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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

More About the B.B.C.

THREE weeks ago (November 15) we published a letter sent to a South African by the London B.B.C. The writer of the letter asked why no Atheist has ever been invited to give his view of religion from the microphone. The reply was one part foolish and one part untrue. It said that the B.B.C. had invited a committee of representatives of the Churches to give an opinion and they had decided to stick to Christianity. The untruth consisted in saying that debates on religion could be given on the "Brains Trust," where discussions on religion were welcomed. No real discussion on religion is ever permitted.

Now an English reader of "The Freethinker" sends us a reply, sent him by Mr. Nicolson, a Governor of the B.B.C., to a question asking when Atheism was to be heard from the B.B.C. microphone. That question has been asked by large numbers of people in this country, as well as from abroad, and that is all that happens. The B.B.C. appears to increase the dose of religion as the evidence of the prevalence of anti-Christian opinion becomes more manifest. Rather rashly, Mr. Nicolson sets out to justify the one-sided action of the B.B.C. Perhaps his position as a Governor led him to rashness. His reply, to say the least of it, is tortuous. Here it is. He warns his correspondent that—

"We should always put fair speech above free speech . . . it is unfair if you choose a very able broadcaster for one point of view and put up against him someone who is less competent."

Mr. Nicolson leaves unstated in words which side he considers fit to supply the "very able" controversialist, but he indicates where he thinks it is by saying later that the unbelievers "are probably more intelligent and more imaginative than the mass of the public." The "mass" of the public, we take it, must embrace the parsonage. We thank Mr. Nicolson for the compliment; but it might be met by selecting an Atheist who is as near as possible the low level of some of the B.B.C. preachers. Unfortunately for Mr. Nicolson, the question of the behaviour of the

B.B.C. goes deeper than the relative abilities of any two debaters.

Here, however, is Mr. Nicolson's defence of the B.B.C.—one may call it an official defence:—

"I do not say that everything that is put up on the wireless should be such as could be listened to without qualms by the rector's niece. . . . But I do say that one has to weigh carefully the balance between the amount of shock occasioned to conventional people against the amount of freedom given to the unconventional. The active rationalists are a small quantity . . . they should be able, therefore, to make their views known by the ordinary processes open to minorities. If, however, the vast publicity power possessed by the B.B.C. were to be put at their disposal, the amount of pain which would be caused to the conventional would not be balanced by the amount of pleasure caused to the unconventional. . . . Although I am not a religious person, and would, in fact, be classed as a pagan, yet I should certainly resist any attempt to put Atheism on the air. This would not be an illiberal attitude on my part, but due entirely to the realisation that religion or atheism are private things and the wireless an immensely public thing. I feel sure that if you think the matter over carefully you will agree that this decision is correct."

I feel inclined to say a word in defence of at least a section of the clergy of the different Churches. I do not think they are as much below the level of the Atheist as Mr. Nicolson implies. Most of them may be, but there are plenty who are not. They are not unintellectual; they are merely cautious. And their caution was manifested when they advised the B.B.C. to stick to religion through thick and thin and to push it by fair means and foul. We must be just—even to the clergy. Mentally honest men would have advised the B.B.C. either to admit all views of religion or none. But in the history of religion mental honesty among priests of any creed has not been very conspicuous.

A "Shocking" Apology

The basis of Mr. Nicolson's defence of the B.B.C. appears to rest upon a peculiar conception of "shock." There are all sorts of "meters" that measure different things; but I have never heard of a "shockometer," by which one could determine at what stage a citizen should be stopped expressing an opinion because it might "shock" someone. But I am certain that you cannot multiply "shocks" by adding up the number of people who are disturbed. If a hundred people are shocked at my saying that I doubt whether Jesus ever rose from the dead, had an argument with the Devil, or that he was born without the aid of an earthly father, there is not more shock than there would be if I whispered it in the

ear of the alleged rector's niece. (These nieces are often much more wideawake than their uncles imagine, and nurse the foolishness of the "old dear.") Each individual must carry his own shock. A hundred people who are shocked doesn't give us more shock; it only presents us with more people who are shocked. The distinction is rather important. There may be more people shocked if I say that Jesus Christ never lived than if I deny that Shakespeare wrote "Hamlet." But shock, like opinion, is always individual; it cannot be done up in parcels or made a subject of arithmetical calculation. In a political section five hundred fools will outvote 499 philosophers; but in matters of opinion one philosopher will outweigh five hundred fools.

