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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

The Roman Empire and Christianity

PERHAPS the most momentous revolution ever effected in European history was achieved in the fourth century of the Christian era. For it was this century which witnessed what is probably the most complete and fundamental transformation that Europe and European civilisation have ever undergone. This was the epoch which witnessed the final passing of the classical Graeco-Roman civilisation, the first secular civilisation in history; a transformation symbolised and expressed in the final demise of Paganism and in the establishment of Christianity by Constantine and his successors as the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Prior to the Greeks and Romans, there stretched the long vista, dating from pre-historic times, of the sacerdotal theocracy, of the god-kings of the ancient East; whilst after it, Europe sank into the medieval twilight of the Catholic theocracy, which survived unbroken in its totalitarian sway until the revival of the ancient secular culture in the era of the Renaissance.

The victory of Christianity in the age of Constantine was preceded by a steady, and, at first, imperceptible progress on the part of the new Oriental religion that traditionally originated in Galilee. Gods were two a penny in the days of Rome, particularly in the Eastern regions of her far-flung empire, and the appearance of a new one who taught, or so his followers alleged, in Galilee, a remote border region in the eastern marches, excited little attention.

Contemporary Pagan references to the origins of Christianity are nil, nor were the Jews amongst whom it originated much better informed. Apart from the earliest literature composed by Christians, our present New Testament (or, its unedited original) we know next to nothing about the early Christian Church and its founders. Prior to the second half of the second century, the only authentic testimony to the existence of the new religion is the brief legal correspondence between Pliny, the Governor of Bythnia and the Emperor Trajan in the year 112 as to the status in Roman Law of the new religion. Apart from which, there are dubiously authentic references in the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius, and still more dubious ones in Josephus and the Talmud.

After the year 150, Christianity began to emerge into the light of history. The Church produced its own literature and provoked reply and comment from representatives of Paganism such as Marcus Aurelius and Celsus. By the end of the second century, the Christian Church must already have become a force to be reckoned with by the Pagan rulers of the Empire. Anxiety regarding a possible Christian victory seems to pervade the work of the anti-Christian writer Celsus, which is the only Pagan "apologetic" against the new creed to have come down to us, thanks to its preservation in the counterpolemic of the Christian doctor, Origen. At

about the same time, the Christian writer, Tertullian, made his famous boast that "we are everywhere" and have left to the Pagans, "nothing except your temples," which no doubt, is a highly rhetorical method of putting it, and must be taken with, not one grain, but several grains of salt.

Behind Tertullian's boasting, there must, however, have been a modicum of truth, for a little later (c.250) we find the Roman Emperor, Decius, declaring that the power of the Bishop of Rome was more dangerous to him than that of a rival Emperor.

As Christianity itself grew slowly, so the Roman Empire and its rulers also reacted slowly to it. Prior to A.D. 200, there was no official Empire-wide persecution of the Church. Isolated "pogroms" were, of course, not unknown, and the roll of Christian martyrs, though much expanded by later Christian fiction which was written at a time when it would have been dangerous to contradict the "acts of the martyrs," was not entirely fictitious. But such persecution as there was was local only and spasmodic. Although Christianity was illegal on account of its "anti-social" practices which included the refusal to worship the Emperor, and to serve in the Pagan army, it was too insignificant to be the object of a general persecution.

In the third century, the Emperors at last woke up to the danger of this new "state within the state" as represented by the Christian Church. It was then that the era of general (empire-wide) persecution began under the military emperors, Septimius Severus, Decius, and most severe of all by the centralising despot, Diocletian. Whilst, again, Christian hagiography augmented the numbers of the martyrs, there is no reason to doubt the severity of these persecutions, particularly of the last one which represented the final stand of the Pagan Empire under Diocletian and his colleague, Galerius, the latter was, it seems, "the Dragon" who actually slew St. George.

Between 303 and 311, the Roman totalitarian State put out its whole strength. A century earlier, Tertullian had already accurately summarised the current regime in Pagan Rome when he said "it is more dangerous to swear falsely by the genius of Caesar than by that of all the gods put together." The totalitarian state described in a sentence!

At first the jubilant Pagans thought that they had actually arrested the incoming tide of Christianity. Two inscriptions dating from this period have recently been excavated in Spain which confirm this supposition, they run:—

To Diocletian Caesar Augustus and to Galerius of the Eastern Empire, who everywhere stamped out the Christian superstition and restored the cult of the gods.

To Diocletian, dedicated to Jupiter, and to Maximian, dedicated to Hercules, Caesars and Augusti, who widened the Roman Empire both to the East and to the West, and stamped out the name of the Christians who were overthrowing the State.

However, the Pagan rejoicings were premature. The Church was now too strong to be suppressed, for the

Empire had given shelter to the Christian cuckoo for too long. The Emperor Galerius was forced to issue an edict of toleration before he died. His successor, Constantine, had either to involve the Empire in a perpetual civil war, or else officially recognise the new religion. He did the latter, for political not religious reasons, for it seems certain that the "first Christian Emperor" was not, himself, a believer. It is a fact, however, that substantially, if not with formal accuracy, Christianity dates its triumph from his dubiously motivated "conversion."

F. A. RIDLEY.

MATERIALISM EXAMINED

AS I do not wish to be accused of "clap-trap,"* I will use Chapman Cohen's definition† of Materialism, "the conception that the whole of the phenomena of nature—physical, chemical, moral, mental and social—are ultimately explicable in terms of the composition of forces" (never let it be said that Materialism is not metaphysics). Now it appears to me that the only notion of force which I possess is one of muscular activity: could it be that this crude anthropomorphism (and I would remind materialists what they have said of anthropomorphisms) is extended analogically not only to the objective world but also to the subjective world. (Logicians tell us that to argue by analogy is the weakest of all forms of reasoning.) Dorothy Emmett has some very illuminating, and some very disconcerting things to say about "extended analogies."

But the struggle between Materialism or Naturalism on the one hand and Supernaturalism or Religion on the other has often been presented (if only by implication), as a war of reason against faith. I do not wish to appear pedantic, but this does appear to be in itself a faith in reason.

In the case of Materialism, the faith in reason is not consequent upon inquiry, it is what Collinwood calls‡ "a necessary presupposition"—without which no knowledge is possible at all, whereas on the other hand, the religious person's faith is faith in certain experiences; and while it may be true that these experiences cannot be articulated simply because they are, by definition, unique, that does not destroy their validity for those who have these experiences (I am *Agnostic*, note—not a "top-hatted Atheist") of God.

As I have shown, the Materialist assumes that the human mind is fitted to unravel the inmost secrets of the universe—and I have pointed out that this assumption precedes, and is not consequent of, Inquiry. Now this in itself implies just what the Materialist in another spheres denies, namely that man (or at least the mind of man) occupies a central position in the universe. The readers of *The Freethinker* are aware, or they all ought to be aware, of the tremendous amount of energy that Materialist writers have expended in, to a pretty successful attempt at showing the utter insignificance of man. Materialists emphasise that when the Copernican Astronomy was introduced and established, that in itself completely removed man from the centre of this "sorry scheme of things." The Materialist claims further (if it be needed) that the establishment of the theory of evolution completes the picture of the "insignificance of man."

To crown all, along come the Materialist psychologists—the behaviourists—and remove the "mind" of man.

* See "Misconceptions of Materialism," *The Freethinker*, January 8, 1950, for the meaning of this term.

† Cohen-Joad debate (issued by R.P.A.), p. 10.

‡ "The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking" (Macmillan, 1945; 12s. 6d.).

§ Metaphysics. (O.U.P.)

The behaviourists seem to be more favourable to a Materialist interpretation of nature than any other school (I am ignoring Psycho-Analysis for the moment)—that is to say they claim that man is all body, and only body, and in the place of mind they put physiological processes, and responses to external stimuli—though they do not show how physiological processes and responses can be "identical" with objective occurrences (it's a matter of faith that they do correspond). They seem to forget or ignore the fact, probably the latter, that there must be a mind which interprets, or finds meaning in, such physiological processes and responses.

