

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

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God and the State

If we are to have a new world after the war, then one of the early steps should be to remodel the position of the Churches—established and non-established. The differences between them are those of degree only. There is no difference of principle where State patronage is concerned.

The only ground we have for calling this a Christian country is that we have a State Church, the doctrines of which are decreed by the State. Using the word "Christian" in its historic sense it is uncertain if a majority of the population would come under that head.

This is a country in which the leading religions of the world are well represented: and if we are to live up to the ideal of making all citizens equal before the law the separation of the State from all forms of religion should be secured. That would lead to many other much needed improvements. The policy of the government should be to "keep the ring," showing equal justice to all and favours to none. Curiously enough, we come nearer to this ideal in India than we do in this country. This is not because Christians in India wish it so, but because they are there in so miserable a minority that even ecclesiastical impudence and greed dare not establish there a Christian State Church.

But quite clearly the laws of this country are not impartial where religion is concerned. We have Sunday laws maintained for no other purpose than that of preventing citizens following on Sunday forms of amusement or recreation that are legally and morally permissible during the remaining six days of the week. These Sunday laws are not as tyrannical as they were, but there are large areas where playing grounds and reading rooms, libraries, museums and art galleries, musical performances and all forms of healthy recreation are forbidden to all to gratify the religious intolerance of others. We have achieved in many places the opening of cinemas on Sunday, but only on conditions that the proprietors of these places submit to a "rake-off" that comes to us direct from Chicago gangsterism.

So that we may protect this country from the "evil machinations" of Roman Catholicism the king is forbidden to be a Roman Catholic, neither must he marry a Catholic. The king may not make any profession

of Atheism or even of Agnosticism. Of course, there is nothing to prevent the king believing in Roman Catholicism or being an Atheist on the quiet. Such rules only prevent men and women being intellectually honest.

In the House of Commons, which is made up of all sorts of Christians, of Jews, Roman Catholics and unbelievers, we have a Protestant parson who prays that God will endow the members with wisdom and justice. No one would be more surprised than the Christian M.P.s if there were any visible reply to such a petition. Procedure would be broken to pieces and laws would be cancelled by the dozen, if God—or anyone else—were to endow all our representatives with wisdom and justice.

In the House of Lords we have a number of bishops who represent no interests but their own. In the Armed Forces we have numerous chaplains—paid for by the State. We have a similar arrangement in prisons. In our State schools the Christian religion is paid for by all, even though wanted only by some. Places of religious worship are relieved from paying rates and taxes—a form of endowment that must run to several millions per year, and which has to be paid by the community as a whole. In the law courts we have a religious oath that is a plain survival of trial by ordeal. An Atheist may refuse the oath, and the judge will then take his evidence on his word of honour. No judge has yet been known to say that he finds fewer lies told by those who call on Almighty God to help them than those who rely on their own strength to either lie or speak truthfully. Of course no Atheist believes that Christians have a monopoly of lying, Christian history would soon remove that delusion, even if it existed.

There are many other ways in which the Christian religion receives State patronage and help, with some of which we will deal later. They are stressed because large sections of the general public are blind to the extent to which we are still hag-ridden by religious practice and intolerances.

We are a free and democratic people, all enjoying equality before the law. But it does not do to take such statements too literally.

Religion and Reform

In what has been said, and in what will be said, I am not attempting to draw plans of a completely transformed England. I leave that task to others. My aim is simpler, and will be concerned with reforms that should have long ago been in operation. And strongly convinced as I am that the proper place for religion—real religion—is an anthropological museum, I content myself with offering suggestions that should gain the support of those who do not use the term "Democracy" with tongue in cheek. There is another reason why I confine myself mainly to suggestions concerning religion. This is that most writers are afraid to touch it. Newspapers will not and politicians dare not. For one man who speaks the truth about religion there are at least a dozen who will confess their doubts in private. I do not mean that the dozen are Atheists, far from it. Some form of religious belief the vast majority will uphold, even though they strain that word "religion" to breaking point. I mean simply

that there are large numbers of men engaged in both public and private life who have little belief in the established forms of religion, but who yet in public pay it lip-homage. It is these men, and women, who are mainly responsible for the mass of insincerity and disguised self-interest on which current religion lives.

It is largely due to this state of things that we cannot count on any immediate reforms being of a very drastic character. We cannot expect an immediate cancellation of all evil privileges, which whatever may have been their use once upon a time, are to-day out of date. Those who benefit from existing privileges are both numerous and well-placed. They hold many key positions. It was said of Edward VII. (who, while by no means of marked intellectual calibre, had a certain shrewdness in his make up) that when discussing with one of his Ministers the question of the abolition of an hereditary second chamber remarked that he had no desire to be the only hereditary institution in the country. That was genuine common sense.

But more important than the fight that vested interests will put up for their continued existence is the fact that there will rise in their defence those who suffer from their existence. It is seldom true that a minority can hold a majority in subordination by sheer physical oppression. Privilege is prolonged beyond its usefulness largely by those who suffer from its perpetuation. It is also astonishing how easily the appetite for reform may be assuaged if those who clamour for it receive twenty-four halfpennies for a shilling instead of twelve pennies.

Once upon a time there existed at the western end of Fleet Street a huge gateway that marked the boundaries of the city. It sprawled right across the road and was an obvious obstacle to traffic. There was much writing to the papers and some local agitation, and eventually the obstacle was removed. To commemorate the reform, another obstacle was placed at the same spot, and everybody seemed content. I have always regarded this as a typical example of the English passion for reform. It is also what is called being "practical."

Rationing Religion

A large number of churches have been destroyed by German bombs. Experience has again proven that God's houses have no greater immunity from disaster than brothels. The days of miracles have not quite gone, for the Roman Church retains its miracle factory and there are many spasmodic attempts at popularising the supernatural. Our English method is to suggest their possibility and to affirm their occurrence when it looks safe to do so. Generally the clergy are as impudent in this matter as ever. They preach the ever-protective agency of God in churches that are protected with sand bags, the valuable ornaments sent away for safe keeping, and the providence of God is vindicated by a preacher who advertises that in the event of an air-raid a "shelter" has been provided near at hand. The same advice is exhibited in public houses. We trust in God, but have a second string to our bow in case of accident.

Now so soon as the war is over there will be a demand for the State to repair or rebuild these bombed houses of God. If the Churches had been compelled to pay war-damage insurance no objection could be raised. But the whole cost falls upon the public, non-Christians and anti-Christians will be compelled to help foot the bill.

Now my suggestion on this head is very simple, and I think it is just. Ever since the war began we have been a rationed people. Food and clothing, necessities and luxuries, all are rationed. Even lies con-

cerning the war have been rationed, for lies concerning the war must not be told unless they bear the government stamp. No one likes being rationed, but everyone submits to it without undue complaint.

Why not apply the same principle to the churches? If we can ration potatoes why not prayer? If we agree to use soap with the utmost economy, why not sermons? If we can say to a shopkeeper that the supply of goods shall be proportionate to the people he serves, why cannot we apply the same regulation to churches? Religion is, after all, a competitive business, carefully organised, hating opposition and competition, advertising by all the methods adopted by business houses. Churches we are told are built for the glory of God. But they are also designed with an eye to attract the public. Preachers announce that they have been called by God to this or that job, but everyone is well aware that they who really call the preacher know that what figures more prominently in their "call" is attractiveness as a public speaker, oratorical power, raciness of language and all the qualities demanded by the theatrical stage. Exception must be made for the Church of England preachers, who as often as not owe their appointment to political services, or to friends in useful places. Many preachers may receive comparatively small salaries, but there is no indication that they would do better, or even as well, in the open labour market. Moreover, there are some very juicy plums in the profession, to say nothing of the social status the pulpit gives to those who would otherwise live and die unknown.

Even the charities of the churches and chapels have their commercial aspects. The general rule appears to be "Do good in secret, but take care to see that it is well advertised." Just over forty years ago Mr. Charles Booth, in his survey of the London poor, pointed out that the interest and practice of the charities of Church and chapel were in constant competition, each one striving to attract customers for their spiritual goods by the material help given. And there is no one who knows the conditions of the poor who will deny that attendance at church or chapel frequently has its incentive in the possibilities of material help. Mr. Booth made the leverage of these church charities fairly clear.

