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• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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Views and Opinions

Church and State in War Time

WAR-TIME is a period of retrogression. Whether the war be one of aggression or of defence, inevitable or avoidable, to secure liberty or impose a tyranny, while war lasts it is a period of social retrogression. While war lasts men surrender much of that individual freedom of thought, action and speech, which has been so hardly won. The individuality of each is subdued to a mechanical obedience to orders. It becomes one of the chief duties of the "good" citizen to obey without question. One may be taking part in a war *for* freedom, but while the war lasts the citizen must surrender much that he toilsfully acquired. Our hope is that he will one day resume it.

The present war offers no exception to the rule. It is, indeed a very marked illustration of the truth of what has been said. It began with those in power demanding a free hand, not merely to do, but to forbid. The people were warned that each must regard his neighbour as a probable traitor to his country. High officials did not hesitate to advise everyone to be more or less suspicious of each other. One ought not to forget the posters on the walls, a young lady with finger to lip as typical of the attitude each should assume. Men were fined or sent to prison for the fantastical offence of "causing despondency." We were advised to listen to nothing, speak about nothing, merely to remember that there were a lot of new officials, and that we must give them unquestioning obedience. If these orders had been obeyed as fully as those in authority would have liked, we might easily have become a nation of men and women who had achieved freedom by making themselves impossible of exercising it.

It has been said from scores of pulpits that the war had achieved "national unity," our disputes and sectional differences have been set aside, and we are united as a nation. The conflict between "capital" and "labour," has been suspended; trades unions have forgone some of their dearest privileges. We have become conscious of ourselves as a people. I admit the general fact, but I deny the interpretation of it. For the quarrels that have been hushed—for a time—were waged round issues that are constant in a progressive society, and, although they may be fought on different levels, they must be always with us. They are essential to human welfare. They deal with things that are permanent in a progressive society. The unity we have achieved is to secure mere survival, and the beneficial differences that should exist are set aside. We suspend our social and intellectual conflicts in order to conduct a conflict on the level of brute force. That conflict must be pur-

sued, but it is treason to the better elements of life to claim the unity it produces as a step forward.

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A Forced Union

I said just now that sectional interests have been hushed or laid aside for the purpose of wholeheartedly pursuing the war. But there is one marked exception to this—the Churches. They also have talked of "unity," but with a different emphasis and with a different aim. Never before have the Churches of this country—Established and Nonconformist—shown so much unity as they have since the opening of the war. But it has been a sectarian unity with small care taken as to disguise. Churchmen and Nonconformists, each probably seeing that neither can displace the other, and alarmed at the probability of both losing ground, have intensified their joint committee work to see to it that when the war is over—if not before—their religion will be more and more definitely established in the schools than it is at present, and with greater influence in the State. Joint Committees of Nonconformists and representatives of the Established Church have been formed all over the country, all working to the same end. Realizing that in view of the completely discredited position of historic Christianity, it is a question of either hanging together or hanging separately, Christian organizations have set themselves to take advantage of the retrogression inevitable to a state of war, and, counting upon the slow recovery of the nation after the war, the high priests of superstition have visualized their opportunity and are taking advantage of it. The much hated naval order "on the knee," marks the ideal position of a genuine Christian.

* * *

Church and State

An article in a recent issue of the *British Weekly*, one of the leading Nonconformist journals, may be taken to illustrate what has been said. It opens with one of those religious "truths" with which critical students of Christian literature are familiar, and which made a famous historian say that Christian truth equalled Punic faith. "Nonconformity repudiates the State connexion; the Church of Christ, it claims, must be wholly free, the separation of Church and State is regarded as a cardinal principle." True in form, this is completely untrue in fact. With the exception of a few small sects that have never had the opportunity of securing an alliance with the State, all Christian bodies have welcomed State help, State patronage, and have used, so far as they could, the force of the State to further their claims and to protect their teachings from assault. Nonconformists, with the exceptions named, have not objected to a State Established Church, it has objected only to that Church getting an unfair proportion of the spoils. It has taken from the State, and still takes, all it can in the shape of patronage and plunder, and has clamoured for more.

Measuring Protestantism as a whole against the Roman Catholic Church it is to the former that we owe the existence of a State Church. The Roman Church has aimed, and still aims, at making the State a department of the Church; Protestants would make the Church a department of the State. Protestantism,

historically, has opposed the State, on the religious side, only when special religious teachings were attacked by the State. But in other respects the State has been used by Protestants to enforce their claims and to protect their doctrines. The present State-enforced Sunday laws are mainly Protestant in origin. It was Protestantism that forced the State to pass a law against the priest-made crime of blasphemy, a law so brutal, so repulsive in its savagery, that no prosecution under it has ever occurred. Protestants have had to content themselves with prosecution of "blasphemers" under the common law. Behind most of the present-day prosecutions for infringement of the Sunday laws there lies Nonconformist bigotry. But for Protestants seeing a method of getting their religion established in State schools, we should to-day have had a complete system of secular education, and teachers might have been at liberty to say exactly what they thought about religious beliefs. Nonconformists are at one with the Established Church in asking for more dogmatic religious instruction in the schools than there is at present. Nor have I ever heard of a Nonconformist Church or Chapel rejecting the annual monetary subsidy given them by the State in the shape of legal remission of rates and taxes. Many years ago when I raised this point in connexion with the Church of that "great" Nonconformist, Dr. Clifford, his retort was that when the Established Church refused the subsidy his own Church would follow suit. That was Nonconformity in practice. The existence of a bench of bishops in the House of Lords is an outrage on the modern spirit—as is the whole of hereditary rule—but Nonconformists have more than once suggested that the situation might be met by appointing a number of leading Nonconformists to seats in the Upper Chamber. Where Nonconformists are concerned in their clash with the State Church one may well read "envy" for "principle." Parson and preacher are one beneath the skin.

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Principle and Practice

For many reasons it is thus worth while placing on record the conclusion of the *British Weekly* that "we must aim at an alliance between Church and State." That is quite definite. All pretence of principle is thrown to the wind. It is mournfully admitted that the Church is a smaller body than the nation, and for that reason Nonconformists "cannot insist that all teachers in the schools be Christians, or that all legislation shall conform to Christian standards," but it is quite evident that Nonconformists desire as many Christians to be appointed to the schools as is possible, whether they be the best teachers or not, and that the whole pressure of the Christian forces will be given to making legislation conform to Church interests. We are to have, if possible, a return of the "rule of the saints." The blasphemy laws may once again prove their utility, and religious Hitlerism rule over all. Impossible, say most folk. Well, ten years ago most people would have said that Hitlerism with all its obscenity and criminality, with its threat to world peace would have been impossible. But it is here, one of the most solid and the most detestable of things. Man is a queer animal; he can soar to great heights, but he can also plunge to the lowest depths, and he can do either the more easily by dressing the tendencies that are lowest with all the grandiloquence that belong to the nobler of motives. The cultured Roman of nineteen centuries ago would have smiled if someone had told him that among the mass of despised religious sects around, the Christian one would, within a few generations, assume supreme power and would bury for centuries the greatness and the best culture of Greece and Rome beneath a host of savage superstitions. And when mankind takes a backward step it brings into play the human and mechanical power that enables it to outdo the beastliness of the

beast, and intensifies a thousand-fold the savagery of the savage.