One of the greatest difficulties facing the Materialist is to explain how, if all "mental" occurrences are ultimately to be regarded as bodily movements (I must ask non-Materialist readers to excuse the necessary obscurity of all this—we are "in the region of pure faith" here) and all bodily movements are to be regarded as responses to external stimuli, simple stimuli should be capable of producing such highly complex mental events—which are, after all, on their own grounds, merely the co-ordinations of the constituents of empirical observation, although the Materialist doesn't seem capable of showing what the "pure elements" of sensation are. If one removes mind from the scheme of things it is pertinent, or it appears to be so, to ask: What is it that interprets, co-ordinates—relates, identifies and distinguishes sense impressions (and what precisely are sense impressions)?

So far as Psycho-Analysis is concerned, I do not know what importance the Materialist attaches to it. If I were a Materialist I think that I should ignore it, because while Psycho-Analysis does not remove mind from the scheme of things, it clearly demonstrates the dependence of its rational elements upon its irrational elements, that is to say, Psycho-Analysts maintain that conscious events are the distorted reflections of unconscious desires and impulses. What we think and do is consequently determined not *by* us, but *for* us by "forces" deep down in ourselves. Thus the reason is the handmaid of our desires and instincts, its business is to provide us with justifications for what we instinctively wish to believe, and the will is enslaved to elements in our natures, which we do not control, and for which we cannot be held responsible.**

It follows that, if we are not responsible for what we think or do, we are determined beings (that the Materialist holds). I would like to have the Materialist criteria for the validity of conscious experience, for it seems to me that one of the most fundamental contents of my awareness is the power of choice, but clearly, if we are determined beings, this experience must be an illusion, so the necessity for criteria arises. This is true for whatever determines our thoughts, be it physiological processes or unconscious desires. The absurdity of Materialism is seen when we consider that it is upon inferences drawn from experience (which Materialism renounces) that he establishes his case for Determinism.

If we deny reality and freedom to the mind of man, then it becomes ridiculous to assert that Materialism is true, for the simple reason that if one holds Materialism, one does so because it is inevitable that one should do so, and questions of truth, indeed of all values, must be dispensed with. "Truth" can only proceed from a free mind. Consequently it is, in the nature of things, contradictory to hold Determinism and Rationalism (as the R.P.A. defines Rationalism).

VERNON CARTER.

** I am deeply indebted to Joad's "Guide to Modern Thought" for the preceding paragraph.

CONTRACEPTIVES AND AUTOMATIC MACHINES

ON 20th October, 1949, the Home Secretary, Mr. Chuter Ede, announced in the House of Commons that a model by-law prohibiting the sale of contraceptives in automatic machines would be circulated to all county and county borough authorities for adoption by them. Following this announcement several members voiced their approval. Among them was Mr. Eden, who, as he used the words "We entirely agree," possibly spoke with the approval of the majority, at any rate, of the Opposition. Whether or not one can say that it is significant, the fact remains that no women members spoke on the subject, but of course, that may be merely a coincidence. No members showed their disapproval. On 24th October, the proposed model by-law was circulated to the respective local authorities. On the same day the Archbishop of Canterbury at a Canterbury diocesan conference announced his approval of what the Home Secretary had done and at the same time urged the early adoption and the vigorous enforcement of the by-law. The Archbishop himself and other ecclesiastical dignitaries had already protested against the presence of these machines in the streets of certain parts of London and other towns throughout the country. The most important of such protests had been made by the Archbishop as recently as 12th October, at the Convocation of Canterbury held at Westminster.

What the Archbishop said at that convocation is so typical of those who have been protesting against the sale of these things in automatic machines that I propose to quote some relevant passages from his presidential address as reported in the *Church Times* of 14th October. One of these passages is as follows: "Let me make it quite clear that in what I go on to say I am referring only to the uncontrolled purveying of contraceptives without regulation or discrimination, so that they are readily obtainable by any child or adolescent, and I have in mind not only slot machines but the fact that at present a shopman has no legal right to refuse to sell these articles to any child however young."

Another passage is as follows: "But there is a profound difference between knowing about these things and actual experience of sexual intercourse—a difference not of degree but of kind and a difference of the mind only but of the soul. As things now are, everything is made easy, blatantly easy, for the child and the adolescent to turn his knowledge into experience. It is a very horrible thing that it should be so."

Before I deal with this attitude of the Archbishop and of the other protesters, both ecclesiastical ones and lay ones, I should explain that these contraceptives not only tend to prevent conception taking place but they also tend to prevent infection from venereal disease. Consisting as they do of indiarubber sheaths it necessarily follows that provided that they consist of sound material and that they fit the persons who wear them neither conception nor infection from disease is likely to result from the particular sexual acts when they are used.

No doubt in a locality where these automatic machines exist the percentage of young persons in their 'teens who buy these articles from them is certainly higher than the percentage of young persons of the same respective ages who buy them in the same locality from ordinary chemists' shops or from what are called surgical goods shops, where as is well known they are on sale, but it is also higher than the percentage of those young persons who buy them from those shops in a locality where the automatic machines do not exist. The average young

person would probably be too shy boldly to enter one of these shops and publicly to ask for some of these things. It follows that the automatic machines which supply them afford an opportunity for young persons to obtain them easily and without publicity. It also follows that the presence of these machines in the streets tends to cause more young persons to use the articles which they contain than would be the case if they were not there and consequently their presence must inevitably cause less young women to have illegitimate births on the one hand and less young persons of both sexes to become infected by venereal disease on the other hand than would be the case if they were not there.

The very great danger that illegitimacy will result from extra marital intercourse is obvious, but the danger of infection by venereal disease is also very great. Among the literature of the National Society for the Prevention of Venereal Disease is a paper written by its chairman, Dr. R. A. Lyster, M.D., in which he shows that in 1917, during the First World War, 100 prostitutes were taken from the streets of Paris and medically examined; 91 of those women were found to be infected by venereal disease. There is no reason for thinking that the percentage would have been any lower in 1917 in the case of similar women in the streets of London. No doubt there is some improvement now but the fact remains that it is the opinion of medical specialists that even now, 70 per cent. of prostitutes are suffering from some form of the disease. This fact shows what a great danger any man incurs who associates with a prostitute, especially a street one, without taking any precautions, but the younger that man is the less he is likely to take precautions. The danger to male adolescents from street prostitutes is therefore obvious, but the evil does not stop there. The male adolescent is capable, it may be quite unknowingly, of passing on the disease to an ordinary woman or girl, and so the evil spreads.

Now let us analyse some of those passages which I have quoted from the Archbishop's presidential address. In effect he must mean that because these articles tend to prevent conception taking place and infection by venereal disease, more young persons would be induced to be immoral than would be the case if these articles did not exist. He consequently deplors the fact that as the result of the use of these things sin has been "made easy, blatantly easy" for these young persons. What does he advocate? He definitely advocates sweeping these machines away from the streets. But he goes further, because in the first passage which I have quoted, he said that he had in mind not only the slot machines, but also the fact that a shopman had no legal right to refuse the sale of these articles to a young person and he thereby indicated that in his opinion the sale of them from any source to a person below a certain age should be prohibited. In other words, he preaches the doctrine that in order that some young persons will be prevented from committing sin through the fear of conception taking place or of being infected by venereal disease, it would be right to make it impossible for any young person to buy these things in spite of the fact that some young persons will, in that case, proceed to sin without them and because they will be deprived of the safeguards which they afford, may be ruined for life.

J. H. G. BULLER.

(To be concluded.)

Quarrels would not last long if the fault was only on one side.—La Rochefoucauld.

"LEST WE FORGET"—SPURGEON

THE passion for centenary celebrations, like that of Mrs. Todgers' young gentlemen for gravy, seems in need of restraint. A friend recently asked whether it was proposed to commemorate the tercentenary of Nell Gwynn, who was born in February, 1650. Mrs. Todgers lived too soon to meet the word "escapism." In any case, it could hardly be applied to anything edible. Perhaps it affords some explanation of any pleasure derived by the Mayor and Corporation of Colchester when, in January, 1950, they went in procession to a Methodist Chapel in Colchester to commemorate the conversion of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a second birth of which Nell had no cognisance! Probably few knew anything about him, and most would have been vastly more interested in the centenary of another sort of actor like Charles Chaplin, whose birthplace I have vainly tried to discover. Still, it was a relief from municipal matters.