I also recall a statement made by Winnington Ingram, ex-Bishop of London, while still Bishop of Stepney. He reminded a West End afternoon party to whom he was appealing for funds for the East End that "things would not be easy for those in the West if it were not for the work of the Churches in the East End." One could agree with that without at all impugning the intentions of the clergy concerned. Charity is a very poor substitute for justice, or remedy for injustice, but it appears to satisfy many.

Whichever way one looks at it there seems no reason, so far as the general public is concerned, and as far as the rebuilding of the churches and chapels goes, why the churches should not be rationed, not proportionally to the population, but to the number of attendants. In other matters that touch upon the public purse such a consideration would take first place. A Council would be blamed if it opened too many library branches. Why should there be an unlimited provision where the Churches are concerned? There would be complaints, of course, but I think they would come from those who preach, not from those who listen. The real demand for churches will decline not merely because of the increasing number of unbelievers, but because of the difficulty of securing for the pulpit men of ability and intellectual honesty.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued.)

LAW AND CUSTOM IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

WE still endure the insolence of office and the law's delays. Yet, at least in England, justice is now administered in the superior Courts on a high plane. It is true that half-a-century since, a High Court Judge, Forde North, displayed his religious rancour in most venomous fashion in the Foote trial and sentence. Still, North was soon removed to a Court where theological animus could exercise little harm. Justices' Justice sometimes shocks us, but any enlightened Home Secretary may compel surviving Shallows and Silences to annul their decisions. And even stipendiary magistrates, despite their legal training, have been known to blunder in Courts of Summary Jurisdiction, as witness the case in which the notorious Newton so scandalised the Court that the celebrated solicitor, the late Sir George Lewis, walked out of it.

Fortunately such miscarriages are now very rare in lower Courts, and almost unknown in the higher ones. In fact, when we note the practical purity of contemporary administration, the immense improvements in England and other civilised States appear profound when contrasted with the evils of the past. During medieval centuries open bribery and corruption of judges was taken for granted. Then, both lay and clerical lords exercised tyrannical authority over the common people. In his highly instructive volume, "The Medieval Village" (Cambridge University Press), Dr. Coulton assures us that "the lord reaped a fine for almost every offence; he took a fine from litigants if they came to an agreement outside his court; he took all the chattels of the condemned felon or of the fugitive offender; he took a fee from a serf who wanted to search the court-rolls for information as to his dues and services. Ecclesiastical judges thrived even more, if possible, on the fines taken for offences; the bishops, writes Gower, take bribes wholesale and the deans of Christianity 'desire sin, for our dean gets far more profit from a harlot than from a nun.'"

Even in King's Courts bribes were essential to secure a favourable verdict, and it appears probable that the standard was lower in the manor courts. The statements of professional perjurers, hired for the occasion, were solemnly accepted as evidence, while private vengeance enjoyed legal sanction for several centuries.

The clergy were forbidden to take the life of a felon or convicted heretic. This was the office of the Civil power. To this injunction, Coulton traces the later custom of the Inquisition to hand over to the secular rulers a heretic who had been found guilty, while they forwarded a prayer that no blood should be spilt. The bitter mockery of this plea becomes transparent when it is realised that "the utterer of that prayer would have been bound to excommunicate any secular judge who should neglect to inflict death."

In England, apparently, there were fewer irregularities than on the Continent, but we had our Crown Justices selected from the higher clerical orders who pronounced the death sentence. Indeed, there was practically little to choose between spiritual and temporal lords where gallows-rights were concerned. "Sometimes," declares Coulton, "by a very convenient division, the monk left the execution to others, while he kept the criminal's chattels for himself."

Devious devices were contrived both by clerical and lay authorities to secure as much as possible of the delinquent's property for themselves. As a rule, however, there is little question "that the monk's bailiff condemned and hanged the thief just as a knight's bailiff would have done; he took the gallows-wrack

just as he took the corpse's presents. Dugdale is full of charters in which monasteries claimed this right of hanging, as a far from negligible item of revenue." It seems certain that nearly all the leading abbeys in Christendom possessed this privilege, and a monastic versifier of medieval rays actually extols an abbot whose beneficent deeds included his erection of a gibbet. Also, a Dunstable chronicler deploras the wickedness of a neighbouring lord who had destroyed the prior's gibbet which had stood without rebuke since the town's foundation. Disputes between the lay and clerical rulers for the right to execute malefactors are recorded. Nor were nuns more humane than the monks. For the offence of having taken fish from the nunnery pond so late as the 16th century the nuns of Maubuisson "put him on trial extraordinary by their officers and justiciars, and he was hanged and strangled on the territory of the said ladies."

Like other protests against disgraceful medieval customs, those urged by broad-minded Churchmen against trial by battle were long unavailing. Monks and nuns alike hired accredited champions to win their cause. The settlement of a quarrel between the abbey of St. Germain and Etienne de Maey, a lay lord, was composed by ordeal in 1152, when each party was represented by a champion. It is stated that: "The champions fought bravely: the St. Germain's man tore out his opponent's eye, felled him to the earth and compelled him to confess defeat, in virtue of which the rights of the abbey were proclaimed."

The more enlightened condemned the folly and futility of this barbarous custom, and even the Pope deprecated it in 1215. At a later date Aquinas deemed such trials unreasonable, and implies that they seldom occurred in his time. Yet the Tynemouth monks were parties to an ordeal at this period, and other cases are reported on the Continent.

Opposition to this preposterous system apparently arose among the laity, while Coulton concludes "that there was no general revolt against it in the cloister on moral grounds." It was with the growth of the secular spirit in the towns that this absurd practice was slowly abandoned, inspired as municipal feeling was, by the increasing influence of commerce and the worldly theories of the legal profession.

If the urban communities were partly indebted to the abbeys for their earlier prosperity, especially when the township had arisen in the vicinity of the cloister, the monks gained far more from the increased taxation of the municipalities than could possibly have been wrung from the village churl. Moreover, as Coulton observes: "Nor had the concessions which had so benefited the townsfolk been made gratuitously and altruistically; in practically all recorded cases we know them to have been bought with hard cash."

In France the Religious were the most inveterate enemies of the rising municipalities. The Parisian Synod in 1213 fiercely denounced them as "synagogues which usurers and profiteers have set up in almost all the cities, towns and villages of the whole realm of France; . . . associations which have established devilish customs, contrary to ecclesiastical organisation, and making for the almost total subversion of Church jurisdiction." In fact, any invasion of clerical domination was bitterly reviled.

In England, sacerdotal obscurantism was equally evident. In her important "Town Life," Mrs. J. R. Green mentions the case of Nottingham where, free from clerical control, the burghers had developed their trading customs on independent lines. On the other hand, the Reading community groaned under the despotic jurisdiction of the abbot and appealed in vain

for the liberty enjoyed by the men of Nottingham. "Towns owned by abbot or prior," writes Mrs. Green, "were, like all the rest, stirred by the general zeal for emancipation, but they were practically cut off from any hope of true liberty. The power which they had to fight was invincible. Against the little lay corporation was set a great ecclesiastical corporation, wealthy, united, influential, persistent, immortal." The monks were adamant in their view that the relatively prosperous townsfolk had no just cause to cast aside those onerous tasks which their parents—mere serfs—had patiently endured and to which they themselves were still in legal bondage.

When all these and other injustices are recalled, the palest pessimists must admit that material progress has been made in modern generations. Despite Morris and other romanticists, few indeed, even in most melancholy mood, can sincerely desire to exchange the comforts and conveniences of our still imperfect civilisation, at least in times of peace, for the alleged blessings of departed medieval days.

T. F. PALMER.

ON CHRONOLOGY

I.

ONE of the subjects connected with a proper understanding of history is Chronology, and it has proved for me quite an interesting experience to track it down, as it were. I found most writers taking received dates for granted or showing a very strong disinclination to discuss them.

There have, of course, been a number of books dealing with dates and eras, but they are by no means easy to get. The British Museum reading room is unfortunately closed for the "duration," and I have therefore been unable to consult some of these works. But how sparse is the literature can be seen by noting the titles given in such catalogues as Sonnenschein's "Best Books" or "Reader's Guide." I am not referring to a "dictionary" of dates—there are plenty of these. I mean books dealing with what the Benedictines call the art of verifying dates—that is, how did we get certain dates which are almost universally acknowledged? How did we arrive at the famous 1066 A.D., for example, or the dates given for our Saxon kings or for the (supposed) birth of Jesus?

