

THE FREETHINKER

▪ EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN ▪

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Views and Opinions

God and the War

THE *News-Chronicle* discussion of "God and the War," has gone its predestined way. The horoscope we cast at its birth has been fulfilled, step by step right up to the time of these notes. With the air of one taking the first steps in a daring adventure the *News-Chronicle* drew attention to the agitated state of mind of multitudes concerning the part God was playing in the war. Or was he playing any part at all? Or were vast multitudes of the people worrying much about what God was doing? The clergy were of course. That is their trade. A large number of laymen were; they followed the clergy. But the overwhelming mass of the people, were they worrying? If they were worrying about what God was doing they kept their worries to themselves. But that none of them could see clearly what the devil God was doing is quite clear; otherwise they would have told us. Of course the clergy told us; that also is, and has been, their trade. They told us what God was doing when he guided Baldwin and Hoare and Simon in the disastrous steps they took with regard to Abyssinia and Spain, and when some of the leading German Nazis were being made society pets in this country. They told us God was guiding Chamberlain with his disastrous slip of paper, and the Munich "peace." But the ordinary man began to get confused and also began to wonder what God was doing, or was he doing anything at all? Was there even a God to do anything? If there was he ought to be doing something. We are officially informed we are all in the war. Is God the only one who can afford to do nothing? Surely he is the one person who can least afford to do nothing. For a God who does nothing might just as well not exist. Nay, a God who does nothing, and is discovered in the doing, soon ceases to exist. That is the fashion in which so many gods have died. There was nothing left for them to do, and they died—victims of chronic unemployment.

A Sham Debate

So the *News-Chronicle* set boldly to work. With rare courage and a staggering avowal of fairness, it announced that it intended boldly to grapple with the situation. It was organizing a "nation-wide discussion" on God and the War. It was to be "a free and frank discussion open to all," and the "all" was printed in large heavy type. To carry courage to the point of folly, guidance was to be given by "a wide variety of leaders of thought." Nothing could be better—on paper, and for a newspaper. It would help circulation. But whether God intervened, or someone intervened for God, the first fortnight of the discussion showed that none but believers in God were asked to contribute, most of them parsons, and the list of those with whom arrangements

had been made to speak, were and are all believers in a God of some sort. More remarkable still is the fact that among the published letters in the *News-Chronicle*, not one of them came from a disbeliever in a God. We know that letters were sent, but they must have got lost in the post. The only possible exception, so far as the articles are concerned, is the one contributed by Mr. Olaf Stapleton, but as he tries to put a little more emptiness into a vacuum by suggesting that love may be God, and wants a religion for the future, he may well have been considered by the editor of the *News-Chronicle* as harmless. The nation-wide discussion shrinks to a selected section. The free and frank expression of all shades of opinion, resolves itself into one opinion expressed in slightly different ways.

It is a remarkable state of affairs. For many years interested folk have been lamenting the rapid growth of Atheism. A considerable number of books have been published in which the idea of God was criticized and set aside. Others, in much larger numbers, have dealt with God in the fashion of Laplace, "God is not necessary to my hypothesis." The clergy are at present running a desperate campaign to capture the State schools, mainly because they do not manage to turn out pupils who all become church-goers. Prominent scientists openly smile when the agency of God is mentioned. But the editor of the *News-Chronicle* knows them not; he shows no sign of ever having heard of them; he never even thought of asking the clergy if they knew anyone of that stamp. So, perforce, the nation-wide clash of differing opinions resolved itself into one opinion only. Perhaps I ought not to use that word "clash," for the articles are really not strong enough to clash, they just slop into one another, they mix without alteration in quality or even appearance. Unconsciously the *News-Chronicle* has supplied those who have wit enough to read it aright, an example of the poverty-stricken character of the religious intellect of to-day.

* * *

Mr. Priestley Sets the Pace

Mr. J. B. Priestley was engaged to write an introduction to the series. I say "engaged" advisedly, for I do not like to think that he is wholly responsible for the reference to the writers as "expert thinkers." Thinkers they may be on the general ground that they are human, and the poorest of humans can think. But "expert thinkers"; that is too much. Even from the religious point of view a superficially better case might have been drawn. I would undertake to make out a stronger case for God than that put forward by the *News-Chronicle* collection, and then show how unconvincing it is. I can remember a lady with whom I was once very intimately connected—my mother—who said very many times, "I can put up with a liar or a thief, but God protect me from a fool." There is evidently not a God ready to protect readers from this daily deluge of nonsense.

But Mr. Priestley risks his own reputation when he writes on religion. Then the shrewd and interesting human observer of human nature becomes a hawk of theological platitudes. He does commence with a comment, with which readers of this column will be familiar, namely, surprise that people should be so stricken with the horrors of this war, when before the war, (he might have said for uncounted centuries)

"hundreds of thousands of innocent persons were being tortured, persecuted, murdered." Exactly. If people are to be killed in war the number adds nothing to the nature of the killing. Torture, persecution, murder, all the problems arising from these things remain. An increase in numbers affects the unimaginative, the comparatively callous. To those capable of real thinking a fact gains nothing by mere multiplication.

But just in time—for the *News-Chronicle*, but not to save his reputation—Mr. Priestley forestalls much of the nonsense that was about to appear—by giving vent to these. "I am convinced that a lack of religious belief has helped to push us all into this blackout." But this is discounted by his having remarked that there was nothing new—save in size—in persecution, etc., that is going on with the war. And so the alleged decline of religious belief (although the *News-Chronicle* knows nothing about it) can have had nothing to do with a state of affairs that existed before that decline set in. Next, having no religious belief in common, men belonging to different races, nations, classes, are robbed of a valuable boon of unity. But, surely, if Mr. Priestley settles down to a study of history, he will discover that there never was a time when this supposed bond of unity existed in any other form than it exists to-day. Therefore, we cannot put the lack of unity between peoples as due to a recent loss of religion. And Mr. Priestley has in numerous speeches and broadcasts been congratulating the British people on the magnificent unity they are showing in waging the war. He ought to make up his mind as to what he means, even when writing semi-religious articles for the *News-Chronicle*. And one more example of the way in which folly beckons to folly. With the air of one exhibiting strict impartiality, "Our task . . . is not only to fight these Nazis, but also the world that produced them." That would be good, were it not for the fact that the world that produced our Nazis, in and out of Germany, is a world that was predominantly Christian. Mr. Priestley should remember that even the Christian readers of the *News-Chronicle* may here and there be given to reflection.

In an attempt to soar above petty quarrels, Mr. Priestley says "The dilemma of the churches in this modern world is that they dare not plunge into politics and economics and yet cannot afford to ignore them." Now that is not just to the Churches, although we are not given examples. There never was a time when the Churches did not interfere with politics, so far as their interests were concerned. The Roman Church always claimed and still claims that the State should refrain from doing anything that lowers prestige and profit of the Church, and in morals, religion, and education claims dictatorial power. The Protestant Churches followed suit so far as they could. What are all the laws for the suppression of heresy and blasphemy, the Sunday laws, the religious sanctions found for slavery, the Church's opposition to the civic equality of the sexes, the fight to maintain control of schools, the teaching that people should rest content in the position in which God has been pleased to place them, and to conduct themselves humbly before their superiors, what are all these, with numerous other examples that might be given, but the descent of the Church into politics? And will Mr. Priestley be good enough to inform us what reform or how many social or political reforms were initiated by the Churches? By the Churches, he it noted, one does not mean the names of individual Christians who showed they were better than their creed. What kind of history has Mr. Priestley been studying?

