

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Great Deicide

SIR JAMES FRAZER was one of the greatest deicides of his day. In the mind's eye he had witnessed the birth and death of hundreds of gods. He had hob-nobbed with gods and the mothers of gods, with men who had become gods and gods who had become men, with gods that were white, black, brown or yellow. He was familiar with gods of disease of health, with gods who ruled the weather, with gods who were responsible for the birth of babies and gods who caused or cured disease. He was never himself responsible for the birth of a god, but he was fully responsible for a detailed account of the deaths of many. There are gods who have survived Frazer, but he has injected a poison into them that one day will send them the way of their predecessors. In the annals of science Frazer will live as the greatest deicide of his age.

Had Frazer lived a few generations ago, his books would have landed him in a Christian prison. Earlier, he would have formed one of the central figures at a Christian *auto-da-fe*. Fortunately for him—and for us—he lived in an age when religion is robbed of much of its power. Before Frazer wrote others had marked a road on which he was so distinguished a traveller. The result of their work was that Frazer was able to pursue his deicidal work unmolested. More than unmolested, for his work brought him open honour among liberal minds, and compelled the silence of those who in darker days would have been his eager persecutors. Merely to read his books is to travel through an immense anthropological museum under the guidance of one who examines, classifies and characterises gods with the impartiality of a skilled botanist examining plants or a biologist describing different species of animals. The world has never known a god who could withstand such treatment. If gods are to live men must stand before them with their heads bowed, with closed eyes, muttering arranged sentences and voicing prepared praise.

* * *

Frazer and God

A Frazer memorial service was held in one of the Cambridge Colleges a few days after his death. A well-known Christian clergyman was the principal speaker. He came to praise Cæsar, and that made the gathering reminiscent of a Roman Triumph,

with the parson forced to give praise to his conqueror. For a Christian clergyman to pay tribute to one who had made it quite plain that the Christian god had his forerunners and prototypes in the many gods who are no more, was to those with wit enough to appreciate the satire something to be remembered. The preacher stressed one thing. Frazer, he said, was not an Atheist. The eagerness of the assertion should, probably did, arouse suspicion. Unless there was the possibility of some and the certainty of others deciding that Frazer really was an Atheist—even though he had never publicly called himself such—there was no need to stress the statement. Methinks the preacher did protest too much. There *must* have been something in Frazer's writings that clearly suggested Atheism. I take it to be that in tracing the history and origin of the gods his generalisations obviously had an application to all gods, ancient and modern, savage and semi-civilised—there have not been any civilised ones. Frazer might, taking a hint from Gibbon, have given his "Golden Bough" the sub-title "The Decline and Fall of the Gods."

It is quite true that Frazer never said in set words "I am an Atheist," or "I do not believe in God." There is nothing new or strange in this. Religion is still strong enough for an open and honest confession of Atheism to create discomfort among friends, to spoil a political career or to incur financial loss in business. It is a state of affairs that is more demoralising intellectually and socially than would be produced by open persecution. That arouses indignation and is a call to the courageous that has seldom failed to secure response. But a persecution that works silently through the medium of a business boycott or social ostracism, which is silent in public but active in private, such persecution does little to arouse open defiance. On the contrary, it induces many to make and wear their own gags, and to parade their silence as so much wisdom rebounding to their credit. The timid become parties to their own suppression.

Those who are in any doubt that Frazer was without a trace of belief in a god of any sort, would do well to study the opening chapter of the "Belief in Immortality." What is said there is the more striking since it actually forms no organic part of the three volumes of this work. It seems almost as though he was losing patience with the thinly-covered savage religious beliefs around him, to which more than once he calls attention as representing that undercrust of our civilisation which constitutes a constant threat to our culture. This introductory chapter covers 30 closely printed pages, and if it was not intended to convey as gently as possible the fact that he had no belief whatever in God, then it is a little puzzling to see any reason for it being written. At the opening of the chapter he has the sarcastic remark: "To speak plainly, the question of the existence of God is too deep for me. . . . I can only confess my ignorance"—this, from a man who, in some thousands of pages, had traced so many of the known gods of the world back to the ignorance of early mankind. And when we bear in mind another hint that when we "discover

that doctrines which we have accepted from tradition have their close analogies in the barbarous superstitions of ignorant savages, we can hardly help suspecting that our own cherished doctrines may have originated in the similar superstitions of our rude forefathers," there does not seem much room to doubt where Frazer stood with regard to the belief in God.

Again, dealing with the origin of the god-idea he says: "If we are indeed to discover the origin of man's conception of God, it is not sufficient to analyse the ideas which the educated and enlightened entertain on the subject at the present day. . . . It becomes necessary to push our analogy far back into the past." He definitely sets on one side the foolish theory of an "intuition" about God, a very favourite method of substituting ignorance for knowledge, and goes on to point out the extent to which religious beliefs about gods have originated with a misunderstanding of mental states—normal, abnormal and pathological—and which in all ages has given a belief in God a basis of experience. He follows Tylor very closely here, and also emphasises the fact that when misunderstandings are carried to extremes they threaten social existence; an idea which leads him to say that if we are not so well acquainted with tribes that have died out as a consequence of anti-social religious practices, "it is because the tribes who consistently acted up to their beliefs have wiped themselves out." It is quite certain that if the Christian view of celibacy, etc., had been given full play, it would have ended any community that adopted it. There is a great deal to be said on the purely anti-social qualities of Christianity.

A Plea for Honesty

Probably the most destructive section of this chapter is when he again, unnecessarily, turns with scarcely disguised contempt, on those who use the word "God" as the equivalent of ethics, or for anything that suits the occasion. He insists upon a conception of "God" that brings the idea in the true line of development from the savage. He says:

By a God I understand a superhuman and supernatural being, of a spiritual and personal nature who controls the world or some part of it, on the whole for good, and who is endowed with intellectual faculties, moral feelings, and active powers, which we can only conceive on the analogy of human faculties, feelings and activities. . . . In short, by a God I mean a beneficent supernatural spirit, who resembles man in nature though he excels him in knowledge, goodness and power. . . . I am aware that it has been usual of late years to apply the name of God to very different conceptions, to empty it of all implications of personality and to reduce it to signifying . . . the Great First Cause, the Universal substance, the 'stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being,' and so forth. . . . I cannot but regard them all as illegitimate extensions of the term, in short, as an abuse of language, and I venture to protest against it in the interest, not only of verbal accuracy, but of clear thinking, because it is apt to conceal from ourselves and others a real and very important change of thought; in particular, it may lead many to imagine that the persons who use the name of God retain certain theological opinions which they may in fact have long abandoned. Thus the misuse of the name of God may resemble the strategem in war of putting up dummies to make an enemy imagine that a fort is still held long after it has been evacuated by the garrison. And as we cannot use words in wrong senses without running a serious risk of deceiving ourselves as well as others, it appears better on all counts to adhere strictly to the common meaning of the name of

God as signifying a powerful supernatural, and on the whole beneficent spirit, akin in the nature to man. . . . At all events . . . I intend to use the name of God consistently in the familiar sense, and I beg my readers to bear this steadily in mind."

This, for Frazer, is a very strong rebuke to those religious apologists who use "God" in one sense while knowing full well that their listeners or readers will understand it in another. It is a trick common to the pulpit and to religious writers generally. Frazer will have none of it. His definition of "God" is one, and the only one, that is consistent with history—it is one which covers every real god from the most primitive to the most civilised stage of life. And between the belief in gods that were born of ignorance and fear and the gods current to-day, there is no break. The present is the product of the past, and the present supplies a non-theistic account of man and his world, which has no need and no room for gods. If Frazer's position is not that of Atheism, then I have yet to learn the meaning of the word.

A Confession of Faith

As I have said, the chapter has no necessary connection with the subject of the "Belief in Immortality." It appears to have been written by one who, while for private reasons did not wish to openly wear the badge of "Atheism," was impelled to make a statement which should separate him from those who for political, or social, or family reasons, or from sheer confusion of thought, profess to be unable to come to a definite conclusion concerning the existence of gods. When he says "God," he means what the word has really indicated throughout human history.