It is quite an amusing experience to track down a number of references—most of which are accepted without question even by the most sceptical of Free-thinkers; not all of us, for there was one at least whose name occurs to me as I write—Edwin Johnson—who showed a very lively scepticism on the problem, and who gave some of the most complacent historians quite a nasty jolt. He went perhaps too far, but I am quite convinced he was on the right lines even though his iconoclastic work, "The Rise of Christendom," never received acceptance.

In Draper's famous "Conflict Between Religion and Science" occurs this passage:—

"It was generally admitted that the earth was about 4,000 years old at the birth of Christ; but so careless had Europe been in the study of its annals than not until 527 A.D. had it a proper chronology of its own. A Roman abbot, Dionysius Exiguus, or Dennis the Less, then fixed the vulgar era, and gave Europe its present Christian chronology."

Draper does not as a rule give his authorities—an unfortunate defect of his work; but I should have liked very much to have had the authority—the *original* authority—for the statement about Dionysius. Who exactly was he, or—as Robert Taylor might have said—who or what was he *in his home*?

It is not easy to find an answer to my question. All the encyclopædias I have been able to consult seem to me merely to copy one another—that it was he who, in his "Cycelus paschalis," took the annunciation of the birth of Christ as the starting-point of modern chronology; but they have to admit that he made the birth of Christ some years too late. How he arrived at his various dates, what MSS. he had in front of him to be able to verify his conclusions, and how he tested these MSS., we are not told—at least, not in the many books I have hunted up which should have given more definite particulars.

In other words, I suspect that we have taken the good abbot or monk—I am not sure of his rank—for granted. We have taken the statements about him and his chronology for granted just as we have accepted the dates given for our early kings in our history books. What boy ever stood up and asked his teacher how do we know *for certain* that Hengist and Horsa landed in Kent about 449 A.D.?

In one of the books on English history in my possession I find that if any reference as to early events is given at all—and precious few authorities are given—we often get "Cotton MSS." Sir R. B. Cotton seems to have been a noted antiquary who, in the 17th century, collected as many of the "original" documents dealing with England and its history as he could. This collection appears to have been rather badly damaged before the British Museum acquired it, but evidently it has served as a primary source for early English history. What the exact value from the authentic point of view are the Cottonian MSS., as well as those known as Harleian and Lansdowne MSS., is no doubt given in some of the books dealing with the sources of British history which I have not been able to consult. But as far as my reading has carried me, I have not much faith in any of them. They appear mostly to be monkish copies of monkish chronicles; and I am very sceptical as to anything of real value coming from such sources.

This estimate can apply also to what are known as the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicles," of which even such a very cautious and conservative authority as Harmsworth's "Universal Encyclopædia" claims the early part to be "of little value." But we get quite a lot of our dates and information of early English history from these "Chronicles," and it would be very interesting to know how these are confirmed.

But let us come back to our friend Dennis the Little, as we are solemnly told in our history books that he is responsible for Christian chronology. F. A. Arbutnot, in his "Mysteries of Chronology," writes as if he doubted his existence altogether. He says there is no evidence how the story about him got into circulation at all. And he quotes the famous Jesuit Father Hardouin (1646-1729) as contemptuously rejecting the whole story. Hardouin is described in the "Century Cyclopædia of Names" as "a classical scholar, numismatist and chronologist." He maintained that, "with few exceptions, all the works ascribed to classical antiquity had been forged by monks in the 13th century" and, in addition, he attacked "the genuineness of ancient coins and all Church Councils before that of Trent." Whether he could maintain his thesis before modern investigation I do not know, but his opinion of Dionysius is worth noting.

The greatest of all works on chronology is that by the Benedictines of St. Maur (1750), "The Art of Verifying Dates," which was later much enlarged, and though out of date now, is still of great use. They accepted the story of Dionysius. On the other hand, in the comprehensive history of the Order of St. Benedict written some time later, the priestly writers admit that "there are grave doubts about this alleged

inventor of the Christian era." But they passed the legend because it had been accepted by other priestly writers.

Arbutnot gives some information on lunar, solar and paschal cycles, and he points out that if you multiply the two former, consisting of 19 and 28 years each, you get 532, the date "coinciding with the alleged discovery or invention of Dionysius." Also he notes that "the paschal cycle is an ever-recurring revolution of 532 years closely connected with the Church calendar."

If what Arbutnot claims is true, we are handed with some genuine "speculations" on the subject of chronology—which, in passing, I should like to add, by no means rouses to enthusiasm theological writers in general. In fact, in two very comprehensive but orthodox Bible Dictionaries in my possession the subject is not dealt with. On the other hand, so important is it, that the editors of the "Encyclopædia Biblica" have devoted nearly 50 columns of very small print to the problem, and a sorry tale they have to tell. I shall deal with it in another article.

H. CUTNER.

THIS FREEDOM

Know ye not,

Who would be free themselves must strike the blow!

By their right arms the conquest must be wrought?

—BYRON.

PROFESSOR J. B. BURY remarks in his admirable little book, "A History of the Freedom of Thought," that "the natural liberty of private thinking is of little value if the thinker is not permitted to communicate his thought to others." It is true that a cynic once said that speech is given us to conceal our thoughts, but it is possible he was referring to diplomats and politicians. Ordinary folk are not adept at dissembling or cloaking their thoughts but, like Marc Antony, "only speak right on." Professor Bury says that freedom of thought in any valuable sense includes freedom of speech. This then is the freedom—to mention a classic example—for which Socrates died.

He dealt shrewd and heavy blows at hypocrisy and corruption. Although given an opportunity to retract his words, he held steadfastly to his purpose, which was to find the truth: and was condemned to death. Since that time many others, inspired by his teaching and example, have suffered imprisonment, torture and death for fearlessly upholding the right to freedom of speech. These martyrs for the cause of freedom have, after centuries of persecution, won for us a privilege which we now regard as a natural right. But what is happening to this valuable inheritance? The vigilant grow apprehensive lest a prolongation of the war will witness a gradual curtailment of the right of freedom of speech until perhaps a whisper may betray us! The tides of reaction and suppression (of liberty) creep stealthily towards the ground won for freedom. Soon the water will be wetting our feet and will cause that discomfort which presages a chill.

In wartime the forces which operate against the freedom of the individual are powerful, but may not occasion much concern at first. Our thoughts are directed to other matters. But, whereas in peacetime any modifications—or rather, any attempt to this end—would cause a political sensation, a Cabinet crisis and a General Election; in wartime a change is effected overnight. A Minister vested with certain powers may suppress, say, a newspaper or anyone who expresses views inimical to the war effort. This gradual erosion by those powerful tides causes the loss of further hard-won ground, and means that those who love liberty are compelled to retreat still further. We see that the more the individual relinquishes his freedom the more powerful those in authority become. Is this the freedom for which we are fighting and which we willingly surrender as a means to an end? The individual loses his freedom of action and is likely to lose his freedom of speech—part of the latter having already gone. He will be left with freedom

of thought, and is now like a dog with a muzzle whose owner may say, "Now you may growl if you like!"

War is the enemy of freedom, but to what extent do we ourselves help this enemy? Let us see. As great oak trees from small acorns grow, so great thoughts and deeds have their genesis in tiny impressions formed in many instances at school. In this connection the influence of *authority* has far-reaching results. During the years spent at school it is not apparent that the juvenile mind is led to appreciate the horrors and suffering of warfare. On the contrary, history books and stories about war describe how territory was acquired and how the Empire was built up; describes great deeds of heroism and endurance so that a glamorous effect is produced in the minds of the readers. With this comes the desire—in fact, an ardent wish and hope is expressed—to emulate these inspiring deeds. The great adventure begins when the boy becomes a soldier, or a sailor, or maybe an airman. And, you may say, a very praiseworthy ambition, too. What would be our position to-day but for the self-sacrifice, devotion and skill of our boy adventurers in the Services? And what has this to do with freedom? A mighty Empire must be defended, otherwise powerful enemies may conquer and enslave us because they have coveted our possessions and envied our position for a long time. So you see, we shall have to work like slaves in wartime to avoid becoming slaves in peacetime. But when peace comes we shall continue to work like slaves to make up for what has been lost (and destroyed) in wartime. A pretty kettle of fish!