After giving the advice cited, it must have occurred to Mr. Priestley that there were exceptions, that the outstanding example of the Church interfering with

politics is the Roman Church, and that is also one of the clearest instances of the evil of Church interference with social life; for having accounted for the existing situation being, at least in part, as due to the Church not interfering, he asserts a note, "The exception is the Roman Church, but some of the interventions of Rome into worldly affairs do not strike an outsider as happy instances of the Christian spirit." So after saying that the Churches must take a part in politics, and ignoring the fact that the only example of their doing so that occurs to him is the Roman Church, he finds that unfavourable to his purpose and promptly rules it out. That is, of course, an orthodox method with Christian apologists. If a man calls himself a Christian and leads the life of a decent citizen, taking an interest in the welfare of others, he is paraded as a Christian. But if he believes just as firmly in Christian doctrines, but shows himself mean in character, and silent in the face of wrong—then, even though he may have had the appreciation of Christians, and of some of the Churches, he is labelled as not a good Christian, he is merely a pretender. In this game of heads I win and tails you lose the Christian is bound to win, so long as his audience is made up of Christians.

Of course it may be that when Mr. Priestley spoke of the desirability of the Church interfering in "politics and economics" he had mainly in mind economics. But what has been said with regard to the Churches and politics will apply to economics, for political actions of any consequence have their economic reactions, and vice versa. What would Mr. Priestley wish the Churches to do? Are they to support the cause of the Communists? We think not. That is at present generally associated with disbelief in God, although Communism may exist with such a belief. Are the Churches to advocate Socialism, or Conservatism, or Liberalism, or some other economic or political theory? Again we think not. As a matter of fact nothing has done so much to prevent desirable political relations with Russia as the religious zeal of most of the Churches backed up by many of our leading politicians. Mr. Priestley must know that any attempt at definite political or economic teaching would shatter any or all of the Churches in Britain, whether Established or Nonconformist.

What then is left for the Churches? All they can do, all they have ever done, in this direction is to mumble ethical and social platitudes such as, be just, be righteous, be good citizens, etc., which so often amount to nothing but phrases used by knaves to mesmerize fools. Such phrases are used as glibly by Nazis in Germany as they are by preachers in Britain. It is the interpretation put upon these phrases that really matters. And we may rely upon the clergy giving us a stomach full of what, considered as mere phrases, are little better than a kind of intellectual narcotic. They lull to sleep the intelligence of those who hear them, and gratify the vanity or disguise the purpose of those who use them.

I have dealt mainly with Mr. Priestley because while his contribution is more coherent than any of the others, it is but poor. And in its way it does suit what follows. It has been my lot to read hundreds of rubbishy essays in defence of Christianity. There are few of them one could not easily better as a defence of Christianity, without making out a convincing case. But if the *News-Chronicle* had planned a method of bringing the intellectual calibre of our modern clergy into contempt they could not have done it more effectively. On the whole the responsible parties showed some kindness to Christians in not permitting anyone to contribute the other side of the case. It would have been very, very cruel.

But I think I may, next week, draw from even this poor material something of an interesting nature.

Wisdom While You Wait

Thou comest in such a questionable shape that I would speak with thee.—*Shakespeare*.

Learning is good, but common sense is better.

G. W. Foote

MR. H. G. WELLS is a clever writer with more than a touch of real genius. His *Tono-Bungay*, his short stories and essays, and his vivid *Cook's Excursion* through Universal History, prove it beyond cavil and dispute. But, as the Ancients used to say, even Homer nods, and Mr. Wells has his moments of somnolence. His admirers, and they are many, do not discriminate overmuch between the gold and the dross, and mistake for precious metal what is but tinsel.

"We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us." In an article in the *Sunday Express*, December 29, 1940, entitled "The World of My Heart's Desire," Mr. Wells writes very confidently on the mutability of human nature, and turns scientist for half an hour for the purpose. Then he pens the following remarkable words:—

He (the average man) is as different from his ancestor of three centuries ago, from the top of his head and everything that is in it to the tips of his toenails, as if he were a distinct species of animal.

Mr. Wells depicts the present-day average citizen as "shaven, shorn, bespectacled, manicured, pedicured, with his dental plate, his punctiliously pressed suit," and contrasts him with primitive man, indistinguishable from a hairy ape. It is in company with the bespectacled man with the dental plate that Mr. Wells starts off in such a violent hurry to reach the Land of Heart's Desire.

The trouble with Mr. Wells is that he has mixed too exclusively with "intellectuals" of a certain type, and has far too little acquaintanceship with the world and mankind in general. In spite of his scientific patter, he cannot distinguish the wood from the trees, the permanent from the purely transitory. It is very easy to say, as Victor Hugo did, that "man is but the troglodite of an angel" and win the applause of sentimental hearers who know nothing whatever of troglodites or archangels. But it is altogether another matter to attempt to prove the assertion, however dogmatically and oracularly it is delivered.

We do not need Mr. Wells to assure us that there is a difference between primitive man and the average denizen of a Bloomsbury bed-sitting room, complete with his gas mask and his daily paper. But Bloomsbury is not London, and London is not the world. And what bunkum is it that would even suggest that human nature itself has changed in so short a space of time as three centuries. Manners, customs, clothing have all changed, but beneath the clothes man is still the "two-pronged radish" that he has always been. The facts that modern man is shedding his toenails, and that primitive man was born without the necessity of buying a fur coat do not affect the issue overmuch. *Homo sapiens* was not a curled perfumed darling, especially when he tore his opponent to pieces limb by limb. But he was a finer man than any of the present-day German High Command, who, not in anger, but in cold blood, plan the wholesale murder of women and children in open cities, and regard the bombing of a lying-in hospital as brilliant military strategy. And it is highly significant that the same Germany has a high record of sexual perversion, for blood-lust and sex-lust are ever partners. Rarely has the ape and tiger been so blended as in these apostles of Teutonic Culture.

Mr. Wells will have it that man of three centuries ago was a different animal to what he is to-day. If so, how is it that thoughtful men still remark on Shakespeare's profound knowledge of human nature?

There are Romeos and Juliets, Benedicts and Beatrices, even Falstaffs and Iagos amongst us to-day, not forgetting Mr. Wells' friend with the dental-plate. If Shakespeare had to hold the mirror up to a different type of human being, how is it that he reproduces the identical traits of men and women around us to-day? Three centuries is too short a time for any fundamental change in human nature, and a parade of scientific terms does not mend the dilemma in the least.

Nature is made better by no mean
But Nature makes that mean.

Take another text. If Mr. Wells were to meet Confucius, Lucretius, Plato, and other worthy Ancients, at Burlington House, would he not recognize that he was in the presence of his intellectual superiors? Yet these men are twenty centuries nearer the Hairy Ape, and seventeen hundred years removed from the time when men were so different as to constitute, in his view, a different species. Mr. Wells is guilty of a hasty generalization, and his sacrificed exactitude in his search for brilliant wording. Were Mr. Wells a mere journalist such writing would not matter, but he is a man of great and deserved reputation, and he should not compete with the scribblers of Ink Street, who write on all subjects with equal ease and lack of knowledge.

Three centuries is but a moment in the history of the human race. Our so-called civilization has made changes for better and for worse through two millenniums. Changes in our bodies are still going on, but very slowly. Our jaws are getting smaller, our teeth are not so strong; and we are beginning to shed our toenails. Our social adaptation to this modern complex civilization seems equally slow. It is so slow as to be almost imperceptible. Nations decline and fall, civilizations rise and decay, but in the universe as a whole there can be neither progress nor decay. Even the changes in the mentality of some western nations which have become apparent in our own day may be due to an environment of arrogant military despotism rather than intrinsic. They are not fundamental changes in human nature itself, but reactions to an altered and more barbarous environment. Our remote ancestors thought the Golden Age was behind them, and so many present-day enthusiasts imagine that El Dorado may be reached in our time. Probably both are wrong. But a new social order with its ameliorations and changes may reach such a pitch that it will result in the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which is a consummation to be wished, and worked for. Such a quest cultivates no illusions, raises no false hopes. But deeds are ever better than mere words.

