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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Can Ethics Supplant Religion?

HOW far can ethical teaching be made to supplant religion is a question often asked. The issue would seem to many remarkably well put, and it does doubtless raise a number of important questions in connection with the eternal conflict of reason and religion. Nevertheless, this way of putting the problem seems to me to be singularly inapt. The real way of raising the essential issue would be rather that of "How far does religious belief nowadays minister to what we are all agreed are the common needs of society?" Put in the manner first stated, it is a tacit admission of the social value of current religious beliefs, and is therefore a needless concession to religious pretensions. It is as though one were to say to the various Churches. "Come, you have done, and are doing, a very good and useful work; but, nevertheless, we imagine that we can do the same work in a much better, or a more expeditious, manner." So far, the question is distinctly objectionable. But, if we vary the form of the question, and ask: "Is there anything being done by a Church in the shape of ethical teaching, social instruction, or political counsel that could not be as well done by a purely secular organisation, or is there any good done by a minister of religion in any of these directions that he could not do as well in his capacity as an ordinary citizen?"—if we put the question in this way we have it fairly raised, and quite free from all ambiguities.

Now, even if the influence exerted by the Churches was due to a conviction that the doctrines taught were true, it might still be that the social good done by them has its source in matters that were not essentially connected with religion. All religions—the lower as well as the higher—are bound up with a number of purely secular elements, and it is not always easy to differentiate between the influence of the two factors. Many a man, said Ingersoll, thinks that he has got religion when he is simply suffering from indigestion; and many a one imputes to the influence of religion actions that have their origin in a wholly non-religious source.

But in such cases as the one under discussion a very little examination is enough to make plain the fact that the influence exerted by the Churches is due far more to the power of organisation than to the simple influence of religious conviction. We need not emphasize interested motives, which so often lead to a uniformity of conduct or profession in religious circles; it is sufficient to point out that every Church—every organisation, in fact—is a society in miniature, and that the mere presence of a social opinion is adequate to account for all the influence any Church may exert.

But organisation is not a religious characteristic; it is a social quality. Social pressure creates organisation, although it is utilised in the interest of religious doctrine. Religion does not, and cannot, create and preserve a

trustworthy social type, although the pressure of an organisation may ensure a certain air of uniformity. Those who have watched closely the "conversions" narrated by the Salvation Army and similar bodies must have observed that it was not the belief in Jesus that kept a rickety character straight for a time, but the constant presence of others, whose approval or disapproval formed the real sustaining and inspiring power. Withdraw from any Church this power, and its influence sinks to zero. Leave an individual to the unsupported influence of his religious beliefs, and we get an anti-social asceticism on the one side and an unstable, unsocial type on the other. In brief, the good usually attributed to a Church as the teacher of a set of doctrines is really due to the Church as a simple organisation; and one need not look very far afield to see that any organisation will produce a somewhat similar result. Trades unions, political clubs, sporting clubs, public schools, all have the effect of producing and enforcing a certain standard of conduct. It is the simple pressure of the herd upon its individual members.

True, it may still be argued that the disappearance of religious beliefs will be likely to vitally affect our view of life—affect it, that is, in the sense of lowering our standard or degrading our ideals; and on this point something further must be said.

This fear, which is boldly expressed by avowed religionists, and which is felt rather than uttered by many others, may be easily removed by one or two simple observations. The history of religion, like the history of all else in nature, is the history of an evolution. We no more hold the religious beliefs that our ancestors held than we wear the same kind of clothing or dwell in the same kind of houses. We retain the same expressions, make use of the same formulas; but our interpretation of them is vitally different. In a world of incessant change it is impossible for even religion to remain stationary, and both consciously and unconsciously it undergoes gradual modifications. The fact of change is obvious to all, and the cause of the change is by no means difficult to discover. This lies not in any inherent quality latent in religious beliefs, and developed by a more complete understanding of them, but in the pressure of social, ethical, and economic forces that exist quite apart from all religion. One has only to look at the current doctrinal teaching, when compared with that of thirty or forty years ago, to see the truth of this. The doctrine of eternal damnation, for example, has not been dropped out of Christian theology because it was found to be inharmonious with religious beliefs, but because it was more or less of an outrage upon social feelings developed by more humanitarian conditions. The growing emphasis laid by preachers upon matters of purely social or secular interest is another evidence of the same truth. It is the development of opinion *outside* the Churches that determines the form taken by the teaching within. The problem of a church is always of a twofold

character: first, to try and keep the age in line with its teachings, and next, when this can no longer be easily accomplished, to bring its teachings into line with the age.

The same evidence of external forces determining the form of religion is seen if, instead of taking specific doctrines, we take religions as a whole. The Christianity of many of the Eastern races, who were among the first converts to that religion, remains substantially as it was originally. Continuing in the environment in which it was born, their religion preserves as intact as can be, after the lapse of so many generations, the same superstitious habits that characterised the primitive Christians. The same religion carried among the Western races, and subject to profoundly different influences, becomes completely transformed. Gibbon has, in a famous passage, pointed out that on the result of the battle of Tours in the eighth century hung the determination of the religion of the Western world. Probably. Doubtless, if Charles Martel had been beaten, the Koran might have been taught in Oxford and Cambridge in place of the Bible; but it is tolerably certain that the genius of the Western races would have transformed the religion of Mohammed as it has already transformed that of Jesus.