Meanwhile it is quite interesting to note that the writer of the article falls foul of the B.B.C., because certain speakers have been denied the use of its machinery, because their opinions on certain matters do not run with those which are held by the controllers at Broadcasting House. The men who are mentioned as having been boycotted are, in this case, Christians. But what else could one expect? The B.B.C. is largely Government controlled, not perhaps in its charter, but in actual fact, and on top of that Government control we have the religious one. During the whole of its history, while steadily increasing its religious propaganda, it has never permitted anyone to present the case against either Christianity or religion in general. Is there any likelihood, once the desired alliance between the Churches as a whole and the State established, that there would be any alteration for the better. No one would be foolish enough to imagine that greater liberality would result. As usual we have Christians demanding *freedom* when all they really have in mind is to secure power for their own dogmas. Even in the case of the centenary commemoration of that great international figure, Thomas Paine, the B.B.C. could not venture on an authoritative statement of his place in world history.

* * *

A "Secular" Coronation?

An article demanding more State religion than we have would be incomplete without some picture of the terrible things that might happen if there existed a real separation between Church and State. Very solemnly the readers are asked to visualize "the consequence in the modern world." We are prepared to shiver, but all we get is the question, "Do we really want a secular coronation service in Westminster Hall [It should be Abbey] without any reference to Almighty God?" The answer to that question is another. Why not? We need not discuss the kingship as a secular institution. All that need be pointed out is that the Mumbo-Jumboism that takes place in Westminster Abbey has nothing whatever to do with the making or the crowning of the King. The King is already King before the Archbishop and his retinue can set to work on him. Who should be King of England in our own day was settled over two hundred and fifty years ago. The people of to-day permit the selection, but they do not make it. King George would be King if he did not undergo the Westminster Abbey performance. I do not think he would cease to be King even if he refused the Abbey ceremony.

Indeed, if the Churches were wise they would not insist on its performance. For the ceremony performed by the Archbishops and his subordinate magic-workers is, as every capable anthropologist knows, merely a pantomimic representation of the incarnation of the tribal deity in the body of the King. We have a lingering of that most primitive superstition in such phrases as the "sacred" person of the King, in practices—which existed in this country until after the reign of Charles II.—which attributed to the King (but only if he were anointed) the power to cure disease by the touch of his hand. Should we be any worse in any respect if our King was appointed, say in the same way as the President of the United States. Or shall we hold that we require a divine miracle to secure such a King as George VI., while the inhabitants of U.S.A. can get along with a President, who is elected by a national vote? I do not believe that we are so inferior to the Americans that we can only do by the aid of a miracle what they can accomplish in quite an ordinary everyday manner. In spite of the inference that may be drawn from the assertion that America can accomplish in an ordinary manner what we can get only by a miracle, I affirm

that man for man the inhabitants of this country are just as good as can be found in U.S.A. And America has no God in its constitution, even though he has managed to edge his way in surreptitiously in local legislation.

One other point. Bluntly we are told, "State control of religion is intolerable, but the secular State is a disaster. We may well say that the cause of the present chaos in Europe is the secularization of the State." Well, we are at war with two European nations, Italy and Germany. Italy provides the headquarters of the largest block of Christians in existence. The vast majority of Italians still profess faith in the head of the Church. Evidently they have not been suddenly turned upside down by the secular State. And Germany until a very few years ago, was among the most religious States of Europe. We had a war with Germany while it was still very, very Christian. And the present war with Germany had arisen out of that one. But Christianity is still the religion of the majority of Germans. And the men who control Germany are merely applying a religious mentality—a Christian mentality—in what they have done and are doing. What is the value of that Christian heredity if its power is so small that a few years of Church disestablishment is enough to throw Europe into a state of chaos? That is a question I should much like some competent Christian to answer.

CHAPMAN COHEN

Victorian Vignettes

We shall never enfranchise the world without touching people's superstitions."—G. W. Foote.

The other day, being surfeited with the automatic writing in the newspapers, I turned to my bookshelves in search of literary sustenance. My choice fell upon Belfort Bax's *Reminiscences of a Mid and Late Victorian*, which proved to be far better reading than its title suggested. Primarily an autobiography, the author's vignettes of men, manners, and movements from the "sixties" of the last century to the last war contained much interesting matter concerning the intellectual and political life during an important period of history.

To Freethinkers the most fascinating of the pages are those dealing with the religious views current in the later years of the Victorian era. Here is an interesting passage:—

It was my lot to grow up under no very favourable conditions for intellectual development. The subjects talked of in the family circle were mainly concerned with religious dogma, or the sectarian interests of the various religious bodies. Preachers of the pure quality of their orthodoxy, as opposed on the one side to Romanism, and on the other to Latitudinarianism bulked largely among the topics of conversation. A severe censorship of literature that was allowed into the house was maintained. The theatre in all its forms was banned. In fact in many cases, ours among them, any form of amusement was supposed to savour of godlessness.

This narrow Puritan tradition of family life is, happily, nearly extinct, and few survive who think it wicked to be happy. Dreadful shadows indeed! And millions have been reared under these dark and stifling conditions. Even to-day, in the twentieth century, the shadow still lurks over the chapels, tin tabernacles, monasteries, and nunneries of the intellectually lost.

Bax himself was a Freethinker, but he wore his "rue with a difference." He even suggests that the work of the earlier Secularists was "crude and coarse." As if any reform was ever started, or wrong righted, without upsetting the bigots. So many abuses are

vested interests. There was money in slavery; there was profit in child labour; there is cash in the soul-saving business. To charge Freethinkers with being coarse and crude is merely to echo the insults of the clergy.

But closer contact with Freethinkers modified Bax views. Here is what he had to say of later aspects of the Freethought Movement:—

It was not till the early eighties and the prosecution of G. W. Foote for blasphemy that the middle-class people began to have sense and justice enough to see the movement below for freedom of thought, commonly known as Secularism, was the plucky attempt of the small middle and working classes to emancipate themselves from the thralldom of an encumbering and galling superstition, fatal to all advance in knowledge and to all independent intellectual effort.

This testimonial, such as it is, is very different from Bax's earlier criticism of the older Secularists. It reminds us of the parson who, when invited to say grace before dinner, always began with "Bountiful Jehovah" if he saw champagne on the table, but moderated his transports in the presence of claret.

It is not as a Freethinker, however, but as an apostle of Socialism that Bax is remembered. The story of the early struggles of the movement, as unfolded by him in these pages is a story of brave men and women fighting at fearful odds and ultimately triumphing. His association with the Socialist Cause brought with it introductions to men of genius, which, in many instances, ripened into friendship. One gets very pleasant glimpses of Bernard Shaw, William Morris, Friedrich Engels, Jean Jaures, August Bebel, Prince Kropotkin, and a whole host of famous men. These vignettes are etched with an engaging frankness, as when he tells the story of Bernard Shaw borrowing half-a-crown from him, and his returning the money the very next day. Bax rallied him on his promptness and honesty. "Oh," said Shaw, "it is my habit to show punctilious accuracy in small money matters, so that when the time comes I may pull off my big coup with success."

The veteran H. M. Hyndman's fondness for the then-respectable frock-coat, pot-hat, and linked shirt-cuff is duly noted by Bax, who adds "nothing would induce me to don this hideous and sordid uniform." Hyndman, be it remembered, not only wore it bravely and constantly, but even sold Socialist papers in the Strand and Fleet Street while so dressed. Cunningham-Graham is mentioned as having a liking for fashionable dress, and as bearing a strong resemblance to Charles the First.

