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EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Natural and Supernatural

LAST week my notes were mainly concerned with an exposure of the attempt to outflank the devastating attack made by Frazer's researches on the origin of religion by the policy of drawing a line between superstition and religion. The distinction is a common one, but quite invalid. A standard (modern) definition of "superstition" is "irrational fear of the supernatural." There is no general agreement as to what is meant by "religion," but a current authoritative definition gives it as "reverence for the gods; fear of God." It will be noticed that the element of fear is never far from religious worship. These two definitions are clearly indicative of two phases of the same thing; for whatever kind of a god people believe in, and to whatever historic period the word applies, there is a very obvious recognition that religion and superstition are fundamentally one. Both are concerned with a belief in the supernatural: with gods; and whether these gods are white, black, brown or yellow, whether they are good gods or bad ones, makes no difference to a scientific inquiry.

It is no fault of the gods that their numbers have diminished, the scope of their activities very seriously restricted and their characters refashioned. These changes are due to the reaction of man to his gods; and at every change the gods reflect the changes in human nature itself. Frazer's division of supernaturalism into two stages—magic, which is displaced by religion—I do not think will stand. The first implies a degree of intellectuality in primitive thinking which I do not think exists. Moreover, a very slight study of the history of religion shows that religion and magic have always existed side by side. And there are elements of magic in religion right through human history. Continuous frustration of effort may have taught man to depend less upon compulsive magic and more upon religious petition and worship; but this does not appear to me to offer any fundamental distinction between the two. Whether man coerces by magic the "spirits" which he believes exist or persuades them to his aid by prayer and petition does not indicate a vital difference. Under disguised forms, and open ones, there is not a religion in existence that does not rest on a basis of magic. The Roman Church still holds that the mumbling of a religious formula converts ordinary bread and wine into the body and blood of a god. The whole of Christendom believes that through prayer their God can effect the cure of disease, give an army success in battle, preserve a king's life and so forth. What are these but forms of magic, as mysterious and as puzzling as would be the real production of a rabbit from a hat by a music hall conjuror! Remove this magical aspect of religion and the life of every god in the world would fade out of existence. Science is, and always has been, deicidal in its operations. The description of Hobbes, "Religion, superstition allowed; superstition, religion not allowed," is in complete conformity with the facts.

That Frazer recognised his colossal work as being a history of the origin of religion there can be no doubt to an unprejudiced reader. Dividing that history into two parts, one concerned with "magic" the other with "religion," does not affect what has been said, since Frazer believed that religion grew out of magic—and it grew out of magic not because man grew more religious, but because man discovered that his magic was not dependable. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it did not. It was this feeling of frustration that led man to turn to petition, prayer and worship; yet this was not to dismiss magic, but, as we have already said, to work magic through and by the will of gods. The priesthoods of the world must keep to this view under pain of extinction. For a world to be described by science, by verifiable experience, and to be utilised by human effort, is to inaugurate an era of Atheism.

When the "Golden Bough" was first published it was with the sub-title of "A Study of Magic and Religion." This was in 1890. "Folk-lore in the Old Testament" was published in 1918 and it bore the sub-title, "Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law." The difference is important. The mask, if not off, was at least lifted. The study of religion—the scientific study of religion—is the story of a series of beliefs which had their origin in the ignorance of primitive humanity, with such subsequent modifications that a more scientific understanding of man and the world made necessary.

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A Plea for Superstition

In a series of lectures, published under the title of "Psyche's Task" (1909), Frazer undertook the task of saying what could be said in favour of the belief in gods. Superstition (religion) he admits has "sacrificed countless lives, wasted untold treasures, embroiled nations, severed friends, parted husbands and wives, parents and children, putting swords—and worse than swords—between them; it has filled gaols and madhouses with its innocent or deluded victims; it has broken many hearts, embittered the whole of many a life, and, not content with persecuting the living, it has pursued the dead into the grave and beyond it, gloating over the horrors which its foul imagination has conjured up to appal and torture the survivors. It has done all this and more."

In spite of this terrific, yet in view of all the facts, modest charge against the influence of religion in its undiluted form, Frazer sets out to see what could be said in favour of the criminal who has been brought to the bar before humanity for judgment; and in "Psyche's Task" he pleads, in extenuation of the evils described, the beneficial influence on social life of the belief in gods. His defence—afterwards practically withdrawn—is that the fear of the anger of the gods has, in the course of social evolution, strengthened moral teaching and practice, and without it any other coercive force might have failed to moralise humanity.

Frazer is not the only one to put forth this plea for religion. Under the guise of philosophy, and taking advantage of the social demoralisation attendant upon a state of war, the Archbishop of York and the Rev. J. S. Whale, of Cambridge, have both published

pamphlets arguing that the only guarantee of morality is religion. If that were true, then the need for the maintenance of religion after so lengthy a rule is not very complimentary to its educational power.

But, before Frazer, Walter Bagehot had argued in his "Physics and Politics" that one of the functions of early religion, with its coarse threats and coarse bribes, must have coerced mankind into submitting to what he called the "social yoke." It was religion, he said, that broke man into the social yoke. Without this, society might not have endured.

There is no excuse for the Archbishop of York and Professor Whale writing as they did at this time of day. One feels compelled to challenge either their intelligence or their straightforwardness. And in Frazer's case it may well be argued that he was just trying what could be said on behalf of the prisoner at the bar. But Bagehot was an economist, and he wrote before the philosophy of evolution had sunk as deeply into the human mind as is the case to-day. But his suggestion is not in accord with the facts. Whatever animal group was the direct forerunner of man, the one clear thing is that it was a gregarious one; and for that reason man was, so to speak, social before he was human, and the law of the herd was obeyed more strictly than it was after he had placed a wide gap between himself and his ancestors. He required no breaking in to the social yoke, but, as Bagehot himself insisted man did require the courage and determination to break the yoke that prevented his defying custom and establishing new forms of living. He needed a stronger individuality, a more independent judgment if society was to develop; and, as Bagehot pointed out, the prevention of this came from his fear of the gods, of the supernatural that his own misunderstanding of nature had created. Bagehot put it—and I agree with him—that there were two steps necessary to early human progress. The first was to be broken into the social yoke; the second was to break that yoke and open the way to social experiment. That last is still man's greatest need to-day. To again quote Bagehot, the greatest pain from which humanity suffers is the pain of a new idea. And to-day, as in the past, there is no obstacle as powerful as religion to new ideas or to new forms of social life. The gods are always in the way. The Tower of Babel was destroyed lest man became as gods.

These notes are developing into a series of side issues, but they are necessary ones and I do not apologise for them. For the whole truth here is that as the principle of natural selection operates on group life as well as on individuals, so the survival of the fittest works in the direction of eliminating societies that take too many liberties with conditions necessary to its continued existence. A society, for example, that developed an appetite for some poisonous article as a daily diet could not hand on that appetite to many generations. Consciously or unconsciously — mostly the latter—a society must observe life-preserving habits: otherwise it disappears.

That Frazer recognised this is plain from his saying that "If it can be proved that in certain races, and at certain times, . . . institutions have been based partly on superstition, *it by no means follows that even among these races they have never been based on anything else. On the contrary . . . there is a strong presumption that they rest on something much more solid than superstition.*" (The italics are mine.) And the theme of his small book, "Psyche's Task," in which he attempts a defence of superstition by acting as counsel for the prisoner—superstition—ends with his saying that he has little hope of an acquittal.

That he did not believe moral conduct, either in the primitive form of social conduct or in its latest manifestation, really depended on religion may be seen by the following, near the end of his book. It is a passage in which he practically informs the court that the prisoner at the bar has no defence: he can only hope for mercy. He says deliberately that the religious claims for creating and preserving morality "are certainly false. You cannot reconstruct the past by importing into one age the ideas of another, by interpreting the earliest by the latest products of mental evolution. . . . Custom often outlives the motive which originated it. If only an institution is good in practice it will stand firm after its old theoretical basis has been shattered; a new and more solid, because a truer, foundation will be discovered for it to rest on. More and more, as time goes on, morality shifts its basis from the sands of superstition to the rock of reason; from the imaginary to the real; from the supernatural to the natural. . . . The State has not ceased to protect the lives of its peaceful citizens because the faith in ghosts is shaken. It has found a better reason than old wives' fables for guarding with the flaming sword of justice the approach to the tree of life."

