

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXX.—No. 24

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Greek Philosophy and Christian Censorship

IN the recorded history of human culture and of the evolution of the human intellect, one era in world history stands out pre-eminently, that of the ancient Hellenes, or Greeks, to give them the name by which they have been known since Roman times.*

Even whilst admitting, as Franz Cumont and others have demonstrated, that the classical Greeks did not, as it were, start from scratch, but assimilated many older ideas from Oriental culture, yet they were the first scientific thinkers who welded the raw materials which they had received from others into a single system of co-ordinated thought that was essentially their own.

It must undoubtedly be regarded as a major misfortune for the subsequent evolution of human thought that we only know Greek philosophy in its later and decadent form after the unprofitable marriage with religious mysticism that was contracted by Socrates and his disciple, Plato, about the year 400 B.C.

For when stripped of the posthumous halo with which Christianity and modern Idealist philosophy have adorned their ancient forerunners, it becomes obvious that with that introspective mystic, Socrates, Greek philosophy entered upon its decay; it no longer studied the external universe as the earlier and greater Greek thinkers had done, but instead of objective reality, substituted a puerile anthropocentric exaltation of man as a "spiritual" being as the centre of the Universe; a disastrous delusion from which human thought is only now beginning to recover.

For the philosophy of the Christian era and of its continuation in modern Idealism, has been essentially the era dominated intellectually by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the last named who was actually a more scientific thinker than his masters, having been very much bowdlerised in the process of "adapting" him to the requirements of Christianity.

If we may indulge in an unorthodox inquiry into the validity of the traditional, and still largely current estimate of Greek philosophy, it seems evident that Socrates, who apparently started his intellectual career as a *bona fide* materialist, eventually became a full-blown mystic in the best "Yogi" manner, similar to those modern mystics like, say, the late Mr. Berdayef, who console themselves to-day, for the loss of Russia by the discovery of eternity. Whilst, as for Plato, for so long the crowned emperor of European religious thought, he reveals himself upon closer scrutiny as a theosophist rather than as a philosopher properly so-called, as a kind of "Madam Blavatsky" who called up spirits from the vasty deep and who communed with spiritual "Mahatmas." To be sure, he expressed his mystical aspirations in a much better literary style than has any one of his numerous imitators.

* The Graeci were actually a tribe of barbaric Albanian highlanders. The countrymen of Plato and Homer would have been horrified at being confused with them.

The classical philosophers of Ancient Greece, those wonderful critico-analytical intellects to whom Humanity owes both the substance and the forms of coherent thought, left behind them a vast literature, the great bulk of which has perished. What exactly has perished, we do not, of course know, but a surviving historian of ancient philosophy, Diogenes Laertius, writing towards the end of the classical era in Roman times, gives us some useful hints. The three most prolific of the Ancient Greek philosophers, he tells us, were Democritus, Epicurus and Aristotle. This means that they must have been very prolific indeed, and yet the authentic surviving works of Plato are extremely numerous, the total bulk of his works considerably exceeds the Christian Bible in size.

Of the three thinkers mentioned above, each of whom, if our authority is to be believed, must have left a whole library as a memento of his ideas, Democritus was, as far as we know, the first complete materialist in history, he ascribed all living things ultimately to the fortuitous combination of the atom, conceived as the final indivisible form of matter. We do not know what, if any, were his theological deductions but logically they would appear to have left no room at any stage for the providential intervention. Of Democritus as also of his great predecessor Heraclitus of Ephesus and of his own fellow-Ionian atomists, absolutely nothing has survived beyond a few doubtfully authentic phrases.

Of Epicurus (c. 300 B.C.) we have a few complete letters, plus a number of discontinuous fragments painfully reassembled by modern classical scholarship, yet Epicurus, as we know from other sources founded a powerful school of philosophy which lasted for some six centuries; long enough to become synonymous with infidelity in the eyes of the Christian Church Fathers, and himself possessed in advanced circles in classical society a personal reputation analogous to that of Spinoza or Darwin in modern times. Epicurus was a hedonist and a *de facto* materialist, who made a nominal discount (perhaps with his tongue in cheek) in favour of theology by admitting the existence of gods who, however, do nothing except admire themselves—quite the most inoffensive kind of gods!

Of Aristotle whose dualistic "Realism" constitutes a kind of compromise between the philosophical idealism of Plato and the materialists, much more has, of course, survived, but by no means all, it would be interesting to know what has not been allowed to survive by the Christian censorship which found some of Aristotle's works useful as a basis for its own theology.

It is evident that the classical critical and philosophical literature of the ancient Greeks has passed, so to speak, through a highly discriminatory sieve before it has been allowed to reach us. A literary censorship in which all that was inimical to Christian doctrine regarding Man and the Universe has been allowed to perish or even been deliberately destroyed by the all-powerful Christian Church during the medieval millenium between the Fall of Rome and the Reformation.

It may, in all probability, be assumed that not only the scientific (i.e., materialist) works of Democritus and Epicurus, but also those of all the more scientific Greek thinkers have perished similarly, including those of the Greek atheists mentioned by name by Cicero, who presumably must have justified their description as atheists by some positive contribution to critical thought. In the above connection, it is deeply significant that the only two surviving works of an explicitly rationalist character which have come down to us in their integrity, the *De Rerum Natura* of the Epicurean Lucretius, and the *Meditations* of the Stoic Marcus Aurelius, both descend from a single copy; an obvious accident. How much else perished?

Obviously, classical literature has survived only in a highly bowdlerised form. If we supposed that Hitler had won his war and that a Nazi Dark Age had followed for a millenium, what survived by accident of modern political and philosophical literature would constitute a broadly accurate historical analogy.

F. A. RIDLEY.

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

ANGELS are generally regarded as being sexless, therefore they may well grace an attempt to analyse the article on contraceptives and automatic machines by Mr. W. O. Bowers (page 151, *The Freethinker*). So little is understood, so much is misunderstood by the public about that most powerful human energy, sex, that even in a Freethinking paper the truth about sex may appear shocking; indeed, to some, even horrifying.

The anti-penultimate paragraph of Mr. Bowers' statement shows how little he understands, or has tried to understand the subject which has so obviously disturbed him, and this, not because he cannot understand, or is incapable of trying, but because he is afraid.

He says: "... the objections to their (contraceptives) being made available openly in such fashion are so strong, that frankly, I am surprised to find anyone advocating such an idea."

Surely Mr. Bowers realises what is implied by his statement. The objections against all advances in the ethical sphere have always been so great as to lead people less enlightened than Mr. Bowers to suppose that the objectors must be right. The old objections to atheism itself, the objections to universal suffrage, the objections to the encroachment of women in the professions, to name a few, have all been exceptionally strong. Surely, the strength of the oppositions has never caused anyone like Mr. Bowers to be surprised at such ideas being held. Why should the belief continue, as it does in strange quarters, that because an idea is greeted with horror and abhorrence by certain sections of the community, the idea must firstly be in error, and secondly, does not deserve support?

The original articles on contraceptives and automatic machines by Mr. Buller, to which Mr. Bowers takes such exception, were not as nicely rounded out as might be. The writer appeared to be applying his pen to the prevention aspect of the question only, leaving alone a much broader theme. Probably Mr. Buller, like Mr. Bowers, has some respect, much smaller perhaps but still existing, for the sex taboo. Gratitude should be shown to Mr. Bowers, however, for his complaint reveals in analysis, how unhappily men are apt to blinker themselves over this greatest of all the taboos. For, of Mr. Bowers' contribution can be said truthfully, not one

sentence has any real relation to fact, and collectively it is hopelessly wide of the mark.

