

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Story from "B.V."

WE fancy that only a very small proportion of our readers will be acquainted with the satirical attacks on religion by James Thomson ("B.V."). Even his poetry, while acknowledged—under compulsion—in standard works on English literature, I think is but little read. Its power and quality has to be admitted, but there is always with this acknowledgment a qualification that is not calculated to lead the general reader to make a further and more intimate acquaintance with "B.V." Unfortunately, this deprecatory tone with respect to Thomson is not confined to Christians, or to those who deliberately set out to keep him in the background. It has affected even those who should have known better than to adopt an apologetic tone for his character and uncompromising Atheism.

One exception, outside the ranks of avowed opponents of all religions, has to be made in the case of Bertram Dobell, by occupation a bookseller, and one of the few second-hand dealers who really knew books from the inside and not as a greengrocer knows the market price of cabbages. Dobell, who was himself a Freethinker, published several volumes of Thomson's writings, which I feel certain was a labour of love and could have brought nothing in the shape of financial gain; and he aimed at reprinting everything of Thomson's that had appeared. We cannot imagine anyone, outside "The Freethinker" office, who to-day would issue a complete edition of Thomson's criticisms of religion.

The reason for this has already been expressed. He was an Atheist—not an Agnostic with an obvious desire for Christians to patronise him or to treat him as a mere erring brother, but one who openly laughed at the gods and rated them as personifications of the poorest aspects of humanity. This reason was well expressed by another brilliant pen: that of a fine writer and one of the keenest intellects that the 19th century and Freethought had in its service—G. W. Foote, the founder of this journal. Foote published a selection of Thomson's prose writings under the title of "Satires and Profanities" (our own copy went with the "blitz"), from which I take the following:—

"Thomson's satire was always bitterest, or at any rate most trenchant, when it dealt with religion, which he considered a disease of the mind engendered by folly and fostered by ignor-

ance and vanity. He saw that spiritual superstition not only diverts men from truth, but induces a slavish stupidity of mind and prepares the way for every form of political and social injustice. He was an Atheist first and a Republican afterwards. He derided the idea of making a true republic of a population besotted with religion, paralysed by creeds, cringing to the agents of their servitude and clinging to the chains that enthrall them."

Taking Them In

As is not unusual, my typewriter has been running along on its own account and also succeeded in writing an account of "B.V." when I had something else in mind. I meant to begin with a story told by Thomson in his supposed report on religion in the Rocky Mountains, and which appeared in Bradlaugh's "National Reformer." He says that the people, mainly miners, are superior to the English on one important point of Christian conduct.

"Christ has promised that in discharging the damned to hell at the day of judgement, he will fling at them this among other reproaches, 'I was a stranger and ye took me not in'; and this particular rebuke seems to have wrought a peculiarly deep impression in these men, perhaps because they have much more to do with strangers than have people in old settled countries; so much, indeed, that the word 'stranger' is continually in their mouth. The result is that any and every stranger arriving in these regions is most thoroughly, most beautifully, most religiously taken in. So that should some of these fine fellows by evil hap be among the accursed multitude whom Christ thus addresses, they will undoubtedly retort in their frank fashion of speech: 'Wall, boss, it may be right to give us hell on other counts, but you say you was a stranger and we didn't take you in. What we want to know is, Did you ever come to our parts to trade in mines, or stocks or sich? If you didn't, how the devil could we take you in? And if you did, it's a darned lie and an insult to our understanding to say we didn't.'"

It was thinking over certain things connected with Russia and this country which reminded me that most of the Christian Churches might put over the door. "We will take you in." It may be remembered that the feeling this country had against Soviet Russia had a threefold origin. First, there was the execution of the Czar; and a king, however bad, should never be executed. He should be allowed to get away with considerable plunder, or a large allowance, and live contentedly ever after. Then there were the financial interests which had an obvious reason for their opposition. Finally, used as a cover for the other two, there was the opposition of the Christian Church to a country the Government of which was professedly Atheistic. If the first two interests—the aristocratic and the financial—had been alone they would have lost much of their strength. At any rate, the question of which was the desirable form of government would have been better considered. As it was, the passions of religious and moral hatred had a fling such as it has not had since

the French Revolution of 1789. The villainies of the Czarist rule might pass unnoticed, but that the "common" people should take the law into their own hands, thinking of their wrongs and seeking by a revolutionary bodkin to end them could not be tolerated. The world—the Christian world—rang with the wrongs of the Russian aristocracy and the villainies of the people. The many generations of suffering under Czarism could be tolerated. As Carlyle said of the French Revolution, in Czarist Russia it was the dumb millions, not the shrieking thousands, that suffered. And I think that, bad as was the time, history will say (again Carlyle) that, as in the French Revolution, never did the people suffer less. One pays a price for everything in this world, and the price for wrongdoing is that many innocents suffer in the cure.

We might have had a friendly agreement with Russia at any time: for there was before her the gigantic task of educating 150,000,000 people—which was accomplished in about half the time it took in this country. But the opposing interests here were too strong. No story was too vile to be used. Every human instinct for good was denied the Russians—it they happened to be with the revolutionists. The lie that religion was not permitted in Russia, and that all Churches were burned or closed, was told up to the outbreak of the world war. To do Churchill justice and forgetting his earlier career, he has for years stood for an alliance. But the anti-Russian forces were too strong. It is these forces that forced Russia into a pact with Germany, and they must be watched now, and still more when the reconstruction of Europe takes place. The men who in this country declared that they would prefer Hitlerite Germany to friendly terms with "Godless Russia" are still with us, and many are still in prominent positions. (Perhaps it would help if Churchill and Stalin had a personal meeting, following that with Roosevelt.) If we are to achieve a better post-war Britain, with an intelligently equipped people, the end of the war of physical force will mean the opening of another war. But that should be worth while: for it will be a war of ideas and ideals. It will be a long one—the longest the world has seen—for it will mean better men and women, bringing happiness instead of misery in its tracks; and it will find full scope for man's fighting capacity and idealistic flights.

Roman Catholics and the War

At present we are in alliance with Russia. Russia did not ask for it; it was, quite properly, proffered by Churchill: although, even then, the remnants of the wrecking gang would have had it take a form that would have been an insult to Russia. We are also in practical alliance with the United States. The three must work together if the war is not to drag on indefinitely. America has already given us great help in providing supplies; and Russia, in providing the first definite check on land to the German war-machine, has given us the greatest help in weakening Germany—and, incidentally, saved thousands of lives in this country by diminishing large-scale German air raids. The Russian war has also given the lie to the silly stories that one heard of the Russian people being held down by force and only waiting a chance to revolt; of the native inability to become engineers; that Russians would not and could not fight, etc., etc. Incidentally, it has been noted that nearly all the Russian generals are youngish men, not relics of previous wars who are hampered by tradition and routine.

Now, the United States has over 20,000,000 Roman Catholics in its population. That is a formidable number; and when it comes to stand against

Church orders a sheep is a perfect devil compared with a staunch Roman Catholic. The general rule was well laid down by Mr. Hilaire Belloc concerning himself: "I accept what she teaches and trust her more than I do the evidence of my senses. Whether I can imagine the thing believed or not is to me of no intellectual consequence at all."

According to the Roman Catholic "Universe," the most influential Roman Catholic paper, in the U.S.A. is "America," of which the Jesuit Father La Farge is associate editor. In that paper there is laid down the following points that must be granted before Roman Catholics can agree that Russia should have help in this war: (1) Russia must permit the teaching of religion to children by their parents and priests. (2) Russia must give up anti-religious propaganda. (3) Freedom to speak and write in favour of religion must exist. (4) The Government must release Catholic and non-Catholic prisoners. (5) The Government must break with the revolutionary movement. This means that Roosevelt's greatest opponents will be the Roman Catholic Church in America, for there is no sporadic and independent propaganda where Rome rules.