No one has ever put the case for an Atheistic morality in more eloquent and fundamentally more complete form than this. There is little effort to hide the contempt for the religious argument. And in the very last paragraph of "Psyche's Task" he confesses that he has been merely playing the part of a special pleader. He hopes that what he has said "might be urged in mitigation of the sentence which will be passed on the hoary-headed offender when he stands at the judgment bar. Yet the sentence—do not doubt it—is death. But it will not be executed in our time. There will be a long, long reprieve. . . ." I have spoken in defence of this power of darkness.

Magic and fear of the supernatural are, in Frazer's judgment, the foundation of religion. It is on these two that he is convinced the court of humanity will one day pass a sentence of death.

Next week I will deal with Frazer's view of the existence of God.

CHAPMAN COHEN

LONDON IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

WITH the State establishment of feudalism in Norman days, the average English town became for most practical purposes part of the baronial fief. With a larger population than the village possessed, the borough steadily evolved greater solidarity and influence. As they waxed in strength, the burghers became better able to promote and develop trade and industry; while their numerical superiority enabled them to bargain on a business scale. Thus, their opulence markedly differentiated them from the peasant confined to the soil, while their increasing prosperity enabled the citizens to pay heavier dues to their feudal superiors in currency or in kind; also, for value received, the lords became increasingly inclined to grant more and more extended liberties to the urban population. This development covered centuries and was still far from complete in Provincial centres in the reigns of Edward III. and Richard II.; but by this time the system was firmly established in London.

The ascendancy of the Metropolis over Bristol and other important cities was of long standing. Its preeminence dates back to Saxon and Danish days; while later, under the Norman, Henry I., London obtained the right to elect its own sheriff and justiciar. Dr. Coulton points out in his splendid historical work "Chaucer and his England" (Methuen; 4th Edition 1927) that "Mr. Loftie, whose 'London,' in the 'Historic Towns' series, gives so clear a view of its political development, shows us the city holding out against Canute long after the rest of the kingdom had been conquered; and making even after Hastings such terms with the Conqueror as secured to the citizens their traditional liberties." Even then, London's industry and commerce were considerable; while many foreign merchants were settled on Thames-side. The stafelhof (the steelyard) was soon established by Teutonic traders and commercial undertakings embraced both the Rhine and Zuyder Zee.

The power of London was plainly evidenced when Matilda, the mother of Henry II., suppressed their privileges: for the affronted citizens gave sustained

assistance to her rival, King Stephen, who ultimately secured the crown. By the time of Edward III. London ranked as one of the leading commercial centres of Europe. It completely eclipsed the French marts, and we are assured that "French sovereigns failed to establish any uniform system of weights and measures and were themselves responsible for constant tampering with the coinage; they discouraged the Lombards, interfered with the great fairs, placed heavy duties on all goods to be bought or sold, and at one time even formally forbade 'all trade with Flanders, Genoa, Italy and Provence.'"

Edward I. encouraged commerce, but his policy varied. His grandson, the third Edward, however, pursued a consistent policy. Hallam inclined to regard him as the real initiator of our island's commercial supremacy. Chaucer and his father were both sent by this ruler to negotiate trade treaties with Continental houses; but although foreign merchants were officially encouraged to settle and trade in England they were regarded with suspicion and even treated with open hostility by the people. The Londoners complained that the King granted alien traders unfair privileges when he "absolved them from their share of the city's taxes in consideration of the tribute they paid directly to him."

Hostility grew into hatred and a terrible massacre of the Flemings occurred during the peasants' revolt of 1381. The Hanse merchants would have shared their fate had they not entrenched themselves within the defences of their steelyard. But the Lombards proved the most persistently unpopular. These Italian traders, now that the Jews had been banished, had become the chief financiers of commerce. To the people they appeared as sinister usurers who sinned against man and God. In medieval times, the term "usury" included banking and other monetary operations indispensable to successful commercial undertakings. Probably, a fair sprinkling of the "chosen people" had returned to England disguised as Lombards. The religious prejudices of the populace intensified the horror commonly entertained towards lending money at interest, even for the most praiseworthy purposes. As Dr. Coulton notes, "Usury, though very familiar to the Papal Court, was fiercely condemned by the Canon Law, which would have rendered all commerce impossible on a large scale but for the ingrained inconsistency of human nature. 'He who taketh usury goeth to hell, and he who taketh none liveth on the verge of beggary'—so wrote an Italian contemporary of Chaucer. But there was always here and there a bolder sinner who frankly accepted his chance of damnation and would point to his big belly and fat cheeks with a scoffing 'See how the priest's curses shrivel me up!' Preachers might indeed urge that if the eyes of such an one had been opened he would have seen how 'God had in fact fattened him for everlasting death, like a pig fed up for slaughter.'"

Still, for one open sinner hundreds covertly compounded with the clergy for their breach of the Canon Law; while there also existed other means of evasion. Money-changers' bodies were at one time callously cast into unhallowed graves; but as the years advanced wealthy usurers were solemnly buried near the High Altar of the church. Also, the friars themselves soon became the eager instruments of evasion and readily granted Absolution to those willing to pay. Dr. Coulton recalls the fact that "Lady Meed, in 'Piers Plowman' (the incarnation of illicit gain), had scarcely come to London when—

> Then came there a confessor, coped as a friar. . . .
> Then he absolved her soon, and sither he said,
> 'We have a window a-working, will cost us full high;
> Wouldst thou glaze that gable, and grave therein thy name,
> Sure should thy soul be heaven to have.'"

The trickery the mercantile community was driven to adopt so as to circumvent the Canon Law was highly conducive to the increase of knavery in social life generally. Gower, Chaucer's contemporary, pitilessly denounced the Lombards' avarice. Inspired by patriotic passion, he probably exaggerated the evils he assailed. These strangers, he complains, dwell in their adopted country and are as warmly welcomed as if they were natives of our island. Yet their main ambition is to rob us of our precious metals. Gower is cited as saying: "To-day I see such Lombards come as menials in mean attire; but before the year is past, by dint of deceit and intrigue, they dress more nobly than the burgesses of our City. . . . It is a great shame that our Lords, who ought to keep our laws, should treat our merchants as serfs and quietly free the hands of strange folks to rob us." In this period, speculative dealings on credit were greatly enhanced, and both Gower and Chaucer assert that the commercial speculators usually paraded an outward and visible sign of opulence in order to conceal a truly precarious monetary standing.

Essential as it is to the success of industry and commerce, extensive transactions on credit, then as now, led at times to financial disaster. As Dr. Coulton reminds us, "Edward III. set here a royal example by failing for a million florins, or more than £4,000,000 of modern money, and thus ruining two of the greatest European banking firms, the Bardi and Peruzzi, of Florence." Yet, the English king soon found other financiers; while the foundations of modern capitalism were firmly laid in the trading world in Western Europe as early as the 14th century.

From this time onwards the number of civic functionaries multiplied, as surviving documents testify. Vexatious by-laws to control the citizens' lives rendered existence almost intolerable when they were really exercised; but it is plainly evident that the City authorities themselves frequently ignored their own newly instituted by-laws. Even when fines were imposed they were not always collected, for they were frequently reduced or remitted. Notorious transgressors were sometimes severely punished. Still, while forestalling in the market was in theory one of the most flagrant offences, it was constantly conducted surreptitiously by the leading dealers of the town.

Dr. Coulton is apparently justified in concluding from his patient and impartial study of the documents concerning London life in the Plantagenet period that "The real history of Medieval London remains to be written; it will be a story of strange contrasts, gold and brass and iron and clay. But there was a greatness in the very disquiet and inconsistency of the city; some ideals were already fermenting there which, realised only after centuries of conflict, have made modern England what we are proud to see her; and other ideals of which we, like our forefathers, can only say that we trust in their future realisation."

T. F. PALMER

FREE WILLIAM

"THERE ain't much in this village, sir, to interest a newspaper man like yourself. I don't think there's much in Dickory Heath that the readers of your paper, or any paper, would care to read about. There was a lad once, the son of our blacksmith, who played football so well that he was snapped up by Preston Villa and played in a Cup Final at the Palace. But that's about all. We've got a cricket team that ain't bad as things go, but bless your soul, they ain't wonders. In fact, there ain't nothin', I'm sure, to interest a gentleman like you—(Mornin', William.) —Umph! Unless, of course. . . ."

"Unless, of course?"