At the close of this particular *Sunday Express* article there is yet another example of Mr. Wells' looseness of expression, and love of verbal fireworks which dazzles more than it convinces. He says:—

In the past men have had dreams of a god, they have invented one premature god after another. They have talked very recklessly, foolishly, dishonestly about these deities. To all such gods I call myself an Atheist. I will have none of them. The true god, the god of truth, has yet to be found. In the world of my desire our whole race will be seeking him before all other things. Truth and courage are God.

One expects this sort of utterance in parish magazines and in sermons, but not from the author of *Tono-Bungay*, with its fine story and noble ending of a pageant of history, its unforgettable:—

We are all things that make and pass striving on a hidden mission out to the open sea.

In sober truth, and not in the cant of journalism, let us wish for the recovery of Mr. Wells.

The Sad Sunday of England

THE dull and dreary British Sunday has long been a byword among foreign visitors to our shores. For generations sectarian Societies have striven to make the first day of the week more sombre than it is. A day dedicated in Pagan Rome to the sovereign Sun, it was adopted by the early Christian Church and adapted to Christian requirements. And, although Luther and other Protestant Reformers recommended a marked relaxation of its customary gloom, Puritan influences still operate both in Parliament and among certain sections of the community.

Dr. W. B. Whitaker, the author of *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, has now added a survey of Sunday from 1677 to 1837. This work, *The Eighteenth Century English Sunday* (Epworth Press, 1940, 13s. 6d.) is the production of a Dissenter. Dr. Whitaker betrays little, if any, sense of humour, yet he has composed an instructive and entertaining volume which is obviously the outcome of painstaking study and research.

Our author considers that the Sunday question has been greatly neglected by historians. Hence the necessity of his latest work. Under the various Acts of Uniformity, Church attendance became compulsory upon all subjects on Sunday, save to those who had lawful excuse. Restrictions of all kinds were imposed which were frequently disregarded. Act after Act was passed into law which a large part of the public constantly ignored. Thus, with the occasional connivance of the authorities, the attempt to make people pious by Act of Parliament was frequently frustrated.

The Sessions and other records of the time preserve many instances of Sabbath breaking such as trading and the sale of stimulating beverages during the hours of divine service. In the eyes of the clergy these were shameful sins, especially when the attractions of the tavern proved more popular than the parson's droning sermons. London, then as now, enjoyed fuller freedom from clerical domination than most parts of England. But the busybodies who formed Societies and cliques for the reformation of everybody save themselves, were up and doing.

So, perhaps under sectarian pressure, in 1681, the Lord Mayor issued a precept in which he stated: "I have taken particular notice of the profanation of the Lord's Day by the general resort to public houses where a great part of the day is taken up and wasted in idle and unreasonable discourses if not worse employed." This backsliding directly contravened the Act of 1677, yet his Lordship finds that "vintners and keepers of ale houses and coffee houses do take liberty and follow their callings on that day." The City Aldermen were instructed to order the churchwardens and constables to prosecute the offenders, and the magistrates were to take away their licences. But it became necessary to publish several later precepts. Either the officials had proved perfunctory in the execution of their duties, or the delinquents were supported by public approval, which at the close of the century was still on the side of the sinner.

In the reign of good Queen Anne of pious memory, the clergy manifested alarm at the wickedness of the common people. "In 1717," observes Dr. Whitaker, "the Upper House of Convocation of the Province of Canterbury submitted a document to the Lower House with reference to 'the late excessive growth of infidelity, heresy and profaneness.' In this complaint is made of the lack of churches, the non-residency of many ministers, and the absence of many people from service on account of the relaxation of the penal laws dealing with non-attendance at church." The competition of the taverns and other secular entertainments is deeply deplored. Throughout the whole

period under review excessive drinking is constantly charged against those who failed to attend church services. But not a word is uttered concerning the fact that the people were forbidden almost every other form of relaxation.

Under the earlier Georges a more liberal interpretation of the sanctity of Sunday emerged. Yet the county records cited by Whitaker contain many instances of prosecution and conviction for Sabbath-breaking. Butchers, hairdressers and inn-keepers figure largely in these cases. Informers of breaches of the law were awarded a small sum when a prosecution proved successful. And as the authorities were apt to wink at the transgressions, voluntary associations were formed to increase attendance in churches and chapels, and to secure the conviction of those who traded or even worked on Sunday. There was a group of meddlesome people calling themselves the Society for the Reformation of Manners. Doubtless, the manners of many sadly needed improvement, but the chief objective of these self-styled reformers was the instillation of humility and piety. The special sermon delivered to these Societies in 1725, by the then Bishop of Coventry, deplored the scandal that: "The Lord's Day is now the Devil's market-day. More lewdness, more drunkenness, more quarrels and murders; more sin is connived at and committed on this day than on all the other days of the week together." Therefore, street strollers, tipplers in taverns and gamblers must be prevented by constituted authority from the pursuit of such pernicious practices, "especially in the hours of divine service." So the vested interests of the clergy are never disregarded. But what a picture after over a thousand years of Christian teaching!

In the early Hanoverian period, a foreign visitor, César de Saussure, after recalling the Commonwealth's ban on plays and other pastimes, notes that "all these are still forbidden, and on Sundays you never hear the sound of music. There is no opera, no comedy, no sound in the streets. Card-playing on this day is also strictly forbidden, at least for the citizens and common people, for persons of rank, I believe, do not scruple to play." Indeed, the Sabatarians, generation after generation, persistently reproached the aristocracy for their indulgence in Sunday diversions, thus setting an evil example to the lower orders.

In 1728 a country parson complains of the bad habit of his parishioners in bringing their dogs to divine service, and never checking them when they disturbed the proceedings, and he stigmatizes those who merely treat Sunday as a day for repose, as being no better than animals themselves.

The ancient custom of celebrating the local saint's day with a Sunday fair was still observed in many rural parishes, and the games and athletic sports indulged in gave great offence to the ultra-pious. A contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1738 is cited who observes that: "These feasts on Sundays are still regarded as times of entertainment and pleasure; but to avoid unseemly noise and disturbance upon a day of holiness, the sports and diversions of many villages are now prudently deferred till the Monday after."

From 1739 to 1757 travel by coach and even races for wagers became comparatively common. A more liberal spirit prevailed, save in those circles influenced by Wesley's Methodist Movement. Of course the clergy were concerned at this growth of the secular spirit. As an instance of this, is mentioned the official sermon preached before Parliament at St. Margaret's, Westminster, in 1750 on the anniversary of the beheading of Charles I. Dr. Stukeley was the preacher, and Whitaker remarks that: "It is significant that he made the duty of Sunday observance his subject, and having to his own satisfaction, at any

rate, proved that the death of Charles I. was the result of the profanation of Sunday which had been permitted in his reign, he went on to suggest that a similar neglect of the duties of Sunday in their own day would lead to some similar national disaster."

The holy day, it was said, was not only ignored, but openly insulted by the inferior orders, the quality, legislators, and the custodians of the law alike. Sad, indeed was the prospect of salutary government when the rich and powerful ostentatiously broke the laws.

From 1758 to 1781 the Sabbatarians agitated in order to strengthen the statutes. Moreover, in strict Anglican and Dissenting households the gloominess of the day was intensified. Perpetual sermons, Bible reading and prayers deadened Sunday. Crabb Robinson, who was born in 1775, thus refers to his experiences as a child: "The only suffering that I recollect was the restraint imposed upon me on Sundays, especially being forced to go twice to meeting, an injurious practice, I am satisfied. To be forced to sit still for two hours, not understanding a word, was a grievance too hard to be borne. I was not allowed to look into a picture book, but was condemned to sit with my hands before me, or stand, according to the service. In consequence, I was often sent to bed without my supper for bad behaviour at Meeting." But this is a mild example of the purgatory endured by children in pious households.

