

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Reflections on Civilisation

QUITE recently we had occasion to visit those numerous areas in the City of London which still lie ravaged and prostrate from the blasts of war. Whole acres of what were formerly imposing and substantial buildings are still reduced to rubble and ruins very much as the German Air Force left them on the night of the Second Great Fire of London, December 29, 1940, when the Nazi Reich made its most determined effort to obliterate the heart of the British Empire and when the midnight sky shone as bright as day with the red glow of the burning City.

Little seems to have been done by way of reconstruction over much of this area. From the ruins, not of Rome or Babylon, but of London Wall, the financial centre of the globe, one looks out at a dismal scene of grey desolation and tangled jungle. It represents a spectacle which can hardly fail to stir deep chords of reflection in the philosophic observer, and to rouse profound misgivings as to, if not the "Whence" and "Why" of human existence, at least as to its "Whither." Where do we go from here?

Such reflections, inseparable from the inquiring mind, have found in the past adequate expression in two works of European literature written by pioneer rationalists who have left famous names in the annals of Free-thought; in Volney's *Ruins of Empires* and in the *Autobiography* of the historian, Edward Gibbon, we recall how the august spectacle of the Oriental ruins of Palmyra provoked the French author to cast a nostalgic eye over the mournful passing of the Empires; and who that has read it can ever forget Gibbon's own poignant description of how he came to write his memorable historical epic *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

"It was at Rome on the 15th of October, 1764, as I sat musing in the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed friars were singing Vespers in the Temple of Jupiter that the idea of writing the Decline and Fall of the City first started to my mind."*

To-day, it is not Rome nor is it Babylon whose impressive ruins rouse melancholy warnings, ever-recurring forebodings as to the transitory nature of human civilisation and as to, at present, the actual concrete future of mankind. One does not have to travel in the East, as in Volney's days, in order to inspect "The Ruins of Empires." Such ruins are all around us and the tragic devastation to be witnessed in London can be witnessed on an even vaster and more terrifying scale on the European continent, where the stark epigram of Tacitus: "they make a desert and call it peace," is literally true.

Such have been the grim fruits of the immediate past. What of the immediate future? What fate—prospect would perhaps be a more cheerful term—does this hold out for mankind? At present it must be conceded that

the perspectives are decidedly grim. Everywhere there is talk of war—and of what a war! For it is the supreme tragedy of our tragedy-haunted age that the moral conscience of mankind has entirely failed to keep abreast of his scientific progress, the latter has been marvellous, the former, to judge by its positive results in two world wars in our lifetime, not to mention contemporary preparations for a third, considerably less so. With the latest and most decisive conquest of physical science, that of atomic energy, the current gap between human power to destroy and its ability to control such power is widening from a gap into a yawning abyss. Is not only human civilisation, but Humanity itself destined to perish in that abyss? Is it destined to fulfil the grim prediction of Alexander Pope?

Thy hand, Great Anarch, bids the curtain fall,
And universal Darkness buries all.

The prospect of universal ruin, of collective human suicide cannot, to-day, be dismissed as an impossible nightmare. Humanity, for the first time in its long history, possesses the technical capability for self-immolation. His somewhat lugubrious history, described by Gibbon as "the register of the crimes, the follies and the misfortunes of mankind," and by a German philosopher still more tersely as "the conjugation of the verb, to eat," gives us only too much ground for doubting man's capacity to use this terrible power.

We recall how, when Leonardo da Vinci, "the universal man" of the Renaissance, had drawn up the first feasible blue-print for a submarine, he promptly destroyed this creation of his wonderful brain; he knew what use man would make of it. One has, unfortunately, to face the unpleasant fact that Science to-day no longer stands for pure beneficence as it did in the days of our Victorian forefathers. To many, perhaps to most people to-day, science means, first and foremost, the newly-found suicidal power conferred by the H. and A. bombs. It is a chastening reflection upon the self-styled "Homo Sapiens."

We seem to have come to the Cross Roads of History. Whither civilisation? This question so vital and important assumes a special urgency for atheists, who, by definition, do not believe in any supernatural guidance and for whom Humanity only passes under the sun once and has only one life to live. For the religionist, at least if he or she is consistent, whatever happens in this vale of tears is the result of the all-wise Providence; in any case no terrestrial happening, even the most cataclysmic, can represent an event of decisive importance.

For in religious philosophy, this life is only a gateway an ante-chamber to an eternal and far more significant existence in the Beyond. A St. Augustine, for example, could behold unmoved the rack and ruin of the Roman world around him because his real Fatherland was elsewhere. To the Christian, again if consistent, the destruction of civilisation, even of Humanity itself, can only be of minor importance at most. In any case, his

* Cf. Gibbon—*Autobiography*.

Sacred Scriptures predict a fiery doom for this sinful world and for its inhabitants. It seems rather surprising that no one, as far as we know, has yet discovered a cryptic allusion to the H-bomb, in, say, those favourite works of the mystagogue, Daniel and Revelations.

To the atheist, and logically, to him alone, the preservation of human life and of human culture upon this earth is of literally unique importance, and his remedy, too, is simple; the progressive extension of reason, not only to the world of religion, but to this world also, he sees in the expansion of reason to the entire sphere of human existence its only valid chance of continuation. In the nature of things themselves, in the blind ebb and flow of matter which is the sum total of existence, the Universe, Mankind is but a transient speck, here to-day and gone to-morrow. Apart from human reason he has no valid life insurance!