There have, too, been difficult problems to solve concerning it. Who was the parson—no doubt divinely appointed for this great mission? It is not quite certain. What was the exact date? It appeared that it was a snowy day, and this made the preacher late. On reference, however, to the Meteorological Office as to the weather prevailing, it was found that on what Spurgeon considered as the new-birth day, there was no snow. It must, therefore, have been on another Sunday in 1850 that the great deed was done. Another problem nobody propounded. Why was it necessary at all? Spurgeon had been brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"; he was not, like Augustine and Bunyan, "a soul returning from the wilds." There was no evidence that this boy of fifteen had even spoken a bad word or bought sweets on Sunday which, when I was at that age, was regarded as the unpardonable sin.

The suggestion that young Spurgeon needed to be saved might embarrass some other parsons. Had they been converted? I cannot trace that Joseph Parker had. Perhaps the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead had escaped the experience, and this accounts for his occasional infidel inclinations, as recently revealed in these pages. At any rate, such an occasion gives rise to much pious pretence. The parsons would fain represent themselves as having the same faith as Spurgeon.

Have they? On the walls of the church, I read, is a tablet commemorating the conversion. It bears a quotation from Cowper's hymn—how extraordinary that the writer of "John Gilpin" should have produced it!

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

Spurgeon would have sung it, but who does now? I doubt if it is ever given out in that chapel; certainly the Corporation were not invited to join in the sanguinary song. Spurgeon, too, believed in Hell—hot and everlasting. I have given a quotation from a sermon delivered at Park Street Chapel, Southwark, in 1856, in *Lift Up Your Heads*. He referred to "racking pains, eyes starting from their sockets with sights of blood and woe; ears tormented with

"Sullen moans and hollow groans,
And shrieks of tortured ghosts."

Still, if Spurgeon thought you might burn in another world he dearly loved to smoke in this! In 1874, he preached on "the little foxes that spoil the vine." At the conclusion he announced that a certain American clergyman, Dr. Pentecost, was present, and would like

a few words. This gentleman intimated that in his opinion one of the said foxes was a love of the weed. Probably he knew nothing of the pastor's private proclivity. The latter then rose and informed his congregation that he proposed to enjoy a cigar that night before retiring—he smoked to the glory of God. What a bright idea! The phrase obtained an embarrassing notoriety for Spurgeon, but it was a saying worthy of all acceptance by other parsons given to a similar indulgence. Let us now light up and worship my Lady—Nicotine! I knew one who frequently lit his pipe whilst quoting Spurgeon. He had been trained at his Pastors' College and followed the gleam from its superintendent. So many sanctified pipes went into action—we have seen some at the Stratford Brains Trusts. What humbug! As well might I have said, in my pious days, when I watched a cricket match with some misgiving, that I had Christ with me at the Oval or, more appropriately, Lords!

When Spurgeon died in January, 1892, a notice was exhibited outside the Metropolitan Tabernacle: "Our beloved pastor went to Heaven this morning." A waggish gentleman arrived and added, "Spurgeon not arrived—getting anxious. Peter." It was deserved. Whatever went to Heaven, the body had to be left on earth. I have seen a picture of the coffin being carried to a hearse adorned with texts: "I have fought the good fight," "I have kept the faith." He had fought a good fight against the Baptist Union in 1887, and it surely had hardly any modernist tendencies then. Amongst its supporters were John Clifford and Alexander Maclaren—both destined to considerable fame in the denomination, but not as heretics, although Spurgeon once thought the latter "a dangerous man." There were a few parsons who appeared, who hinted that they did not accept every word of the Bible as divinely inspired, and dared to think that there might be some slight remission of the pains of Hell, perhaps for good conduct! So Spurgeon called it a "down grade," and left the Union.

The faith kept was obviously crumbling. Clearly, too, it differed from that of others. Spurgeon founded an orphanage. He is entitled to credit for that, though, of course, it was a sectarian one. There was strict discipline. Let any child without father on earth hint a doubt about one in Heaven! Then the Solomonic dictum about the rod came into operation. Yet, according to Spurgeon, the Orphanage would never avail to get him into Heaven if he rejected the atoning blood. Righteousness was filthy rags. I once saw this demonstrated to a children's audience, virtue being shown to have no weight in the scale against original sin! I doubt if parents liked it then. Who would want this discounting of good conduct in the home? The doctrine has passed away.

So, for the most part, Spurgeon's theology has become a museum piece (the "Dangerous Man" preached when the Metropolitan Tabernacle was re-opened after the fire of 1898), but parsons do not want to notice that. One would like to see a theological exhibition in which clerical utterances were arranged round the walls, duly dated and on a succession of subjects—Miracles, Salvation, Heaven, Hell, etc. What a show up it would be! Perchance many who went would ask if parsons were so often wrong in the past, what likelihood is there of their being right now? If Spurgeon was an exhibit parsons would prefer him in a dark corner, but they might show a well-used pipe or a good ash tray! They would justify their little foxes.

WILLIAM KENT.

GOD AND MODERN ASTRONOMY

THE late Bishop of London, Dr. A. F. Winnington-Ingram, said—"An astronomer can never be an Atheist. He sees too much of the wonders of the skies . . ."

Now if he had merely said—"I cannot understand why astronomers can be Atheists . . ." one might have pardoned his lack of understanding. But the dogmatic statement that an astronomer *can never* be an Atheist is so easily refuted that one is amazed at the Bishop's saying such a thing.

If I, personally, cannot claim to be an astronomer in the accepted sense of the word, I was so interested in the science that I joined the British Astronomical Association many years ago, and was soon afterwards elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. But all this did not prevent my being an Atheist. I have seen something of the "wonders of the skies" through the telescope, but through all the years of my observations and up to the present time I agree to the letter with the comments of that famous naturalist, John Burrows, who wrote—"When I look up into the starry heavens at night and reflect upon what it is I really see there, I am constrained to say, 'There is no God.'"

Incidentally, I may point out that many of the greatest astronomers never look through a telescope, much of their work consisting of computing and other mathematical tasks, so that it is not strictly correct to say "they see too much of the wonders of the skies." In any case, there is much in the sky that is the opposite of "wonderful," to say nothing of the dysteleology written all over the cosmos.

Let us look briefly at some of the "godless" astronomers that seem to have escaped the Bishop's notice. Halley (1656-1742), who is counted as one of the greatest astronomers, was recognised as an infidel in religious matters, and openly declared the fact. Lalande (1732-1807) said he was "prouder of being an Atheist than an astronomer." (So am I!) He was converted to Atheism by Voltaire. Delambre (1749-1822) was another Atheist; Arago (1786-1853) was Agnostical in his views; Laplace, as is well known, "had no need for the hypothesis of a God" in his system of the planets; Isaac Roberts (1829-1908) wrote to Holyoake confessing Agnosticism; Edgar Larkin (1847-1921) wrote that "religion is totally useless in a universe based on law, and belief will be swept from the earth when men grow out of infantile ways of thinking."

I had the honour to brush shoulders with both Jeans and Eddington at the Royal Astronomical Society, but never heard either of them intimate in their lectures that "god" had anything to do with astronomy. Many will remember Eddington saying that "If astronomers were frank most of them would confess to some chafing when reminded that the Heavens declare the glory of God." His remarks on man in the scheme of things are worth quoting from his *New Pathways in Science*: "As for man, it seems unfair to be always raking up against Nature her one little inadvertence. By a trifling hitch of machinery—not of any serious consequence in the development of the universe—some lumps of matter of the wrong size have occasionally been formed. These lack the purifying protection of intense heat or the equally efficacious absolute cold of space. *Man is one of the gruesome results of this occasional failure of antiseptic precautions.*" (*Italics my own.*) Jeans apparently shares Eddington's derogatory views on man when he writes: "The utter insignificance of life would seem to go far towards dispelling any idea that it forms a special interest of the Great Architect of the Universe."