But it must still be said that authority and precedent are the dominating factors that influence our "freedom of thought" towards war; and is it unreasonable to infer that centuries of warfare cause us to slip very easily into a fight for this very reason?

S. GORDON HOGG.

ACID DROPS

THE treasurer of the Warwickshire Congregational Union says, in the "Christian World," that what is wanted is the formation of a "Brains Trust." Well, if the Churches formed one the capital would be small, but we expect it would be on the lines of that run by the B.B.C. It would be made up of fooling and quite harmless questions, the answers to which might be found in any ordinary public library, and which generally serve to hold up to the world the very low level of British intelligence. That is, if the questions really represented British intelligence. But they do not. The questions are carefully sifted, and only those that are considered safe are published. It is a pity that anyone can be found to lend a hand to such a game. We know of many questions that would be of interest to masses of people if they were discussed. But the B.B.C. sees that the public never hears them. With all its services, a controlled wireless monopoly represents a standing danger wherever it exists.

Someone said there were three different kinds of lies—lies, damned lies and statistics. Very easily, we think, a fourth might be added in the shape of "religious truth," and one ought to congratulate religious leaders in thus publicly marking off religious truth from truth in general. The rule of St. Paul appears to be to be ready to say anything so long as it "abounded to the greater glory of God," and the Christian Church has lived well up to that counsel.

So we are inclined to take the following from the "Sunday Express" just for what it is worth. The Rev. E. H. Lewis, an Army chaplain at Bognor, is reported as saying:—

"Only 5 per cent. of the men who join the Army can say the Lord's Prayer, 15 per cent. have no connection with the Church, and 85 per cent. have never been in a church in their lives."

Probably the only dependable statement is that 85 per cent. of the men took no interest in religion. These figures go well with the reported proportion of the public who attend church.

But Mr. Lewis is either misquoted or he expressed himself very badly. He says, "The essential need of the Army is religious education." Why "need"? The Army isn't shouting for it. No one prevents the men having as much religion as they wish. We suggest that what Mr. Lewis really said was, "The essential need of the Army, so far

as the clergy is concerned, is that it shall get more religious training." He could hardly be so foolish as to say the Army needs religion. Perhaps it was just modesty that prevented Mr. Lewis saying, "The essential need of the Army is to have more of ME." We fancy the Army would prefer an extra allowance of cigarettes.

The Catholic world in the U.S.A. is still divided as to whether aid should be given to a Russia that is officially "Atheistical." Feeling runs high. Father Gillis, for example, writing in the American "Catholic World" bluntly says that aid for Russia means "making a covenant with hell!" Our own leading Catholic papers are equally undecided and struggle helplessly to reconcile the fact that in America and in many parts of the Continent there are millions of Roman Catholics who, influenced by the many years of crusading lies concerning Russia, are supporting Hitlerism. The same holds good, to a lesser extent, in this country. The Roman Church delights to fish in muddy waters, and at present there is enough to satisfy those who claim to take their authority from, among others, a Jerusalem fisherman.

Amongst the Episcopalian priests in America it is good to see Bishop Manning, of New York, pleading for the fullest collaboration between America, China, Russia and Britain. And in Italy the Papacy has offered no serious rebuke to the part played by Italians in this war, any more than it denounced Mussolini's piratical onslaughts on Albania and Abyssinia.

It is also well to remember that Cardinal Hinsley, the mouthpiece of Roman Catholicism in this country, also says (the "Universe," October 24): "We British Roman Catholics, following the teaching of Pius XI., reject . . . any brand of pagan totalitarianism." Other forms of totalitarianism—that of the Church, for example, are not rejected. "The Freethinker" is the only journal in this country that has persistently stressed the historic truth that Nazism is merely carrying to an extreme extent the essential principles of the Christian Church. The degree of suppression will depend upon circumstances. The principle remains untouched.

Dr. Shailer Matthews, late Dean of the Divinity School in the University of Chicago, writes in a recent book that many people appear to think that God has "ceased to function." That is, for believers, far from being the worst of it. Very many who never before questioned the truth of religion are wondering whether God ever functioned. Of course, the clergy generally assure us that God is as active as ever, but as their jobs depend upon God, it is not for them to foul their own nest.

The Bishop of Lichfield has also been unlucky with the Press. For the Hanley "Evening Sentinel" reports him as saying:—

"The result of the stupendous events we are now witnessing is to make more people think about God."

Something must have been omitted, because we find ourselves agreeing with the Bishop. The war has made the people think a little more about God, but the kind of thinking that has gone on will not have given much comfort to the pleasure. More than one person we know when reading, or hearing, the loss of life during a very bad "blitz," thought about God. "Good God!" was a very common expression, with an emphasis on the first word.

The Bishop says, "It is a marvellous thing to have 1,500 years of Christianity in our bones." We agree. It is more than wonderful—it is terrible. But if the Bishop will look up a good history of diseases he will find that many of the complaints from which man suffers are much older than 15 centuries. And he may find comfort in the knowledge that, thanks to science, many a disease that was once endemic has now almost disappeared. So hats off to the medical pioneers who, in spite of secular ignorance and religious opposition, have done so much to guard us against the ravages of disease.

The "News-Chronicle" for November 6 has the following:

"The British and Foreign Bible Society reports that in Spain the Franco Government, without giving reasons, has forbidden the propagation of the 'Pro-

testant" Bible and seized the Society's stocks. Seizures have taken place as far away as the Canary Islands. Petitions have remained unanswered.

It should be remembered that Franco is a "beloved son" of the Church, and religion is clearly at the bottom of this act of suppression. Franco also received much assistance from this country in establishing himself in Spain.

One of our readers writes asking whether the real reason for God turning Lot's wife into salt was that he wished to keep the matter "fresh" in the minds of his followers? Very good, but we fancy it comes from one of the Ingersoll lectures.

Many Nonconformists are getting uneasy over the plot to capture the schools that was sprung on the country by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, assisted by certain members of the Government. Of course, the position of the Nonconformists is logically as indefensible as that of the Church of England. Less so, in fact; for Nonconformity is based upon the principle that religion lies outside the sphere of the secular State. The quarrel of the Churches and Chapels as to who shall control the mind of the child is pretty contemptible from any but a Christian point of view, but nothing sanctifies such operations more effectively than Christianity. Now the Nonconformists are beginning to awaken to the fact that while the present system gives them all they can expect to get, the new arrangement will place the Church of England on top. Up to date the two artful Archbishops have been too artful for the Noncoms. Look at the faces of these two gentlemen and no one will be surprised.

The evils of having any of the elementary schools under the control of religious organisations may be judged from the following, which we take from "The Times" of October 25. The letter is headed, "A Free Church Point of View," and says, with regard to the tyranny and inefficiency of a great many Church schools:—

"Perhaps the most serious grievance from the Free Church standpoint and that of all non-Anglicans is the continued existence of denominational schools in single-school areas. Non-Anglican parents are obliged to send their children to these schools, but they do not care to make use of the Conscience Clause because it involves singling out a child from his fellows. The condition of many of these schools is deplorable. Many have been black-listed for years and have never been brought up to the requirements of the Board of Education. Others ought to be black-listed. The best teachers quite naturally gravitate towards the most up-to-date schools and to those which are under public rather than clerical control. Consequently, in the rural areas where denominational schools predominate, educational standards fall. Both teachers and scholars are thus deprived of real 'equality of opportunity.'

"Many young people who do not belong to the Church of England are deterred from entering the profession because of the many doors closed to their entry or to their promotion. In some counties two-thirds or three-fourths of the elementary schools are Anglican, and all these headships are confined to members of the Church of England. The present management of the village denominational schools is in practice almost entirely clerical. At the recent Gloucester Diocesan Conference the Bishop said that he would like to see legislation which would put the election of managers not into the hands of subscribers who did not exist, but into the hands of the parochial Church Councils. The control of the Church schools must be fully investigated with a view to making it more democratic. At present the local incumbent has a prevailing influence in the appointment of teachers, and he seeks to have teachers who are in agreement with his particular ecclesiastical views."