Now the first thing to bear in mind is that neither Britain nor the U.S.A. are in the war to save Soviet Russia from destruction. Probably a large section of the British public—not the most intelligent part—fed as they have been for over twenty years with lurid stories about Russia—would be very pleased to see Russia and Germany go on fighting in the hopes that both would become exhausted. That indeed is the kind of talk one hears from very ignorant people belonging to the "lower" and "higher" sections of English society. We are helping Russia wholly and entirely because it pays us to do so. The United States is doing the same thing. And the American public is beginning to realise that the Russian fight is part of their fight, as it is part of ours. If the plea of our own leaders is correct, and I believe it is, there are substantially only two parties in this war—those who are for and those who are against Hitlerism. What we should remember is that Germany's chief cry now is that it is protecting Europe against atheistic Communism. The war cry of our own "die-hards" is coming back against us.

Catholic Truth

Now look at these five points. With three of them I might agree, but granting their truth what right has a Roman Catholic priest to insist upon them? When and where has the Roman Church given freedom of speech and teaching to non-Catholics? Is it in Roman Catholic Spain, which is Fascist to the core and open in its support of Germany? When has the Church protested against the State teaching religion or carrying on religious propaganda? At this moment the Roman Church has joined hands with Protestants in this country in the plot to give more religious teaching in the schools than exists at present. When and where did the Roman Church encourage or permit freedom of speech on religion? We cannot forget that a few years ago the Roman Church here, led by Cardinal Hinsley and Captain Ramsay, strove with all their might, and with the aid of obvious lies, to prevent a Freethought International Conference, attended by eminent scientists, politicians, authors and publicists being held here, and our own Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, expressed his regret that he had no power to do so. The editors of "America" are also aware that the charge against the Roman Catholic priests in Russia is that they were working against the revolutionary governments, not that they were teaching religion. Naturally these priests regretted the enormous wealth of the Church being confiscated. But there are examples of that in

our own history, and none but fools would expect, or rogues claim, that such power of confiscation ought not to be exercised by a government bent on reform.

And here is the Soviet's reply to the charges given to a representative of the "Universe" by a high Soviet official in London:—

"There is not and never has been any persecutions of Christians in Russia. We never persecuted Christians for their religion, but only for their political activity. Priests have been imprisoned for their counter-revolutionary activity. We never forbade religion. We discouraged it because in Russia it was almost synonymous with Tzarism."

But against the barbarities of Czarist Russia the priests made no protest. They were, in fact, the prop on which Czarism leaned.

It is always dangerous to prophesy, but a forecast may be excused. And our own forecast is that when this war is done, and the opportunity arrives for a radical reorganising of our lives, it is the established Churches—episcopal and other—that will have to be fought. They will encourage the building of huge pens for the working classes, soup kitchens and charities for their succour, etc., but not much more, for anything of a radical character will be opposed. Not directly, but under some pretence that will leave things substantially where they are. In the circumstances, it is good to read an article by Frank Owen in the "Evening Standard" for August 20, warning us against the talk going on in many of the Churches. They will never agree willingly with a friendly alliance in peace-time with an avowedly Atheistic government.

Where the interests of the Churches are concerned they will never justify the people saying "Ye took me not in."

CHAPMAN COHEN

EATING AND DRINKING

"Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we
May feast in Paradise with thee."

THE tender shoots of asparagus are said, when eaten, to give rise to gentle thoughts.

(1) Solomon, (2) Shakespeare, (3) Charles Lamb, and many others are of opinion that forms of food affect us mentally:—

(1) Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox with hatred therewith.

(2) I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit.

(3) A man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple dumpling.

How the rationed diet of to-day would have influenced the above three sensitive souls is a thing imagination boggles at!

That some sort of *rationality* would have been welcomed by them is beyond doubt.

People generally, then, were given to appetite. Professional eaters challenged all comers. And bets were made about the amount that could be consumed.

From, say, 1133 to 1853 the annual fairs of St. Bartholomew, of Blackheath, of Peckham, of Wandsworth, etc., were held. And we are told that:—

Cold beef and ham, hot ribs of lamb, mock-turtle soup that's portable,

Did blow, with stout, their jackets out, and made thin folks comfort-able,"

—no patron being sent empty away!

Competitions and "Tryals of Skill" in eating were held at all these fairs, e.g.:—

"*Bromley in Kent*, July 14, 1726.—A strange eating worthy is to perform a Tryal of Skill on St. James's Day, which is the day of our Fair for a wager of Five Guineas, viz.: he is to eat four pounds of bacon, a bushel of French beans, with two pounds of butter, a quartern loaf, and to drink a gallon of strong beer." (Daniel's *Merrie England*, Vol. I., p. 112.)

These fairs, commencing on Saints' days, were not fast days, when total or partial abstinence from food was observed; on the contrary, they were spent in a pleasure-seeking, dissipated, reckless way, feasting and gluttony being characteristic of all of them. They were of religious origin. Whenever people met, whether at church or not, business was done, sometimes within the church itself, which often became a sort of market hall.

In our early history religion played a prominent part. The priest was the representative of God on earth; the Archbishop of Canterbury, if he is to be believed, is to-day "the chief spokesman of God to his fellow countrymen"—always to be depended on to give God's view of things. For instance: Queen Elizabeth is reputed to have been the first English monarch to use a fork at table. Fingers, however, because of priestly advice, were for many years kept in use. "It was an insult to the Almighty," priests argued, "not to touch one's meat with one's fingers."

A well-furnished table here and hereafter is an ideal with religious people, an ideal which finds expression in such phrases as "Church and Guts!" And before each meal God must be asked to mercifully expand our stomachs!

A Grace is said before or after meat. Something to eat being of more importance than anything else.

Charles Lamb felt disposed to say Grace on many other occasions, e.g., a pleasant walk, a moonlight ramble, a friendly meeting, a solved problem, before reading Shakespeare, Milton, or other spiritual repasts. As Ruskin puts it: "Bread or flour is good; but there is bread, sweet as honey, if we would eat it, in a good book!"

Religious people, before meals, ask their God to "Bless and sanctify to our use these thy offered mercies," and then by gluttony and surfeiting so stimulate their animal appetites, in short, by devil worship they abjure the blessing invoked.

In Bible times feasting was a more or less sacred act. The Lord God seems to have been a Gargantuan deity, with an unbounded stomach! For dinner he had a bullock and a lamb, and a lamb for supper in the evening; besides trimmings—twelve flour cakes, olive oil, suet and spice, a fourth part of a hin of wine (over a quart), with a lamb twice a day, the third part of a hin with a ram, and half a hin with a bullock. (Exod. xxix. 40, Numbers xv. 5-11, xviii. 7.)

In the infancy of the human race, appetite was sanctified and glorified: Nature started with a stomach.

Pope tells us that:—

"Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

Need we wonder then that appetite continues to play a leading part in our lives?

The educated classes, by adopting a rational way of living, might have shown a good example to the public. But they neglected to do so. And the saintly classes have been the greatest sinners. Take but the two following instances:—

(1) In the year 1470, says Fuller in his "Church History," George Nevill, brother to the Earl of Warwick, in his instalment into the Archbishopric of

York, gave a prodigious feast to all the nobility, most of the prim clergy, and many of the great gentry; wherein by his bill of fare, 300 quarters of wheat, 330 tuns of ale, 104 tuns of wine, one pipe of spiced wine, 80 fat oxen, 6 wild bulls, 1,004 wethers, 300 hogs, 300 calves, 3,000 geese, 3,000 capons, 300 pigs, 100 peacocks, 200 cranes, 200 kids, 2,000 chickens, 4,000 pigeons, 4,000 rabbits, 204 bitterns, 4,000 ducks, 200 pheasants, 500 partridges, 4,000 woodcocks, 400 plovers, 100 curlews, 100 quails, 1,000 egrets, 200 rees, above 400 bucks, does and roebucks, 1,506 hot venison pasties, 4,000 cold venison pasties, 1,000 dishes of jelly parted, 4,000 dishes of plain jelly, 4,000 cold custards, 2,000 hot custards, 300 pike, 300 bream, 8 seals, 4 porpoises, and 400 tarts. At the feast were . . . ; servitors, one thousand; cooks, 62; kitcheners, 515." (Vol. XIII., 59/60.)

