

Correspondence

STOCK-TAKING IN APATHY.

Editor Clarion:

I recently attended a "mass meeting" called under the auspices of the Workers' Party-cum-Fed-Farmer-Labor-Party. There were exactly 32 present, including the speaker, who is an national organizer of the combined parties.

Looking at the meagre crowd, half of whom were in opposition to the organization the speaker represented, I cast my mind back to other days when the same building would be packed on a similar occasion.

The speaker at the conclusion of his address announced that there would be no questions or discussion, as he recognised the fact that incompatible differences of opinion existed among his audience.

After three years of Communist policy, here was a spectacle. Thirty-two people turn out to hear a member of the Ex-comm. of the Third International!

During my travels in search of the elusive job, I have run across many ex "revolutionaries." Most of them have a highly developed "martyr complex." They informed me, that they have quit making sacrifices (mostly vicarious) and that they are going to look out for themselves. As it they had not always done that very thing!

If hugging the stoves and "flopping" in the reading rooms of working-class organizations comes in the category of sacrifice, then I am willing to admit that there have been many victims. The same sacrifice could be made in Salvation Army hotels—if permitted.

One individual informed me that he has "quit the revolution." Moreover he had a solution to the workers' problem, that is: "Do nothing." Nevertheless, he could not overcome a long established habit. That is, to talk. The answer to the question "What is Life?" over which Marx pondered deeply before he replied: "Struggle," and which perplexed the encyclopedic mind of Spencer to the end of his days; was simplicity itself. "Life," quoth the philosopher, "is eating and drinking." What profound sapientia! surely a diet of coffee and to which this philosopher has an obligatory partiality is not the stuff out of which life is made.

"Canst thou believe thy living is a life, so stinkingly depending?"

Then there are the hot-foot revolutionists of yesterday, who now have jobs.

They give you the hush-hush and wagging finger if the boss is around, or lest the neighbours find out they aren't respectable.

To all appearances the movement has reached another "after '49."

That is, a period comparable to that which ensued after the revolutionary days of 1848; concerning which Harrington writes so lucidly.

In this swamp of apathy, in which we are engulfed, it is up to those members of the working-class who realize their "stinkingly dependent" condition and who do not oscillate between the revolutionary jag and total abstinence, to support the organs of working-class education.

If our interpretation of "materialism" is in error; then we err in good company.

A sinecure in a Prussian University meant "life of eating and drinking" for Marx. A life far beyond that ever enjoyed by our wage-slave so wise of today.

Did Marx reject the offer for something less substantial?

It would seem so. Perhaps he was all balled up on "materialism."

FRANK CUSACK.

FREETHOUGHT AND BACKBONE.

Editor Clarion:

I was interested in reading your "Atonement" article* not only on account of its attitude towards false religious, but also because it appeared at the time of the celebration of the Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement fast therein hinted at, and to which article my attention was directed by a Jewish Socialist friend who, like myself, is also a convinced freethinker.

In the town where we both are located, there is a large enough Hebrew population to support a synagogue, the members of which are all immigrants from non-British countries and whose nationalism and religious beliefs are strong, owing to the pogrom conditions that prevailed in their native lands. But my friend, like the Jew mentioned in your article, being British born and emancipated in manners and views, the rumor spread among his foreign-born compatriots that he was Jewish only on his mother's side and that his father was a Gentile; and that even his mother was quite lax in her religious observances.

In a subsequent conversation with one of the local

* See Western Clarion, Sept. 17th, 1923.

Jewish merchants, arising from his having been given your article to read my friend had pointed out the error of this rumor and in proof of the orthodoxy of his mother, had shown him a letter just received from her in the Old Country wishing her son a Happy (Jewish) New Year. This so tickled the merchant that, just after the great fast, he referred to the message in another conversation with my freethinking friend. However, by this time, another letter had arrived from his mother and which he also showed the merchant. But this missive from an intelligent, well-read and broad-minded woman, did not please him so much because it stated that she had been listening to another of a series of (English-spoken) Unitarian addresses, which impressed her as follows: "Yesterday I again went to church and heard the clever minister give a wonderful address on 'In tune with the Infinite' (by R. W. Trine). It was splendid and all the time I was wishing you were there to enjoy it. The service too is satisfying and sends you away with a feeling of pleasure that unfortunately is lacking in our Jewish services."

