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Views and Opinions

On Burning Babies

Most people are acquainted with Swift's famous satire suggesting that as a way of alleviating the misery of the Irish peasantry the British Government should sanction the boiling of babies. No one mistook the nature of the satire, although even in that form it shocked many. But if the suggestion had been made in real earnestness it would have been taken as the product of a lunatic. Yet something equal to that proposal exists as part of historic Christianity, and still forms part of the belief of millions of Christians. I have no doubt that to put it in the way I have in the heading of these notes will bring the usual charge that I misunderstand or misrepresent Christianity; but the fact is there, existing in Christian creeds, in Christian literature, and part of current Christianity. It is true that not all babies were to be burned, only those who died unbaptized. And to be quite fair, among those who held this belief to be a logical deduction from Christian teaching there was a division of opinion as to whether the unbaptized babies would suffer the full torments for eternity, or whether there would be a milder kind of a hell—Limbo—awaiting them. On that latter question I am unable to give any authoritative opinion. The belief that babies—unbaptized—would go to "limbo" may be taken as the triumph of the humanity of some Christians over the essential brutalities and barbarities of their creed. We have practically in our own time, seen the same humanizing process at work in those Christians who now deny the existence of any hell. That denial reflects more credit on their humanity than on their piety, and bears witness to one of the triumphs of Freethought over superstition. But I think that the majority of Christians still believe in a hell, and I am quite sure that many of them would find heaven robbed of its attractiveness if there were no hell to which others were consigned. I am also certain that there is no sentence that many men pronounce with greater fervour than to tell someone to go to hell! But vicarious sacrifice, however much it may reflect credit upon the one who voluntarily undergoes it, indicates a pretty poor character on the part of the one who runs round rejoicing in it. It sounds unpleasantly like an undetected murderer rejoicing because another man has been hung for the murder he committed.

So I ask my readers to reflect upon the following answer to a correspondent that appeared in a recent issue of the *Universe*, which I believe is the leading Roman Catholic paper in this country. And I also wish them to bear in mind that Roman Catholic papers published here do not publish the same crude and revolting doctrines which they publish

elsewhere. Here they appear religiously at their best, even though that may be, ethically, at their worst. Here is the passage. It is taken from the issue for January 17:—

It is quite true that St. Augustine held that unbaptized infants go to hell, and there suffer eternal pains. In reacting against the heresy of the Pelagians, who held that such infants go to Heaven, St. Augustine went to the other extreme. The Church has not followed him in this matter. She does indeed teach that unbaptized infants do not go to Heaven, but she allows it to be taught that they suffer no pains, and that they go to Limbo. But you must remember that in classical Catholic Theology (as set forth, for instance, in Dante's *Inferno*) Limbo is part of Hell.

Here then is the position clearly, but not quite honestly, stated. And the issue is exactly, Shall unbaptized (that is non-Christian) babies be burned?

* * *

The Christian Hell

But first, it is worth while noting the manner in which the *Universe* presents the question. One cannot say plumply that it is not true, one can only say that it is a Christian truth, and the fact of that distinction being common indicates that Christian truth is not what we may ordinarily understand truth to be. In addition it is Roman Catholic truth, and that is, of course, a sub-section of Christian truth. And when we get through the two sections of truth and get to truth as a general working conception we soon see the importance of the distinction. A statement may be false in fact, but true according to Christian theology.

For example. The name of St. Augustine is mentioned, so also is that of Pelagius, and it is stated that the Church has never accepted Augustine's belief that unbaptized babies would go to hell. The reader is not told that Pelagius was formally declared a heretic by the Church and that his heresy consisted in his denial that Adam's sin was inherited by man, and therefore man would be saved or damned according to his own acts. But Augustine was not the only great Christian leader who believed that unbaptized babies would go to hell. Writing in the sixth century St. Fulgentius says: "It is not only to be believed beyond doubt that not only men who are come to the use of reason, but infants, whether they die in their mother's womb, or after they are born, without baptism, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are punished with everlasting punishment in eternal fire, because though they have no actual sin of their own, yet they carry with them the condemnation of original sin from their first conception and birth." There were many others who shared this belief, and there are at least two Ecumenical Councils, that of Lyons (1274) and Florence (1432) which declared that unbaptized infants go direct to hell to be punished, although it will not be the same punishment that is inflicted on others. And an authoritative Roman Catholic document, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* says distinctly that unbaptized infants, be their parents Christian or Infidel, are born to eternal misery. I have already pointed out there is truth and *Christian* truth. If there were no difference in the two, the distinction would be unnecessary.

Lest Protestants should at this point hold up their heads with pride, I must point out that there was the same division amongst Protestants. The whole of

the Calvinists believed with Calvin in the damnation of unbaptized infants. They deduced it logically from the fall of man in the person of Adam. They found it authorized in Paul's "As in Adam all men die so in Christ all men live." They found it also in a logical justification for a God coming down to earth to pay the price of sin, and permit all men to be saved from hell by an act of faith. The belief in the damnation of unbaptized babies is held by many millions of Christians to-day. But they praise God just the same. Christianity is a lovely creed when one examines it quietly and intelligently.

I am afraid I am not spiritually-minded enough to appreciate the humanity and thoughtfulness of the Church in permitting it to be taught, not that babies will not go to hell, but that they will be sent to a special hell in which they experience neither pain nor pleasure. It does not condemn the Augustinian view, it simply, out of sheer humanity—Christian humanity—allows belief in the lighter punishment. Hell will not be quite as hot for the unbaptized infant as it will be for the Archbishop or the burglar. But in fairness to the Church it must be borne in mind that the Church is not sure that children will go to this mild kind of hell. It may go to the ordinary one; the one that a great Christian declared was paved with infants not three spans in length, a hell where the great Jeremy Taylor said souls would be together like grapes in a press, crowding each other till they burst.

Lest it should be thought that I am not fair to the Roman Church in this respect, I present readers a passage from a booklet published "by permission" of superior authorities, and written for children, with the title of *Hell Open to Christians* :—

Perhaps at this moment a child is going to Hell. To-morrow knock on the gates of Hell, and ask what the child is doing. The devils will go and look. Then they will come back and say—the child is burning. Go in a year and ask; the same answer comes—it is burning. Go in a million years and ask the same question, the answer is still the same—it is burning. So if you go for ever and ever, you will always get the same answer—it is burning in the fire.

We challenge the *Universe* to reprint this pamphlet in the pages—for British readers. What would the very truthful Cardinal Hinsley say if this were done?

We have already pointed out that it would be unfair to follow the example of those rabid Protestants who attack the Roman Church with a dishonesty as great as its own. The early seventeenth century Articles of the English Church state distinctly that those dying in infancy are saved only if they are baptized. My older readers will also remember the outcry there was against the late Cannon Farrar when he protested against the belief in an eternal hell. And if one institutes an enquiry he will probably be surprised to learn how many Protestant mothers have had their minds racked with the thought of what may be happening in the next world to their baby that died unbaptized. Historic Christianity cannot well be separated from this belief. It is a logical deduction from historic Christian doctrine. Man's depravity is not due to his own misdeeds, but to the sin of Adam, the consequences of which he has inherited in this "vile body," to use Christian language. And the powerlessness of man to save himself by good deeds alone is vital to all forms of Christian theology. It has lately been endorsed, in an indirect way, by the Archbishop of York, who, taking advantage of the war that is now in being, seems to hope, in the general condition of moral demoralization caused by a world war, to re-establish a form of Christian teaching about which the Churches have had to remain silent for some years. The ritual of Christianity reeks with the teaching that man is sinful and cannot be otherwise without the saving power of Jesus Christ. It is a ridiculous posi-

tion when plainly stated. But then Christianity is a ridiculous religion.

