

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

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### Church and State

QUEEN ANNE'S BOUNTY, another source of Church income, began as a gift from the Crown. Actually, the Bounty stands as a good example of financial thimblerrigging for the benefit of the State Church. It happened in this way. The Roman Church had always claimed "first fruits" and "tenths." "First fruits" meant the first year's income of any "living." "Tenths" was the tithe exacted by the Church from the people. Those who are acquainted with the merciless manner in which the medieval Church enforced the payment of "tenths," will know that it was one of the most hated of taxes. There is one thing in connection with which the continuity of the Church in England was never broken. The Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Established one never failed to collect their legal dues.

At the Reformation the "rights" of the Church, along with its property, were taken over by the Crown. These included, of course, "first fruits" and "tenths." They remained the property of the crown until the reign of Queen Anne. It was represented to her that there were a number of the clergy who were very poorly paid, and out of sympathy the Queen surrendered the "first fruits" and "tenths" to be formed into a fund for the relief of the poor clergy. But soon after the formation of Queen Anne's Bounty, in making up the payment to the Crown, the sum was increased by the amount given to form the Bounty. So that, in fact, the Bounty came from the pockets of the people. But the name of Queen Anne's Bounty persists.

DONATIONS AND BEQUESTS.—I merely mention these now, because I shall have to give attention to the use made of them to blind the eyes of the public, and I do not wish to travel over the same ground twice. What I have said is enough to establish the fact that "Racketeering" is not confined to Chicago, it is very widely spread, and the Church of England offers us a specimen of the practice that has become familiar by custom and hallowed by religious association. It should be brought to an end as soon as possible. The religious influence of the Church of England declines, but its political and financial influence, exercised in a covert manner, continues.

### The Absurdity of a State Religion

Some sixty years ago there was a fairly strong movement amongst Nonconformists in favour of disestablishing the State Church. Events proved that the agitation was a dummy one. All the time the Nonconformists—with the exception of a few men of sound principle—were really concerned with getting a greater share of State support; only in its absence would they choose disestablishment. They never objected to laws which penalised non-Christians or anti-Christians to the benefit of Christians in general; and in the end they were bought over by what they gained and by the prospect of greater benefits to come. To-day, the opposition to a State Church by Nonconformists has almost died out.

In modern civilised society, where all kinds of religious beliefs and every shade of non-religion exists, a State Church is an absurdity. It must involve political injustice, since it measures men and women by their attitude towards religion. It was the recognition of this that led to the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland and Wales; and these acts at least abolish the pretence that no justification exists for a similar policy being effected in this country. The Church of England was State made, and what the State made it can unmake.

What are the arguments against such a policy? There is, of course, the stupid cry of "robbery." I say the "stupid cry" because the State cannot rob itself of its own resources however much these may be wasted or abused. So-called Church property is State property that has been allocated by the State for specific purposes. Such institutions as the British Museum or the National Gallery come within the same category as "Church property." Money or goods are left to the Trustees of the institutions mentioned just as money may be left by will for the purposes of the Church. But no one will dispute that if circumstances warranted the Government in using the funds hitherto applied to these institutions for some other purpose it would not be acting strictly within its rights.

There are two considerations that may be mentioned on this. It will be remembered that when a heavy tax was placed on motor-cars the money was raised on the express promise, by the Lloyd George Government, I think, that the tax should be used only for the purpose of bettering the roads. But there was a surplus; the Government needed money, and a few millions were taken for general purposes. Then came Mr. Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He made raids on the Road Fund, and complaints were made of "robbery." Mr. Churchill solved the difficulty by abolishing the special fund. For the future it came into the general exchequer receipts. But there was no question of robbery.

The second is a purely legal instance, which I state with all humility because I am not a lawyer. I believe that it is within the power of the English Courts to terminate any trust, or to divert the income of a trust, when the end for which that trust was formed can no longer be reasonably performed, or when its performance is no longer for the public good. But it is quite clear that the Church of England can no

longer fulfil the function for which it was created. It is the Church of England only because it is so called by custom and in legal phraseology. Less than half of the people really believe in it.

This question of public policy goes far. It will be remembered that a few years back the case of a will came before the Courts. A man had left money to his widow on condition that she did not remarry. The proviso is common, but this time—I think for the first time—the widow challenged that part of the will, and she won her case. The judges decided that as the lady was well within the child-bearing age such a stipulation was against public policy and that portion of the will was set aside. There are legal methods of getting over even the troublesome fact of "perpetuity." The cry of "Church robbery" is downright nonsense. The State might rob a Nonconformist Church by seizing its funds. But the State cannot rob itself.

But some of the wealth of the Church, it is said, was given to it with the express condition of money being devoted to the purposes of the Church. The amount of money acquired in this way is very much smaller than most people think, but whatever it is will not affect the issue. First, when one gives to an institution one must give in terms of the conditions governing that institution. And in the case of the Church I submit that it is a gift to the State, with no more than a desire that it shall be applied to a particular purpose. I do not doubt that if someone next week presented the Church with a few thousand millions for some specific purposes the State would feel justified, and would be acting within its rights, in using that money to produce armaments. No question as to the confiscation of private property arises. There is no private property in question.

The "pious benefactor" plea is still more ridiculous. The bulk of what is called "Church property"—we will keep to the familiar term for a time—was obviously taken from the Roman Catholic Church. That really was Church property because it was acquired by the Church by more or less honest methods; and gifts were made to the Roman Church—thanks also to more or less honest methods—for the purpose of teaching and preaching Roman Catholicism. If there is anyone who could plead that Church property should be transferred from State to Church, in order that the wishes of the pious benefactor should be carried out, it is the Pope.

But one need not go back to the Reformation to prove that the religion taught in the established Church is not that which the pious benefactor had in mind in bequeathing money or property to the Church. The doctrine of eternal torment, the belief in a literal virgin birth, or resurrection of Jesus, has ceased to be held by many of the leaders of the Church. It hardly needs stressing that the religion of the established Church is not that of a century ago.

In any case, it is ridiculous to imagine that either custom or law should sanction the continuation of an institution in perpetuity irrespective of changes in knowledge or needs. More than a century and a-half ago a London merchant directed that his fortune should accumulate for two generations and then devolve on a certain descendant. Perpetuity of this fashion was so objectionable that an Act was passed by Parliament declaring any such procedure illegal. There is nothing essentially wrong in the State modifying or abolishing institutions that do not make for the benefit of the community. The injustice would be if this were not done.

Looking back on these notes, I am afraid they have been of a somewhat rambling character. This is not surprising seeing that, as usual, I worked to no set plan and the thing grew under my hands. Even now, only a part—although an important part—of the

subject has been handled. The religious factor has been stressed because "The Freethinker" is about the only journal in this country that will make a direct and unqualified attack on religion and religious institutions. Our glorious Press works under the banner of "No attacks on religion admitted." Whatever may be the opinions of owners or writers, that is the rule. Many are to-day concerned over the amount of regularisation there exists with regard to the war, but the censorship here is light compared with the suppression and distortion of news and facts where religion is concerned.

Most thoughtful people should by now be aware that when the war is over the forces of frustration will become violent. For the moment they are relatively inactive, but only relatively so. Presently they will become active and violently vocal. And history would not be true to itself if a war-weary people were to carry on the fight against privilege and power, against injustice and stupidity, with the same vigour with which they have fought through the war. There are no decorations, no congratulations from the heads of the State, no laudations from the Press, no comfortable incomes derivable from fighting for justice for the people. And history, as it is written, goes on burying the truth under half-lies and suggestive falsities that are more contemptible and more effective than an attempted suppression that is open.

The opposition that post-war reformers will face will not be to any considerable extent open. But it will be there, alert and active to sabotage any effort, to weaken their power over the community. The army of officials the war has created—many of them armed with unnamed, and therefore unlimited, powers that are above the Courts—this army will not be so easily dissipated; its members will not willingly sink back into common citizenship without a struggle. Catchwords will be as "catchy" as ever and cheap slogans will have their usual attractiveness for the crowd.