Again, Mr. Nicolson, I believe, calls himself a democrat. But the essence of democracy is that each citizen shall have the same degree of voting power, the same degree of freedom of thought, speech and action. This is based on the assumption that in matters of opinion majorities and minorities do not exist. A vote in Parliament is essential because there is no other possibility of deciding on the direction of action; but to test the worthiness of an opinion by a vote is of all things the most foolish. This theory, I imagine, would be rank heresy in the B.B.C.

I would remind Mr. Nicolson that, according to popular belief, there was once a man called Jesus of Nazareth. As runs the story, what he said and did shocked a great many people—many more than would be, proportionately, shocked if an Atheist broadcast to the whole of Britain. And people went to the chief official and said, "He gives us shocks. We demand that he be stopped and punished." And if Pontius Pilate had had Mr. Nicolson for an adviser, it looks as though he would have said, "Oh, Pontius Pilate, this man has said things that give people shocks, and if we balance the pleasure his preaching gives to a mere handful against the shock given to the rest of the people it is right that he be stopped." And Pontius, as the equivalent of the B.B.C., said, "So be it. Let Jesus of Nazareth be seized and punished lest he giveth to the good people of the land more shocks." And so no Christianity.

Mr. Nicolson should carry his shock theory to its logical conclusion, for it is not only by the microphone that good, pious people are shocked. Criticisms of religion in books, in journals, in lectures, even in speech, give shocks to a great many people. And there actually is a law in this country which prohibits people using words that will shock the religious sensibilities of Christians. There is our Lord Chief Justice, who is being shocked week after week by the desecration of the Christian Sunday. Meetings for the express purpose of destroying Christianity are also held. Here, again, is material for Mr. Nicolson's "shockometer." If he is logical, and people are often more logical in their foolishness than they are in their wisdom, Mr. Nicolson should bring in a measure for putting an end to these things, and thus please the soul of the poor creature who poisons the minds of children with his religious finale to the Children's Hour.

Opinion

I do not appreciate Mr. Nicolson's distinction of Atheism and religion being private things while the B.B.C. is a

public one. First, as the B.B.C. is actually a public concern—since it is a licensed monopoly—there should arise from this the need for holding the balance level between all citizens. We have public institutions in other directions. We have it in the supply of water, of gas, of electricity and other things. And if any one of these monopolies refuses to serve certain citizens as they do others because it felt shocked at the opinions they have expressed an action at law would stand good, and they would be peremptorily ordered to "go and play the jackass no longer." If the B.B.C. were a private institution it might do as it pleases. At present it does as it pleases in a way that has driven many able men and women from the microphone and has prevented more able ones ever getting there.

But there is a deeper sense in which one may flatly deny that opinion is a private matter: a sense in which ideas and opinions are the most social things we have, the greatest public utility we possess, and the real secret of man's superiority over the animal world. For opinion is not born, like the fabled Christ, without parents. It has a multiple parentage; it is born not of men, but of Man. It begins who can tell where, it ends who can say when? But we do know that it is something which passes from generation to generation, it changes with each generation, and in its upward flight represents the accumulated wisdom and experience of the race. It may also represent the folly of man as well as his wisdom; but our highest and best duty is to see that the warfare of opinion is encouraged, not prohibited lest the foolish receive "shocks" and the timid are alarmed. If it be correct that truth is the finest thing for which we can work, and liberty the greatest boon that we can cherish, then it is childish to argue that the clash of opinion is to be stopped or nullified because the more ignorant among us may be shocked. Truth once gained is not to be kept in cold storage—to be taken out for an occasional airing when vested interests consider its exhibition safe. Free opinion is the lifeline of civilisation.

So it is in the interests of the rector's niece—and of the rector himself—as much as in the interests of all people who are so easily shocked when hearing an opinion that does not fit in with their primitive superstitions, that I regard the conduct of the B.B.C., as it is at present conducted, an institution that has the seeds of the greatest obstacle to genuine progress that now exists. We are protesting to "high heaven" that we are fighting a war for the freedom and the humanisation of a world where men and women shall be able to walk without fear and speak their thoughts with courage and honesty. It is a poor beginning, with the promise of a dark future, if an instrument that can deliver its message to every house in the country is to be dominated by men and women whose first thought appears to be not what opinion has to say on every aspect of a subject, but what shall we say so that we may avoid shocking the least informed, the least intelligent, the most superstitious and the poorer specimens of our people?