* * *

Holy Water

Now I did not commence these notes with the intention of dealing at length with the stupidity of Christian doctrines, or with their brutality, but to offer some explanation of the glorification of vindictiveness as given in this theory of the damnation of unbaptized babies. The issue turns on the question of baptism. At what point of Christian theology does the necessity for baptism arise, and what is its relation to religious superstitions in general? There are many significant passages in that museum of ill-arranged primitive superstitions, the New Testament, and one may note in passing such statements as that by Jesus Christ, "Except a man be born of water," "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," etc. All students of comparative mythology are familiar with the belief of primitive people in the living qualities of water. Dr. J. A. MacCulloch writes, "The animistic theory of the universe which underlies all primitive religion and philosophy suggested that water was a living being. . . . The further idea arose, aided by belief in a spirit or divinity of the waters, that certain waters, usually springs, lakes or wells, had miraculous properties. . . . It was thus by a logical process that water considered as having all these various powers and as being itself the vehicle or abode of spirits favourable to man, should have been used as one method of removing the contagion of 'tabu' or the influence of evil spirits, or at a higher stage has been held to possess the power of removing the guilt of sin. . . . Water, which removed dirt from the body, could therefore remove the contagion of 'tabu,' and if it could do this, it was presumed that it had the further power of removing the stain of moral evil." All students of folk lore are familiar with the legends of sacred wells, and ponds, and rivers possessing miraculous powers. The cures by sacred wells were as common in pre-Christian as in Christian times, and it is to the savage that we have to look for the origin of Lourdes.

Dr. MacCulloch points out that water had a purificatory power, and by "purificatory" we must not link it up with a sanitary quality. It is rather a power to protect, to relieve, or to transform. It is this spiritual "cleansing" property of water that brings us into direct touch with the practice of what is known as baptism. I have said many times that the only way to understand the Old and the New Testament is to read them with a knowledge of the life and customs of the most primitive peoples. You may go to a believer for a knowledge of his ideas and practices, but with that alone you will leave him with your knowledge unenriched and your understanding untouched.

Only one other thing, for the moment may be borne in mind. "Cleanliness" in its religious sense has, religiously, no reference to sanitation. It refers to a taboo, or to the removal of a taboo. And the essential significance of baptism is the removal of something dangerous to the wellbeing of others. We shall deal with this next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN

When a nation changes its opinions and habits of thinking, it is no longer to be governed as before; but it would not only be wrong, but bad policy, to attempt by force what ought to be accomplished by reason. Rebellion consists in forcibly opposing the general will of a nation, whether by party or by government. There ought therefore to be in every nation, a method of occasionally ascertaining the state of public opinion with respect to Government.—*Thomas Paine*.

James Joyce's Job

THE way of the pioneer is very hard, and the path of the literary pioneer is often as difficult. James Joyce, poet and novelist, died at fifty-eight years of age, and before he had perfected his technique of enlarging the language and widening the boundaries of story-writing, the oldest of the arts. He has left it for others to complete what he left unfinished, but his will always be the glory of the pioneer who puts out to sea instead of hugging the safety of the shore.

It is curious how the art of story-telling has altered in this country. The circulating libraries and the advent of young women-readers had a truly devastating effect on outstanding writers who would rather have pursued art for art's sake. They wrote "pot-boilers." The adolescents clamour for handsome heroes and a happy ending; they insisted on the smooth tale, generally of love; sometimes, they wanted sheer nonsense. The freedom of Fielding, Smollet and Sterne, was replaced by a Sugary sentimentalism, which authors had to supply or be denied bread to eat. That the wit of the novelist survived at all under such adverse conditions is a tribute to the writers.

There were some protests. Fresh from liberty-loving Paris, Thackeray, to his lasting credit, challenged convention. His *Vanity Fair* was a novel without a hero. In his stead was a vixen no better than she should have been. The book was a masterpiece and compelled attention. Thackeray then intended to take a further step forward and write the true history of a young man. *Pendennis* was the result, and in the preface to that book the great novelist admits sadly that he lost his nerve. It was not until the advent of George Moore, a generation later, that the Goddess Grundy was successfully and triumphantly challenged with his *A Mummer's Wife*, which still remains the finest realistic novel in the language. In spite of the boycott of the circulating libraries, which refused to take his books, and the opposition of the clergy, Moore removed the reproach of Philistinism from later Victorian literature, and built himself an enviable and enduring reputation in the process.

Nothing shows the provincialism of English literature more than the bare fact that Joyce's *Ulysses* had to be published abroad in Paris, not in this country. Even then, it was issued in a strictly limited edition at a high price. Naturally, the libraries, which had actually banned Meredith's *Richard Feverel* as immoral, would not entertain Joyce's outspoken work for a moment. Hence Joyce never had a real chance of success except among literary connoisseurs, and wealthy ones at that. So few readers can spend five pounds on a novel.

Joyce was enormously impressed by Sigmund Freud's notable scientific revelation of the unconscious mind, and sought to exploit the new knowledge. But his attempt was crude owing principally to his lack of scientific training and precision and his priestly education. The same thing happened with his search for portmanteau-words, and his disregard for punctuation. His ideas were sound enough, but his executive ability was inadequate for such a gigantic task. The English language, as it is, can be used with exactitude to express the thoughts even of a genius. Joyce would have been more successful had he tried to express himself by known methods first before venturing upon the invention of a new language before mastering the old. He had the example of Walt Whitman before him, but the great American succeeded exactly where Joyce failed. As for the reticences of literature, recall what Edward Carpenter attempted in his *Coming of Age of Love* and other books, and Whitman himself in such poems as *A Woman Waits for Me*. In Joyce's own case his exploitation of the hitherto unprintable was so unconsidered that he

nearly wrecked his whole career by restricting his readers to the pornographic.

The genius of Joyce matured very slowly. His earlier works from *Dubliners* onwards, were not very different from the novels of other smart writers, whilst his poems were quite ordinary. It was his *Ulysses* which attracted attention, and on which his literary reputation stands or falls. His admirers claim that the spirit of his age is represented in his work, but this is the language of flattery for he never succeeded in fully "relating himself to paper," let alone the tendency of the time in which he lived. He stammered when he should have spoken with conviction. Had he possessed the fertility of Swinburne he might have set an entirely new standard as to what may be expressed in writing. Some of Joyce's critics laid far too much stress upon his coarseness. Revolutionary though he was, Joyce was never coarser than Rabelais, but he lacked the great French writer's splendid scepticism which runs through his work like a vein of gold, and redeems it as great literature.

When all is said and done, what do we not owe to the gifted Irish writers! What would English literature be without the rare genius of Sheridan and Wilde, two of the wittiest of men? George Moore redeemed the modern novel from middle-headed mediocrity. As for Bernard Shaw, he is not so much an English author as an European figure, for his masterpieces have crossed all frontiers, and his sanity and wit purified the modern atmosphere. Even James Joyce, splendid failure though he was, sought to bring literature into line with the intellectual advance of our time. If he did not entirely succeed, at least he pointed the way to those young writers who will succeed him.

The feelings of Joyce's admirers must be like those of the survivors of a shipwreck, when, the morning after the storm, they see the relics that the sea has spared from the sunken ship. Their joy at each relic does not compensate for the treasures lost. Joyce was not a really old man. Had more time been allowed him, how much greater might have been his achievements! No one can banish the thought of what might have been, of the years that were denied him. Hail and Farewell!

Content thee, howsoe'er, whose days are done,
There lies not any troublous thing before,
Nor sight nor sound to war against thee more.
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,
All waters as the shore.

MIMNERMUS

London's Fiery Ordeal in 1666

THE recent raids on London's City, and the wanton destruction of so many historic structures are heart-rending. A reversion to barbarism so shameful is a sad commentary on the age we, of the older generation have unfortunately lived to see. The outrage serves to recall the disaster that devastated the City in the seventeenth century, when the Plague was followed by the Great Fire commemorated by the Monument. This catastrophe, like the destruction or damage of buildings in the Capital and in important provincial centres stresses the necessity for reconstruction and the possible improvement of all the towns and Cities that have suffered. All seem likely in a minor degree to be confronted with the problem which confronted the City authorities after the Fire of 1666.

