

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Double-dealing Rome

THE Roman Catholic press in this country is in a dilemma; and the Roman Catholic press represents the Roman Church. One of the factors in this situation is our alliance with Russia. Ever since the Russian revolution the Roman Catholics in this country, and many of them hold high positions and exert considerable influence on our politics, have done what they could to prevent genuinely friendly relations with a government that had openly professed itself Atheistic. They raked up many of the vilest stories that have done service in the history of Christian propaganda. Russia was to be treated as a pariah amongst the nations, and some would have welcomed an armed religious crusade against a government that had openly declared itself to be non-religious. Then Germany attacked Russia, and Mr. Churchill promptly and properly announced that any country that was fighting against Germany was on our side and we on theirs. They were, for the time being, at least our comrades in arms. Some of the religious papers thought they saw a way out. It was carefully explained that we had not a real alliance with Russia, we were only "associated" with her for a specific purpose—that of killing Germans. That, in its way, was an attempt to sabotage the combination at the outset. Quick to see the danger, the Prime Minister promptly announced that our relation was that of a fully fledged Alliance, although he had carefully announced—with an eye on his religious supporters—that his opposition to Communism was as great as ever. The Russians might well have retorted that they were as strongly opposed to our religious and social system as ever. But they did not, and so came through this petty discussion with the greater dignity. What was to be done? There was a kind of half right-about turn. The Russian Churches which had been completely forbidden by the government were opened and crowded with Christians—who had been massacred (in the religious press) over and over again. This resurrection of so many dead was the first miracle of the alliance. Nothing like it had been seen since the time of Jesus Christ, when the dead arose from their graves and walked about the streets of Jerusalem—and then promptly disappeared from the pages of history. Equally miraculous was the appearance of numbers of tanks of as high quality as anything that Germany possessed, and made by a people who were declared to be hopeless as mechanics. The skill of the Russian military leaders evoked the admiration

of both Britain and the United States. The courage of the Russian people, fighting in defence of a system which they were, according to the religious press, waiting eagerly to overthrow, astonished the world. They simply did not know when they were beaten. The Germans complained that they fought with "stupid obstinacy" and "unbelievable courage." Even Lord Halifax admits that the Russian intervention may well have marked the turning point of the war. The people who could not develop an engineering class have shown themselves well able to conduct a mechanical war—and then some.

Forever Christianity

But the religious interests that have fought for years against a friendly understanding with Russia, while displaying forbearance with Hitler's Germany, are not dead, they are merely lying dormant and we shall have to reckon with them when the war is over. We shall find an indication of this if we notice the British Roman Catholic press and Spain. The Spanish government is very religious, very Roman Catholic, and very Fascist. Most of the pre-revolutionary financial holdings of the Church have now been restored, as well as its power. The Church has again control over what is called education, there are many thousands of Republicans in prison, and Franco's government has promised military help to Germany. Franco has also received the praise of the Pope as a faithful son of the Church. Here is the *Catholic Herald's* apology for Franco (July 25):—

"Spain has been through hell in the grim work of redeeming a Catholic land from disintegration, Secularism and Bolshevism. She (Franco) associates the evils that came within an ace of conquering her to the pagan philosophy of universal toleration. She simply could not wish for the victory of the very international forces that laid her low. How is she to interpret the climax of a freely entered into alliance between these Western Powers and Bolshevism itself. . . . The time is rapidly coming when we might also begin to ask ourselves how it is that these smaller countries seem to prefer the cause of our enemies despite our enemies' acts of crime, aggression and tyranny?"

It does not need a superior intelligence to read between the lines of the passage cited, and in doing so we must remember that the *Catholic press* is dominated by the Church even if it is not officially under its control. The last passage is glaring in its untruthfulness. Religious zeal has never suggested a falsified statement than to speak of the "smaller" countries that are under the German heel having preferred the cause of German Nazism to friendly relationships with the Allies. Did Belgium, Holland, Norway, Greece, the Balkan States, and others choose freely between Germany and the Allies? No greater lie was ever suggested than this. Putting others on one side, there is not one of the occupied nations that would not have welcomed Russia as an ally, to say nothing of Britain, France, and the United States. If the Roman Church had really concerned itself with the preservation of Freedom, it could have used against Germany its—to Roman Catholics—terrible weapon of excommunication. It has contented itself mainly

with protests and broad generalisations about freedom that permit of reservations in favour of a liberty that will leave room for Roman Catholic illiberalism. If Spain had been a Protestant country the conduct of its leaders would not have been dealt with by the Vatican in so sympathetic a manner.

Haiti and Berlin

Here is a further example of the same attitude in another connection. A recent article in the organ of the Association for Head Masters and Mistresses has given offence to the *Catholic Herald*, that is to Roman Catholicism, because the Association objects to certain steps being taken by Vichy France. The passage cited by the *Herald* runs thus:—

“Religious instruction has now been made an obligatory part of the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. A new subject (which has its exact counterpart in Germany and Japan) has been added—social ethics. The curriculum for the latter has been worked out in detail by the Ministry of Education and stresses duty to God and to the State, and bans atheism. This is in addition to the decrees which increase the power of the Roman Catholic Church over State education. The law of 1903 separating Church and State has been repealed, and the return of the Chartreuse Monks to France after 37 years of exile was the symbol of this change. Religious denominations can now teach in schools, and the Catholic Church has gained increasing privileges. The results of this policy have reacted viciously against many teachers in France.”

The character of what Heine called “the great lying church” was never better displayed than in its condemnation of the British association for attacking the German-French tactics. Everyone knows that to-day there is no French Government in France. There is only a puppet of which Germany pulls the strings. And there is the significant fact that the wording of the “reforms” are German in character. All that the *Herald* is doing is to welcome the return of the Church to power, a return against which the best of Frenchmen have been fighting for many years.

Consider the method of this Catholic journal. It complains that the teachers’ association is condemning “education in a spirit of discipline and obedience” and that it is “opposing the motto ‘Labour, Family, State and the back to the land ideal.’” That is sheer deliberate misrepresentation worthy of “Haw-Haw” or Goebbels. It simply is not true. The teachers are properly protesting against the German, and even the Roman Catholic interpretation and misuse of these phrases. They are protesting against the German, and the Roman Catholic conception of what constitutes reform and liberty. We cannot really insult the intelligence of the managers of the *Herald* by assuming that they do not know that Vichy is a mouthpiece of Germany, and that what Germany means by such terms as education, back to the land, discipline, etc., are not identical with what we mean by them. The interpretation is, in fact, directly to the contrary. The *Catholic Herald* is not run by fools. The quality of some of its followers is another question.

Nor should we forget that the Roman Church has never given up hope of one day seeing Europe reformed on the medieval plan. Medievalism is the permanent ideal of the Roman Church.

A Heaven for Priests

The island of Haiti has just achieved a new President in the person of Elie Lescot. The *Herald* and

the Vatican are delighted, and the reason is not far to seek. The *Herald* prints the following:—

“‘As a true and practising Catholic,’ said President Lescot, ‘I find it heartrending to see my Church and religion exposed to the perils of proselytising in my country.’ This, he said, is the nation’s principal problem—that and the reason for it: a lamentable lack of Catholic clergy, native and foreign. He declared that a major project of his administration will be to seek a remedy for this clerical famine.”

The President has also proclaimed that “No act of my government shall ever be in violation of the principles of the Roman Catholic Church.” We are not surprised that the Pope has sent President Lescot “a very special Apostolic Blessing.” He deserves it.

President Lescot means business. Archbishops, Bishops, and priests will be appointed by him and they all will be paid by the State. Haiti promises to be a paradise for Roman Catholic priests with their doctrines protected from attack and all expenses paid. The good Franco has returned a deal of the loot to the Church, which it lost during the revolution. Loot, in one form or another, will be the attraction of the Catholic priesthood in both places. If Hitler had only taken care to come to terms with the Vatican his career of conquest might have been much easier than it is.