Of William Morris, the poet, he says that "the thing he hated most was Puritanism in all its aspects, and he abominated Teetotalism as he did every other form of ascetic fanaticism." A thorough Pagan, Morris's generosity was Oriental in its splendour. He kept Bax tells us, "a drawer full of half-crowns for almsgiving," which was chiefly expended on political refugees from all parts of Europe. The poet also kept an "open table," and was always glad to entertain his friends. Morris never wore evening dress or a frock-coat, but nearly always wore a dark blue serge suit, and blue shirt without a cravat. An amusing picture is also given of William Richmond, the famous artist, who on one occasion was found "suffering from gout and sitting up in bed reading Jowett's translation of Plato's work, an incident which would have pleased the world-famous master of Balliol College."

Bax knew Lord Haldane well, years before he was ennobled or famous. At that time Bax was living at Croydon, and the two friends had many a ramble over the then-charming Surrey Hills. While crossing a field, Haldane impressed upon Bax that, should any question of trespass arise, the correct thing was to

tender a small coin for technical damage to the owner or agent, with the words: "I claim no right," which should stop all further proceedings. It is interesting to learn that Haldane's real interests were in philosophy, and not in politics. Yet he made a good politician, and an excellent minister of war.

William Sharp, the poet, was another friend. His ambitions were purely literary, and one felt in his case what Morris used to say of Swinburne, that he should have been born between two calf book-covers. An amusing story is told of Engels, who was an outspoken Freethinker. At a Sunday dinner he was asked what church he attended, and he said he always took a walk on Sundays. "You seem to hold peculiar views, Mr. Engels," said the host, "some-what Socinian, I think." This was the extreme limit of theological heterodoxy conceivable by the middle-class mind in Manchester.

Bax's book is worth perusal; for he had lived, observed, and written. It should also remind Socialists that a very wealthy Clericalism is not only a Feudal survival, but a real enemy. Doubtless, in time, Socialists will yet discover, like little Red Riding Hood, that the Church is not an indulgent grandmother, but a very greedy wolf.

MIMNERMUS

Prehistoric Times in Britain

It is shrewdly said that the value of history and pre-history is of supreme importance. For its theme is the study of man's slow and laborious conquest of the forces of Nature. Our own island's story has been recently reviewed by the eminent archæologist, Professor V. Gordon Childe in his well illustrated volume, *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (Chambers, 20s., 1940). Nearly all ascertained knowledge concerning the various immigrant tribes and communities who entered our homeland prior to the Roman invasion has been dispassionately appraised in this important work.

When David Hume wrote his *History of England*, it was commonly assumed that Cæsar and his successors found the ancient Britons in a state of semi-barbarism. But science has since clearly established the fact that native peoples were well advanced towards civilization, at least in Southern Britain. As Gordon Childe states, "agriculture was already so flourishing that Britain was exporting corn in addition to metals, slaves and fat stock. Commerce was facilitated by media of exchange—minted coinage as well as bar currency—guaranteed by the authority of small but genuine States." Consequently the survey of British pre-history embraces "the conversion of a wilderness of trackless forest and marsh into a semi-civilized land with many fields and populous villages in forest clearings connected by tracks over which trade had passed for centuries before the Romans built their roads."

Although men or ape-men have lived on our globe for at least half a million years, the presence of mankind in Britain cannot be safely dated at more than 50,000 years ago. Moreover, the detailed information concerning the Stone Age people furnished in France and elsewhere possesses no parallel in Britain. In Palæolithic Times our island was still part of the Continent, but evidently very few primitive hunters migrated from the richly stored game regions of Gaul and Central Europe for what Professor Garrod describes as "a north-west cape, remote and inhospitable, bounded by the great ice-sheet under which Scotland and Ireland still lay buried." Still, a few early arrivals appeared in Britain accompanied by reindeer and other mammals who migrated northwards as the glaciers retreated towards their

Arctic home. In their new habitat the primitive visitors gathered food and sought shelter in caves in southern districts, while at a later time they reached Derby and Yorks.

The earliest incomers were the Aurignacians, a hunting stock related to the Dordogne cavedwellers in France, whose memorials in England and Wales consist of flint implements for bone carving, leather dressing and other domestic uses. Apparently, they interred their dead with rude religious rites.

This incursion was succeeded by a period of intensive cold, and the invading people may have returned to the Continent. Later, however, came the Gravetians, perhaps accompanied by straggling Solutreans. Childe concludes that the newcomers "still found a few mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, bison and reindeer as well as plenty of horses and wild oxen in Britain. But the climate soon—i.e., in the next two or three thousand years—began to grow milder. First the rhinoceros and then the mammoth died out, and at last even the reindeer vanished from Derbyshire."

In the concluding centuries of the Glacial Epoch Southern England was the habitat of an impecunious and diminutive population of food-gatherers and huntsmen. These primitives were so few in number that Childe thinks that a computation of 250 for the winter season is not extravagantly low. One might infer from the fair number of skeletons discovered that an estimate so low is unreasonable. But Childe rejoins that a score of skeletal remains is "not such a large number for a period of 10,000 years or more."

With the melting of the ice-sheet that covered so much of Europe, a landscape of tundra and steppe was succeeded by that of forest-mantled lands. Aspen, birch and willow groves appeared, only to be slowly replaced by pine forests interspersed with hazel. Oaks then abounded and the alder emerged, and at last the majestic beech. There was certainly no absolute sequence in the priority of those arboreal types. Then, as now, plant life was dependent on altitude, temperature, soil and the other factors involved. Still, the forms mentioned greatly predominated during successive periods. This sequence, as Childe says, is "revealed by actual tree-stools and tree-pollen preserved in the successive layers of peat in bogs and mosses, not only in Denmark, but also in East Anglia, the Pennines, Wales, Scotland and even Ireland. The peats disclose not only the bare fact of an arboreal migration, but also climatic fluctuations which furthered or retarded it."

The supersession of tundra and steppe by forest led to pronounced faunal changes. The large mammals preyed upon by Palæolithic hunters disappeared, and their pursuers were driven to depend upon the smaller game supplied by the woodland growths. They acquired the arts of the fowler and fisherman and supplemented their larder with wild fruits, nuts and molluscs.

According to Childe 99 per cent of man's earthly existence has been restricted to hunting wild animals and collecting the various edible items Nature provided. And although he proved superior to the lower animals in cunning and sagacity he was almost as much at the mercy of the elements as the beaver or fox. Childe adopts the very conservative estimate that, so recently as 7,000 years since, did a few enterprising communities initiate that revolution in man's attitude towards his environment which led onward to ancient and modern civilization. Then man became a producer as well as a collector.

This New Stone Age departure apparently originated in the Near East in the region extending from the Nile Valley to Iran. Childe justly states that: "Wild grasses ancestral to wheat and barley, would grow wild on the uplands of Palestine and Iran. Sheep, ancestors of the stocks from which our oldest domestic sheep are derived, still roam wild on the

Anatolian-Iranian mountains. Only on the edge of the Nile, in Syria and in Iran, does archaeology reveal communities of farmers unquestionably before 4,500 B.C."

In primitive husbandry when no manure was used to fertilize the soil, the cultivated plots were rapidly exhausted, and the rude agriculturists were constrained to migrate from Asia and Africa into Europe and, in the course of centuries, reached the Atlantic area. The wanderers in their new homes were driven to adapt themselves to their novel environment and the pioneer settlers utilized the more open spaces for their pursuits. Apparently, it was "from the chalk lands of Gaul to the chalk downs of Wessex and Sussex that the first farmers to till and graze the soil of Britain came."

