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Views and Opinions

Christians and Christmas

In a few days the whole, or nearly the whole, of Christian believers will be celebrating a Christian lie. Anthropologists know this to be one of the oldest ceremonies in the history of humanity. The Christian legend will have it that on December 25, or thereabouts, a God came to earth for the express purpose of bringing peace to earth and securing the salvation of all men. That is the story which will be repeated in every Christian Church, repeated not as an allegory or as a picturesque piece of folk-lore, but as a literal historic event. And the priests who on December 25 will repeat this tale and will sing the praises of the God who came to earth to bring peace to mankind will have been, right up to December 25, calling the attention of their followers to the fact that we are now in the midst of the bloodiest war of all time, and they must make every possible sacrifice in order to kill the largest number of Germans in the shortest possible time. If the Christian story were told of a human leader it would be admitted that his work had been in vain and his mission a failure. What then shall we say of a God who started to build a world of peace over eighteen centuries ago, and finished with a world such as we have to-day?

Every man and woman of intelligence ought to be aware that the worship of the Sun-God goes back to the beginnings of human civilization. The worship of the Son of God is much later, a mere thing of yesterday, and is derived from the earlier superstition. Ever since man discovered how to cultivate the soil and to grow his food, right up to the present moment when the "blackout" has made all of us appreciate the value of increasing light and heat that will follow December 25, that date has been of interest to mankind. Man's attitude towards the Sun, although expressed in different terms, is to-day not substantially different from what it has always been. The Sun is still the lord of life; we have merely dehumanized it. Fact has replaced fear and, if poets still personify the Sun, their purpose is not mistaken. It is the lie of the priest that insists upon our remaining faithful to a superstition that was hoary with age when the Christian Church was born.

* * *

The Elusive Jesus

What I have just said concerning the identity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with the sun-gods of antiquity, Adonis, Mithra, Horus, and many others, including those that existed among very primitive peoples, is to-day known to all really educated men and women. The identity is admitted even by a large number of Christian preachers and priests. They

know that the God who was born of a virgin, who died to save men, and was raised again from the dead, is a very ancient superstition. They admit this when they are out of the pulpit, but when they mount the pulpit steps, particularly when Christmas Day comes, all this acquired knowledge drops off, they revert to fable and folk-lore, and describe the conditions under which a virgin gave birth to a God, how the God was killed for the salvation of mankind, and rose again from the dead, after he had gone through the farce of dying.

It is not now possible to summarize the most probable way in which the Christian presentation of this widespread belief came into existence. It is not want of knowledge but merely that of space which prevents the attempt being made. That the Jesus Christ of the New Testament never existed as a human being is as plain as can be. It is even difficult to find outside the New Testament adequate evidence to establish the existence of an ordinary human being on whom the character of the miraculously born and crucified God can be fixed. All we are certain of is that the New Testament God is a blend of sun-god, vegetation-god, teaching-god and other primitive deities, which in the course of ages has been refashioned time after time until it has become a combination of ethical teacher, social reformer and general guide. He is, what Luther called the gospel of James, a nose of wax that any man may shape to his wishes.

* * *

Christmas Day

Why December twenty-fifth? Here is the answer which I take from that encyclopedia of primitive humanity, *The Golden Bough*, although it might be taken from any one of a score of authorities. Speaking of the long struggle with Mithraism (a cult that contested with Christianity for superiority of position), Frazer says:—

An instructive relic of the long struggle is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival. In the Julian calendar, the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the Sun to increase from that turning point of the year. The ritual of the nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt, was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, "The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!" The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun by the image of an infant which, on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshippers. . . . Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the unconquered Sun, as they called him, hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December.

And in that tremendous work of Arnold Toynbee (still unfinished) which no serious student of history can afford to pass by, the author points out that not only are these religious stories of babies born of virgins through the direct interposition of a god, very common, but that the same story is told of many historic characters. He says:—

In the Hellenic tradition not only Ion and Asklepios, but also Pythagoras, Plato and Augustus have been reckoned among the sons of Apollo, Alexander among the sons of Zeus. The common form of the tale is that the hero's human mother is visited by a superhuman mate who usurps the place of her lawful husband. . . . Sometimes the divine visitor presents himself in the form of a man, sometimes in the form of an animal . . . or a ray of light. . . . These tales have their counterpart in the Christian legends of the birth of Jesus, and the version followed by Matthew exhibits the direct influence of the Hellenic motif. This influence has not, of course, been transmitted through any literary channel; what has happened is that the popular ideas have been laid under contribution for the benefit of the Christian myth. Be that as it may, the correspondence between Matthew and the legend of the birth of Plato is as exact as it possibly can be. (*A Study of History*, Vol. VI, pp. 267-9.)

And if anyone will turn to pages 470-480 of the same volume, he will find a strikingly exact likeness between the story of the ancestry, birth, life and death of many of the Greek heroes and the story of the New Testament Jesus.

It was both a resumé and a rehash of these legends that the Christian Church finally forced upon the world as objective history. And it did this by the method of Hitlerism. We are wrong in counting Mussolini and Hitler as the fathers of Totalitarianism. Long before either of them the Christian Church put that principle into working operation. Hitler and Mussolini may have outdone their master-teacher in operation, but there is not a principle inherent in Fascism that is not present in the operations of the Christian Church.

* * *

Pagans and Christians

To get a fair view of the situation it must be pointed out that the identity of the Christian legends with the pagan ones was never denied by the earlier generation of Christian believers. Christians rated their gods differently but that the pagan gods existed they never denied. The explanation was given by Paul: those whom the heathens worshipped were devils. It was not, in fact, until many centuries later that the actual existence of the pagan gods was denied by Christians. So far as the Romans were concerned, whatever recognition of the Christian cult was given, the Christians were a noisy, quarrelsome, intolerant sect, differing in no essential feature from other religious bodies. And Christian disputants defended their beliefs by retorting on the pagan that it was absurd for them to laugh at Christian beliefs when exactly the same stories existed with the established non-Christian bodies.

Some of the Christian apologists, with a mentality which reminds one of some of our prominent religionists, explained the undeniable likeness between their own teachings and that of the pagan world, by saying that the devil knew Christianity would come, and so tried to discredit the true gospel by "queering the pitch" and teaching Christian doctrines before Jesus Christ came. Many centuries later when Spanish Christians made their disastrous descent on the Mexican and Peruvian civilizations and found the cross and other Christian symbols and teachings with the "heathen" they gave the same explanation of their existence. Finally here is a passage of a much later date from a Christian missionary who had visited Tartary, and found there what the Spaniards found in South America. "I do affirm that the devil so mimics the Catholic Church there, that although no European or Christian has ever been there, still in all essential things they agree so perfectly with the Roman Church as even to celebrate the Host with bread and wine."

The current method of evading the obvious significance of this identity of the Christian superstition with the ancient pagan world in which it was born, is to admit facts that can no longer be hidden or denied, and substitute for the argument that the devil forestalled Christianity, much talk about the "spiritual hunger" from which the world was suffering and which Christ came to satisfy. Here, for example, is a passage from a recent bulky work *A New Contemporary on Holy Scrip-*

ture, edited by the late Bishop Gore. We are informed that at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, "The world was dreaming of saviours or avatars of the divine soul, born maybe of a virgin, or nature gods dying and rising again, through some mysteries, initiates freed from the bonds of matter—and in Jesus the dream came true." What is this but a revival of the explanation by the early Christians of the likeness between Paganism and Christianity, in a less honest manner? The pagans were not "dreaming" about the things named, they were established facts to myriads of non-Christian believers. The divine child Horus being nursed by the virgin mother was not a dream of which the (later) Christianity was the reality, it was the same belief that was afterwards applied by Christians to Christ. The Pagans might be forgiven their early belief, so might Christians as long as they honestly held it, but what are we to make of educated Christians who in these days, forced to admit the identity of their cult with pre-Christian ones, talk of Christianity realizing what earlier generations dreamed about? The real fact, still but imperfectly realized, is that Christianity was a continuance of the earlier forms of religion. It was the cunning, the unscrupulous suppression of facts, the creation of a largely mythical history, that ultimately created a belief that Christianity represented something new in the world.