In the good old days of George III., an Act was passed, not alone to secure stricter Sunday observance, but to prevent public discussion. Under the iniquitous Act of 1781, "any house, room or other place which shall be opened or used for public entertainment or amusement or for publicly debating on any subject whatsoever upon any part of the Lord's Day called Sunday, to which persons shall be admitted by payment of money, by tickets sold for money shall be deemed a disorderly house or place." The proprietor of such premises became liable to a fine of £200 for every offence, anyone presiding in such a place was made liable to a fine of £100, while the doorkeeper and even advertiser of such an assembly was rendered liable to a fine of £50. This reactionary measure is still inscribed on the Statute Books of free England, save by the slight amendments made by the Sunday Entertainment Act of 1932. Still, from their inception to the present day, this scandalous Act of 1781 has been consistently broken by the National Secular Society and the National Sunday League in their efforts to brighten a day of gloom.

T. F. PALMER

On Rome's Pardon by Lord Rochester (1647-1680)

If Rome can pardon Sins, as Romans hold,
And if these Pardons can be bought and sold,
If were no Sin, t'adore, and worship Gold.

If they can purchase Pardons with a sum,
For Sins they may commit in time to come,
And for Sins past, 'tis very well for Rome.

At this rate they are happy'st that have most,
They'll purchase Heaven at their own proper cost,
Alas! the Poor! all that are so are lost.

When came this knack, or when did it begin?
What Author have they, or whom brought it in?
Did Christ e'er keep a Custom-house for Sin?

Some subtle Devil, without more ado,
Did certainly this sly invention brew,
To gull 'em of their Souls, and Money too.

(Contributed by DONALD DALE)

Acid Drops

From the opening of the war we have called attention to the use made of the world catastrophe by the Churches. Taking advantage of the social demoralization, and the appeal to the primitive that always accompany war, the churches began with the impudent lying slogan that the war was for the protection of Christian civilization. This was worked as hard as it could be, the King, one assumes on instruction, dutifully repeated it, and even Churchill, whose religion, one fancies, is of a very tepid character, joined in the game. The absurdity of the cry, when we were relying upon millions of Mohammedans, Buddhists, Hindoos, Atheists, and others to carry on the struggle became apparent, except for the army of preachers engaged by the B.B.C. That lie has by now worn very thin.

But in another direction the war has encouraged the religious bodies in this country to go farther and farther with the passing of the moons. Before the war the Churches were content to ask for more support from the State, and mildly to suggest more definite religious teaching in the schools for those desiring it. Now that has developed into a full-throated cry that the schools—particularly the elementary and secondary schools—shall be permeated with definitely Christian teaching. A manifesto just issued, signed by the Archbishops of York, Canterbury, and Wales, demands not merely that there shall be a practical repeal of the Cowper Temple clause, but that the whole of the school life shall be permeated with the Christian religion. This teaching is to be in the hands of those who both believe in Christianity, and show their efficiency as teachers of the subject. The school inspectors are to see that the religious instruction is efficient (of course as the Churches count efficiency) and that "religious knowledge" should count as an optional subject so far as the teacher's efficiency is concerned. (This means that a "plus" in religion will overcome deficiency in other subjects.) The whole atmosphere of the school is to be made unmistakably sectarian.

If this plan does not rouse active resistance on the part of Freethinkers, and those who are seriously concerned with the maintenance of social justice, nothing will. In substance it means handing the nation's schools over to the Churches. It is useless looking to the different political parties to prevent this betrayal of our educational system. The Labour Party will work with an eye on the Nonconformist vote, and others will also place party interests before anything else. The Churches can only be checked in their unscrupulous campaign by the activities of those who count justice and the welfare of the children as higher than party interests, whether that party be religious or otherwise.

There is one final example of the manner in which the war is being exploited by the Churches. In one religious journal after another we come across the claim that "It is for the church to point out the goal, and for the politician to find out the way." In this policy the Archbishop of York is playing a leading part, and he is being supported by many Nonconformist leaders. No greater piece of impudence has ever been uttered. It is the claim of the Roman Church in full. The Churches are to issue orders and the politician is to see that they are carried into practice. If all the blood and tears of the war is to end with placing in supreme power a Church which, to quote Kingdon Clifford, wrecked two civilizations and came near to wrecking a third, we may well ask whether the war is worth-while. We have already had to surrender a deal of our freedom in order to win the war; if the Churches have their way, that freedom will never be restored. It will be the "reign of the saints" again. We shall have destroyed Hitlerism in Germany only to re-establish a form of it in Britain. And we ought never to forget that but for these leaders of religion who placed sectarian interests first we might have had Russia solidly on our side. We have not yet finished payment for the tricks of the Churches and the Christian gang which happened to be in power during a critical period.

We have more than once pointed out that all over the country the clergy are laying plans for a revival of their old power, if it can be managed by hook or by crook. And we may count on it being largely by crook. The large increase of doses of religion that in one form or another is being served out by the B.B.C. is one indication. The adoption by newspapers all over the country of special articles on religion, or one-sided discussions of religion and the war is another. The whole aim is to impress upon the thoughtless and ill-informed that the world is at war because religion has been neglected, etc., etc. Of course, this game will not impose on those who are wide-awake, but the majority is never that. So they become easy prey to those who publicly proclaim themselves as the leaders of God's sheep. Sheep is the right word. Donkeys are apt to be stubborn.

Among the papers that, in spite of the paper shortage, are devoting increased space to religion, is the *Southport Guardian*. A series of articles and letters has been published on religion and the war. These are not quite so brazenly one-sided as articles are in the London press, and we note in two recent issues of the paper named, lengthy and capital letters by Mr. W. H. Blore. Mr. Blore makes his points well, and should do something to counterblast the familiar foolishness set forth in the name of God and religion.

Our readers will have noted the action of the Duke of Bedford, who has declined to continue paying £320 a year to the Vicar of Woburn. One of the reasons given by the Duke is that his own income has decreased. As he only has about a million and a quarter (capital) we can appreciate the reason for his having to be economical. Meanwhile lawyers are busy searching for the original grant of land to the Duke's family. This goes back for centuries.

We shall not be surprised, if it is found, to discover that the granting of the land followed the usual course of having duties attached to it, one of which would certainly be that of providing armed men when required for the use of the crown. But gradually these obligations were either partly or wholly ignored, and the burden fell upon the people, our glorious aristocracy retaining the privileges and doing away with the obligations. When it comes to looting the general public we shall find that this form of plunder is a speciality of our landed families. One of their present functions is to provide us with dud public officials. An illustration of this is the way in which they are shifted from office to office—showing the same blundering in each. But the salary continues just the same.

There seems some sort of a moral attaching to the collapse of the Italian armies in North Africa and Albania. To say that the Italians cannot fight, strikes us as one of the ready-made pieces of nonsense that so many people mistake for thinking. Yet experience should show some, and the capacity for looking all round a problem ought to make it clear to others, that there are very few people who will not fight, given the occasion and the inspiration to do so. If the capacity for fighting were a rare quality of human nature wars would not be as continuous as they are, nor would they spread over as wide an area of the earth as is the case. After all, the readiness to fight is a very common quality of human nature, particularly civilized human nature. So there seems something more in the way in which the Italian armies have collapsed than "The Italians are bad fighters." So were the Chinese called "bad fighters" by the same six-a-penny generalizers, until it stood up against such a military trained people as the Japanese.

Confining ourselves to Italy we may note that for a full generation the Italian people have had created for them what is called, curiously enough, a "mass mind." They have been told what to think, when to think, that all must think in the same way, and respond to promptings with the calculable uniformity of a machine. And that kind of training produces results—in certain circumstances. But the desire to live is strong with all forms of life, including human life, and that desire cannot be made collective, it must remain individual, and

although in warfare the units of an army may be brought to resemble the separate parts of a huge machine, there is a point at which the individuality of each unit expresses itself. And it is at this point that the weakness of the "mass-mind," the Fascist mind, will, we think, show itself.