But a plain question. Will anyone point out any substantial difference between the state of affairs in Haiti—if the President gets his way—and the situation in Berlin? We admit that brutalities, the denial of human rights, the massacres, may not be so numerous, or the denial of personal rights so drastic in Haiti as in Berlin. The prisons may not be so large, nor so well-filled as in Germany, although one cannot help recalling a time when the public incineration of heretics was quite a popular method of entertaining a Christian populace, and must remember the President’s resolve to see that there is no violation of Roman Catholic principles. We must also remember that Roman Catholic legalists have always read that a non-Catholic religion may be treated as an attack on the Roman Church.

So one may well ask what really will be the difference between Haiti and Berlin if the Roman Catholic clergy rule the roost? Substitute the Papal-directed President for Hitler and the army of priests for the Gestapo, add the suppression of all teaching that conflicts with Rome, and what substantial difference is there? The precise degree of brutality is beside the question. If only Hitler could establish his new order in Europe it is easily possible that two or three generations might see the people of the controlled countries with a docility so developed, that there would exist a people living with the contentment of well-fed cattle and the aspirants for a free life existing as no more than a reversion to an earlier form of social life that would soon be eradicated.

Let us never forget two things. First, if we can transport ourselves back to the days of the declining Roman Empire we can imagine the scepticism with which a cultured denizen of old Rome would have listened to a prophecy that there would ever set in such an eclipse of civilisation as that which coincided with the reign of the Christian Church. Yet, for many centuries civilisation sank lower and lower, the science, the philosophy, the culture of the old Pagan world was so far forgotten that its reappearance was regarded with amazement—and with no greater opposition than the world now regards the impact of Nazism. We should never forget Gibbon’s tremendous summing up of his great history that he

had been chronicling the triumph of "barbarism and religion." That is what we are faced with to-day, the onslaught of barbarism and religion represented by Nazism and a renaissance of the Christian religion as represented by the Roman Catholic Church.

The second thing to remember is that in the game of *breeding* believers the Christian Church is a very old practitioner. Hitler and his gang have not yet had a single generation with which to work out his plans. Already we are beginning to realise the fanatical fervour of large numbers of the new generation of Germans for their semi-divine leader, Hitler. But against Hitler's single generation we have to put the more than thirty generations during which the Christian Church practised the ethics of the stud farm—eliminating by fire and sword, by torture and death, by the threat of eternal damnation to the unbeliever, by a social boycott and an educational process to destroy even the ambition to acquire the aspiration for freedom of thought and speech among the people. It is very easy to console oneself with such pleasing maxims as "Truth will conquer." Given equal chances, or even something less than equal chances, and the maxim is sound enough. But truth seldom meets error on equal terms. Error is established before truth begins to take its first timid and halting steps. An established falsehood in any direction has a tremendous advantage over a newly discovered truth. Why, we have not yet managed to break down the awe of the name of "king" that began in the belief that the king was a god incarnate. We have not yet broken the tendency to bow before the title of "Lord" or "Duke" as a consequence of the many generations of feudal rule which our forbears experienced. The slave spirit still lurks in most, and can often be detected where one is least expectant of its presence.

And like a small cloud that precedes a heavy storm we have an indication of the return of medievalism in the combined attack by the clergy of all denominations on the little freedom our schools have secured. While writing this I came across an item of news that 72 members of the House of Lords and 152 members of the House of Commons have presented a memorandum to the Prime Minister asking the Government to give effect in the schools to the five points which have been adopted by the Churches, and secretly backed by members of the Government. If that is done it will mark the first triumph on the way to the weakening of the educational value of the schools and the development of a real democracy. The Churches are making the most profit they can out of the war. We cannot hope for much help from the House of Commons to frustrate the clerical plot to capture the schools. But it will be unfortunate if the chief victims of the peace turn out to be the present generation of children.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE MONKS AND THEIR DEPENDANTS

CATHOLIC and even sentimental Protestant writers have presented many fanciful pictures of the relations between the monastic orders and the poor and oppressed. We have been solemnly assured that there was no need for a Poor Law in England until the dissolution of the monasteries by the tyrannical Henry VIII., and that this scandalous proceeding necessitated the later Act of Elizabeth.

As a matter of fact, however, even the free tenant of medieval times was far more at the mercy of the landholder than he is to-day. And when monasticism was at the height of its power, the freeman constituted a small minority only of a population mainly agricultural. This was certainly so in Britain and in several Continental lands. The mass of the rural

community endured a state of bondage, whether we regard them as "serfs" or "villeins." As Dr. Coulton states in the second volume of his *Five Centuries of Religion* (Cambridge, 1927): "The serf was a chattel, 'an economic unit.' He could be sold, with or without his little holding; he could be exchanged or pawned like any other chattel. The lawyers of the later twelfth century are still asserting a principle which originally had been undisputed, that the serf could possess nothing of his own; both his body and his savings, his 'peculium' belonged in strict right to his lord. In practice this was very considerably modified by 1200; yet the theory preserved enough vitality to legalise extortions, here and there, even under Elizabeth."

Not only had the serf no personal rights, but his "brood" as his offspring were disdainfully designated, were equally unfree. If the serf and his spouse were the property of different feudal magnates, they were at liberty to apportion the peasants' children between them. Bondmen and bondwomen, when they wedded, were compelled to pay a fine to the lay or clerical landed proprietor and were liable to the infliction of a further fine if, by choosing a partner from another manor, they lessened the labour services of their own. This system led to close inbreeding in the tiny village communities, and it was deemed expedient to relax the rigours of the Canon Law concerning prohibited degrees of matrimony. It is soberly recorded that some of the more avaricious landlords mated their serfs, much as they mated their cattle, to increase the labour supply. Contemporary documents attest that on a manor near Bâle "the bailiffs yearly chose couples and mated them, as if they had been oxen; the monks of St. Albans and Halsowen habitually prescribed to such and such labourers that they should take such and such widows under pain of fine; it was obviously uneconomic to allow the woman to manage her holding alone, while there were bachelors about."

Whatever its earlier justification, by the 13th century the heriot had become utterly anomalous. For under this ancient custom the lord retained his right to claim possession of the best beast on a holding when a serf died, at the very time when his widow and children were in their deepest distress. Also the parish priest became entitled to the second best animal on the holding. Moreover, the most artful legal quibbles were employed to plunder and degrade the poor, and might usurped the throne of right. As Dr. Coulton intimates: "The monks at Ramsey were not exceptional in keeping a foreman with a rod to hold over the reapers at their work; on the contrary, there are many other such records, and the overseer's rod was an ordinary phenomenon in the harvest field." These were the days regretted by modern romantic writers, as those of a departed merry England, made drab and drear by industrial development.

Then, as now, the pious deplored the indifference of the people towards sacred observances. Common were the complaints of the clergy on this score. Naturally enough, the downtrodden serfs seized every available opportunity to escape the drudgery and monotony of their daily toil. So Sundays and saints' days became the occasions of revel and intemperance. In Italy, moans Antonino, the peasants "spend little time in divine service . . . but in games, in taverns and in contentions at the church doors. . . . They blaspheme God and his saints on slender provocation. Very many of them do not confess once a year; and far fewer are those who take the communion under the false belief that they need not communicate except when they grow old or are sick unto death."