But it is important to stress the fact that these vested interests will, as usual, fight under cover. They always have fought under cover. And the main camouflage adopted will be that of religion. Ever since the dawn of the modern industrial period this has been the case. Even to-day there is the same situation facing us with education. The clergy, backed by members of the Government, are fighting to make the schools so many entrance chambers to the Churches. The Clergy have not waited for the war to stake their claims: and the encouragement of these claims by the present Government is the first move of existing interests to strengthen their defence. "God" still pays good dividends.

Take the case of Russia. The agitation against the revolution was not conducted so much against the new financial, social and cultural plans of the Soviet. That would not have aroused any great measure of indignation or hostility among our people. Religion was again the principal weapon. For centuries Czardom had used the Church to stereotype the degradation of the Russian people. Religion was used in this country to excite prejudice against the Russian people when it could no longer be used in Russia itself. Religion still pays good dividends.

The Roman Catholic Church is another factor to be considered. If of late years it may not have increased in numbers, it certainly has in political and financial influence. Of the Churches generally it may be said that no heavier blow was struck at them than when Russia became our ally in the war. The Protestant churches settled down, uncomfortably, to a situation they dared not openly attack. It was hard after a campaign of such deliberate lying about Russia—a campaign in which the Churches and the Press vied with each other for first place—that we should actually become an ally of this

"untouchable" State. Of course, no apology for having so lied has come from any of the Churches. "The Old Guard never apologises."

The Roman Church in this country has not taken the situation so tamely. It has shown constantly how much it dislikes the association of this country with Russia. In fostering that dislike it has done what it could to keep alive the old ill-feeling against the Soviet. If it succeeds, it will keep alive this feeling that so soon as the war is over—that is, so soon as we have got all possible war benefits from Russia—then we must return to the attitude that was adopted from 1917 until recently.

Consider the following. Place of honour must be given to Pope Pius XI. In an Encyclical of March, 1937, he says:—

"Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilisation may give it assistance in any undertaking whatever."

From the "Catholic Times" of November 7, 1941:—

"We Christians ask ourselves whether uncritical, nation-wide acclaiming of the Soviet and all its works may not be a greater danger to our Christian and national inheritance than are the similar works of our enemy, *which we can openly hate and oppose.*"

The italics are ours. The works that can be *openly opposed* are those of Germany. And there is the plain hint that those "works" that are not openly opposed now will be opposed by all the secret moves and underhand manœuvres of which the Roman Church is past master. The "Catholic Herald" for November 21 has a leading article which plainly expresses dread that—

"it may fall to the lot of Russia to be the chief factor in breaking the back of this formidable enemy."

But the Russian resistance has already done that. What the "Herald" and other religious papers dread is that the revelation of the real Russia, and its contribution to the Allied cause, may incline the British people to find out the truth concerning the Soviet instead of following the old and general rule: "I do not believe in that teaching or in those people, and therefore I decline to learn anything about them." So the "Herald" calls the Archbishop of Canterbury to task for saying that "there is now little or nothing with which Christianity need quarrel." Finally, it gives us the warning that—

"victory through an irresponsibly worshipped Soviet would only defer the day of the sort of victory in which Christians and true Britons are really interested."

The last few words leave us in little doubt as to the "I dare not wait upon I would" attitude of Roman Catholics in this country. Among other Christian papers, the "Church Times" has openly expressed the uneasiness of British Christians finding that our most important ally is an Atheistic State. What will both say of Mr. Eden's plain statement that—

"we in this country want the closest co-operation with the Union of Soviet Republics now and after the war"?

Our Foreign Secretary also said:—

"It is the most earnest wish of His Majesty's Government, and the whole of the people of Britain, that Anglo-Soviet relations should be placed on a sound and permanent basis of co-operation."

The Christian Churches are not the only ones that will oppose Russian ideas and Russian influence having their effect on British thinking. For myself, I

hope that not only ideas from Russia but from all parts of the world will have a welcome in the Britain of the future. There are few countries from which we may not learn, and there are few countries that may not learn from us. If the war is to lead to a world that is better than the present one, many interests must be restrained—some may have to be destroyed; but while these sinister interests threaten the well-being of the world they will find their most powerful friends in the field of religion. The shame is that it is left to a journal such as this to keep before the public the extent to which religious ideas and institutions serve at once as a buttress and a shield to so many social and political and financial interests which hinder or sabotage progress.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MESSIAH

A SELF-ASSERTED Saviour of Israel, Sabbatai Zevi, was born at Smyrna in 1626. His father, Mordecai, a Jew of Spanish descent, was the trusted agent of an English trading concern in the Orient. He and his son had presumably heard that to Gentile mystics the year 1686 was assigned as a date when the dispersed Israelites would return to their native home in Palestine, although 1648 was regarded by Hebrew Cabalists as the time when Jewish redemption would be consummated.

As an adolescent, Sabbatai was inclined towards asceticism, and, although he was married at an early age, he proved inimical to his spouse and willingly divorced her. Nature, nevertheless, asserted her rights; yet another marriage was soon terminated. Like other pretenders to semi-divine authority, Sabbatai was soon the centre of a group of devoted adherents, to whom he revealed the secret doctrines of the Cabala. He seems to have possessed a winning personality with a charming voice both in speech and song.

In their standard volume issued by the Jewish Publication Society of America, "A History of the Jewish People" (London, Routledge, 1934; 21s.), Max Margolis and Alexander Marx record that: "The advent of the year of grace, 1648, Sabbatai marked by breaking with the age-long tradition and pronouncing the Ineffable Name. This signified that the power of the Godhead, impaired as it were by reason of human sin and the low estate of the Jewish people, had been restored and the perfect moral order of the Messianic era had set in."

This startling innovation aroused the anger of the orthodox, and the offender was excommunicated with all the deadly curses. Influential Jews, however, supported Sabbatai's policy. It was said that persecution was certain to signalise a Messianic career. Money was provided and the prophet left his native city.

In Constantinople, Sabbatai met an eloquent Jewish preacher who opportunely fabricated or discovered a supposedly ancient document in which "the birth of Sabbatai and his Messianic dignity were predicted." He then visited Salonica, where the study of the Cabala was fashionable. There he shocked the rabbis by what they deemed his blasphemous conduct, and he was soon expelled. In Morea the Jews proved sceptical, but in Cairo he was more successful. Here Chelebi, the master of the mint, was deeply impressed by Sabbatai's stories, and this hearty reception induced other powerful Nilotic Jews to rally round him.

Sabbatai then went to Jerusalem, the Holy City, where the Jewish community received him with favour. Poverty was there prevalent, owing to the cessation of the many pious benefactions the Jerusalem Jews had enjoyed from their compatriots in

Poland, who had recently been remorselessly pillaged. To restore prosperity to Jerusalem, the pretender consented to make a personal appeal to Chelebi, the mint-master, for assistance. He arrived in Egypt as a messenger and returned to Jerusalem as a Messiah.

Chelebi had responded generously to the monetary request, and, at this auspicious moment, Sabbatai "first heard of the girl Sarah seeking to meet her mate, the Messiah. It made no difference that rumour was unkind about her free manner of life, even that was part of the Messianic prophetic programme, for did not the prophet Hosea at the behest of God marry an unchaste woman? . . . None was happier than Chelebi that in his house the Messiah and his bride were wedded." Sabbatai was now financially secure, while near Jerusalem he found another adherent in Nathan Levi, who officiated as his prophet.

When Sabbatai arrived at Gaza, Nathan, then a lad of twenty, at once proclaimed himself as the Biblical prophet Elijah who had returned to earth to herald the advent of the Messiah. He asserted that he was the recipient of a divine message intimating that in the year 1666 the Messiah would appear in all his splendour and establish his kingdom by a peaceful conquest of the Turkish dominions. The Jewish historians state that this revelation "was sent out broadcast; it was embellished with all sorts of fantastic notions, including a journey of the Messiah to the mythical river Sambation, where the anointed King would take for his spouse the thirteen-year-old daughter of Moses and then lead back the ten tribes to the Holy Land."