"Well, it was the sight of William Wryneck that set me thinkin'. He's just turned into 'The Case Is Altered,' I notice. I know it's a fact that there are some who get excited quite a piece about William. Not that I'm one of them. But it's a plain fact that there's some as does. There was a gentleman staying with Parson two years ago who couldn't keep out of William's company. William struck him all of a heap. And Parson's friend was no fool. But what he could see—or anyone could see, for that matter—in William, beats me holler. To me he's just a plain lunatic. And that's what most of us thinks in these parts. But there's a few strangers who think different, to

speak fair. You might have a crack with him. Which room of the pub will he be in? Nay, sir, I couldn't tell you that. It's just the trouble, so to speak." With which cryptic remark he left me; but I remembered afterwards what he had said. For it was, right enough, the trouble, so to speak.

I found William Wryneck in the Snug. Luckily he was alone and no formal introduction process was necessary. "Beer good?" I inquired casually. "There's all kinds of beer in this 'ere pub," came the reply. "Swipes, filth, fair-to-middlin', excellent." "Well, what's excellent?" "The **bitter's** excellent; it's always top-hole here."

Point one established. "Well, do you mind joining me in a drink? Good! Two bitters, please. What's that you say—a **mild**? Oh—you there, waiter—make it one bitter, one mild; my friend has changed his mind. Oh, of course, of course, every man can change his mind. I know you never said a bitter. It was only because—oh, don't let's bother.

"Well, as you press me. I was surprised at your refusal to drink the best tipple the house supplies."

"Well, sir, I thank you for the drink. Here's your very good health. But I'm a free individual, blessed with the power of choice, and I don't really see why I should pay any attention to the dictates of my palate. That's all there's really to it. I don't intend to be led by the nose by my palate, in a manner o' speakin'. It's a kind of point of honour with me, as the saying goes.

"Ah, yes sir, that happens at times. I often have, and enjoy, a bitter. All I'm on the watch for is to see that my palate doesn't become my dictator. William Wryneck has to feel that he is always firmly in the saddle, you understand."

I nodded assent, and began to share the feelings that I had been told had been possessed by the friend of the parson. This man certainly was not quite mad. I encouraged him to proceed.

"There's all kinds of drinks, sir, and all except the teetotal kind I don't mind drinkin'; windy, fizzy drinks I abominate. But if I were always just to choose a drink because that was the drink I felt inclined for, that would mean that I, William Wryneck [the emphasis he gave to Wryneck proved that he either was not, or was, ashamed of his name] am a poor weak creature entirely at the mercy of my feelin's. I think, sir, a gentleman like you, a man of education, will see my point even if you don't agree with it."

I gave another nod and relieved my feelings by relieving my thirst.

He went on. "There's all kinds of pride in this world, sir, you'll admit. **My** pride, in a way, is fixed on this question of free will. As I see it, if I don't exercise it firmly and often, I should be right down ashamed of myself. I should flop, and in place of William Wryneck, I should be plain Thomas Smith, Robert White—or any such small fry. Oh, believe me, sir, it is necessary for every person born on this earth to have a source of pride, something to give him real satisfaction, something that enables him to throw his chest back and speak out strongly and clearly. I have found that source of personal satisfaction in proving that I am a MAN—capable of exercising choice in ways that need manliness, by choosing, in fact, the path which is far from being the easy one at times, by showing that I have a personality, an ego, that can triumph over the obstacles to self-expression which we all experience and will continue to experience as long as this muddy vesture of decay doth hedge us in. You look surprised, sir."

"Well, as a matter of fact, your mode of expression has undergone such a change from when we started . . . I can hardly account for it."

"**Choice,** sir. Simple, undiluted power of will. I can talk both ways quite easily, and other ways as well—just as I choose. Often, as now, I change gears when speaking to the same person. And it would be a big mistake, sir, if you were to conclude from what I say, that I have simply written the word WHIM on the lintel of my doorway and am guided by sheer caprice. I am guided by nobody or nothing. I have even regular habits. For I am a hide-bound Conservative of the kind that is called Die Hard. Yet what paper have I taken in regularly for the past 28 years? The "Daily News"! And the only time I have appeared in a police court was for insulting my newsagent because of the one morning during that period he had failed to shove my paper through the letter-box. And I have attended every cricket match of Dickory Heath Cricket Club—home and away—for its term of existence—23 years. (There's a match this afternoon, by the way, sir, well worth seeing.) So you will see that my rejoicing in the principle of Choice is no mere egotistical delight in contrariness, the deification of whim. It simply stands for the thing in Man which differentiates him from the lower animals. I can see you understand.

"And now, sir, we'll have another drink and then I'll be going. I've just made up my mind this fine Saturday afternoon to catch the bus to Clipping Fungus and see my brother and his wife and kids. The cricket match? That can wait, sir. Lots and lots of cricket matches! Bless your heart, sir, it's been a real pleasure having a chat with a real gent like you, sir. Perhaps on another occasion. Quick, George—I want a **lemonade.** And this gentleman? What's yours, sir, if you'll do me the honour of having one with me? Give it a name, if you please, sir."

"Thank you, Free William. I think I'll have one. Fill up a schooner, waiter, with a baby Guinness, a small rum, and the rest milk. I think you've made a man of me, William."

T. H. ELSTOB

THE SELFISH CREED

A LANCASHIRE town had been very heavily bombed for several nights in succession, and casualties were high. On the following Sunday, however, many Christian survivors went to the "blitzed" churches and gave thanks to God for their deliverance. This was proudly announced in the newspapers as though it was a fine example for the rest of the country to follow.

Many people in other parts of Britain have similarly suffered, and unfortunately many others are likely to be victims in the near future. If so, let us hope that the subsequent thanksgiving is not widespread. It would be difficult to imagine a more illogical position than that of these Christians, but the point to be stressed here is not the ridiculousness, but the selfishness of it. Just think for a moment: those who escaped death or injury are thanking their God for bringing them or their near ones through a terrible ordeal in which thousands lost their lives and thousands more were injured! Whether there were any husbands who had lost their wives, parents who had lost children or vice versa, taking part in the service, was not stated.

Christians may argue that the people did "right" by attending and taking part in the ceremony. Certainly they did "right"—**by their religion,** as I hope to show here, but no open-minded person will deny that they acted contrary to the code of decent human behaviour.

Christianity, however, is at rock bottom a selfish religion. This selfishness can be noted in many places and is found among the Commandments—the fifth, where one is commanded to "honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long," etc. Nothing could be more selfish than that. Fancy honouring one's parents for personal gain! It is a terrible insult to both good parents and loving children. Yet this is quite mild compared with some texts where selfishness has been carried to the point of intolerance and sheer hatred.

Why is Christianity so selfish a religion? Christianity sprang originally from Judaism, and it is in the old Jewish faith that the solution to the query will be found.

The followers of the god, Jahveh, were originally a small, warlike tribe, essentially nationalistic (if they may be termed a nation), jealous and intolerant. Their tribal deity, quite naturally, was nothing more nor less than a reflection of his worshippers—as, indeed, are all gods. Referring to the Commandments again, we find in the second that "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." Nothing truer was ever written or spoken of this demiurge.

The Old Testament, which relates the actions of these nomadic worshippers of Jahveh, tells for the most part of their battles, disasters and brutal revenges. To-day, Jahveh

is still with us as the god of the Holy Bible. His record, like that of the savage people over whom he was master, is infamous. Typical examples of the excessive intolerance of this now Christian god and his chosen ones can be found in Ex. xxii. 20, where God kills men for not worshipping him, and 1 Kings xviii. 40, where Elijah slays 450 priests for differing with him in religion.

Fortunately, the terrific massacres of the Old Testament are probably to a great extent fictitious—some definitely so. There are, however, many passages in the Bible which have been used as a pretext for slaughter in much later times. One of them in particular cannot be passed over without mention. It is, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," which was the direct cause of the murder of some 300,000 persons. For centuries witches were burnt in almost every town in Europe, sometimes to the extent of a hundred in a day.

It would be difficult to find a worse text even in the Bible than Ex. xxii. 18, unless it be one of the several verses damning unbelievers. In this connection it must not be forgotten that Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism, supported the burning of witches, saying: "I should have no compassion on these witches: I would burn them all," while in 1768 John Wesley wrote, "Giving up witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible."

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible Jesus was almost as intolerant as Jahveh himself. This can be easily seen from just a cursory examination of the gospels. He carried out to the full the teachings of the Old Testament, and if Christian clergymen preach from now till doomsday, they can never make a perfect moral teacher out of the one who said: "But those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them bring hither and slay them before me" and "he that believeth not shall be damned."

