

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity and Life*

THE essential feature of the Christianity known to history is what George Eliot called "other-worldism." Its real purpose was to prepare man for the life to come. Mankind had inherited the consequences of the sin of Adam and was doomed to damnation. Jesus Christ, an incarnation of God, came to earth so that "whosoever believed on him should be saved." But it is tolerably clear that what was really aimed at by the earliest preachers was to add to the many brotherhoods of believers. A principal idea was, at first, that of the approaching end of the world, and that it was man's chief duty to prepare for the "wrath to come." This will explain why the New Testament is so strikingly deficient in teaching concerning science, art, education, family and social life, etc. And right up to our own time most of the prominent preachers were firm in the teaching that "mere morality" was not enough, and that the vilest of sinners who repented in time would go to heaven and merely moral man to a region that is stocked with good company, in spite of its reputed unpleasant atmosphere.

Biologists are well acquainted with the fact that if a noxious germ is to live on man its destructiveness must not run to the lengths of killing its host. If it does so, there is an end of both man and germ. There must be a measure of accommodation on both sides. One develops greater power of resistance, the other loses the maximum intensity of its attack. So it happened with the Christian religion. Had its first followers carried its "other-worldism" to its extreme length it would have ceased with the first generation. But it persisted: at a terrible cost to mankind and in a form which paid some attention to the necessities of social life. As I have already said, if the Church was to live on the people it must live with them. Even absentee landlords must have resident agents—long-distance pickpockets are unknown.

But the anti-social—or, at best, non-social—element in Christianity was always there. It is plain even to its friends. Two such eminent clergymen as Donaldson and Milman have stressed the evil influence of the Christian doctrine of celibacy. And Galton has said plainly that the policy, in its influence, was to kill off the higher specimens of mankind and to breed from the poorest ones. Those who have

* These notes are a continuation of those which appeared in "The Freethinker" for August 10. They were delayed to admit others of more topical importance.

read Dr. Coulton's important work, "Five Centuries of Religion," will not need much additional evidence to accept Galton's statement as substantially true. In this connection we should not forget the deadly indictment of the Christian Church contained in Lea's "Sacerdotal Celibacy."

But still, and in spite of these considerations, the more wideawake Christians have been alive to the fact that the non-social Christian creed of the centuries is now in disfavour; and this has necessitated the creation of a *social* Christianity. Heaven has given place to well-laid-out earthly cities, and a heavenly home to the advocacy of better-built houses for the people. We have the same creeds, the same religion, but stress is now placed upon its value here—the next world has lost its attractiveness. The germ had to accommodate itself to its host. Of this policy we recall John Stuart Mill's remark (paraphrased) and say that the argument for the moral value of Christianity was never used until it was realised that its preaching of the nothingness of this world and the powerlessness of "mere morality" ceased to attract.

Christian Fiction and Historic Fact

What we get nowadays from what is called the advanced (or more artful) Christian leaders is this kind of thing:—

The main reason why civilisation and social conditions steadily progress in the West, while in the East there has been almost complete stagnation and inertia, is that the West embraced the progressive Christian faith which has made the amelioration of human society its special concern.

As a footnote to this bombast, it may be pointed out that Christianity actually began in the East and was forced upon the West; and it is just a little curious that a religion which was so progressive in its nature did not save the West from stagnation and inertia. As a matter of fact—not that a consideration of historic fact will be permitted to disturb a convenient generalisation in theology—it was actually the influence of the East that enabled the West to recover from the paralysis that had overtaken the West for at least seven or eight centuries. It was through the channels of Mohanmedanism—from the 10th to the 13th or 14th century—that the revivifying influence of old Greece and Rome was made available to the Western world. What the Church did was to ostracise science and independent investigation, while imposing upon its people a bastard theological philosophy from the evil influence of which we have not yet completely recovered.

I have not space now to develop this theme, but I think two quotations may here be set down with profit. The first is from John Addington Symonds' "History of the Renaissance in Italy":—

"During the Middle Ages man had lived enveloped in a cowl. He had not seen the beauty of the world, or had seen it only to cross himself and turn aside, to tell his beads and pray like St. Bernard travelling along the shores of Lake Lemano, and noticing neither the azure of the water, nor the luxuriousness of the vines, nor the radiance of the mountains with their robe

of sun and snow, but bending a thought burdened forehead over the neck of his mule; even like this monk, humanity had passed, a careful pilgrim, intent on the terrors of sin, death and judgement along the highways of the world, and scarcely know that they were sightworthy or that life is a blessing. Beauty was a snare, pleasure a sin, the world is a fleeting show, man fallen and lost; death the only certainty; ignorance is acceptable to God as a proof of faith and submission; abstinence and mortification are the only safe rules of life; these were the fixed ideas of the medieval Church. The Renaissance questioned and shattered them, rending the thick veil which they had drawn between the mind of man and the outer world, and for the mystic teaching of the Church was substituted culture in the classical humanities; a new ideal was established, whereby man strove to make himself the monarch of the globe on which it is his privilege as well as destiny to live. The Renaissance was the liberation of the reason from a dungeon, the double discovery of the outer and inner world."

And the core of the Renaissance (the new birth) was essentially pagan in its ideas and its ideals. Further, it must be borne in mind that the Italy which is depicted in the scornfully scathing language of Addington Symonds was then the most civilised centre in Christian Europe.

And here is another illustrative delivery taken from the colossal work by Arnold J. Toynbee, "A Study of History." After pointing out that Christians abandoned the slightest pretence of toleration once they assumed power, he says:—

"The intolerance to which the Christians abandoned themselves before the end of the 4th century of the Christian era persisted in Western Christendom for 1,300 years; and it did not lose its grip on Western souls until the iniquity of the parents had been visited on the children. The atrocities which were inflicted in the name of the Western Church, during the long centuries of its unity and omnipotence, upon Cathars in Languedoc, and Jews and Muslims in Castile, and Pagans in the Nalticum were more than avenged within the span of 150 years which followed the first collision between the Western Christian Church and the modern Western spirit of Parochialism. Overtaken by this disruptive movement within its own bosom, with the old spirit of intolerance still reigning in its heart, Western Christendom proceeded to inflict upon its own body social the treatment which it had been wont to mete out to non-Christian minorities. Internecine wars of religion between Catholic and Protestant Christians ravaged the Western World from the outbreak of the Reformation until the latter part of the 17th century; and these wars were conducted with the ferocity that is peculiar to fratricidal conflicts."

I think the Rev. Mr. Ashby would do well to pay a little attention to historic facts. But I expect it is rather difficult for a clergyman to leave the pulpit behind him.

A further consideration. To-day we are in the midst of a world war. What peoples are there that could disturb the peace of the whole world? Not Mohammedans. For centuries they have lacked the power to do so even if they had the inclination. Not the Chinese. They have always placed the agriculturist, the teacher, the mechanic, the philosopher at the top of their scale of values, with the soldier lower down as being at best a necessary evil. Japan, it is true, has always been of a warlike character; but when Japan wished to develop the military side of their life, it was to the Christian nations they had

to come for tuition. And it was only when Japan demonstrated its military capacity that the "Christian" Powers permitted its equality with themselves. There is, of course, Germany, who is the villain of the piece to-day. But Germany is one of the oldest of Christian European States. What kind of influence has Christianity exerted on her?

And of ourselves we may as well, as the old proverb has it, tell the truth and shame the devil. It is only yesterday that we ceased to exalt war; and we are denouncing war more because of its cost and deadliness than repudiating it as a method of settling differences. If the chief Christian States of Europe had set their faces against war it would have been cancelled out long ago. To-day we are loudly singing the praises of women—in war; and in the last world war it was as a reward for their activities in war time that they were given the franchise.