This is quite good so far as it goes. But it should be borne in mind that Church schools would have been much worse than they are had not there been a Government insistence that a certain level of efficiency must be attained in order to get financial assistance from the Government. There is really only one way of settling this difficulty. That is by restricting State schools to secular education. If we are to win the war and place the educational future of the country under the control of the Churches, we shall be losing on the one hand much that we have gained on the other.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- I. A. WATT.—Thanks for cuttings and good wishes. We are keeping as well as can be expected, and take all possible care. It would be an act of disloyalty to both the movement and to our many friends if we did otherwise.
- T. L. MOWBRAY.—We believe it is a fact that many men who join the Army as "Church of England" afterwards get themselves entered as Roman Catholics. We cannot say how many. After all, there is not much difference between the Roman Church counting these men as converts than there is in utilising the unfair pressure brought to bear on many recruits to set themselves down as belonging to this or that Protestant Church.
- H. S.—We agree with much that is in your letter, but one must allow for differences of opinion. Unquestionably many, as you say, are afraid to fully express their opinions on religion for fear of loss in some way. With regard to Russia, one must admit that the lying campaign of the Churches and other interested groups deceived many non-Christians. They ought to have known better, but not always does a rejection of religion mean a broadening of mind in relation to all other questions. There is such a thing as a bigoted unbeliever.
- W. H. BLORE.—You are not likely to get from the B.B.C. any reasonable reply to a criticism of its religious programmes. They are poor, from even the best religious standpoint. But the aim is to quiet the fears of timid people rather than to enlighten inquiring ones. And no expression against religion is permitted.
- E. MORTIMER.—We are really more antagonistic to what is called modern theology than we are to the earlier forms of Christianity. The first was pure primitivism—naked and unashamed. The second is an attempt to perpetuate primitive ideas by dressing them in modern clothing. To say that the primitive mumbo-jumbo embodied belief in a transcendental mind is sheer nonsense. To claim that belief in a transcendental mind is the equivalent of the primitive mumbo-jumbo is simply dishonest.
- "TAB CAN."—Thanks for cuttings; they are useful.
- C. MARKS and G. WILLIAMS.—The articles on the "War and After" will probably be reprinted with additions.
- A. R. MILLER.—Very interesting. Are we at liberty to print?
- R. E. CRONIN.—Thanks for letter; your wishes have been carried out.
- T. D. JONES.—There are many books on the general subject. Will try to find one on your special line.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Major R. M. Lloyd Still (India), £9 3s.; R. E. Cronin, 10s.; I. A. Watt, 10s.
- To advertising and distributing "The Freethinker": R. E. Cronin, 10s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

WE have repeated what we have said very frequently because it happens that Lord Atkin, one of the Law Lords, on the hearing of an appeal case, strongly protested against the denial to a subject to force a Minister of the Government to give reasons for imprisoning him. Lord Atkin said he viewed "with apprehension" the present attitude of the Executive towards such cases. Generally speaking, 40 years ago, a British subject had the unquestionable right of appeal to the Courts against the rulings of any executive person or body. To-day that is very nearly non-existent. The subject

is the legal slave of the Executive. If he is treated favourably, so much the better for him. If he is treated harshly or contemptuously, so much the worse. But it is the Minister of this or of that who decides, and against his ruling there appears to be no greater opposition than an Italian to a decree of the Fascist Council.

The following from Lord Atkin's protest should be studied by all who are not to be satisfied with mere talk about British liberties:—

"It has always been one of the pillars of freedom, one of the principles of liberty, for which on recent authority we are now fighting, that Judges are no respecters of persons, and stand between the subject and any attempted encroachment on his liberty by the Executive.

"In this case I have listened to arguments which might have been addressed acceptably to the Court of King's Bench in the time of Charles I. I protest, even if I do it alone, against a strained construction put upon words with the effect of giving an uncontrolled power of imprisonment to the Minister.

"I know of only one authority which might easily justify the suggested method of construction. 'When I use a word,' Humpty-Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean different things. The question is, which is to be master—that's all.'"

That is all. It was the question that Hitler put to the Germans, and which he decided by appointing his own judges and deciding the question beforehand. The late Lord Chief Justice published a book denouncing the destruction here, step by step, of the freedom about which we boast so much. The right of the subject to appeal to the Courts against even the most powerful Minister of State was never questioned until recent years. To-day it is being openly spurned. We are pleased to find one of our Law Lords reminding the world of what liberty means—or did mean.

Very many times in recent years we have called attention to the way in which the constitutional rights of the English people were being frittered away by successive governments. We now, not for the first time, mention but one phase of this destruction of individual freedom. For years Parliament, with the general public showing its customary sheep-like docility, has been frittering away civil liberty from the subject by a transference of almost despotic power to the Minister of this and that Department. We need not be conquered by Hitler to become a nation of robots—Parliament, unless watched, will see to that by its development of Ministerial autocracy before the war, its elaboration during the war, and—unless the English people act in an un-English manner—its continuation and establishment afterwards.

The Bishop of Chelmsford says ("Sunday Graphic," October 26) this country is "mainly a non-Christian land." Presumably that is why the Churches are fighting to gain control. And as the leaders of the Churches are loud in their affirmation that we are a democracy, it would appear that the ideal democratic State is one in which the minority, by hook or by crook—but mainly by crook—is given control!

Stoke-on-Trent has decided there shall be no Sunday cinemas. The Deputy Lord Mayor, Mr. Timmins, voted against the opening of cinemas because he wished to give the clergy the chance of capturing the people. We are a free people, but the fact needs constantly to be advertised, or a great many impartial observers would not be aware of it.

We have pointed out many times that Christian leaders never apologise for a detected lie. At the most they put it into cold storage, or revert to the lie suggestive. Here is a passage from an address by the Most Reverend Dr. Greg, Lord Primate of Northern Ireland, which we take from the "Belfast Telegraph" of October 26. This branch of God's tree on earth was talking about the state of children in Northern Ireland:—

"Russia has shaken off officially the Christian Faith, but its treatment of the problem displayed wisdom and understanding worthy of study and perhaps understanding. If Christian teaching was lacking, there seemed to be something like Christian sympathy."

There is not a word of regret for the lies that were told about Russia, or the fact that the Russian revolutionists had to fight against one of the most brutal governments on earth, and that during the establishment of the new order the people had to fight the animosity of this and other Christian countries. The lie was told and re-told, and yet

again told. Now it no longer pays to tell it, so, as we have said, the lie is put into cold storage perhaps to be taken out again when this war is over and Hitler is defeated.

Please note the condescending tone that Russia's plan for benefiting children may "perhaps" be worthy of understanding. And what on earth is meant by Christian sympathy? Sympathy we know and Christianity we know, but what is meant by the alliance of the two terms? To be accurate, the wording should run, "human sympathy as it is expressed under Christian influences," and in that case the fully developed passage should run somewhat on these lines:—

"Sympathy is a sentiment that is born and developed in the associated life of living beings. It is found in the animal world, reaching the higher developments in human beings. Without it human association would be impossible. 'Law' alone could not hold people together, neither could it contribute to the development of sympathy. Politics and religion narrow the sphere of human sympathy and restricts its operations, for both the direction and strength of sympathy is then determined by secondary considerations. No one will deny that where party or sectarian feeling runs high, sympathy is narrowed and cruelty or neglect takes its place. If a Christian had to choose between helping the children of an Atheist or those of a Christian, there is little question as to which would receive the greater consideration. Human sympathy urges help on the sole ground of collective association. Politics and religion are mainly concerned with help for a limited and specified number."

We hope that no non-Christian who reads this will be fool enough to even think of retorting that Russian sympathy is also limited in its scope. We know it is, but that justifies neither the lying crusade that was carried on against Russia, nor condones the fact that now circumstances make the operation of religious and political animosity and lying that was raging only a few years ago impossible, few have the common decency to express regret that they were so easily deceived.