Hitherto, as George Bernard Shaw has aptly observed, every human civilisation has gone so far and then come to grief. It is for us to say with regard to our own civilisation in its present critical impasse, not that it may or that it will, but that it shall survive. For apart from our own determination, there is no guarantee that it will.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE SATIRICAL DEAN OF ST. PATRICK'S

JONATHAN SWIFT'S character has been very adversely estimated by Thackeray and Macaulay, but friend and foe alike acknowledge his outstanding merits as a writer, however unpalatable many of his writings may appear. Swift was not a happy man but one born with a grievance, for he complains that his father's marriage was "very indiscreet; for his wife brought him little or no fortune, and his death happening so suddenly before he could make a sufficient establishment for his family." An uncle, however, sent young Swift to Kilkenny School where Congreve was a fellow pupil and afterwards to Trinity College, Dublin. After taking his B.A., he remained there until 1688, when the English Revolution so endangered the lives of Irish Protestants that Swift left for England and entered the household of Sir William Temple at Moor Park, Surrey.

There, Swift's standing slowly improved while he composed the two works—*The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub*—which first aroused public interest in their author. The *Tale* did not appear until 1704, and is usually deemed his masterpiece. It still seems a strange production from the pen of an author who hungered for a bishopric and died a dean. Swift's Peter, Jack and Martin caricature Rome, Calvin and Luther respectively, and with nothing to their credit. Mr. G. B. Harrison in his essay on Swift opines that "though the ideal critic can approach it with absolute detachment, to simpler souls who regard their religions as too sacred to be ridiculed it is a monstrous heap of ribald blasphemy. That was at least the opinion of Queen Anne, to whom Swift's enemies took care to show the book, arguing, not without some show of reason, that a man who could so anatomise the Christian religion was scarcely fitted to be one of its bishops."

When Peter and his brothers arrive in town they soon revel in its vices and then prosper exceedingly, as all the world knows. Yet, Swift's apologists all point to the dean's exemplary character and indeed endow him with virtues he never possessed and plead that the *Tale* is simply a grave indictment of sectarian hypocrisy by a

moralist who deploras the stain on the escutcheon of the Church and yet remains her faithful friend. But as Harrison urges, Swift's satire provides more pleasure to sceptics than believers, and notes that he "was conspicuously lacking in the quality of spirituality and was never of those philosophers who trip into the ditch while following the stars."

Presumably in order to regain his reputation as a devout churchman, Swift prepared a pamphlet proving the *Inconvenience of Abolishing Christianity*. In this essay, with a project for *The Advancement of Religion* and *The Sentiments of a Church of England Man*, he displays great powers as a controversialist. He alleges that the stock objection to Christianity are those inseparable from fallible human nature and that if sectarian enmities were ended, men would speedily discover other reasons for strife. Moreover, he asserts that religion is essential for the preservation of morality. Still in his *Sentiments*, Swift is a thorough Erastian for he says that "A Church of England man has a true veneration for the scheme established among us of ecclesiastical government." The State thus stands supreme but where there are two contending political parties, the Churchman supports that which will promote the good of Church and State." "These principles," observes Harrison, "Swift followed, leaving the Whigs when he thought they were too friendly with the Dissenters, though it may be that he regarded their failure to promote Jonathan Swift to be Bishop of Waterford as one of several notable signs of their hostility to the Church of England."

With Queen Anne's death in 1714, the Tory ministry was eclipsed and Swift, its most influential advocate, retired to his deanery in Dublin. For several years he avoided politics but in 1721 he defended Irish Protestant rights, for the grievances of Catholics he cared not at all. Still, his denunciation of Wood's halfpence, while it made him popular was exaggerated, although as Lecky observes, he induced the Irish to think for themselves.

Later in life, *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift's most well known work appeared. Lilliput, Brobdingnag and Laputa are all fascinating sections of this remarkable work, but perhaps its most profound pages concern Gulliver's experiences among the intellectual horses—the Houyhnhnms. These refined quadrupeds are contrasted with the savage and lustful Yahoos whose relationship and resemblance to mankind are realistically portrayed by Swift's pitiless pen. Gulliver when watching a female Yahoo has his kingship manifested only too well when she offers herself to him embraces. Needless to state, this, and other passages in this scornful masterpiece have been omitted in many published editions. Yet, the verity that our civilisation is only skin deep was only too plainly shown when a community which boasted of its Kultur indulged in an orgy of officially sanctioned hooliganism. Perhaps Swift remembered the real Hibernians who pelted the coach with stones when he arrived in Dublin as the appointed Dean of St. Patrick's.

In striking contrast to the disgusting Yahoos, are the refined and sensitive horses who betray no resemblance whatever to Swift's earlier Church of England man. Harrison notes, these blameless creatures are Agnostics "because reason taught us to affirm or deny only what we are certain; and beyond our knowledge we cannot do either." Also, they mate on eugenic principles and strength is selected as a male characteristic and comeliness as a female embellishment. Birth control is an operation, the number of offspring being apparently

restricted to two. Family affection is extended to the entire community. Colts and foals are not fondled but trained on rational principles, while Gulliver's master denounced man's system of education as monstrous when giving "the females a different kind of education from the males" for our system, says Gulliver, rendered "one half of our natives good for nothing but bringing children into the world, and to trust the care of our children to such useless animals," he said, "was yet a greater instance of brutality."