Save in rare instances, the Church proved inimical to the welfare of the peasantry. Yet it has been boldly asserted and is commonly believed, that the

steady mitigation and ultimate extinction of serfdom resulted from the benign influence of the Church, and that of the monks above all. This constantly repeated claim has been completely negated by the careful researches of Fournier and Brecht. As Coulton indicates, there exists nothing save legendary report to suggest that the monastic orders ever followed the example of those humane landholders who manumitted considerable numbers of their serfs as a passport to paradise. "For nearly all the monastic enfranchisements recorded," Dr. Coulton avers, "we have either explicit evidence that the serf bought his liberty with hard cash, or have strong reasons to suspect it. A thirteenth century abbot of St. Germain-des-Prés, for instance, sold to a village for 1,400 livres (the pre-war [1914] equivalent of £3,000), not complete freedom but remission of the most onerous servile dues and disabilities." The Chapter of Notre Dame de Paris secured a far more substantial sum for a similar concession. Abbots and other ecclesiastics were frequently accused of granting manumissions for monetary payment and then defrauding their abbey by pocketing the cash. In fact, manumission was as alien to custom as to law. On lay and ecclesiastical estates alike, the serf was permitted no independence whatever and was as much a part of the manor as the soil itself. Again, as Coulton states: "Canon law explicitly forbade alienation of serfs; . . . and English records show how, in the few cases where a bishop wanted to free a trusted servant who was not too decrepit to have lost his market value, he found it advisable to secure himself by procuring papal licence. Serfdom therefore lasted longest of all on ecclesiastical, and especially monastic estates; there were about 300,000 in France when the Revolution broke out."

It has been stated that the monks never rackrented their tenants. Yet, Dr. Coulton notes that their records "which have survived in abundance, prove conclusively that they did." The heriot, a death duty sometimes equivalent in value to half the serf's belongings, was exacted as remorselessly by the monastic authorities as by the average lay landholder. Then there was the mortuary due under which "the clergy seized the beds of their dead parishioners." It is true that the Pope, Innocent III., counselled moderation in the exercise of this clerical exaction, although he fully conceded that the clergy were entitled to this due. Yet, in England, this nefarious exaction persisted until the reign of Henry VIII.

The alms dispensed at the abbey gates have been the theme of many dithyrambic writers. But the amount of charity bestowed appears to have been enormously exaggerated. Dr. Coulton seems fully justified in his estimate that if the alms conferred "had been multiplied fourfold, they would not have equalled what the monks drew from their rights, hallowed by custom and law, of taking to their own use the greater part of the endowments of a large number of parishes. . . . It was notorious, and popes and councils complained in vain, that the monasteries neglected the villages from which they generally sucked about two-thirds, and sometimes a great deal more, of the parochial endowments."

T. F. PALMER.

Innocent III. was Pope in 1207 and was not satisfied with spiritual power unless he could render that power an instrument for the subjugation of every European State to a humiliating subserviency. This principle, as expressed by himself in a memorable letter, was that "as God created two luminaries, one superior for the day and the other inferior for the night, which last owes its splendour entirely to the first, so he has disposed that the regal dignity should be but a reflection of the Papal authority, and entirely subordinate to it."—KNIGHT'S "HISTORY."

A SCHOLAR WHO SHOOK THE WORLD

So far as a man thinks, he is free.

—EMERSON.

Instead of being made—make yourself.

—HERBERT SPENCER.

John P. Robinson, he

Sez they didn't know everything down in Judee.

—LOWELL.

ERNEST RENAN, scholar and philosopher, never cared for the applause of the world, but he would have smiled his kindly smile if he had known that in February, 1923, people would be celebrating the centenary of his birth. Renan had, during life, a large share of popularity, and his influence was continuous from the publication of his famous "Life of Jesus," in which he wrote the life of the young Jewish fanatic whom he had served in his youth. What a storm the book provoked! For years it rained pamphlets. Fifteen hundred replies were published within a few months of its appearance. Whether men applauded or criticised, none could deny its power. Priests might rail and the pious might sigh, but they both have had to reckon with it. Not even the most reactionary of the commentators on the Gospel legends have written as they would have written had Renan's book never been published.

It was a famous victory for Freethought, and none the less effective because it was bloodless. For Renan's kid-glove method is as fatal to religion as Strauss's critical thoroughness. Airily and daintily the French scholar explains away the glamour and wonder of the Christian fables. The result is as deadly as the frontal attack of the German scholar, although Renan does with a smile what Strauss does with grim determination. Always under the velvet glove was the steel gauntlet.

The man who could alter the faith of thousands was well equipped for his task, for he was a great writer as well as a complete scholar. In many hundreds of pages Renan showed the sarcastic power of the French language in hands that can evoke its subtleties and wield its trenchant power. In his hands it was as effective and deadly a weapon as that handled by Edward Gibbon, although many tracts in the thousand years of history seem as if they had been made to suit the genius of the greatest of all historians, who wrote amid the quiet acacias of Lausanne. With his scientific bent on the one side, and his early clerical training on the other, Renan was still at heart a Voltairian. He even suggested that Jesus at Gethsemane may have looked back with a sigh to the black-eyed maidens of Galilee, who, under happier conditions, might have made his bliss. The sentiment was popular, for many sympathetic lady-readers of the Gospels have lamented that the founder of the Christian religion was not a marrying man.

Renan's own pilgrimage from Rome to Reason is told frankly and fully in his own incomparable language in "Souvenirs" and "Fragments." In these two books he tells the story of the sufferings he endured as he shook off his beliefs. The series of letters he addressed to his friend, the Abbe Liart, show step by step how he lost hold of his faith. In the final struggle he is driven to the Bible and to Pascal. In Pascal he finds that a great apologist "hardly dared to affirm anything." In the Bible he finds legend and superstition. Then there were domestic troubles, for there were foes in his own household. How Renan's heartstrings were tugged, for his mother was looking forward to his ordination in happy security. This was a difficult knot to unravel. He says pathetically:

"I exerted all my ingenuity in inventing ways of proving to her that I was still the good boy as

in the past. Little by little the wound healed. When she saw me still good and kind to her, as I had always been, she owned that there were several ways of being a priest, and that nothing was altered in me but my dress, which was indeed the truth."

The way was smoothed by Renan's brave sister, Henriette, and the touching dedication of the "Life of Jesus" expresses in a few sentences what he owed to her. The story of his mental development is told in his inimitable way in "Souvenirs," but that is the memory of a man looking back upon the past, with the fragrance and sadness of the days that are no more. One thing emerges from all his writings, and that is his complete honesty. Truthful in his own despite, it was this uncommon quality that laid the foundation of his maturer influence and universal understanding. The real importance of such a man as Renan will be found as much in the processes of his quest as in what he discovered.

In all the little ironies of literature there are few things more interesting than that Renan's favourite subjects are chosen from a race of men, as he himself remarks, as different as possible from himself. But where his theme is one of the heroes of philosophy. Marcus Aurelius or Spinoza, his eyes kindle, and his smile is graver. For Renan was imperturbable. Through all the charlatanism and devilries of superstition he went his quiet way, humming softly to himself. Far off, the murmur of the busy and noisy world sounded but dimly; but the scholar wrote his books and brought his dreams of the redemption of humanity within the realm of reality. He was content, for he worked at the loom of the future.

MIMNERMUS.

ACID DROPS

ONCE upon a time there was current in the Christian world a theory that a statement might be true in theology but false in science, or true in science and false in theology. That was convenient, because it enabled the Christian Church to forbid a teaching, without damaging theology over much, and to make legal any theological absurdity. It may be that the Rev Professor Whale has a hankering after this old plan for, on being asked whether he believes the story of the Creation in the Bible, the fall of man, etc., were true, ashamed to be a real Christian, Mr. Whale replies that these things are only spiritually true. But Mr. Whale must know that historic Christianity has authoritatively stood by their literal truth. He must know that the main purpose of the coming of Christ was to save man from the taint derived from Adam and his sin in the Garden of Eden. To quote Paul, "As in Adam all men die, so in Christ are all made alive." Of course, Mr. Whale does not believe these things, but why call himself a Christian? We agree that to say one thing and mean another, or to lay down a doctrine and then, when occasion serves, to deny that the doctrine is not true—save in the spiritual sense, is very old Christian business. But if a man in the business or scientific world behaved in this way he would be called either a cheat or a liar.