Broadcasting has a great future before it; but its power for good, rightly directed, is the exact measure of its power for evil when it assumes the championship of established doctrines and vested interests.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CRIMES OF THE CLERGY

IN 1823, William Benbow issued a curious work in serial parts entitled "Crimes of the Clergy." It was a record of clerical offenders against law and morality drawn from the years immediately before its compilation, though one or two cases, such as those of Archbishop Laud and Bishop Atherton, of Waterford, were culled from the 17th century. The appendix contains a violent onslaught against the continuance of ecclesiastical establishment in Ireland; the frontispiece is a cartoon of the clerical pluralist absorbing livings and tithes at the expense of the poor. It is an amazing list; offender after offender is attacked for pæderasty, immorality or fraud. Names and addresses are given, and in few instances does there seem to have been episcopal interference with the incriminated parsons. The main case is that of Percy Jocelyn, Bishop of Clogher, who was arrested on a grave charge in London in 1822, fled the country whilst on bail and was subsequently deposed from his dignities. Benbow is fairly accurate, though his spelling and topography sometimes leave something to be desired. On the one or two occasions that the present writer has been able to check up his statements, Benbow has not been caught out in a material fact.

The author was a dissenting preacher who had been a sailor and then a cobbler. He had resided at Newton, near Manchester, and knew the North Country well. When the work was published he was living in London. Attacked by the Vice Society, he was imprisoned for a time in the King's Bench. Later, he was a prominent Chartist and radical who sought to lead Chartism into the tactics of the general strike. The work is not free thinking; again and again Benbow professes his belief in Christianity. Yet it possibly did more harm to the Church than any number of anti-theological pamphlets. According to Shane Leslie, it was suppressed. Benbow attacks the Vice Society with enthusiasm; he is especially bitter against its president, William Wilberforce. An additional spice is occasioned for him by the fact that many of his criminals were among its members, some even featuring as vice-presidents of this clique which sought to suppress any work of an irreligious tendency.

The circumstances could hardly exist now. A series of reforming Acts of Parliament, dating from the early years of the last century, have all but abolished the pluralist who held more than one benefice, or the non-resident incumbent who drew his income and lived elsewhere, never visiting his rectory. The devout cleric Sydney Smith, felt offended acutely when his Bishop made use of the reforming measure of 1808 to force him to leave London and to reside upon the Yorkshire living from which he drew his income! Many of the clerical offenders whom Benbow arraigns could now be prosecuted under the Acts of 1840 and 1892 for clergy discipline. It is doubtful whether Percy Jocelyn, D.D., having been caught in a disgusting situation by seven witnesses, would now be admitted to bail, even though he was a relative of the Earl of Roden! A series of reforming measures did much to clear the air so far as the Church of England is concerned, but it is important to notice that they were not promoted from within the Church. They are usually claimed nowadays by ecclesiastical apologists, but the dates of the various Acts of Parliament show them to have been the outcome of a general movement for reform, political and social, which was in the air and which culminated in the Reform Bill passed in 1832 by Earl Gray's administration. Reform was a popular battle-cry; the reform of the Church was demanded very widely. The Oxford Movement, the High Church revival, originated in a sermon preached against any Church reform by the secular state acting through the Liberal Government. It was delivered in St. Mary's, Oxford, by John Keble in July, 1833, and was an attempt to upset the reforming movement in the Church of Ireland. It is such authors as Benbow who have to be thanked for the reform; the clergy had no wish to see it come about.

The great lesson for to-day of Benbow's book is that the internal condition of any Church will be affected and conditioned by its social, economic and political environment. The end of the 18th and the early years of the 19th centuries were years of intensive political reaction. They also witnessed the passage of power from the feudal landowners to the new class of industrialists. The agrarian age was over-ripe; decay had set in and was falling to pieces. The Church of England is an essentially agrarian body in origin; the tithe system betokens its close connection with landed interests. It partook of the general decay which was creeping over agrarianism; the motives which it exhibited were those of hunger and fear. In few instances is there such a clear example of the truth of the Marxist interpretation of history and its causation. The attempt to maintain an ecclesiastical feudalism in the midst of a rapidly changing society brought into being a hunger of greed. Many of Benbow's examples are those of an oppressive type who were seeking to wring the last penny from the populace. They were faced with the new artisans of the towns; freethinking was arising and radical politics left scant room for ecclesiastical monopoly. Again, fear can be read in many of the clerical activities, such as those of the Vice Society. They had enough perception to realise that, in the world immediately succeeding the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the liberty cap was a symbol of challenge to their prerogatives. They sought to meet the situation by violent oppression; the reforming Acts were the natural sequel which rebounded upon their own heads. In the meanwhile, the whole system was in decay; the moral rottenness was the outward sign. Benbow scourges the Methodists for their inactivity; an economic interpretation of history shows them to have been the escapists who sought to meet changing and revolutionary times by taking refuge in a next worldly piety.