Not only did Eddington warn theologians against declaring that "the Heavens proclaim the glory of God," but he scorned the idea of postulating a Directing Mind to explain the astronomical universe. In fact there does not seem to be any distinguished astronomer to-day who finds any evidence of design either in the solar system or in the universe as a whole.

As there is nothing whatever in the findings of modern astronomy that suggests either a beginning or an end of the material universe as a whole, though individual stars and galaxies are "born" and "die," it would be out of my province to discuss the subject of "creation." The arguments of Jeans have been much quoted as proving that the universe was "created" in time, thereby necessitating a Creator. It is not so often quoted, however, that Jeans' brilliantly written books have been severely criticised in contributions to *Nature*, on the ground that the public were not warned that many of Jeans' speculations were merely his opinions and not the findings of science or of astronomy. Besides, Jeans didn't believe in a material universe. Again, the great majority of astronomers now deny the validity of Jeans' argument that matter is being converted into energy in the stars. They reject the theory on the simple ground that energy radiated into space may be "re-created" into matter in the interstellar spaces. Further, a large number (if not the majority) of astronomers hold that atoms are not broken up in the stars but are "created" in those bodies.

If there is anything astronomy teaches, surely it is of waste and failure and purposelessness on an inconceivably colossal scale. The order of the heavens is constantly disturbed by vast cataclysms and conflagrations of stupendous size, known as novae, or new stars. Comets and meteoric matter revolve uselessly round suns century after century.

The asteroids of our solar system are almost certainly the relics of a celestial catastrophe of some sort. Similarly, Saturn's rings are most probably the fragments of a shattered satellite and, like the asteroids, an accident. There are collisions and disruptions amongst the stars themselves. Sidereal space is strewn with dead worlds and extinct suns. Without any doubt there are countless worlds and systems of worlds in the depths of space upon which life has never appeared and never can appear. Even where life is possible, there is no reason to think it would take the particular form of man.

The astronomical universe shows us a welter of chaos and of material forces, suns and systems whirling, suns waxing and waning, nebulae condensing, and wholesale and aimless destruction. But it doesn't show us a god.

RUBY TA'BOIS.

CLAY HAS ITS RIGHTS

Clay has its rights; although it cannot speak,
The Potter owes a duty to his clay;
Not his to mar and lightly cast away;
Though clay be humble, let it not be meek.

The Potter must a lordly vessel make,
Worthy of this Creator at his best;
His skill we only by his wares can test:
A pot misshapen he at once should break.

But if a pot awry to furnace go,
That fires to hardness work that he did mar,
The poet on this botcher must wage war;
He speaks for human clay in doing so.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

"Have your auto blessed at the Church of St. Christopher, Patron Saint of travellers," runs an advertisement in an American newspaper. Petrol is still needed to make it run, however, and insurance rates are still the same whether your car is blessed or not, and just as lethal!

When one comes to examine the reasons given by Christians for observing Lent and "Ash" Wednesday, one is staggered at the way they have followed blindly in the wake of primitive Oriental superstition. We are told that the early Church fasted from Friday to Saturday night, but as Easter became more popular—it became so because it was always kept by "pagans" long before Jesus was heard of—the fasting became more prolonged and lasted the magic forty days. It is even admitted that "forty" was chosen because Jesus spent forty hours in the grave.

As the "Church Times" says, "Since the seventh century the Lenten fast has started on a Wednesday. Sundays were feast days, so to set a fast of forty days before Easter meant beginning the fast in the middle of the seventh week before Easter." That is how one gets the solemn Ash Wednesday and Christians have to remind themselves, like Abraham, that they are nought but "dust and ashes." If Christianity had a spark of humour, its followers would have rejected all this balderdash born of half insane monks driven dotty because they believed in such ghastly superstition.

The "Church of England Newspaper," which is not quite as Anglo-Catholic as the *Church Times*, has aroused the ire of the latter in supporting remarriage of divorced persons in church in spite of the solemn word of Jesus. It even contends that marriage is not a sacrament. The fact that Christians cannot agree is, of course, no new thing; but that one section is ready to throw over the express words of "Our Lord" is something to think about. It proves that the inexorable advance of civilised thought is inevitable in a modern world, even if it means throwing overboard the divine teachings of a celibate God.

Five hundred priests, brothers, and nuns left Ireland last year for foreign missions. It would prove interesting to learn if these nuisances were sent out of the country with regret or with pleasure. We certainly could not blame the people of Ireland if they were glad to get rid of so useless a bunch of people incapable of doing any genuine work.

Here is another example of the way Catholics work behind the scenes and it gives us an inkling of what would happen if the Church of Rome had real power in temporal affairs. In a book published at General MacArthur's headquarters for the use of Japanese were passages advocating birth control. Crowded as they are in their small islands, no people in the world need this information as much as the Japanese, but Catholic women with the occupational forces protested and Gen. MacArthur agreed to delete the information. He was probably genuinely frightened at what the Church would do if he didn't give in at once.

According to Bishop Grimshaw of Plymouth, science is beaten to a frazzle by the astounding miracles which have taken place (and are still doing so) at Lourdes.

"No hospitals can cure disease and mend limbs in the twinkling of an eye," he cried the other day to an all-believing audience who were there not to question but to believe. And, fortunately for the Bishop, nobody now reads Zola and his devastating exposure of one of the most impudent money making impostures in history.

Despite all the efforts of the Rev. F. Maddock to exorcise the ghost of the old lady in the "haunted" house in Bristol, the ghost has returned, and according to the present occupier, is more violent and noisier than ever. Even the presence of a spiritualist was of no avail, in spite of his planchette and oujah board. It looks, therefore, as if the "old firm" will have to be called in after all. In any case, the Rev. F. Maddock had to use an old Roman Catholic form of exorcism ceremony, and there is no doubt that the Church of Rome has had more experience with ghosts, holy or otherwise.

The Rev. J. Kellas objects to the practice of selling football tickets on Sunday; he thinks it shocking that this buying and selling should go on, "when people are assembled for public worship," and possibly would like to see the sale of tickets altogether stopped. But it is a typical piece of parsonic impudence—the fact that only a very small proportion of the people "assemble for public worship" but thousands like to attend football games, does not alter the parson's attitude that nothing must be allowed to detract from what he thinks important.

We feel we ought to protest at the action of the authorities of the Rosary Church, Marylebone, who called in the police to eject a woman who said her prayers so loudly. Without doubt, the woman still believes that God dwells in heaven (which everyone knows is a long way off) and wanted to be sure that God would hear her. We have no idea of the likes or dislikes of God, but we would imagine that he would prefer a petition in a loud clear voice to the indistinct mumble that is so characteristic of the parsonic voice.

Apparently the Rev. A. Ross has not heard of the official line laid down by the Church dignitaries that there is every evidence for a religious revival among the people, for he spoils this pretty story by telling his congregation that he is disappointed with his "flock," 65 per cent. of whom think "an hour is too long to spend with God on Sunday."

Ever since the cry of Unity among the Churches went up, we have always emphasised that the only unity in which the Catholic Church is concerned is within its own framework. Freethinkers with some knowledge of the Church will, therefore, not be surprised at the latest utterance of Cardinal Griffin who, in his pastoral letter for Lent, declares "A call for reunion means an invitation to all non-Catholics to join the one true Church, it means submission to the Holy See . . . it can only mean the resumption of that unity that was destroyed at the Reformation." Had we been in doubt before, this would clinch it, and we shall be interested to know how the other Churches will react, particularly to Cardinal Griffin's declaration that Protestant doctrines are false.

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.

Does Cardinal Griffin, who recently said that co-operation on spiritual matters between the Churches can only be on parallel lines, know that parallel lines never meet?

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. VINEY.—*The Freethinker* certainly tries to reach all levels—it does not by any means, as you seem to imply, cater purely for the "intelligentsia." Surely, all readers must admit that we devote many columns to correspondence and every care is taken to allow all readers the right to reply. But brevity gives more a chance.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of 5s. from Mr. S. C. Merrifield.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, K. 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

On Tuesday evening, March 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will address the Conway Discussion Circle in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1, on "Modern Science and Religion." It is a subject that is always attractive and usually produces some good discussion. Proceedings begin at 7 o'clock.

