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*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

Dishonest Propaganda

THERE is a movement afoot to secure a greater degree of freedom on the Radio. And it is high time that some concerted and authoritative protest against the present regime was made. Letters to the B.B.C. itself are of little avail. The B.B.C. ignores them or lies about them. If they are concerned with religion they are passed over to the controller of the religious propaganda, who replies that this is a Christian country, and if any criticism of Christianity was broadcast it would hurt the feelings of many believers—and the abuse of a public institution goes on as before. Long ago that manse-bred man with many friends, John Reith, said that he intended making the religious side of Radio more and more prominent, and that has happened. The time given to religious services grows greater, and at every conceivable and opportune moment the propaganda of Christianity is being pursued. It is carried on for both children and adults. Much of the talks for children is loaded with religious statements that even the B.B.C. would not put before adults. Talks on ethics or history or philosophy are announced, only to find—as in the case of a recent series by that very muddled individual, Mr. Middleton Murry—that the series has been devised to produce the conclusion that Christianity is the world's only hope. The B.B.C. has nothing to learn from Goebbels.

When the war began, as the vultures gather round a battlefield, so the parsons and parsonettes gathered round the microphone.

In addition to the bringing of prayers or religion-loaded talks forward at any odd time during the day, the listener is treated every day to what is called “a thought for the day”—concocted on the assumption that his appreciative listeners are qualifying for an idiot asylum and need help in getting there. Very artfully, and with characteristic B.B.C. dishonesty,

this thought for the day is put on just before the eight o'clock news, when people turn their radio on a few minutes before eight so as not to miss an important item of war-news. That is the meanest and most contemptible trick that even the B.B.C. has attempted, and I am willing to wager that there is more “cuss-words” used over this thought for the day than any other. Morning after morning this broadcaster drones on, providing his listeners with the picture of an unending desert of sand that gives vent to a brain-dulling monotone. Personally I am rather interested in him. But, then, as I have often explained, I am as interested in the fool as I am in the genius. Abnormal and normal psychology, the healthy and the pathologic brain, are parts of the general study of human faculty. Talking when he does and how he does, I can best describe this unnamed person's talk as born of meanness and fashioned by dishonesty. Only once could he have captured the approval of the whole of his listeners. That was when, one morning, he ran dry and in doleful tones remarked, “We will now spend the remaining two minutes in silence.” If he would only do that every morning—and extend the time!

* * *

Facts v. Fancies

Exhibit number two of the B.B.C. policy was given on a larger scale by a series of Sunday addresses delivered by the Rev. J. S. Whale. Mr. Whale called his addresses “Facing the Facts.” The five lectures have been republished, and if any one wishes to have a brief study in religious obscurantism, and to see Christianity at its intellectual and ethical lowest level, I would advise him to read these lectures. They begin with a lie and end with a delusion. I say they begin with a lie because, unless we count false statements and wrong conclusions as facts, and I admit they are a kind of fact, what I have just said is quite accurate.

Mr. Whale professes to deal with five facts. The fact of personality, of evil, of death, of Christ, of faith. But he does not face these facts at all. What he does is to give you the ultra-Christian misunderstanding of them. For all purposes Mr. Whale—save for his terminology—might have been lecturing in the twelfth century, before the Renaissance had blossomed, before Galileo and Newton had seen the light, before evolution was a commonplace, before a science of anthropology or of psychology was born. First of all, the very frame of the addresses is wrong. They are not lectures at all. They are sermons, although the speaker had not the courage to call them such. His religious propositions are not argued; they are stated, and when they are divested of the reference to, and misunderstandings of, modern movements are the typical sermons of the Bridgewater lecture days. But, if the B.B.C. had announced “The Rev. Mr. Whale will deliver five sermons,” listeners would

have been on their guard. Calling them talks disarms the unwary, and absorbs the unthinking.

* * *

Christian Morals

Let us take a few samples of Mr. Whale's intellectual quality. In his disguised sermon on the fact of evil, wrong-doing is regularly equated with theological "sin," and sin (evil) cannot be natural because if it were "as natural as perspiration" it is not sin (or wrong) at all. The distortion of Mr. Whale's own moral sense could hardly be better illustrated. But it is quite Christian. Praiseworthy ideals cannot be the outcome of social conditions, although, curiously enough unpraiseworthy ones are, and, of course, the perception of essential quality persisting beneath a difference of form, or even of consequence, is too subtle for so coarse a mind as that of Mr. Whale's. What a pity Mr. Whale has never read such men as Swedenborg or William Blake. I mention them because they are not Atheists.

Science is set aside as inadequate because it has not prevented men using it to bad ends. But the function of science is not ethical at all. It is the discovery of truth, its application to good or ill ends has no more bearing upon its social value than has cutting a throat with a sharp knife on its quality as a knife. And it, of course, never dawns upon Mr. Whale that religion is much older than science, has always exercised greater influence over the conscious actions of men than science, and that religion has, not only failed to prevent wrong-doing, but has in every age been responsible for the greatest brutalities and ill-deeds that the world has known. If God existed, and if he were to charge science with moral failure, a completely devastating reply would be, *Et tu, Brute!*

In dealing with death Mr. Whale is again away back with the primitives when he asserts that the only reason for believing in progress at all is if we believe in an inheritance from God "incorruptible and undefiled." We agree that this is a real Christian teaching, but it is none the less completely absurd. Mr. Whale's mixture of unwarranted pessimism and absurd theology makes an interesting study. But his complete misunderstanding of the scientific problem of death is that he appears to think that very ancient ceremonies connected with the dead had to do with the desire *to live again*. As all competent anthropologists know primitive man does not realize any such thing as natural death—in the modern sense of the phrase. He knows that people cease to live here, but their demise is attributed to magic, to the escape of the double from the body, and he believes there is a continuity between the man who lives to-day and the one who lives after death. It is a hard thing for civilized man to think of himself as non-existent; it was a sheer impossibility for our most primitive forefathers to accomplish this feat in abstract thinking. The only question that faces him is what has become of the "double"—the "soul"? And it is around this, and the possible activities of the "double" that the earliest thought on death centres. But *natural* death is a discovery that man makes after he has taken a very long stride away from his earliest ancestors. "Death" is a continuation of life. There is no break; but when the discovery of natural death is made it is unfortunately saddled with the inheritance of the primitive double, which to-day meets us in a more sophisticated form, but with no better claim to reality. But the belief has nothing to do with morals. As Sir James Frazer says in his lectures on *The Fear of the Dead*: "In primitive religions the belief in survival is entirely divested of ethical significance: in them the virtuous are not rewarded and the bad are

not punished in the life after death; all goes on in the next world as in this." The belief becomes more stupid and more brutal with the attempts to perpetuate it in more sophisticated conditions.

* * *

Christian Morals in Action

I have space for only one more exhibition of the quality of Mr. Whale and of the complete dishonesty of the religious policy of the B.B.C. There is a chapter on "Personality" which has the distinction of not saying what personality is save for such foolish statements as it depends upon belief in God, and such gross stupidities as making the sense of responsibility, the value of truth, and so forth, depend upon the same belief. There is also the statement that man's animal origin cannot explain all that he afterwards becomes. I do not know anyone who was ever foolish enough to say that the animal group does explain this—that it presents all the factors that develop as the animal group gradually changes into the human group and exhibits new phase after new phase in its development. But this idea is probably too deep for Mr. Whale, so I must content myself by just citing his position as an example of the extraordinary quality of non-understanding possessed by him.

What I wish to set forth is the summary Mr. Whale makes of his position with regard to morals, and which illustrates the extraordinary low moral level at which an overpowering sense of the truth of the Christian religion will keep one. It will be found on page 21-22 of the pamphlet:—

Man's sense of right and wrong has its sanction in God alone. Belief in the absolute reality of God is the heart of all living morality. The validity of honesty, simple goodness, justice, mercy, reverence for truth, self-sacrifice—these great things cannot be satisfactorily explained unless there is a living God, and unless the chief end of man is to know him.

There is no need to dwell upon this. It stands forth in its own demonstration of the extent to which religion may rob a man of a decently intelligent appreciation of right and wrong. When a man says that nothing commotated by truth, or family, or honesty, or duty, or kindness, or anything in connexion with family or society has any quality that makes them of value unless there is a god and another life, he has reached a level of moral and mental degradation that is the worse because it is unconscious. It is the philosophy of German Fascism at its lowest. There should be room for a post for Mr. Whale in a Berlin University. He need only substitute Hitler for God, and the State for the supreme being, and his tutorial and mental outfit would be complete.

For I have kept this information to the end. Mr. Whale actually is a teacher in one of our universities. He is Professor of Ecclesiastical History in Mansfield College, Oxford. Our sympathy goes out to those students who are trained under him. He is also, when delivering such lectures as the ones I have dealt with, protected from criticism by that very Christian, but very dishonest, organization the B.B.C.

CHAPMAN COHEN

It is certain that a serious attention to the sciences and liberal arts softens and humanizes the temper, and cherishes those fine emotions in which true virtue and honour consist. It rarely, very rarely happens that a man of taste and learning is not, at least, an honest man, whatever frailties may attend him.—Hume.

The Lucidity of Landor

The stormy sophist with his mouth of thunder
Clothed with loud words and mantled in the might
Of darkness and magnificence of night.