The age of Benbow was that of the Industrial Revolution; the present period is equally revolutionary, though in differing ways. The French Revolution of 1789 shook Benbow's world, the Russian Revolution of 1917 has marked the beginning of the end for private monopoly capitalism. The same signs are to be seen in the Church of England. It made an uneasy alliance with the new capitalist classes a century ago, but it is now faced with a period when its old friendships are breaking up. The Dean of Canterbury has read the sign of the times with accuracy and is fighting gallantly on the side of advance. But the majority of churchmen are appalled by the situation and seek to take refuge in oppressive reaction. The pleas of the Dean for justice to India find no re-echo in the speech of the Archbishop of York, made in the House of Lords and accepting the Tory deadlock. Fear drives some churchmen to attempt mild social reforms. The Archbishop of Canterbury produces a programme which does no more than to echo many things said by the Fabian Society since 1883. Yet it was far too revolutionary for the diehards of his own Church, who have been the most active in opposing it. The same moral rot has set in. Certainly, few clergy would be guilty of the gross offences which Benbow scourges. Times and manners have changed. But there has been a progressive decline in the quality of candidates for ordination. An inferior, and sometimes effeminate, type of man is recruited. Dean Inge long ago suggested that, if theological modernism was excluded, the Church would be the happy hunting-ground of fools, bigots and liars. It seems to have come about, induced not only by an out-of-date theology but also by an economic and political fundamentalism which links up the Church of England to the politics of an ultra-reactionary class, making it a Tory corporation through and through.

The history of the opening years of the last century are worth observing. They brought about a freethought which was linked up with prevailing issues. Benbow started as a devout dissenter appalled by the corruptions of ecclesiastics. He was forced over into the Chartist camp. The true remedy for ecclesiastical

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ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of Canterbury says that the "Christian aim" is "so to order life as to secure that the public interest always prevails," and this involves a definite attack upon a number of vested interests. We do not wish to do more than point out that this kind of statement may mean anything or nothing, and to put a simple and straight question, which some readers might pass on to Dr. Temple. The question must be preceded by a very significant fact. First of all, the situation concerning housing and the need for better conditions of living for large masses of the people is not a new development. The situation is, in fact, very much better than it was and, in spite of all that may be said, conditions are very much better for the poor to-day than they were even 50 years ago, and better almost beyond belief when compared with what they were just over a century ago. Yet in those days, when the Churches were much more powerful than they are to-day, they were not merely mainly blind to the situation, but they generally denounced the early pioneers of social reform, but even assisted and applauded the suppression of agitators.

But the question we wish to see put to Dr. Temple is this. Are there any of the reforms that, in general terms, Dr. Temple is advocating impossible without the belief in the Churches and their doctrines, or are they forms of social improvement that have been and are being advocated by others without any reference to religious belief? If the answer is that the value of these reforms has no real connection with religious beliefs, why does not the Archbishop take the larger and less controvertible basis for social reform?

The plain and obvious truth is that Dr. Temple's concern is not so much social reform, as such, but the preservation of the power and status of the Church. He is not out to unite the activities of all men and women who are willing to work for social reform, but to use them as instruments to maintain the power and prestige of the Church.

The proof of this is seen when we find him saying, in the same address, in reply to a challenge by Sir Stafford Cripps, "I do not think we ought at this time to embark on a campaign for disestablishment." But how can one expect, say, land reform, without touching one great source of the wealth of the Church? It is perhaps worth noting that Sir Stafford's remark at the Albert Hall meeting involved the disendowment and disestablishment of the Church, and on that matter the Archbishop is almost silent. Disestablishment, to be of full use, must involve disendowment. It would also wipe out the bench of Bishops in the House of Lords. On this also Dr. Temple is silent. He prefers to stick to generalisations and to see two parties of reform—the religious and the non-religious—and so weaken both. The plain ground here is to unite reformers and leave the question of religion outside the reform agitation.