A close study of the history of religions shows, therefore, that, while these may serve as a strongly retarding force to the introduction of a higher social or ethical teaching, *what* religion teaches in these directions is determined by the ethical and social sentiments that obtain currency. In recent times the growth of commerce, the spread of knowledge, the development of better methods of communication between people living in different countries, and even among people living in the same geographical area, have all combined to place the secular interests of life in the forefront, and it is in obedience to these circumstances that the "restatements" of Christianity arise.

The problem, then, is not quite "How far can ethical teaching be made to supplant religion?" but "By what means can the people be brought to realise that the credit given to religion is due to other elements or forces, and that all that is really valuable in life would remain untouched by its disappearance?" The rejection of religion cannot affect the capacity for organisation, since the Churches themselves are an effect of this tendency. And it is equally certain that ethics and sociology will not lose from its rejection, since all progress in these departments has been in the teeth of religious opposition. It is a significant fact that the greatest impetus towards ethical and sociological study has come almost invariably from Freethinkers. Necessarily so. For if the putting on one side of religious beliefs does naught else, it at least leaves one free to face life and its problems untrammelled by groundless fears or unrealisable hopes.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE HEART AND THE MIND

IN an article which appeared under the title of "Two Kinds of Knowledge," in *The Freethinker*, of October 29, 1950, Mr. John Rowland refers to Miss Gertrude Quinton's *Scientific and Religious Knowledge*, which he describes as, in effect, the *apologia* of a knowledgeable person faced with the fact that her ideas appear to be contrary to the general mental climate of her age. As Miss Quinton herself explains that the book was written

primarily because she had to face the questioning of thoughtful sixth-formers when she had given them lessons in scriptural knowledge, it is evident that the reconciliation she was called upon to make to her class was of an entirely different nature to that with which her book is concerned. In the former case she is faced with the impossible task of reconciling barbarous with scientific explanations of the same phenomena. In the latter her appeal is for a general recognition of the fact that scientific and religious knowledge are not so much opposed as complementary—two different spheres of knowledge, gained in different ways, and reflecting differently in human life. It is obvious that no amount of recognition of this so-called *fact* would ever enable one to reconcile a flat earth with a round one; a stationary sun with modern astronomy; or a first man and woman with the theory of evolution. To speak of such an arrangement as a reconciliation is no more reasonable than it would be to say that a husband and wife had become reconciled but had decided to live in separate localities.

Scientific knowledge and religious knowledge, says Miss Quinton, are not necessarily divided by a barrier of rationality and irrationality. They are divided by the fact that they are, on the whole, differently acquired.

I have not read Miss Quinton's book and am depending on the paraphrasing of Mr. Rowland, who may be relied on to do it justice. Mr. Rowland does not tell us how Miss Quinton arrives at her conclusions, but he gives some indication as follows: "The scientist makes assumptions which he cannot experimentally prove—and they are assumptions no less sweeping in their own way than the assumptions of the religious person. For instance, the scientist assumes that the natural laws which he finds workable as hypotheses *always* work. The fact that the laws of chemical combination work may merely be because in any chemical change we are dealing with atoms in millions. The laws of chemistry, in fact, may eventually turn out to be nothing more than statistical averages. And the assumptions of the biologists may well be similar."

It would have been helpful if some religious assumptions had been given for purposes of comparison. If the citation of the above so-called scientific assumptions are intended to be conclusive to Miss Quinton's argument they have been unfortunately chosen as they are not really assumptions at all. The natural laws which the scientist finds workable as hypotheses *will* always work—under identical conditions; if we are dealing with a chemical combination in which *millions* of atoms are not involved, we require a new law to describe what happens under the changed conditions. When this law is not immediately available we may have to rely on a statistical average, and even this device is an indication of something far more definite than any religious assumption can show. An average that works out accurately is obviously dependent upon the inevitable recurrence of certain factors. We cannot have a constant result, even when solely dependent on averages, without constancy among the factors of which the result is the expression. If it could be shown that any religious assumption were only half so reliable we should soon sit up and begin to take notice.

Continuing his argument in *The Freethinker* (December 10, 1950), Mr. Rowland refers to Dr. D. G. Yarnold's *Christianity and Physical Science*. He tells us that the main line taken in this interesting book is to argue that there is nothing, in spite of appearance and general opinion, in the scientific outlook to prevent a scientist from being a Christian believer. It would be extremely

helpful in such discussions as these if the terms used were first accurately defined so as to leave no doubt as to the meaning they are intended to convey in the text. The term "science" has, of late, become as elastic as "religion," and when it is mentioned without qualification we cannot be sure, at first glance, whether it refers to the cooking of a rabbit pie or to the study of relativity and quantum theory. Though we should hardly be inclined to regard a student of domestic "science" as an authority on predestination and Divine grace, there is a general tendency to regard anyone else who dons a long white coat and calls himself a "scientist" as an oracle, entitled to speak with authority on any and every topic. It is not sufficiently realised that while the "expert" may be listened to with respect on his own particular subject, his opinion on other subjects may be, and often is, of no more value than that of the man-in-the-street.

Like all Christian apologists, Dr. Yarnold seeks refuge in ambiguity and irrelevant statements. What he should have attempted to show is that there is nothing, in spite of appearance and general opinion, in the scientific outlook to prevent an astronomer from believing that the stars were made in a day; a geologist from believing that the earth, and all that therein is, was made in six days; or a comparative anatomist from believing in the story of Adam and Eve.