Grace said before feasts, like the above, seems blasphemous. "The injustice of returning thanks," says Lamb, "for having too much, while so many starve. It is to praise the Gods amiss."

(2) The Honorable Edward Russel, who was Captain-General and Commander-in-Chief of the English Forces in the Mediterranean during the reign of William III., had a mighty bowl of punch made at his house on the 25th October, 1694. It was made in a fountain in the garden, in the centre of four walks, all of which were arched with lemon and orange trees, and along every walk tables were placed the whole length, which were covered with cold collations, etc. In the fountain were the following ingredients: Four hogsheds of brandy, eight hogsheds of water, 25,000 lemons, twenty gallons of lime juice, thirteen hundred-weight of fine Lisbon sugar, five pounds of grated nutmegs, three hundred toasted biscuits, and a pipe of Mountain Malaga. Over the fountain was a large canopy to keep off the rain; and there was built on purpose a little boat, in which was a boy belonging to the Fleet, who rowed round the fountain and filled the cups of the company who exceeded 6,000 in number." (*The Percy Anecdotes*, Vol. XIII., 25/6.)

To-day people are more rational and less devout, and feasting becomes so poorly observed that a Grace is rarely asked. Save, maybe, unless done for a reason akin to auld Sandie Tamson's. While on holiday, dining in a restaurant in Edinburgh, Sandie said a Grace before the meal, which gave rise to the following conversation:—

Wife: "Why dae ye say grace, Sandie, ye never dae it at hame?"

Sandie: "At hame, wife, oor meat disna need blessin' an' sanctifyin'. We ken whit we're eatin'!"

Yet nothing can be done, "till body gets its sop and holds its noise," be it at the Lord Mayor's Banquet or any lesser function.

"But for whist and dominoe drives, with hot-pie suppers," says a clergyman, "I could not keep my church going."

"How long are we going to live," says Carlyle, "as though man were but a Patent Digester, and the Belly with its adjuncts the grand Reality?" (*Sartor Resartus*, bk. III., ch. I.)

GEORGE WALLACE

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

IT is by no means an easy task for anyone who sets out to discover for himself the why and the wherefore of things to arrive at the truth, and that is probably why so many are baffled in the attempt. Let us be frank and admit that the task is a very difficult one, calling for a good deal of courage and persistent care

and attention to detail, much disappointment and many heartaches, and that is the reason why a people as a people cannot be expected to undertake the quest. Collectively, there is not the interest in the subject, much less the desire to follow it up; it is only here and there where the determination and desire-to-know-at-all-costs is to be found.

Many a one has, admittedly, started on the way of enlightenment, but because of his—we refer to the male sex only for convenience sake, of course—but because of his birth and upbringing he has become frightened at what he has so far discovered, then got alarmed and turned back lest. . . . Yes, one's early training has a lot to do with the matter: a good many of us are made or marred by who and what our parents were, and those others—of whom, of course, there were very many—who helped to fashion our outlook on life and our ambitions. Figuratively speaking, we may be damned from the outset, or at any rate severely handicapped through having been taught to worship false gods.

But given the will to win, and other things being equal, the task is still not an easy one. For example, it is generally admitted that war is a hateful relic of the past of which all enlightened people should be thoroughly ashamed and determined to stamp out as soon as possible. Our seeker-after-truth might, like so many of us, be convinced of this and then drop across this passage in an article by Sir Arthur Keith, on "Human Nature," in the "Rationalist Annual," 1941: "Why, then, my readers may ask, do I not subscribe to the plan which has been so ably urged by Mr. H. G. Wells in season and out of season for many years past—the plan which would effect a final amalgamation of all nations and peoples, and so rid the world of war? In the first place, I turn away from such a plan because the only attempts at wide national and tribal amalgamations which have attained any degree of success have been the result of conquest obtained by force of arms. The Roman Empire was fashioned by the sword; that of Germany is being shaped by frightfulness. Would a warless world under such conditions satisfy the basal and vitalising elements in our nature better than the one in which we now live? Under such conditions the individual selfish man might have security, and so sit back and take his ease. Man is not happy very long when he sits back and takes his ease. He finds that life, with all its hazards, is the most absorbing of games."

"For my own part, I shall stand up to what is to come under the present scheme of things and brace myself in Nature's old tribal armament—the mental armament of courage, resource, endurance, with a love of country and a zest for life. I shall try to keep my upper faculties so that they have a firm hand on my instincts, and I shall continue to be moved, to the best of my judgment, in showing mercy and doing justice."

One can imagine the student rubbing his eyes when he reads those words: ". . . the only attempts at wide national and tribal amalgamations which have attained any degree of success have been the result of conquest by force of arms," and inquiring: "What, after all is said and done, is 'success,' and what is there against man not 'sitting back and taking it easy' but devoting his bloodless energies to the betterment of the human race?"

Or again: our inquirer may have become a disciple of Freud, who was so much to the fore not so long ago, and then this—from Mark Graubard's "Man the Slave and Master"—may catch his eye: "Freud's speculations have found acceptance among a section of the intelligentsia which never had any affinity with scientific knowledge, and which still feeds on the

vagaries of abstract philosophy and apparently accepts theories mainly because of their sensational appeal. But the Freudian mythology as it relates to specific problems in genetics, evolution, experimental psychology, medicine, sociology, anthropology, economics and other sciences has been subjected to scientific scrutiny in the respective fields, and the results were completely unfavourable. The effect of these analyses on the ardour of Freud's followers has been very slight. Their resistance to science is as strong as that of religious individuals to rational criticism or the resistance of Nazi philosophers to the findings of genetics and anthropology."

"Freudianism is indeed unsound from the standpoint of biology, psychology and anthropology. It is neither an approximation to truth nor a stimulating guess, but mere gossip and folly."

Numerous other examples could be given of the conflicting views which may confront any inquirer, but the foregoing will suffice for the moment. It is not merely a question of paying your money and taking your choice, but a serious difficulty for any student—it is, in fact, a difficulty which we all have to face, all of us, that is to say, who are not Mark Graubards or the like, with the ability to see through these things and assess their respective values at a glance.

With the single exception of Mathematics, which is probably the "purest" science, much the same sort of thing is to be met with in most, if not all, of the sciences, and certainly in all the isms and ologies and other branches of learning with which man is concerned to-day. Religious folk are, of course, notorious for contending even among themselves as to what exactly is the supposed will of God, and so on and so forth, and the proper thing to do is to leave them severely alone to settle their centuries-old quarrel in the best way they can. But we cannot dismiss the other realms of thought and practice in the same way. On the contrary: even though we may know, or very soon find out to our cost, that there are various schools of thought concerning economics, anthropology, evolution, biology, psychology and what-not—yes, and even though we may have a shrewd suspicion that some writers on these subjects are speaking with their tongues in their cheeks, for popular public esteem and for personal gain, rather than to serve a righteous cause—even although all this and much more may be known or suspected, the seeker-after-truth must go on, barking his shins the while.

Perhaps there is some virtue in this clash of interests and battle of the wits after all. In the final analysis the man who sells his soul, figuratively speaking, is known for what he is—and he cannot always plead poverty or say that he was compelled to write as he did; whilst the student who wins through in spite of all the misdirections he encounters has the satisfaction of knowing that he got there in the end, and because of his persistence.

One of these days, maybe, when bloody warfare ceases and the human race devotes its time and attention to something nobler than slitting each other's throats—to the promotion of human happiness, for instance—a few scars on the mind will be looked upon as a decoration far more worthy than medals on the breast are now. Maybe!