Some confirmation of what I have said may be found in a reference to Atheism, the only one I can recall of any consequence in his works. It sounds very much like a statement of his own position. It is too respectful towards Atheism to be without significance.

"When philosophy and science by their combined efforts have ejected gods and goddesses from all the subordinate posts of nature, it might perhaps be expected that they would have no further occasion for the services of a deity, and that having relieved him of all his particular functions they would have arranged for the creation and management of the universe without him handing over these important offices to an efficient staff of those ethers, atoms, corpuscles and so forth which have already proved themselves so punctual in the discharge of the duties entrusted to them. Nor, indeed, is this expectation altogether disappointed. A number of Atheistical philosophers have come forward and assured us that the hypothesis of a deity as the creator and preserver of the universe is quite superfluous, and that all things have come into being without the help of any divine spirit, and that they will continue to exist without it to the end, if end there be."

There was no real need for this statement, save that it would serve as a refusal to pay even formal homage to a belief that Frazer knew had no foundation in modern science and civilised thought. And it is significant that the passage cited follows a lengthy summary of a current scientific teaching that leaves no room for a god of any sort. It reads like a statement of his own convictions. Christianity must be indeed in a desperate condition when all it says of such a man as Sir James Frazer is that he was not an Atheist. He was certainly not a Theist, and between Atheism and Theism what have we that has the slightest claim to intellectual respect?

What I believe to be a statement of Frazer's own position as set forth in his own words, I will give next week in my concluding notes.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

AN OPEN LETTER TO A CRITIC OF "THE FREETHINKER"

"THANK you for the copy of the 'Freethinker'—such a curious title for a paper that only thinks along one line. . . . The 'Freethinker' itself strikes me as being so very 1880-ish. It still goes on barking up the same old trees and disfiguring its pages with the same old abuse of those with whom it disagrees. 'Tis pity. I often think that there is room in this country for a really dignified presentation of the Agnostic case. On the finish, as is so emphatically pointed out in this issue of the 'Freethinker,' you are not without the people who could do it.")

DEAR ERNEST,

When I send a "Freethinker" to a Christian I know I am asking for trouble. Believe me, I did not send it to bait you. I thought you might read my contribution with interest—and disagreement, as I might have done one of yours in, say, "One and All" (the Adult School monthly) or "The Friend" (the Quaker weekly) without criticising the periodical in general. Perhaps, however, you felt constrained to attack the infidels. I might have felt like that 30 years ago, when the "Literary Guide" (I never then met the "Freethinker"; it was not displayed in libraries) came to my notice and, incidentally, made me more uncomfortable than I cared to avow.

I should like to pass some comments upon yours regarding this paper, not because they are original, but because they are trite. Therefore, I shall have a number in mind, though addressing a few.

What purpose is to be served by a date-slinging match? Supposing I said that your objections to the paper were 1906 ish (the Editor would be a better authority on this chronology) or your belief in Christianity 1850-ish or 33 A.D.-ish? Has the position then been more clarified? The last date might indeed be significant, for, as the Editor is always pointing out, much may be understood in explaining the rise of any creed or philosophy by an examination of the conditions under which it arose. On this matter the famous 15th and 16th chapters of Gibbon are, of course, most illuminating.

You write as though there must be fashions in faith and in infidelity. You do not say what your grandparents believed in 1880 you believe in 1941 and, by the same token, we must not in the latter year express the same objections to both creeds that we have always felt. As a boy I sang a hymn about "the old, old story of Jesus and his love." This you would perhaps call 1880-ish! Dickens (as I mentioned in my "Dickens and Religion") uses a curious phrase about immortality, calling it a "blessed fashion." Of course, the great Victorian novelist was often very woolly in his philosophising. The phrase was really a nice present to his Freethinking readers. Many beliefs are fashions adopted because others hold them. Freethinking has not been fashionable except for a few years in Revolutionary France and for two decades in Soviet Russia.

I have suggested 1906 because in that year was published Rev. R. J. Campbell's "New Theology." (How excited some of us young fellows were about it! I am not alone now in wishing that I had taken the Freethinking attitude of a "plague on both your houses, orthodox and heterodox.") Later the reverend author recanted, having led many an obscure parson into a minor martyrdom which he did not share. The lost leader—ye gods!—recited the Thirty-nine Articles and slunk into the folds of the Anglican Church.) The "New Theology" was to create a new order in religion. The orthodox would sacrifice a small portion of the Blessed Trinity; the Freethinker would give up some of his intransigence upon hearing that his brother had found a new god, knowing nothing of Hell, and lusting not for blood baths as a means of salvation. "Gather the rival faiths within thy fold" was a line of a hymn much favoured then.

It was hardly ever understood that the Freethinker was not looking for a new god; he had no room for any god at all. I had a friend who sent me pages of MS. setting out his conception of deity. Another friend, always waggishly inclined, gave him the Christian name of "Conception."

It was impossible to make him understand that I was just as likely to be impressed by new theories of the man in the moon. Perhaps you suggest we are outmoded because you aver a change in the attitude of scientists.

"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and saint and heard great argument"

—about religion and science. When the doctor was a theologian—the saint always was—I found he knew but one scientific name—Sir Oliver Lodge. Sir Oliver appeared, like an Atlas, supporting alone the whole world of scientific knowledge. He must have felt very lonely! Then—"Oh happy day!"—there arrived heavenly twins in the persons of Jeans and Eddington. The Christian soldier scientists increased from one to three. It was held that against this phalanx, albeit one was ripe for superannuation, Freethinkers must yield.

Of course, there was a wretched fly in Oliver's ointment. In a kind of aside on the stage of this controversy the Christian ruminated in a monologue of misgiving. "What a pity the fellow does not know where to stop. He finds us a god in Heaven, but he sees so many spirits roaming about earth. Cannot he offer his theism without his spiritualism? If we question his veracity on the latter the insidious Freethinker will say he is equally dubious about the former. You cannot cross-examine your own witness—put Sir Oliver in the box as evidence for God and then question his spirits."

As to Jeans and Eddington, they are supposed to have put the "kybosh" on materialism. They certainly do not seem to have found in the Universe the "all enfolding love," to use the erotic phrase about deity beloved by my last pastor, Bernard Snell, of Brixton. What, I should like to know, is the Christian quarrel with matter? "A nasty piece of goods," the Christian seems to say, "but Spirit—a fine fellow!" As a child I sang the hymn which said "All things bright and beautiful, the Lord God made them all." Was matter excluded from this? Some syrupy sentimentalists are fond of a saying that God must love poor people; he has made so many of them. I should be inclined to retort similarly to those who seem so fastidious about matter: "God seems to have made a lot of it."

We bark up the same trees! Richness indeed, as a rebuke from the orthodox. Christians have been barking up certain trees for about a century. I do not put it earlier because they sought to prevent Freethinkers climbing any. If the latter succeeded in doing so, the tree was fired, or they were brought down by constables armed with indictments for blasphemy. What about the antique barking now! Our misfortunes are due to forgetting God, neglecting the Sabbath, etc. Sitting in a Quaker meeting-house, my dear Ernest, you fondly imagine that orthodoxy is suffering much more rapid attrition than it actually is. Have you listened to the B.B.C.'s tripe on religion? Did you read—in Hansard—the debate on the Sunday opening of theatres?

We are abusive. Yet you, in an earlier part of your letter, say "it is a reversion to Mumbo-jumboism to associate God with war, of whatever sort." The large majority of your fellow Christians—those who believe in days of intercession—would call your language abuse of them! Satirical sallies, I should prefer to say, are part of our weapons. These weapons have been used by writers like Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, Samuel Butler and Bernard Shaw. Please do not think I should phrase everything as it is phrased here. Have you ever read a periodical which has your entire approval from title to colophon? I doubt if the editor of the "Church Times" shudders more at the "Freethinker" than at the "War Cry." You yourself have made me squirm by the phrase "donkey's years" (a synonym, Mr. Editor, for length of time), a horrible flop from a man of keen literary and artistic sensitiveness.