Men may overcome the desire to live, or to give their lives courageously when they are concerned with the protection of what is finally an individual obsession—love of country, of family, the desire to vindicate a personal right, and so forth. They may think alike, and feel alike, but in these cases the collective feeling is closely related to the individual one. But the monstrosity called the "mass-mind" that has been created makes no great appeal to individual feeling. It leaves no room for a sense of individual importance, and, in a position of great danger, loses its fundamental resourcefulness. Human beings have been trained like sheep, and in moments of crises they are likely to act like sheep.

That is, we think, the moral so far. We are seeing in the Italian collapse the consequence of a generation of training in Fascism. And if there is any truth in what has been said, we may see another illustration of this when Germany's huge armies come face to face with the probability or even the likely possibility of defeat. The Italian Fascist Army has been tested and failed. Will the German Fascist Army show itself to be made of better stuff? Hitherto there has been no test in this direction. We have our doubts. The "mass-mind" that can do well enough while it is able to act like a machine, may betray its weakness when it finds itself in a position of danger. An army composed of such individuals is not fighting for a cause which they individually value. They are not trained to a sense of individual values, and Fascism does not smile at danger. It does not easily smile at anything. At most it grimaces. And although the end of German Fascism will not come as rapidly as that of Italian Fascism, yet we expect to find that its end will not be strikingly different.

Someone writing in the *Western Mail* asks why do not the clergy hold evening classes for religious instruction in Churches? There seems to us two objections to the proposal. First the clergy want the teacher to do their work for them, not to do it themselves. Second, the number of children who came would be relatively small, and would give the lie to the statement that it is parents who want religious instruction for children. The majority do not care whether they have it or not. Parents are just pawns in the clerical game.

The thoroughly Christian laws passed in the days of that pious Catholic, Charles II., are even at this time of day upheld by our most religious L.C.C. It appears that on a Sunday, the well-known comedian, Jack Warner, is not allowed to "backchat" his little "gel," Joan Winters, the Charles II. law not permitting "cross-talk on the stage," according to the *Daily Express*. Romeo and Juliet would not be permitted either if the principals were in private life husband and wife. Even Doris and Elsie Waters are not allowed by the L.C.C. to "back-chat" each other on the stage in London on a Sunday. And the same august body prevents actors using make-up or props on a Sunday. If lunacy could go much farther than this typically Christian law, we should like to know how.

The Bishop of Rochester has declared war to the knife against "Christian Humanism." He declares in a recent article that it has utterly failed and collapsed. It has "emphasized the humanity of Christ and the divinity of human beings"—in fact all the things which "true" Christianity has always opposed. Nothing but a return to the "theology of Redemption" will save the world, that is, the belief in Original Sin, and that the "way of Progress" is "the way of suffering." Suffering, declares the pious Bishop, "establishes the vital principle of human progress." It is refreshing to find a modern bishop defending so many of the tenets of true Christianity with its doctrines of blood, and fear, its hell and devils and angels.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. PEPPER.—Many thanks for new subscribers and your interest in the paper. We have written you on the other matter.

A.C.—We noticed the mistake too late for correction. Lord Caldecote is Lord Chief Justice, not the Lord Chancellor.

H. IRVING (Barnsley) writes: "I think you can't grumble about things being hum-drum since you took over the editorship. The *Freethinker* has had a remarkable career, but I often wonder, if you hadn't happened, whether it could have lived through this and the previous war."

The *Freethinker* survives because it stands for a great cause, and great causes have a habit of attracting to it loyal friends and unselfish men and women. The leader can offer little more than a rallying point. We agree with you as to the rubbishy character of the *News-Chronicle* articles. The greatest enemies of that paper and of Christianity should be pleased at the exhibition.

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

Sugar Plums

In answer to an enquiry concerning slavery in ancient Rome, we recently pointed out in our correspondence column a distinction between ancient and modern slavery. It is a curious and educational fact that Christians—and others—have taken the brutalities and degradation of the slave under Christian rule as examples of the position of the slave in antiquity. It is a typically Christian manoeuvre, a typically Christian trick to take the practical denial of manhood to the slave by Christian communities in America and in some of the British possessions and then deal with Roman and Greek slavery as though the two institutions were identical. In the quotation that follows from Mr. Barrow's authoritative work on *Slavery in the Roman Empire* this assumption is well exposed. It must, of course, not be forgotten that slavery is slavery whether it be mild or ferocious. And the background of slavery is there whatever its nature. But allowing this, the absurdity of identifying the lot of the slave in Rome or Greece with the Christian slave States of modern times is absurd. And, as usual, the Christian found in the Bible and in his religion the sanction for his conduct.

Here, to illustrate what has been said, are some passages from Mr. Barrow's work: it deals with slavery under the Empire: "For the slave almost everything depended on the character of the master, for the protection of the law did not and could not extend to every relationship between slave and free. Within slavery were possible virtue, happiness, culture, wealth. . . . Neither the crushing of individuality nor the refusal of personal growth is necessarily inherent in Roman slavery. It can be condemned only on the ground that it was a gamble in human lives which might attach them, by mere chance often, to a destiny which owing to the limitations of slavery it might not be in their power to shape. . . . The slave was still a slave. Nevertheless it is possible to exaggerate the gulf separating him from the rest of the community. In outward appearance he did not differ from the free man. Neither colour nor clothing revealed his condition; he witnessed the same games as the free man, he shared in the life of the municipal towns, even contributing what he was allowed, and sometimes sharing equally in bequests made to it. . . . Between freedom and the slave there appears to have been little social barrier. . . . We have seen slaves and freedmen working together in factory and office, sitting as fellow members of the same college, and sharing the expense of offering or tomb. The truth is that any real

War Damage Fund

Previously received, £529 19s. 7d.; E. Grueninger, 5s.; W. A. Williams, 2s.; W. M. (3rd donation), 10s.; W. Scarlett, 5s.; H. Irving, 5s.; S. N. Cunliffe, 10s.; C. Mears, 5s.; "A New Reader" (2nd donation), 5s.; A. Harvey, 10s.; S. Gordon Hogg, 5s.; Mrs. C. Bartram, 5s.; S. Miller, £1 1s. Total, £534 7s. 7d.

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.

gulf between slave and freed would have divided families. Marriages between slave and freed were very common, and the relationship between grades was too manifest to be ignored."

A petition from the Churches of Banbury dealing with the opening of cinemas on Sunday, contains the following, "We feel that a further extension will adversely affect the Christian observance of Sunday." But no one is proposing that Christians shall not observe Sunday, there has never been a prosecution for people not going to cinemas; and no one is suggesting that Christians should be made to go to cinemas on Sunday. It is the fact that the Churches, with God Almighty supporting them, cannot compete with perfectly clean amusements on Sunday that is at the root of the trouble. People cannot be forced into Church by law, so the law is asked to prevent their going anywhere else—so far as is possible. And we daresay each one of the Churches subscribing to the rigmarole cited will swear by all that is blue they are waging a war for freedom. It should be said that the statement is usually "for Christian freedom." And that makes a difference. Everyone may do as they please so long as they do as they're told. There is a great deal of that freedom about just now. It flourishes in Germany.

The Bishop of Lewes says that 10 per cent of the captured German airmen called themselves Atheists. That leaves ninety per cent believing in some kind of Theism. Now we should be interested to know how the proportion stands in other countries. But it is good to know that ten per cent of the German airmen have something of which they may be proud.

Mr. Wendell Wilkie has told the American public, after his return from this country that he considers Mr. Winston Churchill the greatest political figure in the world. Mr. Churchill is unquestionably the man of the moment, so far as this country is concerned; whether he is just the man for the moment only, must be decided by what happens after the war, for it is then that the test of real statesmanship will be applied. For our own part we would without hesitation place President Roosevelt as one of the two greatest political figures in the world, and whose career holds promise of being likely to prove the greater of the two in the judgment of history.