Cardinal Sigonani has discovered that instead of the number of Roman Catholics in the U.S.A. being 22,000,000, the correct number is 11,000,000. We place as much reliance upon Roman Catholic statements as we do upon those issued by the Nazis. We venture a guess that political aims lie behind this almost doubling of the number of Roman Catholics in the U.S.A. To begin with, it seems to be from Roman Catholics in the United States that the strongest opposition is coming to the Presidential programme and aims. American Roman Catholics do not support, openly, Hitler, but those who keep an eye on the Roman Catholic Press know that the Papacy is dead against a lasting friendship between Great Britain, America and Russia. Only Russia, beaten to the ground, will submit to a reinstating of the Church as the mouth-piece of the State religion. The Papacy would much prefer an arrangement between America, Britain and the Nazis. So would many in this country who are for the present silent. Thus an increase (on paper) in the number of American Roman Catholics is not a bad card to play. And one must not forget that General Franco, who for the time being is the leader of Fascist Spain, is a faithful son of the Church, and the Pope is on the best of terms with Spanish autocrats and Nazis.

If we were Christians we should say that it was by the direction of "Providence" that we opened a book containing a number of newspaper cuttings dealing with Russia and religion no later than 1938; 1938 was the year of the holding of the International Freethought Congress in London—the time when Cardinal Hinsley and others lied like—Christians—about its character and aims, when pious Captain Ramsay begged of Sir Samuel Hoare to forbid the Congress and Hoare expressed regret to his "dear Ramsay" that he could not do so. The "Sunday Chronicle" reported that thousands of letters were sent to the Home Secretary asking for the Congress to be suppressed, and that Russian visitors should be prevented from coming to this country as "undesirable aliens." This was only a few weeks before the Chamberlain Government enabled Germany to declare war by presenting Hitler with Czechoslovakia and gave us "peace in our time." The Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. Andrews, Edinburgh ("Scotsman," March 12, 1938), spoke of the "consternation" caused throughout the country by the Government's decision not to suppress the Congress.

THE BLACK INTERNATIONAL AND THE NEW COUNTER-REFORMATION

IV.

(Continued from page 509.)

"THE Papacy is the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof." To-day, in our age of the "Total" state—a state which found in his "Leviathan" (1651) what is still perhaps its most perfect theoretical expression—the famous aphorism of Thomas Hobbes acquires a new and still more forceful meaning. We live to-day at the end of an epoch, and the fall of the Roman Empire re-enacts itself before our eyes, as when St. Augustine sat down after the Sack of Rome to write his "City of God" (A.D. 427)—that "Decline of the West" of an elder day. Only, now, the new barbarians arise from within. Out of chaos comes Fear, and Fear is the traditional parent of Religion, as Lucretius so long ago aptly designated it. The Church which rose to power originally in a post-civilised era, confidently anticipates that, endowed with perennial vigour, she can ride the storm again. Anything rather than "Progress"—that key idea of the age that is now passing away.

For historically, and when viewed in the most ultimate perspectives, this is the "Thirty Years War" of disintegrating modern, as its prototype was of decomposing mediæval civilisation. In the seventeenth century, the Jesuit-trained *condottiere*, Tilly and Wallenstein, saved the Church from the armies of the Reformation: to-day it is Franco, Petain and Weygand—all Jesuit trained also—who are destined by Rome to drown in blood and fire the forces of the new Reformation, and to create an obedient, stagnant Catholic Europe prostrate at the feet of the Vatican. The Church has never forgotten that there was a place called Canossa, where the haughtiest ruler in Europe stood barefoot in the snow waiting for the forgiveness of a pope. And we have not forgotten the profound dictum of the Italian Liberal historian, Farini, that "Rome never forgets her claims through length of time." It is with hopeful eyes that Rome watches at the very moment we write these lines her two great secular (ideological) rivals, "godless" Russia and Pagan Germany, tear each other to pieces—"ad Majorem Dei Gloriam"—and to the profit of His Vicar!

Space does not, unfortunately, permit us to pursue the interesting question as to the historical relationship between Romanism and its two great ideological rivals in the present era: Socialism and Fascism. We merely add that, as regards the former, the Vatican—contrary to many people's opinions—has no hostility to collectivism as such. To be sure, the Church is, essentially, collectivist in its outlook: individualism is its traditional enemy since the days of the Reformers. Nor is Rome at all oblivious of the growing political power of the proletariat, which she seeks to balance dexterously against the increasingly insecure authority of the traditional ruling classes. Whoever wins, Rome will be on that side! Nor was even the Bolshevik Revolution at first distasteful to her; e.g., no less a person than Cardinal Gasparri, then Papal Secretary of State, told Colonel Repington at the time—a sentiment repeated by the Archbishop of Genoa to M. Chicherin, the then Bolshevik Foreign Commissar, in person at the Genoa Conference in 1922—that the Vatican regarded the Russian Revolution as a judgment of Heaven on the persecuting Tsars and the Orthodox Church (which had persecuted Romanism ever since the failure of the Jesuits to maintain their puppet, the "False Demetrius," as Tsar at the Kremlin, 1605—6, a failure which led

directly to the accession of the Romanof Dynasty. In general, the Church only opposes Socialism when it is "atheistic" and "Materialistic"—that is, outside the control of the Church. In England, for example, it works overtime to secure control of the non-Marxist Labour Party. (Cp. F. S. Nitti—"Catholic Socialism"—and Stanley James—"Christ and the Workers"—both Catholic writers. For England, cp. the useful memorandum of Allan Flanders on Roman penetration of the English Trade Unions. With regard to the latter objective, the Jesuits have a college in Oxford specifically devoted to this purpose.)

With regard to the relations of Rome with Fascism much confusion exists on this point. To be sure, Fascism is in many ways a creation, a secular step-child of the Church. It was, for example, no accident that it arose in the most Catholic districts of Italy and Germany. For that matter, is there any modern movement of counter-revolution—or even of revolution—which does not owe something to the Jesuits? None the less, "Black" and "Brown" Internationals must ultimately clash, since there is no room side by side for two "Absolutes," for two "totalitarian" regimes. For "Infallible" Popes and "Führers" who are always right! For the Cross and the Swastika—"that (Pagan) Cross which is not that of Christ" (Pius XI). In this connection we have not forgotten that, ever since 1870 (July 18), the Infallibility Decree has vested a totalitarian personal Dictatorship in the hands of the Papacy. Indeed, to trace the final relationship between these two supreme dictatorships we have only to look at Papal History. For just as the Popes raised up the Holy Roman Empire and the Normans so as to combat aggressive Islam, then the ubiquitous foe of the Church, so, to-day, Rome uses Fascism as a big stick to beat up aggressive communism—besides her older enemies Militant Freethought, Freemasonry, even Spiritism. (All illegal in Fascist lands.) Ultimately, however, the Church has to fight for her life against the overgrown power of her temporal ally—as formerly in the case of its historic prototypes. The Absolute State will always persecute the Papacy: for it is itself the oldest and most absolute of States—for its "concentration-camps" extend beyond the grave! Hence, just as proverbially no medieval Pope could be a Ghibeline (i.e., supporter of the Emperor), so for the same reason no modern Pope can be a Fascist.

To conclude this overlong dissertation. What we witness to-day is a new Counter-Reformation that extends to all parts of the globe. (In this connection we must not forget the titanic efforts of Pius XI. to achieve the spiritual conquest of the East, even the Far East, where the formerly condemned opportunist strategy of the Jesuits in China is restored in relation to paganism. (Cp. recent Papal Decree permitting the adoration of the Japanese Imperial Ancestors as a *civil* rite.) A counter-reformation constant in its aims, flexible in its means, Napoleonic in its strategy. The Church reaches out hungrily for a fresh lease of power over the ruins of a decomposing world and disintegrating civilisation. The Church of Hildebrand and Innocent, of Torquemada and Pius V., the Church of the Jesuits and the Inquisition, is on the march: the historic enemy of human reason, the traditional scourge of "dangerous thoughts," the self-same church which provoked a thousand bloody saturnalia, and lighted a whole forest of stakes. That self-same Church which, in our own day, martyred Dreyfus and Ferrer, and which, to-day, stands by the side of Franco urging on the bloody butcheries of his new Inquisition, whilst assuming in democratic lands the deceptive garb of culture and toleration.