Among the early arrivals were the Windmill Hill folk, so named from their prehistoric camp in Wilts. These ancient settlers were seemingly the initiators of British industrial activities. One of their workshops has been excavated in Wales, where axes were manufactured in large numbers. These implements have also been discovered in Windmill remains near Penmaen Mawr as well as in Glamorgan and Wessex.

The religion or magic of these rude agrarians is illustrated by female figures and the male generative organ carved in chalk. These have been interpreted as fertility charms intended to promote the growth of the crops and the increase of flocks and herds. The flint miners' cults were similar. At Grimes Graves there was unearthed "a sort of altar on which may have stood a figurine and a phallus of chalk for rites designed to restore earth's fertility in good flint too."

The megalithic monuments which extended from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coasts betray sacramental characteristics associated with the funerary customs of their constructors. Tombs were erected ceremonially. The remains of fires and calcined bones, regarded as burnt offerings to the spirits have frequently been found in excavated graves. We gather that: "In at least one Wiltshire tomb, as in comparable tombs in Greece and Denmark, anatomical peculiarities denote a real 'family likeness' between most of the chamber's occupants. The dead were accompanied by offerings of food, vases and ornaments." The skeletons discovered prove that their owners were members of the long-headed Mediterranean race.

It is interesting to note that the most ancient relics of cultivated barley in Britain have been preserved in an Urn Folk grave in Glamorgan, which also yielded "the earliest recorded instance in the world of the use of coal for fuel." Another striking feature is the fact that the presence of both copper and tin, and their favourable geographical position made the British Isles a trading centre at a time when the alloy bronze was the leading industrial metal. Indeed, the British bronzesmith's productions appear to have been exported to Central Europe, Spain and the Baltic. But, with the rise and development of the iron industry in Hallstatt, the blacksmith steadily encroached on the bronzesmith's art, and the golden age of British bronze soon passed away.

Gordon Childe's reflective account of Stonehenge and Avebury is extremely interesting and suggestive, but many of the problems associated with these great megalithic monuments still await solution.

T. F. PALMER

Acid Drops

There is, we believe, a Catholic Truth Society, and the distinctive title is necessary. First, as to the number of schools maintained in this country. It is not the Church but the Secular State which insists on every child receiving a certain degree of education. Catholics have thus the choice of permitting their children to go to a non-Catholic school or providing schools themselves which shall reach a certain educational level—not the highest possible. The Church thus provides schools not out of love for education, as such, but in order to make sure that the children attending shall have sectarian instruction and be freed from the contamination of non-, or anti-, Roman Catholic influences. One need only ask what kind of education does the Church supply where the State does not insist on education? The answer of Spain, when the Church controls affairs, is an adequate reply.

Next, it is quite wrong to say that the Church does not, in a particular sense, *educate* the people. It does and always has done so. But its education has consisted of the belief in the Church as the supreme authority in life, of belief in prayers to saints, in securing miraculous cures from disease, and success in "worldly" matters, in the magical power of relics, and the hundred and one similar things that go to the make-up of a good Roman Catholic. It is a lie to say that the Roman Church has never attended to education of the people. It is the kind of education given that condemns the Church and has made Roman Catholicism the synonym for superstition and absurd practices. Without the education of the Church the religious sale of masses, the trade in the saintly cures of disease would not exist. It is not the Church's neglect of "education" that is to blame, but the kind of education given that is of importance. No government has ever paid greater attention to the education of the people than has Hitlerian Germany, and the result is now threatening the existence of modern civilization.

And with regard to the Church preserving the learning during the "Dark Ages." The Dark Ages cover the period when the Roman Church was at its greatest and exerted a power over the Secular State that it cannot exert to-day, save in isolated cases. And as to the preservation of learning. While we write, there lies before us a couple of volumes running to nearly nine hundred closely printed pages containing lists of the number of books suppressed by the Roman Church. It was the Church that was responsible for the disappearance of so much of the literature of antiquity. It is to the Mohammedan world that we owe the return to what was left of the wisdom of the ancient Greek and Roman peoples, and it was the Church that did its utmost to prevent the revival. The *Catholic Herald* is living up to Heine's description of Roman Catholicism as "the great lying Church."

Quite a number of spirits have turned up at Spiritualistic gatherings and delivered the message that we are going to win this war. But that was said by many of us ordinary folk when the situation looked much worse than it does at present. But none of these airy visitors tells us when the war will end. Will it end in 1941, 2, 3, or 4? That information might be very useful. None of these spirits warned us of the conquest of France, or the collapse of Belgium and Holland. None of them point out what people we have in this country working quietly for Hitler. That job is left for the ordinary secret service, or for some other ordinary person. Why do not spirits give us some real valuable and testable information? All that one does note is the mental deterioration that appears to have taken place between the death of men and women of intelligence and their appearance at some spiritualistic gathering. That justifies what Huxley said, that if Spiritualism be true it has merely added another horror to existence.

We sometimes wonder whether those who write religious articles for the press seriously think about what they write, or do they trust to others not thinking about what they write so long as the familiar nonsense is produced. For example. The Rev. L. B. Ashby, in his

In a free nation, it matters not whether individuals reason well or ill; it is sufficient that they do reason. Truth arises from the collision, but from that springs liberty, which is a security from the effect of reasoning.

Montesquieu

weekly religious meditation in the *Daily Telegraph* remarks that the divinity of Jesus is the very core and marrow of the Christian faith, and that being the case the frankness and natural truthfulness of the gospels is shown by their "abstaining from depicting the boy Jesus as supernatural or abnormal." That is really noteworthy, if it were true. As a fact the surprising thing is Mr. Ashby's statement.

Consider. Jesus was born without an earthly father; there is nothing abnormal in that. He caused the blind to see by administering a plaster of sand and spittle. He provided a feast for a hungry multitude with a few fishes and a few loaves of bread, and had more food than he started with when the feast was over. He raised the dead from their graves, and repeated the trick on himself after he had been publicly executed. These things are quite normal and free from any trace of the supernatural—so says Mr. Ashby. Does he believe that this is the case, or does he merely wish his readers to believe it? Why, if one takes the supernatural out of the life of Jesus, all we have left is a hawker of moral platitudes that were old when he preached them.

The other day the newspapers all gave prominence to "Abyssinians revolt against Italians." Good news so far as this country is concerned, but in essence, very, very stale news. For the Abyssinians have been in revolt against the Italians ever since we stood by while the Italians over-ran as much of the country as they could hold. But there were always a number of the natives in revolt. And now the Italians look like having to pay some price for their brutalities in that "glorious conquest," when the son of Mussolini—the brutal son of a brutal father, wrote home dilating on the "fun" it was to bomb women and children and ill-armed men from the height of a couple of hundred feet.

We note this announcement by all the papers of the revolt of the Abyssinians, as compared with their silence during the past few years when the continuous revolt that has been going on during the occupancy of part of the territory by the Italians. Not one Englishman in a hundred knew of this steady opposition that was being offered to the invaders. Dependent as the vast majority of the English people are upon newspapers for *mis*-information, the power of the press is sufficient to keep the public in such ignorance that when news is given them they are unable to form a balanced opinion. This represents a danger to democracy second only to the one against which we are now fighting. For the wealth of a democracy depends upon the existence of a public capable of forming opinions that are based on reliable acquaintance with, and adequate understanding of, events. How many of the papers of to-day could be counted as making for that end?

Miss Dorothy Sayers, the novelist, said to the Archbishop of York's conference:—

Suppose that during the last century the churches had devoted to sweetening intellectual corruption a quarter of the energy they spent in nosing out fornication, or denounced cheating with a quarter of the vehemence with which they denounced legalized adultery. But one was easy and the other was not.