It is, by the way, a pity that Sir Stafford Cripps is also in an increasing measure sandwiching religious phrases and appearing at religious meetings with much idle talk about the value of religion. It would be a pity to find him joining the league of lost leaders. If Sir Stafford thinks he can use the parsonage in the interests of social reform he will find himself seriously mistaken. Others have tried that game, and the people at large have had to pay for the adventure. The English Churches have had a long experience in watering down social movements and cannot be captured so easily. We advise Sir Stafford to consider again the old rhyme about the young lady of Riga who went for a ride on a tiger. Sir Stafford appears anxious to co-operate with the Churches. At that game he will soon find himself following the Churches. The wiser and the more profitable plan would be to invite the Churches to follow him.

We were sorry to find General Smuts saying in one of his speeches that the League of Nations had failed. That is not in accordance with the facts. The League of Nations died, but it did not fail. It was strangled. Thanks to the "big fellows" who dominated the League, it was never allowed to function as it should have done. If the League had acted

as it should have done it would have prevented Mussolini setting out on his Abyssinian enterprise and also in his annexation of Albania. It would have stopped Japan's aggression and saved the Chinese from an invasion. It would then have been in a position to stop Germany and Italy using Spain as an exercise ground for their troops. Very materially the Baldwin and the Chamberlain followers played into the hands of Germany because they thought she could be used to check Russia. The League of Nations did not fail, save in the sense that it was prevented functioning as it should have functioned. We are now paying the price of the ruin of the League.

It is held, we believe, that the questions asked at the Brains Trust meetings are not selected. They are just taken out of a pile. Cannot some scientist who attends many of these meetings be asked "Is the sinking of all questions likely to reflect on religion to the bottom of the pile due to some unknown quality of gravitation, as it is not likely that the laws of chance can explain the phenomenon?"

The Roman Catholic "Universe" has a special column each week which answers perplexed believers who, while believing in Roman Catholic doctrines, show occasional anxiety as to what the devil is the meaning of what they believe. It is apparently a case of believing first and trying to understand afterwards. In a recent issue the priest who has charge of this section explains to one anxious inquirer that it is not "absolutely necessary for the divinity of our Lord that he should be born of a virgin." But the questioner is reminded, for fear he should run loose, that as Jesus "was the Son of God the Virgin Birth was fitting." By which we understand that even with God what was fitting did not always happen. If you can believe in the Virgin Birth, so much the better. But if you can't, then let it go. Meanwhile, the Church will go on teaching it.

But there have been so many Virgin Births where gods are concerned, we have often wondered why in the Christian case something original was not tried. Being born without a (known) father is a very common incident with both mortals and gods. It is therefore a little surprising that in the case of Christianity something really unique was not attempted. Why not have dispensed with the mother also? That would have been something that would have placed the Jesus incarnation quite at the top of the tree.

Those two daredevil reformers, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, recently desired that women might be permitted to enter church without wearing hats, thus deliberately ignoring St. Paul's plain teaching to the contrary. Result, some Christians have complimented them on their courage, others have attacked them for betraying their creed. Still, we must recognise courage when we see it, and the moral courage displayed is great—for a couple of highly-placed clergymen.

Of course, many Christians are up in arms. One writes to the "Daily Telegraph" inquiring by what authority the Archbishops annul the "Divine law laid down by St. Paul" concerning women when in the "House of God"? They have none that we can see. Another says that no man "Has the right to revoke a Divine law." We agree with these protestors. For, after all, St. Paul said that women were to keep silence, by which he meant they should not preach in church; and the Church which pays these two men £25,000 between them still forbids women the pulpit—except for scrubbing it out. Christian tradition is very rich in its denunciation of the sex, a member of which tempted Adam to sin and so led to the corruption of the whole race. We think the Archbishops have been too hasty in their eagerness for such terrific reforms concerning the bonnets a woman shall not wear in church. But—what a creed!

The "Church Times" discovers there is a shortage of "padres" in the Forces. That means, of course, that the "Church Times" would like to see more in the Forces, but we have never heard of complaints from any body of men in the Service. If the question was put to the vote of the men "Shall we have more padres or a liberal cigarette allowance?" we fancy we could bet on which would have the largest vote.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.—Received, but must be held over till next issue.