Now that Lourdes is suffering a "temporary eclipse" which "our Lady" seems to have been unable to avoid, the Catholic papers have to send their dupes to other "shrines." The "Universe," for example, has discovered that Fatima in Portugal "is in some respects an even more remarkable witness to the piety of Catholic Europe" than Lourdes—which is enough to upset the whole bunch of publicity experts in the French town. Fatima went two better than Lourdes, which could only boast of an apparition of Mary. At Fatima, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, with halos complete, all appeared to three children, aged seven,

nine and ten respectively, in 1917, and ever since the faithful in Portugal have made crowded pilgrimages there. Of course, "long records of bodily cures" followed at once, but it would not have been in the best interests of Lourdes to have called attention to them. So it is a case of business as usual.

The well organised campaign to hand over the schools to the control of the Churches—so well organised that very few letters against this threatened betrayal of our educational system are permitted to appear—does occasionally meet with opposition. The "Kilburn Times" is one of the few papers that has not been bought over or frightened into silence, and in a recent issue we were glad to see a plain but important question put to these kidnappers. A correspondent asks how teachers would teach their pupils the Athanasian Creed.

"Whosoever will be saved before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith. Which Faith except one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."

And here is the closing:—

"This is the Catholick Faith which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved."

Of course, the answer is that they would not teach this creed to children as it runs. They would merely have to suggest that if they wish to go to heaven they must believe in certain teachings and hint as to something dreadful that would happen to them if they did not become good Christians. In other words, the schools are to be used as training grounds for the Churches. The children are to leave school in such a state that they will become easy prey to Christian organisations.

For those who say glibly that the doctrine outlined in the quotations given above may be corrected by the following from our pamphlet on "The Devil." Here is one quotation which until a few years ago formed part of the Wesleyan Methodist Catechism, and was intended for "children of tender years":—

"What sort of a place is hell?"

A dark and bottomless pit, full of fire and brimstone.

How will the wicked be punished there?

Their bodies will be tormented with fire, and their souls by a sense of the wrath of God.

How long will their torments last?

The torments will last for ever and ever."

Or this from a Roman Catholic pamphlet, one written for "children and young persons," and published at one penny. It describes to a child what a room in hell is like:—

"Look into this room. What a dreadful place it is.

The roof is red hot, the walls are red hot, the floor is like a thick sheet of red iron. See, on the middle of that red-hot floor stands a girl. . . . 'Look,' she says (to the devil), 'at my burnt and bleeding feet. Let me go off this burning floor for one moment. . . .' The devil answers her question: 'No, not for one single moment during the never-ending eternity of years shall you ever leave this red-hot floor.'"

Then let us also remember that this is still the teachings of many Churches and the beliefs of large numbers of Christians.

Generally speaking, there has not been nearly the keenness shown to develop religious teaching in secondary schools as in the elementary ones. This is probably because the age of the pupils makes it more dangerous. The questions to which religious instruction give rise could not so easily be set aside as in the case of little children who live with more of a fairy tale atmosphere around them. But the educational plot does not overlook even the secondary schools, and we see that the Lichfield Diocesan Magazine points out that "in view of the fact that practically all the future teachers of religion are themselves trained in secondary schools, it is of first-rate importance that steps should be taken where necessary to extend the scope of religious teaching in these schools, including the provision of such teaching throughout the whole of the school's life."

From the B.B.C. 7-55 terror on July 31: "Do you agree that the only thing that will save the world is Christianity, the Christianity that has never been tried?" We do not know who was the intellectual mishap responsible for this gem. What we need is a Christianity that has never existed! But what has existed for so many centuries? What has the world been paying for? Is it just a mixture of rogues and fools that has given the world what it thought was Christianity? And how do we know that the Christianity that has never been tried is the only thing that will save the world? Where on earth does the B.B.C. get these specimens from? We are ready to wager that the same speakers will be telling the same audiences that all the good there is in the world we owe to Christianity—the Christianity that has never been tried! It must be poor sport fooling ardent Christian believers.

The League of God boasts that it has distributed 1,500,000 leaflets. Tremendous! But what an enormous task it must be to keep God in being and the god-industry in business. Now if there were admittedly a large number of gods, each desiring patronage, we could understand all this advertising fervour. But, as the members of the League of God believe there is only one God, they might at least trust this one God to look after himself. If there existed but one kind of soap there would be no need to advertise it. But because of the many brands, there is room for advertising. If God had only just been discovered, there might also be a justification for advertising. But a God who has always existed, who is widely known for what he is, and also for what he isn't, and still needs this enormous god-advertising industry, makes one wonder whether in these strenuous times we might not put God on one side altogether. It is worth trying, anyway.

On the question of "unity," the "Universe" takes the "Methodist Recorder" to task for talking about "a united Christian movement," and pertinently asks what does this imply? How can there be "unity" without "full and honest agreement about Christian faith"? We fully agree, and particularly with the fact that the only Christian faith worthy of the name is that which is believed in by Roman Catholics—fundamental, primitive and thoroughly credulous. The "Universe" insists that the Mass is exactly what the Catholic faith contends it is, and not just mere symbolism; and we are glad to note that on this point, as well as on others, there will be no compromise. In fact, though a Christian is a Christian, this does not necessarily mean that one Christian agrees with another—or agrees in anything at all except the name. And yet Christianity is the one Faith absolutely inspired, unchangeable and perfect. It is all as clear as mud.

Commenting on the statement of the Bishop of Chelmsford that he would shake hands with "a non-praying Stalin," but not with certain others, the "Daily Mirror" remarks that the cloak of religion is the Devil's favourite garment. We do not think this is quite true. True, the Devil did assume the form of a monk occasionally, but on the other hand, if we take religious records, it is astonishing how much the world owes to the Devil. According to the Church, it was the Devil who first taught man independence, who induced him to stand up and, as Lucretius says, "gave the monster gaze for gaze." According to the Church, it was the Devil who invented the printing press and the sufficiency of this life. Really, if one puts on one side what the Devil has done for mankind, we should be in a very sorry state.

We had almost forgotten that but for the Devil we should never have had the Christian Church. Still, we must take the good with the bad. As Shakespeare said, the bad things men do live after them—or words to that effect. And the Church, although built on the Devil, looks as though it will live after him.

The unanimity with which Diocesan conferences pass resolutions for more definite religious teaching in the State schools gives ground for astonishment until one remembers that these conferences are in a position of commending their own wares. What else would one expect from a Christian assembly than recommendation for more Christianity?

Fr. Ripley wants the Legion of Mary, founded in Dublin 20 years ago, to be "the World Army for God." We always thought that the Roman sect of Christianity prided itself on being a "world army" for God, but of course, few religious sects love these high-sounding and utterly meaningless names quite as much as Roman Catholics. The leading spirit in the Legion of Mary is "Mary Herself." Its doctrinal basis is "Mary's universal mediation as Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ," while "its devotional" outlook is that of "Blessed Grignon de Montfort." If this kind of blather did not accompany these ridiculous religious "legions," they would obtain few "soldiers." Legions of Mary, or Salvation Armies, or Spirit of the Swords have all high-sounding titles with a kind of military background, yet all of them enshrining "soldiers" too cowardly to meet the "infidel" in an intellectual encounter. What armies and what soldiers!