The unplesing truth is that apart from these two there are no great political figures in the world to-day that one can discern. There are plenty of serviceable journeyman politicians in this country, but what great outstanding figures are there in the political horizon to-day? And so far as an outsider can judge, the Continent of Europe is in no better state. Wartime with its short, imperious demands brings the demand for a special type of character, but the type of character required for the conduct of a war is not necessarily the kind required for the more testing times of peace, when the demands are of a more permanent and far-seeing character, and the factors at work are of greater complexity. The demands of active warfare are by their very nature of a sharp, imperative, and comparatively simple, character. Peace has to deal with needs that are of a different kind; or if one ought to say that peace requires the conduct of war upon a higher and a more humane level, a level where ideas and ideals take the place of bombing planes and battleships, the test for character and of social worth is the more severe. And for the idealistic, creative work of the great man who is to serve the cause of peace there is required a much higher type of character than our political world has supplied for at least a generation.

Notes for Sunday School Teachers

IN his

Short swallow-flights of song, that dip
Their wings in tears, and skim away.

(In Memoriam)

Tennyson, in replying to—a

Sweet-hearted, you, whose light blue eyes
Are tender over drowning flies,
You tell me, doubt is Devil-born.

informs us that :

There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

Here, the poet allows this short swallow-flight of song to dip its wing in the sea of licensed, lyrical absurdity. He might just as pertinently have written :—

There lives more black in honest white.

That doubt is Devil-born—the statement of the blue-eyed one—is also open to question.

Doubt has even been the boon companion of faith. Tennyson, in his short swallow-flights, couldn't keep doubt out of them, e.g. :—

Yet oft when sundown skirts the moor
An inner trouble I behold,
A spectral doubt which makes me cold,
That I shall be thy mate no more.

A beautiful, finely proportioned, Grecian youth, was, wherever he went, taken for a god until he opened his mouth!

Shakespeare was of opinion that "Silence is only commendable in a neat's tongue dried, and a maid not vendible." While Carlyle thought silence to be the aim and end of wisdom! When a god speaks it dies! Drowned in a sea of doubt.

A little booklet—*Notes for Sunday School Teachers*—picked up recently—inculcates doubt from p. 1 to 123, e.g. : we do not know; it is not known exactly; it is probable; it is supposed; some people say; it is believed; tradition is silent; we are not informed; and many similar phrases.

Otherwise these notes never speak of doubt. Statements are made just as though they were universally accepted as unquestionable truths. And the proof given of their infallibility is that they were received from God by dreams, Urim (Oracle!) and prophets (Hosea ix. 7!) We are further assured that ideas in this booklet "are clothed in the most homely language, and thus rendered suitable for girls!"

Archdeacon Whateley tells us that "Not to deceive is to deceive; that "We must neither lead, nor leave men to mistake falsehood for truth"; and that "He who propagates delusion, and he who connives at it when already existing, both alike tamper with the truth."

To teachers of religion, science, and philosophy, these truths are equally applicable.

The key to the understanding of the Old and New Testament mysteries, be it the famous dream of Joseph about twelve stars; the twelve precious stones in the ephod; or the twelve apostles, is to be found in the Zodiac.

Of the allegorical and astronomical nature of the Bible, even the fathers of the Church seem to have been aware.

For instance, Clement, of Alexandria, admits that : "The bright emeralds upon the ephod signify the Sun and Moon; and the twelve precious stones arranged in four rows describe to us the Zodiac Circle relatively to the four seasons of the year." (Clem. Alex., *Stram.* v.)

Of the mythical nature of the precious stones Josephus says :—

Whether any one wish to refer the twelve stones to the twelve months, or to the number of constellations in the circle which the Greeks call the Zodiac, he will not wander far from the real meaning." (Antiq. Jud. iii.)

The Gospel of Matthew is supposed, somewhere, somewhen, to have been written. Reading between the lines, I found these notes very interesting.

A publican and a spare time tax-gatherer, Matthew, kept, away down in Jer-oo-salem, a pub., in a little back-room of which he permitted the early Christians to meet and, for that privilege, probably, they honoured him with discipleship.

The strange doings of the early Christians may be attributed to a tippie, purveyed by Matthew, called "The Comforter," which (when they got "full of") moved the disciples very pot-ently, inspiring them to unpack their hearts of "langwidge," even before opening time, "which was not fit for cab-men to repeat." And not only does this pot-ent beverage account for the many wild things these fanatics said, but most of the mad things they wrote. (e.g., Mark xvi. 9-20.)

When I was a small boy I remember singing :—

Mattha, Mark, Luke, John,
Haud the cuddie till a' get on, etc.

or :—

Mattha, Mark, Luke, John,
Bless the bed that I lie on, etc.

Indeed all the apostles, more or less, were the subjects of humorous verse. And Christ! was a favourite swear-word among adults, used many times daily, without curtailing their evil doing. (2 Tim ii. 19).

To the writer of this note—the Twelve Apostles—no problem presented itself. He knew about 'em all! How devoutly ignorant religious people can be! Few know the names of the apostles—Simon, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Jude, Simon, Judas Iscariot. For all the information given we got the conclusive chapter and verse, which does not appear to be a miraculous feat.

For over 1,000 years the Church ruled Christendom. And for many centuries it had control of the MSS. of wisdom and history, which it altered or destroyed as it desired.

Eusebius (264-340) tells us (in Book IV. I think) that the great number of sacred books disturbed the Fathers. But after piling them under a table, and praying for a revelation to take place, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John jumped on the corners of the table.

But before jumping Gospels, and jumping frogs were ever heard of, before A.D. 180, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were unknown, and the four Gospels, as we know them, were unheard of.

Luke x. 1, 17, mentions another 70 disciples (or 72), which our notes ignore, evidently for reasons!

Judas, in the Christian scheme, stands on the same level as Christ. He was the greatest of all the apostles. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," said Christ. Judas did more than lay down his physical life, he laid down his moral life. Though his act was necessary, if universal salvation was to be achieved, and tho' it was predestined by God, yet Judas has been allowed to suffer. And how could he betray Christ—the best known man of the time? Disraeli thought that the Christian world should erect a monument to Judas! But justice being done, or honour accorded when it is so long overdue, is as nothing, to the saving of their little Christian souls!

Honesty is a pearl of great price! S. B. Slack, M.A., after trying to make the most of *Early Christianity*, "is of opinion that in all probability" the gospel narratives originated in a sect like that of the Essenes. Even the name Essene has been derived from Jesus. According to this theory the Gospels in their original form were allegorical; in other words, *Christ* is a collective name for the primitive Christians (Matt xxv. 40), just as the name *Israel* in the *Old Testament* is often a collective name for the Israelites (e.g. *Hosea* xi. 1). The Gospels were not intended to be regarded as a narrative of events that actually happened any more than Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or Dante's *Poem*, (see Matt. xiii. 13 —).

GEORGE WALLACE

Manliness

Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men;
As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
Shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves, are clept
All by the name of dogs.

"WHAT is a gentleman?" is a fertile theme for writers. Most essayists have tried their hands at an answer. Summed up, it would appear that just as man has made God in his own image so do literary men conceive a gentleman as someone like unto themselves. The process is natural enough and excusable. It is in fact difficult to avoid. To write oneself down as no gentleman is inconceivable. What can be done in addition, and is done, is to play about with popular conceptions of the term, have their sport, and then exclaim: If this should be a gentleman then, thank the Lord, I am not one.

The expression, *being a man*, presents much the same difficulty. The person who attempts to eliminate his personal equation in the consideration of any theme is rare; what he is pleased to call his opinions are in fact just the outcrop of his personal equation, that which his home surroundings, his early education, his circle of acquaintances, plus, of course, his pre-natal acquirements, have determined. The conclusion that the value of his opinions is thereby marred is indeed arrived at by many—it is so obvious—but like the parson they look this difficulty squarely in the face and pass on. Putting their personal equation into the washtub is, they are quick to realize, somewhat of an arduous job; it entails reflection. It is, as well, an implacable foe to glibness of speech. A lack of readiness in the expression of opinions brings one into danger of being considered stupid, and that has rather serious social and financial implications. So it is easy to come to the conclusion that the correct attitude is to go on expressing what you *feel* to be true and trust this will pass as the outcome of some brain-work. It certainly will not bring you into conflict with many and they whom it doesn't seem to impress aren't in the great majority of instances of much consequence, as far as your smooth passage through life is concerned.