Good enough! But it was only a little time back that Miss Sayers was stressing the teaching that there would be no morality without belief in Jesus, or if there were it would not be worth the having. And with all respect to Miss Sayers as the writer of some very interesting crime stories, we must point out that if one willingly hands the care of morals over to the Church, she must not complain if the Church acts as Churches will act. Miss Sayers should make up her mind to take one of two positions. Either morality is an outcome of social life with all its references—immediate and remote—to human relationships in this world, or it is something authoritatively given by some supernatural being with a priesthood as its interpreter. In writing a novel Miss Sayers can get her characters in and out of any position she cares to create. But when dealing with actual life the task is a different one, not to be accomplished by the mouthing of moral platitudes, or a half-hearted—and therefore useless—denunciation of the clergy.

At the same Conference the Archbishop of York said: "It is the business of Lambeth to remind Westminster of its responsibility to God." That, too, is nonsense. To remind Westminster of its responsibility to God, is to suggest that Westminster come to Lambeth Palace for its approval. It is the duty of Westminster to remember that it is responsible, not to God, but to the people of this country who place members where they are. Naturally, it would suit the Archbishop of York if Parliament went to the Church for approval, because that would be to place the Church at the head of affairs. And the Archbishop has said that he is fighting against "Authoritarian rule"? Ye gods!

The Malvern (Church of England) Conference is over. We have already given some of the gems of Christian thought that were scattered there. Here is another. It is part of a printed manifesto. It is part of a protest against the "ultimate ownership of the industrial resources of the community." It *sounds* well and generous, but when one recalls the millions of money in the possession of the Church in the shape of land, property and cash investments, one is able to put such a resolution in its proper place. The "rights of the Church" are sacred, and there is no other institution that stands so strictly for getting those "rights" respected as does the Established Church. One may witness the struggle over tithes, and the historic readiness of the Church to "grab." It is quite safe for a resolution such as this one to be carried. We wonder what his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury thinks about it.

Another passage from the same resolution appears to be based on direct information from God, for it runs that "A way of life founded on the supremacy of the economic motive which is contrary to God's plan for mankind." God has been very slow in coming to a conclusion on this matter. But he would have acted with greater wisdom if he had sent the information directly to a news agency. As it is we can imagine many members of the Conference, and many more who were not present, winking the other eye.

Perhaps the best counter-slogan, "Keep right with God," might be "Keep right with the devil." After all, and as Christians say that God wishes us well, he should not need any of the praise and flattery that is showered on him. But the devil, he surely is another question. What about trying the policy of praising the might and the power of the devil? The story of the lady who trained her sons to bow whenever the name of Satan was mentioned, on the ground that one never knew what one might need, has its application to-day.

To an Escapist

DEEP in the country lie,
Lie buried for a time;
To the city say "Good-bye!"
And seek the company of oak and ash and lime,
Green fields, and the wide wide sky.

For no contention's there,
No echo of man's wars;
All day you breathe fresh air,
By night you see the everlasting stars;
Their solitude you gladly share.

So with a kindly smile
To the city bid "Goodbye!"
Just for so long a while
Deep in the country lie,
Where fields and meadows stretch for mile on mile.

But when you shall be cured
Of your heart's ache,
Back to the haunts of men you will be lured,
Your country life forsake;
Mankind must be endured.

BAYARD SIMMONS

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- FOR Circulating and Advertising the *Freethinker*.—C. M. Hollingham, £1.
- THE General Secretary of the N.S.S. acknowledges a donation of 10s. from Mr. A. Edwards to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.
- D. ELLIS.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.
- THERE has been some delay in fulfilling orders for the *Bible Handbook, Materialism Restated, Theism or Atheism and Grammar of Freethought* owing to rebinding. All orders have now been completed, and any reader who has sent for, and has not received his order, please advise us.
- WILL Mr. E. Markley of Ladywood, Birmingham kindly send on his address, as the book ordered has been returned "No such thoroughfare."
- S. WARD.—You seem to have struck a peculiarly unintelligent lot of people, and if they feed upon the kind of rubbishy tracts you send us they must be hopeless. Personally we can hardly think of a greater insult being offered to any man than to assume that he will find pleasure or profit in reading such things. You might well quote Bunyan—"There, but for . . . go I."
- W. PEIRRY.—Thanks for securing two new subscribers. That is the kind of help we value greatly. Pleased you enjoyed our *Religion and Sex*. It was intended to provide an understanding of the origin and the perpetuation of religious beliefs.
- W. GAINS.—There was never any relation between the old (philosophical) Anarchist movement and the N.S.S. Some folk may have been members of both organizations. That is all.
- T. H. HOWE.—Your subscription has been handed to the Secretary of the West Ham Branch.
- D. FINLAYSON.—Thanks for contribution to War Damage Fund. Not many of us are able to do all we would wish to do for a cause we love. But the spirit in giving counts for much.
- F. G. GRIFFITHS.—Many thanks for subscriptions from the Chester Branch N.S.S.
- W. EVERETT.—We are very pleased to learn that we have been of assistance to you in your mental development. Hope we may meet one day.
- The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.
- The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.
- Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

War Damage Fund

THERE is not a great advance in the amount of our "War Damage Fund" this week, but there will, we anticipate, be a considerable advance before it is closed. We have never appealed for financial aid when so many of our readers have been so hardly strained in other directions. The greater is our appreciation for what has already been contributed. But in spite of increasing costs of production, and the difficulties arising out of the war, we shall pull through. All may rest satisfied on that point. We hope to close this Fund by the end of February.

Previously received, £402 13s. 10d.; W. G. J. Neild, £5; J. S. Ray, 10s.; R. Sharrock, 4s.; L. B. Cook, 4s.; A. Rich, 4s.; W. H. Jones, 4s.; F. G. Griffiths, 4s.; C. M. Hollingham (second sub.), £1; C. F. Simpson, £2 2s.; A. C. Rosetti 5s.; N. Higham, 2s. 6d.; H. J. Hewer (2nd donation), 2s. 6d.; R. Pariente, 5s.; A. Brooks, 3s. 6d.; S. C. Merrifield, 2s. 7d.; Mr. & Mrs. F. G. Warner, 10s.; S. Isaacs (U.S.A.), £1 2s. 6d.

Total £414 10s. 5d.

Correction. A. Niven £2 2s should have been Dr. A. Niven.

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. Amendment has been made of amount previously acknowledged last week.

Sugar Plums

The following reaches us from a friend on whose report we can rely:—

The following incident is current in a Gloucestershire village:—

A German plane was seen to land by two villagers. The pilot got out and proceeded to take his bombs from the racks. When he had finished he came towards the villagers and said: "Now you can take me prisoner. I was ordered to bomb that College (pointing in a certain direction) but I cannot do it. I was educated there."

If the incident actually took place, it shows a fine humane feeling which Nazi teaching had failed to subdue.

We have been told in the most authoritative manner that we are fighting a war for liberty. This is how it works out when religion is able to play its part. It comes from one of our lady readers, on whose accuracy as a reporter we know we can rely:—

As a regular reader of the *Freethinker* I am writing you, hoping that you will not consider that I am wasting your time.