S. PLEETH.—We have no means of knowing, nor has anyone else the number of Atheists in Russia or elsewhere. All we can be sure of is that the number increases. So far as the number has any bearing on post-war reform is in question, conflict of opinion is bound to arise whatever opinions on religion are held. All we can say with certainty that given less religion the different issues will be more clearly faced, and a better solution to problems that arise will be more likely.

S. N. DENISON.—Thanks for compliments on "An Atheist's Approach to Christianity." We note your wish to see it taken as a subject for discussion in "Discussion Circles." Why not try it in some of your local institutions. The result would be interesting.

W. J. FREEMAN.—Thanks for report. Will deal with it in the course of a week or so, but we are horribly crowded for space nowadays.

A. HANSON.—See "Sugar Plums." We note what you say, and will hear it in mind.

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

THE orders for the new edition of the "Bible Handbook" still roll in, and there was never a better time for it. With the attempt to get the Bible more strongly in the schools, it is well to have the Bible, and "nothing but the Bible," well circulated. All who have ordered copies of the book in advance should by this time have received them. If they have not—and letters do get delayed nowadays—will they be good enough to send a postcard advising us.

We were pleased to note in "The Two Worlds," a leading article pricking the bubble that this is a Christian country, and also the elaborate lying by the clergy from the Archbishops that the morality of our everyday life is a "Christian" morality. We have always done our best to kill this Christian falsehood, and are pleased to see that at last its complete exposure is "in the air." The Christian claim is not only false, but the leaders of Christianity know it to be false. But in a creed so riddled with falsity one lie more or less does not count for much.

The curious thing is that up to little more than a century ago no such claim was put forward by responsible Christian leaders. It was never made by the early Christians, and it had no place in historic Christianity. It could not be otherwise. The foundation claim of historic Christianity was that salvation could be gained only by belief in Jesus, and as the story of the thieves crucified with Jesus showed, no matter how great a blackguard

a man might be, salvation could be achieved at the last moment by faith in Jesus. Take this away and nothing is left of essential Christianity.

Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen made the "House of Laity" of the Church Assembly shiver the other day when he said that "masses" of the English people had no knowledge of and no interest in religion. "Masses of them were just disguised Atheists." We agree with Sir Arthur that masses of the people take no interest in religion, but if he is right, what becomes of the trumpeted rush of the people to a day of national prayer? Of course, the truth here is that, give the people anything like a "show" or a procession headed by the King and leading Churchmen, with adequate advertising, and there are masses that will join in. The "populace" has always loved a show, no matter what it is about and where it is staged. We have read of enthusiastic crowds in provincial towns so great that all traffic has been stopped and everything else set aside to welcome home a victorious football team. The crowds could not have been denser had Jesus staged his advertised "second coming."

But what is meant by "disguised Atheists"? We suspect that the phrase is used as a way of suggesting a deep and deadly plot against the welfare of the country, and which must be frustrated somehow. There are, of course, some millions of Atheists in this country, but all of them do not carry the name of Atheist. They prefer some other term that is more "respectable." But we are certain that Sir Arthur does not hope to lead them to Church. As we have so often said, a man may go right through his life without knowing a particular thing, but once he knows the truth of a subject, he cannot unknow it. You cannot unpull a man's nose. Once pulled it remains pulled for ever.

The Bishop of Gloucester writes in "The Times" for November 5 that the present state of Germany and the downfall of France was due to lack of religion in the schools. But that is downright nonsense. Until the opening of the last war Germany was held up to the people of this country as a great Christian nation. Certainly there was no lack of religion in its schools; and the immediate cause of France adopting the system of Secular education in State schools was the discovery of the rottenness of Church leadership. In the great Dreyfus scandal nearly all the leaders were good Roman Catholics; and those who played into the hands of Germany in this war were mainly good Christians. Spain, before the revolution, was also saturated with Christianity. The Spain of to-day reeks with it. How stood the old Spain and how stands Franco's Spain with regard to education? The Bishop of Gloucester must have profound faith in the gullibility of his supporters.

Our contemporary, "John Bull," is generally a fervent advocate of religion, but the present religious educational muddle has caused it to protest in terms which we in "The Freethinker" have been using for years. As thus:—

"Talking of schools, a reader tells us of a Church school in such bad repair that the children get wet in their classrooms and the sanitation is barbaric. Alas! that is but one of many.

"The Church's attitude seems to be that such schools shall be rebuilt at State expense, but that the State shall not gain control of them.