The Jerusalem populace was now frantically convinced of the genuineness of the new Messiah, but the more thoughtful were doubtful or even hostile. But propaganda prevailed, and in Aleppo Sabbatai was accorded a royal reception, while in Smyrna, his birthplace, the acclamations of the crowd even exceeded the exuberance of Aleppo. The pretender announced his divine mission in the synagogue, while the congregation exultantly cried "Long live our King, our Anointed One!"

Well authenticated as it is, the popular frenzy seems almost incredible. Staid women, girls and wee children were entranced and hailed Sabbatai as their true redeemer. The men, it is said, "prepared themselves for the exodus to the Holy Land; business was at a standstill. On the one hand people submitted themselves to ascetic exercises in order to speed the redemption, and on the other hand indulged in festivities in honour of the Messiah." Whenever the spurious Saviour appeared in public, the mad excitement of the people almost defies description. In Salonica, Smyrna and other centres, children aged ten and twelve were wedded in order that "the remainder of unborn souls might enter into bodies and thus the last hindrance to the realisation of the redemption be removed."

The sage rabbis unavailingly strove to restore the distracted multitude to something resembling sanity, for the frenzy was only intensified by opposition. Wealthy and influential Jews succumbed to the delusion, while the Ottoman authorities were persuaded by money payments to countenance the claims of the pretended Messiah.

Through the intermediation of Dutch and English traders in the East, tidings of this fantastic craze arrived in Western Europe, where even Gentiles sometimes persuaded themselves that there might be some truth in the Messianic story. Apparently, quondam friends of the philosophic Spinoza were drawn into the vortex, in company with Jews of the highest standing in Amsterdam and other Continental cities. Our authors note that: "The presses could

not turn out quickly enough prayer-books in Hebrew and Spanish, with directions for penitential devotions by means of which one might become worthy of participating in Messianic bliss." Moreover, heterodox Hebrews shared the delusion. "The philosophising Benjamin Mussafia, at one time physician to King Christian IV. of Denmark, was the first to sign the address of homage to the Messiah by the Jews of Amsterdam."

Also, the widespread acceptance of Sabbatai's claims, with the idolatry he received from his immediate disciples, seems to have clouded his brain. Adored as a semi-divine being by his intimates and persuaded of his invincible powers, he recklessly undertook an expedition to Turkey. The man who had deluded so many others, now deluded himself. He sailed to Constantinople in the firm belief that the Sultan would eagerly pay him homage as the greatest of earthly kings. But when, after a stormy voyage, he landed on shore, he was promptly arrested and imprisoned. His detention, however, was light; his friends were able to visit and converse with him, and they were convinced that their leader's loss of liberty was merely temporary. He still posed as the Messiah, and his unorthodox proceedings included the abrogation of the Mosaic code and the rabbinical ritual, all very displeasing to the Jewish synagogue, and it implied that he entertained no doubt concerning his coming sovereignty.

A rival pretender, one Nehemiah, now appeared in Poland. When Sabbatai was informed of the newcomer's claims he sternly summoned him to his presence. Nehemiah came and listened, but was so incredulous that some of Sabbatai's most ardent disciples meditated Nehemiah's murder. The Polish pretender, however, fled to Adrianople and became a Moslem convert. He also reported to the Governor the existence of a plot to overturn the Turkish administration and establish the rulership of Sabbatai in its stead.

When this reached the ears of the Sultan, Mohammed IV. (1648—1687), a State Council was convoked. Sabbatai was then in Adrianople, and he was interviewed by the Sultan's Jewish physician, who advised the Messiah to renounce Judaism and embrace the Moslem faith. Sabbatai's nerve gave way, apparently, and he accepted the proposal. It is stated that: "On September 16, 1666, Sabbatai was brought before the Sultan; he immediately cast off his Jewish headgear, and accepted the white Turkish turban. Thus the transformation was effected. Sabbatai, the 'Jewish Messiah,' was no more, for he left the Sultan's presence as Mehemet Effendi, his Turkish Majesty's pensioner." Humane counsels prevailed in the Ottoman Court. No severe measures were adopted, and the agitation was allowed to pass peacefully away.

As soon as the Messiah's adherents had recovered from their amazement, all sorts of legends were circulated to explain the Saviour's collapse. It was said that it was not he who had recanted, but a phantom that had personated him. He himself had ascended to heaven, to return later to redeem his people from bondage. But the delusion persisted, and many refused to admit the deception.

T. F. PALMER.

## HOSPITAL NURSE

MANY people have a wrong impression of the life lived by nurses in the great hospitals of our country, and of the kind of training through which girls have to go in order to qualify as nurses. A new book, "Hospital Nurse," by Doreen Swinburne (Herbert Jenkins, 8s. 6d.), should go a long way towards removing these misconceptions, for it is

the story of a nurse's experience during the four years' training period in one of London's oldest voluntary hospitals, placed in the very heart of the capital—Westminster.

There is some very shrewd and intelligent observation for one who is apparently very young. The discipline and hard work of the wards, coupled with ceaseless lectures on varied subjects—theory and practice of nursing, materia medica, medical and surgical nursing, etc.—as well as the extensive preparation for State examinations are a great strain; but despite this, Miss Swinburne shows how happy people can be in this exacting profession in the service of humanity. We are told of much absurd "red tape" and of many indignities which young nurses are compelled to suffer. All this is done quite frankly, but without bitterness and rancour. Many of these indignities, indeed, would not be tolerated were money to be made out of them. Good salaries *after* qualification, as Miss Swinburne points out, is the least that these highly-skilled women can ask. It is one of the real blots on our much-boasted civilisation that nursing is one of the most neglected of the professions, both financially and from the point of view of hours worked and general working conditions.

This may be partly due (as, again, Miss Swinburne quite frankly admits) to the apathy of many of the nurses themselves. They come off the wards so fatigued that it would mean enormous effort to fight to have these injustices remedied. It would be a fine thing to add a little of the average Freethinker's outspokenness and moral courage to that which some nurses already have.

The moving of Westminster Hospital with its patients and equipment to new premises, and the installation of the nursing staff in a new home shows, however, that even in this neglected profession there is some progress to be recorded, which is very gratifying to all who have the welfare of the community at heart.

Most striking of all, perhaps, in this very interesting volume is a chapter showing the fortitude of the doctors and nurses during the heavy air raids on London which took place almost incessantly through last winter, when so many of our hospitals suffered great damage. Yet always, under the most difficult conditions, these brave people carried on. There is no doubt that lay people as well as many members of the medical and nursing professions will find enjoyment and interest in this volume. Miss Swinburne is, indeed, to be congratulated on her first literary venture. I, for one, look forward with some interest to another work from her pen, and I am sure that all, including many readers of these pages, who want to advance this most vital service will read all she writes with considerable eagerness.

GERTRUDE ROWLAND.

### ACID DROPS

THE secretary of the Sheffield Council of Christian Communities says that an important question is "How should a Christian spend his income?" A far more important question is how a great many Christians get their incomes? It is also worth remembering that, according to the New Testament, a Christian should not have an income. He should "Take no thought for the morrow," for "The Lord will provide."

"Urbanus," of the "Church Times," suggests that as a contribution to the salvage campaign some 15,000 priests might each turn out from their cupboards "ten pounds weight of dead homiletic matter, which would give 150,000 pounds of clean waste-paper." We raise no objection to the plan, but we expect that if that were done there would be enough influence brought to bear on the paper control by back-stair influence to give 20,000 pounds of clean paper on which to print another supply of up-to-date religious rubbish.

If "Urbanus" is, or has been, in the habit of attending book sale-rooms, he would soon find the value which dealers place upon the theological literature of, say, 50 or 60 years ago. They are catalogued by the hundred, they fetch a few shillings a parcel and are bought by dealers only for the sake of two or three volumes of decent literature that are included. And once bought the dealer promptly passes them off to dealers in waste-paper. There is simply no market for them.