I would like to know what your God does do in his disassociation from the war. Does he sit aloof like a superior person? "I told them so. I gave them free will. They must do as they like." Much as a father might watch a child being run over by a lorry. "I told him not to cross the road. He must exercise his own choice. I shall do nothing." Your God approximates to my conception of a devil. It is related of Dickens that once,

hearing a man at a dinner fiercely attacking mankind, he leaned across the table and said, "Young man, do not you think it is a pity you belong to the human race?" This is the retort that comes to my mind when, to exculpate their deity, my Christian friends rush to pile wickedness upon humanity.

On the finish (to use a favourite phrase of yours), is it not apparent that you have but a superficial knowledge of our position? Why should only "the Agnostic case" be presented? Do you consider the Atheistic case—I waive the question whether there is any essential difference between them—should never be permitted print? Unfortunately, I usually find my Christian critics sadly ignorant. You may meet some devil of a fellow who will tell you that when young he read Freethinking lectures and read Freethinking books. When you ask for what we call in the law further and better particulars he is often embarrassed to supply them. You seem to be quite unaware of the "Literary Guide," which might justify your adjective "dignified." Yet it has been published about 40 years. Only recently the secretary of the National Adult School Movement failed to give correctly the name of the Rationalist Press Association.

Whilst I am ill disposed for a date-throwing competition, the idea of meticulously examining the titles of periodicals is intriguing. There is the "Universe." How embracing! A Martian might offer a contribution. Despite the piquancy of a production authentically from another planet, I am sure the editor would regret, etc., if the message from Mars declared they had there a better religion than Christianity. To come down to earth, supposing Mr. Winston Churchill panted to proclaim his passionate Protestantism in a series of articles. There is no more popular man in Great Britain, yet they would be rejected. Or take the "Christian World." Imagine a Roman Catholic saying, "This must embrace us, we top the poll for numbers," and then offering an article in defence of the Holy Eucharist! The "Friend" would not be friendly enough to an Atheist to publish a defence of Atheism; "One and All" does not cater for Freethinkers, who surely are in the "All." Only in the last two papers is it likely that even a mild letter would be published from a pronounced dissident. Yet, I will guarantee that you will be allowed to reply **in an article** to my letter in this paper. Can you match this in any other journal? You must not attack us because we do not reach an ideal hitherto quite unattainable in journalism. When we have a paper that editorially thinks along half a dozen different lines and invites articles of propaganda from Christians, Mohammedans, Mormons, Buddhists, Atheists, Christian Scientists, etc., and treats them equally in the hospitality offered, your criticism will merit consideration. We are free of the influence of priest, holy book, authority, advertiser, financier.

Lastly, my dear Ernest, I did not send you the paper with any hope of making you a convert. You must not, however, think that my lack of optimism in that direction is an implied compliment.—Yours always,

WILL KENT

THE INNOCENCE OF G. K. CHESTERTON

EVERYONE who possesses a sense of literary style must have a certain admiration for some of the works of G. K. Chesterton. Few men can have possessed a more utterly characteristic style than he, and few can have been more controlled by a sense of the vast importance of the message of their writings. But at the same time, few can, on occasion, have written more nonsense under the thin disguise of profundity. For a Freethinker few exercises could be more mentally helpful than a careful examination of the work of Mr. Chesterton in one of his wilder and more exuberant moods. There is no space, in these days of paper rationing, to examine even the whole of one brief essay, so many fallacies are everywhere close packed within small compass; but I would like to call attention to one small point which is quite typical of the way in which the great Roman Catholic apologist begged the questions and (sometimes) the answers.

In an entertaining book of essays, entitled "The Thing," which was included by Messrs. Sheed and Ward in their

shilling "Unicorn Books" in 1939, Chesterton tilts at many people and many movements in his usual swash-buckling way. The example which I choose to illustrate my discussion of his philosophical position comes from an essay in that volume entitled "The Feasts and the Ascetic," which is for the most part a discussion of the anomalous phenomenon of the Catholic Church's admiration for ascetic practices, while at the same time it supports the many religious feasts which are scattered, debris-like, through the calendar.

Chesterton says, *apropos* a remark about the peculiarities of his religion:—

The Faith is simply the story of a God who died for men. But, queerly enough, if we were even to print the words without a capital G, as if it were the cult of some new and nameless tribe, many would realise the idea for the first time. Many would feel the thrill of a new fear and sympathy if we simply wrote, "the story of a god who died for men." People would sit up suddenly and say what a beautiful and touching pagan religion that must be.

One is astonished that a writer who has assumed the attitude of superiority which Chesterton always adopted on religious matters could be so little acquainted with the facts of orthodox religion. What else was Osiris than "a god who died for man," and almost every other religion of pagan antiquity might be described in similar terms. In fact, queerly enough, the idea of a god dying for man seems to have been almost generally held in the childhood of the human race, and only to have been outgrown with the appearance of rational thought.

I have written, not with any desire to "score" off a man who is no longer able to reply, save through the distortions of a spiritualistic medium, but because G. K. Chesterton is in many ways typical of the Roman Catholic Church as a whole. Roman Catholics are very ready to accuse Freethinkers of ignorance, where as they themselves are frequently ignorant of the known facts of comparative religion.

Roman Catholicism, in fact, still remains in the childish stage of humanity, and it is therefore wholly appropriate that Chesterton, its most fervent advocate in our time, should have been, in all essentials, a child to the end of his days.

S. H.

BRITISH-ISRAELISM

THE definite possibility of the United States joining in the war against Germany may bring to the front an old tenet of the British-Israel Party. In 1932 they predicted that in 1934 the English-speaking countries would wage a holy war against the world, Armageddon following. So, at least, it was to be, according to their periodical, the "National Message." It is not very difficult for prophets to push their dates back and so keep their followers in a state of expectancy.

According to British-Israelism, we must distinguish between the Jews (of Judah) and the Israelites, who are our ancestors, and to whose ten northern tribes God's promises are made. These tribes were led away captive into Assyria when Samaria was taken about 721 B.C., and then they disappear from history. What happened to them is not known, but British Israel can tell us. They escaped and drifted westwards to England as Angles and Saxons.

Other peoples, such as the Celts, go towards our make-up, however. What about the Celts, then? To explain this, British Israel takes an old Irish legend as sober history, which says that the prophet Jeremiah visited Ireland with an Egyptian lady who married an Irish chief. This lady they suppose to be the daughter of Zedekiah, last King of Judah, and so the Celts are brought into the scheme of things by connecting the Hebrew monarchy, and therefore God's promises, with them. As for the story itself there would be the same justification in taking a Hans Andersen book and selecting one of the stories as true while rejecting the rest. Next, they trace the descent of the English monarchy from Ireland, and the rabbit is now in a position to be extracted from the hat. English kings descend from the old kings of Judah.

As a matter of fact, there is no evidence at all that Egbert, or any of those that followed him, came from Ireland, and no reason for believing Egbert to have had an Irish ancestry. The only trustworthy record of any Irish connections about this period, I think, is when Edwy the Fair, having been tortured by the Church for wanting to marry his cousin, was banished to Ireland, and this was later than Egbert.

Nor is the British-Israelite to be deterred from his thesis when William the Conqueror comes along. He, too, since he left the imprint of his blood on our royal line, must be somehow brought within the scheme. We must presume that if he had not won at Hastings then there would have been no need for him to have Israelite connections. However, he won, and so the tribe of Joseph separated from others in the westward trek and reappeared as Normans at the beginning of the 9th century.

These theories are presented with an air of learning and a show of scholarship, well calculated to deceive the half-educated and are, in fact, a tissue of wild fabrications, "fragments of unbridled imagination," as one author* calls them.

The Coronation Stone from Perth is also held to have been brought by Jeremiah, and to be that on which Jacob slept. Proofs that it is of local Scottish origin are of no avail.

The thesis is supported by some queer play on names. "Saxons" are "Isaac's sons"; "Danes" are of the tribe of Dan; the word "Scot" is from the Hebrew scoth (meaning tabernacle). These are in our A.V., but Isaac in Hebrew does not correspond to Saxon, and scoth should be sukthoth, with quite a different sound. Why are our sailors called "Jack Tars"? Because, says British Israel, we possess the "ships of Tarshish," promised to Israel.