"That, too, does not accord with 'John Bull's' ideas of social justice. We agree with the sentiments of our reader: 'We are tired of 1066 methods.'"

It may interest some of our readers to learn that "Reveille," that very plain-spoken journal of, ostensibly, Service news, proposes instituting a "Service corner" for the use of Belgians in this country. That part of the paper will, it is announced, be written by the men themselves and, "except within the limits of the censorship and space, these men will write what they like." It would not be a bad plan if some of our daily papers were equally hospitable with regard to subjects that usually attract very scant notice. "Reveille" is published fortnightly at Brunswick Mansions, Handel Street, W.C.1, price threepence. It may be ordered through any newsagent.

THE CATHOLIC VOTE

FOR many years I have been puzzled by the influence that is exercised in this country by that well-known phrase, "The Catholic Vote." At these three words the knees of politicians begin to tremble, the bravest hearts seem to flutter a little and some of the most highly principled men seem to be overcome by doubts and misgivings.

Men whose judicial capacity is normally exercised fairly, at these three words strain every brain fibre to reconcile their fair-mindedness with the giving of privileges (not rights) to this minority sect; educationists who otherwise clearly recognise the true function of education in a community of mixed people will, at these words, become fuddled in their ideas and contradictory in their actions.

"The Catholic Vote"—truly a phrase of terror and intimidation; yet, almost a myth. As much a myth as that other phrase, "The Catholic Church is the only one that is growing in this country." Two myths, I am convinced, yet each somehow possessing the power to hypnotise our public men just as (we are told) the snake hypnotises the rabbit.

To dispose of the second myth, surely nothing more is needed than to observe the general religious decline, and to ask whether, in this period of the rapid decay of Christian belief, it is possible that even one branch of the Christian Church should be escaping the general collapse. Belief in a personal god seems to be fast disappearing. Where the religious idea continues it is now largely expressed by a pretence of belief in some sort of nebulous power, or force, unassociated with dogma, creed or Church.

As Rome has probably the most anthropomorphic of all recent (comparatively) gods, and as such gods are discredited by the modern mode of thought, even in elementary quarters, it seems inevitable that Rome must suffer with the rest, disintegration of numbers, even if at a slower rate, being the major effect. This, of course, is conjecture from personal observation. But the conclusions are supported in fact by the only evidence available. That evidence is, that the Roman Catholic Press frequently bemoans a falling away from the Church, just as the others have bemoaned a falling away for many years. No doubt the R.C.s have suppressed their moans for a longer period than the others, but it is clear that, as the moans are becoming more insistent, the pains are becoming more intense; and they are not growing pains!

Now let us look at the "vote." With the valuable assistance of "Whitaker's Almanack," "The Catholic Directory," year books and other publications, I have gone thoroughly into the question of the Catholic vote—and at the very most I can only make it that Roman Catholics form 7 per cent. of the population of Great Britain. This gives us, taking the national average for families, one R.C. home in 15. The true figure would be nearer one home in 20, as R.C. homes have a higher "sectional" average of children per home than the rest of the country; but if we give them the benefit of the lower national average we can safely say 1 in 15, and no more.

Let us now assume that every man, woman and child has a vote. The "terrible" Catholic vote could muster only seven in every 100 on a full poll. But only adults have a vote and, again bearing in mind the higher number of children in R.C. homes, the real voting strength must be lower than the population percentage of seven. I should say, from my examination of the relative figures, that it would be nearer 5 per cent. But we will give them the whole 7 per cent. and then have a peep at the power of this voting strength.

In the last General Election (1935) the national percentage of votes used was 75 of the total electorate. For simple analysis we will take 100 as the total of electors. Of this 100 there are 75 who will cast votes. Assume that the Catholic vote is fully 7 per cent. and solid to the core (which is not the case), and we get a situation in which seven Roman Catholic voters are out to

force an issue on which 68 non-R.C. voters would be opposed or indifferent, because non-Catholics generally have little sympathy with Catholic "demands."

With such a situation it is yet seriously believed that these seven votes can swing an election in which other and more important issues are at stake than Catholic sectarian interests. It cannot be true, in a general sense, that such power rests in the hands of that 7 per cent. If candidates who are not in sympathy with R.C. demands had the courage to say so, instead of being intimidated by the open impudence and the veiled threats of R.C. leaders; if selection committees had the courage to stand out against candidates chosen and pushed by the Church for sectarian purposes; if those committees selected only men whose chief concern was the secular administration for which they were seeking election—the so-called power of the Catholic vote would melt like snow in the sun, or would vanish like the myth that it is in fact.