Swinburne

THACKERAY, in the beginning of his famous lectures on "The Four Georges," makes mention of an old friend whose life extended back into the eighteenth century. "I often thought," he says, "as I took my old friend's hand, how, with it, I held on to the old society." Even such a link with the past was Walter Savage Landor, whose virile writings bridge the gulf between great Freethinkers at the opening and the end of the nineteenth century.

Shelley, who died whilst the century was yet young, was an enthusiastic admirer of Landor, and Swinburne, the last of our great poets, sat at Landor's feet and found inspiration in his wisdom. How lovingly Swinburne refers to the elder singer:—

I found him whom I shall not find
Till all grief end,
In holiest age our mightiest mind,
Father and friend.

Nor was this a mere tribute of affection. Landor cast the spell of genius on all who came near him. Robert Southey, who had so many opportunities of judging, has left a magnificent tribute to his memory. De Quincey, Dickens, Emerson, and Charles Lamb have all combined in their various ways to render affectionate tribute to that "deep-mouthed Bætian," as Byron called him. Robert Browning dedicated his "Luria" to Landor. It is given to few to inspire such love among friends, or fear among enemies. Carlyle, visiting him in old age, found him "stirring company, a proud, irascible, trenchant, yet generous, veracious, and very dignified old man; quite a ducal or royal man in the temper of him."

Landor's literary activity extended over seventy years, and stretched like an arch almost across a century. Dr. Johnson was still talking when he was born, and when he died Darwin's evolutionary theory was shaking the world. By reason of his eighty-nine years he takes his place as a writer in Victorian literature, as well as in the literature of the revolutionary period. He was a poet embodying revolutionary aspirations in classic language. He was also a literary dramatist of great power, and a critic in the widest sense. *Imaginary Conversations*, on which competent judges have bestowed unstinted praise, is his masterpiece. There is nothing like it in the entire range of English literature. It is a great panorama of historic persons, ranging from Plato, in far-off Greece, to our own Porson; Hannibal, of old-world Carthage, to David Hume; Seneca to his old friend Robert Southey. He has painted them all with masterly skill; Kings, and greater than Kings, statesmen and fair ladies, philosophers and prelates, writers and scientists, of all ages and of all types. Epicurus discusses philosophy in his garden; Montaigne smiles at the worthy Scaliger; Melancthon reproves Calvin.

How perfectly, too, has Landor caught the relation of the French Court and the Church in the bitterly ironic conversation between Louis XIV. and Pere La Chaise, when the grand monarch confesses the most heinous crimes and the courtly and oily confessor imposes the most trifling penances. Scene succeeds scene, each richer and fuller than its predecessor, the whole forming a reflection of "life, like a dome of many-coloured glass."

When Landor is at his best, not many are so perfect as he. In nearly every page of his writing there is high thinking and rare eloquence. Indeed, Mac-

millan's well-edited selection of his works (Golden Treasury Series) is one of the most beautiful books in the language. Although Landor addressed a small audience while he lived, he looked confidently to the future: "I shall dine late, but the drawing-room will be well lighted, the guests few and select."

The chief of Landor's other books is *Pericles and Aspasia*. Another of his works, *The Citation of William Shakespeare for Deer Stealing* evoked Charles Lamb's happy epigram that it could only have been written by "the man who did write it, or him of whom it was written." Landor's poetry is not bulky in quantity, but it makes up for it in quality. The exquisite lines on "Rose Aylmer" have found their way into many anthologies and very many hearts, while the lines on the death of Charles Lamb are a lasting tribute to a splendid genius who was also a hero. The single stanza, in his own inimitable manner, prefixed to one of his last books, epitomizes his life and aims in four lines:—

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
Nature I loved, and next to nature, art,
I warmed both hands before the fire of life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

For those who care for concentration and restraint in literature, Landor's writings are full of delight. Withal, he was a typical Englishman, with a good conceit of himself. He showed this when, on Napoleon's invasion of Spain, he went over, and, with his own energy and money, raised a regiment, with whom he marched to the seat of war. A man of letters, he was also a man of action.

Landor has been called a grand old Pagan, and his sympathies were always secular rather than religious. The eternal arrogance of priests always roused his opposition, and he never forgot Milton's advice that "presbyter is but priest writ large." There are very many sceptical thrusts in his writings. Referring to the Christian Bible he makes Melancthon say to Calvin:—

The book of good news, under your interpretation,
tells people not only that they may go and be damned, but, unless they are lucky, they must inevitably.

And, again, writing of religious persecution, he says:—

The unsoundness of doctrine is not cut off nor cauterized; the professor is. The head falls on the scaffold, or fire surrounds the stake, because a doctrine is bloodless and incombustible.

On another page he returns to the attack:—

There is scarcely a text in the Holy Scriptures to which there is not an opposite text, written in characters equally large and legible; and there has been a sword laid upon each.

How he lashes spiritual intoxication! :—

At last the zealot is so infatuated by the serious mockeries he imitates and repeats that he really takes his own voice for God's. Is it not wonderful that the words of eternal life should have hitherto produced only eternal litigation?

One of his "conversations" closes with the significant words:—

There is nothing on earth divine besides humanity.

That was the keynote of his writings from the time when, at college, he was dubbed "a mad Jacobin," until his death, when he had made an imperishable name for himself. It is worth noting, too, that he was a Warwickshire man, and was cradled in the same county as Shakespeare. Indeed, there was something of "the Master" in Landor's own genius.

Carlyle said finely of one of Landor's last literary efforts, published when the old lion was over eighty years of age: "The sound of it is like the ring of Roman swords on the helmets of barbarians. The unsubduable old Roman." A writer of rare distinction, Landor has a permanent place in English literature.

MIMNERMUS

Is Mutation the Work of God?

It is a commonplace that offspring show a resemblance to their parents, and at the same time display a variation, however slight. Now and again in biology we find a rare and radical kind of variation, differing from normal variation in that it originates as a change in a single gene (hereditary unit). In this way quite new hereditary properties come into being as a result of this "principle of genetic variation." The individuals possessing them are known as mutants, or sports.

Bishop Barnes has maintained (*Scientific Theory and Religion*) that God's activity is "most typically represented in mutation," and he goes so far as to claim that Jesus Christ himself was a mutant. And so, with God removed from his other supposed spheres of action as a result of scientific progress, we have here an eminent Bishop searching for some phenomenon which might keep busy a Deity who might otherwise become unemployed.

Barnes, however, has by his haste fallen into a deep trap which offers no logical hope of escape. Had he waited till more was known about mutation he would not have committed himself so definitely to the position that mutation is God's work. For biologists have now discovered that mutations are mostly diseased weaklings, and on the whole *biologically disadvantageous*. Thus the view of Barnes (also shared by Mr. Arnold Lunn, the Roman Catholic, and others) that mutants indicate the work of a benevolent purpose, fails completely.

Apart from this, it might have occurred to any average theist, interested in finding support for his case, that mutation, in any case, *applies to parasites*, who could thus share the supposed advantages.

There is no sign of any kind of intelligent purpose in mutations. They occur at random, and are seldom incorporated into the species (see E. B. Ford, *The Study of Heredity*, 1938). MacBride claims that Mohr, the famous drosophilist, has shown that sports, compared with normal individuals, have a lack of vigour proportionate to the amount of their divergence from type. MacBride himself regards them as injured weaklings, diseased deviations from the stock, indicating some pathological interference with growth. Barnes' Jesus a mutant? We need not trouble to deny it here.

We speak of mutants being "thrown up"; but they are, indeed, much oftener thrown down or sideways. De Vries' Evening Primrose yields the same sports eternally, so that there is again no evidence here for evolution by "mutational blooms." Biologists mostly agree that mutation has played no vital part, at least in those pipe lines of evolution attaining greatest complexity. In short, they offer no support for teleology. As Haldane says, "There is no evidence at all that mutations are biased in a direction advantageous to the species."

In his debate with Haldane Mr. Lunn innocently made the point that "blind chance would mutilate in mutating." So it does; replied Haldane; and therefore, where is the divine plan? As J. S. Huxley

points out, "Naturally the majority of mutations are likely to be harmful, for the simple reason that it is much easier for a random change in a complex mechanism like the body or the brain to throw it out of gear than to improve it." (*The Stream of Life*).

Colour-blindness, hæmophilia (bleeding without congealment) and taste-blindness are examples of recessive abnormalities in human stocks arising from mutation. Some mental defects may also owe their origin to a mutation.

Let us, however, suppose that mutations were entirely beneficial to the species on all occasions. There could still be no room for extra-natural agencies, for much is already known about their physical causation, chiefly as a result of the work of the drosophilists (experimenters with the now famous vinegar-fly), such as Drs. Muller, Painter, Bridges and Goldschmidt. The latter has produced sports from the fly by heating the eggs enough to kill most of them, and Muller by exposing the parents to X-rays. Mild injury of the germ plasma by the latter has also worked sports on mice, and a similar method was successful on *diffugia corona* (by the work of H. S. Jennings).

There are two kinds of mutation, permutation, in which the whole chromosome is involved, and point mutations of the genes. The recurrence of the same mutation may result in its finally replacing the original type. The actual physical causes which bring mutation need not be the concern of biologist at all. Hogben suggests temperature and the chemical constituents of food. At any rate, "Since the results show that mutation can be produced by a physical agent, a strong presumption is created in favour of the view that other physical agents may also produce them" (Morgan, *Scientific Basis of Evolution*).