Any attempt to set out with honesty an exposure of society's attitude to sex will immediately bring down upon the unangel-like head the wrath of those in whose interest the cloak of secrecy and hypocrisy is maintained. Proof of this is found in Alec Craig's "Banned Books of England," wherein the reader learns that, contrary to general belief, it is not pornography that is banned. Legal frowns are directed at any attempt to pierce that veil of ignorance which is in some minds synonymous with innocence.

Mr. Bowers has advanced in his objection to the articles of Mr. Buller, what is no more than the orthodox view, the Christian view, the view perpetuated but not necessarily believed in by those whose interests run counter to freedom of thought. For Mr. Bowers to espouse the cause of Christian morals within the pages of *The Freethinker* indicates how little Mr. Bowers has succeeded in ridding himself of the vestiges of Christian standards. It should be obvious, even to him, that if he cannot rid himself of the prejudices surrounding the very last and most powerful of the Christian "last-ditch" fortresses—that of the claim to be the sole guardian of morals and ethics—he cannot regard his thinking as fully free. Mr. Bowers should accept that, like all else in their religion, Christian morals are as artificial as their gods.

Examination of Mr. Bowers' protest is most revealing. "I must admit," he says, "such an appalling prospect fills me with dismay."

What is the appalling prospect?

That (in his own words) "... the available supply of young women with no sexual experience would have a tendency to become less and less."

Available supply, mark you. To whom, and for what, may be asked?

Mr. Bowers' phrasing is an unhappy choice, but it is little use his complaining that the phrase has been lifted from its context. A close study of his article will show as much. However, as Mr. Bowers is a reader of and a writer for *The Freethinker*, we can see that he is an enlightened man in many things and no doubt would welcome further enlightenment. Phrases such as are used so innocently by Mr. Bowers are part of the sexual stock-in-trade of the moralising Christian, and Mr. Bowers has done no more than reiterate the Christian attitude to sex; that attitude being in one word, BAD.

Available supply! The phrase, ghastly enough used in this connection, refers only to the supply of virgins. Now a virgin is of value only in two ways. The first is her value to the habitual seducer, and it should be understood that the seducer is a pathological case, as much a pervert as the homosexual. He is best left to the psychiatrist, as there is something peculiarly juvenile about the need of some men to "possess" virgins.

The second value of the virgin lies in the commercial outlook. Girls in Great Britain learn quite early that virginity will enable them to compete more effectively in the marriage market, or alternatively to buy a higher price from a potential lover. These things are not learned because they are natural, or because there is anything moral in the ideas, but solely because these ideas are integral parts of Christian teaching and Christian society.

It is not a natural thing that there should be a commercial value to virginity, as chastity is not recognised in nature, nor by adult human reasoning. (It was Robert Louis Stevenson, I believe, who said that civilisation would not be achieved until we had rid ourselves of the

idea of the sanctity of women. I quote from memory). Virginity has nothing to do with morals either, as any medical man who has distended a hymen to spare its possessor unnecessary pain can readily assure you. All the arguments that will be raised against these views, no matter how sincerely held, are the arguments of an out-moded religion which for its own ends seeks and claims to control morals. Mr. Bowers can be assured in answer to his question that these ideas are out of date.

Claiming as he does to be a non-religionist, Mr. Bowers can be understood to mean that he has ended his beliefs, if ever held, in the religion of the Christians, but why does he retain his beliefs in the immoral "morals" of that discredited creed? He claims that "It has always been the aim of enlightened people to move forward to a higher standard of morals . . ." Is there any proof that the Christian standard is a higher one, or that it has ever sought improvement?

G. WHIT LIBBY.

(To be concluded)

SCIENTIFIC CONUNDRUMS

THIS modern age is a veritable paradise of obscurantist sophistry. Never before were there so many publications, such difference of opinion on such a diversity of matters. It is an age of specialists and "experts," and so vast is the accumulation of knowledge and of information that the difficulty is to keep abreast of the times or to make a comprehensive survey. It is also an age of journalese and publicity; anyone with access to information, or to a place like the British Museum library, can read up a subject and produce a book. And it is also an age of dialectic, with knowledge of the various modes of argument, with much explanation but little understanding, and argument considered as sufficient excuse. But logic refers to anything and it concerns everyone.

We cannot all be scientific "experts," but there is a saying the onlooker sees most of the game. The old game of posing riddles and conundrums in argument is easy but logically purblind. Of all forms of argument the reductio ad absurdum is perhaps the oldest, certainly the best known and most used. It consists in carrying an idea to what is called its "logical conclusions," really, of exaggerating out of all proportion so as to show absurdity. It is legitimate and useful. But to carry any idea to extremes is to reach the point of absurdity. As in the entropy argument, it is used in science and many examples may be given. But the scientist makes himself absurd if he accepts the absurdity of his own reductio ad absurdum, for unless it is absurd there is no point in the argument.

For instance, in electro-dynamics Rutherford found that there is change in mass with change in speed, and, carrying the idea to its "logical conclusions" deduced that, at the speed of light the whole mass is electrical. This was taken to imply the disappearance of "matter" and led to Oliver Lodge's nonsensical assertion that potential energy is a function of space; and that, after Clerk Maxwell had shown that it makes no difference what occupies space, the results follow from the method of calculation. The notion of force, based on the analogy of the feeling of effort, is no longer a matter of space, but also of time; no longer a physical entity, but a matter of sense or sensation. We have reached psychology and the inexplicable Ding an Sich.

Another example arises from Einstein's theory of relativity and the apparently mystical notion of "curved space," that is, space-time continuum, and the idea that

the universe is bounded yet infinite. Using Einstein's formula, mathematicians have carried the theory to its "logical conclusions" and made the deduction that the universe is expanding. But this has not been done to show the absurdity of Einstein's relativity. There is method in their madness for with Einstein's proposition that plus equals minus and minus equals plus, the results indicate that there is a discrepancy somewhere. It is an application of the principles of logic and this is a scientific reductio ad absurdum used as a method of checking up.

The entropy case is by no means the only scientific reductio ad absurdum, but perhaps others are too technical or too abstruse for lay consideration. It may be that it fits in more easily with the old argument that the world must have had a beginning; with the old questions, where did the world come from, and who made the universe? But the idea that God is a mathematician is ludicrous; both a scientific and a religious absurdity; yet of logical use to theologians whose case arises, not from a statement of entropy, but from the other proposition in their syllogism. Entropy is shown by Rutherford to be nonsense and the logic here is that the "running down" of the second law of thermodynamics needs another proposition to make an intelligible syllogism.

This "running down" absurdity was, for years, an accepted axiom, and the condensing and contracting was taken to be the "beginning" of evolution in the nebula hypothesis; the building-up process in the solar system developing the earth, which produced living forms, leading up to man. But evolution is no longer a matter of dispute. It replaces Creation as God's Plan. It is the glorious and meritorious achievement of the Divine Purpose that has ultimately produced us. Being now outside the field of controversy, it no longer overshadows the entropy case. But though entropy and evolution may be contrary, they are complementary and not contradictory. As with energy and inertia, they operate together, at the same time in compensation.

