

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and the War

AFTER the declaration of war against Japan by the U.S.A. President Roosevelt ordered a period of national prayer. Great Britain followed suit. Other countries fell into line, and presently nearly all those engaged in fighting the Axis countries joined in the game. There was nothing new in the move. Ever since we found ourselves at war with Germany we have had many appointed days of prayer—nearly all of them followed by new troubles, and sometimes by catastrophes. All those who joined in these national pantomimes of appeals to God, and probably most of those who were instrumental in arranging them, never expected much. God is still on the side of the big battalions. At any rate, the appeals for more guns, more aeroplanes, more ships, etc., etc., have increased in both urgency and number. Nor is there any evidence that things would not have happened as they have happened even if all the Churches and Chapels had been closed from the date of the opening of the war with the advertisement that they would not be reopened until peace once more ruled the world.

If one were to catalogue the actual happenings since the prayer orgies commenced the evidence would be rather against the advocates of prayer. It was Japan that brought the United States into the war, and the United States has lost, since the praying commenced, both ships, territory and the lives of many soldiers, sailors and airmen. That the tables will be turned in the end we haven't the slightest doubt. But the greatest promise, and the greatest results have come, not from and to the praying section of the Allies, but from Russia, which offers no prayers, and even holds that before we can have a real civilisation we must clear men's minds from superstition. In fact, the situation might be stated as a kind of challenge to the Christian world. For the Russian Government planned without God, armed without God, fought without God, and the world has stood amazed at the courage of the Russian soldiers, at the skill and determination of the Russian leaders, at their readiness in "sacrifice" (an ugly word, but it must serve), and in the shattering blows that the Germans have received. I haven't the slightest doubt but that

candid historians, whatever they may think of the Russian Government, will mark the advance of "godless" Russia as the turning point of the war.

In this war the help of God and the power of prayer has made but a poor show. It seems a terrible waste of energy and enthusiasm to keep on organising prayer orgies to get what can be got only by the output of the workshop and the shipyard, the courage and determination of men and women. If there is a supreme power than can help, he, or it, should help without universal prayers. If we mortals must end the war, as we have in one way or another to shoulder the blame for, and the consequences of, the war, let us get credit for what good we are doing. If there is a God who can end the war, there is a God who could have prevented the war happening. Chamberlain was thrown out because what he did played into German hands. Baldwin is dead, though he yet liveth, because of the way in which his government encouraged Japan to invade Manchuria and as a result we turned a blind eye to Spain and so helped the rise of Nazi Germany. Both might plead that they did the best they could, or they acted as their judgment led them. But in effect the nation refuses now to accept the excuse as adequate. Men who accept office must take the consequences of their misjudgment or their blunders. Gods also have their responsibilities.

Justice, Human and Divine

Is there any reason why men should act in a different way with regard to their gods? After all, the most foolish of men will only carry a rabbit's foot for luck, or a mascot to guard them from danger, or avoid a black cat, so long as they believe in the occult influence of these things. The Christian preacher says to the carrier of a rabbit's foot, the Protestant says to the Roman Catholic who is wearing a sacred cord blessed by the Pope (I have one of these within easy reach while I am writing), give us proof that these things do what you say they do and we will act with you. What a pity it is that the religious believer can be so reasonable when he is dealing with the superstitions of other people, but can be so brilliantly absurd with regard to his own stupidities!

The Christian replies that God will bring the war to an end when man has learned his lesson and has resolved to tread a better path. Till then "as a man sows so shall he reap." That is a common defence and a complete absurdity. Notice that it is put in the plural when we are concerned with the singular. Justice, human justice, which by experience is more reliable and more equitable than "divine justice," aims at the singular. Religious apologists for God talk about man when they should think about men. When a murder or a robbery is committed the police do not arrest "man," they arrest men—if more than one is concerned in the offence. Suppose then that God brings this war to an end next week. That should be a simple job for omnipotence, although we must bear in mind that God's capacity for doing everything implies the possibility of his doing nothing, and that involves acts of stupidity as well as manifestations of wisdom. But if he does end the war who will learn

the lesson of the conflict? Not the dead; they are past learning. Not the worse than dead—those who are so mangled that they are mere shadows of men. Not the statesmen who, by their stupidities, their plots, their considerations of personal advancement or selfish gratification, did so much to bring about the war. Not those vested interests that are lying dormant until the guns cease to roar. Not the clergy who will say anything and defend anything that makes for their own security. And even with the people we must count on the difference that comes from being faced with a deadly danger, and the calmer but more important resolution that arises from a clear conception of the possibilities of a socially better life.

But suppose that the peoples of the world do learn the right lesson of this and other wars, and that the civilized world join hands in creating desirable human societies, will that justify God? Not in the least. It does not remove the savagery that has been, the demoralisation of character that war brings in its trail. The people who have given least to the war, those who have, materially, gained most from the war, will live to reap further benefits from the peace they have done little to secure. That much is indisputable.

There are other aspects. Parents will look round homes that the war has made childless, husbands will have lost their wives and wives their husbands; children will look round in vain for their parents. Friends will seek their friends in vain, crippled bodies will be met on every side, good may come out of war, but so will evil. We hear much of the need for man to set himself right with God, and day after day B.B.C. preachers and semi-preachers moan and groan and grovel and whine about human helplessness and the need for getting right with God. But all the time the real need is for God to get right with man. If God can use war to bring man to repentance and so create a world of peace, why could he not have so made man that he would have taken the right path from the start instead of pursuing the wrong one? There is nothing gained in reaching an end after much folly and blundering and the following of false leads if one can tread the right road at the start. If man had the alleged power of God he would not let people find out things for themselves, he would show them the right path at once. Man has had to blunder to learn, but God appears to plan so that man must learn to blunder in order to avoid the right path.

There is, says the godite, a plan in the universe which steadily makes for a heaven on earth. Let us grant that it is so. What would have been lost if the divine plan had started where it is supposed to end, if man from the start had been endowed from the beginning to do only the right thing? Is there any man who would work for years to reach a goal that he could have gained by a mere movement? If there is one thing more supremely foolish than a Christian apologising for his God, it is the Christian himself calling his deity all powerful and all wise.

'Ware the Churches

I return to Russia, not because of its social theory or political doctrines, but because up to date it is the one country that has left God out and has yet done the most to make the victory of the Allies certain. It is now discovered that there are millions of Christians in Russia. Of course there are. They were there all the time that our Churches were telling us they dare not profess their religion. And equally, of course, these Christians have played their part in the war. They have done so, not because they were Christians but

because they were men and women who loved their land. But Russia has had no days of national prayer. There has been no self-degrading protestations of weakness and unworthiness, there has been none of the grovelling and whining with which Christians approach their god. With none of the stupid humiliation, or professions of weakness and unworthiness, the Russians stood boldly, relying upon their own strength and determination. They threw back in confusion the greatest army that has ever existed, and they have filled Christian communities with a more certain hope of ultimate victory.

How will the leaders of Christian communities face the facts? For a time the more astute ones will toe the line and mildly welcome the aid of "godless Russia." But many have remained silent, and it may be counted that when the war is over these will become vocal, and others will return to their old game. There will be attempts to prevent a really friendly and co-operative effort against Britain and Russia meeting on terms of equality in an attempt to build up a new world. The significance of a country with the largest population in Europe, the government of which treats the belief in God as an idle superstition, will be more than the Churches of Europe can stand. The Churches will not be content to learn from Russia as Russia has learned from the world. Yet it is upon the readiness to learn from one another, and to base the organisation of human groups upon common human needs that the future of civilisation depends.

Consider once more the position and the attitude of the Roman Church, the most powerful and the most unscrupulous of all the Christian Churches. Some time ago Mr. Eden, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, made public the news that the alliance between Britain and Russia that began with this war would continue during the peace. That was really the best news the war had brought. Russia with a territory that covers a sixth of the earth's surface, the British Commonwealth with its tentacles stretching over the larger part of the globe. Germany defeated and disarmed! That picture does really hold out hopes for humanity and an enduring peace.