G. H. TAYLOR

The God Idea

SOMEWHERE, somewhen, here on this bank and shoal of time, a man, say, one in many millions—a sport, probably—created (made out of nothing!) the necessary gods. Necessity's the mother of invention!

Ancestor worship, with its universal appeal, founded on the dreaming disposition of man, had, hitherto, prevailed.

To broadcast his new idea, without producing misconceptions, would be, to this man, an almost impossible task. All's hushed as midnight yet! The graphic arts unborn! And he, the unhappy possessor of a rudimentary language, would, in his struggle to disseminate his startling conception, suggest something different—"nor recognisable by whom it left"—to his hearers. The latter, and some of their hearers, would act similarly, each attempted transmission producing mixed results.

And what characterized the oral, then, would mark the written word later, though probably in a lesser degree. The author of the first religious book, unconsciously, laid the foundations of many creeds. Though something definite had, apparently, been established, misconceptions of its meaning were bound to arise. Considered of divine origin these misconceptions would be eagerly accepted by many. And still further "inspirations" would be aroused by their efforts. Some of the systems thus arising gained popularity and, after a considerable lapse of time, were found to characterize periods.

Lubbock thus arranges the first great stages of religious thought:—

Atheism. An absence of any definite idea of a Deity.

Fetichism. The stage in which man supposes he can force the Deity to comply with his desires.

Totemism, or Nature-worship, in which the Natural, trees, lakes, stones, animals, etc., are worshipped.

Shamanism. Magic and Sorcery.

Anthropomorphism. The representation of the Deity in the form of a man, or with bodily parts and passions. Represented by images, or idols. Idolatry.

In the next stage the Deity is regarded as the author, not merely a part, of nature. He becomes, for the first time, a really supernatural being.

The last stage is that in which morality is associated with religion. (Lubbock: *Origin of Civilization* [1870] p. 119).

Of these stages described by Lubbock the Anthropomorphic calls for special mention:—

When all possible excuses are made for him the Deity of the *Old Testament* is a grossly anthropomorphic creature. Even in the poetic, respectable parts of the *Bible*, his eyes, flesh, mouth, voice, hands, arms and feet all receive special mention. See 2 Chron. xvi. 9; Ps. xxxiv. 15; Deut. viii. 3; Ps. xxix. 4; Isa. xl. 12; liii. 1; lx. 13; Exod. xxxii. 23.

This is not at all wonderful. Tylor establishes that

the conception of a human soul, when once attained to by man, served as a type or model on which he framed, not only his ideas of lower grade souls, but also his ideas of spiritual beings in general, from the tiniest elf that sports in the long grass up to the heavenly Creator and Ruler of the world, the Great Spirit. (Tylor: *Primitive Culture*, Ed. 1891, Vol. II., p. 110).

Man, then, is not only the *Measure*, but the *model* of all things!

If the anthropomorphic disgusts the highly cultured, he provides an alternative, he removes "the limit of theologic speculation into the region of the indefinite and the inane. An unshaped divine entity looming vast, shadowy, and calm beyond and over the material world, too benevolent or too exalted to need human worship, too huge, too remote, too indifferent, too supine, too merely existent, to concern himself with the petty race of men—this is a mystic form or formlessness in which religion has not seldom pictured the supreme." (*Ibid* p. 336).

Grant Allen tried to trace the *Evolution of the Idea of God*, and he tells us (Chap. xx)—"I do not pretend on any one instance to have proved my point; I am satisfied if I have made out a *prima facie* case for further enquiry."

Granted natural living beings, their physical evolution can be satisfactorily traced. The tracing of mental evolution, particularly that of any belief, is anything but an easy task.

Enthusiasm and energy characterize the early stages of religious thought. Between the pioneers of a movement, and its adherents of a few generations later, there lies a deep gulf. The latter lack both enthusiasm and energy and can only be numbered with the "asleep in Zion." When movements cease to be culture forces they become stumbling-blocks. Persistent, active thought is what really matters. One must keep thinking, even if thinking wrongly. Thinking for oneself is of paramount importance. A set of ideas of one's own, even if entirely wrong, is to be preferred to a correct set belonging to someone else.

To blindly, unthinkingly accept a set of ideas, entirely wrong—that way madness lies!—can only be avoided by thinking. Every man's freedom depends upon his own efforts. And to be realized must be claimed by himself.

Every bondman, in his own hand bears
The power to cancel his captivity.

From "the beginning day" God has been a different creature to every member of the human race. But conceptions of him, say the clergy, have all a common resemblance. Naturally! Like begets like! Given death does not destroy resemblances. It creates a great difference though—the magnitude of which lies in the eyes of the beholder.

God seems, to me, the product of a morbid imagination. He is likened to things which cancel each other. Should he exist and still remain ignorant he ought to be ashamed of himself. The clergy, of every denomination, keep him posted each week with current events, advise him how to deal with them, and say what may be expected from him.

And what of it all? The difference between a mental idol and a wooden idol, only that, and nothing more—sheer idolatry!

If the clergy would but read God's book—the *Bible*—intelligently they might learn that man is but a worm, or less than a worm (*Job* xxv. 6; *Ps.* xxii. 6); or a grasshopper (*Isa.* xl. 22), or a sparrow on the housetop, a calf in the stall, a bottle in the smoke, dust, etc., even Nations are but as "drops in the bucket" (*Isa.* xl. 15); it upbraids them for their Idolatry—"Thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself" (*Ps.* l. 21); to whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? said the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things? (*Isa.* xl. 25, 26); and summing them up he truthfully informs them in the *New Testament*—"Ye worship ye know not what!" (*John* iv. 22).

But, notwithstanding all this plain speaking, every religious man remains his own idol. Unable to conceive an infinite being, the pious take refuge in the symbolic—join the heathen, in his blindness, and bow down to wood and stone; each of them communing with himself, praying to himself, worshipping himself!

GEORGE WALLACE

Which was the First Gospel?

ALTHOUGH pretty nearly every Christian authority is convinced that the first Gospel is that of Mark, it can be said without fear of contradiction that this is mere conjecture and that there is no real proof. Nobody knows which or what was the first Gospel—that is, meaning by "Gospel" what is meant by the word now. Nobody knows the *kind* of Gospel which was first written, or whether the first writings, dealing with a Saviour-God, were Gospels, or a collection of sayings, or even if a Saviour-God was mentioned at all in the first drafts—whatever they were. The great theologians and commentators of the *New Testament*, as well as the Higher Critics, have spent many years of ceaseless investigation and toil in their efforts to elucidate the mystery, and we are just as wise now as we were when free and untrammelled criticism of the *Bible* was first attempted.

One fact does however stand out pretty clearly, and that is that neither in the Pauline Epistles nor in those of Clement of Rome and Barnabas is there any mention of written Gospels. Even in the "Didache," the "Teaching of the Apostles" (assigned to a date before about 120 A.D.) there is no idea that written Gospels were in existence.

Apart from what commentators are pleased to call "internal evidence," most authorities fall back upon the account given in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* about Papias, who is supposed to have made certain

statements about the authors of the Gospels of our Mark and Matthew. According to Papias—he may be merely an invention of Eusebius for all we know—Mark wrote down all about Jesus from what he heard from Peter, absolutely accurately, while Matthew wrote the "Logia" in Hebrew which were "interpreted" or "translated" by everybody "as he was able." But unfortunately, commentators are by no means in accord as to whether Papias meant the Gospels of Mark and Luke *as we now have them*; and that is the only point that matters. In any case, there is absolutely no proof that our Matthew is a translation from the Hebrew, and there is a great deal of proof that it is not. As for Luke and John, Papias does not mention them; either he knew nothing at all about them, or they were not in existence in his day, or he did not think anything of them—which is not very pleasant news for those very pious Christians who look upon every word and dot in the Bible as divinely inspired.

Now the date assigned to Papias—it is pure conjecture as is almost everything dealing with the history of the Gospels—is about 80-166 A.D., and the date of his work is about 140 A.D., so that even as late as that date little seems to have been known of our Gospels. And even in the writings of Justin Martyr, dated a decade later, we get nothing about them, for all he speaks of is something called "Memoirs of the Apostles"—which was never the title of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

The important thing to remember about Justin is that he quotes copiously from the Old Testament, though most inexactly, and even far more inexactly from the New—if the "Memoirs" were the New Testament in his day. Nobody knows what is the *real* text of the Gospels, and the quotations given by Justin only complicate matters. But his pupil Tatian must have had four Gospels before him, for he composed a Harmony of them; which goes to prove that after the year 150 A.D. the Gospels were in existence. There is very little evidence to show that they were published before that date.

But did Matthew and Luke use a primitive Gospel which is now called Mark? Nobody knows. That they all used some early writings is pretty certain—or rather one ought to say that they may have used some *oral* matter now found in Mark; but they also used something which was not known to Mark—or at least Mark does not use it. It is a pretty problem which reads almost like a modern "thriller" in which the master detective, after following up all the clues, finds his solution in something quite different from what anybody suspected.