The old absurdity of a condensing and contracting universe that was doomed to run cold and dead is now counterbalanced by one that is expanding and bursting with radiant energy. The contrasting of absurdities is another scientific conundrum which shows up absurdity, as in the conundrum of indeterminacy; with the apparent contradiction of the corpuscular and wave-form theories. But contraries are not necessarily contradictory and there is nothing strange in the fact that we need different instruments, methods or theories for different purposes. The recognition of, and classification of, diversity, is a characteristic of science; shown in the fact that we need different branches of science to deal with the different subject matter of the different aspects of experience.

Indeed, the increasing number and variety of branches of science may be given as a reductio ad absurdum in fact, which shows the absurdity of the idea of unity, of the idea of a universe, with the paradox of unity in diversity. Diversity is factual; unity is mythical, the problem is complex. Perplexed in complexity, we smile at childhood's simplicity. To inexperience a simple question needs a simple explanation but involves complication. We unify for simplicity, but this need finds different expression in the different attempts at solution of the problem of experience. Religion finds satisfaction in myth. Philosophy gives speculative analogy as co-ordinating theory. While science seeks greater precision in descriptive formula and comprehensive generalisation.

This need for unity appears as a personal craving in the mystic search for "wholeness" in the "oneness" of the self, maybe also in that of God. But in this dialectic paradox, order or chaos is the measure of understanding. The different interpretations of experience involves mystical confusion of, and the difference between explanation and understanding. One might give explanation but not understanding. One can accept explanation in faith or belief but can only understand in personal recognition of absurdity in contrast to fact. To answer a reductio ad absurdum is to show the absurdity. These conundrums point absurdity, and to find the answer to a conundrum is to smile at the absurdity.

H. H. PREECE.

OSIRIS WAS NOT A SUN GOD

THIS blunt statement may embarrass many readers who, with my friend Mr. Cutner (see page 176) share the common belief that Osiris was a Sun God whom his worshippers treated as Moon God. The confusion cannot be laid at the doors of the Egyptian worshippers.

Gods are the content of human ideas; yet our ideas and notions are in a continuous state of flux (even the meaning of words change). Any statement as to how a god was imagined and worshipped is merely a half-truth unless this statement is completed by mentioning the exact period in which those notions were valid. Christus, the saviour of the Roman slaves, is different from the capitalist Jesus. Present-day Buddhism has not more in common with the religion of King Azhoka than has the Kremlin rule with Marxism. The Gathic Ahura Mazda is a material agency, whilst its Pahlavi counterpart of the Bundahish is a spiritual principle.

The assertion that Osiris was a Sun God (though rather widespread) is even less than a half-truth. The British Museum's Introductory Guide to the Egyptian Collection states (p.194):—

ASARI, *Osiris . . . originally a god of agriculture of Syrian (?) origin; later, by confusion with Khentia-menti of Abydos, the king of the Other World and judge of the Dead.

For further reference I refer to G. A. Wainwright: *The Sky-Religion in Egypt and its Antiquity and Effects* (Cambridge, 1938).

There is no reference to Osiris until the late 5th dynasty (c. 2750 B.C.) when he, as a companion of Anubis, was a guide of the dead. About 2600 B.C. he appears in Abydos (his place of pilgrimage) superimposed on the ancient deity of Khenti-amenti, but only as late as the 12th dynasty (c. 2200 B.C.) was he recognised as the national god of the dead. There was an ancient Rain God, Set—probably imported by Semites—but in Egypt rain is of no importance; Set became the representant of the hostile Desert Sun, the outlandish red devil, whilst Osiris impersonated the life-giving inundation of the Nile (nahal=river). The center of his cult shifted to Busiris (dedu), where a phallic stele was annually erected in his honour, in connection with ceremonial hoeing and the sacrificing of goats.

It is quite correct to say that the sun rays were considered to be phalli that pierced Mother Earth and rendered her fertile; yet, the primitives held sun and light apart (Gen. I, 3-5); it is apparent that the moon carries light, but it is not with the sun. Long before sunrise (or if the sun is hidden behind clouds) it is day, therefore light seems to have no connection with the sun (Gen. I, 14-19).

We are rather apt to forget that the inhabitants of the hot zones do not look at the sun in the same way as we do; for them, the sun is not their greatest friend, but the fiercest foe, destroyer of all life; he is the powerful Molokh, prototype of the Red Prince of Hellfire. Their Saviour-God is the one who opens the sluices of Heaven for the "waters above" to refresh and invigorate terrestrial life.

The outstanding characteristic of Egypt is its utterly dry climate (favourable for conservation); only the Nile valley is highly fertile owing to inundation. Osiris as the representant of the Nile floods is the supreme life-giver, he is depicted green (the colour of the inundation mud). In Egypt, therefore, fertility has no connection with Heaven, but with the "Underworld," from whence the Nile was supposed to originate. Even the sun in its daily course sinks into the Underworld and takes part in the general resurrection from the realm of dead. Yet the master of the Sun Barge is Hor (Horus), a far more ancient deity than Osiris who, in the latter system, was considered to be the former's father.

In short, Osiris was never a Sun God nor a Moon God; it was only during that period when he became the favourite "all-out" God of the whole of Egypt that he borrowed solar and lunar traits from other deities; yet when Amun, the ram-god of Thebes and "king of the gods," took his place the same characteristics were bestowed upon him; he became Amon-Ra, though his name denotes rain, and was frequently connected with Amenti=West (and, therefore, the abode of the dead).

The connection between Osiris and the Moon was limited to the influence the latter was supposed to exercise upon the Nile and the Other World as a realm of Darkness. The inter-relations between Sun and Moon shall be dealt with in another article.

PERCY G. ROY.

THE POPE AND THE PROD

WHAT I like about you, Jack, said my old friend, Alec McConkey, is that you never cramp my style. It has been said that my stories are sometimes far-fetched, and I have even been called a liar, but that doesn't disturb me. For, having been reared on the Bible inconsistencies, contradictions and absurdities quite natural to me. I object to modern criticism that spoils a good yarn.

I don't think I ever told you about Portadown and his job at the Vatican? Well, as you know, there are few Catholics in that Ulster town, and the Protestants are very bitter. Now, Billy was a true Orangeman, but he was also a proper scrounger. About the hardest job of his life was drawing Insurance and Health benefits. The officials were tired of him at the Labour Exchange. Time after time he had been sent to jobs, but he never retained them long. The manager's patience was exhausted, and at length he threatened that he would be permanently cut off from all relief. "There's only one more job I can send you to," he said to Billy, "and that's to the Vatican in Rome."

"But what in the name of God could I do in Rome?" asked the bewildered Billy. "I'm a Prod, and I can't speak Italian."

"His holiness is not bigoted," said the manager sternly, "and he understands English. It's really a well-paid and easy job, and, anyway, it's your last chance."

He outlined the details. Papers and passports to Rome would be made ready for him, and all expenses paid. Somewhat reluctantly, Billy agreed, and eventually reported at the Vatican. The Cardinal who received him was very gracious and made Billy quite at home; in fact, the Portadown man began to think the Catholics weren't a bad crowd after all. It seemed to be a very cushy job. He had a lovely suite of rooms with rich carpets on the floor, radio and television, and the best of grub—all Italian, you know, macaroni, ice, cream, and fish and chips. All he had to do was to waken the Pope in the morning. The rest of the day was his own. He was thoroughly instructed in the ritual. It appears that eight o'clock is the time His Holiness desires to be wakened at. The procedure was that Billy had to walk along the corridors until he came to the sacred bedroom. He was warned that His Holiness was somewhat irascible, and might protest about being awakened, but, of course, he must not be argued with. So long as Billy made sure that he was wakened that was all that was required.