The Protestant papers for the most part received the news coldly. The Catholic Press was, and is, openly against any such permanent alliance. The Papacy, which pets Franco, the ally of Germany, the Church that has been silent over the villainies of Mussolini, and which gave its sanction to the murder of Abyssinians and Spaniards, simply cannot rejoice, or sanction a permanent alliance between Russia and "Christian" countries. Here is a recent statement from one of the leading Catholic papers in this country. The "Catholic Herald" for January 2 says:—

"We read with the profoundest misgivings the inspired commentaries on Mr. Eden's secret visit to Moscow. . . . We deplore the Government's spontaneous invitation to the present regime in Russia to be an equal and permanent partner in shaping the new world of civilisation and justice. It contradicts the very essence of our moral cause."

That this represents not merely the attitude of the Roman Church, but the attitude of the majority of our own Christian leaders, can hardly be questioned. Their religion does not prevent them making professions of friendship with "godless Russia" for the purpose of killing Germans; it is a permanent friendship with a "godless" country to which objection is taken. As in the following:—

"Let us not be misunderstood. Military co-operation with the Soviet we accept and welcome.

. . . We deplore the Government's spontaneous invitation to the present regime in Russia to be an equal and permanent partner in shaping the new world of civilisation and justice."

There speaks the authentic voice of the oldest and most powerful Christian Church in the world. And when the war is over we may expect that the sinister interests in this country, for the moment silent, will become vocal and active to wreck the peace. One is reminded of Kingdon Clifford's indictment of the Christian Church as having destroyed two civilisations and coming very near wrecking a third.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SCOTTISH SCHOOLS IN CATHOLIC CENTURIES

THE part performed by the monastic communities in the preservation of ancient manuscripts and the preparation of new ones has been enormously over-rated. Even now, writers of respectable standing in theological circles give currency to this misconception. A few years since, Dr. Patrick McGlynn, during an address at Edinburgh, asserted that: "To the monasteries we owe the preservation of many of the greatest classics of Greece and Rome. Scholarship was regarded as a sacred trust. . . . The monasteries of the Benedictines, especially, performed very valuable work by allotting certain times each day to be devoted to labour each day in the Scriptorium."

As a criticism of this pronouncement, the learned Dr. G. G. Coulton, in his instructive "Scottish Abbeys and Social Life" (Cambridge University Press, 1933; 12s. 6d.), retorts that so far no acknowledged authority on monastic history has furnished evidence of the truth of the widespread belief that the monks devoted allotted hours daily to their Scriptorium. "That the monasteries did preserve most precious classical manuscripts is perfectly true," continues Coulton, "but we must not forget those that they lost or destroyed. At Robbio in the Apennines in the thirteenth century there was a priceless collection, yet large numbers were systematically scraped away to make room for modern writing. All the scholars of the Renaissance, in their search for ancient MSS., complained of the dirt and neglect in which they found them. . . . Medieval catalogues, even of great monasteries, show us scarcely any Greek MSS., and only a scanty collection of Latin classics, considering the monks' opportunities." Moreover, Ovid's amatory verses are far more frequently represented than the histories of Livy and Tacitus or the poems of Horace. No good can come, the Doctor urges, from extravagant estimates of monastic culture, above all in Caledonia.

Canon Bellesheim, Dr. Edgar and Father Forbes-Leith are all guilty of misstatement, and must be consulted with caution. It is alleged that the Scottish monks educated the youth of the period "within the walls of their cloisters." But even Catholic scholars discount such stories. A candid Dominican, Father Mandonnet, concedes that: "The monastic Rules, including St. Benedict's, do not provide for either study, in the proper sense, or schools in the monasteries. In consequence, the existence of such schools should be proved by documents, and not taken for granted. The so-called *Schola externa* (for outside scholars), for the use of secular clerics and young nobles, existed only rarely and transitorily."

Proof of the existence of any adequate system of education in Scotland before the days of John Knox is sadly wanting. Dr. Mackinnon opined that of the eighteen schools said to have existed prior to 1284 eight only were monastic. But Coulton is sceptical

concerning the authenticity of some of these. For it is significant that the elaborate researches of Dom Berlière revealed "for the whole of Europe, and for eight centuries, only twenty certain cases and five doubtful in which the monks can be shown to have had a school for non-monastic outsiders; apart, that is, from the almonry schools."

Coulton rightly disregards unverified traditions and strictly concerns himself with monastery schools of which there is evidence. There were distinct differences in such medieval schools. Apart from the very rare monastic teaching for the laity, there were apparently five forms of training supervised by the monks. Young boys—the oblates—who entered the monastic precincts permanently, were taught enough to enable them to take the vows. Then there were the novices—lads in their teens and a few adults—who resided in the monastery during their probationary period. Added to these were the junior monks who were commonly so uncultured that they sadly needed instruction in sufficient Latin to enable them to pursue their clerical duties. Some monasteries contained a song-school, in which hired choristers celebrated the services in the recently erected Lady Chapels where the increasing Madonna-cult was duly honoured. Lastly came the almonry establishments of the larger communities. In these a few penurious clerks were provided with daily sustenance. All these, as well as the boys in the grammar-schools, were tonsured and were universally regarded as clerics throughout Western Christendom.

Seemingly, there is no positive proof that the poor clerks ever received instruction from the monks themselves in the almonry schools. Indeed, the monks themselves were so extensively recruited from the privileged classes that such personal attention would have appeared derogatory. It is intimated that St. Mary's Abbey at York—one of the most opulent in England—boarded 50 almonry pupils, an exceptionally large number, but their instruction was imparted in the local grammar-school.

As the Middle Ages receded, the oblate system imperceptibly passed away. The very intimate relationship of monks pledged to celibacy with boys, hastened its disappearance. The system was strongly disapproved by prominent Churchmen, among others. Coulton notes that: "St. Peter Damian congratulated the Abbot of Monte Cassino (St. Benedict's own abbey and the greatest in Italy) on the fact that: 'I found there was no school for boys, who oftentimes weaken strict holiness.'" The Cistercians, Cluniacs, and possibly the Premonstratensians were predominant in medieval Scotland and, with these Orders, the oblate system seems never to have been adopted.

The younger monks and the novices apparently received a mere modicum of instruction in Latin, and this just enabled them to gather the meaning of the service books, with sufficient understanding of the ritual to conduct the ceremonies decently, and to master the monastic rules.

Choir schools seem to have been unknown in Scotland. In any case, there is no reliable evidence for them, although the almonry schools existed there. In 1260 the Laird of Molle's widow conferred the dower-share of her estate on the brethren "on condition that the Abbot and Convent shall maintain my son in food and drink and raiment with the best and most learned scholars who are fed in the almonry, for so long as they hold the said lands in their hands." This, as Coulton remarks, is a purely business transaction and has no relation to monkish benevolence of which we hear so much. It is also significant that the 13th century accounts of Merton College Grammar School show payments for the pupils' board and instruction which were provided by their friends.

In Scotland itself, in 1216 at St. Andrews, the monks were sued for negligence in the fulfilment of their duties. In commenting on this case, Coulton notes that the document concerning it "makes it quite evident that the monastery was simply trustee for the school and that it had not always completely fulfilled its trust. Leach gives several similar cases, and nearly all the grammar schools, in England as in Scotland, were apparently of this kind." Of course, the Church possessed a school monopoly, and in theory the instruction provided was entirely gratuitous. Yet the fees so frequently exacted by the clergy indicate that not only were the schools utilised for religious teaching, but were also valued for the revenues they afforded. For the school fees amounted to a considerable sum, as the various litigations concerning them testify. Monks' promises needed confirmation, and this appears to explain why "at Roxburgh and Perth and Stirling and Linlithgow, we find schools carefully registered among the endowments conferred upon a monastery."