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

Many of the greatest tyrants on the records of history have begun their reigns in the fairest manner. But the truth is, this unnatural power corrupts both the heart and understanding.—BURKE.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF ONE GOD

ONE God, if he makes a mistake, brings disaster on all who believe in him. Even if he be wise, he has but one sort of wisdom suitable to one sort of man.

The gods of the Greeks, owing to the diversity of their character, are more fittingly adapted to the diversity of the human temperament. Those gods live in harmony together, though they did not agree on a single point. In the Trojan war, some sided with the Greeks, some with the Trojans. That alone taught the Greeks to have broad views.

There were divinities for every temperament. An Aphrodite for the voluptuary, a Pallas Athene for the seeker after wisdom. None of these deities were free from failings, but their failings were mutually corrective.

In all there was more beauty of restraint than of might and greatness. They did not crush their worshippers by their immensity. They were human. Their history was credible, and you were not compelled to believe it. Nowadays we are forced to believe in an incredible God.

The great advantage of the polytheism of the Greeks was that there were no dogmas. You were at liberty to think what you liked, even about the gods, with nothing to fear save a temporary fit of anger due to threatened prerogatives or to excited passions. But intolerance with all its dread consequences was impossible. Its dread consequences were impossible.

Zeus had his weaknesses, but he was wise, too, and he showed it. As for the god of the Christians, he cannot shed his Jewish origin, and that explains his terrible ferocity and a whole host of paltry meannesses. Even the years that have elapsed since his sojourn on Mount Sinai he has not succeeded in acquiring a thorough polish. He is a twaddler and a lie-a-bed. He thinks a great deal too much about cookery and love-making. Moreover, he has one terrible fault; he is logie-chopper. For a word, a syllable, he would lay waste the world with fire and sword.

The God of the Deist cannot be called One God. Every Deist makes his own God and contemplates himself therein. He does not obtrude himself over much. The God of Plato, of Jean Jaques Rousseau, of Beranger, never did anybody any harm. As for Victor Cousin's God, he had a strange adventure. In his old age he turned Christian, and no one mentions him now. Whoever hears his name these days?

ANATOLE FRANCE.

ACID DROPS

CARDINAL HINSLEY announced that "our alliance is with the people of Russia, and not with Communists." But who are the Communists in Russia? Clearly they are part of the people of Russia, and if the people of Russia win the war the Communists will win the war as well. And if God helps the people of Russia, he will be helping the Communists. It looks as though Cardinal Hinsley is trying to fool God. And if when Germany is defeated, and God finds that he has been helping the Communists when he thought he was helping only the people of Russia, there looks like being a hell of a row.

The slimy artfulness of these religious leaders almost passes belief. Cardinal Hinsley, after trying to fool God, which appears to be easy, tries to fool the general public, which is not so easy. Thus he issued orders that all Roman Catholics were, on June 7, to pray for "the victory that will bring a just peace." Germany might well join in such an ambiguous prayer, for if the Allies were defeated Germany would consider the close of the war a just peace, and Hinsley would be on the winning side. But if the Allies win that will also lead to a "just peace," and Hinsley, the artful, will still be on the winning side. If he prayed for the victory of the Allies; that would commit him to something definite and the power of prayer would be on trial. If he prayed for the Germans, that might lead to his internment. So he asks for prayers—for whichever side wins.

Martin Luther spoke of "half-witted" God. But Luther did leave God with half his wits. Hinsley appears to be backing on God having lost that half.

It is well that Christians themselves should have declared that there is such a thing as "Christian truth" as distinguished from truth in science, philosophy or everyday life. In general, when one man asks another, "Is that the truth?" he means, is the statement in accordance with verifiable facts. When we speak of Christian truth we mean nothing of the kind. What we mean is, whatever the Christian religion says, you must believe is true. And in that category, whether statements agree with established facts, or even whether they are conceivably true, is of no consequence whatever. God does not give heavenly crowns for belief in verifiable truths. The highest heavenly honours are reserved for those who believe the impossible and worship the absurd.

No Christian lie has been more sedulously circulated than the one that the Russian churches had all been either destroyed by the Soviet or closed to Christian worship, and that profession of belief in Christianity was met with punishment or death. But when Germany made war on Russia, and so gave great assistance to this country, Christians here began to dream dreams of a re-establishment of official Christianity in Russia. And the better fighters the Russians showed themselves, the more hopeful British Christians became. Even Sam Hoare and Lord Halifax may one day be found praising the Russian (Bolshevist) people. As the poet should have said, hope springs eternal with the Christian pest.

There is nothing new in installing this standard of excellence. We never showed any official admiration for Japan until she was given the rank of a first-class power. She had beaten "Holy Russia." That a nation is great in proportion to fighting capacity is a standard of greatness that is entirely of Christian origin. Neither the ancient Greeks nor the ancient Romans ever reached that point of development. Ancient Egypt came close to it, but was a country saturated in religion, and afforded much material for the building up of the Christian Church.

Here is an illustration of the truth of what has been said. In the "Catholic Times" for August 22 there is an article by W. J. Blyton on "Atheism—Christianity." Mr. Blyton is a bit puzzled to account for our having an alliance with Russia and, as a Catholic, he must find some sign of God in it. So he discovers, in spite of the recent authoritative declaration that the Russian Government would pursue its "anti-God" plan, that there is "a new emotion gripping 160,000,000 people, many of whom have ineradicable religious instincts. We hear of services publicly held in churches." A fine mixture of lying and absurdity.

For, if the whole population—the 160 million—have "ineradicable religious instincts," why be disturbed about "Anti-God" crusades? The explanation probably lies in the fact that, being a Catholic, Mr. Blyton has had a good training in believing the improbable. How does one destroy a feeling that is ineradicable? We give it up. But the common and ordinary lie is suggested by the remark that religious services have been held in public—that is, in churches. Religious services in Russia always were held in public, but they received no State financial help. It was that which hurt most.

The lie theological is continued in another passage—thus, Russia has completed a treaty with certain nations which "now have liberty to worship where Russian rule may extend," as though this were something new. But under Soviet rule this has always existed, but the religion held must not be a cover for an anti-Soviet movement, and it must be self-supporting. There is not, of course, the liberty one would wish to see in Russia, but always it must be remembered from what the new Russia rose, and the practice of a real freedom cannot be created in a day. No one should be quite stupid enough to imagine that a nation could be raised out of the mire by kid-glove declarations. Revolution is nearly always a bloody affair, but no revolution has ever yet produced as much savagery and misery as the perpetuation of the vices which create revolutions.

When a man calls himself the (Roman) Catholic Bishop of any town, or city, in England, he is on exactly the same legal footing as though he called himself the King of England—provided he is not in doing so using his title to cover an act of fraud. The only proper and honest title is that of Bishop of the Roman Catholics in a given area. There is no law that we know of that can prevent anyone calling himself the Catholic Bishop of all (Roman) Catholics in Liverpool, or of Slocum-on-the-Slosh. But it is a piece of sheer impudence for anyone outside the State Church to call himself Bishop of Liverpool.

But here is the advice with which the self or Vatican-styled Bishop of Northampton addresses a gathering of young men. "Be specially prudent when you are old enough to marry. Do not allow yourselves to fall in love with non-Catholic girls. If you find such an affection, stop it at once. Marry a Catholic, for a good Catholic marriage means a good Catholic home and family." We need not stress here the fact that there is no greater guarantee of a happy home following marriage in the case of two Roman Catholics than there is in any other marriage. And when unhappiness follows a Roman Catholic and a Protestant marrying, in nine cases out of ten it is due to the evil influence of the priest. The priest brings pressure to bear on the Catholic half of the alliance to bring the children up in the Roman Church, and the other half wishes to bring them up Protestants. The possibility of trouble is due to religion, and the active factor in making the trouble real is nearly always the priest.