In 1939 I enrolled in the W.A.A.F., and am still a member of that organization. Upon enlistment, the usual question was on the papers about one's religion. Although I am only twenty years of age, and therefore, according to some people, "not old enough to know my own mind," I am definitely of the opinion that religion is only a stupid superstition. It appeared that there must necessarily be a religion if enlistment in the W.A.A.F. was desired, so I put down on the paper that I belonged to the Church of England. After sixteen months, with a compulsory attendance periodically to the Camp Church, to listen to the unintelligible collection of words which the Padre gave, I came to the conclusion that I must change the lie about my religion.

Firstly, I asked my corporal, who told me that I didn't know what I was talking about, and that when I was older I should know better. Then she proceeded to pass it around the section as a rather funny story. Having taken it further to my Plt. Sgt., she said that it wasn't worth bothering about, and that it would be too bad if I ever wanted to take a commission, because without religion, it would be impossible. It seems that should I continue with the query, which I shall definitely do, progress would be impossible for me in the W.A.A.F. Added to that, I should have to listen to the Padre, who would endeavour to convert me.

Surely this cannot be correct. Surely if I am too young to question religion at twenty years of age, then I was too young to accept it at five years?

Unfortunately we have the best reasons for saying that this kind of religious bigotry is very often exhibited in both the regular and in auxiliary services. There is nothing that so quickly ignores the sense intellectual, and even moral responsibility, as religion.

Since the beginning of time it has seemed inevitable that there shall be one small group of clever men and women who do the ruling, and a much larger group of not-so-bright men and women who shall do the obeying. . . . Invariably they represent Strength and Leadership on the one hand and Weakness and Compliance on the other. They have been called Empire and Church and Knighthood and Monarchy and Democracy and Slavery and Serfdom and Proletariat. But the mysterious law which governs human development works the same in Moscow as it does in London or Madrid or Washington, for it is bound to neither time nor place. It has often manifested itself under strange forms and disguises. More than once it has worn a lowly garb and has loudly proclaimed its love for humanity, its devotion to God, its humble desire to bring about the greatest good of the greatest number. But underneath such pleasant exteriors it has always hidden and continues to hide the grim truth of that primeval law which insists that the first duty of man is to keep alive. People who resent the fact that they were born in a world of mammals are apt to get angry at such statements. They call us "Materialistics" and "cynics," and what not. . . . They might as well fight against the habits of parallel lines or the results of the tables of multiplication. Personally I would advise them to accept the inevitable. For then, and only then can history some day be turned into something that shall have a practical value to the human race. (*Liberation of Mankind*, by Hendrik W. Van Loon, p. 71.)

Gibbon and the Modern World

I.—ANCIENT AND MODERN CIVILIZATION

GIBBON'S *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is deservedly a classic. In it an author, sprung from the prosperous English merchant class of the eighteenth century, whose enquiring mind had led him, as a young man, from the Church of England into the Church of Rome, and from the Church of Rome into the Deism of his generation, sets out to narrate the successive stages of that revolution by which ancient society in Europe gave place to medieval, involving among other changes the transition from Paganism to Christianity. It is history which will repay reading or re-reading at the present day, when Western civilization, together with the Christian religion, seems to be undergoing a no less momentous "decline and fall" than that recounted by Gibbon.

The story opens in the second century of our era, when the Roman Empire, extending from Britain to Mesopotamia and from the Danube to the Sahara, had in all appearances achieved an assured stability. The Roman Empire, like all empires, had a bloody history. The slave-owners' and usurers' republic of Rome had successively made itself mistress of Italy, stamped out its rival, Carthage, and turned the entire Mediterranean world into a field for exploitation and extortion. The aims of Roman conquest were land, loot, slaves, and tribute. A portion of the land of conquered peoples was confiscated and leased or sold for the benefit of the treasury, or planted with Roman colonists. Slaves were sold in tens of thousands after every successful campaign. The tribute of the provinces was an immense source of revenue both to the Roman State and to the contractors to whom the taxes were farmed out. A crowd of financiers and their agents, eager to exploit the new provinces, followed in the wake of the victorious legions. At the same time, all this had certain compensations. Communications were improved by the construction of military roads. After the first orgy of expropriation and rapine, the Empire gave peace. The Roman oligarchy, moreover, in the nature of the case could not long continue to exploit the Empire for their own exclusive benefit. Julius Cæsar and his successors extended Roman citizenship to one province after another, and led the wealthier provincials to think of themselves as Romans and to identify their interests with those of their conquerors. By the second century this process was almost complete. Provincials won their way into the ruling class of the Empire; and Spaniards like Trajan and Hadrian, and Africans like Severus were among those elevated to the imperial throne.

This measure of progress, however, failed to remove the canker at the root of ancient society. The whole fabric rested on slavery, and therefore on force. Gang labour on the great slave-worked estates of Roman nobles in Italy and Sicily drove large numbers of free peasantry off the soil, and led to the ruin of land by inefficient cultivation and to the dependence of Rome on the provinces for her food supply. It also led to the exhaustion of the source from which the legions had been recruited. By the second century recruiting had almost ceased in Italy, and troops were raised in the provinces where they had to serve. Armies so raised ceased to be Roman except in their name and framework. They could be kept loyal only by pampering them at the expense of the civil population.

The condition of slaves gradually improved. As the Empire ceased to expand, the supply of human chattels fell off, and their relative scarcity earned them greater consideration. Under Hadrian and the Antonine emperors the rights of slaves against cruel masters were recognized by law. But it was impossible to undo the economic effect of centuries of organized slavery. In the end large areas of land went out

of cultivation altogether, and economic life could be carried on only by a vast extension of serfdom. The Roman world was inhabited by a population three fourths of whom were without freedom, without country, and without hope, while the object of the remaining fourth was to live securely and with the minimum of boredom on the labour of those three fourths.

Such was Roman society at the time at which Gibbon's history opens. If we now turn to modern civilization, certain parallels, as well as certain differences, immediately leap to the eye. The period of modern European history from 1871 to 1914 may fairly be compared to the Antonine age of the Roman Empire. As lately as thirty years ago the stability and progress of our civilization seemed assured. True, we, like the Romans, have had a bloody history. The process by which European nations have extended their power over the American, African and Asiatic continents is no more reputable than that by which the Romans conquered their Empire. It is barely a century since chattel-slavery was legally abolished in the British colonies. Since its abolition, the scramble for markets, raw materials and concessions has proceeded on lines not unlike the armed land-hunts and slave-hunts of antiquity, with the difference that instead of one corner of the globe only, the whole planet has been thrown open to exploitation, and instead of one conquering Empire, half a dozen competing Great Powers have filled the scene. And the arguments used in defence are the same, though modern Imperialists are not so successful as the Romans in assimilating conquered races to themselves. The Romans at least knew no colour bar.

Our solid-seeming civilization, like the solid-seeming civilization of antiquity, rests ultimately on the exploitation of man by man. The palliative reforms of the last two generations no more alter this fact than did the equally benevolent edicts of second century Rome.

In succeeding articles we shall amplify the parallel.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

(To be continued)

Pruning in the Lord's Vineyard

CHRISTIAN Morality we are told on all sides is *the goods*. Without it, or without enough of it, nations fight one another. With it, all goes as merry as a marriage bell. If in confirmation of this one examines the period when the Christian religion had both power and opportunity and finds the thesis to appear confuted, we are then told that this was the result of a lack of real Christianity at these times. What really existed when Christians went into battle joyfully with the Cross of Jesus going on before was a horrible perversion of the simple message of the Nazarene. A wicked Church got obsessed with Things Temporal and the result was calamitous. Another school of thought, also a school very prayerful and God-directed, says that even in the Dark Ages, mankind being corrupt and prone to evil, the message of Jesus was slowly but surely permeating Society and was doing excellent and distinctive work.