Says Mr. Rowland: "Dr. Yarnold's point, indeed, is that the very fact that the average scientist works on the assumption of the general rationality of the world is a reason for believing that there is a controlling interest, a central power, which is what religious people call 'God.'" Put in this way the issue is prejudged before it is stated. The fact is that the average scientist works on the assumption that the laws of nature are constant, and that, given similar factors, he will always get similar results. Unless a law of nature is confused with a judicial enactment, there is no justification for the assumption of a controlling interest, a central power, and even if there were, religious people would certainly not call that "God."

The idea of a deity is foreign to the spirit and method of modern science. So soon as any group of phenomena is brought within the conception of law the notion of deity in connection with those phenomena tends to die out. Scientific laws are formulated to describe what transpires, and to enable man to predict what will occur as the inevitable result of the interplay of determinable conditions without reference to supernatural guidance or interference of any kind. Laplace, by utilising the known laws of moving bodies and the dissipation of heat, was able to explain the structure of the solar system as an inevitable consequent of non-intelligent forces. When Napoleon asked him what place God had in his system, he replied that he had no need of that hypothesis. Nor is there any need of that hypothesis in any other branch of knowledge. All the phenomena of nature, from atoms to planets, from protoplasm to man, exist as a consequence of the interplay of purely natural forces, and there is no function left for the supernatural to perform.

FRANK KENYON.

(To be continued)

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

WE are witnessing the restoration of some old pagan festivals which, apparently, were in a state of obscurity. The ancient Norse new year's day, "Up-Helly-Aa," was celebrated this year at Lerwick, Shetland, on January 30, and was the biggest ever held. The ceremony of "Riding the Marches" is being resumed at Kirkcubright next May, after a lapse of 500 years, according to Press reports. Another festival, that of St. Valentine, for a long time disregarded, has had a revival this year. For a period well in advance of the date, February 14, *the day when birds were supposed to begin to mate*, a considerable array of amatory, satirical and what might be described as unsaintly valentines, made their appearance in the shops. Inquiries were made and it was found that the demand for billets-doux was much greater than for many years.

The custom of choosing valentines had its origin in the phallic rites associated with the worship of Lupereus, an ancient pastoral god, identified with the Arcadian Pan, and with the pagan goddess Hera, goddess of marriage and pregnancy, identical with the Roman goddess, Juno. The Roman festival of Lupereus or Lupercalia, took place at the Lupercal (a grotto in the Palatine Hill), when goats were sacrificed and youths were arrayed in the skins. With thongs in their hands they paraded the streets, striking everyone they met, especially women, who believed that to receive a blow prevented sterility. In *Phallic Worship*, that rare volume by George Ryley Scott, it is stated: "At the Lupercalia of Rome . . . the girls and women, in a state of nudity, were whipped by the men as they marched in procession." At the love-feast on the eve of the festival, young people of both sexes met and drew, by lot, one of a number of names of the opposite sex, whereby each youth got a maid and each maid got a young man, as a "valentine," i.e., a binding. The males were bound to their valentine for a year.

According to "Christian historians" there *was* a St. Valentine. He was a Roman priest, renowned for affection and benevolence. He was beheaded by the Romans for preaching Christianity. They differ, however, as to the date of his martyrdom; various dates are mentioned, such as: in the second century; about 270 A.D.; in the year 290; the third century; in the year 306 A.D. Whately states that he was "a man of most admirable parts and so famous for his love and charity that the custom of choosing Valentines upon his festival took its rise from thence." Very convenient; very profound! It was Josh. Billings who once said, "The trouble with most folks is not so much their ignorance, as their 'knowing' so many things which ain't so."

There appears to have been several holy men named Valentine, but there is no trace of any of them having been martyred. The Valentines, for instance, were a sect of the second century, adherents of Valentine, a priest who deserted his faith and proclaimed a doctrine in which gods and goddesses were substituted for the Trinity. Then there was Valentinus, the Egyptian Gnostic, whose disciples were also known as Valentines.

It looks as if the early Christian missionaries, ever keen to transform pagan rites to the Christian system, looked at the young folks' reciprocal love-making, and to give the practise a more hallowed inflection, with a sentimental halo they hooked it on to the mythical Saint Valentine's day of remembrance, and, as in those far-off days, "saintly" valentines are non-existent.

J. HUMPHREY.

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE. By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Professors Huxley, Eddington, Jeans and Einstein. Price, cloth 3s. 6d., postage 2d.; paper 2s., postage 2d.

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT. By Chapman Cohen. An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

ACID DROPS

Instead of a Day of Prayer to convert the Russians, or the Chinese, or far away Greenlanders, last Wednesday, February 14, was a Day of Prayer "for the conversion of our own people." It was organised by the "Additional Curates Society," and of course it was time that our dear, simple curates had a voice sometimes, and not leave it always to our bishops. We cannot guess the result of the Day of Prayer—or even if one convert resulted—but we do tremble at the calamities that almost always ensue after a heartfelt Day of Prayer. And the worst of it is that it is rare for curates to get it in the neck.

It is about time that the idea that only at Lourdes or Fatima one gets miraculous cures is squashed. An American visitor, Fr. Peyton, "was dying of tuberculosis" when he was told by a fellow priest to "ask our Lady for a cure." It worked; for a day or two afterwards, X-ray plates showed "no trace of the disease." This kind of miraculous cure also knocks out (or at least equals) all other cures whether by "cosmic" rays as claimed by Spiritualists, or by rare drugs. In fact, we can only wonder that doctors all over the world, desperately trying to cope with all dread diseases, have not yet struck upon the simple formula, "Ask our Lady." O men of little Faith!

