

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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CONTENTS

Ghosts—The Editor	337
Heavens Above	339
Krishna and Christ—H. J. Hayward	340
Acid Drops	341
To Correspondents	343
Sugar Plums	343
The Printed Word—G. B. Lissenden	344
In Reply to Critics—H. Cutner	344
The Cult of Satan—F. A. Ridley	346
Sin—G. Wallace	346
The Emergence of Mr. Eliot—S. H.	347
Sunday Lecture Notices	347

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Ghosts

SOME time ago I was asked did I believe in ghosts. I think the questioner expected me to say I did not. But I said I did. "I mean real ghosts," he explained. "So do I," was my retort; and I meant it. Ghosts are quite real to those who believe in them; and if a man says that he has seen a ghost he has evidently had an experience that, as an experience, is real. Whether it would be a real ghost to others is beside the point. He has seen something that he calls a ghost; and delusions, as delusions, are real to those who have them. As a matter of fact, ghosts have played and still play a part in life.

I was reminded of this incident when recently reading an account of the first performance of Noel Coward's play, "Blithe Spirits." After the fall of the curtain, and when the author appeared, there was some "booing" from a section of the audience. It seems there were a number of Spiritualists present and these wanted ghosts to be taken seriously. The author had handled them with levity. In this matter I have no sympathy with Mr. Coward—he doesn't need it, anyway; but I am quite sure that if Spiritualists formed a large part of the population that ridiculous figure, the censor of plays, would have forbidden the play. But small minorities are not protected. The censor's duty is to protect the Christian religion; other religions must look after themselves. If Mr. Coward had "guyed" the Holy Ghost the play would have been forbidden; but Mr. Coward poked fun at the ghosts believed in by Spiritualists: and they, at present, are legitimate game. In this country it is the Christian religion alone that is protected by the law. Actually, it is only the religion of the Established Church that is so guarded. The only ground on which other forms of Christianity have legal protection is that they share some of the beliefs of the Establishment. It is the god of the Established Church that is guarded by a policeman, a judge, a jury, a gaoler and a prison. To use a current phrase, the defence of the Christian deity is a "defence in depth."

Ghostly Etiquette

I agree with Spiritualists and Christians that if gods and ghosts are to continue they must not be made the subject of laughter. Solemn argument may be permitted, but no ridicule. Gods and ghosts must be spoken of with a solemn face. Disbelief should take the form of "I am sorry I cannot agree with you," as though one has missed something valuable.

It is true that some of the ancient Greek gods could send laughter rolling round the heavens; and if Lucian is to be trusted, they could enjoy a joke—provided it did not adversely affect the offertory. Of course, a Christian might stress the moral that these gods are dead. But the Christian god did not make the mistake of encouraging wit. The strong suit of God the Father was sending tempests, plagues and earthquakes; God the Holy Ghost one would not expect to be jokeful; and while God the Son could be sarcastic in a mild kind of way, we read that he was caught weeping, mourning and sorrowing; but there is no record of his ever having laughed. He could play a full hand in a denunciatory way, but he never smiled.

Now, ghosts—who are of the genus "spirit," a sub-section which includes gods—are also very solemn. At any rate, whenever they are guilty of even fun it is of the custard pie variety. Furniture is thrown about or pictures pulled off the wall, and so forth. They love people who are afraid of them and who shiver directly they appear. No ghost worth bothering about would continue to visit a house the inhabitants of which showed no greater agitation at its presence than they do at that of the "harmless, necessary cat." The proper way to receive a ghost and to make sure of his coming again is for one to wait expectantly, to converse with your neighbour in a whisper, to shiver when it arrives, and, if possible, faint just before it disappears. But to receive a ghost with a smile, to welcome its coming, to offer the hospitality of your most comfortable armchair, to offer it a drink or a cigar is enough to make a ghost swoon into nothingness.

A great feature of a ghost is its hearty dislike of solitariness. It delights in calling attention to itself. If it wanted merely to visit some familiar spot no one would ever bother about it. It would come and go unnoticed. But ghosts must have company. So it groans or rings bells or rattles plates, even plays a musical instrument; anything to call attention. Every ghost is an exhibitionist. It also loves a dim light which makes its outlines indefinite. It is conservative to the extreme. Ghosts also love old houses and have a special liking for historic ones. In that it shows a marked aristocratic tendency. It is true that Spiritualism has a great number of commonplace ghosts; but Spiritualism belongs to a democratic period. It began in America, where one man is as good as another—when he is not better, or worse. But in all cases ghosts must have the right kind of audience or they will cease their visits. So I am not surprised that the Spiritualists in the audience listening to Mr. Coward's play "booed" the author when he made his ghosts the occasion for laughter. The rights of ghosts must be respected. If these rights are not respected they may cease to visit us.

All Sorts of Ghosts

What, by the way, is a ghost? Dictionaries are not very helpful here. They give us the usual merry-go-round. A ghost is a spirit; and a spirit is a ghost—or something to that effect. That at least makes us aware that we are on religious grounds, and reminds us of some of the B.B.C. preachers who explain that they believe in Jesus because they believe in God, and believe in God because they know Jesus.

That is useful, at least. We can begin at either end and finish where we please. No one can dispute it because no one can understand it. There is nothing to be understood; it is just an exercise in the art of mumbling. But putting dictionaries and parsons on one side, ghosts did once upon a time stand for something tangible. To the primitive mind a ghost is not a part of a man: it *is* the man. It is in more sophisticated ages that ghosts become the misty and uncertain characters they are to-day. They are not so much shadows of a shade as they are the shade of a shadow.

So I think we had better think of ghosts as the shadow of things that were once real and which continue to exist just so long as we believe in them. That will cover all ghosts of every kind and variety. It will include not merely the shadows that haunt old houses and throw furniture about at Spiritualistic meetings, and also a whole host of customs and laws, institutions and beliefs that are no more than shadows of what they once were. The judge in his robes and the priest in his cassock, the belief in the divinity or semi-divinity of a king, and the persistence of laws which have for a large part lost their relevance to contemporary life: all these are so many ghosts that few of us believe to be good in their entirety. Some we admit are for the most part bad, and yet we lack the courage to bring about their disappearance. They are all like so much dead wood on a living tree: with the difference that we have more sense, and infinitely more courage, when we are dealing with a tree than when we are dealing with human superstitions. For we know that the tree benefits from the cutting away of the dead wood. But when it comes to human institutions we worship the dead wood because, it is pleaded, it is the only way by which we may retain a healthy tree.

But it is clear that a ghost has its followers. If it is really dead it ceases to be a ghost; and whether it be god or ghost, neither can live beyond man's belief in their existence. Readers will remember how in "Peter Pan," when the fairies are dying, one of the characters informs the audience that they are fading away but applause will restore their vitality, and the children and the adults applaud and the glad tidings come that the fairies have renewed their life. There was much philosophy and, one hopes, understanding in that appeal. The author saw that fairies and gods and ghosts depend upon belief to keep them in being; and thus the ghosts that haunt our law courts, our legislature, our highways and byways, and which are most active in our "sacred" buildings and ancient ceremonies, are alive. There is one thing only that will bring about their decease, and that is the destruction of the belief that they are alive.

Man and His World

But the mother lode of all ghosts is religion. It happened in the history of the race that when man had reached the stage of questioning himself about the meaning of things, or the cause of things that happened to him and to the world, the answer given was, perforce, a religious one. And the answers he gave were wrong. But the ghosts and the gods were born in that answer. Ever since, in whatever direction man turned, or whatever question he asked, he found ghosts and gods filling the horizon. I think that is the reason why progress is so rare a thing in the history of humanity. In some way the right lines—sufficiently right to preserve life—must be found. Otherwise there is extinction. But once found, the fear of the gods prevents change so far as it can be prevented. Man treads the same round generation after generation; he finds the folkways guarded by the folk-gods, and the good—religious—man turns neither to the right nor to the left. And even when the gods

have grown weaker, and their power is but a reflection of what it once was, the fear of giving offence remains. That is why progress is slow and so uncertain. For the ghosts are there, and they have always to be counted with.