It is not an inviting task to pick out points for criticism in such a mass of rubbish. We may remark, however, that some Saxons remained in Germany, and yet these latter must be excluded. I know of no British Israelite answer to this, though I am prepared to believe that they could easily concoct one. They have also made much of the measurements of Egyptian pyramids, though it is hard to see with what profit, since the Egyptians were not Israelites.

G. H. TAYLOR

ACID DROPS

RELIGION runs true to form wherever it is found. An Australian paper just to hand records the execution of a native at Port Moresby. The man was attended in his last moments by the Rev. Father Flynn. His religious ministrations were greatly appreciated by the condemned man, who said he "was not angry with anyone; I am going to heaven." We feel quite sure that the hanged man will find himself in very congenial company, considering the large number of men—and women—who have been helped to their heavenly home by the public executioner.

It has been decided by the Board of Trade that clerical vestments shall not come under rationed clothing. Why not? We quite understand that to place obstacles in the way of priests and bishops, etc., putting on their stage uniforms, would rob all preachers of their distinctiveness. It is the only way by which one can tell at a glance that a parson is a really superior person. Besides, to prevent ecclesiastical dignitaries wearing their mumbo-jumbo uniforms is not unlike denying an actor the use of "make-up." Of course, priests might be compelled to wear short skirts without trimmings, but a clown without his easily recognised dress would lose much of his attraction. It is a delicate situation, and the protests of the clergy prove that they at least are alive to the realities of their position.

*"Churches, Sects and Religious Parties." (Butterworth.)

A Roman Catholic paper suggests that Catholics, as a means of recognising each other, should wear a distinctive badge. It suggests that a fish should be worn. That is rather a dangerous suggestion, since it may suggest to those who are interested in religious origins that the fish, before it became a religious symbol, existed as a religious fact, and that might gently lead the believer to an understanding of religion. It is quite certain that no Roman Catholic, or any other priest, would wish that.

For example. Among the most primitive of peoples superstitions exist concerning fish. With many tribes there is a fish totem, and a totem is either never eaten—as among the South African tribes—or is eaten ceremoniously—as in the later forms of primitive religion. Some believed that the spirits of the dead go into certain fishes, and that leads to the fish becoming an object of veneration, and also of petition. The Esquimeaux believe that a fish is the cause of rain. The ancient Babylonians believed that the inventor of letters was half fish and half man. Later, with the beginnings of astronomy, the fish plays a great part as a religious symbol. The Greeks and the Egyptians had a sophisticated form of fish worship. It is found on Christian tombs, it is closely connected with Jesus Christ and, under one form or another, was with him.

It is worth noting that the very ancient Jews must have had both a fish and pig totem. Both were holy, or sacred, animals. For the Jew is forbidden to eat the pig, and on many ceremonial occasions fish is eaten. And in primitive religions an animal totem, as we have said, is either eaten ceremonially, or it is not eaten at all. The eating of the flesh and blood of Jesus is again a custom that leads us direct back to one of the earliest forms of religious practice; for the eating of the sacrificed god was one method of man partaking of his qualities. In the history of religion one must get right back to primitive mankind if one wishes to **understand** religion, instead of merely to record the various phases through which it has passed.

The history of religion is a most interesting study. More, if one would understand the history of mankind, and account for all his modern religious fancies, many institutions, superstitions and frames of mind, the study of religion is imperative. A small book dealing with the way to study religion, giving the complete story from the savage up to the Archbishop of Canterbury, from the baptism of an ordinary baby to the coronation service of a king, is sadly needed. We throw out the hint for some adventurous soul to exploit.

Bridlington and Huntingdon have followed other places in taking the desperate plunge of having cinemas open on Sunday. There was the usual display of typically British religious humbug from both those who wanted them open and those who did not. It is an astonishing feature of modern religion that even when Christians are driven, against their will, to agree in doing something sensible where religion is concerned, they have to apologise and lie in doing so. The reasons given by both sides are seldom made the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That ought to follow with a "S'welp me, gawd," because nothing but religion can so glorify humbug.

For example. Those who really like a genuinely free Sunday—if only as an instalment of the glorious freedom we are to have after the war (how long after is not stated)—put forward the excuse that men in the Forces need this Sunday recreation or amusement. But we fail to see how or why men in uniform need amusement, etc., more than do civilians. If it is bad for soldiers and airmen to lounge about the streets with nothing to do, it must be equally bad for civilians. Sunday, the Christian Sunday, must be bad for both or for neither. Besides, in this war we are all in it. Civilians suffer as well as soldiers. And while we would like soldiers to have as much freedom as civilians—other things equal—we fail to see why soldiers should have greater freedom than civilians.

The religious plea that soldiers could go to church on Sunday will not do. After all, the performance given from the pulpit, or the altar, even though it be the completely theatrical show put on by Roman Catholics, or the burlesque performance of a High Churchman, does not quite fill the bill—for the ordinary human being.

Not to be behind-hand in this game of insincerity, those Christians who are sufficiently developed to feel a little ashamed of the domination of purely savage "taboo" apologise for their behaving more intelligently than they ought where religion is concerned, and set out the claim that what they are really concerned about is that men should not be robbed of their day of rest. As though the Churches ever seriously concerned themselves about that! The real reason for this attachment to Sunday, when it is honest, is purely religious, and, when it is not, the desire of the clergy to prevent any competition. So we have from such moronic institutions as the Lord's Day Observation Society the warning that our troubles are "largely due to our neglect of the Sabbath and, from the clergy, that if Sunday amusements are encouraged, working men will soon find themselves working seven days a week." But one cannot have religion in the modern State without encouraging humbuggery and some very healthy lying.

A very curious incident occurred at Huntingdon. At the Council meeting attention was called to the fact that only letters **against** Sunday opening had been received. One pictured stacks of letters of protest. But it was revealed, to use an idiotic newspaper word, that those who agreed had been asked not to write. And the letters of protest reached the huge number of **seven**, in a population of 7,500, and one of these was a resolution from a Church meeting.

Against the opening of cinemas at Bridlington on Sundays it was urged to the Council that if they were opened attendants should be restricted to members of the Forces, because, said the Rev. Vesey, representing the "Fraternal of Clergymen and Ministers," there was no demand by the general public. But if the general public do not want to go to the cinemas on Sunday, why prohibit them? No one is suggesting that those who do not go to the cinemas shall be fined or imprisoned.

Quite a number of Christians appear to be upset at the sermons of B.B.C. preachers who will have it that our sufferings during the war are due to our innate wickedness, and because we have not obeyed the "law of God," although what the law of God is no one is quite sure. The difficulty is an acute one. We, the inhabitants of these islands, are suffering at the hands of Germany. But, if that be true, it is not rash to say that God is, so far, on the side of Hitler. And that hardly fits in with the manner in which we Britishers imagine God should act. His first concern should be to look after us. Above all, while the good British Christian does not mind calling himself a miserable sinner, he gets into a hell of a temper if an outsider endorses the statement.

We remember that many, many years ago we had a free fight at an open-air meeting for taking a Christian at his word in this matter. He was a very unpleasant-looking individual and the head of some missionary institute, and, in the course of his remarks, after dwelling upon the villainy of Atheists, he said that he, as a Christian, recognised that he was a miserable sinner. When we suggested that, so far as appearances went, the evidence seems convincing, he and his followers were upset—and the fight was on. It is sometimes very unwise to assume that a Christian means what he says or says what he means.

The Vatican may experience trouble in Australia. It seems the Commonwealth Government is undecided whether payments of Peter's Pence, one of the sources of income of the Roman Church, should be permitted during the duration of the war. The New Testament performance of fishes coming along with pieces of money in their mouths for the godly seems no longer possible. The Church now

has to look for money to organisms higher in the biological scale—and with longer ears. The fishes are replaced by animals of a higher grade and with longer ears.

There are some features about the Church's struggle for the Child that gives one hope. For example. A writer in the "Church Times" says that the educational question will never be settled until the "scandalous divisions of Christendom are healed." That, we repeat, gives us grounds for hope. For in the whole of its history the Christian world has never been free from divisions. If we may take the New Testament at its own face value, Christians were very early quarrelling among themselves as to what was Christianity, and Paul had to warn other Christians against being led astray by false (Christian) teachers. When Christians first appear as genuine history they offer the same feature—"everybody's out of step but our Jock"; and the only thing that to-day drives Christians together for united action is the conviction that if they do not occasionally hang together, the alternative is to hang separately.