A work that is likely to remain the standard volume on this latter theme: Mr. T. F. Reddaway's *The Rebuilding of London* (Cape, 1940, 18s.) deals in detail with the many difficulties successfully surmounted by the Crown and the City in their complicated task. As Reddaway observes: "Catastrophe and reconstruction never age. The Japanese, after the destruction of Tokyo in 1923, sent to know how

London had met her calamity, and these words, written in July, 1939, have for their background the same melancholy series of measures for evacuation of children and care of refugees."

In his historical researches, Reddaway found Pepy's Diary useful, but the City documents are the more important sources of information, although they have descended to us in a disorderly state. The main motive of the citizens in hastening rebuilding was the need for self-preservation, and Reddaway concludes from his discriminating study of the City records that, in view of the distracting difficulties to be overcome, "the splendour of the community's achievement" is beyond dispute.

The conflagration of 1666 was the greatest that England has ever experienced. At a time when superstition was rampant men naturally succumbed to morbid imagination. So terrible a calamity had never visited the world, it was said, since the destruction of Jerusalem. The news, as bad news will, circulated throughout the country very rapidly, and reports of the ruin and the plight of the citizens lost nothing in the telling. France and England were then at war, yet Louis XIV. was willing to help the sufferers in their dire distress. The Dutch, on the other hand, then England's chief commercial rival, interpreted the disaster as the divine punishment of a sinful nation whose proud pretensions had been humbled to dust. It was predicted that England would now sue for peace. But although the most fantastic stories of incendiarism were credited, and aliens and Popish agents were charged with the crime, London's reaction to the catastrophe proved much the same as that of its present inhabitants amid the misery and devastation caused by the ruthless bombings and burnings of the pestilent Nazis.

The Great Fire began in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane and no importance was attached to the outbreak until the flames, fanned by a brisk easterly breeze, set fire to the adjoining houses. The danger was apparent when the flames extended into Thames Street, where the warehouses were stocked with combustibles such as oil, tallow, timber and hay. Then the fire became a raging furnace, completely beyond control.

The narrow streets and alleys lined with timber dwellings were soon alight. There was nothing save buckets and hand-squirts for throwing water on the flames, and even these primitive appliances were not adequately utilized until too late. Moreover, the threatened buildings were not demolished owing to the Lord Mayor's dread of the cost of compensation to their owners until an order came from Whitehall for the immediate destruction of all edifices likely to become involved in the flames. But on this September day, after a long dry summer, the timber structures ignited like tinder when sparks from the burning houses, driven by the wind had set them alight.

While the fire raged, the people ran for refuge outside the City walls with what belongings they could rescue. For a time pandemonium prevailed. The underworld emerged on its plundering mission, while panic-stricken people intensified the trouble by spreading rumours of an impending Dutch invasion. While the scare lasted, no alien was safe from molestation or even murder, while the imaginary miscreants responsible for the fire obsessed the mind of the mob.

By the time the flames had been mastered more than three-fourths of the City had been destroyed; 13,200 shops and dwellings were in ruins as well as "the Royal Exchange, the Custom House and the halls of 44 of the City Companies, the Guildhall and nearly all the City buildings, St. Paul's itself and 87 of the parish churches, besides furniture and commodities valued at over three and a half million pounds." The total loss was estimated by competent statisticians at ten millions sterling in the currency of the period. To-day, money has fallen so seriously in value that the pur-

chasing power of the property destroyed must be increased at least tenfold.

The consequences of the calamity had now to be faced. All corporate cities were ordered to afford shelter for the refugees, and to permit them to pursue their lawful calling. London was furnished with food from the Home Counties, and provision was afforded for the destitute and sick, while places of worship and public buildings were utilized for the storage of commodities. Then the rebuilding became the paramount problem. The obstacles to the task were enormous, but when public confidence had been restored, the efforts of the authorities were crowned with signal success.

In houses where the occupants of the upper overhanging stories could almost clasp hands with their neighbours over the way, and in narrow streets and lanes congested with constantly increasing traffic, the urgent need for the construction of buildings allowing ampler access to the light of day with freer passage for pedestrians and vehicles became glaringly obvious.

The difficulties attending restoration may be inferred from the fact that the Exchequer was sorely pressed for money and that, although the City contained many wealthy men, the Corporation itself was almost on the verge of insolvency. For, not only the suffering citizens, but the entire community was in distress. As Reddaway intimates: "The flames had destroyed a substantial part of the accumulated savings of generations and wiped out most of the security behind a complicated system of investment. . . . Companies, hospitals and parishes were the trustees of every form of almsgiving. . . . Almost without exception they were financed from rents, and it was the source of those rents that the Fire had wiped out. The poor lost the gifts of coal and bread which usually helped them through the winter, and the aged were deprived of their pensions. For the sick it meant a reduction in relief, for the schools a loss in their endowments." And to add to the misery, hundreds of previously prosperous citizens had sunk to a state of poverty and dependence.

There were countless conflicting claims for compensation. Freeholders, leaseholders, under-tenants and owners of quit rents were involved in a tangle so complicated, that legislative action was essential to compose differences and hasten rebuilding. Yet, ten years rolled away before the restoration of the City was completed. Timber edifices were replaced by structures of brick and stone. Reddaway notes that: "The rickety wooden houses and the deep overcrowded basements which had been one of the curses of the City were abolished from the rebuilt area."

Judged by the present-day standards the changes were not astounding, but it is justly claimed they constituted an emergence from medieval conditions to those of relatively modern times. The slums adjoining the main thoroughfares were swept away and their sanitary shortcomings were greatly lessened. But even these improvements met with sullen antagonism.

The mansions of the great themselves were highly insanitary. In 1670 Lord Keeper Guilford went to reside in a house formerly occupied by Chief Justice Hyde in Chancery Lane. "There," we read, "he found 'a small well in the cellar, into which all the drainage of the house was received,' from closet and sink alike. When this well was full, 'a pump went to work to clear it into the open kennel [gutter] in the street.' As may be imagined 'during the pumping the stench was intolerable.'" If this could occur near a mansion, one may picture the horrible conditions that prevailed in the meaner quarters of the City.

Guilford suggested the construction of a drain to convey the refuse into the new sewer under Fleet Street. But the inhabitants of the district were more inclined to tolerate the stench than pay for drainage. Guilford therefore obtained a decree which enabled

the work to be done, despite the opposition of the public, from whom its cost was collected "under the threat of distraint." But when the sanitary advantages became self-evident, and not until then, was public thankfulness expressed for the pleasant improvement.

It has been constantly asserted that Sir Christopher Wren's rebuilding plan was accepted by both Crown and Parliament, only to be rejected by a shortsighted and selfish City community. After the most careful examination of the evidence, Reddaway dismisses this story as untrue. He states that Wren's and other plans were submitted to a painstaking and sympathetic examination, and their rejection by the City was due to their utopian character. Indeed, Reddaway roundly declares that "Gwynn's statement that it [Wren's scheme] was approved by Parliament" is a lie."

In the light of recent destruction, Reddaway's attractively bound and well illustrated volume is of topical interest. It contains many facts likely to prove advantageous to all who may be engaged in the restoration or rebuilding of the many famous structures so wantonly desecrated or destroyed by bomb and fire.

T. F. PALMER

Acid Drops

We are not, nor do we think the majority of liberal thinkers will feel, satisfied with the handling of the *Daily Worker* case. This dissatisfaction does not rest on whether the *Daily Worker* did or did not merit suppression in times of war, although it must be apparent to everyone that we cannot go to war for the purpose of preserving our liberty and have freedom while we are doing it. We have to take a hair of the dog that threatens us. But in that case we should have the honesty to throw on one side the pretence that our freedom remains untouched, and face the ugly fact before us on the grounds of sheer necessity. But that perhaps is looking for honesty in politics.