The friars for a time have a better record than the monks in several countries abroad, but their educational services in Scotland seem quite small. Indeed, some of the supposed friary schools were used exclusively for the friars themselves, and conferred no benefit whatever on the general community.

Canon Bellesheim in his "History of the Catholic Church in Scotland" seems to permit his religious predilections to lead him perilously near the path of fiction. As an example of the learned Canon's unreliability, Coulton cites Bellesheim's assertion that the Roxburgh school "was conducted by the monks of Kelso Abbey." But Coulton mordantly observes that: "If the reader turns up the charter he will find nothing of the kind. The school belonged to Kelso Abbey as a matter of privilege, and perhaps of emolument also. . . . But the education at Kelso (and, as we have every reason to believe by analogy also at Roxburgh) was 'conducted' by a hired schoolmaster."

Like the rest of the world, monks were good, bad, and indifferent, and performed a part, however exaggerated by clerical historians, in the evolution of civilisation. Still, Dr. Edgar's claim that the English monasteries rendered unpaid services to education lacks serious confirmation. Apparently, the secular clergy and not the regulars were regarded as the preceptors, such as they were, of the people. Statements to the contrary are clearly invalid. As a result of close inquiry, Coulton concludes that "the monks never proposed to be educators in the modern sense. St. Bernard, one of the greatest of them, quoted with approval from St. Jerome, and other pious cloisterers of later times repeated the quotation: *Monachus non docentis sed plangentis habet officium*—'the monk's duty is not to teach, but to weep for his own and others' sins.'"

In medieval Scotland the ignorance and superstition of the populace was profound and the vast majority of the clergy themselves were as deeply sunk in ignorance as the masses. Perhaps a fair parallel may be drawn between the illiteracy of the Scottish priesthood of the period and the intellectual darkness and moral depravity so general among the Greek Church clergy of Christian Russia in Tsarist times.

Coulton approvingly quotes the considered judgment of the eminent historian Professor Mackinnon concerning Scotland as the Reformation drew near, which runs as follows: "That the Education Act of 1496, directing the compulsory education of the children of the higher classes, does not seem to have been systematically carried out, and education was consequently at a low ebb on the eve of the Reformation. Considering the general ignorance of the clergy, high and low, it could hardly have been otherwise. After

the Reformation the Reformed Church drew up a magnificent system of primary, secondary and university education which, owing to the appropriation of ecclesiastical endowments by the crown and the nobles, was, unfortunately, stillborn."

T. F. PALMER.

ANOTHER "LIFE" OF JESUS

SOME years ago I wrote an article on that rather enigmatical French Freethinker Leo Taxil. I was, luckily, aided by a very rare pamphlet in which he described his upbringing and why he became a Freethinker—details which I found nowhere else. Taxil and his work were not particularly liked by our own writers, and he was very rarely referred to by them. Neither Wheeler nor McCabe mention him in their "Dictionaries," and there is no word about him in John M. Robertson's very full "Histories of Freethought." On the other hand, the great historian of the Inquisition, Henry C. Lea, and that very able and brilliant opponent of Romanism, Dr. Coulton, both deal with Taxil—he was a far too considerable figure in the struggle against the Roman Church to be ignored, and they knew it.

The real reason, I suspect, why Freethought writers in this country have ignored Leo Taxil is because he was the very essence of provocative blasphemy. I know of no opponent of religious humbug who hit so hard, not with the kid glove over the iron hand, but with a frontal attack made with all the weapons he could muster. He was never afraid of "blaspheming," never afraid of exposing pious hypocrisy, never afraid of laughing at the gullible sheep who follow the Papacy wherever it led them. In five years (1880-85) Taxil had delivered the Church in France some of the most terrible blows it had received in all its history. He had, of course, to pay for his temerity, for it is quite a mistake to suppose that even in the France of those days you could say what you liked in defiance of the secular powers. At all events, Taxil suddenly became "converted," most people claiming that the Church was forced to compromise with its terrible opponent and did so by handing him a million francs, which, in those days, meant a sum of £40,000. His subsequent career is very amusing, for he completely bamboozled the hierarchy some years later by pretending to expose Atheistic Freemasonry. That is a story which the curious reader will find in one of Lea's lesser works.

I have reverted thus to Leo Taxil for a special reason. At the height of his fame as an "anti-clerical," as he loved to call himself, he wrote a "Life of Jesus"—needless to say quite different from either the very orthodox ones, or the very reverent ones written by unbelievers like Strauss or Renan. Taxil had come to the conclusion that the whole story of Jesus Christ was completely mythical, and that actually the Christian Deity had never existed either as a god or as a man. He therefore could see no reason why his "life" of Jesus should not be just as funny as he could write it. He decided to make its language and its general tenour that used by the Paris working classes, which is similar to our own East-end Cockney; and there is very little doubt that if he could have put in what we here recognise as gangster Americanese he would cheerfully have done so.

The result was that in his "La Vie de Jésus" Taxil produced a little masterpiece in its own genre. Never had the Gospels been made to look so supremely ridiculous. To hear Jesus using French cockney slang instead of the reverent but quite impossible speeches put into his mouth by the gospel writers was some-

thing so daring that even his own followers must have gasped. Certainly his work was frowned upon by our own Freethinkers. It was one thing to attack the gospel story in a calm and reverent manner; it was something never to be tolerated that the same story, looked upon by millions as the most wonderful ever written in this world, should be attacked so blasphemously that it made even advanced Atheists shudder. It was tacitly decided rarely to refer to Leo Taxil. He was simply not in our circle. In fact, for those of us who knew a little about the Marquis de Sade and his works, Taxil was to be boycotted as severely as that "infamous" sexologist.

I must confess it was with a little apprehension myself that I translated a page or two of "La Vie de Jésus," wondering whether I should be hauled up before another Justice North and given at least twelve months' hard for my awful blasphemy. Nothing happened, however, and I am almost convinced that if Taxil's work could now be translated complete in the gangster slang we know so well from the "movies," it would not cause very much surprise, or even be resented. And this is the reason.

Most readers will have read about the enterprise of Miss Dorothy Sayers in persuading the B.B.C. to broadcast her own version of the "life" of Jesus. Miss Sayers has had well-deserved success with her detective stories, and one can understand her seeing the dramatic possibilities of such a "thriller" as that recorded in the four gospels. In addition, she decided to write it in modern speech, as better understood by her hearers, than the artificial English which the Authorised Version translators felt was necessary to preserve a reverent attitude towards what are, in the ultimate, a lot of silly legends and myths.

But the idea of putting Jesus over the air horrified many pious people, including that noble band of Fundamentalists, the Lord's Day Observance Society. And when Mr. Seton Margrave headed an article in the "Daily Mail" on the coming broadcast that it was written in American slang, Miss Sayers indignantly repudiated "the ridiculous statement." Mr. Margrave immediately replied with a specimen of the script, giving "one piece of dialogue addressed to the apostle Philip." Here it is:—

"The fact is, Philip, you've been had for a sucker. You ought to keep your eyes skinned—you did really. If I was to tell you the dodges those fellows have up their sleeves, you'd be surprised."

This seems to me to go as far as Leo Taxil, though I admit he made Jesus talk almost all the way in similar and very funny slang. In any case, I decided to listen in to the first broadcast, and it was well worth the effort. I found it more than amusing, and was not in the least surprised at the gulf that lay between Miss Sayers as a thriller writer and Miss Sayers trying to put some semblance of rationality into a very old story. The scenes between the "Magi Kings" and King Herod reminded me of similar scenes we used to enjoy in the good old pantomimes between the Demon King and his opponents, and the whole atmosphere as envisaged by the fertile imagination of the lady writer came nearer to a slapdash pantomime comedy than I have heard for many a long day. Wherever Miss Sayers tried to be holy and reverent she merely caused a huge chuckle.