The "Newcastle Evening Chronicle" is discussing what we ought to do when the war is over. Some Roman Catholics are afraid that instead of going through the prescribed religious "grovel" after the war, some readers write to the paper saying that they will first have a good long sleep and then a good feast of ham and eggs. Well, that would certainly be better than going to church and thanking a god who isn't there for what he hasn't done. But we also hope there will not be too much sleeping and eating after the war. We have a long, long road to travel if we wish to convert this country into a genuine democracy. A good many powerful influences are lying low at the moment, but they will be active enough when peace returns. At present we are fighting through war to peace. Then we shall have to fight another kind of war in order to get a genuine peace. Hitler has blown up a lot of our buildings. We shall have, after the war, to see that some of our institutions and propensities follow the road of our demolished homes and monuments.

We see that Canada is to have a day of national prayer on June 29. Folly is far more infective than wisdom, and the Canadians should have learned something from our own attempts in that direction. Perhaps they have learned something, for we observe that the prayers are to incite to a greater rate of arms production. As usual, God will help provide guns, aeroplanes and tanks if they are in sufficient numbers to do the trick without his interference.

It is, of course, brutally stupid—or stupidly brutal, whichever way one cares to put it—for the Germans to have billeted themselves in the Monastery of Jasna Gora, and while there to have destroyed "the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Cresta-chowa." We can understand the "Catholic Times" feeling very angry at this, but, after all, the miraculous picture might have done something to protect itself. The despoilers should have been paralysed directly they raised their hands to "defile" the picture. Or over-night (these things usually happen when no one is about) the picture might have repaired itself. As it is, the miraculous painting seemed no better able to protect itself than a cartoon of Low. Once upon a time the saints, male and female, would have punished the desecrators in a signal manner. But the saints have fallen on bad days.

The evil influence of religion makes itself plain in nearly every possible occasion. The B.B.C. 7-55 morning moan was taken over for a week by the Dean of St. Paul's. Not quite so obviously void of meaning as were many of his predecessors, his addresses were much poorer than he would have dared to give to any ordinary audience. And the announcer adapted his tone to that reminiscent of "Let us pray." But it would, of course, be dangerous to preach religion in the same tone that one talks of other aspects of life. The other aspects would not suffer, but the religious fee-fi-fo-fun influence would be completely smashed.

"THE FREETHINKER,"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—T. B. Jones, 2s. 6d.; D. J. Cavanagh (U.S.A.), 5s.; F. B. Bolton, £4 7s. 10d.; Bolton Branch, N.S.S., £5; E. Chidley, 15s.; E. Williams (U.S.A.), 5s.

M. MURRAY.—Thanks for cutting; always useful.

JACK BISHOP (Melbourne).—Thanks for cuttings. They are always useful. Even when not actually used at the time, many are worth preserving. Such help makes the "Freethinker" a genuinely co-operative effort.

S.H.—Received with thanks.

C. S. SIMPSON.—Several readers have sent us the cutting from "John Bull." We may take it as the subject for one of our "Views and Opinions" so soon as we finish the Frazer articles, which will be next week.

T. L. MATTHEWS.—Most of the works of H. C. Lea have been republished in this country, but not all—"Superstition and Force" and "Studies in Church History," for example—both of them first-class books. Dr. Coulton says that no one has ever been able to point to any material misstatement in the whole of his many volumes. That is a fine testimony by one scholarly writer to another.

E. MORRIS.—The following from Epictetus will answer your query: "Every matter has two handles, one of which will bear taking hold of, the other not. If thy brother sin against thee, lay not hold of the matter by this; for by this handle the matter will not bear taking hold of. But rather take lay hold of it by this, that he is thy brother, thy born mate; and thou wilt take hold of it by what will bear handling."

Lecture notices must reach 2, and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

WE are gradually settling down in our new home at 2, and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, and we say with confidence that the change will be all for the better. We invite a call from both London and provincial friends.

Our chief concern at the moment is to replace our destroyed stock of books and pamphlets, and to print new ones. To do this we shall be asking friends to supply us with copies of those we are without. But two of the "Pamphlets For the People" have just been delivered from the printers. There is a new one, "Christianity and Slavery," for which we have frequently been asked. The other is a reprint of "Did Jesus Christ Ever Exist?" which has been out of print for some time. Of this latter one we can say that it puts the essential as clearly as it ever has been put, and is quite free from the discussion of matters which, while not altogether irrelevant, are yet useful to Christians by confusing the issue. Although we say it, the pamphlet is the clearest and most convincing statement that has yet been issued within the compass of 16 pages. The price of these pamphlets is 2d. each. Postage 1d. extra.

Here is an excerpt from a reader of less than a year's standing. We think it will be appreciated by readers as it is by those responsible for the journal.

"It is just over nine months since I became a subscriber to the "Freethinker." I have read it with interest and, I think, profit. Some four months ago I was fortunate enough to acquire a complete run from 1929 to 1939, and am amazed at the continuously high level it maintained. Candidly, I know of no other journal in this country that can compare with it. It reflects credit on all concerned. I regret I did not make its acquaintance earlier in life."

This is not the first letter of the kind we have received from readers. We hope the compliment paid is well deserved. It will certainly act as a spur to us to take care that the "Freethinker" does not deteriorate.

A reader—we fancy he is a Roman Catholic, although a weak one—asks us whether we really believe that intolerance is part of the "teaching" of the Church. Perhaps the best plan will be to take the following from Cardinal Newman's "Apologia pro Vita Sua," page 257:—

"The Catholic Church claims, not only to judge infallibly on religious questions, but to animadvert on opinions in secular matters which bear upon religion, on matters of philosophy, of science, of literature, of history, and it demands our submission to her claim. It claims to censure books, to silence authors and to forbid discussions. . . . It must, of course, be obeyed without a word."

That should settle the question. Cardinal Newman was among the foremost theologians of his time. Our quotation is from the edition of 1889.

The "Willesden Chronicle" thinks that "no parent would object to the teaching (in the schools) of those elements of the Christian religion which makes for decent conduct in life." We are afraid the editor of the "Willesden Chronicle" does not understand the situation. First of all the objection is to the State, made up of all sorts of religions, and a very large number of people who have no religious belief, picking out a particular religion for financial and moral support. Freedom must rest on equality. There can be no other basis that will be of use. Secondly, "decent," in the mouth of right-thinking people, has no necessary relation to religion. In the mouth of a parson it really means the holding of certain religious beliefs, without which a number assert morality cannot exist. Thirdly, it is wrong to force religious beliefs on children who are unable, and not permitted, to exercise their own judgment on what is placed before them. Fourthly, religious instruction is not "education" at all. It does not bring out the best that is in a child, but teaches it to accept as true theories and tales what the teachers and the parsons would mostly be ashamed to put before a critical audience of adults. There are other objections, but these are enough to get on with.

AMBASSADOR TO THE REICH

IT is not often that one is moved to describe a book as an important historical document; and, of the few books thus described, fewer still merit the description. "Ambassador Dodd's Diary" (Gollancz, 12s. 6d.) should certainly be one of the select few. It is a careful and unsensational account, by one who viewed the process from within, of the way in which the Nazi Movement in Germany gradually tied the German people down, making them the obedient servants of the party will.

Where Mr. William Dodd was so privileged as an observer of these matters was that he was U.S. Ambassador to the Reich for several crucial years, and consequently had the chance of observing most of the Nazi leaders at close quarters.

His appointment was the result of President Roosevelt's desire to come to better terms with Germany; but, at this late date and being wise after the event, one may feel doubtful whether a Baptist Professor of History was precisely the right person to achieve that aim. However, the fact remains that Mr. Dodd, doing his level best to reach a satisfactory solution of the dilemmas even then dividing the world, kept a most illuminating diary, which has now achieved publication.

There are many memorable things in the book, not the least being the portrait (quite unself-consciously given) of the diarist himself. What will arouse most controversy is his denunciation of sympathisers with Fascism among the autocracy of all countries. Already the book has been attacked in some quarters for that reason—but, somehow, I doubt whether there are any near-Fascists among the readers of these columns!