But the Home Secretary's attempt to justify his not proceeding through the law courts and dealing with the matter as he did, and then claiming that allowing a debate before the House of Commons was an example of the highest form of democracy simply will not do. It is simply grotesque. A court of law is, at least theoretically, an impartial body guided solely by evidence and definite law. The House of Commons cannot claim that impartiality. It is composed of parties, it is not governed in its decisions strictly by evidence, but the welfare of this or that party, or the success of this or that policy, to say nothing as to whether a speaker is acting so as to promote his political career, decides the result. It will be remembered that it is one of the claims of Hitler that he received the decision of Parliament for the policy which has brought about a world-war. To say that the House of Commons can act with as strict impartiality in the case of the *Daily Worker* as a law court could work is ridiculously untrue.

We all know how fond English Christians are of misrepresenting Nazi Germany by referring to it as made up of a "godless" people. Of course that is not true or—to put it with accuracy—it is a Christian truth. One of the chief features of Nazism is that it is profoundly religious. The appeal, the tone of it, is religious throughout. Now the *Catholic Herald*, in its issue dated January 24, points out that in Germany there are 2,803,000 Roman Catholic children and 4,355,000 Protestant children, with a large number registered as "God believing." Among the teachers there are 15,401 God believers, 60,500 Roman Catholics and 103,000 Protestants. But we do not doubt that when it suits the *Catholic Herald* will refer to Germany as a land of Atheists.

The one certain thing in this country of ours is that if a man wishes to gain a reputation for wisdom, without the trouble of acquiring it, there is no better field for his activities than religion. He may not merely find it easy

to establish a reputation as a thinker, he will find it bring him profit and distinction such as he would never acquire in any other direction. For example, we know very little of the eminent Roman Catholic priest, Monsignor Ronald A. Knox, but we gather that he is a leading light in certain religious circles. Not knowing very much of this priest we are willing to concede that he has flashes of ability—something on the lines of the character who was described as idiotically sane with lucid intervals of lunacy. So it may be that the short essay that lies before us is due to the aberrations of a great mind, or it may be a self-drawn portrait of the real Ronald A. Knox. We leave others to judge. But here is something on which anyone may form a judgment.

In the *Sunday Times* for January 26, there is an essay by Mr. Knox on "Mind and Conscience." As the cobbler thinks there is nothing like leather, so Mr. Knox thinks there is nothing like religion. In fact he is of opinion that leave God out and there is no security for anything. He falls foul of the old Greek saying that man is the measure of all things, and that one must hold human thought to be the highest thought and the source of all truth. If true that would leave the "Monsignor" drifting about with no authority and no reputation, save a very undesirable one. The teaching leads one, he says, to intellectual despair. Why despair, only Mr. Knox knows. Perhaps he means that the priesthood must despair if that view is adopted. The alternative is that "if you believe in God [that is, if you follow Monsignor Knox], you know that he gives us all things, the truth that is in them and imparts to all minds the adumbration of truth as He sees it." But you must take Monsignor Knox as a guide.

Now we are not going to criticize at any length this clotted nonsense of Mr. Knox. We will even grant, for the sake of the argument, that all truth comes from God, and that Mr. Knox expresses the truth of God. What we really wish to know is by what means does man come to recognize truth when he sees it? It seems as if it must be recognized by man. Who decides there is a God? It seems also that it must be man. Who is it that finally decides what is beautiful, good, and true? Again man. It really looks as though even Mr. Knox must appeal to the "Mind and Conscience" of man for the discovery of anything, and for a decision whether it is good or bad, ugly or beautiful. It also looks, even on the showing of Mr. Knox, that man remains the measure of all things. Whatever we believe in, whatever we think about things, it is Man who is the judge. When some of the saints worshipped by Mr. Knox make their appearance to their followers, it is man's judgment which decides that they are really angelic visitors and not forms of mental delusion. And whether we decide that Father Knox is a genius or a very slovenly thinker, it is still man who decides one way or the other. What we would like Father Knox to explain is how in any case we fail to make man the measure of all things. Is not the belief in the existence of God an act of human judgment, a conclusion of the human mind, which the Father thinks can only land us in despair if we rely upon it? We ask these questions, but we haven't the slightest hope that Father Knox will rise to the level of even trying to answer them.

The B.B.C. was quite courageous the other day in permitting a speaker to refer to the anti-clerical views of Burns. Burns had more than anti-clerical views, they were anti-religious views, if we take them in contrast with the religion of his day, and of doubtful religious value if taken in relation to other points of view. One ought to bear in mind that Burns lived at a time and in surroundings when any plain confession of distinct rejection of the idea of God would have made life a misery. What Burns did, and did superbly, was to expose the cant and humbug, and brutality and immorality of current Christianity. And what Burns did in his day other reformers have had to do in theirs. And a religion that needs purifying in each generation, which shocks the feelings of good and intelligent men and women, even though that disgust is expressed in the name of that religion itself, must have something very rotten about it.

But having permitted one speaker to read "Holy Willie's Prayer," and suggest that Burns had a dash of the Freethinker in his composition, another speaker was put up the same day to give the world extracts from the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and to dwell upon the "simple piety" of it, etc. But there is no reliable ground for assuming that Burns believed in the prayer or the doctrines that were behind it. Burns was human enough to admire sincerity of belief and honest simplicity of character quite apart from ridiculous ideas with which custom has associated them, to see the man peeping through the creed, and honesty of thought finding expression even in the form of stupid ideas. Burns' *A Man's a Man for a' that*, was never bred of Christianity. It was an assertion of the belief that manhood was something greater than the creeds and more valuable than gods. The Christian doctrine is that man is *not* a man without God.

Field-Marshal Milch, addressing a German audience, and explaining the severity of the R.A.F. onslaughts, said, "The English are a German race, and they are fighters, like ourselves." Two lies together. Concerning the first we are not a German race, for no such thing exists. There is a German nation, and there are a large number of the English who have German ancestors, including our reigning monarchy. But, for the matter of that, the Germans have British and Dutch and Polish and French, and Italian and numerous other ancestors. The "race" theory as an explanation of national or group differences is one of the wildest ideas that ever occupied the human mind. And emphatically the British do not fight like the present-day Germans. There are plenty of ghastly stories attaching to British warfare, but it simply cannot compete with the half-insane criminality of the present-day German forces. Not that there are not exceptions even here.

The campaign for what is practically compulsory religious instruction in the elementary schools is being vigorously pushed in all sorts of ways. Letters are appearing in all the papers, but the few sources of inspiration are obvious. A lady, Evelyn Munro, writes to the *Spectator* from Lyme Regis, demanding an Act of Parliament for the teaching of Christianity in every school. Christianity is, as a matter of fact, in every school although its presence is optional. But the clergy see that no school escapes. But this lady says that it proves that many children in Council Schools "do not even know of the existence of God Almighty." We do not believe it.

But if the sentence is to be taken literally, what, when we get down to brass tacks, does anyone "know" of the existence of God? Men such as Eddington and others, who are fond of the word God, admit that it is a mere hypothesis, and an hypothesis does not exist in itself. It is created by man. God as an hypothesis is about as useless as any hypothesis ever framed by man. I think we must read Miss (or Mrs.) Munro's letter as reading "Many children have not heard about people believing in a God." That is why we say we do not believe it. It is one of those statements that belong to the class known as "God's truth."

The *Church Times* makes no secret of the intention of Christian leaders to take every advantage of the war to secure "at all costs" that the educational curriculum in State-supported schools must make room "not merely for instruction about matters connected with religion, but for the actual practice of religious worship," and "that those teachers only should be called upon to give religious instruction who are willing and able to give it." This proposal has also the support of large bodies of Nonconformists who, as so often has been the case, are willing to sell all principle for sectarian advantage.

As we have so often pointed out, there are two key positions here. The one is that of the teachers. If the proposals are carried into practice—and there is a large proportion of the present Government who would favour it—it would mean that teachers applying for a post who were not staunch Christians would have a difficulty in getting appointments, and still greater difficulty in becoming headmasters. It would mean, in any case, a greater measure of hypocrisy, and a larger measure of un-

desirable teachers than now exists. The second key is held by the parents. All those who do not wish the schools to be turned into hunting grounds for the clergy should avail themselves of the law and withdraw their children from religious instruction. Otherwise the next move of unscrupulous Christian leaders will be to agitate for the withdrawal of the "conscience clause," on the ground that the number who avail themselves of it is not sufficiently large to warrant its retention.