The intolerance of the Father and of the Son can, therefore, I think, be safely established, while the Pauline epistles are equally bad. In fact, the fundamental doctrine underlying Christianity that it alone is the way to salvation and that all who are outside the creed will suffer eternal damnation, is the most horrible teaching the world has ever known. Decent, sensible human beings would prefer to take the chance of damnation.

Apart from this, however, let us think of the selfish attitude of the early Christians who believed that the death of another individual would eradicate their own sins. Byron remarked that the basis of their religion was injustice, but the confounded effrontery of the first teachers of it is almost beyond the comprehension of normal people.

The Jews, then, considered themselves to be the only chosen people of God. The Christian religion originally grew out of Judaism and contained substantially the same dogma that all who did not accept the faith were damned. It is not surprising to find that persecution in this world followed when Christianity attained power, and the greatest brains of the times were imprisoned, tortured and killed because they realised the intolerant and ridiculous nature of this creed.

It is possible now for everyone to find out what the Christian religion really is. The Bible is accessible to all, but unfortunately few read it or there would probably be fewer Christians. It has been the object here to show that Christianity is a religion which breeds selfishness. This is often magnified into hatred and is a dangerous and undesirable trait. To the Christian there need be only one message—"think on these things." Once this process has started the way is open to a clearer, wider and more humanitarian outlook.

C. McCALL

ACID DROPS

ALL is not going well with the plot hatched by the Church of England, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic leaders to capture the schools. As is usual with such plots, the conspirators are beginning to quarrel over sharing the loot before the city is taken. At first the Christianising of the schools sounded attractive to all the parties concerned. Then came the inevitable consideration, "Whose Christianity?" Nonconformists cannot well agree to the ritual of Roman Catholics and Churchmen, and the Churchmen can have already what is called a non-sectarian teaching. The term is ridiculous, since Christianity is itself a sect, and that is again split up into sub-sects. The Archbishop of York—although he has been in the front of the campaign—will have nothing to do with "Cowper Templeism," and Convocation was very careful not to agree with this form of backboneless Christian instruction. So we may hope that, even with the connivance of certain members of the Government, the handing over of schools to the control of the clergy may not as easily be accomplished as the Churches and Chapels hoped. And there is an old saying, "When clergymen quarrel, honest men stand a chance." We fancy we have not got that saying correctly, but it will serve.

The Rev. C. B. Mortlock, in an article on "The Church Afloat," says that "sailors are, on the whole, god-fearing men." "On the whole" is a rather elastic term, but is there any reason why Mr. Mortlock should insult sailors in this way? They are not more religious than soldiers, or airmen, and we all owe a great deal in these days to soldiers, and so need not go out of our way to asperse their intelligence. As a matter of fact, there is no evidence that sailors are more religious than soldiers. Of course, many sailors nurse some very crude superstitions, but that is a common feature of a large part of the population, from the Crown to crossing-sweeper, and from Cabinet Ministers to newspaper boys. Why pick on sailors?

There are complaints in the Church as to the difficulty of persuading enough young men to take up the Church as a profession. A leading article in one of the religious papers considers it the duty of parents to develop in their boys a "sense of vocation." But why create a sense of "vocation"? Most of the clergy—perhaps all—are ready to swear that they were called by God to shoulder the task of being a clergyman. The religious theory is that God selects men for the vocation, not that men go round looking for a "vocation." If that is the case, there is no reason why a man should say, not that he is looking for a job, but that he is thinking of adopting the vocation of window-cleaner, or scavenger, or bricklayer.

Something suggests itself at this point. May it not be that God did, until, say yesterday, really call the parsons to their "vocation"? But those he called were such third-class stuff that, instead of "calling" men to the vocation, after consultation with the other two members of the Trinity it was decided to throw the posts open to anyone who cared to come. The results could hardly be worse than they are.

The "Glasgow Observer and Scottish Catholic Herald" for June 6 has a paragraph stating that there was something "significant" in the fact that just before the "Hood" went down letters were received in Dumbarton thanking the Sisters of Dumbarton Notre Dame School for their prayers for the safety of the vessel. Now we are left wondering why that paragraph is headed "significant"? It looks wickedly sarcastic.

Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics met the other day on a common platform to see what could be done to better the religious situation. It was said by Bishop Bell at the meeting: "We are driven as by a hurricane to recover our common ground and to do together what no section can do apart. . . . The destroyer, the 'No-God,' is out to destroy our Christian heritage." It is surprising that this type of parson never seems to think that, as one of the Roman Emperors remarked, the gods should look after themselves. As it is, no sickly child or worn-out old person needs a quarter of the care that gods need not to be forgotten. Really, the Churches should band together under the title of "Organisation for the Protection of God." Then we could better appreciate the cry that unless believers band together the "No-God" party will achieve its aim.

Apropos of this Roman Catholic question, one of the regular contributors to the "Church Times" says of a conversation with Frenchmen who were inclined to come to terms with Hitler, that in reply to a question concerning the Roman Catholic Church, was told "the Vatican would be sure to conclude a concordat with the new master of Europe." That we should also expect. As we have often pointed out, the Roman Church has no politics—save that of doing anything and everything, honest or dishonest, that will maintain and increase the power of the Church. Which again lends point to the number of Roman Catholics who occupy diplomatic posts, and the poor service our decorated gentlemen gave us before the war. But Mr. Eden says that a number of these incapables will retire—with good pensions. The manager of a factory with a similar record would have been sacked.

As this war is everybody's business we may be pardoned pointing out that a new Minister of Aircraft Production is taking the place of Lord Beaverbrook. Has another bubble burst? The short life of these Ministers means either that they are superhuman and exhaust every possibility of their Department, or——?

The Vicar of Tong (Yorks) complains that religion—we suppose he means **his** religion—is not taken seriously enough in Council schools. Perhaps that may be due to many of the teachers having a lively sense of the ridiculous. After all, it requires a teacher with a fair command of the muscles that draw his lips upward to treat many of the Bible stories with a solemn countenance.

Mr. Eden has promised the House of Commons that in the future men—and women—are to be appointed as diplomatic representatives abroad without regard to the old school tie, or their relation to influential families. That promise **looks** good for the future, but it carries with it an unmistakable condemnation of the past. And we have doubts as to whether the promise will be carried out as it should be. It is, at any rate, little short of a revolution that is promised. It would indeed be instructive if one were to take the number of officials sent abroad to represent this country, to say nothing of those who are appointed at home, who are related to the reigning families. One could name many that hold posts to-day who would never have got where they are by personal merit, and who are shifted from post to post to keep them busy.

One would also like to see an official statement made as to the number of Roman Catholics who represent this country all over the world. Quite recently we were staggered by a list of such. We have no desire to run an anti-Catholic crusade such as rabid Protestants delight in, but it must be remembered that a Roman Catholic always has divided allegiance.

The aim of the spider who invited flies to walk into its parlour has been immortalised in fable, and with regard to the organised religious "blitz" that is being aimed at the welfare of our educational system, some of the flies seem to be on their guard. The "Scottish Educational Journal" for June 6, for example, has the following:—

> "There is still a good deal of controversy over the future of religious instruction. . . . Bishops and others are calling provincial conferences to discuss the matter and teachers' associations are being invited to take part in them. The Executive of the N.U.T. have issued a circular practically asking them not to be caught. . . . Teachers are asked to decline courteously any invitation to take part in such local conferences. . . . It is obvious that a big push is being made by interested parties to alter radically our system of religious instruction, and the utmost vigilance will be necessary if the position of the teacher is to be safeguarded.

A favourite method with those who are working this plot against the Council schools is to lament the **moral** failure of the schools and, when in a favourable environment to, with greater honesty, confess that the real grievance is that children are being educated without religion. Juvenile delinquency is the favourite cry of the clergy when addressing the general public. But an article in "Education" for May 16 has analysed some figures presented to the Liverpool Education Committee by the School Attendance and Care Sub-Committee, and finds that the cases brought before the Liverpool Juvenile Courts in 1940 numbered 2,202. Of these delinquents, 21.6 per cent. came from Council schools, 35.6 per cent. from Church of England schools and 45.5 per cent. from Roman Catholic schools. It will be noted that Roman Catholic schools, where the influence of religion is most marked, as usual provides more than twice as many cases as Council schools.

One of the Sunday papers notes that in Germany, Italy and several other countries under Fascist rule, a free radio still manages to exist. What a pity it is that we cannot manage a free radio in Britain!