There was, of course, a time when theologians did turn out good reading matter, and which is well worth reading to-day if one can stomach the foolishness of the theology therein. But those days have passed and are never likely to return. They belong to the time when the world was very different from that in which we now live.

In the issue of the "Sunday Times" for November 23 there are two letters from members of the House of Commons. Their intellectual calibre may be estimated by a single passage. One is by Mr. Francis Freemantle. He informs the world as follows:—

"Science has to be challenged to confess that it is limited to the measure of the five senses and their implications that it cannot explain the dominating of force, of life, creation, motive, freewill and choice."

It would take some pages completely to expose the combination of ignorance and bluster in these few lines. What scientist is there who says that science is limited to the operation of the five senses? We know of none of repute. We should be amused to see Mr. Freemantle elaborate his chapel thesis. And what difficulty is there in the other directions that science cannot explain, or is well on the way to doing so? Mr. Freemantle would be well advised to keep to subjects with which he is a little better acquainted with than he appears to be with the science of to-day.

The second letter comes from Mr. Andrew MacClaren. He informs us that what we lack is "authoritative guidance on matters of religion and moral philosophy," for without this we are likely "to fly to experiments in the hope of rebuilding a better world." But on matters of religion it is science, and science alone, that has told us more about the origin and nature of religion than the Churches have done in the whole of their existence. Really, even a member of the House of Commons might pause to consider whether the Churches have any message at all in science that is not derived from science, so long as we use that word in a reasonable and justifiable sense. The Board of Education is now paying the expenses of giving religious education to parents and teachers. We suggest that they start a class in elementary science for members of Parliament. We have supplied the names of two who *ought* to attend. Their politics would certainly not lose anything in efficiency if they became pupils in the new classes.

The Rev. Dr. Butterworth, Rector of Caterham, says that people are wrong who think that God is shut up in the churches. We do not know whether they are wrong or not, but it is certain that inside a church is the only place where God is safe. For it is the only place where no kind of attack on God is permitted. Perhaps we wrote the last sentence too hurriedly. We had overlooked the B.B.C. There also "God" is closely guarded against assault.

Another notable sentence comes from the Church newspaper, "The Record." "Christ by his cross," we learn from a leading article, "has broken the wall of partition between nation and nation, between man and man." So does the tank and the warplane, and for the time it seems very powerful indeed in breaking down barriers. Even Christian preachers and Christian people appear to have been most powerfully impressed by them. After all, Christ is said to have lived nearly 2,000 years ago, and with God Almighty at the helm, one might have expected progress to have gone on a little more rapidly than it has.

"Women are intelligent beings and ought to be treated as such." So says Mr. Bevin. Wonders on wonders! Woman is exactly what she has always been, and it is strange that it takes a world war to secure full recognition of her nature. Mr. Bevin wishes to get women on to war work, hence the discovery and its proclamation. In this respect history repeats itself. It took the last "Great War" to secure for women the vote, and these circumstances help us to appreciate the real influence of Christianity on the position of woman. But the Church of England will not permit a woman preacher in its pulpits. What a lot of humbugs there are in the world! And they appear to flourish most where Christianity is strongest.

It is just 14 years ago since a largely-signed document was issued by the clergy of the London diocese, part of which ran:—

“We believe that to grant permission to women to preach in our churches is contrary to Holy Scripture and to the mind and practice of the whole Christian Church.”

The Bishops of London and Chelmsford suggested, as a daring compromise, that women might be permitted to speak in church, but not from the altar and altar steps. The Bishop of Durham said that the Church would not be justified to take up a position “which would involve a departure from the institutions and traditions of the universal Church.” The greatest of all Churches, the Roman Catholic, will not have a woman in its pulpits. Mr. Bevin should set to work to convert the Churches. It would look better if the equality of the sexes was made to rest on something a little higher than the desire to win a war. After all, Hitler comes near the Christian Church in his view of women.

*Apropos* of the above, there have again been discussions in the courts whether a woman could be permitted to take the oath without a hat. One Judge decided that she might use a handkerchief, but not a hat. The oath is a religious process, hence the trouble. If the woman in question had claimed to affirm, the question of wearing a hat would not arise. There is nothing to prevent a Judge breaking this taboo. It is St. Paul's teaching that leads a Judge to waste the time of a Court on so ridiculous a subject. It was this woman-hating misanthrope who decided that women should not have their heads uncovered in Church.

Mr. F. Ford writes:—

“In the summer of 1924 I was in the Stoneyhurst Catholic College, near Blackburn, and in a room was a glass about one yard square; in the case was a large stuffed monkey and in front of the monkey was a card about 16in. by 6in., on which was printed the following words: ‘Martin Luther after his fall.’”

The influence of Christianity on character is very marked.

In the “Strand Magazine” Canon S. J. Marriott asks “Can God be neutral?” If there is a God he strikes us as being more a specialist in accommodation than a neutral character. For he is on every side that believes in him. Of course, if the Canon's God was one of a group, each one could blame the others and so reserve all the credit for the only God left. But there is, so runs the Christian legend, but one God. He made everything, he foresaw everything, and therefore should be responsible for everything. The only real friend he has in the world is the Atheist, who does not believe he did anything. God cannot be charged with even the offence of existing.

Canon Marriott decides that God remains neutral “in a national or tribal sense,” but he is not neutral in the present conflict. He is on the side of the Allies. That may be encouraging, but it is also puzzling. For a God with a befitting sense of decency might have made his presence felt from the outset of the conflict, and so have prevented the loss of myriads of lives and the degradation of millions who did not die. He might have inspired his faithful servants, Baldwin and Chamberlain, not to play into the hands of Hitler as they did. And he might certainly have done better than to allow what looks like the turning point in Hitler's successful march to defeat by not leaving this to be brought about mainly by the Atheistic Russian Government. That would have left his followers in a more satisfied frame of mind. It would certainly have made them less concerned with the problem of how to keep Russia in the background when the war is over.

Monsignor Ronald A. Knox provides us with the following story to illustrate the thumbnail religious lesson he supplies to a weekly newspaper. In the reign of the Emperor Trajan a certain Christian Bishop figures among the more or less truth history of the Christian martyrs. He was drowned in the Black Sea with an anchor round his head. But a multitude of his followers determined to recover the corpse. When they got to the seashore the water went back three miles to help the Christians, and they found on the sea bottom the body of the saint lying in a stone coffin

with a marble shrine at the side of it. Monsignor Knox admits that these early tales have little authority. “Little” is a rather intriguing word. But the real significance of the story is missed. This is that such legends give us a very good idea of the mental calibre of the first Christians. They believed the story, and it enables the intelligent student to get a fair idea of the type of mentality that built up the Christian legend. But Mr. Knox did not mean his homily to give that lesson to his readers.

A letter representing the Established and the “Free” Churches (Free with other people's money and other people's children), asking that representatives of the above-named bodies be admitted to the Education Committee, that they should arrange and run “refresher courses for teachers,” that they should give talks to schoolchildren and that “diploma examinations” should be established for teachers. We do not think that the heads of the Churches elsewhere will be grateful for so openly exposing the aims of themselves and others. These people do not make the winning of the war a promise of much other than a return to about three or four hundred years ago.

Burton—we have never been there—seems to be a curious place, for here is the Vicar of St. Chads, Burton, and he tells the world, through the “Burton Observer,” that “20th century physics has shown that the idea of casual laws determining everything is unnecessary and illusory.” We suspect that Vicar Reeves has been taking his philosophy from Professor Joad; anyhow, it is wildly nonsensical. Very kindly we suggest that the vicar asks a competent scientific teacher whether the present attitude of scientific *thinkers*—we emphasise the word—is that any situation may arise without the conditions necessary for its appearance. We do not know how far a little learning is a dangerous thing, but we are certain that a mere grasping of scientific phrases without understanding is a sure method of perpetuating ignorance.