Mr. Morrison, our Home Secretary, has a very delicate mind—or pretends to have. The other day he had occasion to quote in the House of Commons a few sentences which contained a word that shocked his maiden-like mind. He said it was a "big bad word," but he had consulted others, and was advised that "if I quote it, it is all right." Probably even Mr. Churchill could say the word without blushing. But it betrayed a delicacy worthy of the B.B.C. under Sir John Reith. Then the word came out. It was "bastard," and the House survived the shock. Even the Speaker did not call the Hon. Gentleman to order, and there is no record that anyone left the House.

But Mr. Morrison is mistaken. It is not a "big bad word" at all. It is a very clear, simple and precise word. It is a good English word, and although the chaste mind of Mr. Morrison evidently shrank from using it—in public—it is almost an indispensable word. It is used in law, in literature, by writers of robust mind and cleanly thought, and in general conversation. Although, as it is often used in connexion with the birth of a baby when neither mother nor father has gone through a marriage ceremony, and as we inherit a Christian tradition that anything connected with sex is naturally "unclean," it is in certain circles taboo. Christianity has done a deal to poison our general life, and it has, in some directions, poisoned our language. For it is a Christian rule that "To the pure all things—may be impure."

But "bastard" (we hope that Mr. Morrison will not prosecute the *Freethinker* for indecency) has a precise and a useful meaning. One meaning is that of a child born out of wedlock. And Christian-made law, while it did not punish the male and female concerned, did punish the child through the laws of inheritance, and in a Christian community the child—who really could not be made a party to its illegitimacy—was made to suffer. That is quite Christian, for the Christian God himself promised to punish the children for the sins of the parents. And it is one of God's laws that good Christians have done what they could to act as God does. It is what modern apologists call working with God.

But there are other implications of the word. We are sorry to rob good Christians of the enjoyment they find in whispering so wicked a word, but the fact remains. "Bastard" carries the meaning of a sham, something that is not genuine, something that is not according to the usual standard. There are bastard fruits, and bastard charities, and so forth. Most of our good writers use it, and nearly all of the clean-minded ones. We fancy that even in the House of Commons we remember reading that "honourable gentlemen, but perfectly innocent, have denounced a Bill as being a bastard measure." So we can assure Mr. Morrison that he can go on using the word, not merely when it occurs in quotations, but also whenever he believes it to be appropriate. But not on the eve of an election. For the Nonconformist conscience is still alive and active.

The Vatican Radio broadcasts the complaint that in Italy and elsewhere there are films dealing with social justice, presented to the public, which are without mention of God. That is a terrible state of affairs, when one bears in mind the fact that if God is not kept well in front of the people they are apt to forget all about him. It seems that where God is concerned the old adage must be reversed; he must be heard and not seen. But the rebuke is not deserved. We see a fairly large number of films, and in the majority of them "My God," "By God," "God help us," "good God," and even "Gawd blimey" are heard. But we quite catch the Vatican's point. Unless God is kept well advertised he may drop altogether out of sight. It pays to advertise.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- H. N. LONGEN.—Only Christian ignorance, backed by Christian lying, claims that Christianity raised the status of woman. One of the greatest of the early Christian leaders, St. Jerome, counted married women as at best in the second degree, and taught that women should avoid matrimony, after dilating on the "religious" sin of sexual relationship. He said that the only excuse for marriage was that it produced virgins. You will find a full translation of St. Jerome's opinions on this head in the fourth volume of Dr. Coulton's *Life in the Middle Ages*.
- T. H. BURGESS.—Your letter was evidently misread. It has been rectified. The General Secretary will be writing you on the other matter. The *News-Chronicle* is not likely to depart from its general religiously cowardly policy.
- C. R. VICK.—Mr. Cohen's two pamphlets on Atheism and Agnosticism are now on sale. We trust they will clarify the situation to many.
- MR. W. ROBSON writes:—If Bradlaugh had been with us today to watch your valiant fight against adversity he would have thought how finely you were giving effect to his life policy of "Thorough." Whether we deserve the compliment or not, we can say only that we have done our best, and enjoyed the doing. There is no great hardship in following one's inclination. Suppose our destiny had decided that we should be a preacher of Christianity! That makes one feel what a narrow escape from disaster many people have without knowing it.
- H. BLYTHE.—Pleased to have your appreciation of the *Freethinker*.
- P. G. TACCHI.—It is a great many years since those old Victoria Park meetings. But they were enjoyable times—including the fights. Thanks for offer. It is appreciated.
- LADY MAUD SIMON writes: "In *Almost an Autobiography* one feature stands out strongly, Chapman Cohen is one who carries his library about in his own head. He apparently does not spend much time in consulting his books. Once read, and even at his rapid pace, it is there for use when wanted."
- H. DRAKE.—Your letter will appear next week. The schoolmaster is within his rights in marking a child "Late," who does not put in an appearance until after the religious lesson, but he cannot refuse him admission. It is the usual practice, where a teacher does not wish to penalize the child for being withdrawn from religious instruction to give the child some work in another room. Why not send the boy early and see what happens. It might be well to ask the teacher how the child would be employed.
- J. S. ROY.—As you will see the correction of your name has been made. Sorry. The War Damage Fund will be closed within a few weeks, so we regret we cannot adopt your advice to keep the Fund open during the duration. But the need for support is there. We are facing a continuous rise in expenses. Even the new order compelling one to employ a "spotter" adds to the load.
- J. McMANUS.—Pleased to make your acquaintance, even by letter. Your son-in-law is one of our oldest friends in the movement.
- J. W. DAVIES.—We have had no complaints concerning the delivery of the *Freethinker* in Northern Ireland. Will make enquiries. Your cheque was made out for 10s., and we have acknowledged that amount. Trust you are keeping well.
- C.M.L.—We may deal with the *News-Chronicle*, "God and the War" articles, but they are the poorest lot we have yet read, and these selected, one-sided publications are usually poor enough. But they almost merit the word "contemptible." If the writers, from Mr Priestley onward, wished to hold religion up to ridicule they could not have done better.
- 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.
- When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Roselli, giving as long notice as possible.
- Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Sugar Plums

There is a good demand for Mr. Cohen's two new *Pamphlets for the People* on Agnosticism and Atheism. We have received many letters praising them, and we think they will do good work in clarifying the situation. Clarity of thought should be a desideratum for all Freethinkers, and one has only to look round the world of to-day to realize how much we are indebted to the present troubles as a consequence of the muddled thinking that obtains with so many of our leaders. We suggest that some good work could be done by those who are sufficiently interested taking extra copies for judicious distribution. But these pamphlets are quite useless to those who feel that thinking is a terrible bore.

We are indebted to Dean Inge, one of the few really intelligent men the Established Church has had of recent years (in spite of his ingrained and inherited Toryism) for the following quotation from *Amiel's Journal*. It was written in 1871. "It is France that has made the present Germany by aiming for ten generations at the opposite result. Germany will regenerate France by seeking only to break her." We welcome that passage, because from the date of the overrunning of France by Hitler's Army we were sure, and said as much, that France would come back. It is coming back, and so far our Government has acted with wisdom in doing as little as possible to exasperate the French people. France played a great part in the uplifting of Europe nearly a century and a half ago, and it will play its part in the rebirth of Europe.

One other passage from Dean Inge we welcome. "One of the ablest Roman Catholic writers admitted the other day that the political philosophy of the Church was nearer to Fascism than Liberal democracy. Catholicism is in fact totalitarian in religion." Our readers will recall how frequently we have stressed the fact that this is true not only of Roman Catholicism, but of the Christian religion. Its policy is totalitarian; and with wholesale persecution, political disfranchisement, and the use of prison, stake, and social penalties, it has done what it could to establish it. That it has never gone quite so far as Hitlerism is mainly because it has never had an equal opportunity. But it has done what it could in both teaching and practice.