The Pope has recently been denouncing what he calls "immodest fashions" in dress. We can understand the feelings of the Pope. Why should women be allowed to go about in short skirts, when his own priests in all their stage performances are compelled to wear long ones? And consider what millions of Christians have lost in the departed pleasure of seeing only an inch of a woman's legs—and guessing the rest—now that a yard of leg is freely exhibited. A mystery is, as the Church well knows, attractive to multitudes, and the salacious satisfaction from an accidental, or intentional, lifting of a skirt a couple of inches above the ankle has been abolished by all women displaying anything from a foot upwards. Modern dress is really robbing the priesthood and their imitators of what was a constant source of pleasure. All competent psychologists know that the fervency with which some preachers of a past generation dwelt upon hell-fire was evidence of the unconscious desire to gratify an innate brutality, and a study of the attitude of the clergy towards "modesty" is equally instructive. To the (Christian) pure all things are impure.

Mr. Compton Mackenzie wants "a new army of inspectors with power to ask everyone 'What have you done to-day to help the nation?'" That is a truly wonderful suggestion. The chief objection we see to its being put into practice is that the way things are going we should have to import a few millions of people to be questioned. We shall soon be threatened with a lack of non-officials—there is no rationing of them. We recall the row there was when it was discovered that the Ministry of Information mustered a staff of 999 officials. It was said that half that number would have been adequate, and one principal actually resigned because he and his staff had not enough to do. A noise was made, a new chief appointed, and now the number has increased to over 1,800. Now another row is on, and we may soon expect to find the M.O.I. well over the 2,000 mark. No reasonable person can expect to see a Government Department cut down, say, by 1,000 unless 2,000 are appointed to do it. We know fairly well where the officials will come from, but it will soon be a puzzle to provide a non-official population for them to control. What a chance there is nowadays for a Dean Swift! But no one expects nowadays to find wisdom among Deans, and without wisdom one cannot be witty. One can only grin and play the clown.

Clotted bosh is a regular feature of religious "mystics"—a term which appears to cover any sort of fantasy—the more unintelligible the greater the religious value. But the "Times Literary Supplement," which is an ardent worker in the blowing of religious trumpets, surely "beats the band" when it sums up a review of some books on religion by saying: "The seer shows convincingly that the truth is inaccessible to reason, and discernible only as it is lived." We have tried this sentence upside down, right side up, crossways and even shutting our eyes and then opening them suddenly in the hope of catching something intelligible. And we are still left wondering. How does one see a truth that is inaccessible to reason, and how do we know that we are living a truth if it is impossible for reason to see it; also, if we form an opinion (and an opinion obviously involves reasoning), if we cannot know it as a reasonable proposition, how do we come to understand it? And the Supplement is our principal literary organ. Even the confusions of Joad never reached a higher level of unintelligibility than this effort of the "Times."

"THE FREETHINKER,"
2, and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

War Damage Fund.—A. H. Deacon, £1; H. J. Hewer, 5s.; P. Northcote, 10s. 6d.; J. Vallance, 10s.; W. J. Hawks (South Africa), 25s.; W. Perry, £2; W. W. Pearce, £1; H. A., 3s. 6d.; R. W. Cracklow (Ceylon), £5; D. G. Davies, 5s.

E. C. S.—Very sorry to get the news. Please send your address to Editor. It will, if desired, be treated with the strictest privacy.

H. Turner.—Originality is quite as great when old things are put in a new light, or in a new way, as it is when one writes or says something for the first time. The more important anything is the more certain is it that there lies a history behind. And there is a way of making a statement your own, even though it has been said thousands of times before.

C. H. B.—We shall get on with the reprinting of both books and pamphlets, but apart from other considerations, there is the paper supply to be considered. And the "Freethinker" is, of course, our first concern.

G. H. Taylor and S.H.—Received. Shall appear as soon as possible.

R. A. Sanders.—Thanks for reference. Will look it up so soon as we can find time.

J. P. S.—The face is anything but attractive. Perhaps the expression is a consequence of the calling.

F. H. Thomas (Cape Town).—When a man dilates on "mystery" he indicates that he is far removed from a scientific frame of mind. Science has no "mysteries"—it deals only with problems. Mysteries usually provide cover for rogues or consolation for fools. May deal with the subject when opportunity offers.

D. G. Davies.—Mr. Cohen has no intention of retiring from the editorship of this paper. He said he had been looking forward to a time when he could release himself from the responsibilities of editorship and remain as a contributor. But the "Freethinker" is not an ordinary journalistic job, and so we must keep on pegging away. Fortunately dangers and difficulties form what Arnold J. Toynbee calls a "Challenge of the Environment," but, challenges invite a response and have their own attractive quality. So we keep on, as we have said in another column—bombed out, burned out and washed out, but **not** yet knocked out. And that is the one thing that matters.

W. Perry.—Better late than never. The habit of putting things off is not wholly bad. Time often removes many difficulties—if we have patience enough to wait. Letters to the Press are bound to do good, even when one cannot always chronicle the exact results.

Lecture notices must reach 68, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

WE have been bombed out and burned out at one office and washed out at another. After the destruction of 61, Farringdon Street we carried on, packed like sardines in a box, in the N.S.S. office. That also had the roof and top floor burned, and a tarpaulin stretched over where the roof had been. This gave way during the excessive rains of June 7, 8 and 9. The rain came in and one needed an umbrella to get through the day with a moderate amount of dryness. And now we are in our new premises, 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn. The building is a very substantial one, and only a few minutes' walk from Farringdon Street. It is just opposite the Prudential Assurance Company.

As we said last week, the National Secular Society, the Secular Society Limited and the "Freethinker" will all be under the same roof. That should make for ease of work, and we look forward to a little easier time than we have had for some time. And when we say "we," that must include all, for all have worked like the proverbial nigger—and better than the actual one. It is a pity that portraits of Mr. Rosetti and our business manager, struggling round with their shirtsleeves rolled up, trying to dodge the rain and do half a dozen different and unusual things at the same time, are not available. There was much humour in the situation, even though it could not be classified as being of the "dry" order.

As for ourself, we must again ask the patience of our correspondents. We have had to do our ordinary work as we could, spending part of the time running about, making arrangements for half a dozen things at the time, and in an outside atmosphere heavy with the clouds of dust from falling bricks and mortar thick in the air. We should not have been surprised if we had ended with an attack of mortar-fication of the lungs. It will take some little time to get necessary furniture and fittings together, but that need not be done in so great a rush.

Readers will remember the case of Ernest J. Whitehead, of the Grenadier Guards, who refused to enter a church and was court-martialled for disobeying orders. Not knowing his legal rights he had accepted the order or advice of the attestation officer and had allowed himself to be entered as C. of E. The result of the court-martial was a sentence of seven days for disobeying orders. Mr. Thurtle raised the question in the House of Commons and in reply the Minister for War said:—

> "This soldier stated that he had no religion, but when he filled up his attestation paper he was under the impression he had to give some religion, so he entered himself Church of England.
>
> "When a soldier is attested, there is a notice displayed which does not preclude the soldier entering himself as Atheist.
>
> "This soldier has now been given an opportunity of amending his religious classification, and he will not be compelled to attend services in future."

So far, so good. But we understand that the man said, when asked the usual question, that he had no religion and wished to be entered "Atheist." It was only when he was told that he must make some profession of religion that he agreed to sign as Church of England. This was a grave injustice—not the first, by a very long way. The soldier did not know his legal rights, and probably the officer was equally ignorant of the law on this matter. The proper course for the Minister of War would be to see all attestation officers were instructed that they must take down any statement made by the recruit without question or comment. We are talking a lot about liberty just now, and it does not increase the public, or foreign, reliance on our genuineness that through either ignorance or bigotry, or both, large numbers of men are entered on their Service papers as belonging to this or that religion without desiring to be so registered. We hope that all who have been fooled in this way will now insist on their right to have the original attestation with regard to religion altered. This can be done at any time while they are in the Services.

So soon as we are settled down we shall be getting busy in reprinting some of the publications destroyed by the raid. Two of the "Pamphlets for the People" will be ready within the next week or so. These will be No. 1. "Did Jesus Christ Ever Exist?" and a new one on "Christianity and Slavery." The first has been out of print for some time, and was described by one reviewer as the most convincing essay ever written on the subject in so small a compass. All we can plead in extenuation of our brevity is that nothing vitally material was omitted. The other has been written "by request" from those who wished to have something shorter and cheaper than Mr. Cohen's "Christianity, Slavery and Labour"—a new edition, the fourth, of which will appear as soon as possible. But there is the paper difficulty to be overcome.

The "Pamphlets for the People" will be sold at 2d. per copy. The hugely increased costs of production make it impossible to sell at 1d. And 16 pages for 2d. is still a marvel of cheapness. A list of what we have, and shall have, for sale shortly will be found on the back of this issue.