If anyone asks how was this done, one need only reply: Study the growth of German Nazism. If the fantastical mythology that the brief reign of Nazism has created in Germany can be accomplished in the face of strong hostility from the outside, what need is there for wonder that the mythology of Christianity—ethical, historical and religious—could be accomplished in a few centuries?

* * *

The Old, Old Story!

But Christmas is at hand, and in every pulpit in Christendom we shall find the orgy of lying and misrepresentation that takes place at this season. The more ignorant of preachers will tell the story of exactly what happened in Judea when the imaginary son of a mythical God was born in a non-existent stable. These we may smile at, and pass on. But the better educated of the clergy, those who publicly set aside the mythological side of the life of Christ, will return to the old dishonest verbalisms and dilate on what "our Lord" said, on what he did, on his life and death and resurrection, as though it all formed part of the verified news of yesterday. To their congregation they will give the impression that they still believe in the plain reading of the New Testament, in apologetic volumes they will agree that most of the life is guesswork and the miracles are fiction. Dishonesty and double-dealing could hardly go farther than it goes in the pulpit of to-day.

But the clergy will agree in the old tag that Jesus Christ, God of very God, came to bring peace and good-will to the world. Peace and good-will? And from Christian sources? Who are they who are taking part in the world war? Mainly Christians. These preachers will talk of the Germans as trying to crush Christianity. But the Germans have been Christian for hundreds of years, and even now the majority of them are Christian, and ninety per cent are religious in their outlook and in their feeling. Where is the peace and good-will that Jesus Christ brought to the world? If the world had remained Pagan, if Christianity had never been heard of, could it have shown a worse picture than it exhibits at the moment? If Christian nations could have trusted each other would the present world-war ever have come into being? And now it has come into existence what kind of real help does Christianity give towards ending it in a manner that offers a real guarantee for peace in the future?

For over fifteen centuries the Christian Church has told its stereotyped lie. One can hardly expect it to take a right-about turn and tell the truth in the Christmas of 1940.

CHAPMAN COHEN

In the mountains of truth, you never climb in vain. Either you already reach a higher point to-day, or you exercise your strength in order to be able to climb higher to-morrow.—Nietzsche.

A Christmas Cracker

The divine stands wrapt up in his cloud of mysteries, and the amused laity must pay tithes and veneration to be kept in obscurity, grounding their hope of future knowledge on a competent stock of present ignorance.

George Farquhar

THERE is a quaint legend as old as any in the Christian Churches, which has put a premium upon gloom, and has made it part and parcel of the orthodox superstition. It is that Christ was never seen to smile, but often to weep. This does not concern Freethinkers overmuch, for they do not think it likely that a "man of sorrows" would, as Shakespeare says, "laugh mortal." Man is, however, a laughing animal, and in this he is superior, if in nothing else. To be ashamed of laughter and to hold back merriment and mirth, to live in gloom and seriousness, may suit monks and ascetics, but is unworthy of men who love sunshine and the song of children, and the open breezy day, rather than the spectral quiet and gloom of the cloister.

The convivial nature of Christmas Day, alleged to be the birthday of Christ, has frequently been noted to the discomfiture of priests and theologians, who object to the rationalistic explanation of the Christian religion. "God's birthday" has been, and still is, an annual orgy of gluttony and godliness, and the reason for this is a most excellent piece of Christian evidence, for it shows how much the orthodox superstition is entwined with the far older Paganism which preceded it.

Christmas Day was not kept as a holiday until many generations after the alleged birth of Christ. When first observed, it was kept on varying dates. The precise time of Jesus's birth, like that of so many legendary heroes, was wrapt in mystery; but it certainly was not in December. Why, then, does the Christian world observe Christmas Day on December 25, and why is the birthday of their ascetic deity celebrated as a veritable carnival of conviviality?

Like all other human institutions, the Christian Churches and their festivals and feast-days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of ancient Pagan Rome were very numerous, and it was in competition with the feast of the Saturnalia, one of the principle Roman festivals, that Christmas Day came to be instituted by the Christian clergy, and the date fixed as December 25. The anniversary of Saturn was then an old-established institution, and the propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to old custom proved invincible. If these apostates were to be retained in the folds of the new religion, it became imperative for the Christian priests to incorporate the old festival under the mask of the new.

This struggle for survival, in itself an ironic comment on the alleged divine guidance, has also incorporated other Pagan features. In the far-off centuries, white-robed Druid priests cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features were absorbed also, and the mistletoe and the carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, parts in the celebration of "God's birthday." The clergy have always had a very keen instinct for proselytizing. In the past centuries the Christian Churches sought for adherents by increasing their festal days, and they crushed opposition by bribing the weak and silencing the strong. In this twentieth century they are still at the old game. They are cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by conducting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, with star speakers and bands, and by hypocritically identifying themselves with the Labour Movement and with social measures which appeal to the working classes.

Nor is this all, for the bitterest irony is everywhere interwoven in this celebration of the birthday of a legendary divinity. "Peace and goodwill amongst men" proclaim tens of thousands of pulpits, and the same clergy also bless regimental colours, christen battleships, act as chaplains to the forces, and pray for the troops of con-

tending armies. The Christian nations which profess to worship the "Prince of Peace" are in the stronger grip of Mars, the god of war. From one end of Europe to another the roadways resound to the tread of armed men prepared to make a whole continent a shambles of human blood.

To such a sorry pass, after so many centuries of this "Religion of Love," has the Christian world come. Milton's hymn on "The Nativity of Christ" reads like the bitterest mockery:—

Nor war, nor battle's sound
Was heard the world around,
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with human blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
The Kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they knew their sovran Lord was by.

It reads like a poetic fairy-tale. "Peace and goodwill," must wait till another year; and the present Christmas celebration must make serious men and women think. The Christmas festival itself, with all its hypocritical professions and its legendary associations, is largely pretext and make-believe. It is the paradox of paradoxes that the woeful welter of a tragic contest is going on in almost every corner of a Christian world that professes to worship a divinity who is alleged to have commanded his followers not to kill and to obey his behests of non-resistance and forgiveness. Christmastide, so far as the Christian Churches are concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a fitting celebration of an event that never happened.

"Peace and goodwill," indeed! Throughout the civilized world the shadow of the sword has fallen. The fair fields of Europe are covered with armies, and the flower of manhood of many nations are in battle array. A world epoch is dying. While gravediggers are at work at their grim task, a fresh page of history is being turned. On the other side was a dawn which will presently be daylight. The knell of expiring night Nature answers with words of hope. Into a shroud she tosses flowers. Of these many are frail, but one is the white flower of Liberty. It symbolizes the eternal quest of mankind which will one day make all things new, and will change the face of the earth. In the day old-world superstitions will be transformed into the religion of Humanity, and Christianity will be as remote as when the star of Ormuzd burned out in the unquiet skies.

MIMNERMUS

"I Knew Oscar Wilde"

THE APOSTLE OF BEAUTY

LISTEN: Oscar Wilde speaks!

The Laburnum and the Lilac will be blooming in the gardens and I shall see the wind stir into restless beauty the swaying gold of one, and make the other toss the pale purple of its plumes, so that all the air shall be Arabia for me—and there are tears waiting in the petals of some rose.

It has always been so with me from boyhood; there is not a single colour hidden away in the chalice of a flower, or the curve of a shell, to which by some subtle sympathy my Nature does not answer.

I can see him now! dressed for the platform in his black velvet coat, with broad lapels, his flowered waistcoat, frilled shirt, Byronic collar and flowing silken tie; with these he wore tight fitting velvet knickerbockers, silk stockings, shoes with jewelled buckles, and over his white, delicate hands, from his velvet sleeves, fell Irish point lace.

But more remarkable than this picturesque costume was the face of the poet himself—clean shaven, as pale as a gardenia, with the most brilliant eyes I have ever looked into, and behind the face, a mass of dark hair that tumbled around his collar.