It is high time that the extent and nature of this sinister menace was everywhere recognised for what, in reality, it is. "The price of Liberty is still, more

than ever, eternal vigilance." Against the first-swept skies of Europe a huge dark shadow rises from the depths of the forgotten Past: the shadow of the middle Ages returning upon earth. More active to-day, more ubiquitous, than at any time since the Reformation, ultimately, probably still the most powerful force on earth beyond all its more vocal, but also more ephemeral, rivals, the Vatican strides to victory across a war-wracked, weary and disillusioned world.

The decisive battle of our epoch, of Light against Darkness, of freedom against oppression, of progress against stagnation, of the secular versus the spiritual, of Reason versus Rome, still remains to be fought. We go forward confidently, despite the formidable nature of the foe, taking as our own the historic motto of Galileo: "for the Earth," despite all present appearances, "still moves on."

F. A. RIDLEY.

A NOTE ON CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

RECENT discussion in these pages revives interest in conclusions regarding Christian origins reached tentatively when the subject was a particular study. The arguments adduced from various positions set one thinking afresh as to how far those conclusions still hold to our own mind. . . . One may also join in the caveat against the tone taken by certain protagonists herein, the *de haut en bas* attitude towards those who fail to accept the "myth theory" at the value put by its advocates. Something of the *odium theologicum* itself seems to enter into what is a purely objective, if obscure, issue, where no personal predilection whatever affects the candid inquirer.

How and in what fashion did the Christian movement originate? . . . This is the residual question when its supernatural claims have been rejected on grounds that need no recapitulation now. Or, as Mr. Archibald Robertson puts it: "The exact circumstances which, in the first century of our era led to the emergence of a previously unknown sect of 'Christians' or Messianists among the underworld of the Roman Empire. . . ."

"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"—that important city of Syria. Who were these disciples; how came they by the basic beliefs which were expanded into the Christian theology? . . . When the movement begins to attract outside attention it is an established affair, with branches (churches or *ecclesia*) in different quarters, a nascent ritual in its assemblies, a literature concerning its doctrine and antecedents. Beyond a few dubious external references thereto in the first century A.D. all we can surmise as to its sources turns on these canons. The danger here, apparently, is not discerning the wood for the trees.

Setting aside far-fetched analogues from other and alien cults, what appears evident in these canons is—they are rooted in Jewish tradition. The gospel stories are presented as fulfilling prediction and prophecy from the past: of Jewry, with numerous references to the Jewish sacred scripture. This scripture is incorporated eventually in the general credentials, providing a peculiar record of Creation, man's origin, "fall" and destiny, and "redemption" through a Saviour "Son of God." . . . From these premises we find educaed a rounded Trinitarian Faith.

To view these notions in due proportion regard must be had to the prevailing mental and political atmosphere of Jewry during the three or four centuries preceding our era, when Syria and Palestine were brought under the impact of Greek and Roman Imperialism. The "Old Testament" suggests from internal evidence a compilation edited in the post-exilic period from various sources, some of which are lost. Under the theocracy that followed, it would be of interest to learn how much of the barbaric code attributed to Moses and its sacrificial usage obtained in the later State: or how far Jewish custom was interpreted in the more spiritual sense of the "prophet." . . .

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs or of he-

goats. . . . Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meeting. . . . Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."

Then prominent among their beliefs is the "Messianic Hope," the divinely appointed restorer of Judaism to glory and independence. The extent and manner in which this idea pervaded Jewry in the century preceding our era appears to bear vitally on the quest. Such terms as "Son of Man," "Son of God" were current in this connection as part of religious phraseology at a time of internecine strife and revolt.

"Josephus testifies that the belief in the immediate appearance of the Messianic King gave the chief impulse to the war that ended in the destruction of the Jewish State. After the fall of the Temple the last apocalypses (Baruch, 4 Ezra) still loudly proclaim the near victory of the God-sent King; and Bar Cochebar, the leader of the revolt against Hadrian, was actually greeted as the Messiah by the Rabbi Aquiba (ch. Luke xxi. 8). These hopes were again quenched in blood; the political idea of the Messiah, the restorer of the Jewish State, still finds utterance in the daily prayer of every Jew (the Shemone Esra) and is enshrined in the system of Rabbinical theology; but its historical significance was buried in the ruins of Jerusalem."*

During succeeding centuries a number of pseudo-Messiahs arose within Jewry with varying fortunes. The most remarkable was one, Shabbathai Sebi, in the 17th century in Turkey, who had a considerable success until his pretensions incurred the displeasure of Authority, when he found it convenient to embrace Islam, and ended as the founder of a Judæo-Islamic sect, the Dönmeh, "who have survived, especially in Salonika, to this day."

Christian Messianism, taken in its broadest aspect, is construed as a new spiritual Dispensation, alike as a Kingdom of God on earth and a heavenly Kingdom hereafter; opening up a way of salvation to all believers, Jew or Gentile. It is thus, apparently, a schism over the "Hope" and its interpretation. . . . How did this arise? Whence came that zealous dynamic which carried it in face of persecution to eventual supremacy over all rivals, defines the issue here. . . . This creed is hostile to other cults, including that of the Roman State, echoing the exclusive intolerant spirit of Judaism. It emerges, historically, as the theocratic Church Catholic, the *Civitas Dei in peregrinatione per terras*, a unique phenomenon in Western manifestation. If non-Christian elements entered into the system, this was after it had won to power, from various reasons and accommodations.

The doctrinal faiths, as distinct from a pervading native polytheism, are associated with some "possessed" or "inspired" figure, attended by legend, marvel and miracle. . . . Mani and the Manichees; Mohammed and Islam; the Sikhs of India; "restorers" as the "Bab" of Persian Islam or the Sudan Mahdi of sinister memory. Christian tradition, however incoherent, points to belief among the "disciples" in some such determining personality.†

The ethnical and psychic character of "Israel," and its influence on the course of Western culture is a singular variation. So strong is the sentiment anent the English Bible that it might be taken as of native origin. In a famous speech on Jewish disabilities, Disraeli startled the House, perhaps in veiled irony, by this reminder:—

"For his own part it was as a Christian that he would vote for the Jews. Has not the Church of Christ made the history of the Jews the most celebrated history in the world? On every sacred day you read to the people the exploits of Jewish heroes, the proof of Jewish devotion, the brilliant annals of past Jewish

magnificence. Every Sunday—every Lord's Day—if you wish to express feelings of praise and thanksgiving to the Most High, or if you wish to find expression of solace in grief—you find both in the words of Jewish poets. . . ."

AUSTEN VERNEY.

FACING THE FACTS: A REPLY TO CRITICS

I ANTICIPATED that the remarks contained in some of my recent articles would produce some criticisms, and I should like, at the outset of these comments in brief rejoinder to what has been said, to express my gratitude both to Mr. Gordon Hogg and to Mr. J. Phillips. In any movement, whether it be a popular political one or one of more abstract philosophic thought, nothing can be more helpful or more productive of progress than the give and take of friendly controversy, and I hope that the readers of these columns share my feeling of real gratefulness towards the two gentlemen (there may, of course, be more by the time this article reaches the doubtful dignity of print) for their stimulating comments on what I have had to put forward.

And having made that remark, let me go on to say that I am afraid that they have both entirely missed the real point of my previous writings, although I have no doubt that this may in part be due to my own shortcomings as a writer. While I have long been a journalist, I am not practised in the art of working out abstract ideas on paper, and I fear that I have not expressed myself with ideal clarity in this discussion. However, if the Editor will permit me to do so, I hope to make matters clearer and more distinct as time passes. I have, indeed, written one or two brief articles, further expounding the ideas formerly set forward, and these will, I hope, appear in due course.

But the point that seems to have created most stir in the minds of my readers is my suggestion that the decline of religion has left a virtual vacuum in the minds of many—a vacuum which the modern dictator cults hasten to fill. Both Mr. Hogg and Mr. Phillips have answered, in effect, that this should not be so; and, if it is so, the vacuum can be quite effectively filled by a belief in the progress of humanity or in a political movement, left-wing in its approach to the problems of life. Now, I am left-wing in my own sympathies. I have thought over these matters at great length, reading everything I came across which seemed to have some bearing on the question. And my conclusion was that these things do not take the place of religion. Surely, if the history of the last 20 years teaches us anything at all, it teaches us that both left-wing politics and general humanism of a vague sort (unless they become religions) do not seize the imagination of a man in the way in which religion at its best does so well. We have to face the facts of the world. That world is what it is, and not what we would like it to be. "The man who emerges from the gloom of religious dogmas and beliefs, and sees the world in the light of Rationalism, has already everything he needs." Thus Mr. Gordon Hogg. But do men *want* to "see the world in the light of Rationalism"? That is the vital issue which I was trying to raise, and that is the issue, as far as I can see, which both my critics tacitly avoid. Unless it is possible to prove to the ordinary man in the street that Rationalism or Freethought (call it what you will) gives him everything he needs, the movement represented by this journal will surely decay. That is the danger as I see it.