The World Union of Freethinkers proposes, by invitation of the French Fédération des Libres Penseurs, to hold an international "summer school" in Brittany for a week at the beginning of September. The number taking part will be strictly limited, and those coming will be expected to understand French, if not to speak easily. Details will be announced shortly.

We have no intention of reading a book by the Rev. R. Plus, SJ, who is, we are confidently informed, "the popular spiritual writer." But with its title, *The Folly of the Cross*, we heartily agree. Yet we have an idea that if a Free-thinker had written a book with such a title and proved his case, he would have been liable to a charge of blasphemy. The Blasphemy Laws are still on the statute books and will be until we can get a parliament strong enough to defy the ruling Church.

A well known Fleet Street editor once laid it down that newspapers must provide something that will interest people who are not really adult completely in the mental sense. This axiom is obviously accepted, for what other reason could the Editor of the *News Chronicle*, among others, have had when he allowed the item to be published regarding how Princess Elizabeth helped Professor Andrade at his lecture on the Spectrum, in which he said that the Princess would find the colours of the Spectrum useful if she was choosing racing colours!

THE PROBLEMS OF MATERIALISM

I

THE discussion on Materialism now taking place in these columns should send the disputants to *Force and Matter* by R. L. Worrall, M.B., Ch.M., D.P.H. (Staples Press, 1948, 10s. 6d. net). Dr. Worrall's book is a very patient and learned examination of the terms used in discussing Materialism and their meanings. He is a Dialectical Materialist, Marxist, and Communist (these terms may be synonymous) but in this book it is the scientific aspect he is mostly concerned with; and readers will have learned a great deal if they carefully assimilate this most illuminating treatise on a subject about which opinions differ so widely.

Older readers will remember Buchner's *Force and Matter* which was a magnificent defence of Materialism—though its author appears always to have repudiated the term Materialist. And it may also be remembered that Bradlaugh did the same as he considered it a most difficult word to define.

All the same, *Force and Matter* has not (to my mind at least) yet been entirely superseded in spite of the fact that it was first published over ninety years ago.

Force and energy appear to be the same, and their exact meaning and relation to matter have caused an unending discussion. I must admit at once that it is possible for any reader to take exception to my remarks on Materialism, for the way some authorities differ is quite surprising.

What is, for example, Materialism—just plain, matter-of-fact Materialism? Webster says it is, "Any theory which considers the facts of the universe to be sufficiently explained by the existence and nature of matter." One of the latest dictionaries, Thorndyke's, says, it is the "belief that all action, thought and feeling can be explained by the movements and changes of matter." But what is "matter"? In physics, it is "whatever occupies space." In philosophy, it is "the indeterminate subject of reality." It is "substance" or "nature" or the "cause of sensation" but "is not itself directly perceived." Idealists deny this matter (or this definition)—but to continue trying to find some definition of Matter or Materialism which would satisfy everybody must be given up as hopeless. If I were to say that I am a "mechanistic Materialist" (and I certainly feel that such a position satisfies my own way of thinking on these problems) I would very likely come in for a rough handling from those readers who, while calling themselves Materialists, yet differ from me; or I would be treated with contempt by "philosophers" because they would say I am hopelessly ignorant, and it would be a sheer waste of time to discuss it with me. In many years of discussion, I have found few people agree on either Materialism or Idealism.

But during the past few years what is called "Dialectical Materialism" has come to the fore, yet even of this I have not been able to get at any satisfactory meaning, satisfactory, that is, to all Dialectical Materialists as to its meaning. Joseph McCabe in his *Rationalist Encyclopedia* perhaps makes it as clear as anybody. He says it is "a system in which the Communists claim to improve upon Materialism and to provide a philosophy which combines the scientific elements of this with a theory of history (economic determination) and their economic and political theory." He also points out that the word "dialectic" must "not be taken in its ordinary meaning, but as indicating a world process by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, which is in Hegel a process of the evolution of the Absolute (spiritual reality)."

Whether all Dialectical Materialists agree as to this intrusion of Hegel is difficult to say. Dr. Worrall appears to ignore him. Prof. H. Levy in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism* seems quite unhappy about other Dialectical Materialists who, he thinks have a "curiously undialectical attitude." He adds, "If we examine any book or article on the subject written since the days of Marx, we shall find that the language of the so-called laws of the Dialectic is still precisely the phraseology which Marx and Engels themselves naturally took over from Hegel. There is no recognition, apparently, that the language of Dialectical Materialism must be fluid, adapting itself to the changing flux of new ideas and the emergence of new knowledge, and therefore of new terminology. Since the days of Hegel science, for example, has been transformed out of all possible recognition . . ." and so on.

Probably, Prof. Levy does not like Hegel's "Absolute." After all, any system claiming to be "Atheistic" should be able to dispense with an "Absolute" or even an "Unknowable."

In any case, Dr. Worrall tells us that "Dialectical materialism is philosophy that formulates the most general laws of nature—and the very special part of nature that is human society." It is also "a method of approach to particular problems . . . it links the various sciences together by formulating the most general laws of nature. . . ." It is thus a "science of sciences."

Whether the general reader is now better able to say what is Dialectical Materialism I do not know, but certainly other teachers of Dialectical Materialism seem to walk in a thick fog—according to their critics. Prof. Levy quotes for example 16 points set out by Mr. Palme Dutt in the "Labour Monthly" and calls them "puzzling and confusing," and he quotes Engels' three laws of dialectics:—

1. The law of transition of Quantity into Quality and vice versa.
2. The law for the Interpenetration of Opposites.
3. The law of the Negation of Negation.

Armed only with these crystal-clear laws, how would, I wonder, the average reader meet a thoroughly trained Idealist? Prof. Levy points out that these laws "are stated so generally, so popularly from the standpoint of the scientific man, that they amount to little more than the well-known principle that any series of processes are separated by regions of instability, or that positions of stability and instability occur alternately."

But is Dialectical Materialism just what we call Materialism in the ordinary sense? Not at all, says Prof. John Macmurray in the aforementioned *Aspects*. "In the ordinary sense," he claims, "materialism is the mechanistic dogmatism which the Dialectic rejects as a fallacy. . . . Dialectic Materialism is not a mechanistic philosophy, in any sense." When it "defines the central problem of modern society as a material problem" it makes "a fundamental mistake."

This is where it is so difficult to get agreement even among scientists who have given up the Absolute. And often, as I read the various arguments put forward by Dialectical Materialists, I find myself in a whirl of words each one of which has some special meaning according to the particular writer who uses it.

But there are many things in Dr. Worrall's book with which all Materialists must agree and I shall try to deal a little more fully with it in my next article.

H. CUTNER.

OUR DISMAL SUNDAYS

SOME months ago, the Brighter Sunday Association was formed with the very laudible object to "Free the People's Sunday," and to urge the legalisation of Sunday sports and amusements. The National Secular Society, whose work for the secularisation of the "Sabbath" needs no recounting here, immediately offered their support to the new organisation.

As was expected the new Association incurred the wrath of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and Mr. H. Martin ("Misery" Martin), who is, apparently, a regular reader of *The Freethinker*, wrote to the editor of the *English Churchman* quoting the National Secular Society's offer of support.

The Secretary of the B.S.A. thereupon rushed into print and pointed out that the "National Secular Society is not in any way connected with the Brighter Sunday Association." Mr. Martin then returned to the fray and in a further letter to the *English Churchman*, in which he again quoted from *The Freethinker*, waxing very sarcastic at the expense of the B.S.A., and asked whether it was his "exposure" of the "Infidel Newspaper" which forced the B.S.A. to disown the support of the N.S.S., and chided the Association for its ingratitude. His letter runs:—

"It seems disingenuous, not to say ungrateful of Mr. Kenneth Day (Secretary, B.S.A.), at this stage to seek to disown these friends of his Association. Or is it that our exposure of the godless Sunday Amusements agitation is causing embarrassment to the Association's Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic supporters?"

We know exactly where stands the Lord's Day Observance Society. But would the Secretary now tell us where stands the Brighter Sunday Association?

J.S.