But humanity has developed! Granted; but what man is and what man might have been are different but related questions. And even at that the advance is due, in large measure, not to Man but to men: to the few here and there who would enquire, who would know, who would understand, careless of gods and devils, of heaven or hell. The majority have development thrust on them; it is the few who achieve it.

I remember reading an account of a traveller in India who discovered a large stone altar raised on the tops of trees. Religious faith provided an account of the "miracle." But religious explanations are rarely reliable; and this one did nothing to make one question the general rule. For the huge slab of stone was selected on account of its size and certain occult values. It was originally placed flat on the ground in the midst of a grove of trees; but the shoots of the surrounding trees were under the stone and gradually these pushed their way through the earth beneath the slab. Slowly they forced the slab upwards until it was suspended many feet in the air and was duly accepted as a miracle worked by the gods.

But that was taking hold of the stick by the wrong end. The aim of these primitive ghosts was not to elevate but to suppress. The desire of the gods worked, as ever, to keep things as they were. But nature often gets its way, and bit by bit the young shoots struggled upward towards the life-giving sun and air, lifting the obstacle that stood in the way of their development. And the time came when these stunted trees, capped by the heavy stone, were taken as evidence of the power of the gods. But the aim of the gods is to keep things as they left them. The evidence of the "miracle" is that even the gods cannot always withstand the pressure of natural forces. The trees grew in spite of the burden placed upon them; but they stand poor and stunted when compared with their tall brethren. They were handicapped by the weight of the altar.

It is an old story. The Greeks had more than one story of how some of their mythical heroes inaugurated civilisation by defying the dictates and the powers of the gods. And even the Bible God gives as one of his earliest commands the order that man must not eat of the tree of knowledge. Always and everywhere the gods are on the side of blind obedience—and ignorance.

The trees supporting the altar grew despite the weight that might have kept them to the ground. Disregard of the ghostly command not to eat of the tree of knowledge was the condition of human culture. As much fruit of that tree has not been so widely consumed as might have happened, but the supply is inexhaustible. In spite of all the gods and ghosts man has developed. Great are the marvels man has accomplished; but how greater might those marvels have been had ghosts and gods faded away with the conditions that gave them birth.

Do I believe in ghosts? Of course I do! I believe in ghosts as I believe in dipsomaniacs and the reality of their visions. They are real enough while they are believed. There are categories of reality as of other things. There have been full-powered gods, half-powered gods, and gods who are in an evident state of rapid decline. And there are dead gods by the thousand. But the man who can stand up to a god and laugh at a ghost need not live in fear of either: for in such circumstances they dissipate like the summer mist before a rising sun.

CHAPMAN COHEN

HEAVENS ABOVE!

Every splintered fraction of a sect
Doth clamour, "I am on the perfect way;
All else is to perdition."

—Tennyson, *Albar's Dream*.

The word heaven seems to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *heofon*; other authorities think the word heaven—lifted up—may be connected with it.

To get to know anything definite about heaven is difficult. There being no proof available, every splintered fraction of a sect is entitled to its own opinion. Its sometime "pearly gates and golden streets" proved but the baseless fabric of a vision.

Heaven, in the Bible, is often taken for the air (Job xxxv. 11).

The God of the Jews was named, also by other nations, the God of Heaven (Ezra i. 2, v. 11, vi. 9-10, vii. 12; Jonah i. 9) "because," says Cruden, "the Jew adored nothing sensible, and said their God was in heaven; that there he had his throne, and exercised his sovereign dominion over all creatures."

According to the Cabbalists, we have seven heavens, God being resident in "the heaven of heavens"—the highest heaven (1 Kings viii. 27; Job xxii. 12). That is why the gallery of a theatre is called "the gods"!

Where is heaven? Christ told the dying thief, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise"! We read how Christ "was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell," but I forget the ubiquity of the second person of the Trinity. Anyhow, he may have gone with the thief for some asbestos overalls before making his famous descent!

So the Christian heaven is not "as far away as Paris is," evidently, though still up above somewhere!

"Among the lower races," says Tylor, "the tendency to localise the region of departed souls above the sky seems less strong than that which leads them to place their world of the dead on or below the earth's surface."—*Primitive Culture* (Vol. II., Chap. xii.).

Tylor shows that the future life is a reflection of this—a differently furnished home, that is all. The other great idea apparent is that the future life is a compensation for this where men's conditions are re-allotted as the consequence, and especially as the reward or punishment, of their earthly life. Thus the two theories emerge: (1) the continuance-theory, (2) the retribution-theory.

What sort of place is heaven? Endless detail would be needed to hazard an answer to this question. Tylor devotes many interesting pages to it, but generally speaking, this covers all; "Of the hereafter itself we get different details, but the principle is ever the same."—(*Ibid.*)

Th Maoris, according to Sir George Gray's beautiful book, *The Children of Heaven and Earth*, have some strange beliefs: Heaven and Earth, the Universal Father and Mother, the overarching Heaven and the all-producing Earth are, as it were, a father and mother of the world, whose offspring are the living creatures—men, beasts and plants.

Few thinking people have any belief in an everlasting hell nowadays. But many people retain the ridiculous belief in a place of everlasting bliss, despite the fact pointed out so long ago by Archbishop Whately, that the arguments considered incontrovertible when applied to hell, just as logically dispose of heaven when applied to it. So eternal bliss and external blisters must share the same fate of extinction!

But the belief in heaven has been losing ground for some time because of its being applied to modern thought. "It is a curious fact," says Bertrand Russell, "that, as the belief in hell has grown less definite, belief in heaven has also lost vividness. Although heaven is still a recognised part of Christian orthodoxy, much less is said about it in modern discussions than about evidences of Divine purpose in evolution. Arguments in favour of religion now dwell more upon its influence in promoting a good life here on earth than on its connection with the life hereafter. The belief that this life is merely a preparation for

another, which formerly influenced morals and conduct, has now ceased to have much influence even on those who have not consciously rejected it."—(*Religion and Science*, p. 136.)

If believers would only be more consistent. To tell us in one breath that God is an infinite spirit, and then to make such impossible personal claims, just as though he was as ridiculously finite as themselves, seems on the face of it absurd! An unknown poet, who believes God is a spirit, puts their case in a very correct and a very pleasing manner:—

GOD AND I

God and I in space alone,
And nobody else in view.
"And where are the people, O Lord?" I said,
"The earth beneath, and the sky o'erhead,
And the dead whom once I knew?"

"That was a dream," God smiled and said,
"A dream that has ceased to be true;
There are no people, living or dead,
No earth beneath and no sky o'erhead;
There was only myself and you!"

"And why do I feel no fear," I said,
"Meeting you here this way?
For I have sinned, I know full well,
And is there heaven, and is there hell,
And is this the judgement day?"

"Nay, those were but dreams," the great God said,
"Dreams that have ceased to be.
There are no such things as fear and sin,
And you yourself—you have never been;
There is nothing at all but me."

—*The Pillow Book*.

Can't our theological friends reach the thought of Paracelsus (1493-1541) yet, that man is a microcosm—a little world or cosmos—an epitome of the macrocosm or Universe?

Not satisfied with being a conscious, temporary part of the infinite, man vainly aspires to becoming such a one as "Himself!" But he still prevents man from putting forth his hand (Gen. iii. 22).

Finally, we are promised a specially constructed heaven—"Behold I make all things new—and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things are passed away."