It was only to be expected that an "historical" work dealing with the Assumption of Mary would soon be out—and here is one written by Fr. J. Duhr, S.J., entitled *The Glorious Assumption of the Mother of God*, thoroughly historical (though we suspect that the names of the angels who carried the lady upwards are inexplicably missed out). Still, all the proofs are there, that is, if you believe the story first. If you don't, you will surely be cast into a lake of eternal fire.

According to the *Brentford and Chiswick Times*, there was quite a shindy about having *The Freethinker* in the Public Library. Councillor Murray was horrified—he wanted "to see the world Christian in act and not just nominally," and how could anybody be a Christian if he read *The Freethinker*? Councillor Brierley—to his credit—thought that any visitor to the library should be permitted to read the paper if he wanted to, and he got his way. The bigots must have learnt a lesson for the voting was, 18 For and 6 Against.

Whether "appeasement" is in the air or not, the R.C. Bishop of Southwark indignantly asks, "How dare we refuse to appease God?" Cannot everyone see that it is God's anger that is scourging the world for its wickedness? There is only one remedy, believe in the Church of Rome, and support its priests and all will be well again. God Almighty would never let his Church down—except, of course, in Communist countries.

People who believe in reincarnation will be glad to know that an Italian named Pollini is an incarnation of St. Peter, and he has just proclaimed 1951 as his own special Holy Year. We fancy that the Lord will be just as pleased as he was when the Pope proclaimed 1950 as his Holy Year. And what about Christian Science and Theosophy—surely some of our Divine Ladies ought to have a chance with their religions?

We admit that we do not know the details, but it appears that the Education Council at Eastbourne has "a scheme on the way which will satisfy the most fastidious Catholic in Eastbourne." We might hazard a guess, though—if it is going to satisfy the Catholics, it simply means that the Council has acceded to their demands on finance and religion. And if one Council can do this, so can others. What have our Education authorities to say?

Christian teachers are, of course, delighted, in any case, at the way the almost compulsory religious teaching in schools is working. One writer in the *Christian* tells us that the "daily Scripture lesson is a real joy." Bible passages are learnt by heart, and "the fundamental facts" of Christianity—which really means the most superstitious and primitive form of this nonsensical religion—can thus be sown. Jubilantly is added, that "from their earliest schooldays the children will have known the truth of God's work." And yet we are often implored: "No more Bible-banging!"

The Baptist Missionary Society has no fear for the future. Prices here may go up for necessities and, in many cases, people have to do without them, but its income is steadily rising. It received nearly £102,000 in 1940-41, and in 1949-50 the amount was nearly double—nearly £195,000. This money is to convert the "heathen"—and, "no wonder there is rejoicing in Gloucester Place." Whether our hard-working miners or dockers get enough food for their arduous work is a matter of small moment. What does matter is, to bring the "heathen" to Christ!

At an eight-hour poll Honiton voted for Sunday cinemas, with a 469 majority among 40 per cent. of the electors. The local committee of the Sunday Observance Society toured the streets with loud-speakers, and they had a fleet of six cars to take voters to vote for Christ and his Sunday. Yet with God Almighty's help, the bigots lost. We wish Mr. "Misery" Martin could explain?

Is a Unitarian a Christian? *The Inquirer* is publishing some interesting correspondence on the problem—though we fail to see why, as most Unitarians love to call themselves Christians, Christ being in their estimation, if not literally the Son of God, so near that there isn't much difference. We note that Dr. Kilfick Millard, a well-known Medical Officer of Health, thinks Unitarians are not Christians, so where are we now?

In the little village of Ramtalai, Orissa, Hindustan, vast crowds have been coming to be cured by a divine shepherd-boy with a miraculous drug. Special trains and bus services were run by the Government of Orissa; and the influx of people with contagious and infectious diseases produced an epidemic of cholera, from which over a thousand have died, the dead being removed by the cart-load. Sir C. V. Raman, Nobel prize winner, denounced the affair, and a Commission was appointed to investigate the value of this drug, but they could not find a single case of serious disease which had in any way benefited by its use. The Catholic countries, it may be noticed, have not a monopoly of wonder working.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- T. R. CAREN.—Sorry—but your letter is far too long.
- R. HOLMES—AND MANY OTHERS.—The defence of Totalitarianism has produced an overwhelming number of letters and we regret having to close the correspondence.
- MISS P. E. BRYAN.—We generally destroy the cuttings which help our Acid Drops. We think, however, the item you want will be found in the *Universe*, near the date.
- "NORMAN NORTH."—Thanks for sending us the reference which you appear to have misunderstood. The author says "To the average Englishman of 1790"—Paine was the champion of mob rule and atheism, which is quite true. We, in 1951, know it is not true.
- BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations: H. A. Lupton £1, J. M. Symington 5s., Bolton Branch N.S.S. 15s. 6d., Lewisham Branch N.S.S. 12s. 6d.
- Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.
- 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.
- When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, giving as long notice as possible.
- 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.
- Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.
- Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

SUGAR PLUMS

An appeal. The Annual Conference of the N.S.S. will be held in The Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, London, on Whit-Sunday, May 13th. Hotel accommodation is very difficult to book and the Executive of the N.S.S. appeals to London and District members who can offer accommodation to provincial delegates for Saturday and Sunday, May 12th and 13th, to send to the Head Office, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, details as to single or double bedrooms, any convenient catering, terms, and transport facilities to Holborn Hall.