The sentiments of the Rector of Lewes deserve to be placed on record, even though we are a week late in doing so. In reply to the usual impudent appeal of that ridiculous body, The Lord's Day Observance Society, of which the Lord Chancellor is such a firm supporter, asking the Rector's support in opposing the opening of cinemas on Sunday, the Rector replied—

It is doubtful whether 10 per cent of the population of Lewes attend church on Sunday or attach any religious significance to the day. What right then have the Christian minority to attempt to force their religious beliefs and observances on their fellow citizens?

Speaking for myself, I regard the agitation against Sunday entertainment as intolerant and impertinent.

As Christians, we must do all we can to persuade other people to accept our faith, but if we fail, and for the most part we do fail, then it is both futile and wrong to use coercion.

Not the usual kind of Rector, but we appreciate his reply all the more. But the silly Society—surely one of the most stupid organizations in the country—responsible for the circular, will—with Lord Caldecote—mourn the reply.

One of our regular subscribers, now with the Forces writes: "The *Freethinker* which I receive from you each week goes round the whole company, and often finds itself finally in the local Y.M.C.A." We are pleased to hear it; it is a place where it is much needed. We have had many similar letters from the Army, Navy and Air Force.

We are apt to forget how very closely the Nazi programme follows the path marked out by historic Christianity. It declares that the German people are a chosen people, but that is a cardinal teaching of the Bible. God

had his own people, and looked after them, even though his guardianship was sometimes rather unpleasant. Nazism has persecuted the Jews. But so did the Christian Church—the degree of that persecution is not here important. Nazism denied legal rights to non-Nazis. The Church denied legal rights to non-Christians. Nazism manufactured its own history and its own code of morals. So did the Christian Church. Nazism suppresses all teachings, of every kind whatsoever, whenever they run contrary to Nazi teaching. So did and does the Christian Church whenever it has enough power to operate. Nazism seizes the child and controls its education so that it shall believe nothing, think nothing, that is contrary to Nazi teaching. So did and does the Christian Church with regard to its own teachings. Nazism loudly declares that it is carrying out the wishes of the German God that Germany should rule the world. The Christian Church makes an identical claim with regard to its own religion. Nazism holds that lying is justifiable when it promotes German aims. Lying for the glory of God is one of the oldest and the best observed of Christian practices from the earliest times until 1941. There are other resemblances, but those given are enough to go on with.

We have not yet had a chance of reading Sir Charles Sherrington's Giffard Lectures, although we hope to soon. The book is published at a guinea, and one must go slow in the acquisition of high-priced books nowadays. But he appears to have given offence to some of the religious journals because in his scientific studies he finds no use for a God. The work appears to be substantially atheistic in tone and in conclusion. From what we know of Professor Sherrington's opinions we are not surprised at some of the criticisms it has received. You may write endless rubbish in defence of God and be sure of applause, with silence on the part of those who know that what is before them is of no account. But let the attack be on the inherited superstition and the writer is ignored if it is possible to ignore him, and misrepresented if something simply must be said.

There is nothing so pleasingly surprising as to walk along one's bookshelves, open a book, and light on something unexpected but true. Here is a passage we dropped upon by reading where the book opened. It is from H. Kingsmill's *After Puritanism*, "Men who have a quarrel with society are apt to think that there is a greater solidarity than actually exists among those who remain within the ring. They do not sufficiently avail themselves of the reflection that, while those within the ring automatically unite for the purpose of making things as uncomfortable as possible for those outside, they cannot always be so supplied, and must fill the heavy intervals with unpleasantness among themselves."

Here is another, taken from a book of schoolboy contributions. "Increase of money is followed by care and a hunger for ancestors."

One more—three is a sacred number—"Conceit and a feeling of superiority are ingredients of a censor's make-up." That is from Ernst and Seagle's *To the Pure*. . .

War Damage Fund

Previously received £423 18s. 5d.; National Secular Society, £75; A. H. Deacon, 5s.; W.M., 5s.; H. A. Alexander, 10s.; H. Crossley, £2 10s.; W. Perry, £1; Mr. and Mrs. Blaney, £1; Mrs. A. Kellaway, 11s. 6d.; W. Marchant, 5s.; J. M. McManus, £2; A. K. Dowson, 5s.; J. W. Davis, 10s.; E. Goodfellow, 5s.; H. Clifton, 10s. Total £508 14s. 11d.

Correction.—The acknowledgement of a subscription as from J. S. Ray, should have been J. S. Roy.

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.

Transformation Scene

SOME of us are fortunate enough to have lived quite a long while. Like every good thing it has its drawbacks. All the same it has enabled one to observe the gyrations of God's Revealed Religion. It has seen and observed the thousand and one subterfuges in the Unchangeable God. For much has happened in the last half century. Well the Church know it! To them the process is deplorable. We are not likely to get a dispassionate view from an interested body. Self-interest has been known to work its way even into things ecclesiastical. It is just as well to retrace our steps now and again and have a look at this fair flower of Christian Morality, the neglect of which has been so calamitous.

For it is a common retort when Freethinkers point out the fruits of the tree (following the advice given by Jesus in a document known as the Sermon on the Mount) as evidenced by the record of Christianity when it had its big chance, that the Church was then in an era of defective morality, and their job was one of colossal difficulty. But Christians do claim that they won through, and that eventually the effect of God's Revelation and God's Scheme of Salvation made itself felt. So that one is justified on this plea to look back fifty years and study the period of say a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago, and take what we find then to be a fair reflection of the triumphant Christian spirit.

A couple of generations ago Christianity had already commenced its habit of protective coloration; it was having a bad quarter of an hour. Popular Free-thought missionaries drove their drills with consummate ease into the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture. It was being assailed by scientists in the leading monthly and quarterly periodicals. The hurling of names about such as *infidel* in a wholesale fashion was ceasing to frighten their flocks away from enquiry. Attempts to answer them had to be made, but the Church soon found out that they couldn't stand any kind of argumentative publicity at all, that whatever they said on the old lines was of no avail. It didn't convince. It was then that it was realized that the Gospel of Christ had to change or perish. The word went forth that God's Revelation badly needed upholstering, and they appointed themselves upholsterers. They answered the unbeliever by conceding his points. They called it drawing his claws—but that was pretty Fanny's way.

Now what was it that the unbeliever was saying? He was saying many things. First and foremost that the story of God's Revelation to Man was not *true*; there had never been such a Revelation. Whether it was useful or useful in parts was quite another issue. If it was untrue mankind would find it out sooner or later, and the sooner the better. There was a much quoted story of George Eliot listening to a Christian rhapsodist and, when he had finished, exclaiming quietly, "But it isn't true." It sufficed, or ought to have sufficed. But why people came to the conclusion that it wasn't true covered a large circumstantial area. They suspected the validity of the Gospel because of certain features which accompanied it. They then turned to its so-called credentials and became convinced that religion was of man.

It is of great interest when we hear so much at the present-day about Christian Morality to know that the reason behind the rejection of Christianity, in a very large proportion of cases, was precisely that the Christian ethic was repulsive. The current religion was preaching Hell Fire, a doctrine plainly objectionable to the sound healthy feeling of any but theology-polluted souls. More than that Christianity was observed to have no practical ethic at all. The famous Sermon on the Mount was but a set of questionable aphorisms all in existence before the Christian era.

Jesus held no political theory, his Kingdom not being of this world.

That the Gospel of Jesus was not of this world was the point that disgusted social reformers, and all those who concerned themselves with the Condition of England question. It was not difficult for such people to come quickly to the conclusion that Christianity was not God-given. Rendering obedience to the powers that be was plainly a halter round the necks of the common people, and it did not mend things to be told that it was Christianity that put it there. Then there were others consumed with a passion for Justice, and they found that they could not get Christians to share that passion. They looked at the record of the Church and found it cruel and intolerant. These were the "marks of divinity" plainly observable. It was not difficult for them to come to the conclusion that the thing that was infamous was not true.