It would not be too difficult to show that every argument used by those critics trying to prove the priority of Mark could be used to prove that Matthew's was the first Gospel. The simple, touching, "eye-witness" story theory of Mark is just pure nonsense. As John M. Robertson pointed out in *Jesus and Judas* (a magnificent piece of close analysis), Mark

tells us (i. 41) that "yearning with pity" Jesus puts out his hand to the leper, touches him, says "I will, be thou made clean; and straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean." To put *that* as history is to insult common sense. No theory of faith-healing that can pass muster even at Lourdes will support a theory of instantaneous disappearance of leprosy.

Robertson, of course, piles proof upon proof to show the great difficulties which have to be faced by those who maintain the priority of Mark, and finally adds:—

The real and final difficulty is that entailed on those who regard Mark as the earliest of the canonical gospels, and as preserving the reminiscences of Peter.

On *that* view, how is the omission of the Sermon on the Mount to be accounted for? Are they prepared to say that Peter either had no knowledge on the subject of the longest and most important of the discourses ascribed to the Lord, or that, whatever reminiscences he had, he preferred to withhold them? On either view, it is plainly impossible to argue that the absence of the Sermon bars the inference of lateness.

But if Mark is not the earliest Gospel, which is? If the question is impossible to answer faced with our present Gospels, are we to conclude there was some far more primitive document, a proto-Mark, or a first edition of Mark, as some authorities argue, or that there really was a "source" document, as Wellhausen proclaimed?

The answer is that we do not know. The infallibility of the Roman Catholic Church on matters of religion and doctrine goes no further than blind acceptance of tradition—that is, its own tradition, nobody else's. And tradition simply will not square with the facts. Otherwise there never would have been any criticism or Higher Criticism, there never would have been among the admittedly orthodox these incessant questionings, there would have been only the blind following of sheep—that supreme ideal of Jesus.

One reason why so many authorities are so keen to make our Mark, or an earlier edition of his Gospel, the first, is to preserve some kind of a Jesus from the shattering blows of the non-historicity school. If Mark is the first, then there may have been some actual man, some teacher who was not virgin born—at all events one whom his disciples never thought was born of a virgin. But then the question remains—what did he teach? And no one can read Mark without laughing at the "man" Jesus going throughout Galilee and elsewhere "preaching and casting out devils" or "demons," varying this idiotic performance with the cure of leprosy or "withered" hands. Can anybody seriously believe that such cures can be performed by a mere man? Are they not typical of a God?

As Robertson insisted the "historic problem of the Rise of Christianity remains the ultimate one," and it still has to be solved. Every attempt to get at "origins" leaves one baffled, or increases the difficulties. In the present state of knowledge only a miracle will provide a solution.

H. CUTNER

The Bible and Language

THE word Bible came into English from the Greek through the Latin. The Byblus or Papyrus reed, which formed the material for ancient books, originated the Greek name Biblos, *Biblion* for a book. The sacred books, which were read in their churches, were naturally called by the Greek Christians *Ta Biblia*, The Books, though this usage has not been traced higher than the fourth century, when it was found in Chrysostom. In process of time this name, with many others of Greek origin, passed into the vocabulary of the Western Church. Here another term, first used by Jerome, *bibliotheca divina*, "the divine library," had also been in use, appearing in Old English in the form *libliopéce*. In the thirteenth century the neuter plural "*Biblia*" came to be regarded as a feminine singular, and "the Books" became by common consent "the Book" (*Biblia* sing.). This gradually displaced the term *libliopéce*, and was adopted into our language in the form Bible.

The Bible is also called *ai grahpai*, the Scriptures, or the Holy Scriptures, i.e., the Sacred Writings. This

expression is used by St. Paul of the Old Testament as a whole. In the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles the same expression is employed (Matt. xxi. 42; Luke xxiv. 32; Acts xviii. 24). The corresponding singular term *εγραφία*—the Scripture—is always used in the New Testament for a special passage (Luke iv. 21; John xx. 9, etc.). Now the term "Scripture," "Holy Writ," the early English rendering of the Latin word, is used alike for the part and for the whole.

St. Paul in one passage, calls the Books of Moses, if not the whole of the Hebrew Canon, "the Old Covenant." In the same context he describes himself and his fellow labourers as "Ministers of a New Covenant" (2 Cor. iii. 6). These terms *ελαία διαθεκε*, the Old Covenant, and *ε καινε διαθεκε*, the New Covenant, were employed at the close of the second century by ecclesiastical writers to denote the Jewish and Christian Scriptures respectively. The Latin rendering of *διαθεκε* fluctuated at first between *instrumentum* and *testamentum*, but *testamentum* prevailed. Hence in the languages of the West the two writings, which make up the Bible, came to be called "the Old Testament" and "the New Testament."

The language in which the Old Testament is written is Hebrew, the only exceptions being Ezra iv. 8; vi. 18; vii. 12-26; Jer. x. 11; Dan. ii. 4-7, 28. These particular portions are written in the Chaldee dialect, which is transitional, and presents various points of difference from the later Chaldee, in which the Targums are written, and also from Syriac. This curious phenomenon finds its explanation in the residence of Daniel and Ezra at Babylon, and their relation to Babylonian and Persian rulers, who successively held sway over that city and surrounding countries. With regard to the Hebrew language, it is a branch of the great Semitic family of languages, and it is related to the Syriac, Chaldee, Assyrian, Phœnician, Arabic and Ethiopic dialects.

The language of the New Testament is Greek. It is not, however, the Greek of the classical writers, but a particular kind of Greek called Judæo-Greek or Hellenistic. When Alexander the Great formed the idea of imbuing the East with the Greek language and customs, he built Alexandria in Egypt, and assigned a part of it to a colony of Jews. In this way and through the gradual dispersion of the Jews from Palestine, in a westerly direction, a large body of people sprang up, who, whilst they thought and felt as Hebrews, yet spoke to a great extent in Greek. Thus the Judæo-Greek dialect came into being.

The Septuagint was written in it, and it was largely used, not only in Egypt and Asia Minor, but also in Palestine. This spoken Greek varied to some extent in the different provinces of Asia and Africa that were subject to the Macedonian rule. We have but an imperfect knowledge of this spoken language, but it seems to have diverged still more widely than the later written Greek from ancient elegance and purity, admitting new and provincial words and forms in greater number, and allowing a still more marked intermixture of the previously distinct dialects.

This, then, is the language of the New Testament, as we have it.

The dialect has been well described as, "Hebrew thought in Greek clothing."

R. RIDDLER

If we are told a man is religious, we still ask what are his morals?—*Shaftesbury*.

Directly the scientific *rationale* becomes possible, it also becomes imperative.—*Constance Naden*

Acid Drops

"A stirrup-pump, pails of earth and water are essential to every Church." So explained the Bishop of Winchester to the Diocesan Conference a few days ago. On making enquiries we find that the same advice is given to keepers of public houses, night clubs, and even halls in which pro-Bolshevist meetings are held. Really with himself at their head the body of clergymen in the Winchester Diocese ought to be able to dispense with such unsacred things as pails of earth and stirrup pumps, which may be manipulated by people who are cussing away for all they are worth. But even the Pope prefers a dug-out to the Cathedral of St. Peter's during an air-raid. We live in very degenerate times.

The Bishop also said that the clergy can give a "gospel of encouragement (to carry the pails of earth) and courage" (in working the stirrup-pumps). Now we wonder what the Bishop would say, that is, what text would he cite if some of the people he has trained to trust in prayer were to go down on their knees, when the Church caught fire, and started praying. Would he pray, or would he swear, or would he yank the man up by his coat-collar and in his most parsonic tone tell him not to make a damned fool of himself, but to go and work at the pumps? And yet we have not the least doubt that when a church is on fire prayer is an excellent method of saving the building—provided there are enough stirrup pumps and pails of earth on hand.

This war appears to be playing the devil with theology. We have already noted that after a set day of prayer some misfortune has happened to the Allies. The Angels of Mons have never appeared once, and in all the appeals to the people no one has called for more parsons. We have been told that success in this war will depend upon our Navy, even more than upon the Army, and upon superiority in air power. But no one has made an appeal for more parsons or more prayers—no member of the Government. Some question might be asked in Parliament about it. Some member—Lord Caldecote is mentally fitted for the job—might move in the House of Lords, "That this House seeing the amount of spiritual power vested in this country, recognizing also whenever we have won a war it has been because God has been on our side, believes that the number of clergy should be trebled and their united praying power bent in the direction of calling God Almighty's attention to the need for his interference (on the side of the Allies) as early as possible." To show that we mean business, and do trust in the Lord, this praying arm should march to St. Paul's with a stirrup-pump in one hand and pail of earth in the other.

The King "has warmly approved" the suggestion of our super-intelligent Archbishops—that no matter what we may be doing, "every day at the hour of noon, Christians everywhere should make a momentary act of remembrance towards God and of prayer for his cause." This is a very fine suggestion, and to see that it is properly carried out, why don't the Archbishops take a leaf from Mahomet and call Christians to prayer by the voice of a Muezzin stationed in specially built towers all over the country? All Christians would then know without looking at the clock that it was time to pray, they could run out to the street, and have five minutes glorious gravel on the pavement. Specially selected Muezzins could be imported from Turkey, and everything done ship-shape.