And the devout will not only miss relatives who took a wrong turning, but will have their blessedness enhanced by seeing children, mothers, fathers, etc., being tortured in a lake of fire and brimstone. But a poet, whose name I have long forgotten, takes another view of it:—

"Ah! Yet methinks the saved,
Few without some friend or other,
Child or parent, wife or mother,
'Mid that awful host,
Evermore thy glory scorning,
'Long thy shores shall wander mourning,
Weeping for the lost."

CHRISTIANITY AND CHARACTER

I am certain that when a man appeals to my piety and my Christianity in order that he may keep some business advantage, he is a very dangerous man to do business with, a suspicious character. This maxim was well illustrated during the controversy on slave-grown sugar. It was found that some of the loudest humanitarians in Jamaica and Barbadoes had been in the habit of importing slave-grown sugar from Brazil and Cuba and exporting it to England as genuine free-soil produce. You may be surprised to hear it, but it is a proof how completely phrases take possession of men, when such phrases indicate their material interests, and how evidence does, for though they were detected they were not silenced.—Thorold Rogers in "The Economic Interpretation of History."

KRISHNA AND CHRIST

Where the Story of Christianity Came From

MORE than one thousand years before the date fixed as the birth of Christ at Bethlehem, Krishna was born in India.

Krishna's miraculous birth, his divine origin, the very incidents and purposes of his life, the manner of his death are all identical with those of the Palestine Christ—and its analogy is evidence as to where the story of Christianity came from; even the similarity of names has significance.

But let the facts speak for themselves! Here in parallel they are set down:—

KRISHNA

A VIRGIN MOTHER

Krishna was born of a virgin who was selected as the mother of the heavenly child on account of her purity—his Father was God.

BORN IN A CAVE

Krishna was born in most humble surroundings—in a cave.

CAVE ILLUMINATED

At the time of Krishna's birth the cave was illuminated by a miraculous light.

AWAY PAYING TAXES

Nanda, the foster-father of Krishna was away paying taxes when he was born.

COWHERDS' ADORATION

The child Krishna was recognised and adored by cowherds who bowed down before him.

SLAUGHTER OF INNOCENTS

The tyrant King Kansa ordered the massacre of all male children born during the night of Krishna's birth.

HEAVENLY WARNING

Krishna's foster-father was warned by a heavenly voice to take the child to Gakul to escape from the King.

THE CHILD KRISHNA PERFORMS MIRACLES

In the city of Mattra, Krishna performed many miracles in his childhood. (Notice the similarity of name — Mattra and Matarea.)

KRISHNA THE SECOND PERSON IN A TRINITY OF DIVINITIES

Krishna was God in human form — being the second person in a holy trinity.

CHRIST

A VIRGIN MOTHER

Christ was born of a virgin who was of immaculate purity — his Father was God.

BORN IN A CAVE

Christ was born in a cave!—the grotto with the Manger is exhibited to-day in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem exhibited as Christ's birthplace.

CAVE ILLUMINATED

At Christ's birth "there was a great light in the cave, so that the eyes of the midwife could not bear it."

AWAY PAYING TAXES

The birth of Jesus took place while his foster-father, Joseph, was in the city to pay his tax to the Governor.

SHEPHERDS' ADORATION

The Infant Christ was recognised and adored by shepherds who prostrated themselves before him.

SLAUGHTER OF INNOCENTS

King Herod ordered the slaughter of innocents hoping to bring death to the Christ child.

JOSEPH WARNED

Joseph was warned by a heavenly voice to "take the young child and Mother and flee to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath."

THE CHILD CHRIST PERFORMS MIRACLES

While in Egypt Jesus lived at Matarea and there performed many miracles. (See the Apocrypha.)

THE CHRISTIAN TRINITY

Christ was the son of God in a Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost — Christ was the Son in human form.

KRISHNA WAS CRUCIFIED

Krishna was crucified on a cross with arms extended — between two malefactors. Whilst on the cross, Krishna was pierced by an arrow; Krishna said to the man who shot him, "Through my favour, go to Heaven, the abode of the Gods."

THE SUN DARKENED

When Krishna died the sun was blotted out at noon-day.

DESCENT INTO HELL

Krishna descended into Hell for the purpose of raising dead before returning to Heaven.

RESURRECTION OF KRISHNA

Krishna, after his death and burial, came back to life; he arose from the grave and ascended to Heaven "in the flesh."

Remember, the life, drama and death of Krishna occurred more than 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

Christianity Before Christ

Is this not where the story of Christ came from? For the story of Christ is identical with the story of Krishna.*

Keable, in his work "The Great Galilean," sums up what is actually known concerning Christ.

"No man knows sufficient of the early life of Jesus to write a biography of him—if regard were had to definitely historical facts, scarcely three lines could be filled in."

No contemporary Roman knew of his existence—yet few periods of the ancient world were so well documented as the days of Augustus and Tiberius.

The Romans had their painstaking historians who chronicled events daily that happened in the Roman Empire; but there is no mention of the miraculous happenings attributed to Christ, which would have aroused instant interest in any country — especially the "incident" that dead men arise out of their graves and walked around the capital city of Palestine.

Rome had its astronomers who patiently and daily observed and took notes of the heavens—but there is no mention of the sun being blotted out and ceasing to function for three hours. Such an occurrence would have aroused intense fear and attention everywhere—even more than when the sun was put back several degrees to cure Hezekiah of "a boil that troubled him sore."

What is the contemporary alleged evidence? A spurious passage in Josephus; a questionable reference in Suetonius and the mention of a name in Tacitus. This is all!

There is no document, secular or religious, contemporary with Jesus which mentions the alleged details chronicled in the Bible.

* Students who wish for more details on Krishna should read the following: Sir J. G. Frazer's "Golden Bough," J. M. Robertson's "Pagan Christs," L. G. Ryland on "The Evolution of Christianity," and A. Weigall's "Paganism in Christianity."

CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED

Between two thieves Christ was crucified on a cross with arms extended. Christ was pierced by a spear. He said to one of the thieves, "Verily I say unto thee this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

THE SUN DARKENED

On the day of Christ's death, the sun was darkened from the sixth to the ninth hour.

DESCENT TO HELL

Christ descended into Hell to save the Souls of the Saints imprisoned there; Christ broke the fetters of the Saints and led them to Paradise.

RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Christ, after his death and burial, came back to life, arising from the tomb in the flesh and ascending to Heaven in the presence of many.

Even his birthday (which is labelled for December 25) could not be verified, so it was "planted" on a Roman Pagan holiday.

If the story and records of the birth and life of Christ constitutes Christianity, then Christianity existed 1,000 years previously—for the Palestine story is but a duplication of that of Krishna.

Rubber-Stamping Mythologies

The real fact is that ancient Oriental history is crowded with the same class of mythology, which the different nations of Asia "rubber-stamped" one from another as the centuries passed.

Buddha, who lived 500 years before Jesus, was born of a virgin. Buddha was found in a temple as a child and the elders marvelled at his wisdom. Buddha was tempted by the evil powers under his banyan tree.

A score of crucified Christs can be found in Oriental history. Even the very words the Prophets enunciated were duplicated. The Lord's Prayer was originally an invocation to a Pagan Divinity, the Golden Rule was "lifted" from Confucius, and the "Sermon on the Mount" is but a collection of the wisdom of previous Prophets.

History repeats itself! And the Palestinian mythology is but the echo of other past mythologies, each of which, in its age, poor humanity "had to believe or be damned or persecuted."

And 2,000 years after the alleged miraculous events of the Palestine Christ, we Occidentals whose science has searchlighted the darkness of superstition—yes, we Occidentals are told that "we must be baptised and believe" or be damned in fiery Hell.

Theological Marionettes

The invention of a flaming Hell, where unbelievers are punished for ever and ever, is the only original part of Christianity—the rest was but a duplication of older religions.