Morality sprang up out of the necessities of the case; man had to devise rules for the game of life or perish. It is not astonishing that he did not choose the way of suicide. *Let him take who can* is a practical ethic for the strong man, but it does not take a divine revelation to convince him, when up against a stronger, that this rough rule needs amendment. Ethical habits had therefore to occur and did occur. Buckle challenged Christianity in the last century to

show anything distinctive in the Christian ethic, something that the Gods then revealed that man had not found out before. His challenge remains unanswered.

The concrete form that man's ethical system has taken varies; it has always been affected by his local conditions. It has never been static and never will. A new fact has every now and again to be recognized and fitted into his method of living. The discovery of birth-control is a case in point. *Thus Saith the Lord* does not help the process; it retards it. *Thus Saith the Lord* squirms and wriggles—but eventually adapts. A modified ethic results. When it has resulted, the theologically-minded portion of the community term it the *Christian ethic*. It needs such an adjective, it is thought, to give it the necessary importance and authority. The Church strives to keep its position by assuming that authority. *What did Jesus say*, never has been and never will be the key to their conclusions. Human society thinks, discusses, and makes experiments. Eventually a conclusion is formed and a new modified ethic emerges. This the Church accepts labels it Christian and discovers to be what Jesus really taught, or at any rate what he meant. JESUS, who had no political theory, who brought us a plan of salvation so that we could enjoy the life *to come*. JESUS who thought (if the Holy Book has *no* been listened to), that in a very short time the earth would be no more and that many then listening to him would be gathered up to enjoy eternal joy or pain. If there is anything that is of this world it is morality; Christian teaching was not of this world. It was a soul-saving device. The Soul, the Soul was the thing.

But Jesus was wrong. The Stars did not fall; the sun and moon were not blotted out; men had to go on living. They had to continue to devise schemes so that living could be simpler and more comfortable. When they made a decided advance, as they did, for instance, when they lessened the pains of women in childbirth, it was not by poring over either the Old or New Testaments. It was by keeping their eyes to the earth; it was by trusting to their observation and experiment. *Thus Saith the Lord* and *What Did Jesus Say* just hindered this potent process.

Well-meaning Christians look around every now and again and find that *Thus Saith the Lord* is in a backwater. Having suffered from a religious education, they do not see that the backwater is the natural place for an Absolute Religion to be in. Although they would be horrified to know it, they act as if the God-Given Religion were a Man-Made Religion. They say: Let us bring the Oracles of God up to date morally, and be quick about it. Let us Touch Up the Old Revelation. Let us make it respectable. But never for one moment must we relinquish the old jargon. Keep God and Religion, and Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount, ever to the front of your talk. They have in logic nothing to do with morality, but the Church must live. Adapt, adapt, adapt, but for God's sake, the Church's sake, let us continue the old plea that with the orderly development of man's technique of living there must continue regular doses of the Blood and the Body; that it is of first importance that we believe in the True God. This is the thing that matters. And the correct God in the British Isles is Jehovah, the Ancient of Days, who was the father of Jesus the All God and All Man, and from whom there is an important emanation the Holy Ghost. It is not unimportant whether you believe that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father alone or from both the Father and the Son. It is in fact very important. It is more than important; it is *essential* that you must be right on this point. Two great Churches comprising millions of prayerful, god-assisted Christians, unfortunately differ about this. Set to work at once, settle it, or your immortal soul is in danger. Believe in the Right God. And when you have got the right God, then you will have the right morality. You

will know as well that the Church of the past has been engaged in furthering a lop-sided morality. You will know better than to confine morality mainly to sins of the flesh into which a belief in the True God has led us. That is what the well-meaning Christian to-day of unfortunate early training is trying to put right. That is his (or her) contribution to the Faith once Delivered to the Saints. They feel that the Church has got hold of False Gods and this in spite of their heavy insistence on the Blood and the Body.

Suppose that during the last century the churches had devoted to sweetening intellectual corruption a quarter of the energy they spent in nosing out fornication, or denounced cheating with a quarter of the vehemence with which they denounced legalized adultery.

But one was easy and the other was not.

To upset legalized cheating the Church must tackle government in its very stronghold; while to cope with intellectual corruption she will have to affront all those who exploit it—the politician, the Press and the more influential part of her own congregations.

Therefore she will acquiesce in a definition of morality so one-sided that it has deformed the very meaning of the word by restricting it to sexual offences.*

This is what mere men and women who have not boasted of their knowledge of the One and Only True God have been saying for generations. Only they have not called themselves Christians. They called themselves Freethinkers and they made a modest claim, and that is that Man has made religions and has unmade them. And that Christianity, the divine, the marvellous, the god-assisted, was only one of the many religions and the fate reserved for it was the same fate that has overtaken the myriad religions of the past.

T. H. ELSTON

* Miss Dorothy L. Sayers at the Archbishop of York's Conference at Malvern.

Robert Burns: 1759-1796

A poet peasant-born
Who more of Fame's immortal dower
Unto his country brings,
Than all her kings!—*Isa Craig*.

In a recent letter from Moscow I was informed that Burns is a favourite poet in Russia, and that he has been translated into all the languages spoken in the group of Republics forming the U.S.S.R.

Since the first syllable of recorded time, poetry has played an important part in social evolution.

Andrew Fletcher, of Saltoun (1653-1716), in a letter to the Marquis of Montrose, writes—"I know a very wise man that believed that if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."

Ballads were originally solemn, sacred songs. In Coverdale's Bible, the *Song of Solomon* is named *Solomon's Ballettes*, and in Crammer's and the Bishop's Bibles—*The Ballet of Ballets*. As the ballad declined as a religious vehicle it became, particularly between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the means of celebrating heroic exploits. Isaac Watts tells us that in his day (1674-1748) the ballad had become "nothing but trifling verse." The poet, nevertheless, continued to play the part of a great democratic force in social evolution, while lawyers and politicians—with brains that would circumvent heaven—were making laws in their own interests.

Burns was not, he tells us truly, a great poet—"I am nae poet, in a sense, but just a rhymer, like by chance." "Misfortunes great and sma," made a man of him. "The joys that riches ne'er could buy

—a' the pleasures of the heart"—he unfolds for his reader in a simple passionate way. The heart of a well educated poet, in all probability, would have been but the lifeless servant of his intellect. Burns, the poor earth-born companion and fellow mortal of every living creature, a man of unbounded sympathy, even bewailed the lot of the deil and hoped that heaven would forgive her own.

We ne'er shall look upon his like again! Someone said that "in shaking hands with him his hand burned yours." And Walter Scott, struck with his personal appearance, says—"I never saw such another eye in a human head."

We do not know him yet. In life he stooped to our level. We have not yet risen to his.

The poet appeals to the hearts of men. In his opinion—

The heart ay's the part ay
That makes us right or wrang:

He was a great song writer. His songs were written with his heart's blood.

For puir auld Scotland's sake he wrote his verses, but they apply to the whole world, e.g. :—

OURSELS!

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion!
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n devotion!

RELIGION

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

POLITICIANS

Chaps wha, in a barn or bure,
Wad bitter filled their station.

THE STATE

Were this the charter of our State,—
On pain o' hell be rich an' great—
Damnation then would be our fate
Beyond remead;
But thanks to heaven that's no the gate
We learn our creed.

WEALTH

This world's wealth when I think on,
Its pride and a' the lave o't—
Fie, fie, on silly coward man,
That he should be the slave o't.