The Church first. Father Degen, also from Burton, warns Roman Catholics who are members of the Home Guard that attention to drills, etc., does not absolve them from the obligation of going to mass. The rule is “the Church first.”

Roman Catholic priests are much alarmed over so many of the Polish refugees in Scotland marrying Scottish girls. The objection is that the Poles are mostly Catholic, and the girls are mostly Protestant. A religion or a country that would bar marriages between men and women because of a difference of place of birth or of religion, has no right to be considered civilised. It is a reversion to the crudest forms of tribalism.

The “Sunday Times” is publishing a series of articles on “The Churches in Wartime,” and it has the usual feature that only one side is heard. There is probably no Press in the world that is so deliberately, so damnably organised in defence of religion as is the British Press, and of the British Press the London Press stands in the front of this contemptible policy. To judge by the letters printed one would believe that the whole of the country is at one with regard to belief in Christianity and its supreme, its indispensable value, if we “wish to improve our social ives.” The existence of some millions of non-believers in Christianity is carefully ignored.

But the cleverness here is rather overdone. To those who are accustomed to think beyond the newspapers the absence of any radical criticism of the Churches and their religion must strike one as suspicious. Hardly ever, by any chance, does a letter from the Freethought side find its way into the columns of these papers. Of course, the fools will take this as evidence that there is agreement on the value of the Churches and their religion, although the fools cannot be so numerous as to carry complete conviction everywhere among those who are not avowed Atheists or disbelievers in any established form of religion. The game is played rather too openly for intelligent folk not to see through it. But we must suppose that these faked discussions are not intended for intelligent folk.

## ‘ THE FREETHINKER ’

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

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. ACTON.—Obliged for book received. There has been much robust lying about Russia, but the glaring fact is that none of Christian origin has been apologised for.

R. LORD.—Thanks for anecdote. It reads like a version of well-known story of a well-known Scottish preacher and a boatman.

IAN YULE and S. GORDON HOGG. Received with thanks.

C. DORAN.—Obliged for cutting. We do not despair. Naturally the “Freethinker” works under great difficulties. The preacher need provide only familiar stupidities offered in familiar tones; the “Freethinker” provides new ideas and with a new tone and a fresh outlook. Still, if you will compare the general state of the public mind with what it was a generation or two ago, you will recognise that headway is made.

Rev. F. H. E. HARFITT.—Your letter is held over till next issue. Our space is nowadays very limited.

JUDEX.—Received. Shall appear as early as possible.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—T. Quinn (U.S.A.), 8s.; W. A. Thirwuelangan (India), 8s.

*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.*

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

Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

### SUGAR PLUMS

WE have received of late many letters enquiring why certain pamphlets are not being reprinted. The answer to that is in one word—Paper! The paper shortage grows more acute, and our first duty is to make the appearance of “The Freethinker” certain—or as certain as it can be made. That is the lifeline that keeps the Freethought movement in touch with the outside world. But we can assure all interested that we are doing what can be done, and hope to announce further publications soon. But even with other obstacles out of the way, it is not easy to get printing done owing to the shortage of labour and excessive cost.

We have not had the response we had hoped for in rebuilding our office collection of old Freethought publications that was destroyed last May. What we specially want is Freethought papers and pamphlets and books published from the beginning of the 19th century until about 1860. If earlier than the date named, so much the better. We are ready to purchase at reasonable prices. Our original idea was to preserve the valuable collection we had got together, after many years’ “hunting,” and present the whole to the N.S.S. on our death. That still remains our purpose. We desire to see established a real Freethought library—not a collection of liberal writings only.

We are glad to see the “Church Times” asking why the Board of Education does not release the confidential document, “Education After the War,” to the general public. We have said over and over again that the Churches would never have launched their impudent campaign for control of the schools without getting certain promises from members of the Government. In the case of war plans, for the moment, an adequate reason for silence is, “We must not give information to the enemy,” although even that is often over-done. But in the case of plans for education in general these confidential documents are out of place. If we must have a small army of dictators in

power, there is no reason whatever why the public should not know what is going on between the Churches and the Board of Education with regard to our schools. The latest plan for the Board of Education to educate parents and teachers in religion is almost infamous. And in the House of Commons no one appears to have the courage definitely to challenge the Government on the subject.

Needless to add, the Board of Education is plainly told by the “Church Times” that what we want (the “we” being Anglo-Catholics) is a “bold policy,” the meaning of which is to hand over the schools to the Churches so that “the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ, true God and true Man” can be forced on to all children whether they or their parents like it or not. “Religious instruction of a colourless and insipid variety” has proved nothing more clearly “than its incapacity to mould and control human character.” So let us have the real brand and nothing but the real brand established for ever in control of all education. What a delightful prospect after the war!

That writer of amiable futilities, Lord Elton, rebukes, in his own superior manner, Richard Aldington, for having said after the last great war that “war is the triumph of stupidity over intelligence.” But if there is one thing clear about war it is that. Add cunning to stupidity and the proposition becomes indisputable. Cunning and stupidity will completely cover the field. “Cunning” will cover the groups in any country that looks to war to promote their own interests. No one but fools or fanatics will deny that this factor has played a part in producing war, and the charge of stupidity recoils on the people. The other group is made up of that nebulous quantity which comes under the heading of “country.” A. quarrels with B. because A. believes that its interests will be promoted. A. wins the war and counts its action justified. But B. longs for revenge or the restoration of its previous status. So that A. has to pay for its conquest by maintaining larger armed forces and the perpetuation of a tradition of hatred. The stupidity of this policy is always obvious.

Suppose the nations of Europe after the last war had been sufficiently intelligent to recognise that the real interests of a people other things equal, are never promoted by war; that what is gained by war is heavily paid for; and that what is agreed upon after a war, so long as the settlement is reasonable, could have been achieved without war. In that case would the present war have happened? But we continued—all of us—to think of each nation as more or less of an isolated item. The world continued to regard itself as split up into antagonistic groups, each one able to profit at the expense of the other; with the existing result. The world went along in terms of antagonism instead of in terms of peace and co-operation. And the inevitable result was war.

What we have said is admitted in principle by the alleged war aims of the Allies. We have proclaimed that we are fighting the war with the desire to see that “never again” shall war be regarded as a weapon of international policy. That a world alliance shall exist strong enough to prevent war to be pursued as an instrument of national aggrandisement. That granted, we shall have stupidity outruled by intelligence. We are confessing that peace and peace only is intelligent and that the settlement of national differences in terms of international law shall be instituted. We are actually declaring that war is always the triumph of stupidity over intelligence, for whether war results from the stupidity of one group or several groups makes no difference. The truth announced by Richard Aldington is, we are afraid, above the intelligence of Lord Elton.

Someone writes to the “Sunday Graphic” explaining that 50 per cent. of those who stay away from Church do so because they shirk putting Christianity before their convenience. That is sheer nonsense. There is no religion in the world that will better accommodate itself to anybody’s convenience than Christianity. If a man is given to lying he can invent experiences describing how people have reacted to Christianity in a way that suits the average believer. If he is intolerant, he can cloak his

intolerance as devotion to God. If he is selfish, he can glorify his concern about himself by claiming that he is saving his soul, and one might follow this with a dozen more illustrations.

This reminds us of a story told by Fielding Hall in that beautiful book of his "The Soul of a People." It deals with the Burmese, and with the British invasion of Burma. The Burmese are mainly Buddhists, and some of the soldiers went to a Buddhist priest and put a problem to him. "You have told us," they said, "that no man may take life without suffering the consequences in a lowering of his spiritual nature. But we are ordered to fight the British in defence of our country. What are we to do? If we go to war and kill we suffer personal ill. If we do not fight we are lacking in duty to our country. What are we to do?"