Well did Mark Twain say:—

"Christianity mouths Mercy—it invented Hell!

Christianity mouths Justice—it invented Hell!

Christianity mouths Charity—it invented Hell!"

Slowly and gradually these cruel old religions are being relegated to theological museums, and future generations will pity our credulity. Gradually and slowly, also, the atavistic marionettes which theology has dangled too long before humanity are taking their places upon the dusty shelves of time's museum: the winged angels, both white and black, the ghosts, the devils and demons with their tinsel and paint; and with them goes, thoroughly refrigerated by the commonsense charity of common folk, their flaming eternal Hell and its comic custodian, Satan.

The show is over!

Ring down the curtain!

HENRY J. HAYWARD

CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

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OMNIPOTENCE

"In spite of centuries wasted in preaching God's omnipotence, his omnipotence is contradicted by every Christian judgment and every Christian prayer."—George Santayana ("The Life of Reason").

ACID DROPS

OUR notes last week on the mean and miserable dispute as to whether Russia was an ally or not were written before the Prime Minister made his speech, in which he said that Russia was our Ally. And this after the religious Press had been explaining that Russia was not our Ally. It is very, very awkward for the Churches. Either the alliance will prevent any prayers for victory, in which case God and his Churches will lose caste, or if the prayers of the Churches for victory go on, they will be asking God to help Godless Russia to beat the more Godly Germans. It is a difficult situation for the Church—and God, for if he answers the prayers of the faithful he will be injuring himself, and if he does not help, some of the hitherto faithful will ask what on earth—leaving out heaven—is the use of God?

To be quite fair, the Prime Minister cannot be held blameless for the religious Press being "led up the garden." There was just a hint of timidity in the timely and proper speech he made when announcing that we would work with Russia for the defeat of Germany. He assured the British public that he was still against Communism. Why this assurance? When we made a pact with Turkey, the Prime Minister of the day did not assure the public that he was not a believer in Mohammedanism. When a pact was made with France, our then Prime Minister did not announce that he was not a Republican. Alliances and pacts and agreements are made for specific purposes, and the whole matter ends with the statement of what these purposes are.

The real fact of the situation is that there is a very powerful number of people (more in influence than numbers) who would do anything, and lose almost anything, to prevent our being on friendly terms with Russia. But it is no concern of ours whether Russia is Communistic or not; yet there are two very powerful influences in this country at work ready to sabotage any friendly intercourse with Russia, and of these two the Churches are the most artful and insidious. It is only by compulsion that they are comparatively quiet—in public—for the moment. But the one certain thing is that a European peace is impossible with Russia left out and the Churches busy with their religious lies to prevent friendship. We do not fear the enemies of Democracy abroad. But we are not over-confident that the unavowed anti-Democratic influences as represented by the Churches and "high society" may not wreck the peace after the "battle for freedom" has been won. Free-thought—real Freethought—was never so urgently needed as it is at present.

"The Internationale" is a dreary sort of song, or hymn, whichever it is intended to be, but the action of the Government-controlled B.B.C. in suspending all national anthems rather than introduce it into the Sunday national songs of our Allies, surely beats everything for stupidity and meanness. The excuse, which imposes on no one, that there is not time for the national songs of all our Allies, is noticeable when one bears in mind the hours given to religious discourses and services. It is absolutely certain that if a vote was taken, the religious services and addresses would be considerably curtailed. But ours is a Democratic Government—a very discreet Democratic Government.

The "Catholic Herald," which cannot deny and dare not denounce the help given by Spain to the Nazis, excuses the "sending of (Spanish) volunteers to fight against Russia" by saying that it is "an unimportant factor in the diplomatic situation." The "Herald" also says that this "is a convenient way for the Spaniards to liquidate perhaps the most embarrassing of their debts to Germany." Of course, Franco owes much to Germany, but he also owes much to our own Government which, during the Spanish Revolution, did so much to aid by its having "no official information" of what was being done.

The Bishop of Woolwich says that teachers "on the whole are not hostile to the Christian faith." But that does not prevent his wishing to Christianise the schools and force teachers to help in the Christian crusade. Of course, the Bishop would reply that if a teacher did not

believe in Christianity he would not be asked to teach. That is all eyewash. How long would it be before non-Christian teachers were either not appointed or the road to promotion was barred? That is the reason why the Christianising of the schools means a poorer form of education and the poorer type of teacher.

In a very Christian spirit, the Rev. A. Green, Rector of Rushden, says that our making "common cause with a nation that is anti-God fills me with alarm." Well, the Rector is plain and honest on the matter. And we prefer him to those who welcome the "association" of Russia in killing Germans, but will do their utmost to poison the relations between this country and Russia when the war is over. And that goes for many more than parsons in this country. If we affirm our desire to permit every country to manage its own government, by what right do we object to its being anti-God? Why cannot God be left to look after himself? We must keep alive to the fact that there is a powerful party in this country who when the war is over would treat Russia as a pariah nation.

A brief article in the "Evening Standard" for July 15 throws a curious light on the workings of our political system. It seems there is "a big effort to improve the intellectual standard of Conservative M.P.s." Looking at some of those who hold office, and whose unfitness results only in moving them from one position to another, the need for such improvement is plain. To be quite fair, one must admit that this aim at a higher intellectual level is very desirable with all political parties. But, as we have often said, politics does not attract first-class intellects, however necessary politicians may be. The unfortunate thing is that the easy and cheaply purchased popularity of the politician is an indication of the intellectual level of the mass of the people.

The aim of the movement to which we have referred is to be achieved by reducing the price by which candidates virtually buy their seats. It appears that in addition to paying the election costs, a party candidate must pay anything from £100 to £1,000 a year to the party funds. Thus, "men of brains and moderate means are crowded out," with, of course, the result that men who are looking out for a "career," and have money, are roped in. Not merely are they elected, but that type of character will look at any question before Parliament, not on its merits, but how far it will bring about the downfall of his party and a probable loss of his seat. It is a system that makes for the selection of the unfit. One need not look very deeply into the records of some of our Ministers to find examples.

Lest we should be accused of political prejudice, we hasten to point out that there is very little real independence in Parliament nowadays. There is too much party discipline, too much forced obedience, a too great consciousness that if they will not play the party game and blindly obey party orders, there will be no promotion, no "career." There was a time when an individual member with unpopular opinions stood a poor chance of doing anything. To-day he is muzzled and gagged and cold-shouldered. What is required is not merely the removal of obstacles in the way of men buying seats; we also need the presence of men and women who will fight for an unpopular cause, whether it falls into line with party policy or not.

Very unwillingly Warrington Council has agreed to Sunday cinemas. One of the Councillors, a Mr. Poole, said he felt there was no real demand for it, and he would like to get the opinions of homes similar to that in which he was brought up. No doubt. But Mr. Poole is himself an example of the terrible home conditions in which people lived when he was a boy. After all, there is no law compelling Councillor Poole to go to the cinema. Probably his reply would be, "But why should other people be allowed to enjoy themselves in a cinema when my position compels me to go to chapel?" Mr. Poole has our sympathy. He must blame his misguided parents for his misfortunes and miseries.

Look out for squalls, all ye who are likely to commit the sin against the "Holy Ghost," for that, says the "Universe," will never be forgiven.

"There are six such sins, and they are mentioned in the answer to question 326 of the Catechism. One of these—namely, final impenitence—obviously will never be forgiven, and the forgiveness of the others is extremely difficult, not because of any difficulty on God's part, but because of the hardening of the heart involved, which makes a man refuse to seek pardon."

After all, we are not clear as to what the sin is. It seems the most comfortable thing not to believe in any of it. At any rate, we can't be bothered about it while the weather compels us to work in the garden with as little as possible between us and nudity.