There was a much improved audience in the Mechanics' Institute, Bradford, last Sunday when Mr. R. H. Rosetti lectured for the local N.S.S. Branch. The lecture was followed with close attention and prompted a steady flow of questions and discussion until the time limit was reached. The Branch President, Mr. Harold Day, was in the chair and we might repeat the information he gave to the audience, that a syllabus for Sunday evening lectures up to the end of March has been arranged, commencing at 6-45 p.m.

The Leicester Secular Society has been keeping the Freethought point of view before the local population for many years now. Lectures are given in the Society's own hall in Humberstone Gate each Sunday evening at 6-30, and N.S.S. speakers are regularly invited. This evening (February 25th) Mr. R. H. Rosetti will speak on "Man's Animal Ancestry" and some very useful questions and discussion should follow, especially if local readers can bring some intelligent Christians to the meeting.

"THE WANDERING JEW"

WE recently had occasion to read Eugene Sue's famous romance *The Wandering Jew*. More than a century now has gone since *The Wandering Jew* set out upon his eternal quest in Paris in 1845, when Eugene Sue's peripatetic hero first set out upon his world-wide travels. Literary taste varies notoriously from generation to generation, and one must confess it now seems rather difficult to understand how this vast rambling volume with its, to our taste, intolerably "exhibitionist" rhetoric, its total absence of anything that can be regarded as a central plot, and its rambling digressions, could ever have been regarded by critics as a literary masterpiece or even converted into an international "best seller" by the rapturous applause of the general reading public; particularly when one considers that Eugene Sue wrote in French, the most severely disciplined and logical of all languages, and that he was the contemporary of such infinitely greater literary giants as Balzac, Flaubert, and Stendhal. Evidently, what is often regarded as the peculiarly 20th century distinction between literature and best selling fiction already existed in the France of King Louis Philippe when *The Wandering Jew* set off from Paris upon a world-wide tour!

As and when considered simply from the technical standpoint of literary criticism, *The Wandering Jew* evidently is no world-beater. A literary artisan, perhaps, rather than a bona-fide literary artist, Eugene Sue is not one of the world's great novelists. As a writer hardly of the second rank in point of style, Sue may, we think, be classed with such minor English stars of the contemporary literary firmament as Bulwer Lytton or the half-French "Ouida" (Louise de la Ramée), to the violent rhetoric of whom Sue's own books display a marked resemblance. Like his Victorian contemporaries across "La Manche," Eugene Sue was an immensely prolific writer and, like another minor practitioner of the arts of the romantic and picturesque novel, Tobias Smollet, Sue found time to follow the calling of a naval surgeon; whilst also, like his contemporaries in literature, Benjamin Disraeli and Bulwer Lytton, taking an active part in the political life of his day.

However, despite the vast literary output that he managed to cram into a relatively short life—he died at the age of 52,—Sue will be remembered by future ages, if at all, chiefly as the author of one book, *The Wandering Jew*, and we may relevantly add that, in its ubiquitous influence, if not in its technical literary character, Eugene Sue's masterpiece may be regarded as one of the world's great books, great in its world-wide influence, if not in itself. For *The Wandering Jew* is, first and foremost, not so much a literary romance, pure and simple, as a polemic against the Jesuits, against the world-wide power of the famous clerical "Company" founded by Ignatius of Loyola, the "shock troops," to employ a modern metaphor, of militant Catholicism and of the Vatican. The world-wide vogue of *The Wandering Jew* reflects the world-wide power represented by the famous clerical secret society which, and the machinations of which, it set out to expose, in which anti-clerical rôle, if not in its literary rank, it may be classed with the famous novels of Zola. For the generation which saw *The Wandering Jew* appear was marked by the feverish intrigues, both ecclesiastical and political, of the recently restored "Company of Jesus." For it will be recalled that the Jesuits, whom a liberal, or jealous Pope, Clement XIII, had formally declared to be "extinguished, abrogated, and abolished for ever," in 1773, had been restored in

1814 by Clement's successor, Pius VII. In the meantime, the French population had unloosed the storms of the democratic and anti-clerical revolution all over Europe. After their restoration, for which the sons of Loyola had to thank the French Revolution, the Jesuits soon became the spearhead of counter-revolutionary intrigue throughout Europe. In France, their incessant political activity during the reign of Louis Philippe (1830-1848) led to the outspoken definition of the famous anti-clerical historian, Jules Michelet: "Ask the man in the street, the first passer-by. 'What are the Jesuits?' and he will immediately reply, 'The counter-revolution!'"

It was in this atmosphere of feverish clerical counter-plotting against the radical ideas set in motion by the French Revolution that Eugene Sue's famous polemic against the Jesuits, which forms, so to speak, the connecting thread that runs through and unites the vast discursive volume, first appeared and took the anti-clerical public of France in the 1840's by storm. Moreover, the literary sensation made by the *The Wandering Jew* was not confined to France. Eugene Sue's "best seller" soon had a world-wide vogue; a kind of inverted tribute, one might relevantly add, to the world-wide activities of the sons of Loyola, the "Old Guard" of the contemporary clerical reaction.