One of the worst features of the training of boys for the Navy is the way in which religion is forced on them, as Mr. C. B. Mortlock points out in one of the religious journals. He says, "These boys took their religion as a normal thing in a young man's life." Now, what exactly would happen if the boys, or some of them, refused to go to the religious services? Apart from being made to do objectionable fatigues, would they not be ostracised by their comrades and held up to scorn by the Navy chaplains? One of the officers is described by Mr. Mortlock reprimanding the boys for not making the "roof tremble" with their singing of hymns and "rating them for having finished some verses half a tone flat," and complaining there was "too much coughing." The boys also had to write essays on "On being a Christian in the Navy" or "Why does not God stop the war?" All this compulsory balderdash is sheer waste of time and forced on to the boys with the rigour of a Nazi dictatorship. It is disgraceful that the citizens of this country should be made to pay taxes to bolster up and pay for a religion, the heads of which—not in the Army and the Navy—have long since given up the Fundamentalism there taught as true.

An Irish (Eire) paper asserts there are 30,000 churches in Russia. That will be news—to Christians. The news will not be surprising to Freethinkers, but to Christians it will be hailed as a first-class miracle. This instantaneous resurrection of so many blotted out churches beats any miracle the Church has yet produced.

Also, a "News-Chronicle" special article (August 7) helps along the process of miraculous resurrection. "The churches of Moscow were crowded the Sunday following Hitler's attack." So the writer asks himself whether "the Russians have gone back to God, or did they never leave him?" Anyone who knew anything of Russia before the war, or of human psychology before and after the revolution, would have smiled at the foolish boast of some Atheists that Russia was an Atheistic country, or that of Christians that Christianity had been stamped out. Frames of mind that have persisted for generations do not disappear in this way. We have heard Russia described by a Freethinker as a nation of 140,000,000 Atheists! If we could believe that we could easily believe in the resurrection. Mental habits are not changed by the order of a Government.

The "News-Chronicle" writer says that Russia prays for a victory. Russia no more does that than does England. In both cases there are numbers of people who do, but there are also numbers who do not. The stupidity of thinking of a nation as all alike, or personifying it as one being, is—in these times—almost criminal stupidity.

But the "News-Chronicle" man eclipses himself when he says: "I can hear many a Communist saying to himself, 'I am a Russian first and an Atheist afterwards. Therefore I, too, burn a candle to the Lord.'" Now the Russians are our Allies we really ought not to go round talking of the better-brained as though they were drivelling idiots.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No. : Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. LAWBERY.—We wish you every success in your new venture. Thanks for interesting letter.

E. WILLIAMS.—We appreciate your letter with warning. We are fairly well and hope to get a few days of relaxed vigour before the end of the month. But one can never tell. Please send address of the person named, and we will look into the matter.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—J. Walton, D. Straughan and S. Straughan, 20s.; W. K. Hutton, 10s.

T. CAUDISH.—There is nothing more implied in the use of "we" than desire to be impersonal. Perhaps it is the modesty of editors in general that is responsible for the use of the word.

For distributing "The Freethinker": J. Kilpatrick, 34s.

D. HOGG.—The communication to which you refer came safely to hand. But we are a bit loaded with copy at the moment, and we are compelled to have an eight-page issue once per month. That cuts down our space considerably. And the paper situation gets worse instead of better. We have asserted over and over again that Soviet Russia, so far as the people of Russia are concerned, is an enormous improvement on the the Russia of the Czars. But few English people have any idea of what pre-Soviet Russia was like. Unquestionably the hatred of the new Russia was largely based on religious bigotry. And that provided a cover for other adverse factors.

W. MORRIS.—We are still in the dark concerning the matter, and no one gives us precise dates.

J. BISHOP (Victoria).—We have sent your letter to the lady concerned, which we are sure she will read with interest.

H. I. MARTIN.—We agree. If the B.B.C. "Brain Trust" is a fair specimen of British intelligence, then we must indeed be on the downward grade. Most of the questions are puerile, and the answers fit them well.

W. E. LYDDON.—Thanks for your efforts in pushing the sales: paper being sent as requested.

C. TOWNSEND.—The two pamphlets sent as requested. Thanks.

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 connection 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

THE Secular Society Limited is issuing, through the Pioneer Press, a new edition of Ingersoll's famous essay on "Rome or Reason." The pamphlet should be peculiarly helpful to-day, bearing in mind the activities of the Roman Catholic Church in this country and elsewhere. For Freethinkers it is an armoury of facts and reasoning against the "Great Lying Church," and for others it will come

in the guise of a revelation. Almost the whole of the ground is covered, and in Ingersoll's inimitable way, with all that wit and humanism for which Ingersoll was famous. The essay covers over 60 pages and is being sold at 4d., which is a marvel of cheapness in these days of dear printing. We suggest that those who wish to do a bit of useful propaganda might well send for three copies—one for themselves and two for distribution.

Another useful pamphlet the Secular Society is issuing is "The Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ" by Mr. C. G. L. DuCann. It is peculiarly well adapted for those who might resent the approach by "hard-shell" Freethinkers. Mr. DuCann writes with clarity and distinction. It is a pamphlet well calculated to impress those Christians whose faith has already been weakened, but not abandoned. There should be a good demand for it. The price of the pamphlet is 4d.; by post 1d. extra.

May we also remind our friends that the present is really a good time in which to introduce the "Freethinker" to likely new readers. The war has brought us many new subscribers, and there is always that new reader "round the corner" if we make up our minds to secure him. We are having a hard fight at this end, and the best of help that can be given us is to get the paper into new hands.

Mr. John Rowland's name will be familiar to many of our readers as one of our youngest literary critics, and also from the series of interviews with Julian Huxley, J. B. S. Haldane and others which were published in the "Literary Guide." He is also the author of a number of "thrillers" in the Edgar Wallace tradition. His latest effort in this direction is "Gunpowder Alley" (Jenkins, 7s. 6d.). In these days a little time with books of this class is quite a relief, and even, by contrast, a source of strength, to lose oneself in a region in which, however clever and determined is the villain or cluster of villains, sooner or later he is brought to justice. And, after all, the thrilliest of thrillers is as much part of life as are the more solemn and more important aspects, and for that reason we commend "Gunpowder Alley" to our readers.

BOOKS WORTH WHILE

"NO Friend of Democracy," by Edith Moore (with a preface by Joseph McCabe) published by the International Publishing Company, 12, Great Castle Street, London, W.1. Price 1s.; by post 1s. 2d.

If any doubt the sinister role played by the Roman Catholic Church in international politics, especially during the last ten or twelve years, this book of Miss Moore's will furnish them with plenty of evidence in support of the statement.

As Mr. McCabe says in his introduction: "Read this book. It is not a rhetorical outburst. It is not even an attempt to discover what is behind the veil. It is a cold statement of facts, mainly on Catholic authority. Miss Moore had diligently, sagaciously, temperately brought together the scattered admissions which circumstance and events have at times elicited."

Miss Moore shows, by quotations from high dignitaries of the Catholic Church and from Catholic papers, that the Church operated as the ally of Fascism. As she remarks: "Catholics have figured prominently amongst the defeatists of France. They have constituted the backbone of isolationism in America."

Ever since Mussolini obtained power, the Catholic Church has never once condemned the brutality of the Fascist regime. Thus, in 1932, Cardinal Gasparri, the Italian Papal Legate, said: "Mussolini is the man who saw first clearly in the present world chaos. He is now endeavouring to place the heavy government machinery on its right track—namely, to have it work in accordance with the moral laws of God."

But it was not only in Italy. In England our own Cardinal Hinsley, who now belches patriotism in his broadcasts condemning the brutality of Hitler, held mighty different views on the subject of Italy in 1935. Quoting from the "Catholic Times" of October 18 of that year, Cardinal Hinsley, preaching to his followers, said: "To speak plainly, the existing Fascist rule, in many respects unjust . . . prevents worse injustice; and if Fascism, which in principle I do not approve, goes under—nothing can save the country from chaos. God's cause goes under with it."