FELLOWSHIP

But ye whom social pleasure charms,
Whose heart the tide of kindness warms,
Who hold your being on the terms
Each aid the others;
Come to my bowl, come to my arms,
My friends, my brothers.

WORK

See yonder poor; o'er labour's wight,
So abject, mean, and vile;
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil.

LOVE

O, gear will buy ye rigs o' land,
And gear will buy ye sheep and kye;
But the tender o' leesome luv,
The gowd and siller canna buy.

HOME

To make a happy fireside clime
For weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
Of human life.

HAPPINESS

If happiness hae not her seat
And centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest.

THE TREE OF LIBERTY

Let Britain boast her hardy oak,
Her poplar and her pine, man,
Auld Britain ance could crack a joke,
And o'er her neighbours shine, man.
But seek the forest round and round
And soon 'twill be agreed man,
That sic a tree cannot be found
'Twixt London and the Tweed, man,
Without this tree, alake this life
Is but a vale of woe, man
A scene o' sorrow mix'd wi' strife,
Nae real joys we know, man.
We labour soon, we labour late
To feed the titled knave, man,
And a' the comfort we're to get
Is that ayont the grave, man.

BROTHERHOOD

Then let us pray that come it may—
As come it will for a' that—
That sense and worth o'er a' the earth
May bear the gree and a' that;
For a' that, and a' that,
It's comin' yet for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.

The above lines could be multiplied, but they are sufficient to show why the U.S.S.R. is "sae prood o' Robin."

GEORGE WALLACE

Correspondence

THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I wonder if Professor Julian Huxley's "religious spirit," as cited in a recent issue of the *Freethinker*, has anything in common with the following varieties of this phenomenon at present existing all around us:—

The credulous religious spirit, swallowing fables, frauds, miracles and holy books.

The persecuting religious spirit, boycotting pioneers and penalizing freedom of thought and speech.

The dictatorial religious spirit, compelling soldiers, sailors and airmen to attend church parades.

The profiteering religious spirit, exploiting Parliament, the Press, the Cinema, the Theatre and the B.B.C.

The killjoy religious spirit, striving for Sabbatarianism and the curtailment of rational forms of enjoyment.

The cowardly religious spirit, ready to adopt appeasement or days of national prayer according to circumstances.

The obscurantist religious spirit, forcing its dogmas and superstition on the children in their schools.

The reactionary religious spirit, placing obstacles in the way of science, humanitarian ideals and social progress.

The antithesis of every such attitude is one that is forever aiming at more knowledge, more understanding, more honesty, more kindness, more courage, more beauty, more justice, more freedom, more happiness. Historically there is a good deal of justification for calling this attitude "the irreligious spirit," but Professor Huxley would no doubt question the good taste of the description, notwithstanding its accuracy. His "religious spirit," if intended to cover the noblest aspirations of mankind, is all the more in bad taste because it is so obviously a misnomer. Why not be satisfied with "the spirit of

humanity," which nobody would misunderstand or misrepresent, outside the ranks of the prize ranters engaged to concoct the B.B.C.'s morning "Thought for the Day"—the "religious spirit" at its most revealing?

P. VICTOR MORRISS

CROOKES AND SPIRITUALISM

SIR,—Since when has distortion of truth been a side-issue?

I have already written two letters to your paper pointing out inaccuracies made by G. H. Taylor. Instead of following the spirit of Freethought, which is to search for truth, he evades the issues and introduces irrelevances.

G. H. Taylor made two statements in his original criticism of Spiritualism. One was that Sir William Crookes, the famous scientist, was not a Spiritualist. I proved Taylor is wrong by quoting Crookes' own words. But Taylor refuses to admit the mistake.

The other statement dealt with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Taylor's whole article was based on the sealed envelope test deposited by Sir Oliver Lodge with the Society for Physical Research.

"This kind of thing is not new," he said; "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."

If words means anything, Taylor intended to convey that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had left a sealed envelope test which was a failure. I have pointed out that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle arranged no such test.

Now Taylor evades the issue by stating that the words, "this kind of thing" did not commit him to a sealed message in Doyle's case.

He introduces a fresh argument by asking whether any eminent inquirers have been converted to Spiritualism by the result of "Sir Arthur's activities from the other world." But only a few weeks ago Chapman Cohen attacked the idea that the truth of Spiritualism could be established by citing "famous names."

I have dealt with Taylor's fantastic circumlocutions on Sir Oliver's test elsewhere. It is obvious to me, however, from the attitude of G. H. Taylor, that there are none so blind as those who do not wish to see.

MAURICE BARBANELL,

Editor, *Psychic News*

PRODUCTION AND THE BIRTH RATE

SIR,—In your January 12 issue, Mr. T. F. Palmer quotes Professor Thorndike, "the eminent psychologist," as follows: "If nations maintained peaceful relations, and the birthrate remained 'quantitatively the same as now and qualitatively as good or better, and prudent government, man can increase capital goods almost without limits, and with an actual decrease in the hours of labour and abstinence from consumption.'"

A psychologist as such is manifestly not an authority on economics, agriculture, physical geography, or vital statistics. I have lately had occasion to read a large mass of literature on these four subjects, bearing on the very question discussed by Professor Thorndike, and I can find no support whatever for the opinions quoted by Mr. Palmer.

The most exhaustive treatise on the subject is *The Conditions of Economic Progress*, by Colin Clark, published a few months ago. He sums up as follows:

"The world is found to be a wretchedly poor place. . . . Oft-repeated phrases about poverty in the midst of plenty, and the problems of production having already been solved if only we understood the problems of distribution, turn out to be the most untruthful of all modern clichés. . . . The age of plenty will still be a long while in coming."

Professor Lionel Robbins of London University is universally regarded as in the first rank of economists. In the *Listener* of December 5, 1934, he discussed the same question, and said: "The maximum utilization of the world's productive equipment would still leave us, on the average, very badly off."

Two thirds of the human race belong to the coloured peoples. In *The Japanese Population Problem*, W. R. Crocker sums up the position of most of them as follows:—

"Pressure of population is general in the Asiatic corner of the Pacific. In that corner are nearly one-third of the human race, and if India, just beyond, be added, more than one-half. So near to the margin of subsistence are these huddled millions living that a drought or a flood or any other derangement in the food supply destroys them in their hundreds of thousands." (p. 30).

About half the world now under cultivation consists of lands of low rainfall, which are unfit for permanent agriculture. In the United States the situation has become so serious that President Roosevelt appointed the National Resources Committee to investigate the matter. Its verdict is as follows:—

"Most of the territory occupied by the United States is not naturally suited for a permanent civilization. It is like the land of the Mayas of Yucatan or the land of Babylon—a rich country where civilization can flash into a blaze of glory and then collapse in a few generations into ruin. Our soil is not enriched by the usual methods of cultivation, but impoverished. By the normal processes of our farming, our mining, and our lumbering we create a desert. Americans need to realize that all other national hopes and aspirations are secondary to the question whether we can continue to eat."

Even if the world had a stationary population, the situation would be grave. But with such a frightful birthrate as most of the world now has, what are we to say? In India, owing to wholesale starvation, the average length of life is only twenty-six years; yet in the teeth of that appalling deathrate the population of India is increasing by three and a half millions every year. If India could get her death-rate down to that of England, she would be multiplying her population thirty-five times in a century. Most of the world is in the same fix. To assert that by any possibility the world could produce food to keep pace with its present birthrate is to utter a mathematical absurdity as wild as anything in Baron Munchausen.

R. B. KERR

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