But, after all, it is surely God's business to commit an "act of remembrance" towards us. That is clearly his job not ours. We cannot, theoretically, help God; he can theoretically, help us. It is about time that this kind of thing was adjusted. After all the King is officially Defender of the Faith, and he might advise God Almighty that in existing circumstances the people may not feel justified in objecting to a God who does not commit an "Act of Remembrance" when it is so badly needed.

We mentioned last week the report that Laval, one of the rulers of France—under German dictation—and who was so gallant a helper, with British statesmen assisting, in securing the victory of Franco and the Italian victory in Abyssinia—is aiming at securing a coalition of German, French and Italian Roman Catholics. A leading religious weekly points out that the Roman Church is in close alliance with the Fascist parties, the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines applauded the treachery of King Leopold, the Papal organ, *Osservatore Romano*, is jubilant at the destruction of political liberty in France. In America the Roman Catholic press is mainly anti-British, and in this country the defenders of Italian Fascism are Roman Catholics of position. This gives point to Mr. Bevin's recent statement that it is not the members of the fifth column in the street against whom we have to guard. The real danger comes from the members of the fifth column who are "high-up."

It comes also well in the face of the appeals of our own clergy to strengthen the church, that with the threat of a German invasion of Ireland, as a stepping-stone to the invasion of this country, the chief thing that sets North and South at each other's throats is religion. Even the *Church Times* is forced to say that Irish priests may find their country another Poland if they do not sink their religious differences. Is there anything in the world that so definitely divides people as does religion?

The *Universe* placards its front page with a "call to Penance," so as to "placate"—what do you think?—"God's wrath"!! Cardinal Hinsley screams, "We in England have sinned; we have done wickedly"—a sentiment held all over Germany by the way, and assiduously propagated by the Goebbels' lie factory. Ninety per cent of Germans all over the world believe Cardinal Hinsley, and agree that we in England have "done wickedly." Every time Germans contemplate the havoc caused by our air-arm in Germany they will want to re-echo the Cardinal. But as he speaks in the name of religion, and wants more and more grovelling, he is allowed to perpetuate his lies in priest-ridden Ireland. The religious fanaticism of Protestants and Catholics looks as if it will burst into flame again. How these Christians love one another!

We have constantly pointed out that the Roman Catholic Church has no particular policy. It can adopt anything that will permit it to exercise a force on social life. Those who doubt this might do well to read the leading article in the *Catholic Herald* for July 12, with a half-blessing of M. Laval's plan forming a Roman Catholic bloc running through France, Italy and Germany on Fascist lines, and acting as a force against anti-Christian (Roman Catholic) opinion. And, there is the usual warning against any co-operative action with "Bolshevism." The religious opposition to any alliance with Russia has always cost this country dear, and when leading politicians solemnly warn us against activities of the fifth column, it is well to remember that the sympathies of very many leading Roman Catholics in this country are strongly Fascist, even though they may protest against the work of Hitler—so long as it continues to work against the Church. But it would not be at all difficult to make terms with the Church, as Franco and Mussolini have already done.

The *Church Times* wishes to see everyone, the ploughman at his furrows, the munition worker at his lathe, the soldier at his guns, and so forth, open his day's work with prayer. We would venture a substantial wager that if this advice were followed there would be more "cuss-words" used by employers than ever before, and there would be enquiries by the Government, of those engaged in war-work, why the output had decreased. Besides, why cannot the parson do the job? He is on more intimate terms with God than the workman, and he is paid for the work.

We haven't the slightest doubt that the *Sunday Times*, in a special article in a recent issue, was not lying in form when it said that many people owing to the war were returning to Church. All it actually meant, and as it would have been explained, if the statement had been challenged in such a way that some defence had to be made, is that dilatory Church-goers were now attending more regularly. And that we are willing to believe. The days of the Munich settlement are not so far off that we cannot remember the hysterical outburst, partly motivated by fear, that created a whole week of continuous service in Westminster Abbey. That is a very common feature in the history of religion. With a certain type of undeveloped character a pestilence, a ruined harvest, a national disaster, even individual trouble, reawaken the scarcely suppressed savage in man. On the other hand when that "day of God" has passed civilized common sense is certain to assert itself. But the Churches must make hay while they can, even though there is nothing to prevent the crop rotting so soon as the situation becomes normal. As we have so often said, war, whether avoidable or unavoidable, is always a step back in the scale of civilization, and the more marked the retrogression the more favourable to the revival of those mental habits that belong to the childhood of the race.

It is an old observation that history repeats itself, and evidence to that end is found in the religious world. We have the same stories of the return to religion owing to this war that we had in the war of 1914. Most of these are exaggerations, some of them deliberately so. In 1914-18 the most fantastic of these operators was the then Bishop of London; he went to France and told the troops there how the people at home were turning to religion, and they should follow their example. Then he came home and told the people how the soldiers were flocking to religion, and they should show themselves worthy of "our boys" by regular attendance at church. He called the war "The day of God." So it was. It meant better business for the churches or at least he hoped it did and pretended it did. After the war he was lamenting the growth of unbelief.

The *Church Times*, which is certainly free from ultra-Protestant prejudice against Roman Catholicism, says that a petition has been presented to Mussolini by a number of Italian Bishops asking him to invade Palestine, and to put all "the holy places" in charge of the Roman Catholic Church. That would suit admirably the Roman Church, which would not be slow to exploit the showman's income from the "faithful." The *Church Times* says this is depressing because "it shows the readiness of the Roman Catholic Church to ally itself with the forces of evil for a purely sectarian end." We may put on one side the phrase "the forces of evil," as another sectarian phrase, but one need only point out that the *Church Times* itself to achieve sectarian ends is quite ready to use the power of the State when the sect served is its own. It becomes evil when the policy is adopted by another church with which it is not in complete agreement.

Germany has produced a Bible that leaves out all mention of Jews. The next step should be to produce a history of Europe, in which no one is mentioned but Germans. It reminds one of "Proletarian science," a phrase which to-day is not nearly so common as it was a few years back. This general sectarianizing of life should form valuable material for the scientist of the future. And he would not be wholly wrong if he derived it mainly from the sectarianizing influence of the Christian religion. For example, the clergy generally are to-day protesting against the subjection of man to the "State." We agree with a very great deal of this protest, but is there any substantial difference between the complete subjection of the individual to the State and the complete subjection of the individual to the Church? We have never been able to discover any

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S. BULLION.—Very pleased to have the high appreciation of a recent subscriber to the *Freethinker*. We hope to have you long on our list.

(MRS.) E. PUGH.—Thanks. The times are, as you say, "very trying," but we never looked on our job as an easy one, only as congenial and useful.

G. W. MAUD.—Pleased to hear from one who has taken in this paper from the first number. You beat our record by nearly ten years.

R. DANIEL writes that he has read the *Freethinker* for forty-nine years, and hopes "it will be in existence long after I am gone." We hope to have Mr. Daniel as a reader for many years more.

(MRS.) E. SMITH.—It is interesting to know your newsagent always delivers this paper wrapped in *Micky Mouse*, and presents them with an awed whisper "your papers 5d." as if it were a huge secret.

J. HAYES.—Obliged for your promise to secure still more readers. Thanks for those already obtained.

R. HUNTER writes.—"I wish you would give us more about current events. Everything touched on is dealt with in such a manner as to make your 'Views and Opinions' valuable." But if all the paper was on that line, the value of the other articles would be lost to readers, and we know they are highly esteemed.

H. MILNE writes.—Thanks for the great help the journal has been to me.

G. PRESCOTT.—Paper is being sent. Much obliged.

H. CESCINSKY, "CINE CERE" AND R. BOULTING.—Shall appear.

W. WRIGHT.—Pleased to hear from you. Our regards to self and wife. We have many pleasant memories of our meeting you both, meetings which have extended over many years.

G. WHITE.—Muller's prayer "racket" consisted in never asking for money except through prayer, but getting it well advertised that he was depending on prayer alone. The advertisement saved expense and secured wide-spread attention. If a soap-maker tried the game it would be a dead failure.

W. MILLICHAMP.—Thanks for pamphlet. We can only echo your comment "What rot!"

A. H. BRIANCOURT, FRED HOLDEN, H. JEPSON.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.

M. ORR.—The Publisher's name and address of *Jesuit Truth* are Barnicotts, of Taunton, Somersetshire, England.

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Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

SPECIAL

WITH a view to meeting circumstances that may arise with a prolongation of the war, we should be greatly helped if each subscriber to the *Freethinker* would be good enough to send us his, or her, name and address. We refer only to those who procure their copies through newsagents. Those who order direct from the office have their addresses already on our books.

The circumstances we have in view may never arise, but it is well to be prepared for all kinds of difficulties. We have, so well as we can, guarded the future of the paper in many directions, and this suggestion represents the last contingency of which we can think—at the moment.

All that is required is just a name and an address on a postcard or in a letter. We shall know to what it refers. Our readers have assisted us so willingly, and in so many directions, that we do not hesitate to ask this further help.

CHAPMAN COHEN

Sugar Plums

There is an acute paper shortage, so the Government is plastering the walls with pictures of a young woman holding her hands over her ears, and another with the same woman holding her hand over her mouth. The pictures represent the resolve not to listen to anything or say anything that is unpleasant about the war. We should be sorry to think that represents the average British woman. A people that cannot listen to unpleasant things do not deserve to have good news told them. We must listen to insults from our enemies. There is no reason why we should be insulted by our friends. When we were told by the B.B.C at the opening of the war that we were not to talk to our neighbours about the war, we protested that it meant making everyone suspicious of his neighbour, and to breed that kind of feeling was not the way to win an enemy like the Hitler gang. If we are to be dragooned into silence, and talked into suspicion of everyone who takes a dismal view of the present situation, we are taking a leaf from the Hitler Bible.