I pass with just a brief glance at the fact that every step in the direction of securing freedom of thought and speech has been won in the face of the opposition of the Christian Churches. And to-day the existence of blasphemy laws and Sunday laws are remnants of the tyranny that Christianity developed and maintained. Nor have I space for more than a mere mention of the fact that every great advance in science, from Roger Bacon to Charles Darwin, has met with the bitterest of opposition from Christian organisations. Those who consult White's "Warfare of Science and Theology" will find nearly a thousand large pages filled with accounts of the opposition with which the Christian Churches met new ideas in every branch of science.

The Crowning Cant

There is no piece of cant on which the average Christian so loves to dilate as what he calls "Christian morality." There is no such thing. There never has been such a thing. There is a natural morality that is characteristic of all associated life; and there is the fact of social environment to which Christianity has been bound to pay some respect but which it has done so much to distort. Meanwhile, there is the fact staring us in the face that Christians are not more truthful, more loyal, more honest, more peaceful, and certainly not more generous than other people. In the commercial world, a profession of Christianity is not good currency. And in domestic life Christians do not make better husbands, wives, parents or children than do other people. Historically, the centuries during which the Christian Church stood without serious challenge, either from within or without, are the lowest in European civilised history. But there is no need to go to non-Christians for material for justification of what has just been said. There never was a time in Christian history when Christian leaders and preachers were not lamenting the character of their followers—and thereby admitting the moral impotence of their creed.

To-day, the pressure of modern life on Christianity is so great that its advocates are very careful lest they should put arms in the enemies' hands. What they say of themselves is very much like war-time bulletins. The intention is to mislead their enemies and to pacify their friends. So we may take a witness belonging to a time when the Christian Churches were still strong enough to speak a little more truthfully about their creed than they do to-day.

We will take as witness the ecclesiastical historian Mosheim (1694-1755). Here is his testimony; and we may note the emphasis laid upon the character and influence of the Christian priesthood. Of the 2nd century he writes (please note the opinion the educated Pagans had of the quality of Christian

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EGYPT UNDER GREEK DOMINION

WITH his three volume chronicle, "The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World (Oxford, 1941), Dr. M. Rostovtzeff, Professor of Ancient History in Yale University, indicates the importance of his chosen theme. This monumental work extends in its entirety to over 1,600 pages, printed on high quality paper, and is handsomely bound and adorned with 112 fine plates and 11 figures in the text. Cultural, political and religious factors are not ignored, although social and economic influences seem predominant in shaping the trend of events. Our historian recalls the services of forerunners in his chosen department of research, while he grants the importance of constitutional, sacerdotal and other studies. And, as he assures us, in realising the power "of the social and economic aspects of life in general, I do not over-estimate it in Marxian fashion. My reason for restricting my field of observation is purely personal. I imagine I am more competent in this field than in others. I have, however, kept before me as a guiding principle—the maxim that the complexity of life should never be forgotten, and that no single feature should be regarded as basic and decisive."

An extremely interesting and suggestive section of this learned treatise is devoted to the Land of the Nile, when subjected to the rule of the Grecian successors of its conqueror, Alexander the Great. Information of a reliable character relating to Hellenic times is more complete in Egypt than elsewhere during the three centuries of Greek supremacy in that State. Knowledge concerning most other parts of the contemporary Greek world is somewhat fragmentary. But many are the documents that have recently come to light, especially in those Nilotic regions where the aridity of the climate has preserved innumerable papyri. From these and other sources ancient Egyptian life may be more clearly reconstructed than ever before. Still, as Rostovtzeff cautions us, "Every fresh publication of papyri, every additional inscription, throws light on old problems, and raises new ones; every important aspect of Egyptian economic activity is still, and will long remain, under discussion."

Still, much has been firmly established. When Persian dominion was ended and Greek rule began, the native Egyptian could glance back on a long and glorious civilisation under the sway of Egyptian kings. Many aliens, however, mostly merchants, had been settled in Egypt for generations and the State had been materially modified by its proximity to Persia, Greece and other countries. The period was one of almost constant conflict and if Egypt determined to retain her position as an independent Power, it was essential to create and maintain an adequate army and navy and to raise a substantial revenue to meet the necessary expenses. The first of the Ptolemies could not rely on the loyalty and efficiency of a native army and navy. Consequently, the armed forces of the Crown were chiefly drawn from the veterans and cadets of Alexander's Macedonian soldiers and sailors.

Ptolemy Soter sought the assistance of the native Egyptian aristocracy in civil administration, but with little success. Barter, so general in Egypt, was largely replaced by a metallic currency as there were great stores of precious metals available. Foreign trade was fostered and developed. Also, a new capital and port for a Greek guided Egypt was essential. So Alexandria, the city founded and named after Alexander, was selected. In terms of our historian's interpretation: "There is no need to assume a change in Soter's policy in order to understand his transfer of the capital from Memphis to Alexandria. Memphis was his capital so long as he did not feel secure from external attack. As soon as his army and navy were

strong enough to make his position in Alexandria safe, he moved to this Greek city and by so doing made it the capital of Egypt."

Religion remained that of the past. The priesthood and the vast mass of the population numbering millions, were Egyptian. Soter, however, was accepted as the sacred successor of the native god-kings. For the Pharaohs were deemed the descendants of Ammon-Ra, a divinity dwelling temporarily in the land. This belief sustained the divine rulers in the exercise of sovereign sway. In theory, everything both personal and impersonal, belonged exclusively to the Crown and this majestic overlordship the Ptolemies transferred to themselves. Thus, the divine cult of the Greek rulers became ultimately acknowledged by the resident Greeks and the Egyptian people alike.

The extent to which the Ptolemies continued the policy of their Egyptian and Persian predecessors unchanged, is conjectural, but the methods pursued by the Grecian authorities appear strikingly modern. Import and export duties were levied on commodities, and the labouring classes were taxed to the limits of endurance. Moreover, State control of industry and commerce prefigures the most drastic measures now in war-time operation in Britain.

In Egypt, perhaps more so than elsewhere in the Hellenic world, everything depended upon the products of the soil. In addition to grain, the fertile fields yielded prolific supplies of oil producing plants, figs, grapes, olives, vegetables and various fruits. "Egypt," avers our author, "in the eyes of the ancient world was an agricultural Eldorado, a gift bestowed by the bountiful Nile on its people."

The irrigation of the soil was of perennial importance, and from immemorial ages the labours of the entire rural population were compulsorily devoted to the appointed seasons to the maintenance of the water supply. Under the Greeks, registration of the land, a custom of the past, was carefully observed and the sowing, growth and garnering of the crops were strictly regulated by the State. During harvesting operations the peasant cultivators were subjected to close official inspection. The gathered grain was measured on the threshing floor and then apportioned between the King and the peasant, the former appropriating the lion's share. The other staple products were divided in similar fashion.

In pre-Ptolemaic times a substantial area of the cultivatable land was the property of the priesthood. These estates were deemed the demesne of one or other of the multitudinous native divinities, and each was cultivated by slaves dedicated to the service of the god. This system was, as a matter of statecraft, more or less continued by the Greeks. Still, changes under Ptolemy Philadelphus, Soter's successor, certainly occurred but the details are obscure. The State desired to preserve the integrity of the temple institutions to serve as buttresses to the secular power on fairly easy terms. Dr. Rostovtzeff provisionally concludes that: "If, as a result of careful administration, the sacred land yielded a surplus to the government, it was fair to use it as it pleased. Everything considered, it is uncertain whether the temples lost or gained by the changed conditions. They certainly resented the new order, for it deprived them of their ancient paternal superintendence of their revenues, it diminished the influence of the priests in temporal affairs. . . . This state of things could not be agreeable to the priests even if it was not entirely new to them."