But there is something more in this situation than unhappy marriages. The situation created by the Roman Catholic Church is an important element in preventing the development of a real democracy, or of any society that aims at the equality of human beings socially and often legally. It sets up an artificial barrier between citizens that should not exist. Given a class or a sect which, other things equal, bans intermarriage, and the equality of citizens is impossible. The banning of Jews marrying Gentiles plays an important part in the persistence of what is called the "Jewish question." It creates a community within a community, and that is a statement which is not disproved by Jews being quite loyal to the community in which they happen to be born. With Roman Catholics it tends to develop a divided adherence where no such division ought to exist. If a Roman Catholic is true to his religion, it is the dictum of the Papacy that comes first. It is no reply to this criticism to say that Roman Catholics, say, in Britain, do not place the decrees of the Vatican first. We agree with that—where many deliverances of the Pope are concerned. But where the Pope speaks "ex-cathedra," Roman Catholics must obey or leave the Church to which they belong.

The Roman Catholic Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Godfrey, broadcasting in the B.B.C. Overseas Service, says that we must have a "Christian peace," we must be a "Christian State, and the Christian State must protect the home against subversive doctrines." And as Godfrey is a Roman Catholic, what he really means, but without having the courage to say it openly and honestly, is that England must be turned into a Roman Catholic country and all anti-Catholic doctrines or ideas will be suppressed. These people are not really opposed to Hitlerism, they are only jealous of its success in other hands.

We have said more than once that the Churches would not have ventured on their open campaign to capture the schools if they had not received promises of support from members of the Government. We are still of that opinion. It is now reported that the Board of Education has sent a "private and confidential document" dealing with education to certain selected bodies. This plotting between the heads of a Government department and a number of Churches aiming at sectarian aggrandisement is a disgrace to any country with a pretence of being a democracy.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No. : Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

L. GREEN.—A small book giving an outline of modern anthropological teaching with regard to the origin and meaning of religion, would certainly be serviceable, but we have not the time to write it. We should like to do it, as we believe that is the only point of view that really matters. And it should be noted that the defenders of Christianity, or of religion in general, seldom venture on that ground. We have no hesitation in saying that a half-century of anthropological research has had the same effect on religion that the concept of evolution has had on the study of animal development.

S. CONNOLLY.—Our space is too valuable to occupy it with considerations of the second coming of Christ. If he did return, and if he retains the power displayed in the story of the loaves and fishes, he would make an ideal food controller.

A. W. DAVIS.—Pleased to hear from you, also that the display of a copy of "The Freethinker" by your newspaper has brought several regular orders. The lines you quote were, we think, written by Philip Guadella, but we are not certain. We are keeping well, but frightfully busy.

W. MACDONALD.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—C. McRobert, 4s.; Gnr. E. C. Hughes, 4s.

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, P. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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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 view of the correspondence we have concerning Freethinkers entering the Armed Forces, we again remind all concerned that they have a legal right to be registered by whatever term they think proper. Also if Freethinkers have been entered as C. of E. or as belonging to any other religious denomination, they may have that cancelled and a truthful description registered in its place. We take this opportunity of asking all Freethinkers in the Army, Navy or Air Force to see that this is done and a right description given of their position with regard to religion. We have many letters of complaint, but we are powerless to help unless we are at liberty to forward to the authorities precise cases. If all Freethinkers acted as they should in this matter, all trouble would soon be at an end.

While we are on this topic of advising Freethinkers to stand up for their rights, we again press on parents to see that their children are withdrawn from religious instruction in whatever school they are attending. A determined attempt is being made to convert the schools into breeding grounds for the Churches, and no step could be more effective than to let the world realise the strength of the feeling against this manoeuvre than to show how many resent the plot that is being prepared by the Churches and their backers. It will argue ill for the new world that is to follow the war if it finds the clergy in a stronger position in the schools than they have been for nearly a century.

At a meeting of the Sheffield Educational Committee on religious education, the lone voice of "a philosophical

agnostic" was expressed in the opinion of Alderman F. Womersley that the best way of dealing with religion in schools was to leave it out altogether and give a secular education, which would not, however, exclude an outline of comparative religion. He felt that children had the right to decide their ethical values for themselves when they grew up, and that it was wrong for adults to impress their own prejudices on the plastic minds of the very young. We congratulate Mr. Womersley.

A letter on the right lines appears in the "Kentish Independent" from the pen of F. J. Munns. He says:—

"I notice that in Woolwich, as in more benighted parts of the country, certain clergy are utilising the pre-occupation with other matters that the war has brought to most people, to push forward a scheme for carrying out their theological propaganda in the Council schools. They are not content with doing this in their own schools—for which the public pay—but they are trying by means of the Cambridgeshire Syllabus to introduce into Council schools a sectarian bias with religious tests for teachers and an examination of the teachers' work by the clergy. Here in this feudal county of Somerset this latter arrangement already works, and in Council schools the local parsons are allowed to conduct Scripture examinations and the boards of managers are dominated by the clergy.

One hears complaints that in applying for a position one's teaching qualifications are of considerably less importance than one's willingness to run a church choir or the local scouts or boys' brigade.

Woolwich people will find it difficult to realise that such a feudalistic state exists, and on that account will not regard the danger as serious, but I sincerely hope they will regard my warning and prevent their schools from coming under clerical domination, and the teachers from becoming the parsons' lackeys as they were in the past, and still are in many of the Church schools, especially in rural areas."

We should like to see more letters of this kind in the Press.

Those who are interested in social reform and who think they can achieve their end while ignoring the influence of established religion, should find something to think about in our changed attitude towards Russia, and the praise that is now being given the Soviet Union by our experts. It is true that no apology of any kind is offered for what was said for years concerning Russia, and even now there is no recognition of the way in which the entry of Russia into the war has helped us. Something of this kind has been done by Mr. Churchill, but even then there is too much of "We must give Russia all the help we can," without adequate recognition of the help Russia is giving us in fighting Germany. It is about time that this lack of graciousness was corrected.

Those of our experts who have visited Russia and seen her soldiers in the field and the spirit of the people as a whole are loud in their praise of the Russian generalship, the completeness of the army's equipment, the courage of the soldiers and airmen and the intelligence of the individual soldiers. But all this would have been impossible if the Christian pictures of a Russia in which the people were cowed, the ignorance in which they were kept and the backwardness of Russia in general were true. And nowhere has the lie been made more patent than by the way in which the Russian peasantry have carried out the "scorched earth" order. Those who understand human nature will realise that the war-plan could not have been carried out as it has been by the unthinking response of terror-stricken people.

And is there any other people in the world that has equalled the Russian miracle of taking a nation of 150 million with 85 per cent. of its people unable to read or write, and creating a population that is a 90 per cent. literate one? But those who have kept pace with what has been going on in Russia know that there are two things for which money has never been stinted—science and education. It is time the British public recognised these things. When they do we may learn all the good Russia can teach us—and it is much.

PROGRESS, SACRED OR SECULAR?

WHEN we recall the appalling social conditions and the ruthless penal code which, in comparatively recent times, held sway in this country, side by side with the State Church—as it still exists—to some extent perhaps with other religious denominations, we can only gasp with amazement at the claims now made for religious beliefs as the mainspring of progress, whether in peace or war!

In a pamphlet* many years old, on the Great Reform Bill, which was warmly commended by John Bright, Joseph Chamberlain, Justin McCarthy, W. P. Forster and others, we read that:—

“It was not till 1808 that Sir Samuel Romilly succeeded, in spite of all who revered ‘the wisdom of our ancestors,’ in getting transportation for life substituted for capital punishment for picking pockets; and, owing mainly to the obstinacy of the House of Lords—including the bishops—it was not till towards the end of the reign of George IV. that shop-lifting (for which 97 persons were hanged in London alone in the one year, 1785) ceased to be punishable by death. Till about that time, in spite of the ‘pious perjuries of juries,’ men and women were hanged at the Old Bailey every Monday morning for grave and trivial offences alike ‘in batches.’”