It is very significant that one never hears a word of condemnation of Mussolini and his crowd of black-hearted, black-shirted scoundrels in sermons broadcasted by Roman Catholic priests and written up in Catholic journals. No word of protest was uttered by the Vatican on the rape of Abyssinia and the brutalities inflicted on the wretched Abyssinians. On the contrary, this brutality was approved whole-heartedly by the Church. Miss Moore tells us that, "On the very day that the League of Nations met to consider the Ethiopian-Italian conflict, a National Eucharist Congress was in progress at Teramo, attended by 57 Bishops and 19 Archbishops." "Observatore Romano" (August 22, 1935) reported that this Congress sent a telegram to Mussolini which read: "Catholic Italy thanked Jesus Christ for the renewed greatness of the Fatherland, made stronger by Mussolini's policy." No official condemnation of the Vatican was uttered on the unprovoked attack on Albania, which was carried out by Italian forces on Good Friday! No word of protest came from the Catholic Press against Mussolini's closing of the trade unions, the suppression of free speech, the goaling of the intellectuals, the ester-oil brutalities and the ending of all personal liberty. Yet the Catholic Church now wishes us to believe that it stands forth as the champion of liberty.

A few weeks ago we listened to a broadcast by a Father D'Arcy on "The Persecution of the Church in Germany"! Of course, by "the Church" he means his own Church. He did not comment on the persecution of the Lutherans, the Jews, the Socialists or the Communists. No, Hitler's great crime was not that he was a criminal who had broken all moral laws, but that he dared to challenge the supremacy of the Catholic Church. There was no condemnation of Hitler at the beginning of his reign of brutality; it was only some years after he had assumed power; and when the Church saw that Hitler was resolved to obtain possession of the child, that the rift in the lute became apparent. However, the Vatican hoped to win Hitler over, and even begged Catholics to use patience in judging events in Germany. So long as the Church believed that the Nazis would attack godless Russia, they were content to put up with a few snubs and afterwards try to come in on the holy war racket.

When Hitler invaded Austria and entered Vienna, the German troops were welcomed by the pealing of the church bells. The Primate of Austria, Cardinal Archbishop Imtizer, issued a proclamation stating that Catholics must support without hesitation the great German State and its Leader, "whose struggle against Bolshevism, and for power, and for the honour and unity of Germany, corresponds to the voice of Divine Providence."

Another prominent Roman Catholic priest in another country (U.S.A.), that arch-Quisling Father Caughlin, writing this year in his paper "Social Justice" (what a misnomer!) said: "Great Britain is doomed, and should be doomed. There is no danger of Hitler's threatening the United States. We should build armaments for the purpose of crushing Soviet Russia, in co-operation with the Christian Totalitarian States—Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal."

One would think that Germany as a champion of Christianity needs some swallowing, even by Father Caughlin's dupes.

We have seen how the influence of the Catholic Church largely brought about the defeat of Republican Spain. We saw a large and influential Labour Party in England supporting a so-called Non-intervention policy, which meant the defeat of a people to whom, one would have thought, their support would have gone out. Why? Because the Labour Party knew that Franco's greatest friend was the

Catholic Church, and they were terrified of doing anything that might lose them the Catholic vote. So the so-called Democrats of Britain helped to betray Democracy in Spain.

We have seen how Catholic influence tried to force the United States into war with Mexico because that country broke the power of the Church and tried to give some measure of freedom, education and better conditions to the wretched Mexican peasants.

This is a book which should be in the hands of every man who realises that if the outcome of this war means liberty and the creation of better conditions, we have not alone to crush Hitlerism, but we must also curb the power of that Church which, throughout the ages, has always stood for reaction.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

JESUS CHRIST

ON page 345 your collaborator calls me "a learned theologian." I am not, by any means, a theologian of any denomination. I am a historian of comparative religions and of their various assumptions about the nature of which the most advanced and candid thinkers admit to be the "wholly Unknowable." This is a vastly different calling, and I object to being represented as teaching myself any doctrine about the Absolute and being thereby presumably prejudiced in my opinions about purely historical problems such as the historicity of Jesus. I am not easily "roused to a sort of fury." I try to practise Spinoza's precept: *non ridere, non flere, intellegere*—"not to laugh, nor to cry, but to understand" my fellow men. What I do not suffer gladly is self-appointed teachers attempting to teach what they have not studied. Also, Oxford is not a place where theologians or, for the matter of that, historians "rest," but where they work. One need not live here to get books—supposing one cannot buy them—through a lending or even a free library, foremost among them the Students' Library, which we owe to the initiative of Mr. Albert Mansbridge.

That Jesus of Nazareth is described in the Gospels as a semi-divine or divine person is the point of departure in my book (p. 8, note 1, quoting Albert Schweitzer, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus," p. 314). It points out—in the wake of Voltaire—that the proof for the historic existence of Jesus—first doubted by "certain disciples of Lord Bolingbroke"—can only be derived from the writings of the enemies of Christianity. That is what I have tried to do, and my book is the first to show the measure of agreement which exists between the Christians and the anti-Christian sources on the historic activities of Jesus. They do not represent him as "going about doing good"—but agree in representing him as a king of the Jews "by acclamation"—this is the legal basis of the rule even of the Roman Cæsars—proclaimed without the consent and against the will of the Roman authorities. It is a misrepresentation of our sources to say that I have "dragged in" the Jesus who committed what the Romans called *latrocinia* (banditry) at the head of 900 men. It is the Christian Church-father Lactantius, the contemporary of the Roman Governor of the Libanon province, Sossianus Hierocles, who rejects with indignation the latter's characterisation of Jesus and who had no doubt and leaves no doubt that Sossianus meant Jesus the Nasoræan, the Christ.

The Gospels do actually say that Jesus was crucified between two bandits (Greek *leistai*, Latin *latrones*, the Roman legal term for political offenders), and that "in the same condemnation" (*entoi autoi krimati*), i.e. "under the same sentence" (Luke xxiv. 40) as they.

For the Romans who condemned Jesus as "king of the Jews"—the evidence being the trilingual *titulus*, Greek *aition* written on the cross according to the rules of Roman law—and for the Jews refusing to recognise his Davidic descent and Messianic claim—he was a political revolutionary. For the Messianist Jews he was their king by the grace of God. The high priests called him a king-pretender (Ev. Jo. xix, 21), a thesis properly rejected by Pilate, who had condemned him as a *rex Judearum* who was not as Herod *socius et amicus populi Romani*. They

commemorated him in an inscription in the Temple over what was called "the door of the crucified Jesus" as "Jesus a king who has not ruled but was crucified as a false prophet, because he predicted the destruction of the Temple."

The Syrian Marabur Serapion, an exile from Samosata, a city captured by the Romans, most naturally acknowledges him as a wise "king of the Jews" regardless of whether "the" Jews, i.e. all Jews recognised him as their legitimate king.

The number 900 given for Jesus' followers is not "so very exact," but evidently a round number such as any estimate of the Roman *speculatores* (= Intelligence Department) would be able and likely to supply.

The extant Acts of Pilate are a Christian forgery intended to confirm the chronology and account of the Gospels. Indeed, they often bear the title "Gospel of Nicodemus." They are wholly different from the "Acts of Pilate" published by Emperor Maximinus Daza and criticised by Eusebius as alleged Pagan forgeries because they give the year of the crucifixion as the seventh of Tiberius, i.e. 21 A.D. Mr. Cutner confuses the ones which Mr. Robertson rightly declares a Christian forgery with the others which I claim to be the authentic, official records, very distasteful to the Christians who had to hear them read to the school-children in 311 A.D.