Here is a rather amusing account from one of our readers on joining the Air Service:—

> "The A.C.2 who took down my particulars had never heard of Rationalist and, in spite of my assurances, he fetched the corporal to his assistance. He was quite decent about it, but told me it was not usual and asked if he could put Atheist in brackets after the word Rationalist. I consented, and everything was all right.
>
> "When I had to take the oath I told the corporal (another one) I wished to affirm, and after taking me outside the room and asking me the reason, he took me to a flight-lieutenant, who swore me in without any fuss. The rest of my crowd all took the oath on the Bible. Afterwards, one of them told me the corporal had seemed pleased about my wishing to affirm, and said if he had known it could be done without the Bible he would have affirmed also."

We have noted in these columns more than once that tribunals, in dealing with conscientious objectors, are apt to let their verdict depend upon whether the applicant is religious or not. That is, of course, no more nor less than an exhibition of religious prejudice. But we confess that we never expected one of our Judges to take up the same position. Yet, if the report published in the "Sunday Dispatch" for June 15 is correct, this is actually the opinion of Justice Atkinson in a recent case before him. After explaining that the Legislature had decided that if a man had conscientious objections to war he might be relieved of military service, Mr. Justice Atkinson proceeded to say, "A true conscientious objector, which is what Parliament had in mind, is one who on religious grounds thinks it wrong to kill and to resist force by force."

If Parliament meant what Mr. Justice Atkinson says it meant, then it is even more blundering than we thought it. But we incline to the opinion that it is the Judge who is in error. For there is no necessary connection between religion and conscientious objections. All that the phrase means is that an act that is performed or a judgment given under the dominating sense of a **moral** obligation. The moral obligation may be that of carrying out a religious act or, negatively, to do nothing with which one's religious beliefs conflict, or it may be the sense of obligation that one feels towards others on purely secular grounds. Religion has no necessary connection with a conscientious objection against anything, or a conscientious wish to do certain things. If Parliament meant—and we have no overpowering belief in the wisdom or honesty of parliamentarians—that a conscientious objector is one who bases his position on religion, and that alone, then the regulation embodies a general principle to which even Hitler would not object—so long as he was left to define "religion." If we mean what we say in wishing to have equality before the law, there should be an alteration in the law as soon as possible.

The statement that a conscientious objector is one who thinks it wrong (whether with or without religious grounds) to kill and to resist by force of arms, does little justice to those involved. The intelligent conscientious objector rests his case on other and more intelligent grounds. His case is that killing, or the use of force, does not accomplish its aim. He holds that the evils which have led to armed conflict are not removed by force, but are exaggerated and perpetuated by it. Armed conflict, the conscientious objector holds, intensifies ill-feeling and hatred. It leads to the establishment of brutality and wrong, both with those who win and with those who lose. We do not agree with this case, so baldly put, because we hold that there are circumstances where the price one pays for war is justifiable. We are simply stating the case as we hold a man who sits in judgment should understand it.

CHRISTIAN FAITH

Schoolmaster: "What is Faith?"

Schoolboy: "Faith is believing in something which you know is not true."

The parsons drone into our ears a lot of sophistry about the beauty of Christian Faith, and recite from Scripture—"that Faith will move mountains"—"The Lord is mindful of His own"—"The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want"—the faith of the good christian is so great that "he can drink the deadliest poison, and it shall not harm him." Then the next day being Monday the Parson calls on the steeplejack and instructs him to fix a lightning conductor on the Church—and drops in at the "Providential Insurance Company" to pay his fire premium on the Church buildings—also upon his own life, and gets no discount for all his faith and prayers.

Yesterday—looking through the shop window of a Catholic depot—I saw two faith-inspiring engravings for believers to buy and hang on their home walls.

A little child was lying asleep—and around were sinister bat-winged diseases ready to prey on the infant—but above was an angel with golden feathers who protected the baby.

Another was a picture of a terrible storm—and the same little child was tottering across the last plank of a broken bridge with a swirling torrent beneath, but don't be alarmed! the same beautiful angel, with the same golden, outstretched wings, was hovering over the baby.

Then one picks up the paper to read that a farmer's baby boy has strayed and was found drowned in the brook—and a wee Maori maid had walked to her death in the hot pool.

The drone of the parson re-echoes in my ears—"He marks the sparrow's fall; and shelters the shorn lamb from the wind."

Why! I would rather trust one old grandmother than all the angels that never were.

What does this beautiful Christian Faith mean?—just words, words and words! even His august Holiness the Pope has his bomb shelter at the *Vatican*—why?

A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH

Most of us, if we have lived long enough and wandered, have at some time been face to face with the Grim Reaper.

In my earlier days I toured with operatic shows for years—and in these theatrical orbits visited in Britain alone more than six hundred cities and towns, so had many adventures.

One midsummer's night, in sailing south from the Shetland Isles in the "S.S. Ban Righ," the curtain of life almost dropped upon our little company of show-folk.

We had left the land of the midnight sun, where his Sol-ship encircled the sky for 23 hours daily and were ploughing the waves back to the mainland of Scotland.

The "S.S. Ban Righ" was a smelly old boat—for she carried cattle as well as people—so I stayed on deck.

The sea was as calm as a millpond, or I would not be here to-day; but as Napoleon said: "It is the unexpected that happens"—and, without warning, at 1 a.m. we crashed into an uncharted rock.

In an instant all was confusion, but the conduct of the crew was splendid; within seven minutes the gunwales were axed down, the life-boats lowered, and my operatic girls in them, arrayed in their night-dresses—for all our effects and dresses were booked for Davy Jones's Locker. There were seventy odd passengers.

"A PARSON'S CHRISTIAN FAITH"

We were all excited and nervous, for it was really a rendezvous with death, and anything might happen.

I recollect, in waiting my turn, that my legs would not cease from shaking; but there was no open cowardice save from one man.

He was a Presbyterian Minister of mid-age, and he lost his head completely; first he covered himself with several life-belts until he looked like a Knight in Cork, then made a bee-line for the women's boats—he had to be restrained by the crew—for, instead of being a help to us pagan play-folk in such a crisis, he was hysterical at the bare thought of leaving this wicked world for the realms of bliss he had so often preached about.

One cynical old salt whispered to me: "Why! *he* fears to go to Heaven more than we do to go to Hell."

I left in the seventh boat and helped to row our long sea-road to Fraserburgh, where we all, happily, arrived safely.

The fisher-folk were kindness itself—lending the girls clothes until we reached Edinburgh.

I relate this incident to prove that Religious training does not always work—and the so-called Christian Faith disappears—when the instinct to preserve one's life is uppermost.

What is the cold, naked, refrigerated truth? What is meant by "Christian Faith" in our lives to-day? Does the every-day business churchman use it as he enters the Stock Exchange, or baits his goods in his shop windows, or when he puts a "fiver" on a "gee-gee."

Churches are sandbagged as well as dance halls. Ministers of religion carry a gas-mask as well as unbelievers. There is as great a proportion of people killed among believers as unbelievers. The whole nation relies more on material than spiritual arms. Does any body of organised Christians actually follow their professed "faith" and believe that Nature will change one iota in its course for all their prayers and faith.

Do they take no thought for the morrow? Would any one of their members imagine that "the deadliest poisons would be harmless if drunk in the hysteria of faith"? Why this pretence! Yes! it is only words, words, words.

CHURCHGOERS AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

In the "South London Press" (Sept. 17th, 1940), in an account of how this faith works, a Methodist preacher writes:

> "I was conducting a service last Sunday to a congregation of about seventy, and after we had thanked God for preserving us through all the perils, and declared our faith to Him to continue to care for and shelter us, the siren sounded, announcing an enemy air-raid, and at once it seemed as if the members of my congregation did not want to trespass on God's help, the bomb shelter was preferable, the congregation melted away, and I concluded the service absolutely alone."

This is something like the parson in the San Francisco earthquake who, when the first shake occurred, told the congregation that God would take care of them, and, in any case, there was no better place to die than in God's own house; then the second shake occurred, and the parson jumped from the pulpit and made a bee-line for the open door, saying, "but the open-air is good enough for me."