Moreover, some of Swift's idealised horses held vague ideas concerning evolution for some of their philosophers had surmised that the Yahoos had been spawned by the heat of the sun and from filthy slime or from the foam of the sea. Again, when death occurred among these quadrupeds there was no regret and their remains were interred in the remotest available regions. No lamentation whatever was customary nor did the dying horse deplore his impending decease.

Like many other distinguished authors who enjoyed posthumous fame, Swift lived and died a deeply disappointed man. That he was a thinker, however wayward, his writings prove. And that he was both a gloomy and sceptical dean there appears no reasonable doubt. He certainly reviled Collins, Toland and other contemporary Deists, yet his close friendship with Lord Bolingbroke, perhaps the most sceptical of them all, was never voluntarily broken. Swift's chequered career is ably summarised by G. B. Harrison in *English Thinkers of the Augustan Age* (Harrup) when he states that Gulliver's creator "died, as he was born, thwarted; partly by circumstances, partly by physical and mental disease. His ambition was boundless, but he never knew what he wanted, and he had the critic's curse of always seeing the flaws. But with these misfortunes he committed two capital errors: the first was the writing of *A Tale of a Tub*, the second when he was ordained a priest of the Church of England."

Apart from his Deanery, Swift was denied all preferment, while his clerical profession debarred him from what might have been a brilliant public career. His reputation as a creative and controversial writer remains great, while his relations with Stella and Vanessa are still clouded by obscurity. Still, it seems almost impossible to conceive Jonathan Swift as anything but a more or less morbid genius whose most cherished desires were never gratified. Thus he was driven into dejection and a despairing resentment most plainly revealed in the scornful and pitiless passages of *Gulliver's Travels*.

T. F. PALMER.

WELSH TEACHERS

I

EARLY in the century it was the ambition of large numbers of Welsh youths to be preachers. With decline of religious fervour and abandoning of emotional methods of reviving it, that queer concept of a lifetime's work has ceased to attract. Few young Welshmen now envisage it as desirable or profitable.

Instead, they have taken to school-teaching. Boasting of the excellence of their Higher Education system they show its results in marked disinclination for manual toil as farming, fishing, mining, quarrying, engineering, and other occupations which are useful and, indeed, necessary, productive, vital to continuance of a prosperous community.

For they regard themselves dramatically, do these

young Welsh teachers, feeling an intellectual call, a vocation, a mission to teach, preferably in English schools.

Doctor Johnson is reported to have said that the finest view in Scotland was the highroad to England. To-day, with greater truth he could assert that the finest view in Wales is the highroad to England, especially for young teachers.

They are such earnest souls, taking themselves and their profession seriously, too often solemnly. Pious most of them are, offspring of Calvinistic Methodism. If not so religious as their ancestors, they make education a quasi-religion, to doubt which is heresy and infidelity.

Many shocks they receive during their early years in England; at English humour and Rabelaisianism; at the cynical attitude of veteran English teachers who know educational theory to be largely moonshine, educational practice mainly window dressing, and educational principles chiefly superstition.

All this is anathema to the enthusiastic young Welsh teachers; till they begin to notice what good jobs there are in education on the administrative side, when to get such, they change their ideas and tactics.

II

Friendly enough they are, often pathetically anxious to Anglicise themselves and be at ease and equality with their English confrères. The men's approach to girls is arch, coy, and flirtatious.

Yet they have throwbacks, joining Welsh societies if such exist in the towns where they reside, talking with sentimental gusto of Cymru. Given a chance, and no one deflates their nationalism with satire or sarcasm they assume some pride, prepared to state that certain things are done better in Wales.

One such is the educational system. We might believe that if more evidence was forthcoming, but in science they are definitely below standard. Less objection would be raised if these young Welsh men and women had been taught English, both spelling and a wider vocabulary, with better accent. The sing-song Welsh intonation grows unpleasant to English hearers, and cannot be a good example to set before children. Often the latter teach their Welsh teachers a surprising amount of what they did not know before coming here. To many young Cymry the English language is full of pitfalls.

One amusing example will suffice. Instructed to write "Christmas Vacation" in the Register across the space when the school would be closed for holidays one young Welshman wrote "Cristmas Vocation."

On music also they try to speak with authority, claiming Welsh to be a more musical race than English on the strength of their singing. This claim is of doubtful validity. It ignores musical instruments, orchestral work and opera, in which Wales is weak. Furthermore, the native music is too much attached to hymns and sentimental ballads. Nevertheless, in choral and solo singing these Welsh residents among us do strike an unusual note, often sweet and attractive, though not so different or superior as its exponents imagine.

The other field of activity in which our Welsh colleagues essay to shine and to teach us something is sport, particularly football, especially Rugby. They are always rubbing it in, crowing on their dunghill about Welsh Rugby, bandying names such as Cross Keys, Llanelly, and others more difficult for Saesnaeg pronunciation. We allow them elation on that score so long as it is kept reasonably modest. It prevents them feeling too inferior in a strange land.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

ACID DROPS

Another "Life" of Jesus has just been published—this time by the French novelist, Francois Mauriac. No doubt his inventive imagination has had full play, but whether "many will find this book a help to meditation" is another matter. Even the most pious Catholics must find meditating these days a tiresome and most unnecessary job.