So when the question of what is Being a Man (or Behaving like a Man) is concerned the answer one gets is that a real man is something substantially like themselves. The answer, of course, gets one nowhere, but as it is never framed in such plain words, it may sound all right and lead to many a jolly hour of useless disputation. The primitive person thinks that manliness has a very close connexion with the speed with which you are ready to return, in kind, physical molestation. It is quite impossible to consider oneself a man, in fact, if on receipt of a physical blow you do not at least attempt to return the blow, preferably, by one stronger, heavier and more effective than before. Those who have a pugilistic disposition, backed one must confess with the correct physical resources, can be relied upon never to accept a definition of man that does not include the readiness to bestow blow for blow when the occasion arises.

Those who have not been favoured with physical strength or agility quickly retort: Call you that a Man? They say that on the contrary there is such a thing as *moral* courage which every true man has. To speak up in a filled drawing-room when someone is being criticized unfairly and say so plainly, and give one's reasons, *that* is real courage and *that* is the only kind of person who has a right to be called a Man. This they say and say with emphasis, but it would be dangerous to assume that they possess the belief other than theoretically. The rare man who will do such a thing it will be noticed is precisely the person who is not too articulate as to what really is a man or a gentleman. To him, handsome is as handsome does, and he lets it go at that.

"When I became a man I put away childish things," said Paul. *Man* can be used as a simple term of opposition to *child*, if, at the same time, the foolish assumption is not made that the process of development is an ethical one. But there is no correct definition of man save the biological one. Moral characteristics no more necessarily belong to a man than immoral characteristics. Whoever one is considering one must look upon as did Portia—without necessarily accepting all her terms—"God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man." Whether he shows his prowess by leaping five-barred gates or playing chess; knocking his man out after fifteen rounds, or sticking seaweed in old-maids' albums; reading philosophy or reading *bloods*; a man he is for a' that.

If one wishes to express more by the term than that one must add prefix or suffix. If you mean a good man or a civilized man, it is necessary to use adjectives. Otherwise it will be safe to assume that your idea of a Man is but an expression of your personal preferences, and that the man you prefer is the man who is much, so very much, like yourself. Even his weaknesses will amiably be considered strengths.

And if you are prepared to add the adjective *civilized* in order to set going an agreeable logomachy, remember that the same warning about the personal equation still holds good. For just as progress to the great majority means things going along as they want them to go along, a civilized man means to them the type of man to their own liking. And, if you are such a man, a good woman is the kind of woman who makes you feel comfortable and doesn't feel the necessity of airing her opinions when they are contrary to yours. Womanliness, one feels confident, doesn't show itself that way. Or in fact any way that makes you feel ill at ease. Men and women to you are deserving of choice adjectives only as they tend to make your existence smoother and leave your vanity unimpaired. Why even fifty years ago, when Christian Morality was in its fullest flower, when the Holy Ghost was doing overtime, a *good* woman, a *virtuous* woman, an *honest* woman, a *pure* woman, had to Christian men a sex connotation only, and (surprising enough) they prevailed upon women to accept this significance—or to pretend to accept it.

Once again, in the use of such terms as manliness and womanliness, we find that spirit commonly invoked which is contrary to the very life and spirit of Freethought. Their use is just one more attempt to mould opinion into the generally accepted pattern to pass off as agreed a doubtful proposition. The herd has its rules, it gives its rewards, it exacts penalties. It wishes to turn out according to type, and that type is always claimed to be the best type, the type as like themselves as possible. They decree what a *real* man is, a *real* woman is. It is for the Freethinker to refuse to accept their dicta, as dicta. Social life, if it is to be a worthy thing, means perpetual adjustment to new facts and new ideas. Good men and good women cannot be assessed except by bringing them into relation with social facts. When the best thought decides on a new social alignment conduct will slowly but surely change, and, with that, what constitutes a good man will change. This question will not be decided by a mere spate of personal preferences, paraded as judgments. It will be decided by how well men and women fit into the free society of which they are a part. The number of worthy parts to play will be infinite. The good man and the good woman will have no difficulty in finding his or her niche. Then we can

Distinguish the swift, the slow, the subtle,
The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
According to the gift which bounteous nature
Hath in him closed, whereby he does receive
Particular addition, from the bill
That writes them all alike.

T. H. ELSTON

"Jesus Never Lived" (P)

In a recent paragraph Chapman Cohen stated: "That the Jesus Christ of the New Testament never existed is as plain as can be." This seems a simple statement; but, like many simple-seeming statements, it is really complex. The "Jesus Christ of the New Testament" is a literary creation, not a piece of flesh and blood. That this literary creation indubitably existed, and still exists, as such, cannot be denied by anyone.

It may even be said with plausibility that there exist many Jesus Christs in the New Testament. Even the uncritical reader can see four: the respective Christs of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. More subtle intelligences will decline, probably, to see only one personality in any one of the four Gospels. Also, as a literary creation (or creations) Christ exists, not merely in the printed word, multiplied a million millionfold, but also in the hearts and minds of millions of people. He lives immortally within men as Shakespeare's Hamlet or Dickens' Mr. Pickwick live. That is to say: more vividly, more intensely, and more truly than most of the fellow-human beings we meet and ignore "as trees walking" in our daily lives.

There is, then, as much untruth as truth in the simple statement by Mr. Cohen that I am analysing. But Mr. Cohen is not concerned with Christ as mere literary creation—he would probably concede the living quality of the literary Christ—but as an historical person. For he goes on to say: "It is even difficult to find outside the New Testament adequate evidence to establish the existence of an ordinary human being on whom the character of the miraculously-born and crucified God can be fixed." This gets nearer to the root of the question that vexes the ordinary man's mind. "Did any-kind-of-Jesus-Christ ever exist, as a living being, in fact?"

That question is not answered by the difficulty of finding evidence outside the New Testament. If the Jewish historian, Josephus, had devoted chapters to Jesus Christ instead of one short, and it may be, spurious, reference, would that matter? Imaginary gods like Apollo, and heroes like Hercules, are talked of in many books—but they are still myths or half-myths. If the New Testament (or any other record) furnishes adequate evidence what need have we of further evidence?

But there were, and to some extent there are, other records. We must not forget the existence of Apocryphal gospels such as the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Protevangel of James, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of the Twelve, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Judas Iscariot, and all the Gnostic gospels, some of which are now lost but referred, to in early Patristic literature. There is a reference to a Jesus in the Talmud. St. Luke also speaks of "many" authors of gospels in his day. Who, or what, caused this spate of literary activity upon one story and one character in illiterate days?

Something or someone, or both. That, at least, must be true. These evangelistic folk were not artificial concoctors sitting down to make a blend of primitive religion into a new one. Not so is a gospel made. The fact that many of the accretions fastened on to the story derived from the vegetation-god-myth or are paralleled in all religions, as *The Golden Bough* illustrates, is really beside the point.

There must have been, I think, an individual around whom love in life and legends after death gathered, a Jesus-Christ-of-a-Sort. No doubt he was not quite, in life and in fact, the Wonder Worker and Miracle-Monger of the New Testament, the Still of Storms, the Feeder of Thousands, the Conqueror of Devils, the Deliverer from Sickness and Death. But

that there was a Man, and a very remarkable man, uttering what struck his period and locality as marvellous new teaching (even though not really new), is sufficiently likely to be regarded as certain.