A "United Service Intercession" on behalf of persecuted German Churches was held in Leamington the other day. It was God who was asked by the Leamingtonians to intercede. But surely God knows whether his Church is being persecuted or not. We advise the Christians of Leamington to "go slow." Even a God has his feelings, and he may come down on his people in Leamington with an awful wallop for their impertinence in trying to teach him how to manage his own affairs.

THE POWER OF A UNIFORM

No one has yet adequately examined and exposed the hypnotising influence of a uniform—not merely on others, but also on the wearer himself. The fondness of most men for a uniform is easily observable. It begins with early childhood. Children love to "dress up" to play at soldiers or sailors, or to strut around in some quite distinctive dress. And the child is continued in the adult with badges and a special dress of this or that order. Boy Scouts and Girl Guides follow on, the chief attraction here being again a distinctive dress. Court ceremonials owe their chief attractiveness to the uniform of this or that order, or to a dress distinct from that of ordinary life, worn with a simple pride strongly reminiscent of the mentality of the "untutored savage." Knights of the Garter and members of the Order of Buffaloes; Monarchs in their robes and members of the Ku-klux-klan in their winding sheets, the savage in his war-paint and the modern major-general in his uniform all feel a childish delight in being separated from others by a distinctive dress.

A volume could be written without completely exhausting the significance of the uniform in life. Only one or two features can be noted here. The first and perhaps the greatest thing a uniform does is to separate the wearer from his fellows. It marks him as something distinct from those around him and, to most lovers of a uniform, to be distinct is the equivalent of being distinguished. Unimportant within, he feels visibly important from without. He impresses himself and he impresses others. If Al Capone had developed the sense to dress all his followers in uniform he might easily have gathered round him a measure of respectability and social distinction he was never able otherwise to obtain. But he made the mistake of dressing as did other folk, and permitting his followers to follow his example. And the end was prison. A uniform might have meant a different end. Criminality goes a long way towards legality once it is dressed up in uniform. Absurdity become almost reasonable by the same method. Black shirts and brown shirts, green shirts and red shirts, and old school ties are more than articles of dress—they are the eternal witnesses to the shallowness of the average human mentality, evidence that the adult is not often far removed from the child, the civilised person very near to the savage. The day that soldiers are despoiled of their uniforms, armies will crumble into nothingness. When the pantomimic ceremonial of a Court assembly is dispensed with, a more intelligent standard of human worth will be nearer establishment.—"Quondam."

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. SLOAN.—Sorry, but what you say is, in our judgment, just elaborate nonsense. It is easy to say that Jesus went about doing good, but there is no evidence for much of it in the New Testament. And if you take away the supernatural and stupidly superstitious portion of his teaching, all that is left is mainly connected with saving men's souls in the next world. If you compare Plato with Peter, Socrates with Paul, and the primitivisms of the New Testament Jesus with the calm wisdom of, say, Confucius, you will better understand what we said in our letter.

"T. L."—You will probably find what you want in "Language, Truth and Logic," by A. J. Ayer (Gollancz, 5s.). It is a good clear, essay on some fundamental questions in philosophy.

T. ROBERTSON.—We could find work for a suitable man, but getting adequate assistance for a paper such as "The Freethinker" is not so easy as it looks. Holidays are out of the question at present and, naturally, we do not find doing so much easier as we get older.

H. WALTERS.—Unfortunately for your hasty generalisation, German, French and Italian have lived amicably together in Switzerland, upholding the same institutions and sharing a common government for several generations. There is no such thing as a fixity of human nature or of institutions. This has not been prevented by the currency of three different languages.

C. H. THOMPSON.—The only way of avoiding risk is to be dead—unless we grant the truth of the Christian superstition. Still, we quite appreciate your concern in the matter.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—J. M. Mosley, 5s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

"The Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

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 have to thank Messrs. Baddeley, Owen and Potter for copies of "The Freethinker" required for office files. We have not yet had time to collate them, but if the file is not complete we feel sure that some of our readers will supply the missing issues. There are also some of the volumes missing. These we will make known later.

The Minister of Labour and National Service (there will soon be so many Ministers appointed that we shall have to import people to be subjects on which they can exercise themselves) has decided to form a number of Committees to report on the matter of Sunday recreation. We expect that the clergy will be fully and forcefully represented. In that case we should like to see that other classes who are personally interested, such as food caterers and all others who are financially interested in the matter are invited. We see no reason why all who have an interest in Sunday recreation should not be present.

There is one good feature we have to chronicle in the Durham Committee for Sunday recreation. Mr. J. T. Brighton, who is well known in the district as a Freethought lecturer, and is president of the North-Eastern Secular Federation, composed of N.S.S. Branches, has been officially invited to attend the meeting of the Committee

in Newcastle-on-Tyne. We believe the matter to be quite safe in his hands. But the real issue is not the creation of new regulations, but the wiping away of all religious reasons or excuses for limiting the opportunities that people should have for enjoyment on what is, rather facetiously, called the "Day of Rest."

We like the following remarks of Sir Ronald Storr, as given in "The Times Literary Supplement." They are taken from a speech delivered in Edinburgh.

"Reading," said Sir Ronald, "must bear not only the blossom of delight, but the fruits of absorbed and assimilated experience. . . . The spirit of books is the spirit of freedom—universal through, yet independent of time, clime, religion and race; the first book written was the first nail in the coffin of tyrants all over the world."

That is sound philosophy, and it reminds one that ever since books have been published, both Church and State have done their utmost to regulate what books should be published and what should be said in them. The Roman Church has a colossal index of forbidden books, and the other Churches, while not issuing an official index, still have a lengthy list of forbidden books. Both State and Church look upon books as something that must be regulated in the interests of established opinion.

We repeat that we have no official index of forbidden books, although their suppression in this country is not unknown to the law. But the great weapon in this country is the boycott, far more cowardly and contemptible than any form of published legal proscription. The majority of Christians will not read a book on Freethought, the majority of hard-crusted Tories will not read anything that threatens their power or privileges. Above all, there is the boycott—the most cowardly and the most contemptible of all weapons. So far as we are concerned, the meanest form of this is manifested in the sphere of religion. Shopkeepers are threatened if they display Freethought papers, booksellers if they display uncompromising attacks on religion. We have had in our time scores of complaints from newsagents who have been threatened in this way, but they represent those who have stood against it and have told the slimy, cowardly threatener to go to hell.

Yet we have achieved, in spite of Church and State, a measure of freedom. But, how it has been fought for! Just over 100 years ago there were scores of men and women imprisoned for selling Paine's "Age of Reason," and a long list of books might be given that have brought their writers or sellers terms of imprisonment. The State does not like freedom of publication, whatever shape the State is—but the Churches hate it because it strikes at their very existence. Sir Ronald Storr is right—the spirit of books is the spirit of freedom. But they may also be used to crush freedom and, when too late, the writers find that they have been forging chains for themselves.

The reprinting of the "Pamphlets for the People" is going on as rapidly as the paper shortage and other circumstances will permit. There are a few on sale, and we suggest that those of our friends who are inclined to do a little quiet propaganda might well keep a selection on hand to give to those likely to benefit from them. They are seriously written, and aim at giving a concise but thorough outline of important situations. The general situation to-day is favourable to securing converts to Freethought.

Among the very greatest Freethinkers of the nineteenth century stands the heroic figure of Richard Carlile. The years he spent in prison—on different sentences—indicate the heroism of the man, and his conduct affected every reform movement of his time. The working classes owe more to him than most people know. It is for these reasons that we welcome a new edition of "Richard Carlile, Agitator," by Guy A. Aldred (Strickland Press, Glasgow, 1s. 6d.). The sketch extends to 160 pages, with a number of plates and is, in these days of dear printing, marvellous value for money.