So far there has been no "patron saint" for teachers, a grave omission now rectified by the Pope. He has appointed St. John de la Salle to the post—rather belated, we venture to say, for teacher John lived 300 years ago. He founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools and, contends the *Universe*, "he established the world's first training colleges for secular teachers." This does not mean, of course, that they taught Secularism; only that they were not priests. But what a farce is this appointing dead saints to be "patrons"! They are of as much use as dead cats.

One of our Catholic journals gravely tells us about General Sir F. Messervy and his devotion to the Faith. In detailing his career we are told how he was appointed commanding officer of the 13th Lancers and "supervised the regiment's conversion"—to Rome? Alas, no. The conversion was "into an armoured unit."

A Catholic Congress of young people was held the other week in Paris and 60,000 of them attended. And on the Sunday there was a mass Mass all complete with Cardinals, 30 Archbishops and Bishops, 15 Deacons, and 130 Priests "each," we are told, "accompanied by a layman" with their own ciborias, hosts, and other paraphernalia. It is all very inspiring, and we give this detail of news because so many Rationalists are ready to sit back, the battle for Rationalism having been won. We do not share this complacency.

This Congress was very enthusiastic, and sang songs emphasising how much the world wants young people—meaning, of course, the religious world in particular. It is an inspiring lesson for Freethought which also wants young recruits; only, we cannot offer Christ Jesus and a Heavenly after-life or, even if we do as we are told by our political leaders, a Heavenly life here. The prizes in the Freethought movement are what we make ourselves, but the battle for truth, tolerance and integrity has always attracted the best people, and it will attract them just as much in the future.

A new book on prayer by Fr. van Zeller called *Moments of Light* covers, a reviewer tells us, "the purgative and illuminative stages and particularly the difficulties encountered 'in the dark night.'" This really intrigues us. We always thought that there was no aspect of prayer whatever that had not been written about *ad nauseam*—but the "purgative" aspect is a new one on us. Perhaps it doesn't mean it.

The S.P.C.K. has just published *Whom Shall I Send?* which tries to show "why priests are urgently needed" and "what priests are ordained to be and do." It implores young men to hear Christ calling them to follow him, and to parents and laymen generally to help all they can with prayers and other ways. We fully understand these pathetic pleas, for unless the Church can recruit more and more men into the ministry the

S.P.C.K. will become as dead as the proverbial doornail and no more dismal prospect can be imagined—for its employees. But the young men won't join up all the same.

In his Presidential Address to the Diocesan Conference the Bishop of Derby said that Baptism is administered so casually as to become almost a farce, and urged "the need for a less superstitious and a more genuinely Christian attitude towards the sacrament." Surely a distinction without a difference, for the more genuinely Christian, the more superstitious. Even the Bishop's own colleagues are continually complaining that people regard baptism as being lucky and a barrier to the "evil eye."

When compulsory Church Parade for the Army was abolished in 1946, we hailed this progressive step with satisfaction and thought that the powers-that-be had, at long last, realised the stupidity of forcing men to subscribe to a practice that was obviously undemocratic and against the will of the majority. We were wrong. According to the *Daily Mirror*, the reason the Government abolished compulsory Church Parade was because it was felt that conscripts could not possibly cram enough training in their short period of service and leave time for church also. "High Army Officers" are considering its reintroduction. Perhaps some of these "High Army Officers" are padres who are tired of empty churches or, has someone just re-read Crozier's *Brass-Hat* or *No-Man's Land* wherein he says that religion was one of the finest creators of blood lust?

What cannot be cured must be endured, runs an old saw, and we think it is applicable to the latest utterance of Dr. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, when he praised Bishop Barnes' *Rise of Christianity*. The Dean thinks that its criticism of Christianity was carried a little too far, but, Dr. Barnes "did a great service in calling us to examine the foundations of our faith." He adds somewhat pathetically, he has left us enough "on which to build what is essential to the Christian faith." After the howl of horror that went up on the publication of the book, this sounds very much like a sigh of relief that the damage to religion was not so great as was expected. After all, the ideas of Bishop Barnes were current among Freethinkers a century ago.

In Preston Royal Infirmary a patient collapsed during an operation, his heart stopped and to all intents and purposes the patient was dead. After twelve minutes of cardial massage the heart was made to beat again and normal breathing restored in 25 minutes. Unfortunately the patient died again some hours later. The problem would have delighted the old Scholastics and medieval physicians; query—where was the soul during interval of the two deaths?

The following quotation was cut out from the formula service used on Empire Youth Sunday:—

Forgive, we beseech Thee, the shortcomings of our imperial history: the greed and failure to consider the interests of the weak: the misunderstandings and discords we have inflamed and aided: our intolerance, injustice and uncharitableness.

Lord Elton, Chairman of the Church of England Youth Council (who probably saw that the people this attacked were all Christians) and who urged the cut, did not seem to be concerned as to its truth or otherwise; he seemed to be far more concerned that the passage "would be of use to Russian newspapers"—as if they did not know

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mr. W. RITTENOUR apologises for any paragraph which has appeared twice in his series of articles. As he lives in the U.S.A., readers will appreciate his difficulty in not being able to read proofs.

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).