Egypt's domesticated animals were numerous. Sheep and oxen abounded, and the horned cattle were used in ploughing and other agricultural operations. Goats and sheep were prized for their milk and wool, while immense flocks of poultry and droves of pigs

served as food. The pigeon was ubiquitous and served as a cheap food for the people and their droppings were greatly valued as rich fertilisers of the soil. For several thousand years the pigeon played a prominent part in Egyptian economy and under the Ptolemics the owners of dove-cotes were subjected to heavy taxation. Great studs of horses served as steeds for the cavalry, while elephants trained for military purposes were kept in large numbers, as well as an increasing array of camels.

Bees, whose honey was the sugar of the ancient civilisations, were kept on a prodigious scale. In the agricultural treatises of the time, there are numerous references to agriculture. Beehives appear to have been spread over the entire area of Egypt. In addition to the royal apiaries there were many thousands in private ownership. But a severe tax was imposed on this privilege, for a duty of 25 per cent. was levied on the profits accruing, with a likelihood of a licence charge as well. In return for these payments to the Crown, we gather that private beekeepers "were free to sell their goods at the market price and they were protected from the competition of foreign producers by high customs duties on imported honey (25 per cent.)." Thus, we see that our present methods of taxation are not the modern novelty that some suppose.

T. F. PALMER.

BOOKS AND THE ARMY

ONE of the most popular appeals made for our forces is that asking for books and reading matter generally. During the last war, I think I am right in saying that these appeals were made only during the latter part of the struggle, for there were no Camp Libraries, as they were called, when I first joined up. Some of us used to buy books, cheap editions mostly, and hand them round to our comrades. There was little room for classical literature; thrillers and sporting stories were eagerly read, and the works of such a "master" in his own line as Mr. Nat Gould received enormous popularity. I must confess that I preferred those of Surtees, but I doubt whether his sporting classics—such as "Handley Cross" or "Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour"—would have been really appreciated by most of the men with whom I came into contact. When the Camp Libraries were formed I found many books I always wanted to read, and I certainly was grateful to those kindly souls who sent so many half-forgotten Victorian masterpieces as gifts to the forces. At the Y.M.C.A. and similar huts I found old volumes of the "Quiver," "Sunday at Home," and "The Leisure Hour" as well as some of the cheaper evangelical magazines designed specially for the British "working man"—full of delicious examples of Christian imbecility. They gave me a very wide-awake eye-opener as to the kind of intellectual nourishment our grandfathers were cursed with in those more or less happy times when war was conceived by us as something rather disagreeable in somebody else's country.

During this war, books and magazines have been sent in hundreds of thousands to the troops, and it would not be unfair to say that as most of our men and women must have had a good elementary education, and a large proportion a secondary education at least, the standard of reading would be far higher than it was during 1914-18, and immeasurably higher than it was with, let us say, the soldiers depicted so graphically by Kipling. I wonder how many of us who have helped to swell the number of books sent in have troubled to find out what has been done with our contributions?

An interesting side-light has been shone on some of the proceedings by that indefatigable "Daily Express"

journalist, Mr. William Hickey, in an informative article which appeared a few weeks ago. It deals with the Royal Naval War Libraries and gives us a few very intriguing particulars of the way the books are distributed under the direction of Mrs. Ivan Colvin. Not for worlds would I wish to say anything personal against her or any of her kind-hearted co-workers who, no doubt, have nothing but the interests of our sailors at heart. But I must confess to feeling rather surprised that Mr. Hickey did not see the implication of his account of the work done by Mrs. Colvin.

It appears that this lady is the official Censor of what may be read by the Navy. It is she who sorts out the books sent in. Those which do not meet with her approval are "vetted." We are told that "each book is flipped through carefully and shaken; no undesirable message or harmful propaganda must reach our simple seamen." It is the duty of Mrs. Colvin rigidly to see to this, and it is she, no doubt, who supplied the adjective "simple" to our seamen. Who appointed her to this post, we are not told. What qualifications she has to decide what our "simple" seamen may or may not read, or what qualifications the person or persons who appointed her have for their choice in this impudent censorship, we are not told either. You send a book or books to the War Libraries, and it is Mrs. Colvin and her like who will decide whether our "simple" seamen will be able to stand the shock of something which the "censors" may call "subversive" reading. "We don't send out," she pontifically declares, "anything strongly controversial. No religion. Politics only if we can put in a second book giving the other side."

No religion! Does this mean no books in favour of religion? Does it mean that a work let us say by the Archbishop of Canterbury would be "vetted"?

And why should Mrs. Colvin (or indeed any lady of similar tastes and qualifications) decide whether a seaman, simple or otherwise, should not be allowed to read a book by Paine or Ingersoll? Any seaman can buy their works almost anywhere. Are they to be refused permission to read heretical authors merely because the books are given to them? Is it in perfect order that they can read "The Freethinker" when they buy it, but not allowed to by Mrs. Colvin when the journal is given to them?

Mrs. Colvin will not allow our seamen to read politics unless the other side is also given. I beg leave most strongly to doubt this. I am morally certain that any "right" book will be allowed to go through quite unaccompanied. And I doubt very much whether any genuine "left" book would be sent out even if accompanied by the antidote. Mr. Hickey tells us he had to go "bail" for Geoffrey Cox's "Defence of Madrid" and the huge work by the Webbs on Russia—otherwise they had been definitely put aside. And even then Mrs. Colvin "was going to have a good look at them herself." But surely our sailors have a right to be treated as men and not as children with a superior school marm doling out their literature.

One is constantly reminded of our own little dictators everywhere where they can flourish. I read the other day that a number of our free libraries have thrown out to be burnt the works of that well-known humorist—P. G. Wodehouse. The "by your leave" is not put to the public at all. It is decided for us by a library committee—that is, a number of people who are put on to this job without most of us knowing how, or what qualifications they possess. Mr. Wodehouse preferred to live on the Continent as he has a right to do if he wants to, and he was captured by the Germans. After many months of captivity he was given some freedom if he broadcasted for the Huns. That is his affair, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the quality of his books written during the

thirty years or so before the war. I have a right to read these books if I wish without being told by a number of anonymous individuals on a library committee that I shall not be allowed to do so because they don't like Wodehouse broadcasting for the Germans. They need not read him, and I don't care two hoots what they do; but by what reasoning are they allowed to dictate to me what I should or should not read? Who are these people, anyway?

Some of us remember how, directly he was convicted, the books and plays of Oscar Wilde were almost universally banned. Even now, when most cultivated people are thoroughly ashamed of the way in which Wilde's name was bandied about unblushingly by the most filthy-minded, one often gets a snigger directly one of his works is named. It took many years to break the ignorant and stupid censorship surrounding some of the wittiest and charming productions of our generation. We do not want that to happen again, we can leave this kind of thing to the depraved and unbearable Hun. But we must not sit quietly through it all and pathetically drone, "There's a war on." We must protest and protest vigorously. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

H. CUTNER.

THE PRIESTS

BACK to the dawn of history, in the Night of forgotten years,
They rose from amongst the people, to trade on the people's fears;
On the bended backs of the lowly they fastened and clamped their yoke,
And ages have passed, but the gird holds fast, and never a thong hath broke.
The backward path of the years is strewn with a tangle of outworn myth;
It is dotted with dogmas of cranky creeds that craft has juggled with;
For it matters no whit what weary God yields claim to the bending skies,
Full sure from the ash of his perished cult new born shall the craft arise.
To trade as they traded in olden times, and all for their worldly gain,
On fears deep down in the human soul, of Death and its after pain;
They have nourished the seeds of a souring strife, and hearts that else were caught
Together in bond of kinship fond o'er a tenet of faith have fought.
More hearts have broken and more hearts bled through the guile of the priestly clan
Than political wars have accounted for since ever the world began;
They have hallowed unholy things for gain, for gain they have cursed the true,
In the name of their Lord they have called on the sword and struck—when it paid them to!
Lagging an age behind their age, and the spirit that marked its time,
They have dragged on the skirt of a lancing thought in every age and clime;
They claim their "truths" as the only truths it is fit that our minds shall know,
And they say of the paths wherein they tread—"Herein it is meet ye go."
"Or failing, take care for your soul's welfare! It is ours as we choose to blight
Your immortal soul or save it whole, in your own or God's despite!"
And ever their business sense forbade them hold small things in scorn,
They lay their hands on the widow's mite and a tithe on the people's corn.