S. H.

THE "MAN" JESUS

V

THE passage in the "Annals" of Tacitus relating to the way in which Christians were persecuted in Rome under Nero, together with the name of the "originator" of the sect, "Christus," has been a perfect godsend to Christians ever since the reality of their deity has been scientifically questioned; and it is now being used by a number of Rationalists and Agnostics as a genuine piece of Christian evidence with an enthusiasm which would have gladdened the heart of old Paley.

Let us assume for a moment that it is absolutely authentic, that Tacitus did write it—and what does it prove? Actually nothing more than about the year A.D. 115 there was a religion called "Christianity" which had a number of adherents who declared that the founder was someone called "Christ" who suffered death under Pontius Pilate. There must have been millions of other believers in the Roman Empire who, in exactly the same way, would have told Tacitus that the founder of their particular faith had also lived and died; for example, the followers of Osiris, of Mithra, of Adonis, of Atys, and of many other deities. And the business of the historian would be to record what he heard. Certainly, Tacitus did not go into the question of the origin of a particular deity with the scientific precision of a James Frazer.

Christians, in the days of Tacitus, undoubtedly believed that "Christ" had lived—just as the worshippers of Mithra were certain of the existence at one time of Mithra. What religion Tacitus himself believed in I do not know; but he obviously thought very little of Christianity if his description of it is genuine. He says that the Christians were "hated for their abominations." Is that true? Were the Early Christians guilty of abominations?

One of my critics claims they were. He insists that it was "most unlikely" that "Tacitus merely retailed what he picked up from Christians" because "Tacitus was a Roman of position who held public office, had access to official records, and despised and loathed Christians." For these statements he gives no authority whatever, evidently believing in making them that it would not be required. I am afraid my innate scepticism makes me very disinclined to take any statement emanating from a believer in a "man" Jesus on trust.

For the truth is that, as far as we know, the facts are just the other way. Dr. Couchoud, in his "Enigma of Jesus," declares, "It would be hazardous to believe that Tacitus found his authority for this passing phrase in any archive, for it was not his custom to consult original documents. There is no reason to think that there ever existed in the Emperor's archives any report of the Procurator Pontius Pilate as to the execution of Christus. And we know through Tacitus that these archives were secret and that the Emperor refused to allow even the Senate to consult them." These statements are given on authority—from Ph. Fabia's "Les Sources de Tacite" (Paris, 1893) and from the "History" of Tacitus, iv., 40. The reader can, of course, take his choice: believe on authority or not.

There is another point which must strike the unbiassed explorer in these matters. If the records did contain the necessary documents relating to the death of Jesus, would the title given him for his name, "Christ," that is, the Messiah, have been used? Would not the name have been Jesus, or Jesus of Nazareth? Is it not a fact that in John it says, "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." Mark and Luke say merely "the King of the Jews," without giving a name for the inscription; while Matthew adds the name "Jesus." In none of these cases have we "Christ"; yet we are told that it was the word "Christ" which is found in the archives.

And would the average Roman reading the "Annals" in A.D. 120 or so have known who was Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius in A.D. 30? Judea, the source of the "evil" of Christianity, is introduced later, but not when Pilate is mentioned. And again, were large numbers of Christians in Rome under Nero? Is it not a fact that not only is this seriously questioned by modern authorities but almost the whole story of the terrible fate meted out to them nowadays denied? The passage in the "Annals" declares that the Christians "confessed"—though what they confessed to is by no means clear. Could they possibly have confessed to setting Rome on fire when they were innocent of the charge? Or is it seriously contended that is what they really did, and it was so recorded in the archives?

The Christians were, according to the "Annals," made into human torches to provide a spectacle for the Roman mob—and in this mob, used to far worse sights, there arose "pity." Is this conceivable? And why do not Suetonius, Pliny and Dio Cassius, all of whom painted Nero in black colours, mention the "spectacle"? Are we to believe that only Tacitus knew of it, or that only he was allowed to obtain the facts from the archives?

Tacitus is appealed to when we want to prove that there existed a "man" Jesus; but it is rather strange that he is not appealed to when we want to prove that the Early Christians were guilty of "abominations." In this case, either he or the archives are mistaken. Did he go to the records when he wrote about the Jews? He said in his "History" that "the Jews kept for worship in their holy of holies the image of an ass, as the animal by whose guidance they had slaked their thirst and brought their wanderings to a happy sequel." Are we to believe this because Tacitus was "a Roman of position"?

According to Suetonius writing, about A.D. 121, of Claudius, who lived about the year A.D. 25, the Jews were expelled from Rome because, "at the instigation of Chrestus, they were perpetually making trouble. Is 'Chrestus' our Jesus of Nazareth? Was he, as a 'man,' in Rome? So fuddled are the protagonists of the real existence of Jesus as a man on the passage in Suetonius that nowadays they almost all, with a sigh of relief, give it up. As the German, Weiss, says, "It betrays so inaccurate knowledge of the facts that it cannot seriously be regarded as a witness." But it is not unfair to ask if Suetonius is "inaccurate" where did he get his information from? The archives?

The truth is that Tacitus, as a witness for the assertion that there was a man called Jesus who lived in Palestine about the year A.D. 30, went about doing good, and was put to death by Pontius Pilate, is an even poorer authority than Josephus or the Talmud; and that holds good if we accept the "Annals" as genuine. But ever since Robert Taylor questioned the authority of Gibbon on this point, and I think he was the first to do so—Taylor was a great pioneer in many ways—the conviction has been growing that not only is the whole passage relating to "Christ" and the persecution of the Early Christians a deliberate forgery, but that it is quite probable that the whole of the "Annals" have been forged. I will deal with this in my next article.

H. CUTNER

Ecclesiastical tyranny is of all kinds the worst; its fruits are cowardice, idleness, ignorance and poverty.—BANCROFT.

The truest mark of being born with great qualities is being born without envy.—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

The book which you are reading aloud is mine, Fidenius; but while you read it so badly, it begins to be yours.—MARTIAL.

At present we can only reason of the divine justice from what we know of justice in man. When we are in other scenes, we may have a truer and nobler idea of it; but while we are in this life we can only speak from the volume that is laid open before us.—POPE.

THE PROPHET

"The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad."
(Hosea ix. 7.)

WHEN we are born we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools!

"'Twould be a dull, uninteresting world if 'twere not for fools. Even in heaven, we are told, folly is not unknown:

"His angels he charged with folly" (Job iv. 18). The monotony of heaven has created worse things than angelic folly, and the lesser thing should not the greater hide!

Our life drama when theatricalised on our little stage admits of but one fool, whilst on the great stage of life the players are, according to Carlisle, "mostly fools," many of them being prophetic fools!

But what is a prophet?

Augurs, conjectors, diviners, magicians, oracles, ovates, poets, prophets, seers, soothsayers and sorcerers; the prophet may be all of these, but each and all have contributed to the world's prophecies, which the Emperor Augustus lessened by destroying some 2,000 of its volumes.

Religions would, probably, never have been heard of but for these madmen. From the first religion to that of the last—Mormonism—all of them would have perished but for their prophets and prophecies.

But the prophet, honest enough to begin with perhaps, the world understood as it desired, and shaped him to his will. If he prophesied falsely he was punished with death (Deut. xiii 5; xviii 20-22; Jer. xxvi). So their prophecies naturally became obscure, ambiguous, practically void of meaning, or capable of two or three different meanings.

If not really mad they must sham a drunken frenzy, foaming at the mouth, yelling and making a strange noise, gnashing of teeth, shivering and trembling, with many strange motions.

Every earthly encumbrance must be dispensed with. Stark nakedness was essential if true prophecy was anticipated.

Saul stripped himself naked to prophesy before Samuel and prophesied and lay down naked all that day and all that night (1 Sam. xix 24).

And Isaiah, a greater prophet than Saul, walked naked and barefoot for three years (Isa. xx. 3). Whether he remained sober all that time or not he doesn't say! Strong drink in Isaiah's time was very much abused—"The priest and the prophet has erred through strong drink: they err in vision and stumble in judgment" (Isa. xxviii 7).