The sign manual of a free people must be freedom of criticism. Without freedom of criticism the Chamberlain Government would still be in power. It was freedom of criticism that made Mr. Churchill Prime Minister, and brought a Coalition Government into being. But the regulation that it is a criminal offence to say anything that may dishearten anyone to whom we may be speaking is one of the silliest pieces of censorship since the war commenced. There are some people who cannot help taking a gloomy view of anything. If they do not express that view in words they will in their looks, and to make the regulation effective we ought to have police court proceedings against anyone who does not look happy. Perhaps some genius will invent a "laughometer," and one of our many ministers will then be deputed to see that everyone over sixteen years of age is tested to see whether he is looking or feeling in such a manner that will hinder the progress of the war.

There is an infinitesimal number of the people who are opposed to the war. There is, surely, a smaller number who think we shall lose the war. And there can be but a very small number that hope we shall lose the war. Yet to satisfy those with a mania for interference with individual freedom, we are, with the aid of pictures of a week-end kind of a girl, to refuse to listen to unpleasant criticism, and not merely refuse to listen, we must be afraid to say what we think about the war, and by inevitable consequence, make each man suspicious of his neighbour by being deprived of the one thing that can provide evidence that the opinion he expresses—and the smile he wears may not be due to a desire to avoid fine or imprisonment. We must, during the war, to some extent copy the manoeuvres of Hitler & Co. But we surely

need not copy him so slavishly as to make it a criminal offence to play the part of a "dismal Jimmy." These heralds of evil will have short shrift if their number and importance is not intensified by ill-advised regulations. It is the only war in our time, that has come anyway near to a war of ideas and ideals. Do not spoil it by panic legislation and radio alarmists.

The mention of one of the Oxford colleges in this week's "Views and Opinions" brings back to us an experience of our own that may be of interest to our readers. It is one of the personal experiences we have not mentioned in our autobiography. In response to an invitation at the beginning of 1930 from the "Fellowship of Youth" (a body formed of past and present students), we agreed to give the students a lecture. We selected the subject, "The Foundations of Religion." That lecture was reprinted, with a considerable number of notes, and is still to be had. The meeting was a great success. The hall was crowded. I was informed there was a large number of applications for admission received from outsiders—which could not be given because of the rule barring non-members of the college. There was keen interest shown in the lecture, a very lively and prolonged discussion, with not too great a confusion of knowledge with understanding among the young men and young women present.

We remained at the College to dinner with the students, and was informed that it was in all respects the best attended meeting that had been held. We were also asked, by the Secretary, we believe, if another visit could be paid. The reply to this was, yes, but it was accompanied with the assurance that we should never again be asked. "Why not, we can do as we please," was the retort. To that we replied, "You think so, and had few people been present, had the Atheist speaker retired from the field with 'head bloody and bowed,' a second invitation might be given. But the meeting has been successful, and you have confessed to the interest aroused. We shall come again, if we are asked. But we shall never be asked."

Events—or the lack of them—justified our expectations. The invitation was never received. It was too interesting to the listeners, too full of real information about religion, and a wary eye is kept open in such circumstances. But the lecture is in print with six extra pages of notes. And we will send twenty-five copies for circulation to any of the Oxford Colleges, free, on receipt of a promise that they shall be distributed. And we prophesy . . .

Soliloquy

Know whence and whither is an idle quest
Though oft we muse and ponder on the jest
To live with cares surround our lot to be
No need to bow the head, nor bend the knee.

How we are here and why is shrouded still
And echo murmurs that it ever will
For Nature plays with us like tennis balls
Down to the end until the curtain falls.

Yet good there is but greater evil too
The latter is the fate of all but few
The meaning of it all is hid in night
For comes no answer to "let there be light."

Perhaps 'tis pride to think there should unfold
The purport of a part if not the whole
That atoms of a little span should think
There's some bright happy land beyond the brink.

The lure of sex has brought us to this pass
The rolling years add increase to the Moss
'Tis Nature's way in plenishing her store
What of the Soul? a myth! and nothing more.

J. MACKINNON

"Written by People in a Trance"

[This is the second of two articles received after the death of our late contributor, Mr. George Bedborough. We print them as a farewell note from one who loved Freethought.]

A FEW years ago Mr. R. A. Edwards wrote a particularly fatuous "story"—or "parable"—called "Jack, Jill and God." The author seemed in that parable to have a religion all his own. Since then he has written *World Adrift: A Recall to God*, which in a way expands a decidedly "simple" story into something like a Declaration (we cannot call it an explanation) of the author's religious views.

The author has imagination undoubtedly. Who but a writer of fairy tales could see in the queer old "sight" known as the Archbishop of Canterbury a "romantically picturesque picture." Mr. Edwards compares him to a medieval monarch "the past of school history books." But we should take the similarity back a little further, even if the "romance" were lost in the process. The old tribal medicine-man talking exactly like the Archbishop and dressed somewhat like him, although very far indeed from pocketing the huge revenues of Archbishops and Bishops!

As to educational equipment, Mr. Edwards and the Archbishop probably know as much as is taught at our best schools. We do not think this is any compliment to men whose religious ideas are just as barbarous and ignorant as that of the Medicine-man already mentioned. Decidedly all three characters—archbishop, author and medicine-man know as much about God and the "happy hunting ground" as each other.

Archbishops are however bound by certain creeds and traditions, and we know more or less what they believe. Mr. Edwards has "less responsibility and greater freedom." He evidently objects to be CALLED a Fundamentalist. It seems a pity that all religion from the medicine-man to the Modernist of 1940 compels men who believe in religious ideas to conform to innate Fundamentalism, however they may hate the necessity and deny their obligation.

Religion implies revelation. It may be possible for Deists to believe there is a Deity with whom (or which) communication is impossible, but theirs then is not a religion but a barren theory. Even an individual personal access to Deity involves a religion—as for instance a Quaker may believe in an Inner Light revealing God's Will to himself alone, although the same God may say the same things to all who seek Him.

These considerations may account for some Christians who try to save what they call "essential religion" from obviously silly untrue or evil "revelations." When applied to a Christianity, a Bible and a Church, there creeps in a duplicity which is objectionable, whether it is conscious or unconscious. A Judge recently expressed his regret that a lying witness before him was perfectly sincere—adding "and that's the pity of it."

In our view Mr. Edwards is far less advanced in his Modernism, and much more Fundamentalist, than he seems to regard himself. Like any young infidel—of a century or two ago—he rouses roars of laughter as he tells of

A very old clergyman asserting he believed every word of the story of Jonah swallowed by a great fish—but you see from his phraseology that Mr. Edwards condemns those only who believe "every word of the story." He himself refuses to suggest by the least hint that the story is a nonsensical fable. After the laughter has ceased he says

The story is plainly a parable, and gains point when that fact is understood.

So even the silliest of all Bible yarns is positively promoted to higher acceptance instead of mirthful dismissal.

Mr. Edwards would probably find similar phrases to defend whatever he was told by his church to believe however much his reason and his education taught him to be incredible. For instance

It is simply no use trying to maintain that there are not two stories of the Flood in the book of Genesis, for there quite certainly are, and it is equally certain that they do not agree. (p. 51).

But as the Americans say: So What? He seems sorry about it, like Sir Samuel Hoare's "regret" that he could not suppress the World Congress of Free-thinkers.

Mr. Edwards appears to imagine that such discrepancies as he quotes are rare and negligible. He should read the *Bible Handbook*. And he should learn too that these important and accusing contradictions are a link in a long chain of reasons which have led thinkers to see how incredible is the claim—many centuries enforced by cruellest persecutions—that the Bible is the work of an Omnipotent Allwise God.

It is not always clear how far the author is in agreement with Modernist beliefs, or whether he is "exposing" them. He refers to "a group of workers" who

if they have made some extravagant claim—proved beyond any chance of question that the books of the Old or the New Testament had been written like other ancient books.

This ought to mean that no God was required to write the Bible, and we can take it or leave it. For example, he refers to 1 Samuel xiv., wherein we read "Thus said the Lord of Hosts . . . go and smite Amalek . . . slay both man and woman, infant, suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." About this ghastly inhumanity Mr. Edwards says (p. 57):—

Samuel was mistaken in thinking that God wished Saul to kill all the Amalekites.

We notice that Mr. Edwards omits the horrible details given in our own quotation from the Bible itself. He does not expound the curious ethical situation implied in Samuel's queer ideas of the sort of thing one could expect God to say, if God ever spoke at all. And he forgets the sequel shows that God's alleged command was duly obeyed, and that "The Word of the Lord came unto Samuel" after the events and approved of his obedient butchery. Also the contemporary men of God, the historian whose authorship and teaching has been approved by all Christian generations, and the Church Canon and all the Morals of all the Churches have accepted this passage as God's Holy Word.