Back to the dawn of history, in the Night of forgotten years,
They rose from amongst the people to trade on the people's fears,
And their woven spell has served them well, and evil it is to break,
For the Priest fights hard in his keen regard for the gold and the Power at stake!

ICONOCLAST.

(The above appeared in the "Sydney Bulletin" some 30 years ago. I think they are worth "resurrecting."
—A. H.)

ACID DROPS

WE are moved to congratulate the members of the Mosley and Ramsay organisations who are interned in the Isle of Man. There they are, many with their wives and families, well looked after, in a beautiful little island, with plenty of food, comfortably housed, and reported to be able to buy anything they wish. And they are quite free from bombing. We know many who would be pleased to be deported for a little while to the same place, but one has to be a Fascist to qualify for the Isle of Man. We almost wish that the Government would send us there for a week or two. We could do with the holiday. Anyway, these internees will be able to return to London and other parts in full fighting form when the war is over. We hope they will not make claim on the Treasury for any extra expense to which they have been put.

It is good to see that not all the newspapers in the country are lending themselves to the Church plot to capture the schools. We take the following from the "West Cumberland Times" for August 7:—

Denominational religious teaching in our schools was the issue around which there was a fierce fight in the early days of the century, and it ended in the elimination of that kind of religious teaching in the schools. Now the issue is being raised again. During the war this is hardly likely to develop into a practical issue, but the position should be closely watched by those who do not think such teaching in our schools either practical or wise. Education should leave the mind of the boy or girl as free as possible from preconceived ideas. The great need of the hour is ability to think, willingness to think, to hear all sides, and to form one's own opinion after hearing all sides. We have freedom to think, to speak and to write, and freedom about expressing views which may be unpopular or unwelcome. If the Church, or any other denomination, is to teach its creed to children, then those children will be so far crippled in their flight for freedom of thought. The Church wants to do what no parent has a right to do—that is to give a child a one-sided view of a vital question.

We should like to see other papers follow so excellent a lead.

A suggestion for the B.B.C. Why not amalgamate "The Brains Trust" and the 7-55 morning terror? If, as we are inclined to think, this is an Atheistic-cum-Fascist plot to exhibit to the world the types of mind that are current in this country, two better groups could not be found. But we do hope that, while these two forms of propaganda continue, foreigners will be merciful in their judgment. If they offer a fair sample of British intelligence, then it helps us to understand the egg muddle and other things.

We are, of course, alive to the consideration that the quality of the questions is determined by those who select them. But that does not excuse those who by giving, often, empty answers to trifling questions, become parties to yet another B.B.C. imposture. There must be some questions that are worth discussion. Why not publish some of them?

Mr. Hilaire Belloc, who does not seem to bulk in the public eye quite as much as he did, has decided that the Nazi movement is "specifically and emphatically anti-Catholic." That may be true, but it is only so far as both are working for the same end, by substantially the

same methods, and one is bound to be in opposition to the other. A claim to the complete control of the human mind by two parties is certain to make each "anti" to the other. But in substance and quality of aim they may be and are still identical.

Which reminds us of a remark made recently in one of the religious weeklies—"The Christian conscience is a very real thing." Of course it is. So is the conscience of the member of a thieves' kitchen, who, in spite of everything, will not "peach on a pal." So is the conscience of a gambler who will pay his gambling debts but does not hesitate to bilk his butcher or clothier. So is the conscience of the Cabinet Minister who, in ordinary private relations, may be quite truthful and honest, and who yet will not hesitate to tell a thumping lie to the public, and give a well-paid job to an incompetent friend or relative. So is the conscience of the Pope who will denounce German Fascism because it will not give way to the papacy, but will send his love and trust to Franco, who is a notorious Fascist and helping Germany all he dare. So is our English Christian conscience which stood out so bravely against friendly co-operation with Atheistic Russia, but is ready for the closest alliance when the object is to kill Germans, and which has already informed the world that when the war is over our relations with Russia will be as before. Certainly "conscience" is a very queer thing.

We do not know anything of Councillor J. W. Gill, of the Ossett (Yorks.) Town Council, save that he has a capacity for confusing things. Our warranty for saying this is a speech of his in the Council at which he expressed his great concern about religious education—in the schools. After explaining this he attempted to justify his concern because he believes in the importance of "uprightness, honour, liberty and freedom." That is a quite proper sentiment, but what necessary connection has it with religious instruction? He surely does not mean that children cannot grow up with respect for uprightness, etc., without religious instruction? That would be to insult large numbers of people who are not religious, so we will assume that he is simply mixed, muddled, confused, and has taken the professional clap-trap of the clergy for solid thinking. Mr. Gill has a legal right to have his children taught whatever he thinks is best for them, and if he believes in God he might pray to him that he would help in getting his children to grow as good men and women, and to have a clearer brain than their father possesses—at least where religion is concerned.

The "Universe" (R.C.) announces that Mr. Hubert Tunney, a Roman Catholic, has been appointed Coal Mining Labour Supply Officer. We wonder why the announcement of Mr. Tunney's religion? Is it because the Roman Church has a knack of placing its followers in key positions? There certainly seems many of them so occupied. But if that is the case, is it wise to advertise it?

Our newspapers spare neither time nor money in getting news. And some of the news collected is, like our policemen, just wonderful. For instance, the "Portsmouth Evening News" for August 1 has discovered our revolt against the Nazi system is "an affirmation of belief in God." Naturally the source of the news is not disclosed. The only thing that we should like to know is which God is it that we affirm in opposing Nazism? It cannot be the German God, otherwise there would be, ex hypothesis, no war. Nor do we expect the "Evening News" to tell us. That might give away someone. The cheerful news follows that it is certain that God will give us victory. Well, we hope he will hurry up. Meanwhile, our leaders, when they come to facts, are informing us that the war will be won or lost in the workshops. And our Ally, Russia, is certainly not animated by the belief in God. So we must let the matter rest there.

The 72 peers and the 152 M.P.s, in their petition to the Prime Minister, ask that "every day the work of the school shall include a service of united worship." Well,

if Mr. Churchill takes in hand a united service of Roman Catholics, Church of England, Jews and all the other sects, he will be quite busy, and the terms of the service will be so general that even the gods themselves will wonder for which one the worship is intended.

A suggestion to help on the war. Why not ask our Ally, Russia, to send us over one or two of their men to manage our propaganda? They certainly do it far more effectively than it is done here. To read some of the Russian efforts shows one how things should be done. Of course, this may put some of our own people out of a job, but there are plenty of others going. They can be sent to well-paid posts abroad.

The resurrectionary wonders in Russia appear to have been much greater than we were led to expect. We understand there are about thirty churches in Moscow alone. No greater marvel than this sudden reappearance (not of worshippers, they may have been only in hiding) of churches that had all been destroyed by the wicked Atheists. It is one of the marvels of the ages.

Where professional interests are concerned there is little to choose between Nonconformists and Churchmen. Methodists are now suggesting that a daily religious service should be held in munition factories. We wonder what that is supposed to effect? Will it automatically sort out "duds"? Or will the machine work more rapidly? Or will it lead to workmen leaving it to God? Is it a case of

He worketh best who prayeth best
O'er gun, or 'plane, or shell,
And bids the Father of us all
To send the Boche to Hell.

Owing to the shortage of candles, the Pope has given the Churches in the Rhone valley permission to use electric light. We take it for granted that the Pope will make it all right between the worshippers and the head of the Trinity. But what has happened that a very little miracle might have been worked to make the candles in use to last until the end of the war? If we were God we should feel hurt at the Church for which he has worked so many miracles could not trust him to manage such a little one as prolonging the life of a candle.