Strong drink, dreams, fits, moved by good spirits, and evil spirits sent from God, and agitated in a violent manner by God's spirit, prophets used unspeakable gestures and signs, made speeches and psalms, or sung them, or songs of praise to God.

Blasphemous, ignorant, drunken, profane (both prophet and priest, Jer. xiii. 11), every prophet and priest dealing falsely (Jer. vi. 13), prophets prophesying falsely and priests bearing rule by their means (Jer. v. 31). Prophets prophesied lies: the deceit of their own hearts (Jer. xiii. 26). Even the divinely inspired prophet Jeremiah, for his false prophecies, was put into the stocks and finally cast into a dungeon (Jer. xxviii).

That Joe Smith, the Mormon, should have had the arrogance to call himself a prophet, in receipt of a special revelation from, and under the influence of, the Supreme Being, therefore, should not surprise us! But Joe was probably the first respectable prophet!

The above, briefly and hastily written, may want—indeed does need—some qualifying. That some of the Hebrew prophets were remarkable men cannot be gainsaid. They lived in a primitive age and, of course, were queer mixtures. And if in our modern, civilised age we still find survivals of them, what may not be said on their behalf—

"If parts allure thee, think how Bacon shined,
The greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind."

(Pope.)

With Bacon, however, his good works have followed him, while his evil works have been buried. Whilst with the Hebrew prophets, much of the evil they did lives after them, whilst the good part of their work was interred with their bones. That their lives justify Hosea's pronouncement, I think will be acknowledged.

God, in the O.T., is a very elusive being—in clouds, whirlwinds, burning bushes, up mulberry trees, busily smiting nations, armies or individuals in their hinder parts. "He was more concerned," says Voltaire, "with the hinder parts of the Jews than with their immortal souls." And the same characteristic is carried forward to the N.T.

Prophesying dreams and visions; and the prophet still continues, as of old, to be useful, "for," says Paul, "no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries" (1 Cor. xii. 22; 1 Cor. xiv. 1-6; Eph. iv. 11).

Knowing these gentlemen, and the value of their prophecies, does it not seem wonderful that the fulfilment of prophecy should be deemed one of the leading branches of Christian evidence?

To have selected any prophet in the O.T. as representative would, no doubt, have been questioned by many. But in the N.T. no one will question the selection of Christ as a representative prophet. He ought to be classed as King of Prophets! What were his prophecies worth? The most important of them—the end of the world and the last Judgment—still remain unfulfilled. If anyone will for a few minutes turn to Matt. iv. 4-34, and carefully consider what is stated there, then note the declaration in v. 34, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled!" Similar passages may be read, particularly Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii. and Luke xxi. And if we still fail to understand what is so clearly stated, we must wait till we have the pleasure of meeting the Lord, when he cometh in his glory "sitting on a cloud" in the air, when he will no doubt explain many "things hard to be understood."

As the second person of the Trinity, if Christ had prophesied truly, he would only have been revealing secrets. He bluffingly credited his father only with the knowledge of the day and hour of the fulfilment of his prophecies (Matt. xxix. 36). But evidently the son's speculations did not meet with his father's approval!

And yet, after 2,000 years, prophets are still alive!

Bursts like the following may be expected for another 2,000 years, at least:—

"Every man his own prophet. If you wish to look into your own future, consult the Oracle—Unconscious Cerebration—within you, by simply stating your difficulties to your mind, just before falling asleep, and within a reasonable time after you will be surprised, but not always cheered, by the result. Conscious cerebration is untrustworthy as a guide because it is crippled by religion, education, etc. Whereas the freedom of Unconscious Cerebration is unrestricted, boundless. Try it!"

The poet Tennyson was a true prophet. Take his "Locksley Hall" as an instance:—

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew,
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue.

In comparison with the prophetic power of Scott and Byron, Tennyson's prophecies resemble the diagnosis of a doctor. He lacks their concentrating and foretelling power, and certainly their atmosphere. One quotation I select

from Byron because of its aptness at present—"The Isles of Greece," from "Don Juan":—

"What—silent still? and silent all?
Ah no, the voices of its dead
Sound like a distant torrent's fall
And answer, 'Let one living head,
But one arise—we come—we come':
—'Tis but the living who are dumb."

Even so have prophets, apostles and poets been urged to find expression.

At present the prophetic Voice of Spring is again heard in the land. Blackbird, lark and thrush are combining to make this sunny, spring morning into a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!

We may in time be enabled to humanise these forces if we act upon Mary Webb's sage advice:—

"Let us away, out of the murky day
Of sullen towns, into the silver noise
Of woods where every bud has found her way
Sunward, and every leaf has found a voice."

GEORGE WALLACE

MR. CUTNER ON THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS

A KIND friend has earned my gratitude by adding Mr. Cutner's four articles, "The 'Man' Jesus," to my still-growing collection of three entire books—one English, one French, one Nazi-German—and well over three hundred articles about my "Messiah Jesus."

I value them for their unique delightful frankness. Although there are quite a number of reviewers about who have developed the labour-saving device of criticising a book without reading it to a fine art, I had not yet come across one who so openly confessed to using this technique. We live to learn, indeed—and this is still a century of progress!

I gather from No. 1 of the series that not only my late friend Dr. Claude Montefiore, but also Klausner and myself—we are both punished for our sins by being shorn of our academic titles, presumably because they were, unlike Dr. Montefiore's, bestowed by alien universities—"and many other Jewish authorities" just leave Mr. Cutner "cold."

As far as I am concerned, I cannot for the life of me reciprocate that feeling. For I am simply thrilled by the announcement in No. 3 that Mr. Cutner "will read" my book "one day," and I look forward with great expectations to the outcome of so momentous an undertaking. What may we not expect from him when that day will have dawned at last, having already received so much from him for which we ought to feel truly thankful—e.g., the new fine distinction between "the Syro-Chaldaic language" and "Aramaic, which Milman would have so characterised if he had known" of their identity. May I tell Mr. Cutner that modern linguists call one and the same language "Aramaic" if it is used by the ancient Aramæans, Persians, Palestinian and Babylonian Jews and Mandæans, but "Syriac" if used by Oriental Christians? "Syro-Chaldaic" is but an old-fashioned, now discarded name for this language of the ancient Persian and later Parthian world-empire, which was used when Babylonian and Assyrian were unknown and people believed that the ancient "Chaldeans" spoke the language of the Babylonian Jews and Syrian Christians.

After Mr. Cutner has read my book he will know that I do not claim that the Old Russian text was translated from an Aramaic original. On the contrary, I have proved that it was translated from the first Greek version (made by his Greek secretaries) of Josephus' original Aramaic draft, entitled "The Capture of Jerusalem," and written for the Jews in the Parthian Empire; while the slightly different vulgate Greek text, entitled "Jewish War," was intended for the Romans, Greeks and Jews in the Roman Empire.

"One day"—let us hope so—he will also know that beside "the Greek text and this Slav one" two different Latin versions (one of them in some 2,000 MSS., still to be more closely searched for variants), a Hebrew, an Arabic and an Ethiopian one "have come down to us," all carefully investigated and discussed in detail by one whom Mr. Cutner deservedly punishes for his misdeeds by placing his "learning"—such as it may be—in inverted commas and by not reading the material collated in years of painstaking labour. He will "one day" learn that we do know who translated the Greek (not the Aramaic) text into Slavonic. He was not a Jew, but a Russian Subotnik—i.e., a Sabbatarian, heretic "Judaizer." But I must not tell Mr. Cutner too much of what is in my book, published ten years ago and now out of print, lest he refrain for good and all from reading it! And where would I then be?

"Not until an authentic manuscript or copy of Josephus in Aramaic or (!) Syro-Chaldaic comes to hand can we be absolutely certain what he wrote," says Mr. Cutner on p. 220. But, may I humbly ask him, what could prevent him, or any one of the other fanatical devotees of his inverted religious belief in the non-historicity of Jesus, from declaring that the happily re-discovered Aramaic text of Josephus is "inauthentic," "interpolated," etc., just as they declare the Latin text of Tacitus—recognised as perfectly authentic by everyone who knows anything about this author—as falsified simply because it militates against their own unshakable prejudice?