The anti-Jesuit literature is vast and varied; but we doubt that any book written since Pascal's famous *Provincial Letters*, first pilloried the Jesuit order with its mordant irony, has done so much to discredit the Jesuits in the eyes of the world as did *The Wandering Jew*. Whilst, certainly, no literary critic is likely to put Sue's sensational romance in the same class as Pascal's classical prose, yet it could be plausibly argued that *The Wandering Jew* has done for the Jesuits in the eyes of the man-in-the-street what the great satire of Pascal has done in the eyes of the educated classes. And this is no mean service to social and intellectual progress. Whilst Eugene Sue's "best seller" is hardly likely to captivate a 20th century audience with its long-winded rhetoric, it still may be said to deserve a place upon the shelves of Freethinkers as a minor classic of anti-clerical literature.

Like many of his contemporaries in both France and England, Eugene Sue was also a radical in politics as well as in religion. He was the author, also, of a now forgotten but, in its day, famous volume, or rather, series of volumes, *Mysteries of the People*, translated into English by an American Socialist, as *The History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*, a unique work of its kind, which was for long a classic in socialist and radical circles. In this ambitious serial series of volumes, Sue traced the history of a working-class family from ancient Roman Gaul to the France of Louis Philippe in the author's own day, a sociological study of absorbing interest. Besides which, our author also earned distinction in another and entirely different field by writing what was for long a standard history of the French Navy, in which he had himself served as a naval surgeon at the Battle of Navarino.

Eugene Sue carried his anti-clericalism and political radicalism into active politics. He took part in the French Revolution of 1848 and sat as Deputy for the Seine in the Chamber of Deputies. In 1852, he was forced to go into exile on account of his courageous opposition to the infamous *coup d'état* of Louis Bonaparte, "Napoleon the Little," as Victor Hugo scornfully styled him. In a France given over to a proto-Fascist despotism in which the Jesuits played a major rôle, there was no room for the author of the *The Wandering Jew*. So

Eugene Sue died in 1856 in exile in Italy, leaving a formidable reputation in the annals of both anti-clerical and radical literature.

F. A. RIDLEY.

"BOADICA"—THE BRAVE BRITON

LONDONERS admire the mighty monument of Boadica at Westminster Bridge, and gaze at the statue of that valiant woman standing in her chariot; but few Britishers are aware of the facts relating the history which makes Queen Boadica a haughty heroine when ancient Britain was invaded and devastated by Roman legions commanded by Suetonius, under orders from Emperor Nero, A.D. 61.

The history of these ancient events has been carefully preserved, as recorded by both the British and Roman annalists; yet, the whole of the true details are scarcely known except by the searchers studying the books of antiquity. During the period A.D. 50, and even as early as Julius Caesar's era, B.C. 55, ancient Britain was a wonderful country and the nation a race of admirable people, highly civilised and trading extensively with most European countries.

It was the wonderful condition of the country and the wealth of its inhabitants that caused Caesar to fight the Britons, and wars had been constantly carried on for more than a hundred years, because the might of Britain's soldiers could not be wholly overcome by the Romans. Queen Boadica was the wife of Prasutagus, king of that division of the ancient Britons known as Iceni, and he was famed for a long reign of peace and prosperity.

Prasutagus knew of the bitter severity which both Nero and his general Suetonius viewed the contemplated conquest of the eastern division of Britain, and in order to avoid a disastrous war, Prasutagus agreed to make his wife, Boadica, her two daughters and the Emperor Nero heirs to the land of the Iceni; but, Prasutagus died before this arrangement of heirship could be settled; and, immediately the death of Prasutagus was known, the Roman soldiers rose in revolt, murdered the Iceni and robbed, as though everything valuable were spoils of war, besides treating the defeated as slaves and worse.

The Queen was stripped and her bare body brutally lashed, while her two beautiful daughters were outraged by being ravished, and these royal personages together with relations were turned away from their estates and reduced to conditions of slavery.

But the barbarous treatment by the Roman fiends did not subdue Boadica's valiant spirit, which was invoked for a determined reprisal and revenge, whereby the Britons were called to arms under Boadica's leadership. She addressed the troops with speeches both severe and pathetic, for she reminded the men of the brutal lashes she had received and told them that if the Romans were not exterminated, their wives and daughters would be raped and themselves subjected to perpetual slavery.

The Iceni became determined to fight for liberty and save their women from unclean lust, and the first ferocious engagement in battle caused the fall of seventy thousand Roman soldiers. Thrilling records of these fights show that no one was allowed to escape. Those captured Romans were treated in a similar manner as the Iceni had been outraged.

Every captured Roman was killed and those already dead were burned in piles of corpses, to prevent plague by putrefaction.

Suetonius arrived after this dreadful massacre, bringing with him an enormous army which annihilated Boadica's forces and the Queen seeing that her chances of victory were hopeless, poisoned herself rather than be taken alive and subjected to ignominious cruelties.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

CORRESPONDENCE

REJOIN THE N.S.S.