I cannot resist the temptation of showing how Taxil approached the "Magi" scenes. The "Kings" are pictured by him as being very "savant," and when they saw the "star" in the sky shining very brightly, they decided to retire and each study alone the remarkable phenomenon. When they met again,

Melechior was the first to speak. "I counted," he said, "all the movements of the star for

seventeen minutes and multiplied the total by 4228695. I then subtracted 5672, divided the result by 47, and then made 29 multiplications, as many subtractions and divisions. And here is my final result."

Gaspard and Balthazar had on their side also fagged hard at some mathematical brain-twisters and—marvel of marvels!—their results were exactly the same as that of Melechior. They then looked at each other, and all three said at the same time: "The result of our operations on the movement of this star indicates as clearly as the mid-day sun that in a village near Jerusalem there is going to be born this winter a new King of the Jews, and that as this King is a God we must go and adore him."

How marvellous are mathematics! How wonderful are the exact sciences!

As the star had not said a word to them, it was only through the most difficult calculations that they had solved such a phenomenal problem.

"Let us go and adore this new King of the Jews," repeated Gaspard, Balthazar and Melechior.

And without giving themselves the time to say good-bye to their wives, nor caring what happened to their States in leaving them thus without Kings for a long time, they set off for Palestine. The star went before them, shining by day as well as by night, and all they had to do was to follow it.

Space, alas, forbids me to continue, but I can assure the reader that the balderdash with which Miss Sayers surrounded the three kings following the star was quite as silly as Taxil's absurd nonsense about mathematics and the star. How could one expect anything else?

The voice of Jesus will be heard on the radio. As the Director of Religious Broadcasting, Dr. Welch, has said, the language of the Authorised Version has been deliberately set aside, and modern speech—and slang—substituted. This "helps us," adds Dr. Welch, "to see Christ as a real human being." Good. I expect one day we shall see a "movie," perhaps in technicolour, with Jesus walking about as if he were Clark Gable but in traditional costume. And the day may come when Jesus will be depicted in modern costume, perhaps in plus fours and spats, with the Marys and the Marthas as modern glamour girls in shorts and slacks . . . ! But I had better desist.

H. CUTNER.

ACID DROPS

THAT representative of the great Barnacle family, Mr. Duff Cooper, son-in-law of the Duke of Rutland, has concluded his trip round the world and is returning home—much to the pleasure of the Australians. The immediate task of the Government will be to find a post for him at home. He has already filled a number and has earned the same measure of praise in each. As a democracy we must make the most of what genius we have left with us. In his trip abroad Mr. Duff Cooper has received a warm send-off from every country he has visited.

The other event occurred in the House of Lords. Lord Addison, dealing with the fall of Hong Kong, described the Commander-in-Chief as a "nincompoop." It was daring enough to dismiss the holder of a high position without finding him a higher one in which he could exercise his qualities, but for it to be said in the House of Lords is tremendous. Next we shall have a request that the King shall cease to speak of "My Army" or "My Navy," and fall into line with the President of the United States, who simply is the chief official who deals with the nation's army and navy. But perhaps Lord Addison will apologise. He will have made many enemies. It is perhaps worth

noting that the "Daily Telegraph" omitted all mention of Lord Addison's "nincompoop." So did the liberty-loving B.B.C.

The Director of the B.B.C. religious broadcasts spoke the other day on the plans made for more and more religion by way of the radio. With pride, Dr. Welch outlined the wonderful things which were going to happen on the microphone—services, and more services, and still more services, with plenty of religious talks in between and a huge series of lessons by an Oxford Don who had been an Atheist and was now a thorough believer in everything that the Church requires him to believe in. We are always a little suspicious of these converted Atheists. Of course, there have been some, but generally their knowledge of Atheism and Freethought equalled that of the average follower of General Booth. Safe in that impregnable castle of cowardice, the B.B.C., we don't doubt for a moment that the Oxford Don will triumphantly produce unanswerable arguments on the truth of the Bible—or for that matter, on anything under the sun. Christianity must be true if all opposition is sternly suppressed.

Dr. Welch was obliged, in spite of himself, to refer to a section of the public which was definitely hostile to religion and its broadcasting, and blandly suggested that if they would only send in their objections they would be properly considered! It would be difficult to characterise this piece of religious humbug as it should be. Everybody knows quite well that real opposition put by competent Freethinkers and completely uncensored, would be contemptuously rejected by the brave, well-paid warriors of the B.B.C. Some of us remember the "discussions" with "unbelievers" held by that doughty champion, Canon Cockin, some months ago, in which, we believe, all the questions and all the replies were actually written by the courageous Canon. The idea was that a series of childish objections to Christianity made by a "business" man or an employee in a gasworks, but which were in the first place carefully chosen by Canon Cockin, and then replied to by him, would indisputably prove that Christianity was true. Anybody who was taken in by this outrageous piece of humbug should be left to stew in his little bethel.

It is interesting to note that in a little review of Canon Cockin's pamphlet, "What it means to be a Christian," the "Church Times" says, "The weakness of these otherwise carefully constructed lessons is the encouragement they offer to the argumentative." We agree that this is very dangerous. The argumentative should always be completely suppressed; better still, *destroy* them.

One of the bitterest pills the Churches have had to swallow was that after more than 20 years' propaganda to make "Atheistic Russia" a pariah among the nations, the war has caused this country to hail Russia as an ally, while it is made obvious to all that the Allies are deeply indebted to Russia for the help it has consciously or unconsciously given us in the war. But the bitterest pill of all was administered by Anthony Eden, our Foreign Minister, when he made the plain statement that the British Government was determined that the close alliance between this country and Russia should continue during the peace as well as during the war. That was indeed bad news—for the Churches.

Another official statement of German atrocities in Russia—atrocities, that is, against the civilian population—has been issued by the Russian Government. The offences beggar imagination. There is no need to repeat them in detail—the newspapers and radio have made them sufficiently known—and the sadistic element in human nature, so widely existent, will guarantee that these accounts are known and remembered. But there is hardly room for surprise. Long before formal war was declared, while our own Government, in the vain hope that it would keep Russian ideas from spreading, was helping Hitler and his followers to strengthen themselves, the brutality and the bestiality of the Hitler troops were well known—outside British official circles; and from diplomatic circles, even from those who are still in power, there came little or no condemnation. It would be foolish to assume their ignorance of events.

This is probably the only paper in this country that will stress the fact that these atrocities of the Germans in Russia and elsewhere have all the marks of a strongly religious crusade. Nothing on so large a scale, and of such a character, has ever occurred without a strong religious impulse. Parallels are to be found in the early crusades for the recovery of Jerusalem and in the various crusades of the Middle Ages. After all, man is a social animal, and it needs some strong, unreasoning and, temporarily, all-conquering incentive to so distort the social side of human nature as to produce the brutalities and bestialities of the German troops. It is only when we read the German crusade as a religious one that we can understand and appreciate its quality and power.

But the course to be taken by the Allies is obvious. Where possible, incidents and names—particularly of officers, from the highest to the lowest—should be taken. When the war is over these scoundrels should be seized and treated as criminals or insane criminals. From general to private, from the highest officer of State to the lowest official, there should be no exceptions, and if we would really build a new world out of the old battered one, we should cleanse our own Government Services of those men and women who contributed by their policy and prejudices and inherited stupidities to the building of Hitlerism. If we have the wisdom to build a new world, we shall realise it only by developing the courage to cleanse the old one.