It would be pleasant to record that Mr. Edwards says, "And therefore I reject a religion and a Book which thus offends my moral sense." Oh no! Mr. Edwards is so clever a gentleman that he can himself distinguish between what God really said and what He is said to have said, but didn't. It comes to this: that when you hear the priest stand up and tell you as he does every Sunday: "God spake these words and said—so and so," he really means only: "The Bible says that Moses said Thou shalt not—so and so," and you then distinguish for yourself which is God's word and which is the ordinary pretentious liar's word.

It is not for us sceptics to worry about these difficulties of believers, whether it is their attempt to perform miracles (and impossibilities therefore) of dis-

crimination between God's Word and Man's assumptions. Nor does there seem any ground for the strange discrimination between God speaking to His Prophets (in the Old Testament), and the same God speaking through a human being like Christ in the New Testament. It is amusing to realize that the same man in this present day can be (more or less) a Modernist about the Old Testament, and a Fundamentalist concerning the New Testament.

"Let us confine ourselves to the New Testament," says Mr. Edwards.

He claims without much basis that:—

The New Testament is not some kind of magical literature written by people in a trance.

It is perhaps only a question of definition. Most people call "the Book of the Revelation of St. John," the record of a dream, some would call it a trance, and others a nightmare. Probably all three descriptions are correct. What else is any "divine" revelation? The Acts of the Apostles (x. 10) frankly describes St. Peter's revelation by the word "Trance," and St. Paul (the "most important of the Christian Missionaries," according to Mr. Edwards) boasted of a similar "Trance" revelation (Acts xxii. 17-18).

Perhaps the author is sincere in saying:—

As clearly as it is possible to condemn anything Christ condemned war.

We deny altogether that Christ expressed any direct condemnation of war. He certainly did not mention it "as clearly as possible," or he must have mentioned war. Christians have a nasty knack of claiming that Christ condemned everything objectionable in human conduct simply because amongst other words attributed to him are "Love one another," and it suits some up-to-date apologist to overlook that Christ is said to have said also "unless a man HATE his Father and Mother he cannot be my disciple." Accordingly Christians can "take it or leave it," and in any case quote the Master as an authority—on both sides.

But the Bible does quote Christ as saying, "Resist not Evil." This sentence MAY include war. But if it means anything at all, it means also that no Christian should wash, cat, take medicine or do anything at all which might retard any kind of evil such as dirt, indigestion, or small-pox. These things have always been considered Evil. We could quote evidence, including every kind of religious organization's representatives' evidence, claiming that War is sometimes less evil than peace.

The efforts of those pioneers—always including the work of "infidels" and heretical Quakers—to end and prevent all wars (as for instance the Kellogg Pact) were based on humane and reasonable principles. For these Mr. Edwards has no place. He says:—

If we refuse to bear arms it must be because we are Christians, not because war hurts, or is wasteful, or causes slumps. God and God's Glory Only. And if we perish we perish. Madness—but divine madness? (p. 119).

Only religionists, relying upon infantile delusion about a post-mortem life (somewhere in Heaven or Hell) could degrade humanity by the suggestion that mankind's existence here is so unimportant that he may perish like flies for all these religionists care. The noblest of all that mankind ever did or thought was to save from fire, flood, disease and death any man, woman or child who could be thus saved.

It is what Hardy called one of "Life's Little Ironies." Salvation! Christ coming "not to judge the world but to SAVE it" (John xii. 47) really means He is going to judge and condemn the world and finally destroy it!

Another "little irony" is Mr. Edwards's jejune gospel of Non-Resistance. Christianity—armed with state-power and vast earthly riches *plus* Omnipotent Omniscience—for many centuries devised the cruellest persecutions and supported the bloodiest of wars. Its God and its Bible approved of human chattel-slavery. Their later professors intensified this in the diabolical slave-trade—carried on with the Cross of Christ at the masthead of their freights of living flesh. It is a religion which even to-day interdicts reasonable recreation and entertainment one day every week, and all the time prevents Secular Education having a fair chance. And, forsooth, Mr. Edwards asks us to regard this religion of his as a guide to Non-resistance to Evil. The jest has gone far enough.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH

Paris in 1872

RECENT events bring to my recollection very vividly the condition of Paris in 1872. Being of a receptive age, all I heard and saw of the aftermath of the Siege and Commune was indelibly impressed on my youthful mind.

Paris was slowly awakening from a long nightmare, the blackened ruins of the Tuileries, the shattered public buildings and houses riddled by Prussian shot and shell, the bullet-holed shutters, doors and walls, which indicated the site of barricades, the legend in long lean letters, "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité," which one met with everywhere, all told their tale of suffering and sacrifice.

The Louvre and Notre Dame had escaped destruction, and the Place de la Concorde, where the statues representing French cities had been wreathed with crêpe, so that they might not behold the desecration of Paris, seemed undamaged.

Our cocher and cicerone was an English groom; the tide of war had stranded him in Paris, and his vivid stories of the siege, the famine and the street fighting during the Commune were of never-ending interest to my parents and to me. He told how, as the pressure of the blockade was intensified, all animals gradually disappeared. First horses, then dogs, cats and even rats were consumed. The monkeys were the only animals in the Zoological Gardens which escaped the ragout.

The Maître of Meurice's Hotel gave me an interesting souvenir of the burning of the Tuileries. The intense heat had caused the vast mirrors to melt and run in a molten stream, which later cooled and lay in pools, and a curiously twisted lump of glass, like giant barley sugar, was my memento of the Hall of the Marshals "where Napoleon III. and his wife, his mistresses, his sycophants, his corrupt ministers and his incompetent commanders, had danced and made merry for well-nigh twenty years."

Amid this devastation, and despite the crushing terms of the capitulation, the people bore themselves bravely, and Paris still exhibited that indefinable and appropriate air of gaiety which seems to belong to her by right. The terms had been severe indeed, they were, *inter alia*, the cession of the fertile plains of Alsace and Lorraine with the pine-clad mountains of the Vosges and the payment of a huge indemnity of £200,000,000.

The resilience of the French nation was shown by the payment of this vast sum in a little over three years; but the severance of her beloved provinces left a wound that never healed.

In these days it is interesting to turn to those fine war-stories of MM. Érekmann-Chatrian, *The History*

of a Peasant, The Siege of Phalsbourg, and The Conscript. Therein one reads of scenes and incidents which are being re-enacted at the present time.

The hero of these stories is Joseph Bertha, "the young man with a bit of a limp," who, detesting war, and seeing very clearly when conscription called him that "glory is not for us; but for others," was yet to bear himself with high courage and endeavour in many campaigns. The little town of Phalsbourg is the scene of the simple home, life described in these novels, where Joseph, his sweetheart Catherine, his master good old Pere Goulden the watchmaker, Aunt Grethel and other simple folks watched the flux of war and the fortunes of Napoleon's star till its extinction on the field of Waterloo.

And now we learn that Phalsbourg has become a vast military hospital centre, where no combatant may enter unless brought in wounded; it is a town of mercy under the International Red Cross. Will our enemies respect that symbol? They have not done so elsewhere, and it was recently reported that they have killed by machine gun, from a height of thirty feet, a party of children playing football outside the town.

After many years I seem to stand again before a house in one of the streets near the Rue de Rivoli. Half-hidden in the façade was an unexploded shell; the owner of that house had, we are told, vowed it should remain there till France was free.

EDGAR SYERS

Hymnomania

(Continued from page 430)

HYMN 339 puts an embargo on toffee and bull's-eyes, the kiddies' pennies being really "to carry to his temple gate"—otherwise the collection plate. The home "above the bright blue sky," sung in No. 337, hardly compensates for living in a home here not worth a song. But O, to hear the kiddies who love untidy romps, to whom a drawing-room would mean torture of "tidiness," and who feel the day well-spent if they have accumulated all the grime that puddles and ponds can attach to them—O, to hear them chant: "Soon in the golden city The boys and girls shall play And through the dazzling mansions Rejoice in endless day." (No. 341). "Endless day!" for young terrors glad to drop into mother's arms and thence into bed tired out after a scrumptious time! "Coo-! Goo-night!"

It would be an interesting experiment to teach naughty boys and girls the full instruction conveyed by hymn 572. They could then logically defy the authority of parents completely, and even ridicule parental claims to right of control, because all the care for which parents are supposed to stand is absolutely "the Lord's alone." Food, clothes, protection are all "bestowed" upon the children by "him."

How potently the sentiments of No. 568 have been forced upon the young—ay, and "children of a larger growth!" "Meek and lowly may I be." "Let me to my betters bow"—that's the stuff of which good little Christians—and peers and plutocrats—are made.

Children are baptized, it appears, to "Lift up their fallen nature." In after years they may be sorry they did not stand up for their birthrights filched by the priests. Also, they are baptized in order that their "Divine Father shall Receive them, cleanse them, own them." From results of baptism we have seen, the "Divine Father" makes a very poor "nannie" in the "cleansing" business, and his "ownership"

is on a par with the husband's who deserts wife and babes.

"For the young" there are quite a few mentions of "the virgin's womb," the miraculous nature of which, no doubt, overwhelms the curiosity of the infant mind. Far too frequently, however, the singer of this "mystery" would be a "little mother" who, from her own acquaintance with family burdens, could teach a Sunday school "teacher" that babies do not grow under cherry-trees or emerge through a maiden's ear.