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. Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Annual Conference of the National Secular Society was useful and enjoyable from beginning to end. A musical programme in which Mrs. Homes, Messrs. A. Oldfield, H. Day and G. L. Colebroke, under the direction of Mr. Stan Hatton, was a feature of the Saturday reception.

The business sessions on Sunday were carried out in the best traditions of Freethought Principles, and was rounded off by the usual public demonstration in the City Memorial Hall. On Monday there was a delightful coach outing through Derbyshire scenery to the Derwent Valley Reservoirs. Mr. A. Samms, the Sheffield Branch Secretary, bore the brunt of the local arrangements, which were excellent, and added a material feature to a very successful Conference.

A fuller report will appear in a later issue of *The Freethinker*.

We have often wondered why Christians have not made much more fuss over the Holy Ghost than they do. For God they have deep reverence, for Christ Jesus it is, if anything, still deeper, but reverence trails right off when it comes to the Holy Ghost. It must be heartbreaking for the old gentleman—that is, if he really is an old gentleman, or even if he isn't. At long last he has a champion in Canon J. E. Fison whose book *The Blessing of the Holy Spirit* can be bought for 5s. 6d. The Canon is quite convinced that most of the ills the Churches have had to bear are due to their neglect of the elusive Ghost—to a neglect of the reality of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

The difficulty inherent in this is that (according to the Canon) the Holy Ghost "is incurably self-effacing" and when we come to think of it we must agree that artists have always fought shy of depicting him (or her or it). You can, we are assured, find him "beyond the no-man's land of the Cross" and that "there can never be a short cut round the Cross." So there you are. If you want to see and adore the Holy Ghost and prevent any more evils attacking the Church, go for a hike round the no-man's land of the Cross. What an intellectual treat is Canon Fison!

ON SHAKESPEARE AGAIN

I MAKE no apology for introducing this much debated subject again. Readers who are fed up with the question can skip this article, but for those who are still interested I want to have a little say on a problem which is still unsolved though some of us think it is getting a little nearer solution.

Few even of the older readers will remember that, as far back as 1923, I was advocating the cause of Edward de Vere as the probable author of the plays of Shakespeare—the principal author, of course. For even such a doughty champion of the Stratford man, John M. Robertson, spent a good part of his literary life to show that quite a number of the plays clearly indicated two or more hands in their composition. But I had another reason for bringing forward Edward de Vere and that was because he was an Atheist. That he was the greatest nobleman at the court of Queen Elizabeth was long known. What was not so well known was that his contemporaries recognised in him the greatest of the Court poets, and the greatest writer of comedies then living. And he had other rare accomplishments.

No one—except John M. Robertson—took the slightest notice of my article, but many years later I had another try, and the fat well and truly dropped into the fire! Angry letters poured into *The Freethinker* office, some of them from shocked readers who threatened to stop their subscriptions if I were allowed to write another word on the "aristocratic" Earl of Oxford. One gentleman pointed out that it was much more likely that William Shakespeare at Stratford wrote the poems of Edward de Vere than vice versa; and I doubt if he changed his mind when I pointed out that it was hard to believe that even his great William at the age of six was quite capable of doing that. And there were similar crushing arguments hurled against me.

Let me admit that I was taken by surprise, for if there was one thing that I was certain about it was that Freethought taught some kindly tolerance. I may have been quite wrong, but at least I should have got a hearing. However, some projected articles had to be abandoned.

But the recent controversy borne so ably—in my opinion—by Mr. Kent, prompts me to enter the fray again for, indeed, some of the arguments brought forward to support the Stratford Shaxper (he never spelt his name Shakespeare as far as I have been able to discover) appear to border on the ludicrous.

One controversialist pointed out, for example, that Shaxper must have written the plays because Tolstoy learnt Greek in six weeks. It is true that he hastily changed this illuminating argument into "six months" but what have the flowers that bloom in the spring to do here? He was asked from where did Shaxper get the 15,000 words with which his plays are adorned? And the answer came pat—he learnt them! I submit that even with the best intentions in the world a disputant has to retire in the face of such colossal stupidity.

Another gentleman came forward to prove that the plays were "rustic minded." They were full of Warwickshire allusions and lanes. When asked to substantiate this, he said Shaxper used the word "boggle." And besides, he blandly told us that the supporters of Bacon said that he was the son of Queen Elizabeth. The complete ignorance displayed by this supporter of Shaxper (he said that de Vere was the seventh Earl of Leicester!) made me declare that he knew nothing of the Baconian case and, terribly hurt, he returned to the fray by asking

me, "How did I know?" Why, he actually had a number of Baconian books—as if the possessor of erudite books on mathematics was then in a position to argue with Einstein. May I suggest that Baconians have been writing books for 80 or 90 years, and the idea that they can be answered by one word—"boggle"—is asking a little too much. I am not a Baconian, but to my knowledge they can put forward a great case, and it is absurd to think otherwise. And will the kindly reader note that when I say that I am not a Baconian, I mean it. In my previous discussions, this seemed to upset some opponents, for they insisted that I was one and they refused to believe me. The idea behind this has always been that a Baconian is an idiot, a crank, or even that he is mad. I do not share that view.

I should have preferred not to deal with the rather precious articles of Mr. Yates. He seems to be completely unaware that his "arguments" have been answered over and over again. They were dealt with by Sir George Greenwood in his two masterpieces of discussion, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated* and *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?*, and any reader who wants to see how a K.C. can wipe up (metaphorically) an opponent should read them.