Mr. Cutner says Josephus "would have said so," if he had originally written in Aramaic. He did say so—otherwise we would not know it. But he did so in the introduction to his "Jewish War"—as anybody can see for himself—not in the passage referring to the much later Jewish Antiquities quoted by Mr. Cutner. Nobody denies that "just as there are two Christian-forged passages in the original Greek Josephus, it was possible for a Jew—or Judaiser—to forge an account of Jesus in the Slavonic translation." That is self-evident. But such a Jewish forgery could only have had the object of vilifying Jesus or, at least, disproving his Messianic claims and divine character. It could not have been designed to prove the mere historic appearance of such a person since no Jew or Christian denied it until the end of the 18th century.

We are all agreed that the Russian as well as the Greek Josephus have suffered Christian deletions, Christian additions and corrections. I claim, and such scholars as the late Dr. Rendel Harris, the late Salomon and Théodore Reinach have accepted the thesis, that what remains when these alterations are set aside, is a simple, straightforward account which fits into the context of Josephus and, what is more, into the general context of Roman history of those times. It explains them perfectly, while the non-historicity thesis remains in the domain of bookish, literary hypothesis where the scientific historian can leave it to stew in its own juice.—Yours, etc.,

ROBERT EISLER

THINKS THE CURATE

I.

THE Rev. Aloysius Pown lay awake in bed. It was the night of his thirtieth birthday. There had been no recognition of his having lived three decades, neither did the man want any. Congratulations would have galled him; gifts been an insult in his present mood. He was conscious of being poor, in money and prospects.

"A pure curate, as is so often said contemptuously of my sort," he murmured with a mirthless laugh.

Poor he was in everything except spirit.

The passage in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," moved him to scorn. It was untrue, as was so much of what he professed to believe, and was paid to preach.

But not paid much, reflected Aloysius Pown bitterly, and with slender prospects of getting more. I have no family or other influence, none of the hidden

but potent levers which elevate men into high preferment.

A Bishopric, for example. The curate licked his lips at the fancy. Lowest paid bishop gets £4,000 a year. Others run up to £10,000, with Archbishop of Canterbury at £15,000.

Thousands a year! His salary was £200, with small chances of increasing it. Not even a Vicariate was likely to come to him, much less a Deanery or Canonry, while a Bishop's seat was too ridiculously remote.

Aloysius Pown groaned. Money, money, money! "Oh, for plenty of money! Money enough and to spare!"

For it he would hold any belief, however absurd; teach anything, however irrational.

Other men at 30 were engineers, officials, managers, holding all manner of responsible and highly-paid posts. They had used no more brains than him, but his energies were wasted, whilst theirs were directed to achievements.

He had wallowed in religiosity, floundered through theology, groped at the nothingness of metaphysics, and memorised dead languages; all because of the snobbery of his pious parents, who sentimentalised a Church living into something superior to trade or profession.

Against his will he was doomed to poverty, chastity and obedience. Poverty, a crime against oneself; chastity, an unnatural condition, and obedience a vice.

He was too old now to change. Could nothing be done?

II.

After lying still, nearly holding his breath with concentration, rigorously excluding side-issues and repressing mere repining, possibilities began to shape themselves in Aloysius Pown's mind. There was a future for him. It would have to arise out of his present avocation. Not necessarily promotion within it—that was outside consideration, but a use of his hitherto misused talents.

Think of them, whispered Pown tensely into the darkness. Whether they left the world any better is questionable, but they did well for themselves, and will never be forgotten.

Mohammed, who made a camel driver regarded as one of the world's great men by starting a new religion and enforcing it on Asia Minor. I don't doubt his singleness of purpose, but he enjoyed life and prospered. Allah may be great, but his Prophet is better remembered.

Saints Dominic and Francis both gave their names to new Orders. Money or fame was not their object. Really their devotion and asceticism formed their self-indulgence. The same may be said of hundreds of other saints and religious leaders. They expanded their egos, gave free play to their individualities through religion.

Outstanding example is Ignatius Loyola. Organising the Society of Jesus afforded him fullest scope for his essentially business-like, formalised technical mind. Almost the same applies to Martin Luther and John Calvin and Mormon Smith.

So one can wander about the world and up and down the ages naming great religionists of whom it can be said they made a good thing for themselves out of their faith—especially out of their disciples' credulity.

Come nearer home and more recently:—

John Wesley found satisfaction, perhaps happiness, in travelling, preaching and founding Methodism. Obviously he had histrionic gifts. He worked hard and suffered, but men's ideals vary. Not everyone wants ease and comfort or wealth by religion, though many achieve them, particularly the last.

What a howl would go up if I said publicly General Booth did. All the Booth family are set up through Salvationism. Without it the old General and his kinsfolk would be nonentities, and poor.

The Rev. Aloysius Pown gave a short laugh and resumed communing with himself:—

Joanna Southcott, of the Box, is a funny case. Followers accrued to her, some still exist, and they paid up. Even her end doesn't warn them off. She was going to bear the Messiah, but the swelling proved to be dropsy, from which she died.

See what a huge affair Christian Science has become. An artful move, appealing to old-implanted religious ideas and the coming science of her period. Mrs. Baker Eddy didn't do badly whatever standards you judge her by—influence, reputation or money.

Mrs. Annie Besant achieved little and made nothing by her advocacy of Freethought. Behold the change when she converted to Theosophy. The atmosphere of religiosity and mysticism pleases woolly thinkers, and is profitable.

The process continues. Dr. Buchman, the Oxford Movement founder, luxuriates, as does Judge Rutherford of Jehovah's Witnesses. Meanwhile, their poor followers listen to their utterances with bated breath, do the dirty work and pay in the cash. This last is not the least of their simple duties—simpletons!

Go thou and do likewise.

III.

Aloysius Pown lay moveless, no longer half-humorously, half-resentfully grumbling to himself, but getting interested in his own plans.

He proceeded:—

Already the Salvation Army has a world-wide span. For the island race a Salvation Navy would be appropriate. It would have to be more than a mission to seamen, fishermen or canal boatmen, all of which exist, but make no splash.

What about a Salvation Air Force? That would be modern and spectacular, justifying our nickname of "sky pilots." It should lead to world notoriety for the organiser. Imagine the effect of missionaries alighting from airplanes in all parts of the globe; airplanes brightly coloured and text-covered in many languages. The missionaries immediately deliver their message, distribute literature, then fly on again.

Expensive, of course, but pious people will always pay up for a good propaganda cause.

I shall devise something broader than a re-statement of Christianity. This is a minority religion, one of the many myths which have infected human gullibility—and enriched priests.

My new religion must have universal appeal. I know all religions are getting exposed as illusions, but only a minimum of people have the cleanness and clearness and strength of mind to live completely secular lives. The masses are yet susceptible to the fascination of attributing good and evil to forces outside ourselves, entirely supernal.

First necessity is a Book. I've read widely in many Scriptures beside the Bible. I'll compile a synthesis from them all, fitting together the dogmatic statements about God interlarded with moral maxims.

That'll be the instrument—comprehensive, international and ethical. A universal religion, of which I will be the Apostle; from which I shall derive fame and wealth.

With that high resolve Aloysius Pown fell asleep.
A. R. W.

MAN AND GOD

JUDGING by the violence of feeling with which Christianity inspires you, I should say you believe it to be imposed on men by a supernatural power in order to make them different from what they are. Don't be disturbed. Christianity was man-made and can no more change men than a coat can change the body of the wearer.