But what dare-devils we have in the Church. The Vicar of Twickenham has decided that women may come to church with their heads uncovered. But they must stop at that.

A correspondent of the "Wiltshire Gazette," meeting the point that a united service will mean many reservations among those who join it, says that "reservation" is better than no religious service. So we can imagine a Jew, Roman Catholic, and Protestant each saying the same prayers and then mentally "tipping off" their God by saying softly to him, "Please do not mix my prayer up with the god of Johnny Smith, or Sally Jones. My prayers are intended for you. I am joining in the general prayer diversion with 'reservations.'" It looks as though a united service would really be a first lesson in humbuggery. Still, that will help religion quite a lot.

The Archbishop of Wales is a bit disturbed. He appears to feel that the Nazis are "queering" his pitch. They are forming a distinct religion of their own. They have a god, they teach that God and Germany are one (that means God is on their side), they have regular prayers and a confession of faith, with saints' days, etc. etc. Well, why not? After all that is the way Christianity was established. It took some of the old gods and gave them new names; it created many of them saints; it took the holy days of the pagan world and labelled them Christian. And the Christian Church used its hotch-potch of primitive superstitions, with a crowd of saints, male and female, and used it for something which would fool the people. History is just repeating itself. But it is not likely that Hitler and his gang will meet with the same success that did the Church.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No. : Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. HEMMINGWAY.—It is to be expected that with so many of the members of local branches away in the Services and others away from home on war work of one kind or another, propaganda in certain areas is not so active as it was. But there is a deal of private or individual work going on, and when the war ceases those who return will be as active as ever in "the best of causes."

T. RAWLINSON.—There is no limitation whatever. Wherever the religious oath is required there is an unquestionable legal right to substitute an affirmation. Only one question may be asked: "On what ground?" And the reply may take the form: "On the ground of having no religious belief," or "Contrary to my religious convictions." As a matter of fact, it is within the power of any Judge or magistrate to accept any kind of oath or affirmation that is binding to the person in question. And that is just common sense.

"T. W. M."—We are doing the best we can under the most difficult conditions that have faced "The Freethinker" in the whole of its history.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Mrs. K. Swift, 18s.; J. J. McManus, £2.

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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

IN the communications between the N.S.S. Secretary and the War Office, Admiralty and Air Force, statements were received that care would be taken that recruits may be registered as they please with regard to professions of religion or non-religion. We are pleased to see from a note in the "Literary Guide" that, thanks partly to Mr. Thurtell's raising the question in the House of Commons, the following notice, it is said, has been placed in all recruiting stations: "Every recruit is entitled to be classified for religion in the Army in accordance with his own declaration on the subject. This does not preclude an entry as Atheist." We suggested to the three Services at the opening of the war that this should be done, but we still receive complaints that "Atheist" and "Freethinker"—even "no religion"—gives rise to difficulties and even to refusal in the Air Force.

We again advise recruits to insist on their legal rights in all the Forces, and to ignore the apparently friendly hint given that not registering as of some religion may stand in the way of the recruit's "career." Above all, the practice of sending a man who wishes to be entered as Atheist or Freethinker, or Rationalist, to interview the padre, should be abandoned. That is sheer impudence. The Armed Forces are made up of men who were but yesterday civilians, and they should retain as much of their civilian freedom as is consistent with military duties. If the Russians can do as they are doing without requiring religion, are we to say that Britishers are so inferior that they must have a God to give them strength and morale? We do not believe it. We believe our men are quite as much men as are the Russians, and we protest against the implied insult to them to take any part in the service.

We are promised a delivery of books almost immediately that have been awaiting the binder. The orders of those who have already sent on money will be discharged at once.

Among these books from the binders will be complete sets of the Editor's "Essays in Freethinking." These contain the pick of Mr. Cohen's articles contributed to these pages over many years. Each volume is cloth bound and is priced at 2s. 6d., postage paid on all orders for the complete set. It is not likely that these volumes will be reprinted, in view of the conditions that are likely to prevail for some years, whether the war ends sooner or later. At any rate, they could not be published at present prices.

Two things appear to have been overlooked in connection with the egg trouble. First, the importance of a controller of anything must be measured by the number of officials under his control. Second, without a large staff of subordinates many of the home-produced eggs might be eaten while they are still fresh and this would weaken the sale of bad ones. As it is, by dealing out the bad eggs first and holding back the new-laid until they are of a respectable age, we guarantee that there shall always be an adequate quantity of eggs of a questionable age and quality on the market. Our egg-controllers are not quite so haphazard as those who write letters to the papers appear to think.

It is just a little surprising to find in the "Observer" for August 10 a protest against "the diplomatic habit of treating nations as individuals." "The Freethinker" has criticised this stupid habit so often that we are pleased to have an opportunity of saying it again through the mouth of someone else. And in war time this kind of malignant stupidity is very common. Anyone who is able to get into the papers, either by way of a letter or special article, finds it easy to write as though a nation is a single individual, and as though all Germans are "naturally" and inevitably and incurably brutal. It is, of course, the kind of foolishness that may help to win the war, but it is certainly a first-class way of losing the peace.

The folly of it all should be seen when we find the large number of intellectuals in Germany who have shown themselves to be "good Europeans" by their exile, their existence in concentration camps, or by their deaths. Of course, these are at once ruled out as not being "true Germans."

We wonder that the German propagandists have not pointed to the number of English people who are under arrest on suspicion of wishing to see Hitlerism firmly planted in this country, and the much larger number who are silent, but who were before the war sympathisers with both the Hitler and the Mussolini efforts, as evidence that in England the "real English people" are being held in subjection by Jews and the "Churchill gang." For they were very vocal before the outbreak of war demonstrated that caution was better than valour. We ought not to forget the valuable work Fascism did in providing new roads in both Germany and Italy, and what pets of certain circles the agents of both Hitler and Mussolini were.

Meanwhile, we suggest that if it be true that "there is something in German human nature," etc., etc., that defies genuine humanitarianism, that we develop a little courage in the matter and make one of our peace plans the devising of a scheme which will remove as quickly as possible—some infective deadly disease would be one way of approach—the whole 70,000,000 Germans off the face of the earth. Or there is the Hitlerian plan of castration. But let us be sensible in a matter that is of first-rate importance.

FREETHOUGHT IN NEGRO POETRY

THE poetry of a people is always an index of its thought. Freethinkers should therefore find interesting material in the poetic efforts of oppressed minorities, for among them the hope of "pie in the sky" has been even more strongly kindled than amongst other sufferers from Christianity and vested interests.

From this point of view the poetry of American Negroes is perhaps the most interesting of all. Compensation is, of course, its essence, but the spirituals and sorrow songs are not always so spiritual as they seem. In many, Biblical similes conceal revolutionary thought, the Negroes having learned the advantage of wearing a mask at a very early stage of their relationship with whites. Thus, if one interprets Pharaoh as the ruling class, the familiar spiritual "Go Down, Moses," is revealed as an appeal for liberation to Negro leadership:—

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land.
Tell ole Pharaoh
To let my people go!

And even when they are genuinely religious, most of them have a revolutionary content, inasmuch as they insist on the sufferings associated with slavery and oppression. "All God's Chillun Got Shoes," for example, is a subtle picture of the degradation which prompts the wishful thinking of its motif:—

Ah got shoes, you got shoes,
All o' God's Chillun got shoes.
When ah git to Heab'n gonna put on mah shoes
An gonna walk all ovah God's Heab'n.

But the social meaning of the spirituals was blindly or deliberately ignored by the slave-owners, who liked to present the blacks either as brutes to be kept in their place with whips and shotguns, or as blissfully simple folk who found all the joy they needed in chanting the praises of the Lord. Even to-day the majority of those whites who know the spirituals regard them mostly as exotic and tuneful hymns admirably suited to the rich quality of the Negro voice, or as distress signals to God, who will doubtless respond in his own good time.