THE FACTS ABOUT THE HYDROGEN BOMB

THE Press has lately contained much about the so-called "hydrogen bomb," and there was considerable surmise as to whether President Truman had authorised research into its construction to go on in the U.S.A. There is little doubt that the revelation that Russia has an atom bomb of sorts has caused pressure in the U.S.A. in attempts to force the government there to make even more dangerously destructive weapons. The hydrogen bomb is certainly one of these, though as yet it has been broached only in theory, and there are considerable technical difficulties to be overcome before it is a practical possibility.

The theoretical basis of the hydrogen bomb depends on the fact that helium can be made from hydrogen. The atom of hydrogen weighs rather more than one unit of atomic weight; the atom of helium weighs exactly four units. If four atoms of hydrogen (some with electric charges and some without) unite to form one atom of helium there will be a huge outpouring of energy. It was, in fact, calculated by one scientist that the manufacture of one ounce of helium by this method would release energy equal to a million horsepower for seven hours.

It will be seen that, in theory at any rate, the thing is far more powerful than the atom bomb of the type used on Japan in 1945. The snag, from the manufacturing point of view, is that a tremendously high temperature is necessary to start the reaction off. Astronomers believe that reactions of this sort take place in the interior of the sun, where the temperature is in the region of twenty million degrees.

Such temperatures are never approached on earth in the course of ordinary laboratory or industrial practice. But the atomic bomb, of the type used at Bikini, does give rise to temperatures of something like this height, though only momentarily.

The suggestion, therefore, is that an explosion of an atom bomb of the type with which we are already familiar can be used as a kind of fuse to send off a hydrogen bomb.

There is only one other difficulty—that hydrogen is a gas, and it is not at all easy to see how it can be obtained in sufficient concentration to start off a reaction of the type mentioned. A leading theoretical chemist from Austria, Dr. Hans Thirring, recently gave in *The Times* details of lithium hydride, a compound which could be used to make a hydrogen bomb, since it contains hydrogen in solid form.

One thing should be stressed. This is not, at present, a practical proposition, though, if sufficient money is spent on it, it can undoubtedly become so in a few years. It should also be remembered that this is, to all appearances, a purely destructive weapon. It cannot, like the more conventional atom bomb, be adapted to peaceful purposes. But if the hydrogen bomb is ever used in war it will undoubtedly mean the destruction of everything approaching civilisation in the countries attacked by it.

JOHN ROWLAND, B.Sc.

THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM

THAT there is a problem is definitely proved in the various works of Sir G. G. Greenwood who is content, although not a Baconian, with proving that Shaksper of Stratford is not the real author. Mr. Thomas Seecombe, distinguished scholar and critic, says: "Let them [the biographers] do it again. And let them begin by confuting Mr. Greenwood—I cannot." Sir G. G. Greenwood, like others, including Stratfordians, believed that Shakespeare is, in fact, a "noun of multitude"—that many pens contributed to the Folio.

Bacon (1561-1626) is highly certificated for his mind and for his abilities. A contemporary said of him: "At twelve years of age his industry was above the capacity and his mind beyond the reach of his contemporaries." Dr. Rawley, Bacon's chaplain and executor, wrote: "If ever there were a beam of knowledge derived from God upon any man in these modern times it was upon Francis Bacon." Macaulay himself said of Bacon that his "was the most exquisitely constructed intellect that has ever been bestowed on any of the children of men" and "that he had an amplitude of comprehension such as has never been vouchsafed to any other human being." Similarly, Bacon is credited with parallels with Shakespeare in thought, imagination, and poetic feeling. Instance poet Shelley in his "Defence of Poetry": "Bacon was a poet. His language has a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost super-human wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect. It is a strain which distends and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind."

The orthodox Dr. E. A. Abbott said: "Bacon's style varied almost as much as his handwriting, but it was influenced more by the subject matter than by youth or old age. Few men have shown equal versatility in adapting their language to the slightest shade of circumstance and purpose."

Bacon, in 1576, went to France with the English Ambassador and returned to England in 1579 after visiting Spain and Italy. Between 1580 and 1591 only six

of Bacon's letters have come down to us and they all concern his great project, after that of the Pleiade in France, of developing the English language and its literature. Mrs. Henry Pott writes: "With positive evidence before us that in the years 1587 and 1588 Bacon was engaged in theatrical enterprises . . ." (p.90 in Introduction to Bacon's "Promus" (1883). Mr. R. Eagle says that Shakespeare's plays occupy a definite place in the Fourth Part of Bacon's Great Instauration, actual types and models "set as it were before the eyes." Bacon had a secret society of men helpers, and Mr. R. J. W. Gentry writes: "We have the testimony of Archbishop Tenison that its members included Ben Johnson, Thomas Hobbes, Richard Field, Thomas Phillips, a cipher expert, and John Florio (according to evidence in the Pembroke Papers in the British Museum). That the group of helpers was still in existence in 1623 is evidenced by Bacon's mention, in a letter from Gorhambury, to Sir Tobie Mathew of some 'good pens, which forsake me not.'" ("Baconiana," No. 127, 1948, p. 112.)

Of the uncertificated William Shaksper of Stratford (1564-1616), very little is really known, and that not very creditable. The standard "Life of Shakespeare" dealing with the Stratford actor is that by Sir Sidney Lee—a voluminous but not luminous production of assumption writ large throughout, as shown in Mr. E. D. Johnson's "The Fictitious Shakespeare Exposed." Over one hundred instances of conjecture are detailed, pages 8 to 15, and Lee's "A Life of Shakespeare" is shown as unreliable and enough to make one anti-Stratford.

Praise of the plays and poems is not proof of the identification or identity of the author or authors. Mr. E. D. Johnson tells us: "All reference to Shaksper, direct and indirect, in contemporaneous literature during the period 1592-1616 have been carefully collated and published. They number 127; those made to his works, 120; those made to him as a man, seven. These seven are Thomas Nashe, 1589; Robert Greene, 1592; John Manningham, 1601; two anonymous writers, 1605; Thomas Heywood, 1612; and Ben Johnson, 1616. Nashe calls Shaksper an idiot; Greene, an upstart crow; Manningham makes him hero of an amour; the anonymous writers only refer to his wealth, landed proprietorship, and aspiration to a title; Heywood, because two of Heywood's poems have been published as Shaksper's; and Jonson scoffs at him as a poet ape. Here we find that three of his literary fellows, Nashe, Greene, and Jonson, who knew the man Will Shaksper well, treating him with contempt and his literary pretensions with ridicule." ("Baconiana," No. 133, p. 214.)

As for Leonard Digges' verses prefixed to the 1640 edition of "Poems by Wil. Shake-speare, Gent.," Sir G. G. Greenwood says: "Digges was either writing with his tongue in his cheek, or had no conception what he was talking about. They are such a tissue of absurdities, and so entirely inapplicable to Shakespeare . . . Digges had earlier lines . . . in the 1623 Folio." ("The Vindicators of Shakespeare" (pp. 15, 20). As for John Davies (ca. 1611), Sir Richard Baker (ca. 1643), Frances Meres (1598), John Weaver (1599), and Thomas Freeman (1614) and their allusions to Shakespeare, Greenwood says that "with due weight for it, it is not conclusive of the case" and he instances the case of Sir Philip Francis as Junius ("Is There a Shakespeare Problem?" (1916) pp. 350, 370). This case of Davies is important, for Greenwood writes of him: "His enigma, addressed to 'Our English Terence, Mr. Will Shake-speare' is one of the strongest passages which can be cited in support of the received doctrine of authorship. . . . There are

grave difficulties in the way of the negative case." Then he quotes an author, highly distinguished in law, literature, and politics, on the other hand: "The difficulties in the way of Shakspeare are enormous." Greenwood continues: "Nobody has been able to explain his epigram's cryptic allusions. . . . What knowledge of Shakspeare had J. Davies, if any? And what opportunities had he of knowing the facts as to the authorship of the plays? On these matters we have, unfortunately, no evidence whatever to guide us." ("The Vindicators of Shakespeare," pp. 111-114). We'll, Sir G. G. Greenwood, who tells us that Terence was the very author whose name, it is alleged, was used as a mask name or nom-de-plume for the writings of great men who wished to keep the fact of their authorship concealed, apparently did not know that Sir John Davies of Hereford, lawyer and poet, was a friend of, and amanuensis to, Bacon (see B. G. Theobald's "Enter Francis Bacon," p. 26, and "Baconiana," No. 125, p. 174). Davies knew Bacon to be a "concealed" poet. As for Meres—whom Mrs. Stopes claimed to be brother-in-law of John Florio, Greenwood finding no evidence to support that claim—Greenwood says, of Meres' ascription of "Titus Andronicus" to Shakespeare as author, that far-from being considered a conclusive proof of the true authorship, the overwhelming balance of "orthodox" opinion is to the effect that Shakespeare had no hand in it at all." ("Vindicators," p. 64, and "Is there a S. Prob.," p. 233.)