Fielding Hall was a man who had held an official post in Burma and knew and loved the people. He says that if that question had been put to a Christian priest who had just been felling his followers that he who lives by sword shall perish by the sword, and that he must meet attack with non-resistance, the Christian would simply have turned to another part of the Bible and read a text about God "being a mighty man of war," etc., and have assured the soldier that he would find a full reward in heaven.

The Buddhist priest knew of no such subterfuge. He replied: "My son, we did not make the moral law, and we cannot alter it. The natural law of morals is that when a man takes life he must pay a price in the shape of a deterioration of character. Nothing can avert the consequences of one action. We cannot invent a moral law to suit the occasion. You have to choose between duty to your country and your own spiritual welfare. It is for you to choose. We cannot alter the moral law." We are quoting from memory. Our books are scattered, and the "Soul of a People" is not to hand. But readers may rely upon the substantial accuracy of the quotation. But Buddha was an Atheist. The Christian priest was—a Christian priest.

Fame is often expressed in curious ways. For ourselves we have done what we could to call the attention of people to the centenary of one of the greatest of Englishmen—Thomas Paine. We did manage to get some notice in the Press—and that is not easy in England—and we issued a very large edition of Paine's Church-shaker, "The Age of Reason," at the lowest price that a complete edition had ever been published at. And now we find this quotation from Paine, duly signed, in one of the daily papers:—

"We fight not to enslave, but to set a country free, and to make room upon the earth for honest men to live in."

The quotation is duly signed "Thomas Paine," and was being used to advertise "Peck's Meat and Fish Pastes." Well, well! Let's hope the fish pastes are as good as the quotation.

## A SLUMP IN SOULS

### A True Story

It happened long ago in the town of Gympie, Queensland, Australia. I was a secularist lecturer at the time, and was frequently subjected to a drastic criticism of a doughty champion of orthodoxy in the person of a somewhat belligerent Baptist minister.

This gentleman, I remember, had a somewhat supercilious habit of referring to myself as the "little man." As an ardent admirer of the works of Providence, he was evidently of opinion that in my case Deity had not maintained His usual high standard of perfection. Naturally, I did not like to be perpetually reminded of my physical proportions; and on one occasion I got home on him in what was perhaps a needlessly brutal retort.

"My clerical opponent," I said, "with the courtesy which characterises the cloth, persists in referring to my unfortunate self as the 'little man.' Well, I plead guilty. Nature is often parsimonious, and she has evidently been as niggardly to myself in the matter of anatomy as she has been to my unfortunate opponent in the matter of brains."

Eventually a public debate was arranged between this gentleman and myself. I forget the exact

subject, but, if I mistake not, it turned principally on whether it was possible for a person to carry out in actual life the principles of Christianity. My opponent held that it was. I held that it was not.

After the first night's debate, a friend with whom I was staying made a somewhat remarkable suggestion.

"Why don't you give him the test?" he cried.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "the parson professes to be a sincere Christian—a genuine Christian. Why not give him the Christian test?"

"What's that?" I asked.

"You know," was the reply, "that the Founder of the Christian religion has Himself set forth the test of a Christian in the Gospel of Saint Mark. Immediately before the Ascension, He said:—

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In My name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink a deadly thing it shall not hurt them. They shall lay their hands upon the sick and they shall recover."

"Now," said my friend, "why not challenge your opponent to drink a bottle of poison? If he refuses to drink—well, he has no right to claim to be a true Christian, according to the Christian test."

I at once fell in with the suggestion, and my friend—who was something of a chemist—soon brought a small bottle of some deadly thing labelled "Poison."

But when I saw the actual article, my courage failed me. "I cannot do it," I said, "my opponent is a very fanatical man and may drink it and die."

Accordingly, to avoid any unnecessary risk, my friend removed the poison and brought me the bottle filled with a coloured—but perfectly harmless—liquid.

"That will suit you," he cried.

"Worse than ever," I answered, "Before, the trouble was that he might drink it and die, now the trouble is that he may drink it and not die."

Still, I decided to use the harmless liquid, and when I mounted the platform next night I carried in my pocket a fairly large-sized bottle aggressively marked "Poison."

The debate went on more or less uneventfully until the conclusion of my last speech. I then proceeded to read with great solemnity the words of Saint Mark's Gospel already quoted, and concluded in something like the following words: "Ladies and Gentlemen, here we have the test of the true Christian from the lips of the Founder of Christianity Himself. I am resolved to put my opponent to the test. I cannot invite this great audience to accompany me to the public hospital in order that my opponent, by putting his hands upon the sick, may cause them to recover. Nor have I in my possession to-night a live snake. But I have (here I pulled the bottle from my pocket and held it up to the audience) a deadly thing. And I invite my opponent to demonstrate that he is a true Christian, according to the Christian test, by drinking the contents of this bottle with impunity. I may add that if he drinks it and is not dead in less than five minutes, I will immediately give up my scepticism and join a church." I then—with a gracious smile—held out the bottle to my opponent and invited him to drink.

But he respectfully declined, whereupon I turned to the audience and said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, he refuses to drink, which proves that though he may be a very sensible man, he is not, any more than I am, a true Christian, according to the Christian test."

Of course, my Rationalist supporters cheered jubilantly—which was more natural than rationalistic.

I thought the incident had ended, but I was mistaken. On the following night I was amazed to find my opponent, at the conclusion of his last speech, pulling out of his pocket a huge document and saying: "My friend gave me a test last night. I will give him a test to-night. Will he sign his name to this document?"

Here he flourished a large sheet in the air, while his supporters, who were evidently in the secret, cheered again and again.

It was, as I soon found, a very ingenious document. My opponent had evidently tried to so word it that no self-respecting Rationalist would sign it—in order that he would be able to say that, if he had declined my test, I had declined his. I cannot at this distant date recall the exact words, but they were to the following effect:—

I, Wallace Nelson, do not believe in, and do not desire, a life beyond the grave, I am, therefore, prepared to sell my soul for the sum of two shillings and sixpence.

"Will my antagonist sign this document?" cried my opponent. I was in for a fight and would have signed anything.

"I will sign with pleasure," I cried, and my supporters cheered lustily. My opponent handed me the document, which I immediately signed and flung upon the table.

Then, with sarcastic ceremoniousness, my antagonist proffered me the half-crown—expecting the anti-climax.

I frankly confess that I had overlooked the indignity of receiving half-a-crown as the market value of my soul. I hesitated. But only for a moment. I saw a way out.

Snatching the coin from my opponent's fingers and holding it up to the crowded theatre I exclaimed: "This half-a-crown, with the rest of the proceeds of this debate, shall go to the public hospital, and if my friend has a thousand such documents requiring my signature, I am prepared to sign every one of them for the same noble cause."

The results were startling. My supporters cheered wildly, while from various parts of the theatre came offers to sign at greatly reduced rates. "I'll sign for a bob," cried many voices, and I regret to say that one excited Rationalist went so far as to publicly avow his readiness to sell his immortal soul at the ridiculously low price of sixpence.

It was a veritable slump in souls.

WALLACE NELSON.

## A CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

WHAT is meant by "A Christian Education"? By itself it is as uninformative as "a square deal" or "a good meal." Like them, it means something, but something different to everybody. All Christians would agree to a Christian education in the schools, but how many would agree with it? That is all to the good for the clergy. They can get a united front from their congregations for a Christian education for the children, but once reveal the syllabus and that unity would end in chaos and sectarian spitefulness.

Between the clergy and the layman a fundamental difference exists as to the meaning and objects of a Christian Education.

To the layman it means chiefly an inculcation of the moral teachings of Jesus and their practice as a guarantee for decent behaviour and good citizenship. Being unaware that morality develops quite naturally from group existence, he is thrown back to the Christian method of counting the moral hits and ignoring the misses in a muddled effort

to understand why social actions predominate over unsocial acts in human society. Therefore, to him religion in schools is necessary for the moral welfare of the scholars.