What has, indeed, prevented Mr. Cutner from retailing again the obsolete statement that "apart from the Bible" we "have got only the well-worn arguments from Josephus, Tacitus and the Talmud," when he could have found in my book the witness of the Samaritan Thallus, trying to give a natural explanation of the alleged eclipse of the sun during the crucifixion of Jesus, long before Josephus wrote his first book; the letter of the Syrian Mara bar Serapion, mentioning "the wise king of the Jews killed by them"—demonstrably anterior to the year A.D. 73, i.e., older than the gospel of Mark, which is posterior to A.D. 75; the testimony of the Roman procurator of the Lebanon province, Sossianus Hierocles, about "Jesus and his nine hundred followers committing banditry" (latrocinia); and last, not least, the witness of the genuine reports of Pilate to Emperor Tiberius, published by Emperor Maximinus Daza in A.D. 311, which proved so embarrassing for the Christians that Eusebius tried to discredit them by chronological arguments on a par with those used by Mr. Cutner in order to discredit the witness of Eliezer b. Hyrkanos?

It is this perfectly authentic official report, used by Josephus in the Imperial Archives in Rome, from which the Flavian propagandist culled the authentic pen-portrait of Jesus as it was given in the "how and cry," or "mandate to arrest" the king of the Jews proclaimed without Roman consent by the Messianist revolutionaries, in order to prove that a

person corresponding to this description could not have been anything but a mere human being. This does not suit Mr. Cutner any better than it suits Christian fundamentalists (although the pre-Nicene church-fathers were well acquainted with this description and did not hesitate to accept the uncomely outward appearance of their crucified Lord as an historic fact and a verification of the prophecies in Isaiah lii., 14; liii., 3ff.). I am sorry, but I cannot help either the one or the others. They both manage to stick to their guns by refusing or, let us say, postponing to read what irks them.

But even if we had nothing but the one passage in the Talmud, quoted by Mr. Archibald Robertson from my book, it would be an irrefutable proof for the fact that a Rabbi Jesus the Nasorean (Jeshu han-Nosri), alleged to be the son of a Roman soldier Pandera, interpreted Biblical passages in exactly the same provocative way as the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels. For the chronological difficulties raised by Mr. Cutner on p. 272 are all wholly imaginary.

First of all, it is wholly irrelevant whether the story occurs in the "Mishnah" or in the "Gemara," for there is no separate MS. tradition of the "Mishnah," which was committed to writing in the 6th century A.D., together with the "Gemara." For Mr. Cutner's purpose the one is no older nor more reliable than the other.

Secondly, Rabbi Aqiba (born about A.D. 50; executed by the Romans about A.D. 132) did not talk to his master "about the year A.D. 130," as Mr. Cutner tells his readers, but in the year of the persecution of the Palestinian Christians (A.D. 106/7). He could have found this date in R. Travers Herford's book on "The Pharisees," p. 141, if he was afraid that my own and Dr. Klausner's more recent works would have left him too cold to hold a pen in clammy fingers in this chilly month of May, 1941.

R. EISLER

(To be concluded)

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. L. EBURY.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11.0 a.m., Rt. Hon. LORD SNELL, C.B.E. "A Sane Cure for the Ills of a Mad World."

COUNTRY

June 28 (Saturday).—Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), 7.30 p.m. Debate: "Is there any God?" Affirmative, PASTOR T. BARNES; Negative, Jno. T. BRIGHTON.

June 29 (Sunday).—Darlington (Market Steps), 7 p.m. MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

June 30 (Monday).—Blyth (The Fountain), 7 p.m. MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

July 1 (Tuesday).—North Shields (Harbour View). A Lecture.

July 2 (Wednesday).—Stockton (The Cross), 7 p.m. MR. J. T. BRIGHTON. (Will Stockton friends and Tees-side members please note.)

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"ANNA KARENINA"

THERE is not only the book, there is the time, the place and the circumstances. Many of my recollections of books are mingled with these incidental associations; this one with a train journey, that one with the smell of basilicon ointment on an incapacitating bruise, another with the richness of hours unwarrantably stolen from examination study. I remember once returning home from a short absence to find a copy of "Anna Karenina" awaiting me. Being tired, I but half-heartedly opened it and essayed the first page. It began: "All happy families are more or less like one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own particular way." Whereupon I sighed a superior sigh; what specious nonsense! what unobservant dogmatism! Well, I supposed I ought to try a little more just to confirm my worst fears. But somehow, my bump-tious attitude seems to have dissolved away; quickly too, for I do not recall the transition of mood. All that remains

with me is the impression of that tedious absence closely followed by my "living" within Tolstoy's behemoth of a novel for some little time.

"Anna Karenina" may be regarded, in two ways, as a double novel; firstly, it is about twice the length of the average novel, and secondly, it contains two, almost discrete, themes, centred respectively round the lives of a man, Konstantin Levin, and a woman, Anna Karenina. Although they are both members of the Russian gentility, move, in Moscow and in Petersburg, in the same circles and have innumerable acquaintances in common, their affairs never directly touch, and only once, near the end of the book, do their paths cross and, for the first and last time, they meet.

Anna's saga has at least the titular right to be considered first. It is refulgent with the amaranthine glamour of a *grande passion*, yet it is never banal nor even "romantic." Anna, the wife of an eminent Government official, whose religion is Conventional Rectitude and whose god is Social Prestige, meets Count Vronsky, a soldier, wealthy, handsome "and gay." Love is immediate and overwhelming. And so is their problem: if they renounce each other their futures will be socially secure but mentally intolerable; if they cleave to each other, social ruin is spelt for the whole triangle—and it must be mentioned that the position is complicated by the existence of Anna's well-beloved young son. Well, the outcome, of course (this is a Russian novel!) is tragedy. Vronsky eventually deserts his mistress to go to the wars, and Anna, who had just made the decision to break up her home life for her lover's sake, throws herself under the wheels of the train which carries him away—a method of suicide brought forcibly to her notice on the occasion of her first meeting with Vronsky at a Moscow terminus. Tolstoy's thesis is clearly this: if society becomes so artificial that love plays second fiddle to convenience in marriage contracts, and so hypocritical that clandestine love affairs are *de rigueur*, then that society is sick, and the lot of most of its members will be unhappiness and frustration. He treats the relation between Anna and Vronsky not contumeliously or "gaily"—the conventional attitudes—but realistically, as an unavoidable, natural and inevitably tragic happening. There is no question of guilt or innocence.

An interesting sidelight is Tolstoy's treatment of Vronsky, in which is detectable an odd mixture of admiration and disapproval. It mirrors Tolstoy's own life-long conflict between sensuality and moralising severity.

Levin, too, has a love affair, but it is far more straightforward than Anna's; it has neither complicated repercussions nor social significance. Although, almost needless to say, Tolstoy's subtle handling compels our interest in this department of Levin's life, it is to the accounts of his rural pursuits that the reader is most likely to return. Here the author was describing his own experiences as a landlord and his enthusiastic attempts to introduce co-operative farming among the serfs. Levin is substantially his creator's image. Through him Tolstoy voiced his dissatisfaction with Russian agriculture generally, with absentee landlordism, with the poverty and subjection of the peasantry, and with the haphazard farming practices. Levin tries, as Tolstoy tried, with some success, to improve the organisation on his own lands. He is undeterred by the sneers and discouragement of his citified friends, for he cares as little for their opinions as for their way of life. The really serious opposition comes from the peasants themselves—ignorant, conservative, tradition-bound, highly suspicious of interference and frankly incredulous of altruism. The progress of Levin's schemes and the fluctuating relations between master and man are described with fine insight. Interspersed with this material are enthralling accounts of hunting and mowing. Tolstoy, like Levin, was a strong, vigorous man, and his delight in outdoor activities is made to infect the reader powerfully.

A measure of the greatness of all lasting literature is the degree to which it holds the reader who is remote in time and place from the scene of action. And just as Chaucer's pilgrims, Shakespeare's soliloquists and Balzac's money-grubbers all transcend "period," so Tolstoy's princes and serfs, *grandes dames* and prostitutes, and philosophers and ne'er-do-wells are as familiar to us to-day as if we had been nineteenth-century Russians ourselves.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN

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