EARTHLY PROMISSORY NOTES FOR HEAVENLY BLISS

The clergy preach and praise the faith of Christians, and dilate on the blessed reward that awaits the faithful in the next world, where the sexless pious will be for ever with the heavenly hosts, ceaselessly praising their Maker with glorious hosannahs and harps of a thousand strings; but, generally speaking, the churches offer their earthly promissory notes payable in paradise in exchange for solid realities of this world; indeed, I believe that if the average parson were offered a choice between an instant translation to his heaven or a nice motor-car *here*, we should hear him go gaily tooting his horn down the street, for even flamboyant evangelists show no feverish eagerness to quit the flesh-pots of this "wicked world" for their theological synthetic next life.

Was not Bruno as brave as any pious martyr filled with Christian Faith when, worn, starved and tortured, he faced the Pope and Inquisition? Worn and tired in flesh, but triumphant in mind, he refused to recant and went to the stake; and his last words ring down the centuries:

> "May whatever Gods there be give me courage to maintain the Truth I hold!"

And here are the saddest words the records of Rome relate—the profit of pain:

> "To the Bishop of Sidonia, for the degradation and burning of Bruno—17 scudi."

Seventeen scudi!—somewhere about £1 18s 6d.—that was the pitiful price a Bishop of the Holy Church was paid to superintend the degradation and burning of Bruno, a learned scholar and humanitarian, who loved truth better than life.

TWO "FAITH-LESS" WOMEN AND AN ARCHBISHOP

Did Florence Nightingale (who was outside Christianity) need Christian Faith when she laboured and laid the foundation of military hospitals for suffering soldiers? or Marie Curie, living in poverty, in a Paris garret, with one patched frock to wear—did she need Christian Faith then, having isolated the initial gramme of Radium, worth a fortune, gladly gave it to the first Radium Clinic, and asked nothing but to continue to work still in poverty in her old damp shed?

But His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury—well! he possesses abundant Christian Faith, amid his lackeys and footmen at Lambeth Palace, where he draws £300 a week wages and extras—Yes! he is renowned for his Christian Faith and for his Charity towards King Edward VIII for daring to love a woman not an aristocrat. Yes! he does even better than the Bishop of Sidonia with his bloody seventeen scudi.

We live in a wonderful world, my Masters! and Life is a great show!—as Robert Louis Stevenson says in "Human Playthings."

> The streets are full of human toys,
> Wound up for three score years,
> Their springs are hungers, hopes and joys;
> And jealousies and tears.
> The toys are played with until they fall
> Worn out or thrown away,
> Why were they ever made at all?
> Who sits to watch the play?

HENRY J. HAYWARD (New Zealand)

FREEDOM AND POWER

(*Concluded from page 267*)

BETWEEN 1900 and 1939 the storm intimated above burst and Britain and others were involved in war with the Central Powers to maintain, as many felt, the liberty already in being. Despite their defeat, we are to-day confronted with a revival of German aggression in a more brutal form. Britain is maintaining a deadly contest almost alone, with such aid as comes from those "allies" who survive in some measure the blast, whose resources, outside Europe, none the less count considerably. The forces that have brought about this situation, and their elucidation, would invite a separate study. Now we are concerned simply with the decisive facts germane to our conclusion.

Freedom has practically disappeared from the Continent. Before the main German-Axis onslaught it had been wounded in the house of its friends. The Peace Treaties of 1919 carved out of the old empires a number of assumed ethnical or national States and gave them free institutions. Though from the manner in which the distinct European tribes are scattered a purely ethnical State is not to be compassed. After a short experience, these institutions in one quarter after another have not proved a success in practice and have given place to some kind of dictatorship or oligarchy. Allowing for material troubles (which all the world has had to contend with) or defects in political organisation, the final cause is that these peoples have failed to educe the qualities of character without which, as previously insisted, "democracy" is sure to court disaster. . . . Why . . .? We must pass.

In England, the State has no other significance than the sum of its legal and administrative system: from Whitehall and the Supreme Court to a parish council and coroner's inquest. The spiritual side of national life is something apart. On the Continent—particularly in Germany and from the Liberation struggle against Napoleon in 1913-14 notions of the State have been forthcoming of a peculiar mystical cast. Fichte, Hegel, Treitscke and others adumbrated a theorem that the State is a supreme entity claiming individual allegiance, and to which his will is subordinate as the means to realise his personality as a component of the great whole. Then the tradition of German Governments since the slow revival after the Thirty Years' War is autocratic. Further, that as the chief end of the State is power, military force must be maintained at the highest level as a support to policy: either for actual war or as a useful weapon of pressure and menace in difficult negotiations. These doctrines influenced more or less the line of action that created the German Empire of 1870.

One need hardly stress their entire antithesis to the prevailing English school of that time.

With this expansion of might came the view that the Germans themselves were some super-breed*

*We avoid the word "race" in this connection, which probably applies to the great organic division of the Species-Caucasic, Mongolic, etc., of which minor sections are breeds and peoples.

destined to give the law to the world, dominant alike in the cultural and political sphere.

The innate superiority of the "Aryans" among mankind (whoever that might be taken to include) had been advanced in a treatise by a French writer, Count Gobineau, about 1850—"L'inégalité des races humaines." If his views attracted little notice at the outset, they came under Wagner's cognisance and his friends at the height of his fame, and were warmly espoused thereby. He had utilised Teutonic myth at the basis of symbolic music-dreamers of high distinction; and this view harmonised with his art-theories. The eminent music critic, Ernest Newman, has lately remarked:—

> "It was only in the last years of their lives that Wagner became acquainted with Gobineau, his attention being first drawn to him by the brilliant set of imaginary conversations entitled 'La Renaissance.' Gobineau was a guest at Wahinfried in the summer of 1882. He died in the following autumn. By the 1880's the 'Essai' had been so completely forgotten that Wagner was unable to obtain a copy anywhere except on loan from a friend of the author. Though he could not accept all Gobineau's deductions from his theory of the predominating influence of race in history, the theory itself, and the supposed importance of it via the Germanic race for the future of humanity, made so profound an impression on him that he henceforth did all that lay in his power to force Gobineau on the attention of the German world. . . . A whole literature now exists in Germany based on the comfortable theory derived from the 'Essai' that the Germans are God's very own people, destined not merely to rule the earth but to give the universe a good 80 per cent. of the fatuous conceit of itself exhibited by the German mind in every sphere during the last thirty years must be laid to Gobineau's charge."*

The irony of this Herrenvolk theory is: it is totally fallacious. The original peoples (Nordics) of North and Central Europe, as we meet them in early records, comprised various vigorous tribes who became disbursed through Europe with the fall of the Empire. Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Norsemen in Great Britain; Goths, Franks, etc., elsewhere. This either through want, cupidity or the pressure of foreign invaders from the East. The domain of Charlemagne, largely "Nordic," did not extend eastwards much beyond the line of the Elbe. Their place was taken by the composite horde which settled in the central plain, now known as Germany, from which the people of the Middle Ages are descended, with their German language, and their modern successors. The Poles, whom they have murdered and oppressed, are a purer ethnical breed. Their chief title to distinction would seem to be an abundance of sadistic impulses. They have set up a criminal record which must call for account at the final assize. There looms up the figure of retributive Justice. . . . Vengeance is mine. . . . I will repay! . . .

Now, we have seen arise in Germany during the last decade a movement embodying these doctrines in a crude, barbaric guise. A brand of demagogues, sprung from nowt, by a well-organised agitation and defined aim, secured enough popular support to enable them to get hold of the Government. They said in effect: Put us in power, follow implicitly our lead, break the Versailles Treaty, arm to the teeth, and we will lift you and Germany to the highest place of domination and world influence she has ever held. To that end we must become a Totalitarian State, where all think (or do not think) alike and have one will and purpose wherein they realise themselves through its greatness and grandeur. So we must be always ready for war, conducted with the fullest equipment of mechanical weapons, which we have studied to use with the utmost effect and directed

* "Sunday Times," October 20, 1940.

equally by terrorism against the civil population without ruth, so it shall be short, sharp, decisive. . . . To which is added a new national cult reviving old Teutonic customs, anti-Christian in its general trend; and a brand of Socialism from which the "Nazis" get their name.

While the world was wondering what this blether might really portend, they were soon left in no doubt as to its purpose. The Nazis proceeded to implement their policy with devilish consistency in a way by now sufficiently familiar. What is of import is the world's reaction to this peril. Realising none too soon the impossibility of any compromise therewith, we entered on a programme of defensive re-equipment and were fortunate to gain time for it to be effective enough for a first emergency. As to other European States, after its first victims had been struck down, so far from combining to guard at least their independence have only been concerned to protest their pacific neutrality, deserted their own ententes, and presented the greatest exhibition of "collective poltroonery" and short-sighted self-interest of modern times.