It will probably not come in our time, but one day we hope that some wealthy person will see to it that a series of biographies of famous Freethinking men and women is published. As we have so often said, in this country we have a very effective method of burying our great heretics. We neglect them when living, and ignore them when dead. If possible, their names are never mentioned. If as prominent in their day as was Paine or Carlyle, just a passing mention is made of them and their work which leaves the student quite ignorant of what they did, and with the impression that there is no need to bother about them.

Take for example that miserable production by a late Minister of Education, "A History of Europe," by the Right Hon. H. A. L. Fisher, published a few years back. In his excellent "British History in the Nineteenth Century," G. M. Trevelyan says of Richard Carlyle that he "suffered and achieved more for the liberty of the Press than any other Englishman of the nineteenth century. He and his like bore the brunt of the early struggle. . . . Thanks to these sturdy predecessors the decorous and well-to-do philosophers of the Victorian era were able without fear of the law to write whatever they thought about the relation of science and literature to dogmatic belief." In another part of his work he dwells on the good fortune of the working class of their day having three such servants as Owen, Cobbet and Place. But one may look through the whole of the 1,300 pages of Mr. Fisher's book for any reference to their work. Those whom a scientific history has consigned to the muck heap of humanity are there galore, but not the names of the heretical men and women who fought so well, suffered so greatly and achieved so much for humanity.

It is a cowardly and contemptible policy, this burying of great men and women. Young students, and now aged teachers, are ignorant of how much these early reformers did for the world that they spend no time in finding out what these men and women did. And not only is this policy of punishing our great reformers carried on by the Churches, but modern politics takes a hand. Politicians are as frightened of offending a wrongly educated public opinion by praising notorious Freethinkers as religious leaders are of evaluating heretics in such a way their flocks may be led to read their works. We think our copy of Fisher's "History of Europe" cost us 10s. 6d. We advise others to wait until they pick it out of a shilling lot on a second-hand bookstall.

The General Secretary of the N.S.S. is away on a short vacation, during which only business of pressing importance will be dealt with at the offices.

THE PRINTED WORD

OF the many abilities that man has developed during the course of his evolution, that of being able to communicate with his fellow creatures by means of signs and symbols is, unquestionably, one of the most beneficial. The power of speech no doubt took a long, long time—probably many millions of years—to acquire, and that in itself, even in its crude form, eventually made for the much speedier progress of the human race. It certainly helped to promote group life and all that that implies. But by the invention, five or six thousand years ago, of the means to communicate, one with the other, without speech—i.e. by hieroglyphics—man forged a weapon, the importance and power of which is even yet but little understood. Were that not so we might, perhaps, be a little more careful than we are habitually as to what we set down on paper.

By what we write—as well as, of course, by what we say—we sooner or later reveal our mental make-up, and our real thoughts and feelings, good or bad as the case may be. We know, or we should know, that words are merely the symbols of the world of reality, and as such we should exercise care in their employment. But we are careless—that is the truth of the matter. The majority of us, to put it bluntly, just "sling ink about" and we often wonder

why we are either not understood or misunderstood. The fault rests with us, because we are not studious of the meanings of the words which we employ and selective in their use. Without taking into account the purpose and nature of our communication or the character of the individual to whom it is to be addressed, we just sit down and scribble—or dictate as the case may be—the first thing that comes into our mind; or to be more precise: we write or utter the first words that occur to us, and that is where the trouble begins. We do not make our meaning clear, either (1) because we are too lazy-minded to think out in advance just what it is we wish to say or how best to say it, or (2) we have not studied the art of verbal expression, and often the result is lamentable.

As one authority has so well said: words are like the notes of a musical score, which remain dead on paper and must be played upon the instruments of the mind before they can have the desired effect. But many of our compositions—our personal and business letters for example—are like what a score would be if the notes produced by a cat running over the keyboard of a piano were recorded. And the one—the badly written letter—is just as offensive to the eye and ear as the other—the cat's sonata—would be if set to music.

We may tell ourselves that in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives we have not time for "that sort of thing"—meaning the precision of verbal expression indicated above. Admittedly there are occasions when we cannot be as thoughtful and precise as we would like to be. But like all other habits, the habit of being careful or careless grows upon us and we develop in the one or the other direction, according to custom. Merely to go on finding excuses is a pernicious habit and takes its toll in the long run.

Clarity of thought is not something that can be learned overnight. On the contrary: success and competence in this connection and its outcome—facility of expression—only come, and can only come, of much reading and fairly regular practice in communicating our thoughts to our fellow men. Perhaps that is why so few of us get very far along the road of better knowledge, even if we take the first step. . . . The path is not easy and we soon turn back. . . . But if we only had the courage to go on we would be amply repaid for our pains. To make the acquaintance of the best men of the world, dead or living, through their books, is to experience a pleasure second to none. An emotional response is not peculiar to young lovers. By no means! It is a feeling which is experienced by some students of literature when, after much study, they are able to appreciate the depth and quality of the mind behind the printed word before them. That, of course, is one of the rewards of reading: one is not only able to make many good and lasting friends by this means, but in the making one absorbs their virtue, so to speak, and learns from them a variety of languages—or rather, one learns from them a variety of ways of using the same language to produce a number of desirable effects—and one's own mind and vocabulary are improved in consequence. The student of music must necessarily go to a professor of musical composition and expression if he wishes to excel in that calling; in precisely the same way he who would know how best to use his mother tongue to produce light and shade and a vivid word picture in anything that he may write, and so give full effect to what he has in mind, must of necessity go to those who have mastered this art.

In short, a word can either produce a thrill or a thump, according to how it is employed and its context, and for that reason words should be chosen for the inclusion in any composition with the utmost care so that there may be the required crescendo and decrescendo and fine, making the whole understandable and harmonious both to the eye and the ear.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN

IN REPLY TO CRITICS

I

FIRST of all, I must thank the anonymous reader who so kindly sent my articles on "The 'Man' Jesus" to Dr. R. Eisler—it is always much more

satisfactory dealing with a learned theologian at first hand. I should like to point out, however, that I was not dealing with his book, "The Messiah Jesus," as such, but only with certain statements made from it by Mr. A. Robertson. I did promise to read the complete work as soon as I could: and for some reason—not at all clear to me—Dr. Eisler seems to have been roused to a sort of fury about this; and also because I have not read other books he thinks I ought to read. May I point out that, unfortunately, I am not living in that delightful rest-home for theologians—Oxford—with its many marvellous libraries at my command. I read what I can get, and I do my utmost to consult authorities who are, in my judgment, competent to deal with the question at issue. It is part of my case that these authorities often deride each other with just the same delightful banter with which Dr. Eisler handles his opponents.

In the second place, I think we ought to be quite clear as to what we are arguing about. The Jesus of Nazareth described in the Gospels is quite clearly a God, and he has all the marks of the sacrificial or sacrificed deity so well known to readers of the "Golden Bough." It is contended, however, by many Rationalists—some very reverently, like Renan—that the picture of the God really conceals a Man (almost always with a capital M) who "went about doing good," who alone was responsible for the most remarkable sayings and parables the world has ever known, and whose ethical teachings, if accepted by the world, would transform it into a paradise far exceeding anything ever imagined in beauty, love and justice. In fact, it would be possible to fill an entire number of "The Freethinker" with this kind of eulogium and then not exhaust them. Renan, Strauss, Montefiore and other writers were all more or less convinced that the "miracles" and the other weird happenings recorded in the Gospels had been grafted on to the real story of a Man who, anyway, gladly gave up his life to save the world—that is, so long as the word "save" is here not used in a theological sense. All I asked for in my first article was what evidence could be brought to prove that such a Human Being ever existed.