Shakespeare said: "A low voice!—a most excellent thing in a woman." So it is with a man. There

was melody in Oscar Wilde's voice, and priceless wisdom in the words that came from it.

It is a lifetime since I, in my late 'teens, being intensely interested in the "Æsthetic Movement," had the honour of presenting Oscar Wilde, as a lecturer in the Midlands of England, where I lived.

His lecture was entitled, "The House Beautiful." Only those who are old enough to remember the drear, dull homes of the Victorians, with their stodgy furniture, their shouting primary colours, their horsehair sofas, their wax flowers in glass cases, can appreciate the great advance which has been made towards beauty in our houses of to-day.

Ugliness was God! It was the Crusade for Beauty by Oscar Wilde, associated with that great Englishman, William Morris, poet, craftsman, and social reformer, that revolutionized the ordinary homes of England.

William Morris designed furniture of loveliness, fabrics of wondrous patterns and art-colours; Liberty & Co., made these into beautiful realities; and Oscar Wilde went into the highways and byways to preach "The Gospel of Beauty."

What a brilliant, strange, tragic genius he was! And what a wizard of words, too. Playwright, Poet, Essayist, Epigrammist, a star of the first magnitude in English Literature.

Yet of all the services Oscar Wilde rendered us, that of the Apostle of Beauty was the greatest. During his too short life, how passionately he pleaded for Beauty of Colour and Line in our every day lives.

Our audiences were practically all women—mere men mostly ignored the Crusade for Beauty—but the fair sex came in crowds that overflowed into the corridors, filled the aisles and even invaded the platform. It needed all my tact and diplomacy to protect the poet from the awkward adulation of hundreds of adoring matrons and maids. It was my doubtful pleasure to select from these "fans" who clamoured to gush to Oscar Wilde, six adorers only, and take them, armed with their "Birthday Books," to the ante-room for introduction—but I was a good picker, and my selections did not offend the Apostle of Beauty's æsthetic taste.

As a budding showman, I learnt a lesson from this initial experience as an entrepreneur, and that is—in every walk of entertainment, whether of the theatre, the cinema, or the concert room, it is the goodwill of women patrons that alone can spell success. Whilst men are mainly the Creators of Art, it is women who build the shrines—it is women who worship at them.

The Fates at birth, flung into Oscar Wilde's make-up of mind and body a flair of femininity, for he was a midway human between the sexes—because of this he possessed a knowledge of the emotions of both men and women which is denied to us more normal mortals.

His poetic temperament sensed the secret longings of both Man and Woman—in his one mind both Aphrodite and Apollo held sway.

True! this was his Tragedy, as well as his Genius; yet weighed all in all in Life's scales, his service to human æstheticism was a great gift to us all. His witty wisdom was amazing! his plays sparkle! and his prose is jewelled. Listen:—

To a woman the consciousness of being well-dressed imparts a satisfaction, that Religion is powerless to bestow!

The Book of Life (the Bible) began with the story of a Man and Woman in a garden—it ended in Revelation.

But priceless is his repartee to a pompous old judge, which occurred at the time when I was associated with him. The publishers of a book entitled *The Green Carnation* were prosecuted for alleged indecency, and Oscar Wilde was called to give evidence. The pompous judge had ferretted out the most purple paragraph: he read it with accentuated emphasis.

"Now! Mr. Wilde, is not this paragraph indecent?"

"My Lord! it is worse than indecent! it is ungrammatical!"

HENRY J. HAYWARD

Vision

Were the imperfections of language, as the instrument of knowledge, more thoroughly weighed, a great many of the controversies that make such a noise in the world would of themselves cease; and the way to knowledge, and perhaps peace too, lie a great deal opener than it does. (Locke: *Human Understanding*, Book III. Chap. ix §21.)

WHAT, in the light of the above, may be said of the word vision?

"Where there is no vision the people perish." (Prov. xix. 18). What did the word vision, some 3,000 years ago signify to the writer of this proverb?

Cruden and others tell us that a prophet in an ecstasy, being neither properly asleep nor awake, had supernatural revelations. (Gen. xv. 1; Num. xii. 6.) And that this semi-conscious state could be produced by drugs.

In the West Indies, at the time of their discovery, Columbus tells of strange religious ceremonies. And Pane describes how a native priest, when brought to a sick man, would put himself in communication with the disease-spirits by snuffing *COHOBA* "which makes him drunk, that he knows not what he does, and so says many extraordinary things, wherein they affirm that they are talking with the *CEMES*, and that from them it is told them that the infirmity came."

And Hooker (1584-1600) speaks of "the intuition vision of God in the world to come."

Vision: something having a supernatural, prophetic, or imaginary appearance; creating:—

Fables as false as hell; yet deem'd oracular.

(*The Task*, Cowper.)

The causation of mental derangement and delirious utterance by spiritual possession was an accepted tenet of Greek philosophy. To be ill was simply to be possessed of a disease-spirit. To be insane was to be possessed of an evil-spirit.

"The general doctrine of disease-spirits and oracle-spirits," says Tylor, "appears to have its earliest, broadest, and most consistent position within the limits of savagery. When we have gained a clear idea of it in this its original home, we shall be able to trace it along from grade to grade of civilization, breaking away piecemeal under new medical theories, yet sometimes expanding in revival, and at least in lingering survival holding its place into the midst of modern life. (*Primitive Culture*, Ed. 1891 Vol. II., pp. 1244-5.)

Dealing with the infliction of ailments and the inspiration of Oracles, Tylor is forced to the conclusion that "The infliction of ailments and the inspiration of Oracles, are not only mixed together, but often run into absolute coincidence and accord with the view that both results are referred to one common cause . . . as for Oracular possession, its theory and practice remained in fullest vigour throughout the classic world, scarce altered from the times of lowest barbarism. Could a South Sea Islander have gone to Delphi and watch the convulsive struggles of the Pythia, and listen to her raving, shrieking utterance, he would have needed no explanation whatever of a rite so absolutely in conformity with his own savage philosophy." (*Ibid*, Vol. II., p. 138).

Oracles were made use of in ancient Egypt. The Bible, and the poetry of the Greeks and Romans, are full of allusions to them.

The Hebrews might lawfully, through the High Priest, consult the Urim and Thummim (Num. xviii. 21). But they also made illicit use of Teraphim—images, idols or household gods—(Jud. xvii. 5), and from the gods of surrounding nations (2 Kings i. 2, 3, 6, 16).

The Oracles of Urim and Thummim, which were in the Ephod and Pectoral worn by the high priest, were ordained by God with the power of foretelling things to come. They seem to have been two little golden figures (probably the forerunners of our Punch and Judy) shut up in a pocket of the breastplate, and they responded

when God was consulted. Here we get at the source of the Bible, which Hooker admits:—

"The main principle whereupon our beliefs therein contained dependeth is that the Scriptures are the Oracles of God." (*Ecc. Polity.*)

It was not necessary for the Urim and Thummim to understand either question or answer, any more than it is necessary for a ventriloquist's doll to do so.

Great Visions were arranged by Astronomer-priests. For instance:—

The rays of the sun in coming once a year (while procession admitted) through an aperture in the gable of places of worship, showed the finger of God touching the breast of the priest. The Jewish priest, knowing time and place convenient, the rays of the sun fell upon his breastplate, and the twelve precious jewels in it "shined out," as Josephus says, "when God was present." (*Antiq.* III. viii.)

The significance of the word vision should now be apparent. But what about the meaning of the proverb itself?

Where there is no vision the people perish, according to the priests of all ages. Vision always has been an ally of priests! Unbelievers, the indifferent, and all those said to be without vision instead of perishing have gathered strength.

It is really with one another's visions that we quarrel to-day. The priests claim a monopoly, of course! Their vision only is correct. But we are all visionaries. What we see is ourselves in things. When we alter, everything undergoes a change. Specialists in Vision always have existed, but all were victims of mental derangement, e.g., Peter, Paul, Mohammed, Swedenborg, Joseph Smith, and others.

The Pantomimes of these gifted visionaries all have points of resemblance, but they all differ in their transformation scenes.

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains—

Are not these, O soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?

asks Tennyson. The poet seems to enjoy asking questions!