The alternative is that some literary genius, anterior to Mark, the earliest gospel-writer (about 67-70 A.D., I understand) created an amazing character, a religious anarchist and revolutionary, out of his own mind or out of the "Q" lost script or some other wretched literary rubbish, as Shakespeare created Hamlet out of similar material. Certainly a Mark could not create Him out of his own brain. Assume an anterior literary genius to Mark! Such a genius would not have botched the job of delineating Jesus as the Four Evangelists obviously do.

The Jesus of the New Testament certainly lives as vividly as any literary character can live, in spite of the incompetence of the Four Propagandists as biographers. He fascinates even modern sophisticated readers prejudiced against his Divine claims, or his miracles, or his doctrines of rewards and punishments, and all the supernatural paraphernalia he is made to carry about with him. Even the Church cannot entirely destroy his personality or obscure his ferocious anti-clerical bias. But this Christ at the back of the Gospels; this Christ the Freethinker; this master of parable and paradox; this repudiator of family ties and the binders of the law; this all-too-human emotional creature who could be "angry," "greatly amazed," "grieved," "sore troubled," "indignant," "tired," who denied that he was "good," who announced a new and apparently ridiculous standard of values, could hardly have been invented by any writer. And such a strange, often contradictory, character is the last Head of a Church the scheming brain of a Church-animal would invent.

There is nothing inherently improbable—quite the reverse—in a sensitive imaginative Jewish boy, told by his mother that he was the Son not of Joseph but of God (and therefore different), brooding upon such an obsession until, fired by the eccentric example of a John the Baptist, he adopts the career of a wandering teacher and preacher. He might well do much good and heal by faith (as modern doctors and medicine can), and so lay the foundation for preposterous miracle-stories. Devoted to religious meditation all his life, he might well perceive and enunciate original truth. Such a one would arouse the implacable hostility of the Established Religionists of his day, and so the final tragedy might be inevitable. Of course if he neglected to raise persons from the dead, or to raise himself, his zealous followers would imagine that for him. For that, like virgin-births and miracles, was "common form," so to speak, for religious great ones in early times.

I see no reason to doubt the existence of a Jesus Christ—in fact it seems to me reasonably probable, like the existence of Homer. The mere fact that lies and legends, similar to those of other religions or mythologies, gathered round the figure of the dead Jesus, seems to me to be evidence for, rather than against, his existence. Lies and legends do not gather round nobodies or non-entities or non-existences. It is a living hero of some sort who turns a Hercules, and a living Jesus of some sort who turns into a Christ. There is a good evidence for a Jesus Christ's existence as that of anyone else of his environment, even highly-celebrated and highly-placed persons such as Tiberius Cæsar or Pontius Pilate or King Herod.

Anyhow, I do not see how the non-existence of Jesus Christ, or any other literary-historical character, is to be proved. For how does one prove the non-existence of a character in literature? By saying his biographers tell lies and contradict each other? But that is—biography! Besides, Jesus exists in men's consciousness to-day if he never existed in flesh and

blood; and that present-day existence is what matters.

Important as the question of Christ's past existence may seem, or even may be, it is not really the most important. The most important question is whether, or to what extent, his teaching (or the teaching attributed to him) is valid as regulating the lives of men and nations on this earth. No Church and no nation ever faces that uncomfortable question. Nor have I ever met an individual in this largely "Christian" world who faced it either. For the pure Christ-business of "resist not evil," and give up all, including your home, kindred, and even your eyes and limbs, for the sake of an hundredfold hereafter or of being perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect, frightens everybody. No wonder the Church denies her Master and waters down his doctrine into prayers and collections on Sundays. Shall a respectable Anglican clergyman or Roman priest, or Nonconformist "minister" be reduced to only a walking-stick and pair of shoes, as Christ reduced his Apostles to a staff and sandals? That is the kind of Apostolic succession which no modern Christian cleric will tamely accept. Nor would their families or bank-managers wish it, I feel sure. Any clear-thinking man must realize how necessary it has been for Christianity to improve upon "the Jesus Christ of the New Testament"—for which intolerably exacting person no one in England (not even Chapman Cohen) seems to have any real use.

C. G. L. DU CANN

Papist "Marriage"

The papist church has no authority in the matter of marriage. This requires stating very plainly, because the reckless way papists say that the papist church permits this or forbids that is intended to give, and often does give, the impression that the papist church is really entitled to permit or forbid. It is not. It has no more authority than any other religious sect—which is nil. The most it or any other sect could say would be that this or that is or is not according to its doctrines or theology, and that any member acting contrary would be dismissed from the sect.

In the case of marriage the entire legal authority is with the State. Legitimate marriage is absolutely a civil contract. The legal status of husband and wife, of being a legitimate child, is only conferred by the State. A priest merely as priest cannot "marry" a couple. He can only do it legally when acting as a servant of the State and under conditions laid down by the State. If he fails to perform it according to the legal conditions the couple would not be legally married, legal husband, legal wife, and if they went and had children, the children would be illegitimate. Let this also be further understood; when priests or church set out and invade the State's sphere, when they impudently say that they make marriages, they are TRAITORS trying to assume authority which is part of the State's sovereignty. Of course this is actually what Papist priests are doing all the time, not only as regards marriage but in everything else. A State within the State, then a State above the State—that is the game all the time. This question of marriage is only part of a larger conspiracy.

The papist church has a boast that it is *semper eadem*, i.e., always the same. Actually the only thing in which the church has been *semper eadem* is viciousness. The dupes think that the large-sounding claim means that the papist church has always stood for the same doctrines, that what it teaches and practises now is exactly like what it taught and practised 1000 years ago. To anybody who knows, this is ludicrous. On most subjects the papist church has boxed the compass quite a lot, and in nothing more than "marriage."

Its first stage in regard to marriage may be called that of "indifference." We have come across no evidence of any religious marriage ceremony amongst the early Christians—not even as supplementary to the civil contract. Early Christians had to accept civil legal matters as they found them. Jesus himself did not attempt to alter or even suggest alterations in the making of marriages. He did not spend his time making up elaborate forms and ceremonies. With him it was the "spirit" that was important, not the "letter" or "form" or "place." Precisely because of this, it is ludicrous talking about Jesus making priests an essential part of a marriage ceremony. To all priests the "letter," etc., is more important than the "spirit" (and to none more than papist priests). Jesus was particularly condemnatory of priests for this very reason.

Neither Jesus nor his early followers attempted any interference with marriage arrangements. In one direction their silence and non-interference are, when one thinks of it, rather extraordinary, and that is as regards polygamy. Nowhere in the New Testament is polygamy denounced and condemned and, of course, in the Old Testament it was taken for granted. The Jewish Jehovah was, amongst other things, a god of fertility and fruitfulness. Marriage, and plenty of it, was an essential part of his cult. The absence of any condemnation of polygamy in the New Testament has been taken as a tacit acknowledgement that it was at least not unlawful, though perhaps not expedient at any rate as a general thing. One Pope was apparently ready to offer Henry VIII. the expedient of a second lawful wife whilst his first was living, and Luther told a German Prince (who was needing an heir and had a barren wife—practically Henry VIII.'s case) that he could find no law against it in the Bible, but recommended as much secrecy as possible. So we think that this absence of either tacit approval or condemnation justifies us in calling this period as the phase of "indifference." But the phase passed into another of a very different kind. Instead of "marriage and plenty of it," a reverse view came to be held, which we will call the "stigma" phase. It went to lunatic lengths. There can be no doubt that its chief exponents were pathological cases. The "smart set" of the Roman Empire went to an extreme of sensualism and its example was largely followed. The pious people got the idea that "bodily lusts" were about the most evil things there were, and that bodily pleasures were extraordinarily sinful. But these pious fanatics did not only refrain from "lustful" sinning, they started a positive mortification of the body. They kept it physically filthy (quite literally lousy) and scourged it and generally gave it a bad time. Under this cult virginity was looked on as an essential element of holiness, or, of course (if the reformation started late in life) absolute resignation of sexual life.

C. BOYD FREEMAN

(To be concluded)

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