I am not saying that there will be a great move back to the Churches (though that is not as impossible as many Freethinkers would have us believe); the majority of human beings in this matter of religious belief have long been indifferentists. But there will be a move away from Freethought, with Communism, Fascism, or what-have-you as the new religion for a new age." (Both the political philosophies, as Mr. Cohen has often forcibly pointed out, are essentially religious in their approach.) Man, in general, wants something in which to believe. Are we providing that something? That is the question which is being posed in these articles of mine, and I must admit that up to the present I have not received any kind of answer to it.

S. H.

*Encyclopædia Britannica.

† ". . . He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16).

ESOTERIC PRIESTCRAFT FOR YOUNG PRIESTS

(Continued from page 510)

But, after all, paganism was the natural growth of the Mediterranean soil. That is a fact on which our (i.e. your) firm has based its policy. Pure Christianity, pure Jesusism, has no survival value except as a rare and delicate plant. Jesusism is an effeminate and enfeebling cult. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is no inspirer of virility. If the old pagan firms had pulled themselves together, they would have got back their trade. But what happened was that Christianity began to adopt pagan methods and outfit, and by paganising itself, took over the trade of the old firms and put them out of business. In other words, Christianity turned into Catholicism, which, of course, is our (i.e. your) firm.

Jesus did not like priests and said very hard things about them, but in Catholicism, priests are more numerous and important than in any other brand of paganism. Paul's idea of the execution of Jesus as a sacrifice "once for all" (in other words, an end of all sacrificing business), has been replaced by our numberless repetitious "sacrifices" of the "mass." The Jews and, therefore, Jesus, hated Goddess worship. But the desire for it was in the pagans' blood—so our firm purveyed it; and very profitable we have found it.

Christianity had very little organisation. Most Churches were independent, though the chief Church of a large city or district would have other sub-Churches. All this was accompanied by the rise of a professional caste.

The religion of Jesus as found in the New Testament is a very amorphous collection of sermons and parables. Jesus had no "system" and no organisation except a loose and fluctuating body of disciples. Paul made a sort of a system out of Jesus and Jesusism, but his chief achievement was to make Christianity independent of the Judaic religion. At first, Christian Churches were independent of each other, though keeping in touch to some extent. The earliest Christians were communistic. All were "equal" in rank and rights. But such an amorphous collection of persons has little stability or cohesion. You never need be afraid of amateurs who "go back to Jesus." They are sentimental fools and quite harmless. They can never be numerous for any length of time. Ordinary humans have got to be a bit human. Christianity survived because it adopted professionalism. Even among the original Communist Christians some differences were forced to show and be arranged for. The first approach to religious specialists were "elders," who led the worship and conducted the business of the sect. At first, of course, these elders were spare-time amateurs. But they developed into a caste of professionals, i.e. priests. Differentiation took place among the priests. The head priest of a district was a bishop. The bishops were autocrats each in his diocese, and all bishops were equal. The trend towards a large organisation went on. The bishops, though independent, were in alliance, and on occasion met together for business purposes. At this stage the firm, our (i.e. your) firm, was an oligarchy (called the Episcopacy). The bishops were each bosses in their own territory, but had a certain cohesion amongst themselves. But differentiation still went on. The most important bishop of a great city or a country became an archbishop. Thus centralisation made a start. Finally, the Bishop of Rome got a pre-eminence and our (i.e. your) firm became centralised in Rome. More details of the constitution of our (i.e. your) firm will be given in a future lesson.

C. R. BOYD-FREEMAN.

CORRESPONDENCE

HALF-WAY HOUSE—NO CHANGE

SIR.—Mr. F. J. Corina, in his penetrating article ("The Freethinker," November 2) on the subject of what he describes as my "middle life struggle of the intellect," seems rather to miss the spirit of what I have tried to convey.

In resorting to the dictionary, one only finds oneself involved in an endless discussion on word *usage*, which may lead to much confusion and misunderstanding, though actually, the point at issue does involve the much maligned description of Atheist, and what it means both to the ordinary reader and to those who seek to define their own position in the world of belief or disbelief.

I still feel inclined to hold—as I have tried to point out in other articles from time to time—that by common usage, the term Atheist denies too much. The term Freethinker is far more comprehensive, and is even claimed by some Christians! For instance, it has been held, as readers of this journal well know, that the Catholic faith is, in the last resort, amenable to support by the exercise of unaided reason. I am well aware that most readers would scorn the quality of reason which by the most questionable stretch of the imagination could reach any such conclusion; nevertheless, to such minds as are able to reconcile logic with the extravagant dialectics of Thomas Aquinas and others, the term "Freethinker" would rightly apply. That no such conclusion is likely to darken my modest intellect does not alter this.

In these days a god without tradition behind it would merely be the expression of some current form of lunacy—but surely that all depends on what one means by "god"? and in an atmosphere of vague definitions which prevails at present, one might by professing a dogmatic Atheism find oneself denying some fruitful and logical speculation which the presence of the vast mystery of existence, and conclusions drawn from human nature seem to justify, within the scope of true FREETHOUGHT.

Until, therefore, science has found itself able to probe more deeply into the problems of perception, the mystery of the nature of time, and above all the source, through causation, of such "living" values as poetry, music and the arts, it is difficult to hold that by exercise of a higher reasoning, there may not emerge an aspect or reality which or within phenomena eligible to be described as "God."

With Professor Joad, I am impressed by the testimony of the "mystics," which must be recognised as psychological phenomena, in the true spirit of science. There is a strange though wide consistency in the conclusions of those who enjoy these experiences, which loses no significance because it can be shown that they may be brought about by purely physical influence (drugs, starvation, etc., etc.). And particularly impressive are those visions which clearly owe thought itself becomes involved.

"The Atheist is one who simply asserts the untruth of the proposition of God." Quite. And as I have said, in so far as any recognisable traditional God is concerned, a humanised projection of oneself to whom one can appeal, and who dispenses rewards and punishments, I am in full accord with the categorical denial demanded by Atheists. But if the denial is to cover (for instance) the endless and limitless embodiment of human personalities deduced by what J. W. Dunne believes is valid mathematics (a special form of reasoning), then I must walk warily, lest my freethought itself becomes involved?

Mr. Corina's warm invitation to "join us" in "sweeping the mental highways" is an appeal not lightly to be turned aside. But according to my conception of a true Freethinker, I claim already to be within the fold. The "struggle of the intellect" to which Mr. Corina refers no longer takes the form of a wavering between tradition and New Thought—that phase ended years ago. The struggle now has entered a field which holds no hope of finality until all outstanding philosophical questions have been resolved, which will not be to-morrow.

Those readers who have come across my various articles will at once realise that my approach to ethical and sociological problems is entirely free of traditional sanctions, that where an issue is at stake I seek only to invoke the principles of the highest human values, without however denying myself in more philosophical moments the right to speculate on wider issues. This seems to me the essence of true FREETHOUGHT, and the only tenable standpoint for an honest man.

Readers of Havelock Ellis will recall his many reflections on the philosophy of James Hinton, and particularly of his best-known work, "Life in Nature," which so remarkably anticipated the work of subsequent agnostic writers. Hinton, a true Freethinker, came to the conclusion that the beauty and goodness around us was inherent in Nature herself—Ellis even called it "intelligence"—where would the Atheist be if by common consent this "pattern" or plan which bursts fitfully into joyous display for a brief spell in every hedgerow in isolated corners of the vast universe—if this "Life in Nature" were ever to become known as God?—Yours, etc.,

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

IN MEMORIAM

Marjory Neilson Newbold, formerly of Wishaw, Lanarkshire. Died November 15, 1926. Freethinker.

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