To Goethe, Carlyle, and many others, the material world was the living garment of God

To Pope:—

We all are parts of our great mighty whole,
The body nature is, and God the soul.

Browning is a thoughtful, sane sort of person, who illuminates life for us. He keeps firm hold of his bone, no matter how beautiful the visionary one may look.

Another world!

And why this world, this common world, to be
A make shift, a mere foil, how fair soever,
To some fine life to come.

To him the neglect of the present is blasphemy:—

Oh, 'twas too absurd to slight
For the hereafter the to-day's delight.

The folly of theologians belittling this fair world, as they never tire of doing, from their own point of view, is very irrational, and the poet asks:—

Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?

Priests have ever stood between man and the light. Small wonder is it that Christ omitted them from his list of messengers sent to enlighten the world. (*Matt.* xxiii. 34.)

William Watson, the poet, was of opinion that they blotted God from the world:—

When 'whelmed are altar, priest, and creed
And all the faiths have passed
Perchance from darkening incense freed
God may emerge at last.

That such an emergence may be an improvement on the priestly vision presented to us in *Exod.* xxxii. 21-23, is a consummation devoutly to be wished!

GEORGE WALLACE

Spain and the War

ONE of the most unedifying of the recent actions of the British Government (which, since the accession of Mr. Churchill to power, has on the whole represented well the views of the majority of the people) was the appointment to the post of Ambassador to Spain of Sir Samuel Hoare, notorious part-author, with the French renegade Laval, of the plan to present Mussolini with Abyssinia. Critics have not failed to point out that an attempt to "buy off" Franco would be bound to fail, just as ignominiously as did the previous plan to "buy off" Mussolini. Only now, however, in Mr. Charles Duff's *A Key to Victory: Spain* (Gollancz; 2s. 6d.), has this view been put forward at length by any truly authoritative writer. Mr. Duff probably knows more about Spain than anyone else writing to-day, and he asserts, roundly and without quibbling, that only by enlisting the Spanish *people* on our side, as against the Spanish *Government*, can Britain's present predominant position in the Mediterranean be assured.

Actually a large proportion of Mr. Duff's pages are devoted to a discussion of the past history of Spain, and, even to readers who disagree with his main conclusions, this survey of the past will be of extreme interest. Especially interesting to Freethinkers will be his revelation of the sinister part played by the Roman Catholic Church at crucial moments in Spanish history. Always reactionary, always barring progress, that Church certainly comes very badly out of the argument.

As to the wider issue—whether or not Spain is likely to enter the war side by side with Hitler and Mussolini—Mr. Duff is less eager to prophesy. He does, however, say one important thing—that Franco's power will last only as long as Hitler goes on winning victories. When defeat stares the Nazis in the face, then will Franco and his Roman Catholic Phalange begin to fade away. It is noteworthy that the hesitation of Smer (only time will tell if it is more than hesitation), under the blandishments of Hitler and Mussolini, has coincided with the magnificent defence of the Greeks.

Mr. Duff goes so far as to suggest that, before this war is over, a new Peninsular campaign on the part of Britain may become necessary. Some people will feel that he ventures on dangerous ground in making such a suggestion. But that Spain is a key nation in the present European turmoil there can be no doubt, and Mr. Duff deserves the best thanks of all thoughtful folk for calling attention to the fact.

S.H.

Acid Drops

A friend writes us that he recently attended a meeting at which a Jesuit Father lectured. The speaker pathetically asked whether God would give us victory after the Government had permitted the World Union of Freethinkers in this country. But clearly the matter concerns God, and as he did not interfere at the time the preacher might at least credit God with the decency of not feeling a grudge after such a lapse of time.

It is reported that the Pope has issued an appeal to those engaged in this war to a range a truce over Christmas Day. It is dangerous to prophesy, but we do not expect that either side will agree to the proposal. But the Roman Church has many hundreds of wonderful interventions by its Saints, and there is a rare business done in holy candles and the like to procure heavenly favours in almost anything from being successful in a business deal to curing corns. Why does not the Church mobilize its heavenly forces and see to it that something really spectacular is accomplished? Or, alternatively, why not cause something to happen to anyone who fires a shot or drops a bomb on Christmas Day? That is the kind of thing that used to happen. Only the Church knows the number of people who have met with some heavenly-inflicted disaster because they did something that offended the Roman Church.

One may be certain that any work dealing with what are called Christian problems will be sure of as favourable notice as possible from the *Times Literary Supplement*. We fancy these notices are written either by clergymen or by "safe" Christian laymen. Here is a passage from a review of a book, *The Activity of God*, by the Bishop of Liverpool. "The problem of evil may elude the final analysis of Christian thought as it eludes the thought of the non-theist; but the Christian insists that even more significant than the problem of evil is the fact that the persistent effort of goodness against evil is always to be found like light in the darkness."

One may safely defy anyone to produce in so few words a more completely muddled, and, on analysis, stupid collocation of words. To begin with there is clearly no "problem of evil" existing for the non-theist. The problem of evil is how to reconcile with it the existence of a wise, good and powerful God. But as the non-theist does not believe in God, anyone outside a pulpit or an asylum should see that there is no problem of evil for the non-theist to handle. It is a difficulty created by the godite, which he then asks the non-theist to explain. One might as well ask the non-theist to explain how the bread and wine become the very body and blood of a man who—it is said—died nearly two thousand years ago. It is the job of the Christian to explain the puzzle, but here we are told flatly and finally, that the Christian has no answer to the problem he has created. The sheer impudence of it!

The last clause insists that the important thing is the fact of the persistence of goodness against evil. That has nothing to do with the "problem of evil," and the puzzle that is said to exist in relation to what is stated indicates a degree of both scientific ignorance and philosophical futility—startling in what claims to be one of our intellectual journals. "Goodness" is no other than a general term covering all those actions or teachings that make for the furtherance of a better life. Its opposite, "badness," is logically a term that covers all thought and action that makes for worsening of life. That being the case it follows that unless living beings, whether high or low in the scale of existence, act up to a certain standard which brings them into harmony with their environment they soon cease to exist. And as a matter of fact not only are individuals constantly "passing out" that do not act in a way that will prolong life, but whole species have ceased to exist from the same cause.

These notes are not on the usual line of *Acid Drops*, but we could not resist the opportunity of exhibiting the manner in which religious ignorance, or calculated religious dishonesty, fogs the simplest of problems, and with what confidence religious writers place reliance upon the dosed and dazed brains of their religious followers.

It is reported in the press that the B.B.C. is to have a new Director-General. Let us hope it will be an improvement on the present one. Of late, in addition to the ghastly seven-fifty-five terror, and set services during the day there has developed a habit of a Bible reading, or some short dose of religion, whenever opportunity offers. During the Reith overlordship the first question put to anyone applying for a job was whether the candidate believed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One can imagine what would have happened to any candidate who answered in the negative.

There is something that is called "Scotch caution." We have never been certain as to what it is, or in what sense it differed from caution in general. As a hazard we would say the phrase was coined by an Englishman trying to take advantage of a Scotchman. Had it been the other way about we should have had the phrase worded "English caution." One meets with the same kind of thing when a Christian finds that he can't get the better of a Jew in a bargain, or when a Jew cannot get the better of a Christian. Each one deplors the exercise of a quality possessed by both, when the clash ends

in a stalemate. All of us might benefit by taking to heart the wisdom of Burns in that we could see ourselves as others see us. Burns, we may note, wrote his lines after sitting in church behind a very fashionably dressed lady and watching a louse crawling over her bonnet. It is strange that one of the world's most famous sayings owes its inspiration to a louse.

We were led to write the above by what we think is an example of what Englishmen would call "Scotch caution," and which appears in the *Glasgow Citizen*. It seems there is a factory which a writer in the paper recently visited. The Manager took him over the place and finally introduced him to a room which was called "the power house" because every day the directors "meet there to ask God guidance." He added, "We provide our staff with an air-raid shelter, but we know there is a greater shelter." Well, why not trust to it? If God is the better shelter of the two why not let the workpeople have it? Or is it that the workpeople, with more commonsense than their employers, prefer a shelter "built with hands." That might be cited as "Scotch caution," but that does not seem very different to the English parson preaching about the protective providence of God in a Church covered up with sandbags, and supplementing it with a notice that there is an air-raid shelter a few doors down the street.