John Florio, a servant of Francis Bacon in 1591, published a book entitled "Second Fruites" and in this book is a sonnet, "Phaton," to his friend Florio, which Sir Sidney Lee admits was written by Shakespeare. In 1598 Florio published another book entitled "A World of Wordes," in which he refers to this sonnet as "being written by a gentleman, a friend of mine, who loved better to be a poet than to be counted so." No evidence that Florio knew the actor, or as a gentleman, Shaksper not being entitled until five years later to be a gentleman when he applied for a coat of arms by false pretences. ("The Shaksper Illusion," by E. D. Johnson, p. 48.)

GEORGE ROSS.

(To be concluded.)

CORRESPONDENCE

THE SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM

SIR.—May I venture to ask a few pertinent questions, though I do not want to get involved in the Shakespeare controversy that has been going on in these columns for quite a time; I feel mildly puzzled at the fact that the fierce contestants keep strictly within two well-defined camps. Couldn't it be that they both were wrong?

In my school days, already one thing seemed clear to me, namely, that the plays attributed to Shakespeare could not have been written by that actor whom *Voltaire* denounced as "this drunken savage"; their author must have been a nobleman, or at least a highly refined member of the feudal leisure-class which in noble, high-sounding language is continuously glorified at the expense of the yokels and "groundlings." There had been plenty of political and social unrest in Shakespeare's days; John Ball had been hanged and quartered for asking the question:

"When Adam delved and Eva span
Who then was the gentleman?"

Yet for rebels like Ball and Jack Cade, the author has merely haughty sneers. "King John" does not even refer to so unbecomingly an incident as the Magna Charta! Being a "true-blue," the author befouls everything "un-English," including Joan of Arc.

So for me the fascinating mystery is reduced to the question: Who was the aristocrat who really wrote the plays and sonnets in that most splendid English ever written? Who

then was the gentleman-poet of whose language an American critic asserts: "Like the splendid harmonies of a master-musician it throbs and thrills us as we read."

I am not an expert to say whether Francis Bacon (Lord Verulam) could have been able to compose so scintillating verses, as is claimed in a series of articles by General Cartier, published in the *Mercure de France*, September, 1922. Yet, there is still another theory expounded by *Thomas Loony*, who, with a lot of learning, claims the 17th Earl of Oxford to have been the author. (By the way, the coat-of-arms of this Lord was a lion "shaking a spear.")

This theory, I think, should be worth the while of your erudite contestants to be taken into some consideration.

It may still be possible that the comedies, tragedies and poems were written (or re-written) by *different* people, but came to be known and published in the version in which Shakespeare, their producer, actually performed them. His name in this way, could have been a collective name or code, like that of Homer.—Yours, etc.,

P. G. ROY.

TWO CLASSES?

SIR.—Mr. Hugh Millar, in his letter in your issue of the 19th February, is surely in error in concluding that there are two classes of Freethinkers. Granted that some Freethinkers are brainier than others, what kind of Freethinker believes that "lasting peace" can be won at all? Such a one might just as well go to church and pray for it.

The true Freethinker is neither God-intoxicated nor Stalin-intoxicated. He does not delude himself with expectations of a glorious robe at the resurrection, nor does he blindfold himself with remnants from the dialectical ragbag. He knows that Freethought Principles will never be universally recognised and that the battle will never be won, but he goes on fighting just the same. He also knows, incidentally, that "majority rule" is a contradiction in terms, to be classed with the Holy Trinity.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

SIR.—What is the difference between Socialism and Communism? I quote from an interesting passage in "Socialism or Chaos" (p. 21), published by the Socialist Party of Australia: "None. The two words are synonymous—one means SOCIAL, the other COMMON ownership."

Briefly, at the time Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto* (1847), they called themselves "communists" in order to distinguish scientific socialism from various Utopian schemes flourishing under the name of "socialism." Throughout their works, however, they used two expressions indiscriminately and never suggested that there was any difference. Later Engels used socialism exclusively.

With the advent of Bolshevism to power in Russia, the various political parties that were formed under the spell of the Russian Revolution adopted the name "communists" and posed, in contradistinction to the Social-Democratic parties, as revolutionaries. Gradually, as it became increasingly difficult to hide the fact that Russia was evolving a tyrannical form of state-capitalism at breakneck speed, the "communist" International put across the idea that there is a fundamental difference.

Wages, wage differentiations, stocks and shares, increasing class-distinction, piecework, rouble-millionaires—all these are explained away as features of a socialist society. The slogan of the Russian constitution—"To each according to his work"—is palmed off as a Socialist slogan. All these features, they tell us, will disappear in the higher stage—Communism. With the tremendous means of propaganda at their disposal and the magic spell which the word "Russia" casts over millions of workers, this idea has become widely accepted.

It has not the slightest basis in fact, or in the theories of Marx and Engels. The Communist Parties are neither Socialist or Communist, they are parties representing the interests of the Russian bureaucracy and their aim is "state capitalism."

Secondly: Mr. Millar (February 19, 1950) asks, "Was Holy Russia superior, from a freethought point of view, to the present Soviet Union?" The answer is no! But his question should be: "Is the present Soviet Union superior, from a freethought point of view, to Holy Russia?" The answer is not much, if any! The Press is controlled by the Government. The Communist Party is the only legal party; the others, including the Essars (social revolutionaries), Liberal Cadets, Mensheviks—and the Anarchists, etc., were all illegalised by the Bolsheviks.

Certainly, there is very much pseudo-science (Michurinism) and the views of Lysenko) taught in Soviet schools and universities, but the Russian Orthodox Church has many millions of adherents and is quite an active organisation—with certain

Government support. The Anti-God movement has been officially abolished, and there is now a new religion: Stalinism, the deification and hero-worship of a certain Joseph Vissarionovich Djugashvili.

Here are two typical poems written by priests of the new religion:—

"Oh Great Stalin, O Leader of the Peoples,
Thou who didst give birth to man,
Thou who didst make fertile the earth,
Thou who dost rejuvenate the Centuries,
Thou who divest blossom to the spring,
Thou who movest the chords of harmony:
Thou splendour of my spring, O Thou,
Sun reflected in a million hearts."

This written in *Pravda* (August 28, 1936) gives the "gen" on who created "the heavens and the earth."

"From the tower of the Kremlin,
Stalin, chief of all the peoples of the world,
Points the way for the whole universe."

Vera Ibrer.

Which of these religions will survive longest? Christianity or Stalinism?—Yours, etc.,

PETER E. NEWELL.

CHARLES MAIR: AN APPRECIATION

SIR.—The first time my wife and I went to stay in Scotland together, we went to Greenock. Our hosts were Mr. and Mrs. C. Mair; we shall never forget the welcome they gave us. We met their friends, and soon we, like them, called our hosts Charlie and Jessie. These memories are brought to my mind now by the sorrowful news that Mr. Mair is dead.

What a really wonderful man he was. He was an atheist, and did all he could to make it known; he was keen as could be at all times to justify his position in discussion and the manner in which he did this was not offensive in any way. It endeared him to all with whom he came in contact.

He was actively associated with every progressive movement in the town; he befriended scores of people, and many converts to freethought can date their change of outlook to their contact with the Mairs. His influence was felt in many circles, and people were enriched by his presence amongst them. The Freethought movement is vastly poorer by his death.