But Mr. Yates added, "A prominent writer of *The Freethinker* has, on more than one occasion, shown his predilection for an aristocratic authorship of 'the plays,'" and I think that I am right in saying that he means me. Now all I am interested in is the real author, and I don't care two hoots whether he was an aristocrat or not. I look upon Charles Dickens as almost, if not quite, equal to the author of the plays, and I feel that Rembrandt is one of the supreme artists of the world; and even Mr. Yates' sneer cannot make aristocrats of either. This coy reference to me is not worthy of him.

He mentions Robert Greene's famous allusion to the "upstart crow" and obviously imagines he is the first to mention it. Personally I see in it an attack, not on the author of the plays, but on an actor. If Mr. Yates disagrees, he is at liberty to do so, but in passing, may I point out that that stout defender of the Stratfordian, Prof. Churton Collins, claims "that it is at least doubtful" that the "supposed allusion" to Shakespeare has "any reference to him at all." This is pointed out by Greenwood, and the pros and cons carefully considered. I am quite content to agree with him.

But what is really amusing is Mr. Yates' remark "that Greene in his *Pandosto* not only furnished the plot of the *Winter's Tale*, but that in his *Groatsworth of Wit* furnished good evidence that Shakespeare wrote it." Will the patient reader note that Greene died in 1592, a year before Shakespeare gave to the world the "first heir of his invention," and that his *Groatsworth* appeared in the same year. And what is the date generally given for the *Winter's Tale*? It was first printed in the Folio in 1623, and many writers on Shakespeare have therefore "speculated" on the date when it might have been written. Sir E. Chambers, one of the greatest of all Shakespearian authorities, gives 1610, Brewer in his *Reader's Handbook* gives 1604, Sir Sidney Lee gives no date, Staunton gives 1611, and Furnivall, 1610. Thus it is at once apparent that poor Greene knew in 1592 that Will Shaxper of Stratford wrote the *Winter's Tale* on some date between 1604 and 1611!

Let me finally ask the reader, if he is interested, to get hold of the late Frank Harris' *The Man Shakespeare* which is, in my opinion, the most brilliant study of the man behind the plays ever written. It is a fascinating book, and all the more so because Harris believed he

was describing the man of Stratford. In actual fact, so magnificently did he penetrate to the writer behind the plays, that his *Man Shakespeare* is a most marvellous pen picture of Edward de Vere, and it can apply to no one else. I may deal with this splendid study some other time.

H. CUTNER.

RIVAL PHILOSOPHIES

THERE are many people in this rather workaday age who say that philosophy is a waste of time; these folk think that what they are pleased to call "practical" matters are the only ones which merit attention. Yet there can be little doubt that the philosophy of the orthodox Marxists and that of the orthodox Roman Catholics are, between them, splitting the world in two, and that the lack of an adequate philosophy of a more moderate nature may easily lead us into almost unthinkable disaster.

For that reason, if for no other, Mr. Herbert Read's new book, *Existentialism, Marxism, and Anarchism* (Freedom Press, 3s. 6d.), deserves to be read with the utmost care by all who have any ideas of freedom. The book is divided into two sections, the first a lengthy essay on the subject indicated by the title and the second random reflections on various subjects covered by the subtitle, "Chains of Freedom."

Mr. Read, as I have in the past indicated in various articles published here, is one of the most important thinkers of our time. Primarily an art critic, he has come to see that only if some measure of political freedom be attained can the artist have any hope of attaining his own aims in the world. Mr. Read has therefore in recent times tended to turn from pure art criticism to a kind of mixture of art and Anarchism, which is not achieved by any other writer of the day. And in his new book he says some of the most acute things which ever he has ever said. Witness this:—

"The mind which rejects the notion of a social hierarchy tends at the same time to reject the notion of a spiritual hierarchy, and therefore to deny, not only the existence of God, but even a religion of the imagination. This can be excused in a thorough-going Marxian materialist, but it is difficult to see where the Christian democrat finds his logical footing. A Christian anarchist, like Eric Gill, is conceivable, as is a Christian royalist, like T. S. Eliot. One derives from St. Peter, the other from St. Paul."

That appears to me to be a very deep-seeing comment on the theological tendencies of the day. And on almost every page there may be found similar thought-provoking remarks.

But what is, I think, most important in all the book is the argument which Mr. Read advances that something like an Anarchist philosophy is the only one that can be used to offset the advance of Marxism in our day. The power of the Vatican, so often suggested as a possible counter-balance to the power of the Kremlin, is in actual fact useless. In these days of hydrogen bombs, if it ever comes to open war between Moscow on the one hand and Washington-Rome on the other, there can be little doubt that the ordinary man will not live to see the end come. And the powers that be in all the great countries of the world tend increasingly to envisage a war, not unlike that of 1939-45, as the way in which to set right the balance between States. Mr. Read says that what is needed is a political theory "that combines an essentially revolutionary and contingent attitude with a philosophy of freedom." One cannot entirely agree with his analysis here; it is not merely Anarchism in its narrower sense that can do this, though Freethought or Liberalism

Christianity are not revolutionary. But at the same time it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that there may be movements which are based on a philosophy of freedom and which, provided they are adequately advanced and given a reasonable opportunity of propaganda, may give people the power to stand up against the apparently overwhelming force of the Marxists and the Catholics.