A Roman Catholic Member of Parliament has been saying that the "only difference for us Catholics between Nazi Paganism and Soviet Communism is that we are not fighting the one which is the worst." So much for Mr. Alfred Denville. Commander R. T. Bower says that "Catholics have to regard such high moral questions (association with Russia) from the point of view, not of the present time but of eternity," which is a not very courageous way of saying "the Catholic Church first." There are other utterances that might be cited, but the samples given help one to realize one of the sources from which opposition comes, open and secret, to a friendly understanding with Russia. Roman Catholicism is always a danger, and a distinct threat to a reasonable view of life.

Turning on the wireless the other morning in time for the 8 o'clock news, we were in time to hear the 7.55 religious horror, and to catch the sentence "we have no power in ourselves," which reminded us once again what a whining, miserable kind of creed is Christianity. "We have no power in ourselves"! Then in whom has a man power if not in himself? If a man has no power in himself where, in the name of all that is reasonable, is he to get it from? An incentive to the exercise of power may come from others, but in the end it is the calibre of a man that tells. But, of course, unless the Churches can get men on their knees, itself a miserable and demoralizing attitude, *their* power is reduced to zero. Could one imagine more demoralizing and insulting drivel than the gospel of "Man has no power in himself"? And why does the B.B.C. not publish the names of these semi-moronic performers who insult all by their moanings and groanings? Perhaps we ought not to ask this question, for after all, these speakers being nameless is the only indication of decency in the whole proceeding.

The *Two Worlds*, the well-known Spiritualist organ, cites with much approval a statement of the late Conan Doyle that the truth of Spiritualism has been testified by "a long array of famous names, and multitudes of commonsense people in every land." We are not greatly impressed. Was there ever an established absurdity or generally received error that was not accepted by an array of famous names, and accepted by a multitude of commonsense people? How could absurdities and errors ever get established otherwise?

The Glasgow Presbytery of the Church of Scotland needs £50,000, and the Rev. Peter Diak explains that this is just the cost of a single Spitfire. But we wonder which the members of Mr. Diak's congregation would rather trust. The Spitfire or the prayers of their parson?

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- L. CHEETHAM.—Will do as you suggest. Thanks.
 W. WRIGHT.—Please to hear from you. Hope yourself and wife are both well.
 R. SPIERS.—We appreciate your concern, and that of others, as you will see. But we must have our own way in this matter.
 R. D. MORRIS.—There are few of us who are not feeling the pinch just now. Our appreciation is the greater.

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Sugar Plums

One of our readers has discovered a text which he evidently thinks led him to contribute to our War Damage Fund. Here it is, "The Holy Ghost descended and took the form of a sphere, saying, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And the Spirit led him straight to the water.'" But the poor misguided man concluded that the vision was to lead him to the *Freethinker*, and so sent his cheque to the War Damage Fund. Still, there are so many different interpretations of these celestial visions that we hesitate to return the cheque. Perhaps he is right. At any rate we think he might easily have hit on a worse interpretation.

Another reader writes lamenting that although he has been reading steadily for many years he cannot help feeling that so much remains; a complete study of any subject seems impossible. We are afraid he has written the wrong person if he is looking for sympathy. On the contrary we congratulate him. His danger will arise when he feels that he has really exhausted the feeling that there is much more to be done and, like so many writers of to-day, rushes out a new book with a feeling, sometimes with the expression, that he has given the world all they know on that subject. Our correspondent instead of exciting our sympathy only assures us that he is still alive. When he loses that feeling he will have ceased to live.

We think we can claim without exposing ourself to a charge of egotism that we have done as much and as wide reading as most men. But we have always had the same feeling that distresses the writer of the letter before us. There are few books of any calibre we read, or have read, that have not had the effect of suggesting further investigating and awakened the consciousness that there is much more to learn on that subject. We are so accustomed to that feeling that we are inclined to count a book that does not have that effect as wasting our time. And yet that would not be a correct conclusion, for a really foolish book has its lessons to impart. The fool may teach us as well as the philosopher, the *bookmaker* as well as the author of a creative masterpiece. Each form part of the pattern of that huge canvas that we label "Humanity."

When all is done we suppose that the real significance of this expanding vista of knowledge and the feeling of the impossibility of reaching finality has its roots in the more or less definite appreciation of the fact that experience is a connected whole, and that much, if not all, of our researches incite to the framing of a connected whole. Such generalizations as that of Natural Selection, of gravitation, and so forth, have their great attraction, if not their chief value, in the fact that they bring apparently independent facts and things into an organic association. So we bid our friend cheer up. Chasing the horizon is a fine, healthy and profitable sport.

(Continued on page 764)

War Damage Fund

OWING to our absence in Glasgow, the present list of subscriptions carries us only up to letters received on the morning of December 13. The list will be the longer in our next issue. Meanwhile, I wish again to register my appreciation of the letters received, from which only a few citations can be given. The genuineness of the writers admits of no doubt, and many of the personal tributes to myself and to other writers in the paper are very gratifying. None of us writes for praise, but appreciation of one's efforts is welcome irrespective of the quality of one's labours. On behalf of all who write for the *Freethinker* I can only say that they do their best.

Quite a number have written a kindly protest against my cutting my princely salary down by fifteen per cent for the "duration." I thank them for their solicitude, and can assure them that this was not done because I had any doubt that our friends would not do their share. On this occasion I simply wished to have a hand in the business. If I were a man of means it is just likely that I should be selfish enough to pay the total bill myself. I should enjoy that form of dissipation.

But one old friend, one who has worked for Free-thought for many, many years, and who is still active, when possible, Mr. J. Hammond, writes complaining that my appeal is "painful reading, not because of the necessity of the appeal, nor for the amount asked, which is, after all, moderate. It hurts because of the evident reluctance with which you ask for help, due to your darned independance, but most of all because of your announced intention to contribute £25 out of your own meagre salary. That you should think it necessary to do this seems to me a reflection on Free-thinkers who owe so much to you for splendid leadership. You have given so much to the Cause, and put so many of us in your debt there is surely no need for sacrifice."

To all of which we say, "sacrifice" be damned! We wanted to be in it, and that is all there is to say. And who is Mr. Hammond to tell us what kind of dissipation we may indulge in. We have known Mr. Hammond for so many years, that we feel we may tell him to go to blazes. And if he follows that advice we are fairly certain to meet him, and we can renew the discussion, and sandwich the quarrel with an exchange of reminiscences of my early adventures in which he took part.

Mr. F. S. B. Lawes says: "I shall watch the progress of the Fund with interest, and if it is required will endeavour to give further help." We hope it will not be necessary. There has again been serious damage each side of our office, but this time we escaped. Mr. F. Lee thinks "the pleasure I get from the *Freethinker* is too great to be deprived of." There is no fear of that happening. A very old and staunch friend, Mr. H. Spence, promises to send again. So do many others, if necessary. Mr. W. Nelson says: "I imagine there must be many like myself, personally unknown to you, to whom your weekly article and notes appear at times like a letter from a trusted friend." Mr. A. Edwards writes cheerfully: "Carry on; we cannot do without the *Freethinker*." If we can help it there will be no need to do so. Mr. A. Coleman and Miss Coleman write: "You and the *Freethinker* staff are putting up a magnificent fight against long odds." Mr. F. E. Monks says: "It is because of the gradual encroachments on our liberty of thought and speech and publication that it is so essential the *Freethinker* should be as active as ever. Only in this way shall we preserve our rights." Mr. S. Clowes writes: "The readers of the 'old paper' know the good meat it contains . . . and it is up to us to see that those who come after us are not deprived of the good work of the *Freethinker*. From A. H. Millward: "The *Freethinker* means very much to me, and I have no words to express my admiration for its work in the fight against bigotry, ignorance and superstition,"

I am off to Glasgow in the morning, and so must let the matter end here for this week. But I do wish to thank, not merely those who have contributed, but not the less heartily those who, sufferers from this beastly war, have troubled to write expressing their regret that they are unable to do as they would have wished. Their trouble is greater than mine, and they pay an unconscious tribute to themselves that they should think of others in such circumstances.