And to give another pathetic instance—one of many—of the penal code then in force, we learn that “weeping boys” were hung for “stealing apples.” Even if religion cannot be arraigned as responsible for such a legal system with all its horrors, it tolerated it. Incidents such as these in our history are deplored nowadays by everyone, religious or non-religious, and all can shake hands in condemning social conditions such as preceded the Great Reform Bill of 1832.

But this Bill, though it did not lack support from the emotional religious fervour of the masses, was *no religious Bill*. It was a *secular Bill*, and supplied the first great political stepping stone towards the right, which we now enjoy in full, of all classes of society, the under dog as well as the top dog, to have a voice in representative government. And support was demanded and found for it, not in State Churches and Cathedrals, but on such spots as the slopes of Newhall Hill, so well known in Birmingham, where the “Union Hymn,” described as the “Marseillaise of England,” was sung.

Opposition to the Bill was obviously strongest in the State Church. The pamphlet referred to states that:—

“Bristol Cathedral had only been saved from destruction by the plucky efforts of some leading Dissenters; and at a meeting, held about this time at Canterbury, it was proposed to turn the minster into a stable!”

Also that:—

“The bishops were most unpopular. They had deliberately opposed the dearest wish of the nation; and they have never regained the influence which they then flung away. Nor has the cause of religion yet recovered the ground it then lost with the working classes. At that time it was not safe for a bishop to appear in the streets. The Bishop of London had to give up the intention of preaching at Westminster because it was found that the whole congregation would leave the Abbey if he appeared in the pulpit.”

It is, however, true that progress—sacred, secular or purely scientific—brings with it disagreement on some of its aspects. But the facts of human history show that even the progressive belief of the religious modernist cannot honestly credit religion with reforms which did not *originate* with it, but with which it now desires to be associated. In any case, those of all persuasions of belief or unbelief in this country can unite in furthering principles upon which our Empire bases its resistance not only to Nazism but to Nazi methods of enforcing it, both in the country of its birth and in those countries which it has overrun. These principles, based on what might be called representative freedom, found expression—limited as it was by the spirit of the times—in our Reform Bill. It opened the door to freethought and free activity which can fight

* “Two Generations Ago; or, the Great Reform Bill,” by Richard Simon.

out their own battles, and are among the priceless gifts of advanced civilisation.

Freethought maintains that the term “crusade,” which in some quarters has been used for our side of the war, is a misnomer. We are out, not to spread the tenets of one particular religion, but in defence of Country and Empire; of the principles for which the Reform Bill stood, in so far as they applied to our social conditions.

Speaking generally, we are fighting for the fruits of progressive civilisation, the cradle of ethics, science, art, of all the conditions which make the brief span of life worth living; coupled with freedom to choose the ground for this, and to ask the question: Is this to be sacred or secular?

MAUD SIMON

THE DECLINE IN SCOTLAND

A COURT of Inquiry was held in Scotland to discuss the serious decline in Sunday-school attendances in that country. This rapid decline was partly attributed to the lack of enthusiastic and well-trained teachers, and it was noted that the pupils ceased attending mostly when they reached the senior ages.

If an impartial Freethinker had “given evidence” to the Court, he could certainly have enlightened the church-workers who attended. A reason for the reduction in numbers is that many parents and children in Scotland reject the religion which was so violently opposed to criticism and progress, and which produced such a peculiar attitude towards life in its adherents.

Perhaps a few instances of this attitude may be interesting.

I once visited St. Giles’ in Edinburgh with a devout friend. After admiring the building, he removed the protecting cord and entered a pew to offer a prayer. Hardly had he knelt down when a verger hurried up and told him reproachfully that no one was allowed to use any pew for private prayer except during services. Evidently the God to whom the worshippers at St. Giles pray is only “at home” to listen to their prayers at certain times.

Another friend of mine was staying at a hotel in the Highlands a short while ago. On preparing to retire for the night he jokingly remarked to the proprietor that he intended to have a bath and cut his toe-nails. “You will not do that in my hotel to-night,” replied the other; “have you not heard the saying:—

“Better that he had never been born

Who has his toe-nails on a Sabbath shorn?”

My friend said that he could not see the difference between shaving on a Sunday and cutting his nails, but the outraged Scot was not to be daunted. “If you want to offend your Maker, do not do it in my hotel.”

The father of a parent whose child does not attend Sunday-school, and is one of those about whom the Church is so concerned, used to forbid his children to read anything on the Sabbath except the Bible and, as light relief, “Pilgrim’s Progress,” to play any games or to talk about non-religious subjects, and dressed them in funereal garb. After he had sent his family off to Sunday-school in the afternoon, this “man of God” collected his cronies and they all drank themselves into a stupor in the privacy of the back room of his house.

At Kinloch-Ranoch there is a churchyard at the side of the loch, in the shadow of mighty Schichallion. Walking through the yard, I saw two tombstones to commemorate two people who had been drowned in the loch at different times, although both tragedies had only occurred less than ten years ago. After relating the facts, each inscription ended with the words, “Thy Will be done.” It is strange to a Freethinker that the loving, fatherly God we hear so much about, has as his will that two people should suffer such terrible deaths. It makes one wonder what each did to annoy him so much.

One final illustration will show how religion may be blended with commercialism. A shop at Pitlochry has a large sign in the window, “Bibles and Hymnaries; Golf Balls,” evidently hoping to supply the spiritual and recreative needs of its customers.

Perhaps two questions will start the Court of Inquiry along a profitable path of thought.

Could any intelligent person "enthusiastically teach" a creed which produces such peculiar results?

Is it any wonder that at the "senior ages" when children begin to think for themselves that they reject religion and turn to something more broad-minded, whole-some and useful?

ANDREW GLENCOE

A FINAL REPLY TO ERNEST—A CRITIC OF "THE FREETHINKER"

DEAR ERNEST,

I was pleased to read your reply to my letter, which you do not appear to have read very carefully. I must forgive you; I know you live a busy life, and the war does not assist concentration.

As to "kybosh," you will note that I put inverted commas round my word. It is in the great Oxford Dictionary—of course, as slang. Your expression is not so honoured. By the way, I first heard the word from a colleague in the L.C.C. Education Offices about 35 years ago. I thought he had invented it. I was therefore delighted to find it in Dickens's "Sketches by Boz." There, a lady who is acting as a kind of second to another lady who is preparing for a bout of fisticuffs in Seven Dials, says, "Put the kybosh on her, Mary!" I am sure the expression is more apt than "donkey's years"—to denote a period of time.

What do you mean by saying now that "The Freethinker" is 1859-ish because that was the year of the publication of Darwin's "Origin of Species"? Am I to understand that the Christian world has gone back to the Creation theory and discarded Natural Selection? I had not heard of it. I have always thought that, except for a few fundamentalists—and I know you are not one—Freethinkers and Christians were at one on this matter. Darwin was buried in Westminster Abbey. In this connection perhaps I may quote my "London for Heretics":—

"The religious ceremony seems to have been adapted to suit the scruples of some of the mourners, there being sung a special anthem composed by Dr. Bridge, 'Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and getteth understanding.' That Darwin was regarded as having found wisdom when he published the 'Origin of Species,' and thus, however unintentionally, laid a deadly mine under Christian theology, was certainly somewhat ironical from an orthodox point of view."

Indeed, it was much more a Christian than a Freethinker's Annus Mirabilis, as on the finish (your phrase is gratefully accepted here) it was a long while, of course—it was felt to be futile to reject this drastic purge, and changes were made in Christian belief undreamed of in 1859. Freethinkers knew about evolutionary theories before Darwin in the works of Lamarck and Lyell. If, however, it has been decided that it is 1859-ish for Christians to accept natural selection, I should like further particulars. It is the most important event in the history of religious thought since that date. Of course, modern scientists may modify the theory of Darwin. There's no impropriety in this. He was not supernaturally inspired. Some of us, however, cannot make sense of *divine* revelation that is right to one generation and wrong to another. Some of us, too, would like to know from the modernist clergy—who, I am sure, whatever your attitude, stick to natural selection—how the founder of Christianity is related to it? Was the second person of the Trinity simply evolved?