And scientific men fought the Church with fierceness as they knew that *Thus Saith the Lord* meant death to scientific progress, and that science was the true Providence of Man.

And all this time the little Parish Magazine was finding its way into the homes of the land, telling its readers how wicked and how deserving of Hell were these wicked infidels. Heavens! how they lied, those Parish Magazines!

And these were the precious fruits of the spirit after nearly two thousand years of the pure undiluted Gospel. If you wish men to be good, we are told to-day, if you wish men to behave decently you must return to the simple Gospel which the wicked infidels of the Nineteenth Century so successfully undermined. If you hadn't listened to them, there would have been no war this day. All would have been as good and as pious and as helpful as our Dean of Exeter, who tells us in this year of Grace, that Christians are divided into three bodies, those who think the war is a Holy Crusade, those who are frankly Pacifists, and those, the larger number, who simply don't know where they are.

Isn't it plain that a return to Christianity is the one thing needful? So lucid, so compelling, so soulful! So plainly of God.

T. H. ELSTON

Gibbon and the Modern World

(Concluded from page 57)

III.—THE ANCIENT AND THE MODERN CATASTROPHE

In the third century the Roman Empire literally went to pieces. Rural depopulation, due to intensive slave-cultivation, in Italy and Sicily weakened it at the heart, while the indiscipline of the armies increased the cost of defence and the burden of taxation. Legions recruited in the frontier provinces fought for pay and plunder or for a popular general, not for Rome. Usurpations and disruptive movements became frequent; and military adventurers of African, Thracian, Arabian and Illyrian origin rode roughshod in turn over the decaying plutocracy of the Mediterranean world. Then, in the middle of the century, the Germanic peoples of the north, the Goths and the Franks, broke through the weakened defences and plundered the Empire, until a succession of tough soldier-emperors—Claudius II., Aurelian, Probus, Diocletian—temporarily retrieved the situation. Even this was only done by enlisting barbarians in the Roman armies and settling them in the provinces to keep the others out. Meanwhile trade and industry were paralysed, and by the fourth century Roman civilization was in the last stages of decline.

Some strong ideal motive was required if the masses were to work, and at need fight, for an Empire which could not pretend to make their life tolerable, and had

ceased even to fulfil its promise of peace. The old nature-religions, except among the peasantry, were now a meaningless ritual. Philosophy was useless for the purpose. There remained the other-worldly religions, Mithraism and Christianity. While the Empire had been going downhill, the Church had been organizing itself, purging itself of dangerous and potentially revolutionary elements, and palpably preparing for an alliance with authority. The Ebionites or Nazarenes, who compromised the Church by their Jewish observances and hopes of a visible Messianic kingdom on earth, the Montanists, who, though not Jewish, were tarred with the same brush, and similar sects were repudiated as heretics, though in fact they were nearer to primitive Christianity than the Catholic Church was. The episcopal office became a vested interest; and as the bishops controlled the property of the Church, the mass of Christians followed where the bishops led, for much the same reasons as the modern trade unionist supports his head office against "minority" movements. The most serious obstacle that retarded the recognition of the Church by the Roman State was the Christian attitude to military service, which we know from Celsus and other witnesses to have been pacifist, and which alone would be enough to account for those persecutions which occurred, though they were mostly of short duration.

The emperors therefore turned to Mithraism for the spiritual cement they required. But in competition with Christianity, Mithraism had two disadvantages: it was an expensive religion, involving the sacrifice of a bull in the initiation ceremony; and it excluded women. No religion can with impunity ignore the hand that rocks the cradle. After the abdication of Diocletian in the year 305, the Empire relapsed into a state of military anarchy, during which at one time six imperial "toughs" were fighting for the mastery. One of these, Constantine, made the brilliant discovery that Christians were not pacifists when it was a question of fighting for an emperor who favoured them against one who did not. He did a deal with the bishops, reaped his reward in victory over all his rivals, and made Christianity the religion of the Empire.

It did not save the Empire. For a few decades more the Barbarian flood was kept at bay by armies now largely composed of, and even commanded by, barbarians. Then the Goths and other northern peoples broke in at last and became lords of the western world. Ancient civilization was dead: the Middle Ages had begun.

Modern Europe, unlike the Roman Empire, has never been politically one. Nevertheless, time was when hard-headed men like Cobden and Bright could hope for the realization of perpetual peace by the spread of commerce alone, and view the possession of colonies with indifference. That dream of universal peace on a basis of capitalism was doomed to fade, as the Roman dream of universal peace on a basis of slavery was doomed to fade. Machine industry spread to and dominated one country after another, and by spreading, led to new developments in heavy industry and a race for markets for iron and steel products. That led to the scramble for African and Asiatic concessions, and that to alliances and counter-alliances, until in the twentieth century Christo-capitalist civilization went to pieces as the pagan slave-civilization did in the third. There is an evil similarity between the military anarchy which in the ancient world brought able brutes like Aurelian and Constantine to power, and the international anarchy which in the modern world has thrown up Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, and the smaller fry of pinchbeck Cæsars who have imitated them. The decrepitude of the ancient State religion has its parallel in the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the Churches to-day. The suc-

cess with which Constantine turned to his own ambitious uses a religion, which had once blessed the poor and threatened woe to the rich, has been repeated in the capitulation of the organized Labour movement to the Imperialist Governments of 1914, in Hitler's "National Socialist" demagoguery, and in the Governmental collaboration of Labour leaders to-day.

Must the parallel be pursued to the bitter end? History never repeats itself exactly. Working men and women of all countries—even the Fascist countries—are by the very nature of modern industry better educated and more capable of common action than the heterogeneous slave-masses of the Roman Empire. The revolutionary ideology of to-day is not magical and other-worldly, but Materialist and Secularist. It has conquered one sixth of the world, and its boundaries are enlarging. In that lies the hope that a new Gibbon in a future century, and in a scientifically organized world, will be able to write the history of the *Decline and Fall of Christian Civilization*.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

A First Line Defence

We are told that if, or when, our enemy attempts to land on these shores one of the strategic points will probably be Romney Marsh.

So at long last the Royal Military Canal, the object of much satire in its time, will take its part, however insignificant, in our system of defence.

This little known waterway was constructed in 1805, when Napoleon assembled his flotilla of flat-bottomed boats at Wimereux and Boulogne, preparatory to his long projected invasion of England.

It is not much like a canal for its course is winding, its waters are fair, trees and rushes grow on its banks and wild life makes a home there.

Long before the advent of railways, and when roads were few, the canal was used as a means of transport, and packet-boats carried goods for the use of nearby towns and villages.

Those who have read the *Ingoldsby Legends* will recall a description of the canal, which is to be found in that eerie tale *The Leech of Folkstone*: This is a not very practicable ditch, some thirty feet wide, and nearly nine feet deep in the middle, extending from the town and port of Hythe to within a mile of the town and port of Rye, a distance of about twenty miles.

Another means of defence designed to frustrate the threatened invasion was the building of seventy-six Martello towers on the foreshore of Kent and Sussex, extending from Beachy Head to Hythe. Few of them are left now, many were used as targets for artillery practice and destroyed, others were undermined and carried away by the sea.

The towers were very solidly constructed of brick, their height and diameter at the top is about thirty feet, the diameter at the base forty feet. The walls are nine feet thick on the seaward side and six on the landward, and the massive entrance doors are reached by a stairway from the beach.

On the bomb-proof roof of one, which I inhabited some fifty years ago, an ancient swivelling cannon still dominated the solitude of the low-lying foreshore. In those days a number of the towers were rented from the War Office by visitors, who used them as holiday homes, some indeed, were occupied permanently by those enthusiasts, whose invariable toast when they foregathered was "God bless Towers."