And Britain, taking up this challenge on a solemn agreement with her quondam ally France, because of some rough handling by the enemy at the outset, but with resources still unimpaired, is suddenly betrayed by an abject surrender under circumstances that make its instigators touch the lowest depth of possible infamy. . . . So she remains the chief protagonist in a mortal duel to one supreme end: that Liberty shall continue in the world; that its banner shall fly inviolate over the length and breadth of her domain and the peoples of every colour and creed valiantly battling in the Cause. . . .

> "So he went on, and Apollyon met him. Now the Monster was hideous to behold; he was clothed with scales like a Fish (and they were his pride); he had wings like a Dragon, feet like a Bear, and out of his belly came Fire and Smoke; and his mouth was as the mouth of a Lion. . . . Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole width of the way and said . . . 'Here will I spill thy soul.' "*

AUSTEN VERNEY

*John Bunyan: "The Pilgrim's Progress."

CORRESPONDENCE

RELIGION AND THE ARMY

SIR,—Your "Acid Drop" in the June 1 issue regarding Church parade was very appropriate, and I hope it will get a wide circulation.

You will perhaps be interested in an incident which happened in this unit several weeks ago.

A voluntary Church parade was announced in the daily orders, and when Sunday morning arrived **not one man** turned up for the parade.

The Company-Sergeant-Major (a species not generally gifted with an abundance of intelligence) had been detailed to conduct the parade. He was annoyed in the first place, although I know for a fact that he dislikes the farce as much as the men do. But because no one turned out he showed his puny mentality by going round the whole billet and putting every man on fatigues who had not a good excuse. (Fortunately I had one.)

So you see, even when the men are allowed to please themselves they are at the mercy of a nit-wit like this, who, not knowing how to use his authority properly, must show it at every available opportunity by doing spiteful tricks of this sort.

No doubt he has the moral uplift of his men at heart.

SIG. H. STOCKTON

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.0, MR. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.0, MR. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 7.30, Thursday, MR. E. C. SAPHIN. Sunday, 6.0, MR. R. H. ROSETTI.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11.0 a.m., JOHN KATZ, B.A. "The Call to Sinai."

ON SPENDING TIME

TO begin with, what is time? We say that we "spend" it when we do this or that, as though it were a coin of the realm; we say that we "do" time when we are put in prison for some misdeed, as though it were an individual whom we could best in some way or the other. But actually it is no such thing—it is, in fact, no thing: just a figure of speech to denote the interval between two events. Just that and nothing more.

But to say that we "spend" our time in doing so-and-so is a convenient way of putting it, nevertheless, and by custom the phrase is well understood. The pedant might argue that we can only "occupy" time—to which, if we are in a challenging mood, we might reply that if there is **no** thing to occupy, you cannot occupy it—that you can only occupy a seat in a train, or a house and so on. So, for convenience sake, we will stick to the figure of speech.

On waking we stretch our limbs and yawn and, often enough, give ourselves just another five minutes—to get used to the idea of getting up. If we have had a bad and restless night—troubled by nightmare or a guilty conscience, or both—we may try to go to sleep again, particularly if the weather is cold and uninviting, only to find, when we do get out of bed, that we are in a far worse mood than ever because we have stayed there much longer than we should have done, and we now have to rush our toilet and our breakfast or we shall miss our train. . . . Damn!

If, on the other hand, we have had a good night and sing in our bath, something in a letter which we find beside our breakfast plate, or which we read in our morning paper as we sip our coffee, may upset our equilibrium and we start the day with a clouded brow. Few of us, in fact, begin our daily occupation with a clear and untroubled mind. We haven't yet, at this time o' day, got up steam, as it were; we aren't yet up to concert pitch.

We settle ourselves down in our favourite corner seat in the train to make a further study of the morning's news, when someone whom we know bursts into the compartment, full of the joy of spring, and insists on giving us his views on the international situation. We try for a while to be sociable, but. . . . And as the train rattles along we get more and more annoyed with his persistent chatter. The man hasn't got an opinion of his own, we tell ourselves; he's just a parrot. Ugh!

Arriving at the office we go through our mail and alternate between gladness and gloom. One letter gives us a thrill, another a pain in the neck! You probably know the feeling quite well—it's fairly common to most of us. During the morning we dictate a few letters, interview one or two people and, generally speaking, try to occupy out time to advantage till lunch time.

In the afternoon, if we have had the good fortune to enjoy congenial companionship with our midday meal, we feel in a much better mood and ready to meet anything or anybody that may come along. It is surprising, sometimes, what a drink and a meal, and a chat with someone whom you are glad to meet, will do to banish care and worry. Especially if he talks what we call sense. It is a veritable tonic—in more senses than one. Whereas before we went out to lunch we may have had a perpetual scowl on our face, we may now have a smile and begin to whistle. All of a sudden, as it were, the whole atmosphere is completely changed and a different spirit prevails among our staff. . . .

What we say or do during our journey home again equally reflects our physical and mental condition. We bury ourselves in our evening paper, sullenly, or chat agreeably with our travelling companions, more or less as our thoughts and feelings dictate. Very few of us are really sociable when we are out at the elbows, so to speak. We are the creatures of circumstances, and we are influenced far more than the majority of us realise by the prevailing conditions.

We may have told ourselves when we started out in the morning that we would devote an hour or so in the evening to that book which we bought last week, only to find when

we do settle down to it that we—well, we just aren't in the mood for "that sort of thing!" and we put it down, irritably. Someone has turned on "that blasted radio!" and made concentration impossible. We light our pipe—but that won't draw properly. Gosh! Or maybe the book grips us from the very first moment we open it, and we are serenely happy. We stay there, by the fireside—in slippered ease—now puffing huge clouds of smoke—and turn over page after page, completely engrossed. Then, round about midnight, we knock out our pipe and go to bed—content for the time being.

Yes, no matter what our trade or calling or social position may be, that is how we spend our time. And we are all much of a muchness. We react first to one thing and then another, according to our moods and motives and our outlook on life day by day, and in that way we help to make up this world of saints and sinners.

G. B. LISSENDEN

OBITUARY

WILLIAM WRIGHT

ONCE more the ranks of the North Country Secularists have been depleted. The death of William Wright, of Old Penshaw, Co. Durham, has to be reported. This was at the age of 78 years after a short illness. Mr. Wright was not always a Freethinker; he had browsed during his early life in Presbyterian pastures. But the light came vividly when it did come. His work for Freethought became constant and easy—for he loved it. Right up to the end he could be found wherever the Cause needed assistance. As a writer he had a particular charm of his own. For a long time the "Newcastle Daily Chronicle" published weekly a column from him over the *nom de guerre* of Wylam Gael. The "Newcastle Weekly Chronicle" knew him under this pen-name and several others. The readers of other North Country papers learnt to look forward to his writings, for he had a simple method of raising one's interest in common things, and in so doing he made legitimate use of his opportunity for the best of causes. He occasionally sent articles to the "Freethinker" under the name of Alan Tyndal. He was a gentle and sincere man, and his name will live long in the locality in which he spent the larger part of his life. Everyone had a good word for him, and many relied on his advice and help when events seemed to them serious. His taste in literature was of a high order, and he was delightedly helpful in the formation of literary tastes in his function of librarian to the local branch of the Durham County Library. No visitor to the Wrights ever left without feeling mentally refreshed and stimulated. He leaves a widow, a son and daughter, to whom we extend our profound sympathy. He was cremated at the Newcastle West Road Crematorium on June 6, when, in accordance with his wishes and at the request of his family, John T. Brighton gave a short address to relatives and friends.

William Wright was my oldest and closest friend; the lustre of our friendship was never dimmed. I remember him joining the Newcastle Secularists when in my teens. I saw much of him—but not too much—before I left Tyneside. Space may have divided us since, but that was the only kind of division that could have existed between us. The bonds were a satisfying mutual belief held with fervour, and human characteristics on his part that would have stood out plainly as fine and lovable in any setting where the fates had cared to place him. Life to him was a pageant, the sight of which was not altogether displeasing. Tolerant indeed he was. Where others may have felt bitterness, William Wright was quietly, but not superciliously, amused. To him, in very truth, "it took all kinds to make a world." What mines of kindness did he, and his dear wife, lay open to me. I drew from them lavishly, greedily. I can never repay, but then repayment was never wanted. What the Wrights gave they gave from full hearts, hearts perpetually replenished by the giving. Freethought has suffered a loss in the North—but there are memories that will live.

T. H. ELSTOB

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