The Pope issued a New Year's message to the world, which, on analysis, was full—of nothing. It can be used as a sanction for a particular policy or course of conduct, or the exact reverse. Among five distinct propositions there was not one that really meant anything definite. Here are the five—with comments: (1) Rights of small nations. (What rights?) (2) Rights of national minorities. (Rights concerning what and to what extent?) (3) Economic resources not to be hoarded. (Nations never "hoard"; they simply "reserve" their resources and retain control over their use by outsiders.) (4) Progressive limitation of armaments. (That was agreed on all the time Germany was arming. Besides, the progressive limitation of armaments will not stop war or the glorification of war. It is not the progressive limitations of national armaments that is necessary to world peace, but the deliberate surrender on the part of individual nations to make war on their own account and at their own decision.) (5) No persecution of Religion. (That is impudent insincerity. By practice, the Roman Church has shown quite clearly that what it means by "no persecution of religion" is non-interference with Roman Catholic practices. It does not consider the persecution of non-Catholic movements in Spain, for example, as persecution. The "Great Lying Church" runs true to form. Will the Church agree to give equal freedom between Catholics, non-Catholics and non-Christians?)

The real Catholic position is given in the "Catholic Times" for January 2: "The cause behind the cause of Nazism and Communism, and all the evils that flow from these two poisoned sources, is Atheism." If we read the Pope's five points in the light of that passage we shall be able to evaluate Justice, Freedom, etc., when used by Roman Catholic leaders. Hitlerism has been equally fond of the same phrases. It is about as good a rogue's litany as one can get, and its real nature is so obvious that we simply cannot think that those people in this world who look to the Pope for guidance are quite such fools as they seem to be at a superficial glance.

It really does seem as though the end of this war will leave us in a new world of outlook and values. On the same day, here are two items of news: The Glendale (Northumberland) Urban Council, by a majority of 10 to 2, sent a protest to the Lord Lieutenant of the county against the appointment of the Countess of Tankerville as a Justice of the Peace. One of the members of the Council said plainly that if the Countess's husband had been the keeper of the Chillingham cattle instead of the owner, she would never have been appointed. This is grave disrespect to one of our most important institutions.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. MASON.—There are many editions of Lucretius. One is issued in Dent's Everyman Series at 2s. 6d. Any bookseller should be able to procure a copy.

T. M. MOSLEY.—Thanks for cuttings. They are very often useful, even though no immediate use is made of them. We are keeping well, but frightfully busy.

J. W. DAVIES.—You did a very useful piece of work. The Labour Party in this country suffers greatly from its not being able to get rid of its theological old man of the sea. Perhaps recent events may encourage its members to speak with greater boldness and honesty where religion is concerned. They must come to it one day, or become progressively of less use. Pleased to know you are keeping well.

G. TAYLOR, J. PEPPER and F. H. DAVIS.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.

C. McCALL.—Received; shall appear.

S. WARING.—Thanks for your high appreciation of "The Freethinker." We have no intention of raising the price of the paper, in spite of your readiness to pay twice as much for it. We shall do our best to keep it at its present level.

LADY SIMON, G. H. TAYLOR, F. W. THOMPSON and S. WINKWORTH.—Received and shall appear as early as possible. For the moment we are very full of "copy."

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—K. Amoako-Atta (B.W. Africa), 1s.; D. H. Koff (Sydney), £2; Mrs. Rose Solomon, 12s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Farnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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SUGAR PLUMS

MISS DOROTHY SAYERS has had but a qualified success against the Lord's Day Observance Society, which, in addition to the support it has in the "backwoods" of this country, number many supporters in high places, and who can, therefore—to use an expressive colloquialism—"pull strings." One objection to the B.B.C. play dealing with the life of Jesus was that the voice of Jesus was heard, and not only heard, but he actually used current slang. Here is one of the passages to which objection was taken. Jesus says to Philip:—

"The fact is, Philip, you've been had for a sucker. You ought to keep your eyes skinned."

So the B.B.C. bows to the storm and promises that while the voice of the God Jesus will still be heard, it will be in good university English. That will, of course, separate the God from the "common" man.

Miss Sayers defends herself by pointing out that such men as John Milton published conversations between God and Jesus such as do not appear in the New Testament, and supporters of Miss Sayers have pointed to similar illustrations in earlier handlings of the Christian myth. But these were a long time ago when, as we have pointed out many times, the Christian mythology was accepted as genuine history and there was, consequently, no obvious clash between the Christian religion and current life and thought. God spoke as well as acted in those days; they

"went places" and "done things." To-day, such plain statements of the essence of Christian belief arouses suspicion and breeds unbelief. The offence of Miss Sayers is that, in making Jesus talk like a modern man, she unconsciously exhibits Christianity as what it is, and in a modern environment no religion can stand that strain.

The Rev. Mervyn Stockwood, of Moorfields, Bristol, writes in the "Daily Telegraph" in defence of Miss Sayers, and refers to Jesus as a "working-class labourer." The Christian imagination will always get out of the New Testament whatever it requires, but the Jesus of the New Testament appears as a common, wandering preacher only. If he lived, that is his place in sober history. And the reference to him as one who was associated with working conditions is to be found only in the apocryphal gospels which Christians now regard as semi-forgeries. And that does not picture him as a "working-class labourer," but as a mere miracle worker, as when Joseph, who was a working carpenter, found the article on which he was working was too short. So Jesus took one end of the wooden article and Joseph the other and stretched the wood to the proper size. That hardly warrants his description of Jesus as a working man. His was an easy job.

It seems that even the better type of Christians cannot avoid misrepresentation where the interests of their religion is concerned. Ex-Dean Inge quotes the following—with substantial approval—from Nansen, the Arctic explorer, written in 1923 when this country could say nothing that was too bad for Russia. It was being given credit for a repetition of Christian atrocities:—

"It appears probable that not only will Russia some day, and at a date not far distant, save Europe in things material, but that the sorely needed spiritual revival will also come from thence."

That was a shrewd appreciation of the effect of the Russian Revolution on the world, although it took a world war and our own desperate need of Russian help, to bring about some recognition of the character of the new Russia. But it is tolerably certain that if the Christian Churches have their way, when the war is over, there will be an attempt to revise the original religious prejudice.

But we note this citation by Dean Inge as an illustration of the difficulty of even the more intellectual of Christian leaders to act fairly where no Christian interests are at stake. For it is certain that Nansen, being a Freethinker, did not mean by "spiritual" what Christians mean. Nansen's "spiritual" meant the higher intellectual and ethical qualities. Dean Inge means by "spiritual" religious ideas and doctrines; and it is certain that Russia will not make for that. That Russian influence will make for what Nietzsche called a revaluation of values is certain. Its influence has already been made clear in that direction. That it will make for a revival of religion is to border on the ridiculous.

From the South African "Johannesburg Star" we see there has been trouble in Durban over the experiment of a black-out. A Sunday evening was selected for a trial run, and as the travelling star which led three men to where God was being born, and obligingly stood still just over the stable where the event happened, there was nothing to guide people to church. The result was that 18 clergymen, led by Canon Martin sent a letter of protest to the Mayor of Durban and to the fortress commander. The protest says the black-out was "an insult to Almighty God," that we cannot win the war without God, and the black-out involved "a flagrant gesture of contempt for prayer and worship." We sympathise with the protesters. What is the use of proclaiming that God will give us victory while the Prime Minister goes about with the message that we shall win this war only by speeding up production? One cancels the other. Is a shell made by an Atheist less effective than one made by a member of a Church? The matter should be put to the test of experience. As it is, God may easily take Churchill's casual remark that we shall win this war with the help of God, but that we must never forget increased production, as a rather clumsy sarcasm. How can we expect God to pay attention to a day of national prayer when we behave in this way?

A CRITIC AND HIS CRITICISM

I DO not think that there is at present much to be gained by further controversy with Mr. J. Phillips, for we are (as he has realised) arguing along lines that must certainly be parallel, since there seems to be no prospect of their ever meeting. Mr. Phillips' last contribution to the argument (published in the December 21 issue of "The Freethinker") seems, at any rate to my limited mind, to show once more a complete incomprehension of my position in this matter of Freethought and religion. He will no doubt be able to retort that I equally misunderstand his position—and that will only confirm what I have for long suspected: that people who embark on public controversies are frequently arguing about totally different things. "Be more concerned with principles and ideals," is Mr. Phillips' advice to me. "And even if such do not take the place of religion, why worry? Who said they should, anyway?"