Now, I am fully aware that there are many Jesuses in the field. Josephus himself mentions quite a number, and we come across the name in many other places. But space in these pages is short, and I confined myself to the "Jesus of Nazareth" described in the Gospels; and it does seem to me to be wasting my time, and that of many readers, for Dr. Eisler to drag in a Jesus who was the head of nine hundred banditry and say "There's your Jesus of Nazareth!" There is nothing whatever in the Gospels about Jesus being a great Bandit Chief—who is, no doubt in Dr. Eisler's opinion, the Greatest Bandit Chief the world has ever known. Josephus mentions a Jesus who went about the walls of Jerusalem during the siege by the Romans uttering, like so many Christians since, "Woe! Woe!"—but I really feel disinclined to discuss this particular fanatic or similar ones.

Dr. Eisler gives, so he tells us, (1) the Samaritan Thallus, (2) the Syrian Mara, (3) the Roman Sossianus, (4) the Report of Pilate as authorities for the undoubted existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Until I read the proofs given in his book that these documents are without question absolutely authentic, I cannot deal fairly with them. I do note in passing, however, that Dr. Eisler's faithful henchman, Mr. A. Robertson, rather jibs at accepting them himself. The "Acts of Pilate," for example, he deems "probably" a forgery. "Probably" is very good! My own reading so far on these documents makes me quite convinced that they are all—not "probably," but actually—impudent forgeries; and I am all the more

inclined to agree with the authorities I have consulted on this point when I find the Roman Sossianus telling us about Jesus and his "nine hundred followers committing banditry." The figure 900 is so very exact. The Syrian Mara also seems rather a dubious authority on the face of the matter, for he speaks of "the wise king of the Jews killed by them." Was Jesus of Nazareth really acknowledged by the Jews as their King? Surely, even the Rationalist who accepts Dr. Eisler must see that the killing of Jesus was absolutely necessary to make a god of him. The whole story as given in the Gospels would have been valueless if there had been no death sacrifice. If Frazer had done nothing else, at least the way in which he has proved *that* should ensure him the gratitude of all students studying the making of a religion.

Let us now examine the testimony of Josephus again. And first I wish to make it quite clear that I do not take back anything I said about the language in which Josephus first wrote. The authorities I have consulted claim that he wrote in "Hebrew," in "Hebrew—that is, in Aramaic" or in "Syrio-Chaldaic"; and it is not at all clear what is meant by "Aramaic." If E. Deutch is any authority, then Aramaic seems to have had several forms. But what does Josephus himself say?

"... Afterwards I got leisure at Rome; and when my materials were prepared for that work, I made use of persons to assist me in learning the Greek tongue, and by these means I composed the history of these transactions... for, as I said, I have translated the Antiquities out of our sacred books, which I could easily do since I was a priest by birth... and as for the History of the War, I wrote it having been an actor myself in many of its transactions..."

If this passage has any meaning, it is simply that Josephus had to learn Greek to write both the "Wars" and the "Antiquities"; and if he had first written in "Hebrew"—or in "Hebrew, that is, Aramaic"—surely he would have said so. Let us now turn to the Slavonic Josephus and compare what my two critics say. As thus:—

Mr. A. Robertson: "Eisler claims to show, by a minute examination of the text, that it was translated from an Aramaic original, that that original enshrined the genuine work of Josephus, and that it contained a credible account of the doings of Jesus."

Dr. R. Eisler: "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."

It will be seen from this that Mr. A. Robertson got slightly confused as to what the Slavonic Josephus was actually translated from; but no doubt the two authorities who thus disagree—though Mr. A. Robertson has read Dr. Eisler's book—can easily be reconciled. In any case, I see no reason for giving up my—speculative—suggestion. I said that just as there are two Christian-forged passages in the "original" Greek Josephus, so it was possible for a Jew to forge an account of Jesus in the Slavonic translation. Dr. Eisler objects to the word "Jew" here—he calls the translator a "heretic Judaizer." Very good; he was not a Jew but a Judaizer—and I am "of the same opinion still."

H. CUTNER

THE CULT OF SATAN

(Continued from page 335.)

TO conclude: then great Witch Hunts of the era of the Renaissance were not due to blind credulity, nor, as later critics imagined, did they centre around pure delusions. Far from such being the case, they represented the dreadful conclusion of an epochal struggle between two religions waged with fire and sword as was then the universal custom; Christianity and the old European Shamanism. It was only in the fourteenth century that the Church, strengthened by the Crusades and her new engine of repression—her “gestapo” the Inquisition—really got down to the serious task of extirpating physically the older cult. At the end of the fifteenth century, with Pope Innocent VIII.—who issued a fulminatory Bull against witches and all their works (1484), and with Sprenger’s famous text-book—the battle was really joined. The sixteenth century saw “the retreat from Moscow” of the older creed: the seventeenth saw its “Waterloo,” by the eighteenth “the Devil” and his worshippers alike were no more. Rationalist criticism could henceforth safely deny their existence! In the (alleged) last words of Rome’s last Pagan Emperor, Julian the Apostate, “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean.”

The Devil was dead! or rather He had “suffered a sea-change” back into His original spiritual substance! Henceforth, His habitat was no longer “the greenwood tree” and the “witches Sabbath,” but his original Hell. Not that He is any less active on Earth than He was in the fifteenth century and the sixteenth century: He only chooses another line of approach! It is as once more a Spirit of the Air that he descends upon the seance and the spiritist medium so as to ensnare souls for His Infernal Kingdom. For the Church of Rome still teaches with fearless consistency, that, except in obvious cases of sheer mediumistic fraud, all spiritist phenomena must be regarded as presumptive evidence of diabolical possession. It is not necessary for our present purpose to examine the artificial, purely literary Satanism of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Anatole France—the cult merely of a literary clique. Still less does the “Black Magic” cultus of Aleister Crowley and Eliphas Levi fall within our scope.

We have already cited the greatest Roman theological authority on this murky subject; Cardinal Lepicier. Another quotation, also written with the cordial approval of his Church, may be usefully cited in conclusion. In a Latin work—not intended therefore for the uninitiated—the same eminent authority explicitly asserts the right of his Church, now as in the past, to put heretics and witches to death (1908). If our civilisation, as at present, continues to tear itself to pieces, will the fires be lit again to consume afresh “the sin of witchcraft”? Has the historic evolution of the cult of Satan concluded? Or is its lurid and fire-swept story to culminate in yet another concluding orgy of blood and Fire. (cp. His Eminence Cardinal Lepicier—“De stabilitate et progressu dogmatis” (1908)—“On the Finality and Development of Doctrine.”)

AUTHOR’S NOTE.

The definitive work on Satan and His Cult is still to seek. Of the two most instructive writers available in our language Joseph Turnell (“Louis Coulanges”) is a brilliant theologian, but, apparently, knows no anthropology. Whereas Dr. Murray, an anthropological expert, does not seem to know much about theology. A combination of the two methods is urgently needed for the production of a Satanic classic.

F. A. RIDLEY.

SIN

THE Wilderness of Sin (see Exod. xvi. 1)—a place where monotony and dullness remained unknown—fascinated me in my boyhood.

Early attempts to trace the derivation of the word *sin* are associated in memory with Sin, the Assyrian Moon-god, and his wife Nin-gal—“the great lady”—who merited her distinction! Sin, the Moon-god, ranked higher than Shamash, the Sun-god, his chief seat of worship being Ur (the “Moon City”), probably the oldest capital of Babylonia. His reign may be said to have been anything but sinless!

Consciousness of sin never dawned upon me until I went to Sunday school.

My early days were spent playing in a farmyard. There everything seemed perfectly natural—the degrading influence of John Calvin being absent.

“It’s quick enuch tae bid the De’il guid mornin’ whan ye meet ‘im!” said my old granny. But, at Sunday school the De’il and all his works were thrust upon me.

To enable me to withstand all the wiles of his majesty, I was warned by an old Calvinistic elder, who, in doing so, introduced me to all the sins which were likely to beset my manhood. Many of these sins I failed to comprehend, and my questions regarding them were jokingly thrust aside.