SIR,—I am moved to make this appeal in consequence of the statement in Mr. G. H. Taylor's letter that you have not been giving fair play to both sides in the N.S.S. dispute over the last four years. This crack of Mr. Taylor's is surprising in the light of the fact that a determined attempt was made to break up one of the N.S.S. branches, which was hardly fair play. Did Mr. Taylor expect *The Freethinker* to give the individuals concerned a pat on the back? The excuse given for the attack on the branch in question (which fortunately failed), was that the Executive of the Society was too feeble in their support of the branches. There was no suggestion of any disagreement in the fundamentals of Secularism, so that the action taken in founding another Society with similar aims was simply a division of unity, and thus a dis-service to the cause. As regards the Executive of the N.S.S., it is to their credit that they pursued their activities, which in the nature of things are limited to their financial resources until the freethought millionaire comes along, in their usual thorough and lively manner, which we can all read in their monthly reports printed in *The Freethinker*, and in the annual reports of good work done. Throughout the dispute this journal calmly ignored the disruptionists, which was the right thing to do, and went on appearing every week just as brilliantly as ever, despite the general boycott on all freethought literature.

Now that we have all had time to think over this little quarrel, and seen that it has nothing to do with essentials, would it not be wise, in the interests of the cause which we all have at heart, for all those former members who left to return to the N.S.S.? The Society has a great history of achievement over the past eighty years under exceptionally fine leaders. If the "reformists" want to strengthen the freethought and secularistic cause, the best manner to do it would be to throw their weight into the National Secular Society. Will all supporting readers of *The Freethinker* consider as to doing likewise?—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

SIR.—My attention has been drawn to an article in *The Freethinker* of September 24, 1950, which I had overlooked. It is entitled "An Opinion of Bradlaugh," in which extracts from Sir Alfred Pease's autobiography are quoted, generally hostile to Bradlaugh, as being "interesting." My mother dealt with these references at the time of the book's publication; and I did not expect to have to deal with them again, particularly as appearing in the columns of *The Freethinker*.

(1) Bradlaugh consulted the Crown Law Officers on his right to affirm on taking his seat in 1890, and it was on their advice he applied to the Clerk to the House to affirm—this application was referred to the Speaker, who referred to a Select Committee of the House, who disallowed it. Bradlaugh always said that an oath was just as binding on his conscience as any promise is on an honourable man.

(2) I cannot understand a contributor to *The Freethinker* referring to "Bradlaugh's blatant advertisement of his obnoxious opinions."

(3) Pease was wrong, perhaps deliberately and meanly so, in declaring Bradlaugh "could not put an 'H' in its right place." Sir Edward Clarke, a bitter opponent of Bradlaugh on many occasions, was prepared to give evidence in a court of law that this was not so.

Bradlaugh was a product of Hoxton and it would have been surprising if his speech had never shown any traces of his upbringing.

(4) The "tiresome Bradlaugh case" was entirely due to the actions of the House of Commons in first refusing to him permission to affirm, then in refusing him permission to take the oath, then in excluding him from the House to which he had been duly elected.

Mr. Coulthard may have had benevolent intentions in exhaling Pease's libels; I should have thought them better buried.—Yours, etc.,

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

CONSCIENCE

SIR,—Would some of the philosophic critics of Mr. Rowland, who write so freely about "conscience," kindly explain why it has been such an unalloyed curse to humanity throughout the ages.

Mr. Rowland himself seems to think that "conscience" has been a blessing, but gives no reasons.

Apart from the Inquisition, which was founded on "conscience," "suttee" in India and other cruelties founded on "conscience," throughout history (one notable instance was the murder of Socrates), we have innumerable crimes of "conscience" dating back to the tombs of Ancient Egypt and before.—Yours, etc.,

F. C. PARSONS.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held February 15, 1951

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

Also present: Messrs. Griffiths, A. C. Rosett, Ridley, Morris, Johnson, Ebury, Woodley, Corstorphine, Barker, Hornbrook, and Mrs. Quinton.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Glasgow, Lewisham, West London, North London, Kingston Branches and to the Parent Society. A very successful Annual Dinner in The Charing Cross Hotel celebrating the centenary of the birth of G. W. Foote was reported. All tickets had been sold, and a number of late applicants were disappointed.

The Annual Conference in London this year will be held in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, on Whit-Sunday morning and afternoon. Resolutions for the Agenda can be received up till March 13 next. Messrs. Barker, Morris, and Johnson were elected as an Agenda Committee.

Mr. F. A. Ridley reported a very successful lecture visit to the Manchester University Rationalist Society which was held inside the University building. Spirited discussion followed his address and the Executive of the N.S.S. was cordially thanked for its encouragement and help to the new Society.

A legacy of £243 15s. under the Will of the late J. B. Fysh of New Hebrides was reported as having been received.

Correspondence from Glasgow and Lewisham Branches received attention, arrangements made for future lectures and a discussion on various aspects of the Society's work closed the proceedings. Next meeting, fixed for March 22.

JOHN SEIBERT, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

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

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, 25th, 7 p.m.: GEO. BRIDGEN (Birmingham), "Atheism, Religion, and Human Conduct."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Science Room).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: REV. DUDLEY RICHARDS, M.A. (Unitarian), "A Free Religious Faith."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 27, 7 p.m.: General Discussion, "Must There Be War?"

Glasgow Secular Society (Branch of the N.S.S.) (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. WINGATE (Perth), "The World Peril: Rome or Moscow."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: R. H. ROSETTI (President N.S.S.), "Man's Animal Ancestry."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: HERCTOR HAWTON (Conway Hall), "The Revolt Against Reason."

South London Branch N.S.S. (The London and Brighton Hotel, 139, Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E.15).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: STUART MORRIS (Peace Pledge Union), "The Pacifist Solution to World Problems."

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (The "Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Power and Secrets of The Jesuits."