It can deform man, just as a coat can deform the body. The corset is not a heaven-sent device, but it can ruin woman's figure. Men make religions and religions make men, or, at all events, shape them. Humanity is in the position of that poor devil of a fellow who, being lonely and lovesick, created for himself, by a supreme effort of imagination, a companion who came down from heaven. He followed her over hill and dale, till he fell in a pond and was drowned.

Men are led on by their own imaginings. They create gods and obey them. There is no harder taskmaster than the master you make for yourself, no crueller tyrant than the tyrant within you.

The Church, founded as it is on disastrous illusions, has buried science and beauty in the tomb for eighteen centuries and shed blood in torrents. She has dimmed the genius of the races that have adopted her. Christianity is a reversion to the most primitive barbarism—the idea of atonement. That brings us back to the savage. The basis of it is horrible.

Sometimes for Peace, sometimes for War, according to its sentiments or interest, Christianity has properly no morality of its own. It reflects the morality of the people who foster it and, like the chameleon, takes on the colour of the ground on which it alights.

To believe in God or not to believe in him. What is the difference? Not much. For those who believe in him have no conception. They say he is everything. To be everything is to be nothing. The ideas we assign to him come from ourselves. We should have them whether we attributed them to him or not. And they would not be any better.

We may therefore conclude that the existence of God is a sentimental truth.

We render thanks to God for creating this world, and praise him for creating another quite different, where the wrongs of this one will be righted.

God is the focus of all human contradictions.

ANATOLE FRANCE

ON EVIL-DOERS

The grading of sinners according to badness of character goes on the assumption that the wickedest man is the most dangerous. This would be true if men were abreast in their opportunities to do harm. In that case the blackest villain would be the greatest scourge of society. But the fact is that the patent ruffian is confined to the social basement and enjoys few opportunities. He can assault or molest, to be sure; but he cannot betray. Nobody depends on him, so he cannot commit breach of trust—that arch sin of our time. He does not hold in his hand the safety or welfare or money of the public. He is the clinker, not the live coal; vermin, not beast of prey. To-day the villain most in need of curbing is the respectable, exemplary, trusted personage, who, strategically placed at the focus of a spider-web of fiduciary relations, is able from his office chair to pick a thousand pockets, poison a thousand sick, pollute a thousand minds or imperil a thousands lives. It is the great-scale, high-voltage sinner that needs the shackle. To strike harder at the petty pick-pocket than at the prominent and unabashed person who, in a large, impressive way, sells out his constituents, his followers, his policy-holders, his subscribers, or his customers, is to "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."—E. D. Ross, in "Sin and Society."

CORRESPONDENCE

AN APPRECIATION

SIR,—I have just finished reading with great interest your "Almost a Biography," and wish to write you a few lines of warm appreciation.

Usually, I feel that a letter of approbation from a perfect stranger, to a writer or thinker whom he admires, shows some lack of restraint. But in my case there is no feeling of a perfect stranger.

My parents knew you in the decade before 1911, when we came to this country, and I find among my father's papers a membership card of the National Secular Society dated April, 1910, and signed by E. M. Vance. Both Miss Vance and George W. Foote I remember very well, although I was a child in 1911; however, they were personalities who stamped their memory on the mind of even a youngster. So the work my father did in the early part of the century and my great sympathy and admiration for the work accomplished by Bradlaugh, Foote and yourself, are my excuses for writing to you. I have mailed the book to my mother, who lives in another part of California.

And my message is just this: I appreciate your latest book deeply and just want to give you an affectionate handshake and say, "Well done!"

I feel, too, that it would interest you to know that you are read and appreciated way out in California in spite of war and an upset world. Although, if you knew of the activity in the United States in the way of aid to Britain, you would not feel that we are so far away.

I read with sorrow the account in the "Truthseeker" of the disastrous blitz damage to "The Freethinker" premises, and it is difficult for us to imagine the appalling conditions. We send our heartfelt sympathy. There is truth in the phrase: "A world peopled by savages wearing better clothes and living in larger wigwams."—Yours, etc.,
California.

PETER CHARLTON

ARE WE PLAYING THE GAME?

SIR,—With reference to the note in "Acid Drops" ("Freethinker," dated August 3) concerning the Home Secretary's "handling" of the "Daily Worker" business, perhaps your readers read quite recently Mr. Morrison's evasive reply when questioned in the House of Commons by both Mr. Mander and Mr. Shinwell regarding the membership of the Right Club, the secret society controlled by the notorious Captain Ramsay—Sir Samuel Hoare's "My dear Ramsay" at the time of the International Free-thought Congress held in London—now detained under the Defence Regulations. In replying to a request that the names of the members of this anti-Judaic club should be published, the Home Secretary replied that such a step would not be in the public interest.

Surely it is not in the public interest to suppress the names of those "respectable" folk who join a club, the sole object of which appears to have been to express hatred of Jews, Freethinkers and Communists.

It is not very gratifying for anyone, whether Christian, Jew, Atheist or Communist, who will lay down his life in this war, to know that there are a number of gentlemen at Westminster who are busily engaged in fomenting trouble at home. These propagators of class and racial hatred, many of them anti-Government as well as anti-Russian, should be vigilantly watched; much more so, I suggest to Mr. Morrison, than the "Daily Worker," a paper which, with all its faults, has never ceased to support our courageous Ally.

In conclusion, I should like to refer our Home Secretary to the stirring words uttered by the Prime Minister on the night in which the Soviet Union was invaded. They were to the effect that "any man who fights against Nazism shall have our aid." Haldane, Pritt, Chalmers Mitchell, Pollitt, O'Casey and Montagu—to mention but a few "Reds" in this country—were doing that when many other ostentatious patriots in our midst were—oh, well, ask Captain Ramsay and the Right Club!—Yours, etc.,

PETER NORTHCOTE

THE JESUS QUESTION

SIR,—In reply to Mr. Cutner's article of July 27, I must point out that (1) in matters of history I am not a "faithful henchman" of Dr. Eisler or anyone else; (2) while I certainly hesitate to accept as evidence "Acts of Pilate," first published in the fourth century A.D., I said nothing one way or the other about Thallus or Mara, and I mentioned Sossianus as proving that Pagans about 300 A.D. had a pretty definite idea who the "man Jesus" was.

I plead guilty to unduly simplifying Dr. Eisler's case in regard to the Slavonic Josephus. It was, of course, translated into Slavonic from Greek; and Dr. Eisler's case is that the Greek original was itself translated from the Aramaic. My slight short-circuiting of Dr. Eisler's theory leaves the merits of that theory unaffected.

I cannot for the life of me make out why Mr. Cutner persists in misrepresenting his Freethinking opponents by debiting them with things they do not say. I challenge him to name any writing of mine in which I spell the word "man," as applied to Jesus, with a capital M, or in which I say that he "went about doing good," or in which I declare his sayings and parables "the most remarkable the world has ever known," or in which I recommend his ethical teachings for acceptance by the world to-day. My sole interest in the matter is that of a student of history who is, naturally, interested in tracing the exact circumstances which, in the first century of the current era, led to the emergence of a previously unknown sect of "Christians" or Messianists among the underworld of the Roman Empire. If the myth theory can explain how just at that time that new sect arose, good luck to it! If Dr. Eisler or any of the "historical" school can do so, good luck to them! Meanwhile, I have an open mind. I am far less sure than Dr. Eisler that there was an historical Jesus; or than Mr. Cutner that there was not; and I see no justification whatever for turning the question into a matter for flouts and jeers by one set of Freethinkers against another.—Yours, etc.,
ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

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COUNTRY

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Chorley (Market Ground), 2.45 and 7.0: Sunday, August 17, MR. JACK CLAYTON.

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Newcastle (Bigg Market), Sunday, August 17: 7.0, MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

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Scoutbottom (Rossendale), Friday, August 15, 7-30, MR. J. CLAYTON.

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