No one, Mr. Phillips, ever said that they should; but it is becoming, to my mind, abundantly obvious that the only way in which any philosophy of life can become effective in the minds and hearts of the ordinary people, is for philosophy to provide at any rate a tentative answer to the questions which all thoughtful folk find it necessary to put to the universe at large. In other words, it must provide an answer to those essentially religious questions which we all put forward in these difficult and trying days. Mark my words: I do not say that the answer is necessarily to be religious. If Atheism or Agnosticism can provide satisfactory replies, then good luck to either of those philosophies. But I hold that those who say, like Mr. Phillips, that there are no such questions are merely blinding themselves to all the realities of present-day controversy as deliberately and as ineffectively as their opposite numbers on the religious side—the Roman Catholics, the Salvationists, and other Fundamentalists.

Freethinkers can, in fact, become as set and almost as bigoted in their outlook as the most extreme folk on the religious side. If we are not prepared to open our minds—to become really *free* thinkers—then our philosophy will fail us at the most crucial moments.

After all, some of the religious propagandists of the present day are pointing at the mess and muddle which we miscall modern civilisation and are saying: "After the last war you excluded religion from the League of Nations; you tried to construct that secular world which you have always boasted would be a heaven on earth." That criticism has to be faced and answered if Freethought is to remain a living philosophy with real influence in the world. We do not answer it, I submit, by advancing the kind of proposition supported by Mr. Phillips, which is, in effect, a restatement of the kind of secular civilisation that (let us admit it) failed miserably in the period 1919-1939. Quite likely a more directly religious civilisation would have proved an equally horrible failure. But we have to be definitely constructive in our approach; we have to show that we can offer the world a new hope. It must not be merely the old hope re-hashed (if I may mix my metaphors) to suit a more modern palate.

I do not propose to carry this argument with Mr. Phillips any further at the moment. Mr. Phillips and I have inflicted enough of it on the long-suffering readers of these columns. I am only too conscious (as I have said before) that I am arguing without having quite settled the whole matter in my own mind. I am, in fact, thinking on paper. But I hope that Mr. Phillips, and others who

have been disposed to disagree with me, will bear with me. I propose to write further of these matters as opportunity offers, and as events and books of the day provide convenient pegs on which my ideas can be hung. I have already said, in the various articles to which you have given the hospitality of your columns in recent months, I am only too conscious that what I am doing is to try to work out a philosophy of life which will be satisfactory for myself and possibly for others. To try to set down one's ideas on paper before they are finally crystallised and their implications fully considered may be foolish; for that the urgency of the issues and the difficulties of the times must be the excuses. And similarly Mr. H. R. Clifton must not blame me if I do not develop my theme in precisely the way which he deems to be advisable.

He says that the signs of the times are against my suggestion that the more thoughtful people are (at any rate in isolated cases) gradually drifting back to something approximating to a religious attitude. But let him regard the case which I was trying to put in the article which he criticises—that the typical "intellectuals" are tending to become more religious in their general outlook. Let him compare, say, Mr. Aldous Huxley's early book of essays, "Do What You Will," with the same author's more recent "Ends and Means"; let him pay careful attention to such works as Miss Rosalind Murray's "The Good Pagan's Failure" or Mr. Julian Duguid's "I am Persuaded." These people are not paid propagandists of the Churches, they are people who have quite deliberately come to the conclusion that the religious way of life holds more for them than does the way of Freethought, Rationalism, or what-have-you.

In these articles I am doing my best to draw the attention of the Freethought Movement to what I feel is a definite danger to our future progress. There are huge masses of people who may have left the Churches for the time being; but to leave the Churches does not mean to join the Freethought Movement. Thousands of voters (to take the corresponding political line) have left the Tory Party. But to leave the Tory Party is not to join the Labour Party. All politicians realise that the "floating vote" is dangerous. The "floating vote" also exists in the religious field. It is to that vote to which we have to appeal.

I did not intend that my writings in these columns should lead to interminable controversy, but I feel that Mr. Clifton deserves these lines of explanation. I would also like to point out to him that my articles do not necessarily appear in the precise chronological order in which they are written. That must be the explanation if one article seems to disregard criticisms which have previously appeared. But at any rate I trust that there will, in the course of time, be revealed a philosophical uniformity which will show Mr. Clifton and my other critics just where I stand and where my thoughts have been leading me. In the meantime I should like, once again, to express my very real gratitude to the Editor for allowing me to have my say in this way. I am sure that much which I am writing will appear to him to be false and facile superficiality. There are few papers which would devote space to a philosophical argument of this kind, and I hope that all regular readers of "The Freethinker" will appreciate that those of us who may appear to be criticising the traditional attitude of the Freethought Movement feel deeply grateful for having the columns of this journal thus open to us.

S. H.

CONCERNING "INTERNATIONALISM"

(Concluded from page 17)

A REMARK in a contemporary on "the modern cult of Nationalism," in the interest of the school noted at the outset, appears rather belated by the light of a historic sequence adduced in the foregoing. Yet in another, and objective, sense national consciousness is a modern summation following on the break-up of medieval Absolutism. The schism of the Reformation was accompanied by new forms of political State organisation, opinion and secular enterprise. As an English philologist observes:—

"In the 16th century the idea of nationality, of political unity and independence began to take the prominent place in men's thoughts and feelings which it has since preserved, and we can trace this growth in the curiously late appearance in the English language of what we may call 'patriotic' terms. 'Nation' was an early word, but it was used more with the notion of different races than that of national unity, and was indeed commonly employed to describe any class or kind of persons. It gained its present meaning in the 16th century, and late in that century we find the adjective 'national' formed from it; and we can note at about the same date the appearance of such terms as 'fellow-countryman' and 'mother-country.' 'Fatherland' and 'compatriot' appear a little later; and 'patriot' and 'patriotic' belong to the middle of the 17th century, but did not acquire their present meaning until a hundred years later, at which time 'patriotism' is found. 'Public,' in the sense of 'public-spirited,' belongs to the early 17th century, but 'public spirit' and 'public spirited' are somewhat later . . ."

"We note, too, in the 16th century the beginning of our modern political vocabulary; 'political' itself belongs to this period, and 'politics' and 'politician' (in the older and more dignified meaning of 'statesman') and 'Secretary of State' and the adjective 'parliamentary.' This political vocabulary was largely increased with the growth of political institutions in the 17th century. The words 'politician' and 'minister' began to acquire their present meaning in its earlier years, and 'legislator' was borrowed from Latin in the same period. . . . We can trace, too, at this period the first beginnings of the vocabulary of modern democracy. 'Populace' was, indeed, borrowed in the 16th century, by means of France, from the Italian 'popolaccio,' but, like other Italian words ending in 'accio,' it was a term of abuse; 'the populace' was used in England as an equivalent for 'mob' or 'rabble,' and the adjective 'popular' had something of the same depreciatory meaning. 'The people,' however, in its modern sense appears during the Civil War, when Parliament made a solemn declaration that 'the people are, under God, the original of all just power.'"*

The last sentence complements the affirmation of the previous century as a first principle of doctrine, "The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England," though more complex in implication. . . . It follows that, whatever the genesis of the independent nation, once consolidated it carries with it a measure of individuality and a new concordance of political terminology. It presents a sufficiently powerful unit of association for guarding a casual way of life and usage congenial to the people concerned in its maintenance. If limited in outlook and sympathy, that arises from the nature of things.† For it is a citadel amid the vast amorphous horde of mankind where the tribe is the only original bond. A horde that ranges in its "cultural" stages from savages little removed from simian relatives, cannibals who dispose of their ageing folk and serve them up for dinner, through all manner of variation to amiable dilettanti such as foregather at London Promenade

* L. Pearsall Smith, M.A.: "The English Language."