This spirit explains why we hear so little of the "seculars," which arose as spontaneously and at the same time as the spirituals, but were much more daring in their protests. They express a surfeit of religion:—

I don't want to ride in no golden chariot,
I don't want to wear no golden crown,
I want to stay down here and be
Just as I am without one plea.

Or they are playfully contemptuous of the efficacy of prayer:—

Our Fader, who art in heaven,
White man owe me 'leven, pay me seven.
Thy kingdom come, they will be done,
And ef I hadn't took that, I wouldn't git none.

The modern protest songs of Negro labour gangs naturally carry on the secular tradition. They constitute a genuine folk poetry in which the shrewd materialism of the Negro masses is conspicuous. They exhort their fellows to stop fooling with prayer:—

Sistren an' brethren, stop foolin' wid pray,
When black face is lifted, Lord turnin' away.

They see preachers as sleek hypocrites who are an intrinsic part of the machinery of repression:—

Lawd make preacher big an' fat,
Sleek an' shiny lak a beaver hat . . .
He eat yo' dinner an' take yo' lamb,
Gonna give you pay in de promise' lan' . . .
Two prayin' Niggers ninety-nine years in jail,
Waitin' fo' Jesus to pay dere bail.

And occasionally they cut right through to the heart of the problem:—

While Nigger he busy wit' Bible an' pray,
White folks dey's stealin' de whole cart' away.
White folks use whip, white folks use trigger,
But 'twere Bible an' Jesus made slave of de Nigger.

When we come to the poetry of the Negro intelligentsia, the note of protest is still evident, but it is framed within the limits of convention. Indeed, the older poets of the Afro-American middle class are so anxious to be good boys that supplication and sycophancy become painfully frequent in their work. Yet one detects an underlying uneasiness, an inability fully to reconcile themselves to the white man's religion. In the 'twenties, when the New Negro Movement had its brief heyday before losing itself in a newer one, this conflict was often expressed, notably in these lines by Countee Cullen:—

Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
So I make an idle boast;
Jesus of the twice-turned cheek,
Lamb of God, although I speak
With my mouth thus, in my heart
Do I play a double part.
Ever at thy glowing altar
Must my heart grow sick and falter,
Wishing He I served were black.

The problem was, however, more than a matter of colour. The Negroes are a vigorous people, given to enjoying the pleasures of the flesh to a degree incompatible with the Christian ethic—and when self-realisation through uninhibited physical experience clashes with "spiritual values" there is seldom any doubt of the eventual result. Frank Horne recognises this in a half-apologetic and half-aggressive poem addressed to Christ:—

All my life they have told me
That You would save my Soul . . .
And yet
One night in the tall black shadow
Of a windy pine
I offered up the Sacrifice of Body
Upon the altar of her breast . . .
You,
Who were conceived without ecstasy or pain,
Can You understand
That I knelt last night in Your House
And ate of Your Body
And drank of Your Blood
. . . and thought only of her?

Sterling Brown, perhaps the most realistic and creative poet in America to-day, handles the same idea more crisply in a poem on "Seeking Religion." Lulu, "long urged by Parson Jones," seeks religion among the pinewoods, but is only moved to dreams "the creaky-jointed parson hadn't so much as warned her of." Her lover finds her there, and

. . . with a convert's joy
Lulu sought religion in thick, deep-shadowed pinewoods.
Lulu found religion in a chubby baby boy.

In another poem he shows how doubt, born of a materialistic way of living, creeps into the mind of a singer during an intensely fervid rendering of "When the Saints Go Marching Home":—

Sportin' Legs would not be there, nor Lucky Sam,
Nor Smitty, nor Hambone, nor Hardrock Gene . . .
Nor bootleggers to keep his pockets clean.
An' Sophie wid de sof' smile on her face,
Her foolin' voice, her strappin' body, brown
Like coffee doused wid milk . . .

. . . saints and heaven didn't seem to fit
Jes' right wid Sophy's beauty—nary bit—
She mought stir trouble, somehow, in dat peaceful place.
Mought be some dressed-up dudes in dat fair town.

The foundation on which such poems rested also produced a vital discontent with the "white man's civilisation" as a whole and a determination not to be victimised by the ruling class. Claude McKay started a new era in Negro poetry with his call to "face the murderous, cowardly pack, pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!" while Fenton Johnson and others gave the same impulse a more negative form:—

I am tired of building up somebody else's civilisation . . .
Let the old shanty go to rot, the white people's clothes
turn to dust, and the Calvary Baptist Church sink
to the bottomless pit . . .

I am tired of building up somebody else's civilisation.

This dual mood of defiance and disgust, so typical of cultural effort in the 'twenties generally, was the beginning of a poetry of realistic social criticism among Negroes, which naturally included religion as an evil to be directly attacked. And the temper of these critics provides encouraging proof of the fact that dogmatic religion contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction, the violence of the eventual reaction to it being proportionate to the extent to which it is imposed. Characteristic are these lines from "Goodbye Christ," by Langston Hughes:—

Listen, Christ,
 You did alright in your day, I reckon—
 But that day's gone now.
 They ghosted you up a swell story, too,
 Called it Bible—
 But it's dead now.
 The pope's and the preachers've
 Made too much money from it.
 They've sold you to too many
 Kings, generals, robbers and killers . . .
 You ain't no good no more.
 They've pawned you
 Till you've done wore out.
 Goodbye,
 Christ Jesus Lord God Jehova,
 Beat it on away from here now . . .
 Go ahead on now,
 You're getting in the way of things, Lord . . .
 Move!
 Don't be so slow about movin'!
 The world is mine from now on—
 And nobody's gonna sell ME
 To a king, or a general,
 Or a millionaire.

And for Langston Hughes, and the other progressive Negro poets, the attack on religion is not isolated from the need for a fundamental change in the structure of society. He calls for a wider unity. The whole downtrodden world must put their hands together—

To shake the pillars of those temples
 Wherein the false gods dwell
 And worn-out altars stand
 Too well defended,
 And the rule of greed's upheld—
 That must be ended.

It is an approach which freethinkers should ponder.

CEDRIC DOVER.

NOTE.—Those who wish to pursue this subject further will find an excellent survey, with bibliographies, in Sterling Brown's "Negro Poetry and Drama" in Alain Locke's "Bronze Booklets," published by The Associates in Negro Folk Education, P.O. Box 636, Ben Franklin Station, Washington, D.C. (25 cents).

THE FUTURE OF FREETHOUGHT

I AM well aware that what I have to say will not appeal to all readers of these pages. I know, even, that to some it will appear almost as a denial of the cause for which many of our predecessors in the world of Freethought fought so valiantly and so long. Yet I would appeal to all who would dismiss my thesis as hopelessly out-of-date and redundant to pause and think afresh before utterly condemning my approach to these problems.

First of all, then, let us face facts without flinching, as befits those who believe in the complete and undisturbed freedom of the human mind. Let us admit that Freethought, Secularism, Rationalism (call it what you will) has never succeeded in attracting the mass following to which its great merits as a consistent and coherent philosophy undoubtedly entitle it. Only during the later nineteenth century, under

the mighty influence of Bradlaugh in this country and Ingersoll in the U.S.A., was anything like that mass following attained.

Now, while we do not make the mistake of thinking that the importance of a philosophical school can be deduced from the number of its adherents, the fact remains that it is vitally necessary to produce a satisfactory response to the appeal of Freethought. Why, we must ask, do not people flock into the N.S.S. and the R.P.A.? Why are the adherents of such societies to be numbered in thousands rather than in millions? Why are the circulations of the heretical journals so comparatively restricted?