	£	s.	d.
Previously received	165	11	0
F. S. B. Lawes	10	0	0
W. Wright	0	2	6
J. Close	1	1	0
F. Hobday	0	5	0
L. Cheetham	1	0	0
Mrs. A. Heal	5	0	0
C. M. Hollingham	1	0	0
H. A. Alexander	1	0	0
W. H. W. Ballast	1	1	0
Mrs. F. Goodman	0	12	6
Dr. R. C. Cohen	5	0	0
A. D. Corrick	0	10	0
C. Townsend	0	5	0
Mrs. Wood	0	5	0
Dr. W. H. Cilliers,	1	7	6
W. Ellison	0	10	0
W. Morris	0	5	0
Mr. and Mrs. J. V. Shortt	1	0	0
A. George	10	0	0
B. G. Ralph Brown	10	0	0
T. Dixon	5	0	0
H. Bedford	0	2	6
J. B.	0	2	0
T. Robson	1	0	0
H. A. Downes	2	0	0
A. Hanson	5	0	0
F. W. Silke	0	5	4
A. Stephenson	1	0	0
Total	£230	5	4

In last week's issue the donation acknowledged as F. Warlington should read F. Warburton. The amount sent by Mr. & Mrs. Minett should be £45 4s. not £3.

We shall be obliged if any who note inaccuracies in the above list, or that any subscriptions have escaped acknowledgment, will be good enough to write without delay.

(Continued from page 763)

The shadow, if not the directly baleful influence of that first-class bigot, Sir John Reith, still hangs over the B.B.C. The latest exhibition of this bigotry is to cancel the broadcast to be given by the Glasgow Orpheus Choir on the ground that its conductor, Sir Hugh Robertson, is a Pacifist. It would not make the situation better if every member of the choir was a Pacifist. But they are not. Some of the members are away on active service, a large proportion of the men are acting as Home Guards, and Polish soldiers were guests at a recent performance of the choir. Sir Hugh's opinions on war have nothing to do with it; the bigotry of the B.B.C., a public institution living upon public money, has everything to do with it.

It is another public scandal if this conduct of the B.B.C. is not condemned and rectified. We are fighting a war for liberty, but what kind of liberty is it if a man's opinion on something that has nothing to do with the public function for which he had been engaged is denied expression because this opinion does not meet with the approval of the intolerant nobodies who control the B.B.C.? There can be no doubt whatever that if the bigots of the B.B.C. could work their will Sir Hugh Robertson would be dismissed altogether from the position he occupies. Short of physical ill-treatment this is Nazism in practice—so far as circumstances permit. Those in authority should—and they can if they would—deal drastically with the B.B.C. and make it quite clear that our professed dislike to German and Italian tyranny extends to bigotry and tyranny at home. There are plenty of little Hitlers that need clearing out. A start might well be made with this case.

New Testament Problems

I.

THOSE theologians whose job it is to prove that the New Testament is of Divine origin, that it is all true, and that it ought to be accepted by everybody without question, are of course aware that the matter is not quite as simple as that. They admit, in some cases rather grudgingly, that there *are* problems, and that their only solution is Faith with a big F and plenty of it. If a pressing question cannot be answered easily, that is no reason why the Bible, as a whole, should not be believed. After all, what is puny man in the face of the tremendous mystery of the Universe? If we cannot say exactly what electricity is, does that not prove the truth of Jesus?

I am often amused when inadvertently I turn on my radio, and hear one of the B.B.C.'s prize religious idiots in a whining—or at least a pained—voice dealing with “our Lord,” and asking plaintively how can we explain such a wonderful miracle as Jesus unless we acknowledge him as God and the Son of God? How can we explain the way in which he went about “doing good” and “healing the sick”? These people refuse to see any problem here at all. On these points the matter is settled; and never for a moment would they discuss such tremendous “facts.”

Most professional theologians are in full agreement with them. The problems they prefer to attack or answer are those concerned with textual questions, the value of one manuscript or codex as against another, the interpretation of a Greek word, or whether it has in most MSS. a digamma when a better “reading” would be an epsilon. Thousands of volumes have been written on these lines, and in normal times they could be picked up easily at a penny each, even if the original cost was twenty-five shillings. Their net result in solving difficulties has been almost nil.

Theologians and B.B.C. speakers hate discussing the real and most difficult problems connected with “our Lord.” Some of these are—what did he say worth saying and preserving, did he say anything that was both new and true, and did he follow his own teaching? Let us assume for a moment that such a God as Jesus really lived, and that he went about teaching and preaching, and that what he said was correctly reported by his inspired disciples.

For example, he certainly advised his followers, and therefore all Christians, to return good for evil. Did he do so himself, and did his followers ever do so? Well, in Matthew x. 33, he said, “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Here is the plainest possible proof that Jesus did not practise what he preached, and theologians ought to have spent many happy hours in proving to Christians that, while *everybody else* should return good for evil, in the case of Jesus it was quite natural for him to deny any unbelievers before God, and even—as he does—damn or condemn them to an eternity of living flames. Yet I must confess that I have never heard a preacher either in the pulpit or on the wireless ever deal with the problem. They simply repeat *ad nauseum* that Jesus taught good for evil and everybody should do likewise.

Jesus, of course, reserves the right to “deny” an infidel before God, but it is also very amusing to see how anxious he is for his followers to submit to any sort of humility. He says in Luke vi. 30, “Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.” I cannot remember that Jesus himself gave away very much in goods anyway, though he could, as a God, always “multiply” a small quantity by a miracle not given to the ordinary man to perform. It surely is not of much credit in giving away something one can obtain through a miracle, any more than healing the sick in the same manner. But the idea of presenting a thief with all he has stolen from you is so funny that I am not surprised this particular verse is hardly ever quoted by our preachers. But if we are to follow the teachings of “our Lord,” surely the heavy

sentences passed on looters at the moment are dead against his clearly expressed teaching? What do our magistrates mean when they give a man five years penal servitude for "taking away thy goods"? The thieves are not even rebuked by Jesus, and they are given to understand that they can keep all they steal. Are our magistrates Christians or not?—or are they not quite convinced that even if they are, the teachings of Jesus are simply nonsense in a work-a-day world?

But what about resistance to what the late Mr. Chamberlain called "evil things"? Jesus said: "Unto him that smiteth thee on one cheek offer him also the other." I admit that this is one of the teachings of "our Lord" which has been commented upon by many theologians whose opinions generally on the point have made confusion worse. The best answer is to point to Hitler and similar Dictators, and the régime they have compelled people to accept under the threat of murder and torture. As Lord Amberley (the father of Bertrand Russell) says in his *Analysis of Religious Belief*, "A doctrine more convenient for the purpose of tyrants and malefactors of every description it would be difficult to invent." But in any case do Christians accept this teaching of Jesus?—or is it one of the problems they prefer not to discuss? If the "way of Christ" is the way for all Christians and for all peoples, why are we refusing to offer the other cheek to Hitler? Why are we not allowing the German ruffians to jackboot it through our streets and impose their bestial will on all—followers or not of Christ?

And what, if we really did follow him, ought we to say to the Christian given to boasting as he did himself? He said in Matthew xii. 41, 42, "Behold a greater than Jonas is here. . . Behold a greater than Solomon is here," and in John x. 8, "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." You will never hear these verses repeated by the B.B.C. religious gentleman or at the Children's Services. They constitute a problem theologians prefer to leave alone. It is much easier to say that "our Lord" went about "doing good" and "healing the sick." Yet I think it is time for our time, or even our untamed, theologians to tell us whether they believe that Jesus did say these things and that he meant them.