The first morning of duty arrived. Exactly at eight, obeying his instructions, the Irishman knocked three times at the bedroom door, saying solemnly, "In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." A voice answered, incoherently.

"Good morning, your Holiness," recited Billy. "it's eight o'clock, and it's a lovely day. Your bath is prepared."

An answer, now quite distinct, came through, "You foolish man, you surely do not know who I am. I am the Holy Father, I am infallible, and I know that it's eight o'clock, and a lovely morning, and that my bath awaits me. Go away you foolish man."

Billy went away—just a little bit annoyed, but, after all, that was his day's work done.

The next morning there was the same performance. Billy gave three knocks, intoned Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the rest of the rigmarole. Again the same angry protests from the wakened sleeper: "Don't you realise that I am the Pope and that I know everything? I know that it's eight o'clock, that it's a lovely morning, that my bath is ready, so go away you stupid man."

Billy went away. After all, what did it matter how carnaptious the old lad was, the job was a soft one. All the same, his Protestant pride resented being called stupid by a Papist.

Came the third morning. Billy went to the door, and gave the three knocks in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He was just beginning "Your Holiness," when he was interrupted by the voice from within.

"Look here, my good man, haven't I told you that I am infallible and know everything. I know what you are going to say. I know that it's eight o'clock, and that it's a lovely morning, and that my bath . . ."

But now it was Billy's turn to assert himself, to make a stand for Protestantism and Portadown.

"Oh yes," he roared, "you're the Pope all right and you know everything. You're infallible. You know it's eight o'clock, and a lovely morning, and your bath's ready. Sez you. But you know damn all about anything. For it's half-past eleven, it's raining cats and dogs and I've just had your bath. And let me just tell you, you may be infallible to them poor Romans, but you're a heluva bad name in Portadown."

J. EFFEL.

FREETHOUGHT DICTIONARY

FEAR. An inherited instinct which comes into play with any sense of impending danger to the individual. Primarily, a dread of the unknown. Petronius' dictum that "Fear first created the Gods" is a statement of incontrovertible fact. All gods originated from primitive man's fear of malignant spirits of nature.

If his plowing and sowing were blessed by gentle rains and a warm sun it was natural to be complacent and congratulate himself on his handiwork, but if the gentle rains turned into storms which washed away the crop or if the warm sun got so hot as to wilt the crop, the obvious reason for such a calamity was some malignant force in nature. From such a conception to the belief that it was needful to propitiate such a force is a simple and logical step and, assuming that the malignant force had "eaten the crop" because it was hungry, what better prevention could there be than a sacrifice of some food on hand from the previous crop?

From this to human sacrifice is a step which hardly needs elucidation.

As far as the present-day Christian is concerned this primitive emotion is still his greatest bugbear. Fear of death; fear of a last judgment; fear of hell. He is told that he has an immortal soul, a statement which his natural ego makes him assimilate avidly, and his main concern in life is to save ". . . this puff of vapour from his mouth, Man's soul," as Browning called it, to save it at any cost from annihilation. Also to save it in the body as long as possible. He knows, he is absolutely certain, that the future existence is better than the earthly one, but this old fear still prompts him to put off a visit to Heaven until all the doctors and surgeons at his command have given up hope of saving so worthless a life.

F. W. RENNIE.

CRUSTACEAN ADVANTAGE

It would be nice
To live as wood-lice,
Under a rock or stone;
Never to hear the moan
Of godly folk who think it "sin"
Should they drink gin,
Forfeiting Kingdom-Come
For Demon Rum.
It would be nice,
Like the wood-lice,
Not to hear that "teacher",
The Radio-Preacher;
Nor read of atom bomb
And hydrogenic doom;
Nice when the foolish chatterers appal
To roll up in a ball
And just ignore them all.

B. S.

Fr. L. McReavy is a very sad man. He has just discovered that many Catholics spend far more money on football pools than they do on the Catholic Social Guild. And in some quarters, matters are still worse, for, speaking recently in Sunderland, he pathetically admitted that "among some Catholics there is not only indifference to the call of Pope Leo XIII, but hostility." Perhaps the number XIII has had a deleterious effect on their Pools; or perhaps they find that the prize in Heaven promised by the Pope is not quite as evident as a prize received from the correct crosses on a football pool paper.

ACID DROPS

We so often hear of the great longing the heathen has for the Christian God that it is with something of a shock when the former Bishop of Darwin (Australia) admits publicly, that in his 50 years missionary work in the Northern Territory he did not make a single convert to Christianity. He even doubts whether it will be at all possible to convert the Aboriginal. "Self confession may be good for the soul," but to admit such a failure in other walks of life would, at least, mean the end of further pleas for finance, but where religion is concerned another set of values operate, and wholesale begging for the "heathen" will continue, even though the Australian Aboriginal prefers his own god to the White one.

We cull the following from an Australian newspaper which proves (if proof were necessary) that religious influence makes for idiocy the world over. A Methodist Church was burgled, and that despite the sign over the door of the Church, "Be sure your sins will find you out." The Missioner thereupon prayed long and earnestly, and then phoned the police who immediately answered, "we have caught your burglar." A real answer to prayer! Although the burglar was later charged at the Sydney Central Court with "sacrilege," it appears that all he stole was a "pressure cooker and a razor." The objects had, of course, acquired sanctity from their contact with a holy place. The burglar should have "pinched" a cooker from an ordinary house when the charge would not have been so serious.

Pausing for a moment to wipe his brow, the Rev. W. Booth, who is helping to build his own church at Shipton, said, "this is what I call Christian work," and shovelling sand and cement is "practical Christianity." So just to add to the confusion by another definition of Christianity we now have bricklaying. As if there were not enough definitions of Christianity already.

Once again the pantomime of the "Boy Bishop" was played at Norton Parish Church, Sheffield, when the 14 year-old Keith Bently, clad in pale blue and gold surplice preached the sermon. And what a sermon! How his friends must hate the little prig. He advocated that "naughty children should be punished. Spare the rod, spoil the child." It would do good," he said, "if mothers would spank their children," and so on. We can only hope that when Keith reaches the age of discretion he will never be able to think of this occasion without embarrassment—and contempt for the parsons who have used him thus for their own ends.

The secular world moves, and slowly, very slowly, the religious world follows, for at last we have a prominent churchman who has reached the same conclusion that freethinkers reached hundreds of years ago. Canon T. P. Stevens has publicly stated that he finds parts of the Old Testament obscene and embarrassing, particularly when as a young man, his sisters read to him the stories of Noah's binge, David's nudism, and Moses's fiddling, as well as the stories of rape, murder and lies. The difficulty that faces the worthy Canon is, of course, that he cannot reject part of the Bible whilst retaining another. For if the Bible is inspired, then it is inspired wholly. The New Testament, which the Canon thinks is wonderful, cannot be separated from the Old. And to think sceptics were burnt for saying far less than the Canon.

The Canon is not yet ready for membership of the National Secular Society; he thinks that men like "Shaw, Bennett and Wells turned against the Church because of wrongful teaching." He does not seem to realise that a religion founded on such a Book is enough to turn any intelligent man against it, and it is a little late in the day to talk of "wrongful teaching" after the centuries of Christianity.