In musical and dramatical circles Mr. and Mrs. Mair were well known, and I can well imagine how greatly they will miss him. I can never think of Scotland without thinking of Charlie and Jessie Mair, and I must record my appreciation.

It will be a lonely world now for Mrs. Mair and their son and daughter but the memory of Charlie will always be cherished and respected by a large circle of friends, whose deepest sympathy at this hour goes out to the widow and his family.—Yours, etc.,

J. T. BRIGHTON.

**OBITUARY
MARIE FISHER**

I have the painful duty of recording the death of Mrs. Marie Fisher, which took place at her home, Halcyon House, Chapel Allerton, Leeds, on February 20. Mrs. Fisher was the widow of Greevy Fisher, and both were well-known atheists in the days of Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, etc.

For the whole of her mature life of 87 years Mrs. Fisher kept a keen interest in the Freethought movement and continued to receive and read *The Freethinker* to the end of her life. She was one of the party who went to Rome for the International Congress in 1904 and her recollections of this trip in which Mr. Chapman Cohen, Mr. Gott, and others took part, were vivid and pleasurable to the end of her life. My mother's life was bound up with the movement since as a young country girl she used to tramp 8 to 10 miles to attend the meetings of Charles Bradlaugh.

She leaves 4 children and 18 grandchildren and many great-grandchildren, amongst whom are numbered many freethinkers. Her life is a record of indomitability in being an early recruit to erstwhile unpopular movements. She was a member and speaker of the W.S.P.U. (the suffragettes) and on more than one occasion was the victim of the brick-bat throwing that took place at their public meetings.

Other interests were Astronomy, Geology and more general Natural History. Her example of living through the execration caused by cycling with her family on Sunday, etc., indulged in by the strict sabbatarian Christians of 50 years ago, and pursuing with determination the heterodox path she had chosen, led at last to admiration and affection by all who knew her, and she has died a revered woman whose loss is greatly felt in the locality, and by her 4 surviving children, of whom I am proud to subscribe myself.

WORDSWORTH DONISTHORPE FISHER.

(Correspondence continued on next page)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held January 23, 1950

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

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

The meeting endorsed the letter of condolence sent to Mrs. E. C. Saphin, on the death of her husband, Mr. E. C. Saphin. An accident to Mrs. E. Venton, a member of the Executive, resulting in a fractured arm, was reported and a message of sympathy from the Executive was ordered to be sent.

Financial statement was presented. New members were admitted to Birmingham, North London Branches, and to The Parent Society. Grants were sanctioned to Birmingham and Bradford Branches.

Mr. Barker reported he had collected material on Church finance and thought it would make a useful publication. The Executive expressed its interest and Mr. Barker agreed to proceed further in the matter. The date of the annual dinner next year was fixed for January 13.

By the votes from Branches, the Annual Conference will be held in Sheffield on Whit-Sunday, May 28. Motions for the Conference Agenda must reach the Head Office by March 28 next.

Newcastle, Birmingham, and Lewisham Branches reported good meetings and progress.

Arrangements were in hand for Professor Levy's lecture in The Conway Hall on Thursday evening, March 23.

The attention of The Brighter Sunday Association has been called to a Press statement that the Association had support from the N.S.S. The truth is that when the Association was formed the Executive of The National Secular Society did offer its support, but it was refused by The Brighter Sunday Association.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for March 30, 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.: "Down to the Sea in Ships." Mr. H. L. SEARLE.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 7, 7 p.m.: "Modern Science and Religion." Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (National Secular Society).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Sick Society." Mrs. M. I. WHITEFIELD.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: 69th Anniversary. Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK.

Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: "Religion and Present-Day Politics." Mr. TOM COLYER (I.L.P.).

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

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers' Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Role of the Individual." Mr. KENNETH COOKE.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Shakespeare: The Man Behind the Plays." Mr. W. KENT, F.S.A.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Bombed site, St. Mary's Gate).—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.

CORRESPONDENCE—(continued).

HAS SOCIALISM BEEN TRIED?

SIR,—I think from his letter in the issue of February 5 that Mr. Bott recognises some toleration is necessary in the discussion of the U.S.S.R.

May I be permitted to point out that the full name is, "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" and that in accordance with Article 3 of the Constitution, "All power belongs to the working people of town and country as represented by the Soviets of Working People's deputies."

It is evident from the fierce attacks it has had to face since the Revolution, that a much different form of society exists there to the rest of the world and whilst Mr. Bott may state that it is not "Socialist" it appears to me that he may have difficulty in the first place in defining the word "Socialist."

According to Nuttall's Standard Dictionary, "Socialism is a system which, in opposition to the competitive system at present prevailing, seeks to re-organise society on the basis, in the main, of a certain secularism in religion, of community of interest and of co-operation in labour for the common good." I am not dealing with an ideal society, such as Morris portrayed in "News from Nowhere" or Bellamy's "Looking Backward" but a society transformed in the midst of world strife and I contend that the U.S.S.R. fulfils all the conditions laid down.

The central economic theory of Marx is that of "Surplus Value" in which he shows how, in the most natural way possible (that is in the production of commodities) part of the wealth created is skimmed off and appears either as capital goods or as profits. It is this contradiction that is responsible for the slums, unemployment, emigration and the general lack of even necessities for the bulk of the population in the capitalist world.

The business of the real politician, appreciating the position, is not to argue but to change the world, and the test of the efficiency of the Socialist system is to be found in a constantly increasing production of goods, which in turn means the workshops in which these are produced. Hence in the U.S.S.R. from year to year the productive capacity increases. If it were not a Socialist country there would be surplus value to be distributed to shareholders. I read it in this week's "Soviet Weekly" that three-quarters of the national income goes back to the people for immediate use in the form of wages and services. The remainder represents "capital" investment.

Finally, with regard to Mr. Bott's point that the U.S.S.R. have "skipped" an historical period, perhaps he can tell us why, when the opportunity offered to make the change and with a due appreciation of what the change must be, they should hand power back to the capitalists? What would Mr. Bott have done?—Yours, etc.,

T. D. SMITH.

COMMUNISM AND HUMAN LIBERTY

SIR,—Hugh Millar seeks to defend Communism as a "real Socialist State," which, however, is not the subject under discussion here. We have been protesting against the Russian conception of freedom and liberty. Many letters have pointed out that Communism is not in operation in Russia. That is probably so; but the important point of principle is whether the political system in that country is a free democracy. I have contended that there is ample evidence to show that it is not, and I have cited ex-communists as testifying to the negation of freedom prevailing in the communistic ranks.

It is rather amusing that the British Communist Party are complaining that they are not being allowed sufficient time on our radio to present their case to the electors in the Parliamentary Election. Would Mr. Millar tell us how much broadcasting time is allowed to anti-communists in Communist governed countries? That is a test of freedom.

I challenge Mr. Millar to quote Sidney Webb as being a convert to Communism, as suggested in his letter. The Webb wrote a book explaining the Russian system, but Mr. Webb is known all over the world as the apostle of gradualism, and he remained a Fabian to the end of his days.

Listen to what Sidney Webb found in Russia: "a total absence of freedom, a lack of variety, and an effective and operative tyranny evidenced in the universal presence of spies. The price which would have to be paid, the total destruction of liberty; the placing of the life, livelihood and liberty of every man and woman at the disposal of State Commissars, is far too high a price for the efficiency of a cast-iron bureaucracy. It is quite certain that our people would never stand it. Even in our casual contact with members of the Communist Party, the repression of free thought and free expression was obvious. There is the physical terrorism; the trapdoor disappearance of unwanted personalities and the ostracism and persecution of innocent but inconvenient workers."

Since Mr. Millar suggests that we are making "callous preparations for war," may I point out that if this means the British people or their leaders want war, then it is a malicious lie. Russia refuses to collaborate, although implored to over and over again, with the Western powers in the promotion of peace. Russia wants a Communist peace. She wants to boss the world, but it must be remembered that there are more than sixty separate countries, and no two of them have ever been governed exactly alike, and probably never will. It cannot therefore be a Freethought, Catholic, Protestant, Cominform, Capitalist, Russian, American, or British peace, and everyone should work for combined peace.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

[We regret that this correspondence must now cease.—EDITOR.]

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