Next, the dealer asked him if he had fasted on the Day of Atonement and also commented on the fact that my friend was absent on that occasion from the synagogue. The reply was that, being a very temperate eater and at times putting in, on his own account, a few hygienic 23½ hour fasts, he did not need to abstain on any special Day of Atonement and therefore did not do so; and neither had he felt impelled to attend the religious services, especially as he was working at that time.

At this, and quite in the spirit of our ancestors who used to legally enforce church attendance, the dealer's eyes flashed fire and far more in earnest than in jest, he fanatically cried out "If I had seen you on the streets, I would have pulled you into the synagogue!" Here history repeated itself, for the great Jewish philosopher, Spinoza whom Haeckel acclaims as one of the world's most gifted thinkers, was himself ex-communicated and bounded from the Jewish church because he came to the conclusion that he must reject his traditional religion in favor of his pantheistic philosophy. In this case, the centuries-long persecuted race became themselves persecutors.

A noteworthy point as regards this incident was that my friend had received in return for a freethought equivalent a free consignment from the good Bishop W. W. Brown of "Communism and Christianity" but on which entry duty had to be paid. Feeling that what costs the recipient nothing is nothing valued, these books were disposed of at practically duty cost, namely, five cents each. Now this same merchant on being asked to purchase a copy at that price had eagerly agreed stating that he had heard about the books, and even if they cost \$10 apiece, he would buy one. Yet, when his own religious skin was pricked, how he did squeal! The mark of a man is that he should have enough mental firmness to support his convictions, irrespective of where or to what they may lead him.

It was the want of this quality that caused me to lose further interest in another man here—a French-Canadian Socialist who was brought up as a Catholic. Nevertheless, he liberally indulged in freethought and had a number of copies on hand of "Communism and Christianity," as many of which as I liked he offered me for nothing, stating that he had already peddled them everywhere he could in the district. He also used this as one of the text books in a study class which he organized. Yet, by a mere accident I afterwards found out through a neighbor woman friend of his when I called on her one Sunday to find out where he had temporarily gone to, that he was still attending Catholic church services. This woman must have told the man of my utter astonishment at his conduct, for, next time I met him, he somewhat apologetically admitted the truth of her report. So good fellow as he was, we drifted apart, and I never saw him again.

Now, such tactics will not do. The Jewish layman who doesn't depend on religion for a living, and who, through enmity to and at the expense of Christianity, is a "freethinker" but remains the slave and tool of his own particular brand of superstition; the Protestant or Catholic, etc., who is ditto to each one's rival religions; all such who have not the courage of their convictions, are not, as the French term freethinkers, genuine "esprits forts," which means strong minded people. They are merely weak and unreliable mental invertebrates, and decidedly gaseous too at that; yet not even on a par with what Haeckel dubs the god of the various orthodox religions, for him they conceive as being a "gaseous vertebrate!"

Despite the fact, as your article pointed out, that the material and moral welfare of the race depends on dropping every form of religious irrationality, it is certainly difficult at first to make a clean break with the latter; for, as Marx says, the traditions of the past weigh like an Alp-

on the brain of the living.

However, "practice makes perfect" and should the hoary and horrid spectre of superstition threaten to dominate the mind, it may be that help will come from the buoyant exhortation of one whose soul, before he gained freedom, was steeled and strengthened in the harsh school of chattel slavery; even as the modern revolutionary wage-slave has developed an invincible virility that laughs all the onslaughts of parasitical philosophies to scorn.

For it was Epictetus the Stoic, who advised this antidote against any appearance of the arch enemy: " . . . bring in against it some other fair and noble appearance, and therewithal cast out this vile one. And if thou use to exercise thyself in this way, thou shalt see what shoulders and nerves and sinews thou wilt have! But now we have only wordiness and nothing more. This is the true athlete, he who exerciseth himself against such appearances. Hold, unhappy man! be not swept away. Great is the contest, divine the task, for kingship, for freedom, for prosperity, for tranquility . . . For what greater tempest is there than that which proceedeth from appearances that mightily overcome and expel the Reason?"

In other words, all ye workers of every kind, whether or not your jobs compel you to exercise your physical muscles; try and develop, harden and strengthen your mental muscles. As a sporting race, you are no strangers to physical culture. Now 'tis time to take an equal pride and interest in, so to speak, mental physical culture.

Dauphin, Man.

A. S.

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