The "Eastbourne Gazette" reports the Rev. E. G. Rudman, of Holland Road Church, Hove, as saying: "There has never been any care, outside the Christian faith, for men and women. The Atheist has never even built a dogs' home." It reported correctly, the Rev. Rudman is just lying on behalf of his God and his religion. There never has been less care for the truth than inside the Christian faith.

Once again the Lord's little ways have proved mysterious. In the recent floods disaster at Winnipeg and the surrounding country, five churches, five presbyteries, four convents, and probably many other religious buildings were completely submerged. So far, 50 Catholic buildings have been either damaged or completely destroyed. Prayers appear to have been quite unavailing. And to cap matters four nuns died in a fire at Hull, Quebec.

All this in Canada. But God had not finished with his faithful, for in Peru an earthquake destroyed the tower of a 300-year-old church, splintered the walls of a cathedral and damaged most of the nearby churches. The others are in danger of collapsing. Why has the Lord been so ferocious with his sheep? It is an easy question to ask but we venture to say that not the most fervent convert to Catholicism could supply the answer, let alone those born to the Faith. Could it be said that the failure of the Lord in Winnipeg was due to the attack of the Red River?

The "unity" problem is still being discussed in the *Church Times*. One prominent Anglo-Catholic, Dr. C. B. Moss, insisted that the Church of England wanted scriptural authority for dogmas—not, as in the Church of Rome, what the "Church" says. This has been countered by "Friendly Orthodox" who also insists that the real question is not "should dogmas be capable of scriptural truth," but "who or what is the proper authority for declaring that a particular dogma is 'proved' and what constitutes the nature of proof?" Speaking of one completely outside these discussions, we can only say that "who is the authority?" has been the cause of almost all the disputes in Christianity in history. And only a miracle from God or Jesus can answer that one.

About 2,000 people prayed in a village church near Salerno (Italy) with the local Communist leader. Members of the congregation said they had seen the Communist's arm break as he raised it aloft to yell an anti-religious slogan. He had "insisted on leaving hospital to beg the priest's forgiveness and to make peace with God." With God all things are possible, even accommodating 2,000 people in a "village" church. What a wonderful stunt to stage in Westminster Cathedral, if only a leading Communist could be persuaded to break his arm. What a crowd would throng the Cathedral to hear him ask God's forgiveness.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. DRAPER; J. P. TUCK.—Many thanks for cuttings.

G.M.—One of the best Freethought sellers is still Paine's *Age of Reason*. But may we be permitted to point out that our *Bible Handbook* has sold steadily for nearly 60 years and is also still selling?

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.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of the Annual Conference

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society held in The Grand Hotel, Sheffield, had a good send off on Whit Saturday, with an enjoyable reception of delegates and friends.

The President of the local Branch, Mr. J. Rawson, in a few well chosen words, welcomed all present, after which the evening was given over to introductions, a capital musical programme, light refreshments and conversation.

At the business sessions on Sunday, the following Branch delegates assembled:—

Blackpool, A. C. Rosetti; Bradford, H. Rowntree; Bolton, Peter Foster; Birmingham, F. Terry; Chester-le-Street, Mrs. M. A. Brighton; Chorley, W. Healey; Glasgow, Mrs. M. Whitefield, Edith Kirkwood; Halifax, Mrs. F. Edwards, N. F. Berry, Councillor H. Woodhead; Kingston, J. W. Barker, H. S. Michael, A. E. Whitaker; Lewisham, E. W. Shaw; Manchester, Mrs. McCall, C. T. Smith; Merseyside, W. C. Parry, C. Coleman; Newcastle, J. T. Brighton; North London, Ebury, Mrs. E. Ebury, W. Fraser; Nottingham, Mrs. M. Beesley, T. M. Mosley, A. Elsmere; South London, J. Seibert; Sheffield, J. Rawson, H. Trumwell, A. Samms; West Ham, P. Turner; West London, C. H. Cleaver. There was also a good attendance of private members.

The proceedings opened by the Acting President reading a message of fraternal greetings from Mr. Chapman Cohen. At the suggestion of Mr. W. Collins, a goodwill message to be sent to Mr. Cohen was heartily taken up.

To allow more time for dealing with other items on the Agenda the minutes of the last Conference were taken as read.

The Executive's Annual Report was read by Mr. R. H. Rosetti, and was adopted by the Conference after some suggestions and questions had been put (the report will

be printed and circulated among Branches and members in due course). The Annual Balance Sheet, covering the past year, was also adopted after a few questions had been asked and answered.

For the election of President, Mr. L. Ebury, a Vice-President, occupied the chair. He spoke of the traditions and responsibilities of the office and said the confidence of the Executive, including himself, was behind the nomination of Mr. R. H. Rosetti. Mr. J. T. Brighton (Newcastle) moved the resolution and paid a tribute to Mr. R. H. Rosetti, Mr. P. Turner (West Ham) seconded the resolution on instructions from his Branch and a number of others spoke in support. On the other side Mr. G. H. Taylor read out a number of reasons why Mr. Rosetti should not be elected. The motion was put and Mr. R. H. Rosetti was elected by a large majority. Messrs. J. T. Brighton and L. Ebury were re-elected as Vice-Presidents of the N.S.S.

There was no opposition to the motion to elect Mr. J. Seibert to the post of Secretary of the N.S.S., which was duly carried. Mr. W. Griffiths was again re-elected as Treasurer to the Society and Mr. H. L. Theobald was re-appointed as Accountant.

The following Executive was elected:—

N.E. Group.—Mr. A. C. Rosetti and Mr. F. A. Ridley.

Midland Group.—Mrs. C. G. Quinton.

Yorkshire Group.—Mr. P. V. Morris.

N.W. Group.—Mr. J. V. Shortt.

South London Group.—Mr. R. Johnson.

North London Group.—Mr. L. Ebury.

East London Group.—Mrs. E. Venton.

West London Group.—Mr. R. J. Woodley.

A motion to encourage Branches to organise open-air meetings by subsidising each lecture by 5s. out of Society funds, was moved by the Executive and carried by the Conference.

A protest from Glasgow that the name of a "certain speaker" was omitted from the Lecture Notice column in "The Freethinker," was a matter for the editor and was remitted to him.

North London demanded the abolition of the Sabbatarian Laws and so giving freedom for all forms of entertainments permissible on other days.

Kingston Branch drew attention to the methods of the Roman Catholic Church for increasing its power by definite political action and advised progressive organisations to discourage attempts to use the machinery of their organisations for Roman Catholic Church purposes.

A resolution from Manchester called for further pressure on the B.B.C. to give time for definite Freethought discussions over the radio, was accepted and passed.

The Executive stressed the necessity for an increased activity all over the country in support of Secular Education, to combat the campaign of the Roman Catholic Church for a bigger allocation of public money for their schools.

The appointment by the Government of a Minister for Peace, for the purpose of a more determined effort for international co-operation to secure peace, was the point in another motion in the names of North London and Kingston Branches, which was duly carried.

The Conference also passed resolutions against the re-introduction of corporal punishment, and to join in the efforts to abolish capital punishment, and to add "and the abolition of blood sports" to the paragraph on cruelty to animals in the Society's Immediate Practical Objects.

A resolution that drew plenty of discussion was one from Manchester calling for the travelling expenses of Executive members attending Executive meetings to be a charge on the funds of the Society. It was pointed

out that the cost might well be over £1,000 a year, and as no present member of the Executive received a penny for expenses there was no point in incurring such an outlay. The motion calling for the payment of expenses was defeated.

