bacon's essays, "Wisdom of the Ancients," and "History of Henry VII." Therefore I have no feeling against it as such. But how it ever came to be supposed that Bacon was Shakespeare I never could make out. And still less do I understand the cases for Edward de Vere, seventh Earl of Leicester, and the others.

I should like to answer Mr. Kent's question, but I really don't know why Shakespeare didn't mention Stratford-on-Avon. He came very near it "on Cotsal" and "the rough uneven ways" of Gloucestershire. Anyhow, his rustic neighbours gave him the finest grave-space in their church and cursed those who moved his bones.

There are a few specimens of Shakespeare's writing extant; I am intrigued by their similarity to Charles Dickens' signature. If I were dogmatic I should say that they "proved" (blessed word) the temperamental identity of the two writers—sometimes incredibly slipshod, sometimes incredibly "inspired," and neither was a scholar.—Yours, etc.,

F. C. PARSONS.

OBITUARY

The death of Dr. Robert Eisler last December removes from our midst a very capable scholar on many subjects, particularly on Christian origins. He was one of the most original of Jewish writers who clung to a real Jesus, his book *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* working out in great detail his views on the much discussed Myth Theory. He also wrote on economics and astrology and made many friends in Oxford where he settled down. Dr. Eisler was interned at Dachau during Hitler's occupation of Austria and later in the Isle of Man. These privations impaired his health and no doubt shortened his life.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Brains Trust. Mixed Team of Experts.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Sati's Cafe, 40, Cannon Street)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Charles Dickens, Secularist or Christian?" Mr. W. KENT, F.S.A.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1)—Tuesday, February 28, 7 p.m.: "Is Pacifism Practicable?" Mr. STUART MORRIS (P.P.U.).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Problem of Race," Mr. JAMES ROY.

Irish Rationalist Society (The Four Courts Hotel, Dublin)—Tuesday, February 28, 7 p.m.: "The Origins of Religion," Mr. E. W. CRAMPTON.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate)—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Wonder of the Stars," Mr. BASIL GIMSON.

Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, S.E.)—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "Religion and the Navy," MAJOR C. DRAPER.

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

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street)—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Halfway Through the Century," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Co-op. Hall, Parliament Street)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Christian Origins," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1)—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Art and Propaganda," Dr. HELEN ROSENAU-CARMIL.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1)—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Roman Catholicism and the Labour Party," Mr. E. W. SHAW.

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loco. Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E. 15)—Tuesday, February 28, 8 p.m.: A meeting. All Freethinkers invited.

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. L. EBURY.

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

ANOTHER JESUIT PLOT

A WRITER in our leading Catholic journal, *The Tablet*, for 14th January, asks that, as the main political parties have rejected the Catholic proposals regarding their schools:—

“ Could not the possibility of a solution on the following basis be explored?

Firstly: That *compulsory denominational religious teaching* [my italics] should be given in all schools and paid for by the State in cases where the school has no denominational teacher available. This would require some amendment of the existing Acts, and it would cater for the needs of all children in the schools.

Secondly: That where there is a majority of children in a school of any particular religion the authorities of that religion be given the right to approve the teachers.”

Now wouldn't that be grand?

You see the consequences; the Catholic's urgent building problem would be solved at no cost to themselves and they could crowd their children into the already overcrowded schools. Further, the local authority, the only democratic voice, would have no say in the appointment of teachers and in practice we know that no majority of any other religion would be permitted the right to select the papist teacher.

Almost absolute reaction. Educational progress was made possible in this country only by taking the schools out of the hands of the Churches, these proposals would restore power to them at once. The Romans surely feel that the tolerant English people have fallen so often for their plausible trickery that they can get away with such proposals.

J. McILWAIN.

“ BASIC GEOLOGY ”

(Concluded from Page 63)

IN the previous article I tried to present a few “ basic ideas ” of geology before coming to the student's question of: “ How do geologists compute the millions of years in geological periods ? ”

Basic thoughts must precede this—a difficult question to most intellectual students. Here are a few suggestions and evidence of the “ wonders of Time.” The “ Palæozoic era ” (old world life) has “ six periods; ” the “ Mesozoic era ” (middle life) has “ three periods; ” and the Top Rocks “ Cenozoic life ” (new life) has “ six periods.” We will call these Eras III, IV, and V, the “ New Top Rocks ”—Cenozoic life.

In Era III, “ Silurian period,” mountain forming on a grand scale occurred, only the “ roots ” of the original range now remain, they were worn away before the next period, “ Devonian,” were deposited upon them. That is called “ unconformity,” and that effect is in many of the other periods. This “ Devonian period ” deposited much of our oil and gas, also quartz sand, important in glass work. 20,000 feet are exposed in the Appalachian Mountains. Seas were over most of what is now Siberia and Central Asia, North and South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and South America. These seas dwindled and much land was afterwards “ elevated ”—known as the “ Arcadian Mountain Revolution ” and accompanied by much volcanic action. The above events folding and elevating much strata and exhibiting 15,000 feet uplift on the Appalachian Mountains.

Then Era III, “ Carboniferous period.” In Pennsylvania 50 to 76 coal seams, forests of the past are to be seen one upon another. Then coming up to

“ Permian period ” Era III (Red Rocks) above the coal, is a harsh time lasting millions of years, and was followed by great disturbances called “ The Appalachian Revolution ” of deserts and droughts, and much life was obliterated. In Central Europe gypsum and vast salt beds were deposited, like the Dead Sea, and the Great Salt Lake in North America. One bed, near Berlin, the deposits are 4,000 feet thick and the bottom has not been reached. Then coming up to the “ Triassic period,” Era IV, these, rocks are “ unconformable ” to the under rocks—Permian. These two facts show that great intervals of time elapsed between these two sets of rocks. Particularly note “ Silurian ” remarks above. These seas deposited beds of salt 75 feet to 120 feet thick on Cheshire, Droitwich and Stoke Prior; millions of tons of salt are obtained from these “ Triassic ” rocks of England and America.

Coming up to top of Era IV, “ Cretaceous period,” this is vastly different to Triassic or Permian before it. Instead of lagoons being intensely “ salt water,” they were continually “ diluted ” by rain and river resulting in developing much fresh-water species of animals and plants. In these island seas were deposited thousands of feet of clay and sand which we call the “ Wealden Beds,” some are 2,100 feet thick.

Era V (New Top Rocks) are shallow sand deposits, these lie “ unconformably ” upon the Chalk (Cretaceous). These facts again “ evidence ” that the chalk beds were much eroded or worn away before the “ New Rocks ” which lie upon them were deposited. This again points to a great interval of time having elapsed between the deposition of the “ Chalk ” and the “ Eocene period ” (Era V). If you can obtain a “ Geological Chart,” this article will help you very much more; and for those who wish further study, I can recommend: *An Introduction to Historical Geology*, Prof. W. J. Miller, and *The Evolution of the Earth and its Inhabitants*, Prof. R. S. Lull, University of California.

CHARLES H. SMITH.

BREAKERS AHEAD !

The Church is heading for the rocks,
Saint Peter on his rock will crash;
The faithful must prepare for shocks.

Because young folk refuse its trash,
The Church is heading for the rocks;
Her rotten timbers soon will smash.

Though bishops still upbraid their flocks,
And though the Atheist they lash,
The Church is heading for the rocks.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

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