THE LOGIC OF THE CHURCH

SOME years ago, aiming at discussion, a magazine called *The Controversialist* only survived four issues. Chapin Cohen, in controversy with a Roman Catholic priest, contributed. Considering the idea of playing with words, that all argument is only about words, he said, what else is there to argue about? But, often, in *The Freethinker*, he asserted that words are "loaded." We are not only concerned with the ambiguity of words but also their "meaning." Consider the words, discussion, controversy, argument, polemic. Engaged in anti-religious "polemic," my old friend F. A. Ridley does not appear to welcome discussion. My article, "The Miracle of the Assumption," was provocative and I was disappointed at his reply.

His short letter in the correspondence column did not say which article he was referring to or in what way I had misrepresented him. A challenge invited a reply and I was pleased when J. H. G. Buller stepped into the breach, for it seems there is plenty of room for discussion on Roman Catholic logic and dogma. Buller correctly assesses what he calls an "attack" on Ridley's logic, knowledge of science and of Catholic theology; but pays no more attention to this beyond saying he was personally convinced; and makes it a matter of "general obscurity" which it is "impossible in the space available to adequately deal with"; and shows personal resentment with the implication of his own, or of my "stupidity."

This personal attitude involves psychology, which seems to have escaped Buller. But Roman Catholics also have a personal approach and also resent what they think a parody and misrepresentation of their case in a similar manner. In controversy, we should face our opponent's case. As I said in my article, if we do not pay attention to the psychology of Aquinas we shall be lost in Loyola's mysticism. Other points in my challenge were, that the Pope is not the supreme authority in the Church and is claimed as infallible only in faith and morals, and that the Vatican does not claim to know. Buller appears to agree, for he closes his article saying that the assumption dogma is "merely confirming an already established article of faith." Is this *knowing*?

I agree when Buller says Catholic logic is deductive in contrast to scientific induction. But he should go deeper. Ridley says the Church claims to be rational, also that the Church is logical. Quite so, but what is meant by these words? The word reason is highly ambiguous. Logos is reason, motive is reason, cause is reason, and we might remember that both dialectic and logic are said to be the art or science of reason. Cold logic is said to be impersonal; to Bertrand Russell it is completely abstract. But Roman Catholic logic is animistic and not abstract, having form and content, with reason as motive or personal intention it is teleological or purposive. It is passionately personal in the dialectic of good or evil. By all means let us consider Catholic logic.

To St. Thomas Aquinas logic is based upon analogy. In the *Analogy of Being* he argues that something exists but we cannot know what, for we can only think by analogy. So, in speaking, for instance, of God as Father, we do not mean our actual parent, we must consider the meaning of the analogy. Accepting Aristotle's six modes of existence, being, essence, reality, etc., he argues five ways of considering it. As degrees of perfection; there is no perfect analogy, only God is perfect. Of things acted upon, God is pure Act. As degrees of purity, of

truth or error, God is Pure Being or Truth. As complexes of good and evil, God is Good. Finally, existence can be thought of on the analogy of the Church as a hierarchy of being; as the Pope is head of the Church so is God of the Universe.

Spinoza said God is the asylum of ignorance and it would be illogical to profess to know in justification of ignorance. Ridley completely misunderstands Catholic logic when he says the Vatican claims to know. Aquinas saying that we cannot know is as fundamental as the Garden of Eden tree of knowledge. God only knows and in our darkness we live in faith by the grace of God. But not only is the Church consistent in its logic, with St. Thomas, it goes much further, stigmatising an assertion that one knows as arrogant self assertion, even as an assumption of the divine prerogative, of inspiration or revelation. We should hold our beliefs in all humility and reverence, with full realisation of our basic ignorance.

All this is not only deductive in the sense of cold logic, it is also dialectic of sympathies and antipathies. The condemnation of science follows logically in Aquinas's four-fold classification of law, with eternal or divine law superior to scientific or natural law, and moral to civic or political law, as the soul is to the body and as good is to evil. Arrange these four categories as a hierarchy and the order runs from the physical or material up to the psychological and spiritual; from impersonal physical science, next, the pains and penalties of politics, then, moral sympathies, up to personal conviction; with nature red in tooth and claw and God as the panacea against all that is undesirable.

But what is meant by knowing? The Ancients had two concepts, the science of the five senses and the inspiration or enthusiasm of gnosis, which is the root of our word know. Scientific or natural law may be observable or demonstrable, but the logical conviction here is based upon the prejudice of personal feeling, and simple faith that can believe an absurdity is justified and the science that can produce the atom bomb is condemned. And as the bottom end of the scale is identified with the sensual lusts of the flesh, the seven deadly sins, and the mammon of unrighteousness, the concern of the Church is the "knowledge of right and wrong," which is a very different kettle of fish.

There are tricks in every trade, and imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery. Trying to find a political motive for the Assumption dogma, as if there were something "wrong" about politics, Ridley is not exposing but using Catholic tactics condemning "worldliness." So also, Buller's concern about cruelty to animals follows Catholic technique in appeal to moral or personal sympathy. Whether or not this comes within the scope of morality, there is no science of morals. He should apply his scientific induction to Catholic word magic. But he also seems to agree with Aquinas that personal conviction or moral sympathy is superior to political opinion or scientific knowledge.

H. H. PREECE.

INFIDEL DEATHBEDS. By G. W. Foote. Revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth 5s., paper 3s. 6d.; postage 3d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED. Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.