The resolution from Glasgow for the immediate appointment of an organiser was also defeated on the same ground that the cost would be too heavy a drain on the Society's resources, and the uncertainty of applying the tasks of an organiser to the conditions of our propaganda.

That brought the business sessions to a close. The whole proceedings had been in the very best tradition of Freethought principles. Well-informed discussion, calmly stated points of opposition, and a ready grasp of the business before the meeting.

The President paid a tribute to the excellent arrangements made by the Sheffield Branch, and the care and attention of Mr. A. Samms, the Secretary, for the comfort and easy running of the Conference.

At the evening public demonstration in the City Memorial Hall a team of speakers consisting of Messrs. J. T. Brighton, J. Clayton, H. Day, L. Ebury, T. M. Mosley and F. A. Ridley put various aspects of Freethought in clear, crisp and pointed terms to an interested audience. Mr. R. H. Rosetti was in the chair.

On Monday a coach ride through beautiful Derbyshire scenery to the Derwent Valley Reservoirs brought the proceedings to a close and there seemed to be a general feeling that the 1950 Conference had got to what a conference of Freethinkers should be, and the credit is due to everybody who took part in the proceedings.

R. H. ROSETTI.

THOUGHTS ON RELIGION

X.

If a man were not deceived by religions promising rewards and heavens, he might, if he were a philosopher, quite rightly and naturally turn his attention to the present life and try to discover what conduces to the least pain and misfortune. Without the disenchantment which follows the discovery that there is probably no life after this one and certainly no heaven, he would not be very miserable about the loss of heaven; in other words, he would not grieve about something of which he had never heard and would not judge with the judgment of disappointment the natural life. There is no unhappy grieving in Greek and Roman literatures about a myth like the Christian conception of eternal life; and the Greeks and Romans seemed disposed to live the natural life and there find whatever could be found in existence while the Stoics among them tried to learn how to endure life to its end.

Regarding a life after this life, it may be said that, as far as experience and reason enlighten us, we shall not live but this one life. Beyond that, nothing is known of the subject.

No one after extended reflection, until he understood the matter, would desire the immortality promised by religions.

If this world is vain, the worlds to come, which do not exist, are even vainer, if that is possible; for they are in the relation of nothing to something. Those who are completely ingenuous about their conceptions of a future life will admit if necessary that they are not sure that there will be none; but, trusting to experience and reason, they see that their disbelief in a future life is well founded; and, even if they are wrong, the loss is small; for their

error is merely an intellectual error which the appearances of the world cause them to believe.

Pascal wrote in his *Pensées*, Section II, 110, of the falsity of pleasures: "The sentiment of the fallacy of present pleasures and the ignorance of the vanity of absent pleasures cause inconstancy." Granted that the pleasures of life are somewhat illusory, it would be better to write of the falsity of religions which spoil the spirit of man.

In the *Pensées* of Pascal you find reflections which are the same as what the negative critics of religion have thought regarding the mysteries of the Bible. In Section VIII, 564, is the following remark: "The prophecies, even the miracles and the proofs of our religion are not of such a nature that it can be said that they are absolutely convincing. But they are also such that one cannot but say that it is not without reason to believe them."

In Section XII, 743, he wrote these two questions which he did not answer and which are, it must be confessed, rather strange questions for a Catholic believer. "Proofs of Jesus Christ. Why has the book of Ruth been preserved? What about the history of Thamar?" In 755 of the same Section he wrote: "The apparent discordance of the Gospels." He did not explain this lack of agreement between the four canonical gospels, which has provided ground for one of the principal arguments of the philosophers and the freethinkers against the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Pensée 802 is this observation:—

"The Apostles were deceived or were deceivers; either is difficult because it is not possible to say a man has been resuscitated . . .

"While Jesus Christ was with them, he could sustain them; but afterwards, if he had not appeared to them, who was it that made them act as they did?"

Even if Pascal's faith is not questioned, such remarks show that he had in his mind a few doubts about Christianity, which were either his own or those of others.

There is among the Christians a traditional conception of a wicked world of men which has probably been derived from the writings of the New Testament and perhaps from the teachings of Christ and which seems to be peculiar to Christianity and not found to any extent in other religions. In his *Penseiri*, LXXXIV, Leopardi wrote that Christ was the first to reveal to men this conception of the world. It is a conception appropriate to an ascetic view of the world; and the founders of Christianity were no doubt influenced in their ideas by the beliefs then prevalent in the world, such as those of the Essenes who formed a religious brotherhood that existed in Palestine, from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. The use of the word denoting *world* to mean the human inhabitants of the world, has been common in many languages and existed in Greek and Latin, two of the chief languages of Christianity, before the development of Christianity; and it was accordingly no trouble for the early Christian writers to develop this conception contained in *kosmos* and *mundus*, a pessimistic conception of the world as the enemy of truth and goodness. From this have come the Christian conceptions of the worldly and of worldliness. The Christian conception of the world is an inaccurate conception of humanity and human affairs and, as a consequence arising from and productive of seclusiveness and intellectual narrowness, is characteristic of the spirit of Christianity which is seclusive. We have here another example of the ordinary mode of operation of minds of limited intelligence; according to the small mind things are either good or bad, true or false, black or white; and there are no intermediate degrees of quality because

small mind does not see such degrees. According to Christianity, either a man is one of the elect or he is an infidel; either he is saved or he is damned. Christ said in Matthew, XII, 30: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Similar antitheses characteristic of primitive and narrow minds are found throughout the Christian Bible.

Christ's fundamental idea of the world was that its works were evil, that it was lost and dying in sin, and that the devil was its prince; at least, according to Christian exegesis he inferred in John, XII, 31, that the devil was the prince of the world. Christ believed that the world hated him, as is shown by the two following contradictory passages in the Gospel of John:—

"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."—VII, 7.

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, therefore I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."—XV, 18, 19.

This indicates that Christ thought that the whole world hated him and his disciples. The fact is that, if he ever lived, some men but not all men may have hated him and his followers. It is easy to see how Christians of succeeding centuries in reading such texts and believing themselves to be meant by them, have developed the conception of a world antagonistic to Christianity and therefore to truth and goodness. It is curious to note in passing that in the first chapter of the Gospel of John we are told that Christ, the Word, made the world; then we are told in the same book by Christ himself, that the world hated him. Did men hate him because he made them? How could they hate their creator in the best of all possible worlds?

The distinction between a few who are pure and saved and a world of many who are entirely wicked and damned is mythical. Those Christians who abandon the world by living in a convent or a monastery, abandon human society; but they cannot escape themselves or the world within themselves. The Christian conception of the world rightly belongs to obscure ages and to obscure minds.

WILLIAM RITTENOUR (U.S.A.).

STILL GRINNING

LET me begin by saying that since Tommy Handley has left us there would appear to be a vacancy in the Mayoral Chair of the little borough Foaming-at-the-Mouth, and that in the issue of *The Freethinker* for May 21 there appeared a suitable candidate for this Worshipful position. But I must not continue in this vein if I wish to avoid a charge by Mr. Vernon Carter (on whom be peace!) of misplaced facetiousness. In these days facetiousness is a word on the downgrade, but among the things it still, or formerly, stood for, are gaiety, sprightliness, and cheerful good humour; not bad qualities, I think, to take with one into an argle-bargle.