"Of course I do not believe as my parents and grandparents believed. . . . It is not a piece of your use trying to pin me down to beliefs held by our grandparents." I distinctly said I knew this. My words were: "You do not say what your grandparents believed in 1880 you believe in 1941." This I said primarily to reject your suggestion that objections to Christianity felt in 1880 must not be repeated in 1941. The official Christian belief in a divine government of the Universe may be felt more incredible now than it was then. I suppose Christian criticism of Mohammedanism would be now much what it was 60 years

ago. Do you accuse the missionaries of being 1880-ish—or is it to be now 1859-ish? Forgive me, my dear Ernest, but if your father and grandfather were so wrong, by what token are we to know you are right? Your grandchildren may eagerly tell mine that of course they do not believe what Grandpa Shipp did! It is no use saying this cuts both ways. *You* have "light" denied to the Atheist. God is supposed to be guiding *you*.

As to this "light," we shall be duly impressed when all you Christians agree about it. What you call light another Christian will consider as darkness. Yes, you may say, but we all believe in God. Yet I will venture to say that the largest body of Christians in the world care nothing about this. It is sheer delusion for Protestants to imagine that Roman Catholics get a great thrill from reflecting that Protestants believe in the same deity. I doubt if Cardinals Newman and Manning cared any more for Charles Voysey than for Charles Bradlaugh. As a writer said in the "Times Educational Supplement" with delicious irony, referring to the sects, "the essential features of Christianity for each resided in the points on which it disagreed with the others."

Here is an edifying extract from a church magazine, "St. Martin's Review":—

"We view with the gravest concern a report that the name of St. Martin is associated in the minds of certain people with the ideals of pacifism. We can only believe that this has been due to the circulation of propaganda leaflets which contain excerpts from the sermons and writings of the late Dick Sheppard. It must be clearly understood that whereas we maintain the utmost respect for the views of the individual—and no less for the views expressed with passionate sincerity by our late and beloved vicar—such views can have no bearing on the policy of St. Martin's."

These people (who are alarmed at the Sermon on the Mount being accepted literally) would consider themselves your fellow Christians. You perhaps would dub them Mumbo-Jumboists.

When you write of "the sense of God" and "the presence of God," I must leave you to it. As Mark Rutherford's Atheist, Edward Mardon, said: "When my friends go into the cloud I never try to follow them." I would, however, ask how much suffering the world might have been spared if an omnipotent deity could have contrived to make himself more apparent. I do not know what is meant by Atheism being a static creed, and who and in what terms Freethinkers have admitted it. It seems to be a little odd that another war should bring an increase in a "sense of the presence and purpose of God," and what evidence is there for it? It reminds me of something to be seen within a quarter of a mile of where I now write. A Baptist chapel has been reduced to a shell by bombs. Visible to all, over the pulpit, is the text "The Lord Reigneth." Thomas Hardy could not have improved upon that. "The man who wrote the Book of Isaiah had a far greater vision of God than the one who wrote the Books of the Judges." How do you know? Is the explanation not to be found simply in your emotional reactions? You like the vision of one: you do not like the vision of the other.

The fact that man can be "a fine fellow" and yet go "amazingly wrong" is difficult to understand. Somehow it seems to me that your God must have been amazingly wrong, inasmuch as his omniscience did not enable him to see what man would do. It is evident you are still prepared to regard man as the villain of the piece so long as you can have the face of your hero deity.

Your suggestion that art is manifested by matter I welcome, but it surprises me. Here one has never seen a picture produced without pen, pencil or paint, but also I, at any rate, have seen no mind divorced from a body, yet mind is represented by Christians as something independent. I thought the claim was that *true* art (this, of course, means the art that appeals to the users of the adjective) was essentially spiritual.

"To call a man a fool because he holds a different view from oneself is to descend to the policy of the pothouse." I agree, and do not wish to countenance this. It is unfortunate, though, that the Christian book, the Bible, advocates the pothouse policy! Do you remember what the

psalmist said? I never recall his language has been retrospectively rebuked by a Christian, though surely it was very 500 B.C.-ish? Yet Beverley Nichols did not mind using "The Fool Hath Said" as a title for a book about six years ago, and I do not know that anybody called it insolent. I do not think you approve of the psalmist's manners, but you come near to his dogma when you assert that Freethinkers are in darkness and without light that others have. The large majority of Christians, too, are apparently deprived of it as "official (i.e. non-pacifist) Christianity is wrong." Really, Ernest, these are high-sounding claims. You are approaching the position of the Scotch lady who said she knew only two people who were saved—herself and the minister—and sometimes she had her doubts of the latter.

You did not make it clear that the Atheist case should be published. Your expression was "Agnostic case." If you want to proclaim your desire for complete political freedom you ask for it, for the Communists, whose flag is "deepest red"; this will include the pink Socialists. If you want to advocate complete religious freedom, why not mention the black Atheist rather than the grey Agnostic? This is just as pertinent if you maintain that there is no difference and, if you do, you are unique amongst Christians. The parsons are disposed to thank God for Huxley, who saved the proprieties by giving the Englishman a softer sounding word for his unbelief. Say, with bated breath, that you are a *revered* Agnostic, and some parsons are almost equal to embracing you. They will say you are not far from the Kingdom. I fancy you shuddered at the word Atheist, like so many do, and so suggested that you wanted liberty to doubt, but not to deny.

Now I have finished. My beloved Mark Rutherford once wrote that the man who says that religious differences do not affect a friendship neither understands religion nor friendship. That is quite true. Whilst, however, they may limit, they need not cancel a friendship. I leave you to the conception of God that warms you and leaves me stone cold. I see you walking along one shore of a gulf and I on the other. Happily there are bridges such as the one made by our common love of literature. Hereon we can meet. I will never disturb you again by attempting to invade your side of the gulf.—Yours always, WILL KENT

"COME WITH OLD KHAYYAM"

A PARSON recently published the information that during wartime the *Rubaiyat* has a larger sale than the Bible. If the statement is accurate we rejoice at the news. But a great deal of the sales of the Bible are largely fictitious. It is the organ of an established religion, and to large numbers the possession of a Bible is taken as a duty. How many read it when they have it is quite another question. Those who buy Omar do so because they wish to have it and, having bought it, read it. One is genuine circulation, the other is not. At any rate, we are prepared to hold that the reading of Omar Khayyám is a healthier occupation than reading the Bible—important as the Bible is to the student of folk-lore. We do agree, however, that if one merely desires to make people "war-minded," it is a very useful book.

Like many other poets, Omar met with scant honour in his own days. Although living in a cultured Mohammedan centre, he had far more liberal surroundings than any Christian country in the 12th century. Indeed, in the Christian world, civilisation was mainly conspicuous by its absence. There can be no question that Omar was a philosopher, a man of wide culture, a student of astronomy and mathematics, and a heretic—a Freethinker. (He made pilgrimage to Mecca, probably to allay prejudice, if not to avoid persecution). He has been described by some as a "materialistic Epicurean," "the poet of Agnosticism" and "a philosopher of scientific insight and ability far beyond the age in which he lived." Von Hammer calls him a Freethinker, and Professor Cowell compares him with Lucretius. No one reading the *Rubaiyat* will find serious fault with these opinions.

Doubt has been expressed how much of Fitzgerald's translation was the translator's, and how much Omar's, so it may be advisable to take a more literal prose rendering by Frederick Rosen, based on two recently discovered manuscripts. Here are a few passages, which should leave no doubt of the nature of Omar's philosophy:—

"If on the day of resurrection you wish to find me,
Seek me in the dust of the threshold of the tavern."
"Drink wine for life is not given twice to anyone,
Whoever has left the world will not return."
"To-day when you are yourself you know nothing,
To-morrow, when you leave your own self what will you know?"
"As you must die and abandon all desires,
What if you are devoured by ants in the grave, what if
by wolves in the desert?"
"There is a state midway between intoxication and sobriety.
I am a slave to that state, for that is life."
Only a Freethinker could talk of "the day of beginning-
less eternity" or say:—
"I have become wearied with the idol worshippers and
the Church,
Who has said that Khayyám will be an inmate of Hell?
Who has gone to Hell and who has returned from
Paradise?"