These are questions, I am sure, which have been asked by the majority of Freethinkers at one time or another. When a man has found a philosophy of life which fits his needs—which seems to him admirably satisfactory and satisfying—he naturally wonders why it does not make an equal appeal to others. Even the supporters of such forlorn hopes as British Buddhism and Mohammedanism have been known to ask such questions, and much more so the staunch believers in all the fundamental decencies of human intercourse, such as are to be found in the Freethought Movement.

What, then, is lacking in the appeal which we set out to make? And this is where I leave the agreed ground and embark on the controversial. I know that the editor will not agree with all that I have to say—but I know that "The Freethinker" has a well-deserved reputation for wholesome freedom, and as a debating platform for progressive thinkers of every school it deserves the support of one and all. Fortified by the thought that I shall be allowed to speak my mind on this vitally important topic, I therefore proceed.

Some of the more facile critics of the Freethought attitude have sometimes been laughed out of court because they have asked what we propose to put in the place of the superseded beliefs of religion. Yet I am not so sure that these people are wrong. The decay of religion within the past fifty or sixty years has indeed been almost catastrophic. And what have we seen, in some degree associated with this? On the Continent, there has been the growth of the new religion of the State, more hideous in its tyranny than any similar manifestations since the medieval inquisition. Even in this country there has been an enormous increase in the hero-worship of the royal family, culminating in the celebrations of the Silver Jubilee of King George V. in 1935 and the coronation of King George VI. in 1937. During the last war Mr. Lloyd George was acclaimed as a mighty hero; during the present conflict Mr. Churchill is hailed as almost supernatural—and one can see the folly of such things without for one moment detracting from Mr. Churchill's leadership of the nation in a period of grave crisis.

God seems, therefore, to be slowly disappearing; but a new, human god is taking his place. Is this altogether a good tendency? Do we prefer the worship of a political leader to the worship of a religious leader? I am not altogether sure. And I consider that all who are concerned with the future of Freethought should think very seriously about such matters, for on the decisions arrived at may depend the whole welfare of the cause which we have at heart. Can we afford to be purely destructive in our aims? Is a rather nebulous belief in humanity and its welfare sufficient to replace the intensely emotional belief in God? And, if not, what can take its place? With those queries I leave the matter for the moment, though, with the editor's permission, I hope to return to it at an early date.

S. H.

(Continued from page 382.)

morals in action), after pointing out that many learned men considered the Christian writers as "the very worst of moral instructors," he adds, "The cause of morality suffered deeply by a capital error which was received in this country"—the growth of ascetic doctrines.

Third Century.—Church rule was soon followed by a train of vices which dishonoured the character and authority of those to whom the administration of the Church was committed. . . . The example of the bishops was ambitiously imitated by the presbyters, who neglected the sacred duties of their station and abandoned themselves to the indolence and luxury of an effeminate and luxurious life.

Fourth Century.—When we cast an eye towards the morals and lives of Christians at this time we find, as formerly, a mixture of good and evil: some eminent for their piety; others infamous for their crimes. The number, however, of immoral and unworthy Christians began so to increase that the examples of real piety and virtue became extremely rare.

Fifth Century.—The vices of the clergy were now carried to the most enormous lengths; and all the writers of the century, whose probity and virtue render them worthy of credit, are unanimous in their accounts of the luxury, arrogance, avarice and voluptuousness of the sacerdotal orders.

Sixth Century.—The various orders of the clergy were infected with those vices which are too often the consequence of an affluent prosperity.

Seventh Century.—The progress of vice among the subordinate rulers and ministers of the Church was, at this time, truly deplorable.

Eighth Century.—The clergy abandoned themselves to their passions without moderation or restraint; they were distinguished by their luxury, their gluttony and their lust.

Ninth Century.—The licentiousness of the greatest part of the clergy arose at this time to an enormous height, and stand upon record in the unanimous complaints of the most candid and impartial writers of this century.

Tenth Century.—The clergy were, for the most part, composed of a most worthless set of men, shamefully illiterate and stupid.

Eleventh Century.—All the records of this century loudly complain of the vices that reigned among the rulers of the Church. . . . The inferior orders were also licentious in their own way; few of them preserved any remains of piety and virtue—we might add of decency and discretion.

Twelfth Century.—Wherever we turn our eyes among the various ranks of the clergy, we perceive in this century the most flagrant marks of licentiousness and fraud, ignorance and luxury and other vices whose pernicious effects were felt in both Church and State.

Thirteenth Century.—Both the Greek and Latin writers, provoked beyond measure by the flagitious lives of their spiritual rulers and instructors, complain loudly of their licentious manners and load them with the severest reproaches.

That, we think, is enough. The tale continues in contact with the Renaissance—the rebirth—of the world, which meant a return to the culture of Greece and Rome to be used as a basis for a European revival. The superior morality of Christian leaders, and the elevating power of Christian ethical teaching, is one of the most persistent and the most outrageous falsehoods that even modern Christian apologists have been able to devise.

CHAPMAN COHEN

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

WE are indebted to "Cameronian," of "Reynolds's," for unearthing the following from the Bishop of Portsmouth:—

At the end of the war he hoped they were going to do something that their English education had taught them to do and not allow themselves to be swayed by the ideas of men who had not the advantage of public school education in England, men who were not permeated by the Christian spirit.

It will take more than this war to kill the superstition of the old school tie. We are a democracy that falls short of destroying the one thing that matters most: a real sense of self-respect manifested in a state of *social* equality.

This from the "Sunday Dispatch" for August 10 is also of interest as occurring in a special article reproving those who belittled the new Russia:—

Do you remember them?

"The Germans will go through the Red Army like a knife through butter. . . . The Red Army is nothing but a rabble, a cross between a political meeting and a herd of cattle. . . . The Russian planes are obsolete, they fall to pieces in the air, and the tanks are put up for show on Red Square. . . . The Russians are degraded and downtrodden; they can't fight and won't want to."

That is interesting because the Northcliffe Press played a very active part in so describing Russia. Some of us may remember the crusade carried on against Russian oil—a crusade that ceased without any reason given for its cessation when the big guns of the oil industry came to terms with Russia. The main charge against the Russians was that they had "stolen" the wells. The real offence was that the oil was being sold to the public at lower than the combine charges. No explanation was ever given to the public why the crusade stopped and the public never appeared to have developed enough common sense to ask why it ceased.

It has been noted in these columns that a memorial has been handed to the Prime Minister asking for the provision in State schools for more definite religious teaching in the schools. The memorial was signed by members of the House of Lords and of the Commons. The "Church Times" (August 8) says apropos of this:—

"Mr. Churchill needs no reminder of the heated political controversies of a generation ago when the education question was the most burning of political issues and Presidents of Education were sacrificed then as Ministers of Information are sacrificed to-day."

That sounds very much like a threat; and it is certain that the underhand methods by which the Churches hope to achieve their aim would be ready to turn out Churchill or anyone else who stood in their path.

The "Church Times" also regrets that "The Roman Catholic Church is becoming increasingly involved in Europe and the Western hemisphere in Fascist intrigue, and is, we must sorrowfully recognise, throwing away in advance the opportunities which the end of hostilities will present for the moulding of a new and better order." But in this matter is the English Church at all better than the Roman Catholic one? A Church that can find nothing in the tense situation of the moment to plot and plan.

by all sorts of backstair methods, to gain control of the schools has little ground to point the finger at the Roman Church. Self-interest is and always has been the dominant note of the English Church.

We read the other day a withering attack on the German Gestapo—the secret police. We concur with all that was said of its meanness, its cruelty, and the social consequences of such an institution. But we protest against the compliment paid Germany in calling it “typically” German or giving Germany, or some Germans, credit for originality in the matter. The Gestapo is really a copy of the Christian Inquisition. The secret police, the arrest on the mere authority of an Inquisitor, the torture to extract confessions, the denial of an open or fair trial, followed by, in the circumstances, a merciful execution. There is nothing original in the behaviour of Hitlerian Germany. It has only been more open and even more thorough in its brutality.