I hope Mr. Carter will not think me discourteous if I decline to be drawn now into an argle-bargle with him on Mind and Brain Activity. I have already written that I consider an argle-bargle is generally unprofitable, though I am always ready on suitable occasion to set forth my viewpoint on important matters. So let me say, without more ado, that I await with interest Mr. Vernon Carter's

two promised articles: (1) "On mind being brain-activity," and (2) "On cause-effect relationship." When I have digested these I may have something to say on the lines of my article, "As I see it." But meantime it is up to me to answer Mr. Vernon Carter's direct questions to me, and, by giving a definition or two, to clear up, if possible, any misunderstanding.

I take first Mr. Carter's questions in the order in which he asks them: Question, "What precisely has your (i.e., Mr. Simmons's) annoyance to do with the validity of my (Mr. Carter's) arguments?" Answer, "Precisely, nothing." Question, "Will he indicate by what criterion he judges the truth of a proposition?" Answer, "My sole criterion is *probability*. An event is true for me if I judge that it will probably happen. That an event may *possibly* happen is not true for me." That is my concise answer, but perhaps I may expand a little. There is a world of difference between the possibility that I shall die rich, and the probability of my so doing. I am thinking now that probably Mr. Carter will find my answer inadequate, but I have always felt that our, as it were, home-made criteria, formulated by ourselves, are, for the ascertaining of whatever we can know of truth, superior instruments to other people's thoughts "got out of a book" of logic or philosophy.

Mr. Carter's final question I will leave for the moment, while I endeavour to define more clearly a couple of compound-words. Argle-bargle is a dialect word for "obstinate argument, a bandying of words, a wrangle." Murray's (the Oxford) Dictionary supports this by an appropriate quotation dated 1827. "Me and the minister were just argle-bargling some few words on the doctrine of the Camel and the Eye of the Needle."

"Chain reaction" is a very modern term, not to be found in Murray's. But it is in the admirable "Dictionary of Scientific Terms" of Rear-Admiral C. M. Beadnell, published by Watts & Co., in their "Thinker's Library." Chain reaction is defined as a "sequence of reflexes each of which, except the first, is set going by the preceding." The admiral gives two examples, one in the sphere of biology, the second in the sciences of chemistry or physics. Admiral Beadnell gives a simple example of an organic (living) chain reaction, or chain of events, which I give here in my own words. A frog sees a fly—the frog opens its mouth—its tongue is protruded—the tongue curls round the fly—the tongue is withdrawn—the frog closes its mouth—the tongue is unrolled—the fly is swallowed. The second example is of energy—a quantum of light—activating atoms of H (Hydrogen) and Cl (Chlorine) to cause the atoms to combine as HCl (Hydrochloric Acid), which starts a sequence called a chain reaction in which HCl (a strong acid) acts on other elements.

Now, Mr. Carter thinks I confuse the meaning of "chain reaction" and that the reaction in atomic fission is different to a purely psychological response in Mr. Carter's mind. He believes, he says, that a distinction can be made between "reaction" and "response." Maybe: I should be interested, indeed, to read Mr. Carter on this distinction, but he does not favour us with it. Perhaps that will make the subject of a third article. To me it seems a "distinction without a difference," in fact, a metaphysical exercise. But if Mr. Carter prefers to call his chain reaction to my last article a response and not a reaction, who am I to dictate what words he should use. It won't alter the fact that he was "responding" with all the energy of a reflex action. I rather thought my stimulus might have that effect: it did—and how!

I now return to the final question. Mr. Vernon Carter says he would ask "Whether the grin he (Mr. Simmons) would indulge in would be vacuous?" Answer, "I don't know, chum, but I hope it indicates an unruffled and cheerful good humour."

BAYARD SIMMONS.

PERSECUTION BY PROTESTANTS

DESPITE the advantages attending the invention of printing (1438) and the Revival of Learning, 14th and 15th centuries, the Reformers in every country where they obtained power preached and practised the most cruel intolerance. Luther held that the Anabaptists ought to be burned, declared all measures lawful against Roman Catholics, and invoked the civil power against the Reformers Carlstadt and Zwingli. In Saxony blasphemy was punished with death, and heresy with banishment. Calvin burnt Servetus for denying the Trinity, and wrote in defence of persecution: *A Faithful Account of the Errors of Michael Servetus in which it is Proved that Heretics ought to be Restrained with the Sword*. Bucer and the "gentle" Melancthon congratulated him on his action and also wrote to the same effect. Gibbon, the historian, was deeply scandalised at Servetus's fate (1553) at the hands of Calvin, regarded to be "the greatest of the Protestant divines" and, by Renan, as "the most Christian man of his time." He thus has, as religious persecutor, a bond of union with "the most Christian" Isabella and Ferdinand, Charles V, and Philip II of R.C. Spain. In England the history of the penal laws of Henry VIII, "Defender of the Faith," Elizabeth, Edward VI, James I, Charles I, Cromwell, Charles II, is a history of fines, imprisonment, banishment, torture and death against Roman Catholics. Elizabeth's "Court of High Commission" is called "a Protestant Inquisition." The Parliament of James I urged persecution as "necessary to advance the glory of God."

The English treatment of Ireland, 1691 to 1798, remains a very dark blot on the English name for its frenzied cruelty. John Wesley, 1780, wrote: "They (Roman Catholics) are not to be tolerated by any government, Protestant, Mohammedan, or pagan." In Scotland, John Knox, who had been a priest, "one of Baal's shaven sort," as he said, approved and applauded, with a gleeful and mocking levity, the murder of Cardinal Beaton; and proclaimed the extermination of idolaters the clear duty of Christian princes and magistrates and, failing them, of all individual believers. Every Christian man (Protestant) had a right to slaughter every idolater (Roman Catholic)—Knox producing Scriptural texts to back up his opinions. The Scottish Parliament, 1560, decreed death to all Roman Catholics.

In the English period about 1598 Sir James Stephen reckons 800 executions a year (*History of English Criminal Law*, I, 467). English law denied to accused the use of witnesses and the use of advocate (ibid., p. 350). Boiling to death, half-hanging, disembowelling and quartering were common penalties under Henry VIII and Elizabeth. "The rack seldom stood idle in the Tower for all the latter part of Elizabeth's reign" (Hallam, *Constitutional History*, I, 200).

In France occurred the well-known Massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572, of the French Protestants, but few seem aware of the massacre by the Huguenots at Nimes on St. Michael's Day, 1567, and of other butcherings, burnings, torturings, sackings, and destruction of some 50 cathedrals and 500 churches,

against Roman Catholics. Similarly the Unitarian Robespierre and his associates, who declaimed against the cruelty of the Spanish Inquisition, directed the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution of 1798.

In the Netherlands the atrocities of Governor Diedrich Sonoy were equal to those of the execrated R.C. Duke of Alva, who received, for his cruelties, a consecrated hat and sword of honour from Pope Pius V. The treatment of Nanning Koppezoon, suspected of being a Roman Catholic, was one proof that the Reformers surpassed the Catholics in ingenuity to produce intense agony. (Motley, *Rise of Dutch Republic*, III, 29-31). Sonoy's Council sought to rival Alva's "Blood Council." The Reformers' proceedings "left an eternal stain on the Dutch name."

In Germany it was decreed: "Whosoever sins against faith shall be punished with death." Calvinists were intolerant of Lutherans. Luther in his coarse way declared reason to be "the arch-whore" and "the devil's bride" and "its activity is always evil and godless."