Our prattling innocents are given full rations of blood and death in "Hymns A. & M. or The Charnel House Songster." More than enough to put "the fear of God" in 'em, but little likely to instil the "beginning of wisdom."

Now to take a general outline of Hymnomania. Youth moans with age that "Brief life is here our portion"; "Our life is but a fading dream"; "Soon will you and I be lying Each within our narrow bed" *ad nauseam*. But life goes on, and congregations merge so evenly in its activities when away from the "dim religious light" (more truly, damned religious blight) that they cannot be identified from the pagans around them. Morbidity would be bad for business. "Strangers and pilgrims here below, We seek a home above," sing parson, squire, merchant and tradesman, temporarily ignoring stipend, revenue, dividends and profits, but emphatically pool-pooling the idea that they are not *well-known* "here below."

"God . . . Whose yearly operation Brings the hour of harvest mirth" sings Giles with what energy is left to him after his "yearly operation" in toil and sweat on a twentieth part of parson's wages. Equally regardless of truth, operative, smith, trader, fisherman, scientist (?) and artist sing: "Thine is the loom, the forge, the mart, The wealth of land and sea; The world of science and of art, Revealed and ruled by thee"; well knowing that their respective labours leave naught whatever for "thee" to claim. Hymn 373 would be most unsuitable for the commemoration of a colliery disaster: "Deep in unfathomable mines He works his sovereign will," says the book.

No modernist can get away from the rank fundamentalism of the hymn book. No. 377 has a primitive cry against "Pestilence"—"Thine awful judgments are abroad," it tells the Lord, invoking him to "let the plague be stayed." "While the wicked are confounded, Doom'd to flames and woe unbounded," (398): "To shine in heavenly lustre, Or burn in everlasting night"; (327) these keep hell alive.

It appears that the "Creator" went wrong in making a heart. He had finished his job, and said that "all is very good," but "One sinner by his sin has marr'd The blissful harmony," and hymn 44 "reveals" that the "very good" job necessitates "creating man's heart anew." Sabotage by some celestial pattern-maker, perhaps.

Fear is, characteristically, rife throughout the list. "Oh, how I fear thee, living God"; (What a tongue-licking the Christians make of that "living God!") "Plant holy fear in every heart"; and so on. Intimidation is rampant: "awful hour," "before his bar severe," "Day of wrath, that dreadful day," "ghostly enemies," "phantoms of the night," "evil dreams" are a few of the bogey-bogeys of the chaste collection. The "Hear us," "Save us," "Have mercy" of the litanies fit well with No. 94: "Holy Jesus, grant us tears, Fill us with heart-searching fears, Ere the awful doom appears." To what degradation can man descend—under the "spell" of religion!

But now for some light relief. There is much unconscious humour in a hymnal. For instance: "God only knows the love of God" (195): "The Lord is in

this place. . . . How dreadful is this place" (text for hymn 526); "Awful is his name"; "Vainly would reason grasp the things divine" (159); "Long-suffering Jesus, hear our prayer" (490) "Jesus, what didst thou see in me That thou hast dealt so lovingly?" (191): "Have mercy on us worms of earth" (162); (Christian self-portraiture?); and finally, "Though vile and worthless, still Thy people, Lord, are we." No Atheist can hope to beat the derision in that last taunt.

"Saviour, when in dust to thee Low we bow the adoring knee," infers a shortage of hassocks, possibly. According to hymn 560, the devout go to holy communion to "see the things unseen," a phenomenon not uncommon in religions. And of the virgin birth we are told: "Ask not how this should be, But worship and adore." Well, isn't that the very essence of all worship? With Christian lands obscured by thick "black-outs" it is amusing to read: "O'er heathen lands afar Thick darkness broodeth yet." (217). Unhappily, our "missions" are mainly war missions to canvass for allies to-day.

Then there are some comically misplaced "alleluis." No. 295 raises this note of praise for lightnings, storms and floods. "When Thomas doubted the disciples word, Allelui" (130); "But the pain which he endured, Allelui (134); "Lord, though parted from our sight, Allelui," all sound very unfeeling. But "Allelui" is "the eternal strain The Lord of all things loves," so he "asks for it."

Fortunately, few weddings would reach the fourth verse of hymn 350, "Holy Matrimony"; it would be *too* embarrassing if the bride's father turned out to be an oddity. "Be present, *awful Father*, To give away this bride," are words to upset the solemnity of the occasion.

Excluding the many fantastic and, mostly, meaningless words and similes of hymnology, all is an *utterly vain* attempt to convert things mundane into a preposterous unknown and unknowable sphere. The Lord's countless names, all the divine events, every "spiritual" experience rest upon things of the earth earthy. The Lord is a "Rod" (of Jesse), a "Day-Spring," a "Key" (of David), and—strangely enough—"Lord of *Night*." In one hymn alone (176) he is a rock, a shield, a hiding-place, and a Treasury! His abode is a Park-Lanish nightmare; his country a Hatton Garden paradise. It has "jasper bulwarks" and "emerald streets" (No. 227: though 236 describes the streets as "shining gold"), amethyst walls, pearly gates, a golden floor, and rays of sardius and topaz. It has also, if hymn 160 is to be trusted, a "glassy sea"—a glaziers' paradise, evidently.

The Lord's coming is to be decidedly earthly, too; though metaphorically unearthly so far as clamour will distinguish it. Trumps, shouts, songs, hymns and wailings (some subtle difference between the last two, it seems) will herald his appearance riding or sitting on clouds, to be crowned as king, surrounded by soldiers, pomp, and triumph. What will he boast beyond the coronation of George VI? Well, one hymn calls him to be crowned "with many crowns," and unless we can appropriate more of the world's monarchies it may hap that we won't have enough in the Tower of London to meet his divine majesty's requirements. Terrible thought: suppose he chooses to be crowned in Berlin?

Yet let us not jump to conclusions. On whose side is the Lord? Hymn 439 proclaims "His *blood-red* banner streams afar." What if there's a hammer and sickle on it?

A. G. DUNN

(To be concluded)

Correspondence

CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—In this month's Parish Magazine (Bingley) the Bishop of Bradford (Dr. Blunt), instead of giving his usual Letter, has published the letter from a (alleged) young airman, which no doubt you read in the *Times* of a few weeks ago. It is indeed a beautiful letter from the Christian standpoint—at least I too was much impressed with it at the time! I am writing this to ask you to be good enough to read it again yourself, and see if you react to it as I have done. I have read and re-read it, and strongly suspect that the alleged letter from "an average airman" is the product of Cantaur or his like. I don't wish to do any man an injustice, but that is the conclusion I have come to. Note:—

1. "To-day we are faced with the greatest organized challenge to Christianity."
2. "I maintain this war is a very good thing."
3. "I firmly and absolutely believe that evil things are sent into this world to try us: they are sent deliberately by our Creator to test our metal . . ."

I think it infamous! This youth's feelings (if he ever existed) have been used to bolster up a creed that is founded on murder . . .

Am I all wrong? I should very much appreciate your opinion on this. The more I think of it the more I become convinced that it is an organized ramp! It has many precedents. You will note that it is "an average airman," and an anonymous one at that. I'm surprised now that I was taken in by it—or as I say—am I all wrong? The more I think of it the more convinced I am that it is nothing more or less than the exploitation of an imaginary airman's death in the interests of an oriental superstition. I know you are a very busy man, but even so, thanks in anticipation.

A.H.

ANOTHER APPRECIATION

SIR,—I am one of the (probably) large number of regular readers of your paper who are personally unknown to you. I saw a copy of the paper on a friend's table a year ago, and took it home and read it. It seemed to me to be just the thing I had been wanting for a long time, as I had become gradually convinced that the tenets and creeds of the Christian religion were untenable and impossible for any thinking man to hold. On reading your paper it seemed to me that it expressed the very ideas I had begun to hold, but could not express in the able way in which you express them week by week, and I accordingly gave an order to my newsagent to deliver the *Freethinker* regularly each week.

I have never regretted this decision, and can safely say that for me the arrival of the paper is the literary and intellectual treat of the week, and I look forward each week to its arrival with keen anticipation.

I wish you all possible luck in what I know must be the difficult task of keeping the flag flying in these difficult times.

W. R. GOSLING

A MENTAL TONIC

SIR,—If not too late I should like to express much appreciation of the lines headed "It's all in the State of Mind" (author Unknown) in your issue of July 7. They were never more wanted than in an age, like the present, when the abiding realities of life are sometimes in danger of being paralysed by the inevitable resort of the most highly civilized nations to brute force, none the less brutal because scientific.

MAUD SIMON

Freethinkers and the Forces

FREETHINKERS liable for services in H.M. Forces should clearly understand their rights with regard to religion.

They should insist upon their own statement of Atheist, Agnostic, Rationalist, or non-religious being accepted, without modification, and duly recorded on the official papers.

If the person recording—usually an N.C.O. is not aware of the recruit's rights and refuses to accept the recruit's own statement, he should insist upon the matter being referred to the officer in charge. If the recruit's legal right is not then admitted, information should be sent to the General Secretary N.S.S. without delay. In all cases hitherto reported by the Society to the Army, Navy and Air Force authorities a satisfactory reply has been received.

Finally, a man serving in any of the Forces has the right at any time to have the description of himself with regard to religion altered should any change of opinion on his part have taken place.

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