QUONDAM

THE POWERS OF DARKNESS!

“WHERE there’s reek there’s heat,” says an old Scottish proverb, even when the heat has no utilitarian value!

And where there’s fire there’s light, may be as accurately asserted.

Who could successfully blacken out the light of hell? that “lake of fire and brimstone”; a fire that never shall be quenched; who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth and her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains; an everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And after the above abbreviated scriptural description of the glowing, consuming fires of hell, to be told that hell is a place of extreme darkness; that many of us are to be consigned to “the blackness of darkness for ever!”

“The land of darkness,” says Job, is the “grave” (Job x. 21-22). But hell is the accepted implication. The grave is an end of things. An everlasting hell is preferable to it because eternal hell carries with it immortality!

How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, Son of the Morning! The light-bringer reduced to the Power that walketh in darkness!

But the triumph of Lucifer is obvious!

“Answer not a fool according to his folly,” says Solomon, “lest thou also be like unto him” (Prov. xxvi. 4). The Lord God answered Satan according to his folly! Result:

“The day of the Lord cometh, it is nigh at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness. . . . The sun shall be turned into blackness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come” (Joel ii. 2 and 31).

The Lord sowed the wind, and he reaped the whirlwind!

Later, when he found that his darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people—when the “darkest hour” had come—that the Scripture might be fulfilled which saith, “The darkest hour is just before the dawn”! he allowed his light to shine forth, and the Gentiles sought his light, and kings the brightness of his rising.

Evil communications breed evil results! The Lord spake out of thick darkness; he made dark his pavilions round him; Moses drew near the thick darkness; darkness was under his feet; he made darkness his secret place; the Lord rideth on a thick cloud; clouds and darkness are his clothing, etc. From all of which we may infer that “The Lord loved darkness rather than light!” He had already decorated Satan and made him “Power of Darkness,” but he reserved personal rights. He found darkness very convenient!

Our few hours of thick darkness to-day are legally regulated. This is no new thing. The Septuagint tells us that “there is no entirely new thing under the sun. Who can speak and say, ‘behold this thing is entirely new’?

It has been already in the ages past that were before us” (Eccl. i. 9 and 10). Only more so! e.g. :—

1. “During the season of strict tabu, every fire or light in the island or district must be extinguished; no canoe must be launched on the water, no person must bathe; and except those whose attendance was required at the temple, no individual must be seen out of doors; no dog must bark, no pig must grunt, no cock must crow. . . . On these occasions they tied up the mouths of the dogs and pigs, and put the fowls under a calabash or fastened a piece of cloth over their eyes.”—(*Tour Through Hawaii*. Rev. W. Ellis, London, 1826.)

2. “There was a thick darkness which could be felt over the Land of Egypt for three days” (Exod. x. 21).

3. “And now from the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land” (Matt. xxvii. 45).

Present bitterness can be modified—rendered at least endurable—often sweetened—by memories of the past. And many blessings we remain unconscious of.

At night the exclusion of artificial light does not disturb lovers of the country. They enjoy it. Stars seem nearer to us. The beauty of the moon is magnified, and cloud effects are enhanced by it.

Byron never eased his soul of a greater truth than when he told us that:—

“Man marks the earth with ruin.”

In the light of the past, what does our few darkened hours really amount to?

In the past, “Dark Ages” lasted, say, 1,000 years, during which period no light of any description, material or mental, worthy of mention, save for the dim religious light of the Church, was visible.

And above, I have given but three illustrations. In No. 1 we have an illustration of man in an early stage of development.

In No. 2, the darkness of Egypt prior to the Exodus of the Israelites, and

In No. 3 the darkness which is said to have been felt (and not seen) over all the land at the Crucifixion of one, and yet all, of the three Christian Gods.

Other illustrations that would beggar description might be made. But those given should suffice to show that, in man’s darkened periods, religion always plays a leading part.

“The evil that men do lives after them!”

GEORGE WALLACE

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 N.S.S. (Hyde Park), Sunday: 6.0, a Lecture.

COUNTRY

Blackburn N.S.S. (Market), Sunday, August 24: 7.0, MR. JACK CLAYTON.

Blyth (The Fountain), Tuesday, August 26: 7.0, MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday, August 23: 7.15, MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Colne, Thursday, August 28: 7.30, MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Darlington (Market Steps), Sunday, August 24: 7.0, MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Edinburgh N.S.S. (Mound), Sunday, August 24: 7.0, MR. F. SMITHIES.

Higham, Tuesday, August 26: 7.30, MR. JACK CLAYTON.

Kingston and District N.S.S. (Market Place), Sunday, August 24: 7.30, MR. J. W. BARKER.

North Shields (Harbour View), Tuesday, August 26: 7.0, MR. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Padiham, Friday, August 22: 7.15, MR. JACK CLAYTON.

CORRESPONDENCE

KRISHNA AND CHRIST

SIR,—Mr. H. J. Hayward seriously asks us to believe, not that myths about Krishna have come to be told about Jesus—given sufficient time, myths may cover a wide geographical area and undergo all kinds of curious developments—but that “the Story of Christianity came from” Krishnaism. This is both historically and psychologically impossible. If “the Story of Christianity” is of Krishnaite origin, then Christianity itself is an Indian importation into the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean. Mr. Hayward says that “even the similarity of names has significance.” He should be aware that “Krishna” means “the Black One” (or “the Blue-Black One”) and is applied in the Vedas to a demon, while “Christ” is “Christos” (“Anointed”), the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Moshiah” (“Messiah”). The roots of Messianism are in the Old Testament.

The mythic parallels between Krishna and Christ include some that no well-informed student would deny, as well as others that are the fruit of Mr. Hayward’s vivid imagination or careless reading. To mention one of these, not the least important. Krishna was not crucified between two thieves; he was shot in his foot by the arrow of a hunter.

Mr. Hayward talks of Krishnaism flourishing 1,000 B.C. There is no evidence whatever of any Krishna cult until much later than this. Nearly all the mythology of this cult appears, for the first time, in post-Christian documents, and it is quite a feasible theory that Nestorian Christianity, which is traceable in Southern India at least as far back as the sixth century, helped to shape the Krishna lore.

Passing over Mr. Hayward’s wild assertion that the Lord’s Prayer was “originally an invocation to a Pagan divinity,” which seems to be due to his misreading of Robertson’s “Christianity and Mythology,” p. 418 (note), we come to a still more absurd statement that the Gospel-writers “lifted” the Golden Rule from Confucius. The *Annalects of Confucius*, written in Chinese, could not have been accessible to a Greek or Aramaic-speaking Evangelist in the first or second century of the present era. If the Golden Rule was “lifted” at all, the celebrated Jewish Rabbi Hillel is more likely to have been its source.

Mr. Hayward’s “score of crucified Christs” betters Kearsy Graves’ enumeration by four. Who were they? None of the Oriental Saviours was crucified. The alleged founder of Manicheanism, Manes, is said to have been crucified. But he was not a Christ, nor did his death atone. The “crucifixion” of Osiris is only a magical posture. Who else was there?

“The invention of a flaming Hell” is much older than Christianity, and I would invite Mr. Hayward to study Mew’s “Traditional Aspects of Hell” and J. A. Farrer’s “Paganism and Christianity,” which fully disprove his dogmatism on the subject. Freethinkers cannot be too circumspect in their theorising.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

Upon the points which interested him most closely, Milton knew that his understanding of the text differed from the standard of Protestant orthodoxy. That God created matter, not out of nothing, but out of Himself, and that death is, in the course of nature, total extinction of being, though not opinions received, were not singular. More startling is his assertion that polygamy is not in itself contrary to morality, though it may be expedient. More offensive to the religious sentiment of his day would have been his vigorous vindication of the free-will of man against the reigning Calvinism, and his assertion of the inferiority of the Son in opposition to the receiving Athanasianism.—PATTISON’S “MILTON.”

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