The verdicts of Rationalist historians on surveying the beliefs and actions of authoritative exponents of Christianity, old and new forms, are such as these:—

"Persecution among the early Protestants was a distinct and definite doctrine, digested into elaborate treatises, and enforced against the most inoffensive as against the most formidable sects. It was the doctrine of the palmiest days of Protestantism. It was taught by those who are justly esteemed the greatest of its leaders" (Lecky, *Rat. in Europe II*, 61).

Rousseau declared: "The Reformation was intolerant from its cradle, and its authors universal persecutors."

"Whoever has read the great Calvinist divines, and above all, whoever has studied their history must know that in the 16th and 17th centuries the desire of persecuting their enemies burned as hotly among them as it did among any of the Catholics, even in the worst days of Papal dominion" (Buckle, *Histry of Civ.*, I, c. 8 p. 505). "Whatever may be the popular notions respecting the necessary intolerance of the Catholics, it is an indisputable fact that early in the 17th century they displayed in France a spirit of forbearance and Christian charity to which the Protestants could make no pretence" (ibid., p. 518).

The Puritans in England persecuted the Quakers, and the Puritans in New England who claimed liberty of conscience, denied it to Quakers and hanged them, throwing their naked bodies into a common grave. So the record went on among various sects. The Churches have not the power and authority they had, and persecution takes milder forms. Judges and juries are the humble ministers of the law whether the law is good or bad: and in 1797 and in 1812 men were severely dealt with for the crime of selling Paine's *The Age of Reason*. The Blasphemy law is based upon Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale's contention, 1676—often quoted since by Lord Chief Justices and Judges—that "Christianity is parcel or part of the law of England." Hale's contention was in keeping with the statement of Queen Elizabeth's time that it was indictable for anyone to say that "the laws of the Queen are not in keeping with the laws of God." In 1883, Lord Chief Justice Coleridge said: "It is no longer true, in the sense in which these dicta were uttered, that Christianity is part of the law of the land." But cases for blasphemous libel followed that ruling, and bequests to Secular Societies or for secular purposes were declared illegal and void—a subject suitable for separate treatment.

Again, the world owes much of its civilisation and humane development to Freethinkers and freethought martyrs who have sought and brought sanity to sanctity.

GEORGE ROSS.

CORRESPONDENCE

A COSMOLOGICAL EPIC

SIR,—I have read with interest your magazine. I am sure it is a valuable weapon against the curse of ignorance because in it so much of the futile, facile and false in religious orthodoxy is exposed to a merciless criticism. It is these deep-rooted prejudices which hinder the individual from being able to think at all reasonably about human life and prevent him from even making a start on working out his possibilities in life. And it is this problem that besets us all, of making the most of our capacity for enjoyment and work, the solution of which is so important to our own satisfaction and to the needs of our fellow men.

It is with this thought in mind that I should like to draw your attention to a recently published book by a great but little known thinker, G. Gurdjieff, called "All and Everything." The first three books of this ten-volume work are entitled "An objectively impartial criticism of the life of Man." They are written in the form of a cosmological epic. Gurdjieff uses the character of Beelzebub—a being from another planet—to present his ideas on the nature of man, his limitations and his possibilities as seen from a more objective viewpoint.

Briefly he teaches that man has three purposes in the Universe. Firstly, a significance which he shares with every other thing. His body, bone structure, musculature and nervous system is a collection of minerals which decay and disintegrate on his death and return to their original form of planetary substance. In the second place he has a part to play in what Gurdjieff claims is a universal process, the transformation of food into higher forms of matter. It is by this transformation of food into the energy we use in our thoughts, feelings and sensations that something is introduced into the scheme of things which goes against the inevitable running down of things as substantiated by the physical idea of entropy. Man serves the same purpose as the higher forms of animal life in this respect and it is interesting to note that Gurdjieff sees man's use of his superior intellect to have been largely directed towards the improving of his existence as an animal.

The third aspect of man's existence is his possibility of self-creation. In addition to using his intellect for the more efficient attainment of his animal requirements, man can also think seriously about the nature of his experience and try and understand its general and specific significance, what his existence means in relation to the whole of known existence and what its value is to himself. And it is this capacity for sincere thinking that enriches a man's orientation to life and enables him to come to a point where he is able to set out on the achievement of what Gurdjieff conceives to be his greatest purpose, the creation of his own being.

A man can, for example, set himself an aim . . . the removal of false ideas and superstitious credulity in his own thinking and that of his fellow men if he is able to influence them. In order to achieve that aim he will have to make certain efforts. He will have to know at first hand the literature of the bodies of doctrine he is attempting to expose. In order to get this knowledge he will have to make prolonged efforts to understand what appears to him very dull material and he will have to drive himself on in order to realise his aim without paying too much regard to the other things in his life which stand in the way of his success. He may have to sacrifice a good many social comforts, friendship, popularity, maybe a successful career, and so on.

It is out of these purposive efforts and intentional sacrifices for the sake of a conceived aim, that, Gurdjieff teaches, a man can make for himself, if he has the opportunity to learn the technique, such an unmistakable attitude towards himself and his experience that he will be valued by those who can see even a little through the falsehoods and superstitions which befog our lives, as someone who is out of the ordinary run of mankind. All those who were able to meet Gurdjieff while he was alive (he died in Paris last October) felt convinced that he was such a person.—Yours, etc.,

PATRICK WILSON.

P.S.—Gurdjieff's book "All and Everything" is published by Routledge.

MARX AND MALTHUS

SIR,—I must thank Mr. Newell for agreeing with me about the way the term "Marxism" is bandied about, but I am not quite clear as to where telling us that Marx and Engels were anti-religious leads us. Does Mr. Newell mean that if he had told this personally to Marx, the redoubtable Karl would have immediately said that he was now a Marxist? If not, what does he mean?

As for Malthus, all I need say here is that I regard nearly everything said by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, and the *Socialist Standard* on Malthusianism as drivel.

As two or three readers have expressed a desire for articles on the Population problem, I hope to deal with it at some future time.—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

MARX AND DARWIN

SIR,—I did not attend Prof. Farrington's Conway Memorial Lecture, but he must have been mistaken if he gave the impression that Marx seemed to "care little or nothing at all for Darwin's magnificent work on the Evolution theory" (p. 189). In fact, Marx and Darwin tackled the problem of revolutionary changes from different angles, therefore I cannot see where a feeling of "jealousy" could have come in. Marx was mainly concerned with the economic aspect and left the rest to Engels, the co-founder of Scientific Socialism, who in the preface to his "Origin of the Family," speaking of Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*, states:—

"The repeated discovery that the original maternal "gens" was a preliminary stage of the paternal "gens" of civilised nations has the same significance for primeval history that Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology, and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy."

Morgan was concerned (as Marx and Engels were concerned) with tracing back the historical process whose *hither* end is historical European civilisation; Darwin undertook the same task in regard to animal life. In so doing, they supplied the evidence which proved the conclusion Marx and Engels had reached conjecturally from the analysis of "civil society" as something having grown and continuously still growing in a series of historical permutations and transformations. Here and there some special hypothesis of Morgan and Darwin has been shaken or even become obsolete; but "in no instance has the new material led to a weakening of his leading propositions," Engels goes on. The publication of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* and Darwin's *Origin of Species* simultaneously revolutionised the whole subject.

This is why a host of pettifogging Philistines has since been busy in "reforming" Marxism as well as Darwinism by disrupting their organic unity into an aggregation of separate and incidental "factors."—Yours, etc.,

PERCY G. ROY.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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