† The wider aspects and bearing of national egoism would link with the "ideological" speculations previously indicated and require a separate approach. Here we are dealing with "statics."

Concerts. Where the strong have invariably preyed upon the weak; bitter creed animosities prevail; and a human without a country behind him is much in the position of animals which raven in packs, when if one is thrown out for some misdemeanour it is left to the tender mercies of other carnivores.

A "World State! . . ."

Ultimate national values, beyond simple existence, in a rational category lies in their contribution to light and betterment. To that process of amelioration and applied knowledge (when won) which has raised some portion of the species above bondage to the coarse necessities of our physical being, with their inflictions of dirt, disease, squalor. The inventive genius that has provided means of health, hygiene, sanitation, cleanliness;‡ which has made possible enlarged food resources through improved crops, fruit, vegetables, livestock, poultry, and arrested plant and animal disease. That "plenty" (where it exists) due entirely to selective cultivation.§ All this apart from the æsthetic vouchsafements. Only from a few centres have these things emanated. The chief claim to distinction of the residue may be put as a "great faculty of procreation. . . ."

A heightened national impulsion followed the Napoleonic era. In order to effect Napoleon's overthrow, the "Dynasts" had to appeal to the patriotism of their subjects. In return, these expected some concession to Liberal principles and institutions, wherein they were disappointed. In the settlement of Europe a cold reaction predominated, influenced largely by the Austrian, Metternich, who had played a leading diplomatic rôle in the struggle. Popular discontents and agitations led to uprisings through Europe during the mid-century. To which was added the desire for union between nearly related peoples separated into different States with the return of Dynasts whom Napoleon had relieved of their office; as in Germany and Italy. Hence followed the unitarian movements to which poets like Arndt and dreamers like Mazzini lent their inspiration. . . .

What is the German Fatherland?

Is it Bavaria?

Is it Saxony?

Is it where the sedgy marshes spread?

Is it where the miners work the ore?

Greater, O greater, the German Fatherland!

The wish for unity between kindred peoples thus divided is a natural and legitimate aspiration. Attempts to implement this aim on a popular basis amid the excitement of the times failed from various causes. It was taken up and carried to partial completion through other and forceful means by the Prussian statesman, Bismarck, which issued in the German Empire of 1871. In Italy, though the "spiritual" faith and republicanism of Mazzini had great influence, unity was eventuated by more mundane methods, leading to a national monarchy in the House of Savoy, or Piedmont, and a Liberal Constitution by 1870.

Nationalism culminated after 1918 in the treaties which carved out of the old system a number of, assumed, ethnical States through a formula of "self-determination." These States should at least have been tenacious of their newly won independence. . . . There has followed the tragic betrayal of modernist Europe. The leading

‡ From some recent data provided by the Metropolitan Water Board, in the year ending March, 1907 (the testing laboratory's first full year of working), the standard purity of water going into supply was 74.3 per cent. first-class samples. In 1937 the figure was 99 per cent. No water supply in the world was better guarded than that of London. The daily consumption was over 310,000,000 gallons for a population of some 8,000,000. The death rate from typhoid fever, which was 235 per 1,000,000 in 1875, had fallen to 53 per 1,000,000 in 1905 and to 4 per 1,000,000 in 1937.

§ An article in point in this connection, "Botany and the Ordinary Man," appears in the October number of "Chambers' Journal," by Sir E. John Russell, Director of the famous Rothamsted Experimental Station.

protagonist of the war (supposedly "done in") rose again with renewed power and surpassing lethal equipment to attempt the subjugation of Europe—and the world. Before this menace, so far from "collaborating" to uphold their liberty, these States, new and old (save one or two), have been only concerned to barter their own security! . . . It was left to a few—a heroic few, embracing gallant spirits of every race—to defend the bastion of Freedom; with tardy aid forthcoming from some quarters, and others drawn perforce into a bloody mêlée—yet to be resolved . . .

AUSTEN VERNEY.

A SOCIAL STUDY

THERE is no compelling reason why a notice of a book should be concerned with a newly-published one. It should be sufficient that it is a book which in the opinion of the reviewer is worth commending; and a book that gives us an aspect of life in the raw must always repay reading. The book before us, "Stude Lonigan," by J. T. Farrell (Constable, 5s.), was published five years back, and if it is not autobiographical it does at least give us part of the life history of many of the denizens of the slums of our cities. There is an added feature which gives the story an interest to Freethinkers. It is plain spoken in the direction of religious influences, and all who recognise the fight that "Stude Lonigan" is making against terrific odds, in an environment in which poverty of life and mind is a constant feature, from which only one here and there escapes, will recognise that they are reading the life story of large numbers of our people.

It is the tale of a child of the Chicago streets, born of a Catholic family, eventually passing through a Catholic high school education, but withal one of the hardiest of a group of "tough guys." It is a sordid background with its inevitable effects.

It is unlikely that the parts of the book which depicts the distorting qualities of Catholic teaching and priestly influence were singled out by reviewers in the U.S.A., but it is that part which I wish to bring before readers.

In early manhood "Stude" listens to a sermon preached by a Father Shannon, who has come on a special mission to young Catholics. No Freethinker should miss reading Chapter 20. It contains a fine example of the influence brought to bear upon Catholics in their most impressionable years. The father says:—

"We live in a world to-day . . . that is debauched with paganism of the vilest kind. . . . We live in an age of growing laxity of sin, ugly sin that is a cancer destroying immortal souls made in the image and likeness of God almighty. Our modern jazz age of freedom and untrammelled unconventionality is characterised by immorality, vice, disease . . . spiritual cowardice. To-day there are movements afoot, started by vicious men and women who philander with the souls of youth in order that they will receive their paltry profit of cheap notoriety. I refer to such movements as jazz, Atheism, free love and companionate marriage, birth control. These are murdering the souls of youth."

Speaking of books:—

"The novel . . . that mocks at the most sacred profession that man can enter—the cloth, the service of God Almighty.' There are other books and other writers, among them some which preach evolution, saying that man came from a monkey; and on what evidence do such false prophets preach evolution? On the evidence of science? That is a lie. I'll tell you the evidence. A slab of slum bone and half of a skull was found in China. These half-baked pseudo scientists gave it a confounding and terrifying name—Pithecanthropus Erectus—then they went to a zoo and saw a monkey eating with a fork, and because of that they say that man came from a monkey and is only an animal."

"And the Universities, miscalled seats of learning . . . temples of truth are full of such men. Recently I conducted a mission in another part of the city and a Catholic girl came to me and said: 'Father, what

am I going to do? I am given these kind of books to read in my courses, and if I don't read them I will be flunked. And they present fallacies contrary to my faith. . . .' I told her what to do. I told her what every Catholic student should say in such circumstances. I told her to take the books back to her professor and say that father said she should tell him this: 'I am a Catholic. I will not read these books and endanger my holy faith. They are full of half-truths, paradoxes, lies; the men who wrote them are either ignorant or they are liars. You must put a stop to this sort of thing. You must stick to what you know, to the limited field you have studied, and stop talking about or recommending books on morals and theology, because you are ignorant and biased.' That is what every Catholic student in a Godless university should do. . . ."

"There is only one hope for America. That hope lies in Catholic young men and women. They must be the leaders. They must fight the untruths spread by these cheap little, half-baked, second-rate anti-Christis."

It does not need a very vivid imagination to picture the effect of this kind of teaching—given by those who stand as representatives of God—on the adolescent mind. It fills youth with a holy spirit of revenge. It draws a distinct and unsurmountable line between the good Catholic and his fellow citizens. A Greek waiter who has dared to speak in terms of admiration of the Soviet Union is one of the gangsters' victims. Yet Stude Lonigan is looked up to by many. His parents are proud of their son. He attends Mass regularly, and also Confession. He is also initiated into the secret Catholic order of St. Christopher. He is a good Catholic, even though non-Catholics may regard him as a citizen of questionable value. But many who do read the book under notice will be revolted at the exploits of Stude Lonigan.