It may appear to some readers that I have tended to disregard the third angle of Mr. Read's triangle—Existentialism. This has in the past been discussed at some length in these columns, and most philosophically-minded readers will probably be acquainted with it, both in the Atheistic version advocated by Jean-Paul Sartre and the religious version advocated by Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers. Mr. Read has some sympathy with Sartre, though he feels that there are weaknesses in the Existentialist position. And in any event, as he says, it is clear that the Marxists do not regard it as being in any way a powerful threat to them. The Roman Catholics still seem to feel a certain distrust of Existentialism, but this may be partly because it derives in part from Kierkegaard, who was an unorthodox Christian. And heresy of that type often seems to worry the orthodox Catholic even more than the direct opposition of Marxism or Freethought.

At any rate, Mr. Read has made clear some of the more important philosophical issues of our time. He has set out his own position in no uncertain terms. And if there are points at which many will tend to disagree with him, that in no way detracts from the value and importance of his book.

JOHN ROWLAND.

CORRESPONDENCE

MALTHUS AND MARX

Sir,—In his article "The Meaning of History," H. Cutner says "Like the term 'dialectical materialism,' Marxism is bandied about as if everybody knew what it was..." This is unfortunately true. People like Farrington, Stalin and Tito; and political parties like the so-called Communist Party throw the words Marxism and Socialism around as often as possible, but most of them have very little knowledge of Marxist Socialism—and never propagate it.

Although claiming to be a Marxist Party, the Communist Party accepts as members people of all shades of religious opinion (including a Dean). Did not Marx say that Religion was the opium of the people?

In his introduction to "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," Engels writes: "Only material things being perceptible to us, we cannot know anything about the existence of God." (Page xii.) "... But nowadays, in our evolutionary conception of the universe, there is absolutely no room for either a Creator or a Ruler." (Page xv.)

In this introduction he attacks the "respectable" agnostics of his time.

I think that the introduction of this book, of which I have given two short extracts, should satisfy Mr. Cutner that at least in regard to Religion, the Marxist-Socialist point of view is sound. Socialists are not responsible for the "revisionist" acrobatics of Farrington and the Stalinists!

In his last paragraph Mr. Cutner is worried about Malthus. Briefly; Malthus contended that the population tended to increase faster than the food supply. But "To say that increases in population tend to out-run food supply is of course the merest of truisms. It would only have force if the productive powers of society were themselves incapable of progressive improvements. Such has not been the case. Indeed since Malthus lived all evidence has gone to show that wealth has tended to increase faster than population." ("The Over-Population Myth," "Socialist Standard," September, 1948.) Only in backward, semi-feudal countries is there a problem of over-population; and this will disappear when they become highly industrialised. Even at the moment, capitalist America could almost supply the world with food.—Yours, etc.,

PETER E. NEWELL.

VACCINATION

Sir,—Mr. Effel might have left the burden of proof on the vaccinationists, but he transfers it to himself, and asserts that vaccination never saved a single life. How can he prove such a negative? Bertram Russell advises us not to feel certain of propositions which experts do not accept. In "Bacteriology," by A. D. Gardner (Oxford University Press, 1944), it is stated that Jennerian vaccination is universally accepted as an effective prophylactic, although statistically indisputable figures are scanty, and that U.S.A. statistics in 1919-28 show that in states where vaccination was rare 115 per 10,000 persons contracted smallpox, while in those in which it was compulsory only seven per 10,000. Statistics showing that in the last 20 years three times as many people have died of vaccination as of smallpox do not illustrate relative deadliness, since we cannot get statistics showing how much smallpox has been checked during that period. London fever hospital figures for 1901-4 show (Gardner) percentage fatality of cases of smallpox less than ten in vaccinated persons, but 31 in the unvaccinated.

Mr. Effel thinks it fantastic to believe that a dose of one disease can prevent the taking of another. The question whether it can is a matter for experimental science. Gardner asserts also that vaccinia is due to a virus related to the smallpox virus, and that monkeys can be given smallpox by inoculation of infected human pus, but that a similar inoculation in calves and rabbits gives rise only to local lesions, and if the virus is passed through several animals in succession it loses its power of causing other than vaccinia in man, which gives immunity from the parent virus. This claim may be untrue, but why is it fantastic?—Yours, etc.,

J. G. LUTON.

OBITUARY

It is with great regret that I report the death of Thos. Walker Ewing on 13th May at the age of 62.

For more than 40 years he had two loves in his life, to which he remained ever faithful—the St. Andrew's Ambulance and the Glasgow Secular Society. In paying tribute to his memory at the cremation service, his Commandant said, "To know Tom was an education in human decency..."

He was equally familiar on the G.S.S. platform and was always active in the cause of Freethought. He acted as president, secretary, librarian, treasurer, billposter, and committee member for many years. We in Glasgow are proud of our association with a man of the character and kindness of Tom Ewing and his influence among us will be sadly missed.

To all his relatives and friends we express again our deepest sympathy.

The secular cremation service was read by Mrs. Whitefield to a company which included representatives from his place of work, the R.P.A. sports associations, and the Freethought movement.