To the clergy, however, the meaning and object of a Christian Education is something quite different. A morally sound citizen with no religious beliefs is a dead loss to the Churches, and if a Christian Education in the schools only produced morally sound citizens infused with the determination to keep their characters clean, with no further need for churches after leaving school, it is safe to predict that the clergy would prefer a purely secular syllabus which would at least leave them with a line of attack upon the children through the Sunday schools.

Remember, in the present agitation for religious control in the schools, the clergy have found no fault with the moral character of schoolchildren. Their concern is solely with religion, and to them the meaning and object of a Christian education is first and always the creating of servile subjects of the Churches, and if the schools cannot do that, the clergy's interest in the function of schools drops very considerably. It is for that reason that the clergy are indifferent as to the efficiency of teachers on the secular subjects; their one anxiety is that the teachers shall be fully qualified to teach religion.

And the religion to be taught in the schools will include a great deal more than the moral platitudes of our Lord. It will be the Bible, and all of it, as the undoubted word of God, questioned only by vagabonds. There will be creeds and catechisms to be memorised, the Prayer Book to be digested, the lives of saints, death of sinners, and holy days to be remembered, hell fire will be rekindled, sins will be stressed to accommodate atonement, while hymns and psalms will add to the gaiety of school life. Further, the influence of religion will not be confined to scripture lessons—that is made quite plain by the clerical plea for a religious atmosphere throughout the school.

We believe that not many Christians would knowingly surrender the schools to such a retrogressive scheming as is involved in the present clerical agitation. The serious difference between the layman's conception and what the clergy hope to achieve is a propagandist point of great importance, and Freethinkers at least should see that every one of their Christian acquaintances is made aware of this two-sided aspect of "A Christian Education."

R. H. ROSETTI.

## CONCERNING "CITIZEN KANE"

WHEN a completely new art medium reaches something like maturity within a generation or so—a medium, moreover, which is calculated to appeal to an enormous public—the danger of easy sentimentality *without artistic ability of conscience* is always present. One example of this is the banality of much work written for broadcasting; another instance is the cinema. The cinema, indeed, as Freethinkers will realise, is the outstanding example in our time of the way in which a vital artistic medium has been distorted and prostituted away from its best possibilities. When we see the occasional good film which somehow gets through the long and tortuous processes apparently deemed necessary by the film companies, and then go on to view the average film, we see how hopelessly inadequate the financial and artistic machinery of the film studio must be. Silly films, inane films, stupid films—these seem to come in their thousands. But sane films, interesting films, intelligent films—we are lucky if we get one a year. And that is why it seems to me advisable, in this year of disgrace, to give due praise to Mr. Orson Welles and the R.K.O. Radio Picture Company for "Citizen Kane." It is the most intelligent film which has come from Hollywood for many a long year—perhaps since Hollywood first began. The films of Chaplin and of Walt Disney are intelligent, of course, but they are intelligent in a different way. It is extraordinarily difficult for me to convey precisely what I found in "Citizen Kane" that, as far as I am concerned, was absent even from "The Circus" or from the early Silly Symphonies, though those had that authentic touch of magic which only the work of genius can produce.

I am writing this immediately after having seen "Citizen Kane," and I think it would be good if I could work out here and now in what I think its peculiar attractions rest,

because I feel that it has done for me very much what those earlier films did, and with added force, because it seems to me as a writer that it presents writers with a very real challenge. If the films can do this kind of thing with any sort of regularity, the writing of novels and imaginative fiction may decline. "Citizen Kane," in fact, is precisely what a first-rate novelist would do had he the technical background to produce a film.

I will not tire the reader by retelling the plot of the film at any length, for it has been written almost *ad nauseam* by the professional critics of the cinema, among whom I am definitely not to be numbered. But I must give a brief résumé, so that any reader who happens to have missed the popular criticisms and appreciations of the film may be enabled to understand what follows. The film opens with the death of the great Mr. Kane and records the fact that his last spoken word was "Rosebud." A reporter, sensing a mysterious story in this word, sets out to discover its meaning. We see the news-reel account of Kane's life, and then, as the reporter interviews various people who have been associated with the dead man, we get views of him from various angles. Gradually we piece together the way in which the man's life evolved, how he changed from a small boy living in a small hut in the wilds, to a millionaire in a huge and fabulous castle in Florida, but still the meaning of "Rosebud" eludes us. It is only in the very last shot of the film that this is explained, and I will not spoil the prospective cinema-goer's delight in the delicious "twist" at the end by revealing the secret here. The detective story writer is justifiably annoyed if the critic gives away the secret heart of his tale, and Mr. Welles would be equally justified in annoyance if the secret of his film was betrayed to those who have not seen it. It must suffice if I say that it is the sort of "twist" which a greatly superior O. Henry might have used to give a perfect rounding-off to the end of a tale.

The plot as I have thus outlined it must seem bald enough, but there is behind the telling a wealth of technical resource such as few experienced film producers can command. The camera work is brilliant, and the sound had that crisp hardness which so few directors seem able to command, notably in the huge rooms of the Florida castle, where the conversations have to be shouted across the intervening distances. Whereas the average film would present alternate close-ups of the characters, with no sufficient distinction between their voices, Mr. Welles showed Kane in the misty distance bellowing at his wife. His voice echoed in the lofty caverns of the roof, and there was thus presented a feeling of space which no orthodox film technique could possibly imitate.

Indeed, Mr. Orson Welles is a very remarkable person, for (and here, perhaps is the real secret of his magic) he is part author, producer and principal player of his film. In these days when most films are written and produced by a seemingly endless committee of "experts," this may account for the peculiar attractiveness of the film, because (we must not forget) Chaplin and René Clair also write and direct their own pictures.

Mr. Welles, although he is very young, being born in 1915, has had a wide experience of the world of acting. He was for a short time a member of the Gate Company in Dublin (hence, perhaps, his naturalistic style), and his first acting job in the U.S.A. was in radio in a "March of Time" feature. He acted with Kathleen Cornell on the stage, and then he formed the Mercury Players, who accompany him so well in "Citizen Kane." Some readers will remember the scare that was aroused in the United States a few years ago over a too realistic broadcast version of Mr. H. G. Wells's "War of the Worlds," describing a supposed Martian invasion of the earth. That was an early effort of the Mercury Players, who have since made such a name for themselves, both on radio and in the theatre.

There is only one thing, in fact, of which I am desperately afraid. I do not know how Mr. Welles managed to get "Citizen Kane" through the tangled morass which is studio policy of most film companies, but I fear that if this film does not get adequate support among cinema-goers the whole world over, we shall get no more masterpieces of its type. I am afraid, in other words, that Mr. Orson Welles will be "groomed." The Hollywood magnates, we may be sure, will be severely tempted to apply such a process to

him. He is tall, dark and handsome, he has a magnificent voice and, if he is allowed to have his own way, he may become one of the most important figures in the whole history of the cinema. But will he be allowed to have his own way? Well that, dear reader, depends on you and me. I think that in writing this I am doing my little bit to ensure that a great genius shall not be lost, and if you will make a special point of seeing the film whenever it is available for you, then you too will have assisted Mr. Welles in maintaining his own independence in a world where independence is rare.

Hollywood has taken many geniuses to its heart and remoulded them, then expressing surprise that their genius has unaccountably disappeared in the process. If you doubt this, ask yourself what Fritz Lang has done since he went to Hollywood. Except for "Fury" (where he had the outstanding acting of Spencer Tracy to assist him), nothing which is memorable. And the typically French genius of René Clair was similarly all but extinguished when he was presented with the best technical equipment but lost the freedom of his own studio.

There is one way in which Mr. Orson Welles may succeed in maintaining his own freedom to work as he likes, whereas these French and German masters have lost theirs. He does not come to Hollywood as a stranger to a strange land. He is an American, and may thus be able to stand up to American methods.

This is not a formal criticism of "Citizen Kane"; it is more in the nature of a critical appreciation in which an intelligent (I hope) student of the cinema has tried to sum up his own reactions to one of the most interesting films of recent years. I hope that what I have said will make the many thousands of filmgoers in this country who pick and choose their films with some care to decide that this, above all, is a picture which they must not miss. "It's terrific!" said the posters outside the London theatre where the film was shown, and for once the posters err on the side of under-statement. It is impossible in words to say precisely what the film does for you, but it is something which only the greatest of productions can do.