Then there is that utterance about hating your parents in Luke xiv. 26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Here is, forsooth, a pretty problem! What did Jesus mean? Have you to hate your parents to be his disciple—to be a Christian? Does the word hate here mean hate? Or does it mean something else? If so, what? Needless to say Christians are aghast at the very idea that hate means hate when the word is used by Jesus. It must mean something else—though naturally if a blatant infidel were to use it, its meaning would be—hate. Readers however can take their own view of the matter; they can look into such a work as Lecky's *History of European Morals* where they will see that the early Christians, at any rate, took the word literally. And that, may I say very humbly, is good enough for me.

But there are still more fascinating New Testament problems which can be dealt with another time.

H. CUTNER

Fear, Ignorance, Godism and War

The amity that Wisdom knits not, folly may easily untie.

It is no wild stretch of imagination to say that the war between the Freethinker and the priest or "parson" is the oldest in the world of humans. Guided by scientific imagination one can see, away back in that primitive time when the human was emerging, how the first Freethinker—fearless in the scorn of consequence—dared to explore and experiment so that the common life could be made less insecure. Then came the first priest or "parson," seizing the new knowledge, reserving it as a sacred mystery, and using it as a power to exploit the fear of consequence among the "common crowd." Right down the ages this struggle has continued and continues still—even in these days of deadly danger to us all.

This idea—a very old one with me—was re-aroused by the circumstances in which I read of the unexpected losses in our Freethought ranks: George Bedborough, Charles Tuson, Victor Neuburg, and Joseph Reeves. It seemed—almost—as if the final dictator, death, had made a "lightning war" raid upon that force which so effectively has cleared away the fear—diabolic and divine—that has been religion's vested interest in death. The first two I knew personally; and I admired them for their constant steadfast work against Godism of all sorts. The latter two I knew only by their work; although one of the "chance" happenings in life had made a link for me with Joseph Reeves when first he came to London—c. 1905. Little did I think, *then*, of how he was to add to our Freethought strength; much less did I foresee how I should read about his death in 1940.

Each of the four, as individuals, had qualities different from the others and their lives had varied, too; but all alike found their real life interest in striving to eradicate from human life, the evil influence of Religion—i.e., Belief in Spiritual and Supernatural Forces. Each and all did lasting work in exposing Religion as the most dangerous enemy against human freedom, happiness, and progress. Their names are now added to the others—great and small—on the Freethought Roll of Honour: a Roll, grander and more glorious than that of any church or party, nation or empire.

The opening of this article "dates" itself—like a man's evening-dress suit. The tailor makes a dress-suit "date" with an eye to future business which means recurring orders for him and cheaper uniforms for waiters. The private-profit makers of armaments are not the only gentlemen who regularly need a new "line" to put upon the market. It is thus they get "the sinews of war," while "the lesser breeds without the law" get the cast-off weapons "cheap"—even as the waiters get the suits. However, it was not in this way that this "present writing" happens to "date." The "dating" was not intentional. It arose merely from my insatiable entomological-like interest in every form and phase of human activity—even when inhuman. Friend Elstob may find an absorbing interest in entomology, bacteriology, and God; but, to me, "lumantology" far transcends all three in that respect. Alas! The price that has to be paid for this, is that it often leads to delay and neglect in doing a specific job of free-time work for Freethought. Sometimes, when it *is* done, it is too late, or, perhaps, someone else has done the job!

Having diverged to explain we may now proceed. Our four friends, who have finished their work in person, did what they did for Freethought because, as Freethinkers, they realized that human progress is made by UNDERSTANDING the forces and processes which operate in nature: first in external nature and then in human life—individual and social. They worked against the evil influence of religion (Godism); because they understood that Godism is the most serious obstacle against that understanding. Truly, Socrates was right: Understanding is virtue. Socrates, Pruno, Ferrer, among many others, worked to spread that understanding—and paid the price therefor.

From these reflections it is easy to pass to the present life-or-death struggle in which we are all involved—whether we want to be or no. With the exception of a few minorities, dominated by some absolute belief or by some "fixed idea" in political policy, the great mass of British people are—now—resolute in facing the terrible and terrorist danger associated with the name of "Hitler." All are agreed that defeat for us would mean a slavery worse than death. True, sectarian beliefs, practices, still persist and confuse—especially in Religion: sectional economic interests still interfere with the necessary national unity and effective effort: ideas—of plans, there is none yet—about "the bright new world" to be brought to birth when the mad fool-fury shall have been subdued, are many, varied, and contradictory. True also that, in political parties, economic leagues, corporate journalism, educational institutes, radio broadcasting, and—last, but not most vicious of all—religious bodies, numerous varieties of the mental proletariat are working overtime, by tongue and pen, to confuse the issue and to prove that some particular part is greater than the

whole. In spite of, and beyond, all this, there is a wonderful grim cold-blooded unity of purpose to face and defeat the terrorism that threatens us: to maintain the democratic civilization of Western Europe, the British "Empire," and North America; and to extend it on a more secure foundation, as shall be required by and for the People as a whole.

We are now in the fourth stage or period of the world struggle that began in 1914. The stages are clearly marked; and those who look at world affairs in the light of a scientific atheist philosophy can understand how each stage has emerged from the previous conditions. Also, they can predict—with a large measure of accuracy—what the outcome is likely to be; always, of course, in general terms and trends, not in detail. 1914-1918 led to 1919-1931: that, in turn, produced 1931-1939: and out of that emerged 1939—? The chief characteristics of the fifth period, which shall emerge from the present, are—so it seems to me—calculable now. An interesting tendency is that one of the main beliefs of early "scientific Socialists" is likely to be nullified; and, "curiously enough, the trend of events points to it being nullified in much the same way in the British "Empire" and in the New Russia—but, perhaps, with different results.

We now find ourselves compelled to devote all our energy, mental and physical, to the destructive work of war—"Totalitarian" War. This is the result of failure to understand the—human and natural—forces operating, and the sequences of events, in Europe and the world. The great majority of people in all parties, high and low, leaders and led, alike failed to understand; and the minority who *did* understand, failed to arouse the rest. *That is a bare statement of fact, beyond reasonable doubt.* Laval, Petain, etc., failed to understand; and, as a result, they have lost even that which they sought to save. The same shall be said, in the end, about many others. A scientific analysis of the failure to understand proves, with certainty, that Religion contributed more than any other cause to the mental confusion which prevented understanding; and that vicious influence of Godism is still active, not only directly but indirectly in an unlimited variety of ways.

ATHOSO ZENOO

(To be concluded)

Kate Greenaway

ONE of the season's' choice illustrated books is a Biography of Kate Greenaway, written by M. H. Spielmann and G. S. Layard, and published by Adam and Charles Black. It is beautifully printed and the numerous illustrations are triumphs of coloured reproduction. Perhaps the biographical narrative is too long through the multiplication of unimportant details, but we can quite conceive that even this will be of interest to many readers, and we are loth to press any adverse criticism of this delightful volume.

Kate Greenaway does not require our eulogy at this time of day. Her art has taken its definite place. She is known all over the world as the child's artist. Destined never to be a mother herself, the love of children was the very breath of her being. It is said that the boys and girls in her drawings were finer and daintier than they are met with in the world. But the touch of idealism was not a falsehood. She worshipped and reproduced the beauty of things. There is ugliness also in nature, but she was not born to depict it. She was at least true to nature in being true to her own genius. Nothing in her work was forced—she did everything *con amore*; she had a sure eye for the most characteristic charm of children, and she was able to transfuse her pictures with it, and pass it round for the delight of all civilized people.

We are not astonished to find that Kate Greenaway was something of a Freethinker. Her biographers wind up the story of her last days with some rather cheap talk about "the pilgrim spirit of Hope and Faith at the very threshold of the Valley of Death"—which is a fine confusion of metaphor; but they are obliged to admit, in

the body of the book, that she "held no very definite or orthodox religious opinions." True, they seek to minimize this by declaring that "she had a strong religious instinct," but this only makes her scepticism all the more striking.

It was to her dear young friend, Miss Violet Dickenson, and to her great and revered friend, Mr. John Ruskin, that Kate Greenaway unbosomed herself in regard to her religious opinions; and we make the following extracts from her letters to these friends, without specifying which of them she was writing to on each occasion.