The grand old philosopher endeavoured in vain to throw off destiny and glimpse into the future, and finally decided to make the best of the present and advised us to "Try once at least to satisfy your own desires in this world."

It is fitting that the concluding glimpses of his philosophy should be taken from the glorious translation by Edward FitzGerald, to whom we are forever indebted for this truly great service. Stanzas like the following should never be forgotten, particularly by Freethinkers:—

"And that inverted bowl we call the sky,
Whereunder crawling coop't we live and die.
Lift not thy hands to it for help—for it
Rolls impotently on as thou or I."
"Oh come with old Khayyám, and leave the wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that life flies;
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies;
The flower that once has blown for ever dies."
"The moving finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

Some may see only wine in Omar Khayyám's poetry, but to the Freethinker there is very much more. It contains a philosophy which is not, by any means, a thing of the clouds, but is beautiful, sensible and workable. As for the wine, well we suspect he bragged more than he drank, and he himself remarks that "there is a saying that truth is bitter, in that case wine must be truth." No doubt he loved good wine as, in fact, do most, but the *Rubaiyat* is definitely not the work of a drunkard. Anyhow, let us with old Khayyám:—

"Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the dust descend;
Dust into dust, and under dust, to lie,
Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, and—sans end!"

C. McCALL

STAR-BORN

The poet is crowd-scorned till his end,
But, being scorned, beloved of the gods;
What does it matter if he lack one friend,
What does it matter; tell me, what's the odds?
High on Olympus all the gods recline,
Nor much concern themselves with things of earth,
But know Parnassus also is divine,
Its denizens have, too, celestial birth.
Deep calls to deep, and height to mountain height,
So to Parnassus Mount Olympus calls;
These are abodes of beauty and of light,
No shadow of earth's ugliness there falls:
Yet no true poet will desert Mankind,
For he in ugliness can beauty find.

BAYARD SIMMONS

ROMAN CATHOLICS AND THE WAR

SOME books simply wait to be written. They just cry out for an author to come along and write them. The author who tackles such a book is not altogether in an enviable position, for if he fails to come up to expectations a good theme has been ruined. There is always someone who could have done it better.

Such criticism does not apply, however, to Edith Moore's booklet on the Catholic attitude towards the war and Fascism ("No Friend of Democracy." International Publishing Company, 12, Great Castle Street, W.1; 51 pp.; 1s.). Miss Moore is a Freethinker and belongs to the Council for the Investigation of Vatican Influence and Censorship (C.I.V.I.C.).

What qualities would we have in a writer who sat down to expose the part played by Rome in present affairs? Nothing less than a deep-rooted sincerity and practical earnestness, allied to the ability to make painstaking research, would fit one for the task. Miss Moore is lacking in none of these, and the result is a first-class booklet well set out and therefore easily digestible and popular. Among the war books which have come to my notice I know not where to look for one so valuable at such a price.

It is not a wordy tirade against Catholicism. It is a collection of material from which the reader can draw conclusions, and for this material Miss Moore has wisely probed into Catholic sources so as to get it "straight from the horse's mouth." The notoriously nebulous character of Papal and other Catholic pronouncements does not, I should imagine, make this kind of research intrinsically pleasant. We should therefore be thankful for Miss Moore, for she has done some real spade work in the McCabe style. In fact, she has done something to bring the latter's "Papacy in Politics To-day" up to date. McCabe, by the way, writes a preface, in which he says:—

"We do not tell them (the children) one word about the savagery which the Church blessed in Italy, Spain and Portugal—though we tell them a hundred lies about the French and Russian revolutions. And our organs of public instruction are so cajoled and intimidated by secretly working Catholic societies—Leopold, Petain and Weygand are fanatical Catholics, we learn. Strange that the worst traitors to civilisation should be the most docile subjects of the Vatican. The Pope has forbidden the German bishops to publish the congratulations they have prepared for the wicked Hitler at his triumph. The Italian hierarchy talk about England in the language of Gayda. The Catholic weeklies in England admit sadly that one of the strongest elements of Isolationism and Anglophobia in America is the Catholic Church."

Miss Moore claims justifiably to show in her book that the failure of the League can be explained partly by a reference to Catholic policy, that in one country after another the Church bred defeatism because she wooed Fascism for the sake of State favours, and that the Catholic ideology itself in large measure is akin to that of the Fascists. "The mass of data here provided demonstrates forcibly what pro-Fascist groupings and tendencies exist within the fold of the Church, and that the Church herself has supported and marched together with Fascism when it suited her purpose." She spends some pages reviewing the pre-war Catholic attitude to Fascism and Nazism; from this section the following gem is taken:—

"Ethiopia is but a mixture of uncivilised tribes. Its peoples have no true notion of the duties of man, of its rights, of its freedom. It is a people which, having become detached from Rome, cannot get the full benefit of the Christian ideas—Roman Catholic Italy has the duty of bringing to populations deprived of them, its principle of equity, charity and fraternity. We pray God that he should use Italy as his divine instrument for the evangelisation of the whole world." (Bishop of Nocera, October, 1935.)

She then shows Catholic influence at work to-day in various countries, theocracy at work in Austria and Spain, the Church's part in disruption and dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, associated with the Catholics Henlein, Hacha and Fr. Tiso of Slovakia, the Catholic undercurrents at the League of Nations, the friendship of

De Valera and Catholic Ireland for Franco and, in England, the pro-Franco Catholic nuclei in the Labour Party, T.U.C. and C.W.S., while only a year ago the "Catholic Herald" wanted a "gigantic diversion" to turn the war against Russia. She has a chapter on capitulation in France and the Pope's acceptable overtures to Vichy, and another important chapter (unfortunately omitted from the list of contents) on Catholic Isolationism in America, where Fr. Coughlin has made plain his support for Nazism: "Great Britain is doomed and should be doomed. We should build armaments for the purpose of crushing Soviet Russia in co-operation with the Christian Totalitarian States—Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal." The whole book abounds with pertinent facts. Is Henry Ford turning Catholic, like his family? Why did he receive the Order of the German Eagle, given to "distinguished foreigners who have deserved well of the Reich"? And what has the ex-Ambassador Joseph Kennedy, another Catholic, said since his return?

Miss Moore's conclusion is that "The British Government will be wise not to refuse the co-operation of R.C.s in this country in relation to the present struggle against Nazism. But Parliament and the people at large must realise on what unreliable foundations such co-operation rests. Otherwise they will be deceived into expecting absolute loyalty from a community which, with individual exceptions, can give absolute loyalty to none but the leaders of their Church." G. H. TAYLOR

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held August 17, 1941

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

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A. C.), Bryant, Ebury, Bailey, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Monthly Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to the Parent Society.

A report of the proceedings at the Police Court, in the case of Mr. Ebury, was discussed at some length.

Lecture reports from Messrs. Brighton and Clayton showed good meetings and an increasing interest in our movement in their respective areas. The present position regarding Freethinkers in the Armed Forces was under discussion, and further action agreed upon.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for September 28, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

COUNTRY

Colne, Thursday, September 4: 7.30, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Edinburgh N.S.S. (The Mound), Sunday; 7.30, Mr. F. SMITHIES.

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

Rawtenstall (Daisy Hill), Sunday: 7.0, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Read, Tuesday, September 2: 7.30, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday, September 1: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Chester - le - Street (Bridge End), Saturday, August 30: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Newcastle (Bigg Market), Sunday, August 31: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Newsham, Wednesday, September 3: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

North Shields (Harbour View), Tuesday, September 2: 7.0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

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