The author has not used scientific language to cover the actions of his characters. Crudely, almost vulgarly, he presents his scenes. There is no escape from the stark ethical nakedness of his descriptions, evidently drawn from life.

To Freethinkers and all free and decent-minded people will come a responsive echo of Danny O'Neil: "Some day he would drive this neighbourhood and all its memories from his consciousness with a book. He would purge himself of this world he knew, with its gods, its life, its lies, its frustrations, the hates it had welled up in him."

This book should do something to achieve this ideal—perhaps the beginning of the new world is not so far away, after all. That we have not said more of it is explained by the words of the publishers. This book is too grandiose and too terrible, too crowded with incident and character to be a possible subject of a brief description, but it is a book that Freethinkers should not miss.

MURIEL WHITEFIELD.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF THEOLOGY

IN my preceding article I glanced at the degeneration of theology from a positive (pseudo) science with fixed principles into our contemporary welter of emotionalism and slush. This degeneration itself must, of course, be taken, not in isolation, but as a necessary reflex of the wide—and ever widening—gulf between Christianity and our contemporary world. Obviously, it is the height of absurdity to try to put a case when one has no case to put! The absurdity of "Fundamentalism," whether exemplified by Karl Barth's atavistic "neo-Calvinism" or by the anti-evolutionist "Monkeyville" trial in Tennessee, indicates that the gulf between the theology of the Reformed Churches and our current scientific culture is now definitely impassable. It is the gulf between two incompatible mental worlds. The attempt made by the "Modernists" to "re-interpret" Christianity in the light of modern knowledge is subjectively quixotic and objectively muddled—where not consciously dishonest. In this connection, we can legitimately cite "Christ" himself against his (nominal) followers as to the stark impossibility of pouring new wine into old bottles.

The Reformed Churches, however, do not exhaust the theological arena. There remain certain other "approaches" to the (alleged) supernatural Universe. (In this connection we hardly deem it necessary to pursue the aberrations of the theological intellect into that grotesque "spiritual" underworld represented by Mormonism, "Jehovah's Witnesses," Christian Science and the "monstrous regiment" of freak religions in general. We keep to the theological highways and perforce neglect the many alluring bye-ways or, more accurately, blind alleys.)

Two major phenomena attract our attention: Roman Catholicism and Spiritism. A glance may therefore usefully be directed at these still ubiquitous creeds.*

It may come as something of a shock to many Rationalists, but it is literally true that the Roman Church—if and when considered from a purely theoretical angle—is to-day the only Christian Church which is officially Rationalistic. For, despite its current and habitual exploitation of every profitable superstition, the Roman Church still officially has "confidence in reason" to the extent, at least, of officially condemning irrationalism—or "Fideism," as it is technically known in the writings of Catholic "natural" theologians. For we must in fairness remember that the Vatican Council has defined it as an infallible dogma binding on all the Faithful that "a certain knowledge of the One and true God can be obtained by the natural reason independent of, and antecedent to, all revealed revelation." And this heroic, if somewhat belated, attempt to defy reason in reason's own language, is still the official doctrine of the Church. Incidentally, it has always seemed to the present writer that the Roman authorities must have turned a blind eye on Cardinal Newman, whose famous theory of "the illative sense," by means of which God is known by a kind of natural instinct, is formally heretical under the above Vatican decree. No doubt Newman was too useful to be alienated. Incidentally, we may remark that many professed Rationalists seem to be quite ignorant of the existence of this decree; which makes a good deal of anti-Roman literature quite superfluous (cp. Bernard Boedder's S.J. "Natural Theology" and Joseph MacCabe's "Twelve Years in a Monastery").

In actual history, of course, Rome has never been noted as exclusively devoted to reason. As I have elsewhere observed, she is the supreme opportunist on earth. Moreover, the decree of Papal Infallibility (July 18, 1870) enables the Pope "infallibly" to adopt, or quietly drop, or fundamentally to change, any and every doctrine—under the pretence, of course, of "reinterpreting" it—when and where he likes. Papal Infallibility is, in fact, the perfect device for keeping pace with the needs of a changing era. Biblical Inspiration, the Virgin Birth, Christ, God himself, can all be infallibly dropped overboard as and when their existence becomes an embarrassment to the Church. The climate of Hell can be infallibly modified until it approximates to that of Torquay! By a judicious use of Papal prerogative, dangerous enemies can be "baptised" into Christ, as once were the Pantheist, Plato, and the Deist, Aristotle. Similarly, Karl Marx—or even the gifted President of the National Secular Society—can, if need be, be declared to be men of "heroic virtue," and, as such, worthy of all veneration, as indeed they are! (It is probably not an accident that the author who is said to be in present favour amongst Jesuit theologians is the pantheistic mystic, Scotus Erigena, 9th century.)

At any rate, there can be no doubt that the Roman Church has already all the appropriate machinery for dropping dogma—and even God—overboard when the inevitable growth of scepticism makes this necessary to keep the Bark of Peter afloat. Readers of Joseph Turmel's magnum opus will know that there are plenty of precedents! (To drop dogmas gracefully is now as necessary to an expert theologian as it was formerly to discover them in more robust ages of faith.) The Church of Rome is nothing if not decorous. When the appropriate time comes she will drop her celestial pilot less crudely than the Protestant irrationalists are now doing, but no less effectually: via the pantheistic arterial road the Catholic God also is now eventually

doomed to fade away, to "swoon into the absolute" vacuum (cf. J. Turmel: "Histoire des Dogmes"; six vols., untranslated).

We have only space left for the briefest reference to Spiritism, yet it is necessary to take some notice of this quasi-religion, since wartime is eminently favourable to its growth—it both multiplies the spirits and provides a favourable emotional atmosphere for them to come down—or should it be up? Whether Spiritism can be called Christian is dubious; some have seen in it the possible nucleus of a new world religion if only some organiser of religious Big Business—a General Booth or a Mrs. Eddy—could be found to take it in hand systematically. The logical Roman Church, which has keen business acumen for possible religious rivals, has always treated this primitive cult of the Dead—the prototype of all religions—with intense hatred. No doubt because the spiritist "trespassers" cut across its heavenly lines of communication! Viz., what is the use of paying a priest to celebrate Mass so as to get your grandmother out of Purgatory when the old lady is alive and kicking under the table in the seance room?†

However, this aspect of decomposing theology is too crude to detain us. There may quite possibly be room for a legitimate science of psychic research. In the present infancy of psychological science, what is more natural than that unexplained mental phenomena should still exist? But of our diabolical (sic cf. L'Epicier ut infra) visitors we can only say with Professor Huxley—the great one—that, wherever they come from, they evidently leave their brains behind them! Spiritism is (literally) the second childhood of theology—its *reductio ad absurdum*. The world of the supernatural has come full circle. It ends where it began—among the dead!

But, before quitting our subject, a most formidable current phenomenon remains for our investigation. To this terrestrial theology of present-day god-making a sequential article must be exclusively devoted.

F. A. RIDLEY.

† N.B.—Cf. "The Unseen World," by Cardinal L'Epicier, for the Roman view of Spiritism. Actually, the world of spirits is sharply divided into Anglo-Saxon Christians of a sort who come from "summerland," a more or less orthodox heaven, and Continental spirits, followers of Allan Kardec and Gustave Geley, who are reincarnationists, e.g., we recall the pleasant story of the spirit who, on being asked whether he was happy in "summerland," indignantly replied that he was a bull in the Argentine!

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North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12-0, Mr. L. EBURY.

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Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate): 3-0, Mr. F. A. RIDLEY, "What Will Succeed Christianity?"

* N.B.—We use the more precise term, Spiritism, as the more usual term, Spiritualism, has also a philosophical connotation of a quite different character.

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