The films have produced few authentic geniuses. The whole world of the cinema seems destined to be the happy hunting ground of the charlatan and the quack. Now that we have seen what can be done with the film medium at its best, we should never again be content with the slick, pleasant, incredibly 15th-rate, which has seemed to be the staple fare of most of our cinemas for a long time past. Mr. Orson Welles and the Mercury Players have shown what can be done.

All that we can do is to cry "Encore!" and hope that it will not be too long before this dose of magnificent sanity and intelligence is repeated.

S. H.

## ESOTERIC PRIESTCRAFT FOR YOUNG PRIESTS

(Continued from page 529)

EXPERIENCE has proved that the introduction of goddess worship was one of the most profitable moves ever made by our firm. Of course, it was in direct opposition to both Old Testament and New Testament, but when profit is concerned that sort of little inconsistency does not matter much.

The original Christianity was, for the individual, chiefly a matter of arranging for his or her salvation from hell and safe passage to heaven. The problem as originally put was an overwhelming one; nothing else mattered, and a lot of frightened people did make practically a whole time job of it. But the rest of the world carried on as usual. With the majority of people it was nearly a whole time job to earn their living, and even if converted to Christianity they had to attend to salvation more or less in spare time; and with such average people day-to-day worries were as important as the business of salvation in the hereafter. What they wanted was a religion that would be of some help in the here and now. In other words, what this class want from the supernatural powers is help and favours in regard to their daily lives. Paganism met this want by supplying any number of gods, goddesses and godlings to pray for help. Of course, "answers" to prayers are merely coincidence of petition and result. But it was a "reason-

able" proposition that the gods could, if they wished, do something for a petitioner, and anyway there was nothing lost by trying one's luck. If there was no result, perhaps the prayer was improper, or perhaps the god in its wisdom knew that the asked-for thing would not really be of benefit; there are lots of "reasons" that can be given for unanswered prayer. But if there is a wished-for result, although there may be many mundane explanations, the petitioner only allows for the flattering one that the god has attended to him. A feature of pagan temples was the "votive tablets" put up by people whose prayers had been answered. A man was going on a journey. He prayed to his favourite god for a safe journey. If he did arrive safely he gave the god credit for it, and put up a votive tablet. Or he might erect an altar to the god or goddess who had done the trick. (Such altars, erected by Roman soldiers, have been found in Britain.) Naturally, only hits were recorded. Misses dropped into oblivion. The votive tablets in a temple afforded no data for reckoning up the efficiency of the gods as answerers of prayer. To the devotee the misses were out of sight, out of mind. He only saw the record of hits and got an exaggerated opinion of the efficiency of prayer and went on trying his luck. The pagans probably got more answers than the Christians, for a simple reason. If the pagan's first deity did not answer he could try a second and third—and thirteenth; thus the chance of coincidence (i.e. a successful prayer) rose arithmetically.

The speciality of the pagan gods was aiding their devotees, i.e. answering their petitions. But the speciality of Christianity was salvation in the hereafter. True, the personages of the Trinity were supposed to answer prayer, but this was only a by-issue to "salvation." Nor did the Trinity have a particularly strong appeal in the prayer sphere. The senior member was the maker and user of a torture department and hence not perfectly sound as a philanthropist. The Holy Spirit had a rather limited sphere as an answerer to prayer. He was not asked for much except for his holy *presence* occasionally. We do not remember that he is ever credited with performing miracles. The Son, however, was prayed to. He had said that whatever was asked in his name should be granted—a rather reckless statement because it could not be kept up to 100 per cent. efficiency. Prayers were nominally to the Father, and he was asked to grant petitions "for his Son's sake," though, of course, people began to ask the Son for favours direct, notwithstanding that his instruction had been that when people prayed they had to pray to "Our Father." It is very revealing of people's actual opinion of the Father that they should conclude their prayers to him with the significant "for Thy Son's sake." Practically, Christians depended on the Son. In other words, they had, practically, only one deity to pray to. And this arithmetical inferiority had further discount. To get in touch with a pagan god was very simple. If a man was a member of the cult he had only to keep up with his subscription and, in case of asking a favour, to promise a further subscription; an easily understood and easily utilised system. But the Christians had a moral code to live up to, an irksome affair, and if he did not behave according to the code, his position as a petitioner was jeopardised. He would have to eat humble pie before he could pray, and his prayers must be only such as a "holy" deity could attend to, whereas the pagan could, without incongruity, put up a much larger selection of petitions.

But the Christian Trinity had a handicap still more important. Women, of course, are the chief prayer addicts. They have many petitions which are strictly feminine. Pagan women could approach their goddesses on matters which they would not dream of mentioning to a god—even to a perfect gentleman of a god. Christian women—living, remember, with pagan women as neighbours, friends and acquaintances, with a Trinity that had no female in it—felt here a decided blank. Our smart predecessors realised this and filled the blank with the Virgin Mary. Practically, though not with definite legality, they made the Christian Trinity into a Catholic Foursome, and could henceforth meet the pagan firms on more or less level terms.

The original Trinity was not very useful even with men, except the effeminate ones. After the first enthusiasm for the pathetic Jesus had passed, it came to be seen that he did not appeal to the majority of men. It was difficult to get

virile, masculine men to be enthusiastic about the meek and mild Jesus. He was too effeminate, too soft, too goody-goody, and an altogether impossible exemplar to follow literally. It would have helped matters if we could have kept Satan as the old Jehovah, the Lord of Lords, the Man of War. But we were too much committed to the cult of Jesus, the Prince of Peace at any Price, the meek and mild one, the *Lamb*. The incongruity was too great. The firm had, somehow, to side-track the *Lamb*, for it was evident that a Divine Man who was a Lamb had not a sufficiently wide appeal.

C. R. BOYD FREEMAN.

(To be concluded)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### "HALF-WAY HOUSE"

SIR,—I am sorry I have "missed the spirit" of Mr. J. R. Sturge-Whiting's article, "Half-Way House." When people discuss from different sets of premises this is almost inevitable. Mr. Sturge-Whiting asks what I mean by God. I think he knows; but as he views God, or the possibility of God, from a different basis, we are bound to stick on the question.

I can only attempt to deal with God from the history and nature of Gods, and their believers. Belief in God necessitates a "Personal Being" or "Living Spirit," which can interfere with the natural or normal order of things for the benefit (or otherwise) of the believer. As I see it, that is the only practical or historical idea of God, and still the most widely held by practising believers.

Any development from that form of belief (including the "Some sort of Force or Power" idea) is an expression of partial unbelief. Such unbelief is inevitably a step towards Atheism and away from the God idea. Shifting God from Heaven to put him among the flowers and trees, even to call him "Life in Nature," won't help a bit.

Mr. Sturge-Whiting's apparent desire to leave room for the word, God, by fitting it to some new mode of thought, suggests a too great respect for a word at the expense of the new mode of thought. The antithesis of God—Atheism—does not prevent fruitful and logical speculation, but by clearing away an obsolete idea, *and its name*, it encourages and helps that speculation.

It might be that I cannot see the need for the word God, because (thanks to my parents) I was never taught in my tender years to believe in God as a necessity. Perhaps—I say it respectfully—Mr. Sturge-Whiting was so taught, and he has not yet discarded his respect and reverence for the word. If only we could settle the God problem on its historic meaning, Mr. Sturge-Whiting, the word Atheist would no longer trouble.

May I add, Mr. Editor, that Mr. Sturge-Whiting's general outlook (I read his articles with interest) stamps him as a Freethinker of the best type in my estimation; he is daring, forthright, original, and damnably accurate on questions of social convention. Atheism deserves his type more than Godism.—Yours, etc.,

F. J. CORINA.

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