M. I. W.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. ROTHWELL and SHARPLES.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK. (Bombed Site, St. Mary's Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, June 7, 8 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. F. A. RIDLEY and R. A. CALVERLEY. (Highbury Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Messrs. A. ELLESMERE and T. MOSLEY; 6-45 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELLESMERE and T. MOSLEY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branches N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

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

THOUGHTS ON RELIGION

IX

EVEN if religion is admitted to be useful as a tamer of men who are by nature lawless and immoral and who must be cultured in laws and moral rules if societies are to exist, there will never be a satisfactory excuse for the absurdities and contradictions of religious writings. If the "Artikel von Gott" in *Die Augsburgische Confession*, for example, were clear and based on truth and clarified men's conceptions of their duties toward each other by instructing them of the true divinity, this article of theological law would be a useful part of the concepts governing the social existence. However, in the past no sooner has one religious sect established its confused tenets of things unseen and of mercy and compassion, than a great and horrible conflict has arisen among men about something of which no one was sure in order to determine the right dogmas of the unseen and to determine who of the contenders had the right tenets of mercy and compassion. In this age we witness similar conflicts about empty political and social philosophies and schemes devised generally by men of the poorest intelligence; and indeed it would seem that mankind has been most influenced by its unintelligent specimens. The "Gott Vater, Gott Sohn, Gott Heiliger Geist" of the article mentioned, the three *personæ* in one *Wesen* are just the things to cause undying hatred between those who believe in a triple God who is really one and those who believe in a God who is one God; and the Protestant Reformation, of which *Die Augsburgische Confession* was an important manifesto, finally culminated in the Massacre of Wassy which started the eight religious wars lasting from the time of its occurrence in 1562 to 1598, in the assassination of the Duke of Guise, in the Massacres of Nimes, in the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, in the murder of Henry III of France, in the expulsion of the Huguenots from France, etc. All this happened for the ostensible cause of the difference of opinion which men entertained about religious quiddities; however, self-interest and the desire for power were the principal causes of the religious wars and persecutions just as they are the principal causes of all other human conflicts. If religion were to make a just demand on the attention of intelligent men as something requiring their belief, it would have to be expressed clearly and truthfully, otherwise, they will continue to regard it as mostly the invention of charlatans whose interests are served by deceiving mankind. The mystic concept of religion which reconciles all by seeing religion as a necessary and beneficial part of human history is mystic indeed.

Some religions have in their metaphysics a good principle and an evil principle who are at war with each other. The belief in such principles may be regarded as the result of a vague intuition of the constructive and destructive forces which are at work in the world. In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, Marduk, the adviser of the gods, was made their leader in order that he might combat Tiamat, Confusion, the mother of heaven and earth. When he had vanquished her, he made heaven and earth from her body. Zoroaster taught that two opposing spirits existed: Ahura Mazda, the Good Spirit, and Angrô Mainyush, the Destructive Spirit. According to the Old Testament, Satan was the enemy of Jehovah and of Israel. In the New Testament and in Christianity he is represented as the spirit of evil who is the enemy of God and Christ and the righteous, as the prince and god of the world, as the ruler of the

darkness of the world, and is called the devil. From the dualism of Zoroaster, Manes developed his system of dualism in which he posited the existence of two opposing kingdoms, the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness. In the Koran, Eblis or Satan, is a fallen angel who is the chief of devils and was made a devil because he refused to worship Adam when God required such worship.

There is much to be said for the physiological view of the soul; for it would appear that what is called the soul is derived from the material and that body and soul are the same thing; but this does not mean that materialism is the final answer on the subject of spirituality. Such creatures as men are not miserable enough; under the pressure of superstition they have to invent for themselves souls which they can lose and agonise about losing.

The cross is in Christianity a symbol of the suffering of Christ and by extension of the suffering of human life; and evidence of this latter symbolism is in Christ's words, ". . . come, take up the cross, and follow me." According to the established human custom of reducing things to contradiction, the cross is often used as a decoration for the midwinter feast called Christmas; and the contradiction is that the cross is not a symbol of joy.

"The Lord helps those who help themselves." "Dios hará merced. Y aún tres días sin comer." "Dios proveerá, mas buen haz de paja se querrá." These sarcasms on the deity have become proverbial in English and Spanish. The English expression is so commonly spoken that it is a good example of the smallness and generally non-existence of men's faith in those things in which they pretend to believe. It is difficult to understand what Tolstoy meant by writing in his book, *Confession*, of the necessity of belief in the god in whom men have believed unless it is admitted that he was confused which might easily and correctly be concluded by reading his philosophical writings. While it is true that some men believe in a god or in gods, a great many men have little genuine belief in anything which is very religious. They merely have a few opinions which pass for beliefs; and even their opinions are badly formed. It is indeed faith in ourselves and in the constructive forces of life that we need; but some of the beliefs of men do not supply that faith.

The fate of those who, in order to be made a little good, or at least hypocritical, must listen to harangues of praters who exhort them to give more to the Lord and also better salaries for his servants, praters, is exactly the fate which they deserve.

WILLIAM MITTENOUR (U.S.A.)

* Mark, X, 21.

OBSEQUIES

For the dying God, let us toll the bell:
The Church of Christ is losing its last fight;
Oblivion's tomb is theirs, not heaven nor hell.

Trusting in princes, preaching "Might is Right,"
The Church's God is dying: toll the bell!
Science now overcomes its ancient might.

In after years we shall our children tell
How cruel cunning has been put to flight:
For the dying God, sound the slow, measured bell.

BAYARD SIMMONS.