Naturally it was first of all on the side of the heart that Kate Greenaway revolted against the orthodox conceptions.

It's such a beautiful world, especially in the spring. It's a pity it's so sad also. I often reproach the plan of it. It seems as if some less painful and repulsive end could have been found for its poor helpless inhabitants—considering the wonderfulness of it all. Well, it isn't the least use troubling.

She almost appears to have shared Omar Khayyam's wish to shatter the universe to bits and remould it nearer to the heart's desire. The idea of the indignity which men and women so often suffer at the hands of nature in sweeping them off the stage of this world seems to have haunted her.

I think death is the one thing I can't reconcile with a God. After such a wonderful life, it seems such a miserable ending—to go out of life with pain. Why need it be?

What she really thought about God would be well worth knowing. She expresses herself suggestively, but far from clearly, in the following passage:—

I can't tell why it is people are always trying to convert me. They seem to look upon me as always such a ready subject, and really there is not a more fixed belief that I possess—I have thought the same way ever since I have had the power to think at all. How is it possible that I should change? I know I shall not. If there is a God who made all the wonderful things in this world, surely He would require some worship of those also, but I can't help thinking of a power so much greater than all that altogether—a power that the best in us reaches to only.

Ruskin himself grew less and less assured of a future life as he approached what has been called "the leap in the dark." He could see no evidence of it in the natural course of things, and as he did not accept the inspiration of the Bible in the common meaning of the word, he could only look upon the Hereafter as the "Great Perhaps." Much the same might be said of Kate Greenaway. Look at this:—

You think, I know, that people are well off when they leave this world, but then there's the uncertain other—or nothing—it is a mystery I wish we had known more about.

Here is another passage on similar lines:—

It is a strange world this. How queer it all is, isn't it? living at all—and our motives and things matter, and liking beautiful things, and all the while really not knowing anything about the Vital Part of it—the Before and After.

The tender little lady could even quiz the folk who expect a place for themselves in heaven, and on such very slender grounds:—

It feels to me so strange beyond anything I can think, to be able to believe in *any* of the known religions. Yet how beautiful if you but could. Fancy feeling yourself saved—as they say, set apart to have a great reward. For what? Those poor little bits of sacrifice—while many and many an unregenerate one is making such big ones—but isn't to go to heaven.

Writing to her young friend she is quizzical in a still more drastic fashion:—

Don't you wish you knew if you had got an eternal soul or not? People believe half things in such a funny way.

Yes, people *do* believe half things in such a funny way. They drop hell, for instance, and cling to heaven;

not perceiving that these are two halves of one and the same conception, and perfectly meaningless out of relation to each other.

The popular faith, derived from the Bible, Kate Greenaway must have abandoned at a very early age.

Did you ever believe at all in religion, I mean did you ever believe it as the Bible gives it? I never did—it's so queer.

Really this is the whole criticism of Bible religion in a nutshell—"It's so queer." Queer from a scientific point of view, queer from a common sense point of view, queer from a moral point of view. And the dear little lady who dropped that delicious "queer" over the composite mess would not waste her time in the company of its hireling advocates:—

I never can, never shall see it is more religious to sit in a hot church trying to listen to a commonplace sermon than looking at a beautiful sky, or the waves coming in, and feeling that longing to be good and exultation in the beauty of things.

Probably the scepticism of Kate Greenaway will be forgotten. The public has such a convenient memory for such things. People will go on talking of her as a sweet Christian soul who loved to draw charming children for the illustrated literature of Christmas-time. Christianity and Christ will get the credit of her—as usual. Nevertheless we shall receive the thanks of Freethinkers for drawing attention to the sceptical side of her character. They will be glad to know that such a delightful artist was not one of the branded sheep in the penfolds of faith. They will be pleased to learn that she thought for herself, that she was free from the fetters of superstition, that her head and heart alike rejected the base puerilities of the Creed of Christendom.

(Reprinted) G. W. FOOTE

Correspondence

SIR OSWALD MOSLEY

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—There is an axiom against hitting a man when he is down. Therefore it was with surprise and regret that I saw the *Freethinker* attacking Sir Oswald Mosley, the imprisoned Fascist leader, not upon his principles, but as "a clown" and "a man of very small mental capacity" at this juncture. If the attack had been upon Sir Oswald's political principles one would not complain, but why, at this juncture, attack him personally?

Mosley is at the lowest ebb of his personal and political fortunes. He is in prison. His newspaper *Action's* suppressed. Worse, he is denied a fair trial or even any trial, an abominable (but legal) baseness towards any English citizen whether he be Fascist, Communist, Atheist, Christian or anything else. He is a sick man to my personal knowledge—it may be, a very sick man.

I would suggest to the *Freethinker* that a State capable of keeping a Fascist in prison without trial is equally capable of keeping a Freethinker there without trial.

No one who has crossed swords with Oswald Mosley either in Parliament or upon the platform or even in a fencing-salon would agree that he is a man of "very small mental capacity." He is, in fact, one of the most effective public speakers in England, and both the Tory and Socialist parties once acclaimed his abilities—when he belonged to either of them.

A few weeks ago it was my task to question Mosley upon a number of difficult matters, and the intellectual clarity of his replies was striking. An opportunity was then afforded a Member of the present Government and a former colleague of Mosley's to cross-examine Sir Oswald but, perhaps wisely, no questions were put.

It should not be forgotten that Hitler was once in the fallen position of Mosley. If Mosley does not die in prison and the money-grubs of England bring him to power, he will be considered "brilliant" once more. Such is the way of the world.

C. G. L. DU CANN

[The question of the legality of Sir Oswald Mosley's detention is not at issue; at its worst it is an illustration of what could certainly happen under the system he advocates. As

to his mental quality we have had no personal contact with him, and can only form an opinion on the slavish manner in which he adopted the programme and the form of propaganda of Mussolini and Hitler, the cheap histrionics of his platform work and parades, and the absence of any marked intellectual quality in either his speeches or writings. As to his political principles these have varied so often that it is not easy to manufacture for him the character of either a political or social thinker. And effective public speaking is no final test of intellectual capacity.—ED.]

PASTEUR

SIR,—Mr. Rostron's ignorance is only exceeded by his verbal intemperance. Obviously he knows nothing of Pasteur's work and achievements. What Pasteur saved for France, after the 1870 War, more than paid the German indemnity by his viti culture experiments. He saved countless hundreds of lives by his hydrophobia inoculations, and he saved the agricultural situation in France by his discovery of the causes of anthrax. He is one of the most deservedly honoured sons of that country.

Tell your benighted correspondent to go and see Paul Muni in the film of Pasteur. Every word of it is true. I am in a position to know for I assisted Pasteur for a year in his laboratory near the Pantheon. There was not a student then, as there is not an intelligent man throughout the civilized world, but who worships him as the finest example of a scientific philanthropist.

Poor Mr. Rostron. I will pray for him, knowing it will have no effect on his make up.

FRANK COLLIE, M.D.

CROOKES AND SPIRITUALISM

SIR,—Instead of admitting his mistake, which would truly be an example of free thinking, G. H. Taylor draws red herrings across the path. With his gratuitous and somewhat offensive references to Sir William Crookes I will not now deal.

In his article, G. H. Taylor included the name of Sir William Crookes in a list of well-known men who, "Though treated to some apparently remarkable phenomena have not finally endorsed the Spiritualists' interpretation."

I proved him wrong by quoting Sir William's own words, given in an interview two years before his passing when, in reference to his acceptance of Spiritualism, he declared: "I have never had occasion to change my mind on the subject."

G. H. Taylor also said, regarding the sealed message left by Sir Oliver Lodge, "This kind of thing is not new: it was tried, it may be remembered, by the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who, we must presume, has not yet had time to attend to the appointment, or has not found the right medium."

I replied by saying I had never heard of this sealed message and could trace no record of it in any psychic publication. "Where and with whom was it deposited?" I asked.

On this subject G. H. Taylor maintains silence. Freethinkers, of all people, should make sure of their facts.

MAURICE BARBANELL

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