Early impressions are interesting and valuable things. The sinless farmyard and the sinful Sunday school taught me a never-to-be-forgotten lesson.

But as is your type of mind so is—

A parson’s daughter, in failing health, took up a situation in a farmhouse and, after a few weeks, gave it up. Asked by the farmer’s wife, who had done her utmost for the girl, if she could give her anything more, she replied: “I lack nothing, but I cannot stay here any longer—the poultry are so disgustingly immoral!”

“In my young days” (about 1800), said Granny, after telling her the above little story, “animals were looked upon as fallen creatures and sometimes they were subjected to strange, almost incredible treatment.” For instance: An old elder, who lived in the same Scottish village, kept a few fowls. On Sunday the old follower of Calvin kept his hens only their liberty. The cocks he tethered to the table legs. “It wadnae dae,” said he, “tae let them disgrace ma sacred callin’ by ge’in them freedom, the stravaigers! (wandering vagabonds) to gang about fornicating on the Lord’s day!”

“Pleasing and sensual rites and ceremonies” satisfied the soul of the parson’s daughter, while the natural farmyard filled her with disgust.

There’s nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so!

The thinking of “archbishops and bishops, of both provinces, and the whole clergy, in the Convocation holden in London in the year 1562 for the avoiding of differences of opinion . . . the curious and unhappy differences, which have for so many hundred years, in different times . . . we will that all further curious search be laid aside.” Thus priests willed in 1562, whilst formulating the Thirty-nine Articles. And many are still blindly led by their dead hands!

Article IX. on Original Sin makes mention of “lust of the flesh, called in the Greek, *phromena sarkos*,” which is certainly illuminating; and the Pelagians. Little Johnnie Morgan, a Welsh monk (I hope his Christian name was Johnnie!), in the fourth century, was the founder of the theological heresy called Pelagianism—Morgan’s name in Latin being Pelagius.

Morgan held that there was no Original Sin through Adam, and consequently no hereditary guilt; that every soul is created by God sinless; that the will is absolutely free; and so on.

Morgan, in the fourth century, had more sense in him than the entire Convocation, holden in London eleven hundred years later!

Sin originated in heaven, Lucifer and the fallen angels being its first victims.

Then Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden; and because of their sin, man to the last syllable of recorded time, will continue to be "shapen in iniquity, conceived in sin" (Ps. li. 5) and tortured for ever.

Original Sin, Predestination and Evolution make an interesting study, these three, and the greatest of these is Evolution!

There is a curious coincidence between Predestination and Evolution. Augustine and Calvin attributed Predestination to the arbitrary decrees of God. Evolution traces it to the influences of heredity. Augustine and Calvin assure us that "all things work together for good to them that love the Lord." Evolution shows us how everything works together for good, whether we love the Lord or not. From low ancestral conditions—Original Sin—evolution opens for us a way of escape through the modification of inherited traits by careful breeding. Augustine and Calvin, while offering no way of escape, cheerfully consign us to everlasting torment.

That a perfect, all-powerful God made defective angels and men cannot be disputed. Like begets like! And his own son tells us, "Men do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles."

Gen. vi. 6 tells us, "and it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart"; no indication of omniscience here, is there! No indication of infinity! To slightly alter Tennyson:—

The God in spirit, however he veil
His want in forms for fashion's sake,
Will let his coltish nature break
At seasons thro' the gilded pale.

Having abandoned the earth to the governance of Lucifer, he would, if left to himself, also resign heaven but for the unbeliever.

Why ask man to love his enemies while God will neither pity, nor love, his mistakes?

Few of the sects have the same idea of sin. Sin seems largely a question of taste! e.g. Original Sin: The Anglican, the Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian, to mention but three of the sects, give widely different versions of it.

Sin is distinctly a theological thing. And unbelievers, therefore, are the only sinless creatures!

GEORGE WALLACE

THE EMERGENCE OF MR. ELIOT

SOME months ago I had the pleasure of writing in these columns of Mr. T. S. Eliot, attempting to analyse, in the briefest possible compass, the reason why this American turned British should be so interesting, both as poet and as theologian. I make no apologies for now returning to the former theme—and in any case, if excuse were needed, it is provided by the appearance, under the title of "Later Poems" (Faber, 3s. 6d.), of an exceptionally attractive selection from his work. Actually this volume, together with "Poems: 1909-1925," which had been previously issued by Messrs. Faber in an edition uniform in price and format with the book now under consideration, provides a complete collection of all Mr. Eliot's verse to date—with the exception of two plays and that genuine masterpiece, "East Coker," which is available for anyone who has a shilling to spare.

Nevertheless, the volume of "Later Poems" is of extreme interest as demonstrating the gradual process by which Mr. Eliot, originally a "nothingarian" in religion (at any rate, judging by the internal evidence of his work), emerged as one of the few first-rate intellectuals of our time with a genuinely religious attitude towards the manifold problems of modern life.

Even the earliest poems in the book exemplify the appearance of Mr. Eliot's religious leanings, and by the time the end of the volume is reached the Anglo-Catholic Mr. Eliot has emerged, full-fledged, from the non-religious young man who wrote his earliest verses.

Yet, although to Freethinkers as Freethinkers it is the personal religious philosophy of Mr. Eliot which is of the greatest interest, the fact remains that he is an exceedingly cunning and sensitive craftsman, whose work must

inevitably have its appeal for everyone interested in the development of versecraft. The subtle command of rhythm and the mastery of words which are evident in the slightest work of Mr. Eliot is so neatly done that critics unacquainted with modern methods in verse are apt to think (as a correspondent in the "Literary Guide" recently thought) that Mr. Eliot's verse is "mutilated prose." Actually acuter critics can see that Mr. Eliot has attained his effects by means often far more delicate and subtle than those used by the orthodox versifier.

In other words, even though we may dislike Mr. Eliot's theology and the way in which some sections of the religious community have acclaimed him as a sort of major prophet of our time, we cannot and should not deny his standing as a poet. He is a writer of great abilities, and it is good those who disagree (as we do) with his general philosophical approach should attempt to understand his ideas and appreciate his position as an artist. S. H.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held July 6, 1941

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Bryant, Seibert, Ebury, Bailey, Griffiths, Mrs. Grant and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to the parent society. Resolutions and other matters remitted from the Annual Conference were dealt with. Mr. Ebury's prosecution was discussed at some length and the line of action agreed upon. The President reported his interview with counsel briefed to conduct our case.

Items of correspondence and general routine received attention. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Sunday, August 17, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI

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. W. BARKER.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11.0 a.m., Mr. J. McCABE. "Germany: An Interpretation."

COUNTRY

Blackburn N.S.S. Branch (Market), Thursday, July 31: 7.30, Debate, "Has Christianity Benefited Humanity?" Affirmative, Rev. G. A. WEST (Queen's Hall); Negative, Mr. JACK CLAYTON. *If wet*, in Lees Hall, Mincing Lane, Blackburn.

Kingston and District N.S.S. Branch (Market Place): 7.30, Mr. E. BRYANT.

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday, July 28: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Chester-le-Street (The Bridge), Saturday, July 26: 7.30, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Darlington (Market Steps), Sunday, July 27: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

North Shields (Harbour View), Tuesday, July 29: 7.30, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Stockton (The Cross), Wednesday, July 30: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Foubridge, Friday, July 25: 7.45, Mr. JACK CLAYTON.

Hapton, Tuesday, July 29: 7.30, Mr. JACK CLAYTON.

Waterfoot (Rossendale, Sunday, July 27: 7.30, Mr. JACK CLAYTON.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

President - - - CHAPMAN COHEN
 General Secretary - R. H. ROSETTI
 2 & 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.

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Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; it affirms that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised State.

Secularism affirms that morality is social in origin and application, and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

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