Accommodation was limited, the lower room was used as a kitchen and living-room, the upper as a dormitory. The immense thickness of the walls kept these apartments at an even temperature, it also limited the amount of light, for the windows were

small and splayed. On a winter's night, when the only sounds without were the surge of the breakers, driven by a south-west gale, and the cry of passing curlews, the solidity of these quaint dwellings gave one a sense of security. They were warm and weatherproof, too, unlike the frail and unsightly lungalows and shacks which now disfigure our seaside resorts.

What value, if any, these towers possess now, as a first line defence, I do not know; but we remember that until similar blockhouses were constructed during the second Boer War we were unable to terminate that long and tedious conflict.

It was in 1883 that I first visited Romney; to roam over the Marsh or "loyter long days" by the clear waters of the Canal, as old Isaac did by "Shawfordbrook." In the far away 'eighties there were still old folks on the Marsh who cherished the memory of the good times when the free traders were welcome visitors.

Some of these oldest inhabitants had been inveterate smugglers in their youth, and in many a home there lingered pleasant memories of the fine brandy and hollands, of which they had their tithe. "Mighty different to the public house stuff us gets now-a-days," was their regretful comment.

The old rumours of invasion by France were revived during the reign of Napoleon III., a degenerate learner of a great name, who, like many other deposed Monarchs, was forced to seek sanctuary in this England. Those who possess old volumes of *Punch* will find many humorous allusions to this.

Inhabitants of the once peaceful Marsh must be having a trying time in these days, for they are in the track of the many German planes which incessantly attempt to wreak destruction on London. The white cliffs of France are once more scanned eagerly by a generation whose forefathers sailed from the Cinque Ports to intercept, and defeat the great Armada of Spain, when

Eastward straight from wild Blackheath
The warlike errand went,
And roused in many an ancient hall,
The gallant squires of Kent.

EDGAR SYERS

Correspondence

THE REAL UNIT OF VALUE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—I was much interested in Mr. W. L. English's contribution to the above, especially with regard to his handling of the question of money and his estimation of values in terms of such. But after all, is he not really dealing with a symbol, and mistaking the formulæ for the physical facts of reality?

Supposing his theory of £3 per week were adopted, what is to prevent one spending it all in say a couple of days in extravagant amusement, or any form of dissipation? Or alternately living say upon half the amount, and becoming a capitalist to the extent of the other half?

I have often heard it stated by Socialists that they consider that all profit is surplus labour power, but is that so when it is estimated in terms of money?

Labour has been expended in producing the profit, or means to that end via say a locomotive. Profit is not inherently stored up energy, although it may be the symbolic loophole to acquire it. It is when this symbol can be so manipulated in terms of further mathematical symbols that the superstition of the mistake I have mentioned becomes obvious in discrepancy. The accountant is responsible for the differentiation between the symbolic values of anything as to its cost and price recorded, of course, in terms of money.

An article (including labour) costs say 6d. and sold for 7d., and if this be done often and long enough via, say an office and telephone, profit may easily run into thousands

without ever seeing the goods so translated.

And what are these thousands but artificial symbols exaggerated by the fundamental differentiation in formula which do not effect the utility value of any article.

Business consists essentially of such manipulation; it extends to politics and eventually war, and the gods smile at it. It is easy for the rich man to see how good God is in terms of money, but the deception is real, and I should like to see some Freethinker tackle both dictators. The problem appears to me to be a mental one, about which I have my own theories, but it all comes back to Freethought in the end.

P. G. TACCHI

CIVILIZING THE ARCTICS

SIR,—With reference to the article of George Wallace in your issue of the 26th inst., with regard to the circulation of the poems of Robert Burns in the U.S.S.R., readers will no doubt be interested in the following taken from a book entitled *40,000 Against the Arctic*, by H. P. Smolka, the first non-Soviet journalist to reach the furthest outpost of this astonishing Polar Empire. Flying down the River Tencisi the seaplane landed on the water:—

"The main principle applied in the campaign to raise the Arctic natives is to get it done as far as possible by the natives themselves. They are asked to form nomadic Soviets, a form of Government which is presented to them as only a short step away from their own tribal councils. Nor is the revolution halting at the fringe of the Arctic. The tribes are encouraged by Red missionaries to collectivize their reindeer herds and the resistance of the Shamans, their medicine-men, is broken by the young Communists who expose them to ridicule. They do it by giving them a taste of their own medicine. As soon as the tribes find out that the doctors and veterinary surgeons can drive away just as effectively as the Shaman the evil spirits that have crept into the bodies of men and reindeer, they give their confidence to the new doctors. And soon they believe what their new friends tell them; that the Shaman is a parasite who tries to live on their ignorance and superstition.

"My little progressive Dolgan hostess No. 2, on the Khantanga River, told me how she herself was convinced that the young Comsomol girl who visited her was right and not the Shaman. He said that the aeroplanes were flying devils, with whom the Russians had made a pact to destroy us! But last year I saw one and touched it myself. Then I saw that it was really made of the same material as my teapot. And when the pilot invited us to fly with him, my grandfather replied that, being the oldest, he would risk least if he exposed himself to the danger. When he came back he reported that he had been in heaven and seen no gods there at all. Then we knew that the Shaman had been lying when he told us that the birds had told him that they would always bring him messages from the gods, which we would have to obey."

Readers will appreciate this glimpse into the primitive conditions of the past and its reaction to an advanced civilization.

T. D. SMITH

CROOKES AND SPIRITUALISM

SIR,—Mr. Barbanell's opinions as to what constitutes a "distortion of truth" of such magnitude as to raise it above the level of "a side issue," are as peculiar as his views on the legitimacy of "introducing a fresh argument." The argument, in fact, was not new, but in reply to Mr. Barbanell, who claimed that Conan Doyle's relatives had had a communication from him. In face of that I think I was justified in asking whether those "communications" had been acknowledged as genuine by expert investigators (as distinct from his relatives) without being accused of introducing a new argument. If Mr. Barbanell wished to take the argument further he should have supplied evidence that the Doyle communications had met with acceptance in other and different circles. Instead of that, he simply complains that I had given him an argument in reply to his.

His persistence about the exact classification of Crookes would only be justified if, in face of his overriding quota-

tion, I had subsequently re-asserted that Crookes was not a Spiritualist. I virtually conceded Crookes straight away, but Mr. Barbanell likes things in so many words. I hereby remove Crookes to the category of Spiritualist, with the comments already given. And it is such a small point that the structure of the article will be hardly the worse for the dislodging of this particular brick, though by now readers must almost suppose that the article was about Crookes. If Mr. Barbanell has dealt with the main issue elsewhere, I should like to see it. I should like to see him match his knowledge of the possibilities of matter against that of Prof. Haldane, whose speculations, as I said, were the basis of the article. I suggest that before he writes again he should learn the real nature of a distortion of truth; he will find an excellent example in his last letter, where his dropping of the italics in my expression, "a scaled message," alters the whole meaning.

G. H. TAYLOR

National Secular Society

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD JANUARY 26, 1941

THE President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, presided.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Bryant, Ebury, Griffiths, Mrs. Grant and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to the Parent Society

A cheque for £150 from the Executors of the J. G. Neate Estate was announced and acknowledged.

The President and General Secretary now are the Trustees in the Sanford Estate, in which the N.S.S. is interested. The Executive voted £75 as a donation to the *Freethinker* War Damage Fund. A decision was reached to circularize Branches concerning the Annual Conference for 1941.

The proceedings then closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury.

INDOOR

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, C. E. M. Joad, M.A., D.Lit.—"Some Nazi Philosophy"

WEST LONDON BRANCH (At the house of Miss Woolston, 57 Warrington Crescent, W.9): at 2.30, February 9, F. A. Hornibrook will lecture on "The Moral Aspect of V.D." Nearest Tube Station, Warwick Avenue, also served by Nos. 6 and 16 buses.

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (47 Thurnscoe Road, two doors below the Rink): 7.0, Mr. Backhouse—"Paying for War."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. E. Harry Hassell—"John Galsworthy."

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