I appreciate, of course, that in some constituencies the R.C. vote might just make a beneficial difference to a candidate who was pledged to work for R.C. interests—provided that his opponents were not pledged. But if neither, or none, of the candidates were pledged, the R.C. vote could not affect the issue even in the few constituencies of that type, as there could be no useful direction of the R.C. 7 per cent. by the Presbytery.

If candidates had the courage to say plainly that they were seeking election to administer for the secular needs of the whole community, and not for sectarian religious interests, the Catholic vote would insignificantly follow the secular course of the political sympathies and social ideas of the voters. Catholics, outside their religion, have the same secular needs as other people, and the same proneness to bear those needs in mind when voting. If they were refused promises of privilege for their religion they would be sensible enough, I feel sure, to vote with other objectives in mind, thus merging themselves into the general electorate. If they withheld their votes, only they would suffer.

This, of course, assumes a courageous and honest band of candidates, with the mental honesty to agree together that religious interests are outside the scope of secular politics. It is a great deal to assume, or to hope for, but it could be done quite easily with a little intellectual spring-cleaning on the part of politicians—and the hypnotic influence of the snake would disappear.

To encourage any future candidate who may desire to follow the honest course, I quote the following figures. In 1939 the population of Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) was 44,759,357. Of this total the Roman Catholic Directory (1939) claimed 3,020,888 as Roman Catholics. So that on their own figures, which will not be under-stated, they have 1 in 15 of the population, or rather less than 7 per cent. Bear in mind that a large number of these R.C.s are crowded together in five or six areas of the country (where, indeed, they might have a local majority), and it will be seen that in the country generally R.C.s have very little numerical strength.

Bear in mind also that all the figures quoted about Catholic adherents are suspect. We are well aware of the Catholic habit of counting all classifications—good, bad and indifferent Catholics. We are now also aware, in the light of recent investigations in connection with youth movements, that in our thickly populated districts the proportion of young people with religious connections is as low as 3 per cent. This is very revealing, because it could lead to the assumption that Catholic "real strength" must be somewhere below that 3 per cent.; for we know that attendance at church is obligatory on Catholics under pain of "sin." Catholic "sinners" among their suspect 7 per cent. must be very numerous indeed if the figure for all churches in heavily populated areas is down at 3 per cent.; and I should hesitate very much before being prepared to accept regular "sinners" as being Catholics of influence!

Why, then, this shuddering at the mention of the Catholic vote? Why this hypocritical "respect" for a religion that is alien to the secular interests of the State, if and when those interests are not favourable to the Church; a religion which serves a foreign political power (the Vatican) rather than the democracy whose citizenship its members share in Britain? As citizens of Britain, R.C.s are given the only political rights to which they are entitled—a say in the country's affairs, by means of the vote, according to their numbers. Why allow that power to be multiplied far beyond its true strength by allowing it to dominate selection committees, and to set off candidates against each other, in order to gain religious privileges?

Perhaps the answer is contained in some other figures. The number of Roman Catholic clergy (excluding nuns and monks) in Britain is 6,683, or one to every 450 of the R.C. population. This contrasts strongly with the average for all other denominations of one cleric or minister to every 1,000 of population. My deduction is that the problem is not one of the power of the vote, but of the power of the priest. In this country R.C.s have more than double the proportion of priests possessed by all other forms of Christianity. More than double the capacity for interfering in secular life, for making mischief! More than double the man-power for doing the dirty work of sectarian religion in political and social life.

Let us hope that our politicians will soon realise that helping religious movements to secure privileges is no part of their job as democratic representatives. Religion is essentially a matter for the individual in a community of mixed ideas. There is sufficient to do in this world without going to the help of God to assist him with the next world. Let us hope that our politicians will soon wake up to the fact that pandering to religious demands—especially to the demands of Rome—has put us "in the cart" many times in the past; and that pandering to Rome is especially dangerous in these times, when we owe so much to Moscow, and so little to the Vatican. The T.U.C. recently set a good example on education. Let Parliament follow suit.

These are the times of the twilight of the Gods; may the power of the priest perish with them.

F. J. CORINA.

GODISM AGAINST HUMANISM

II.

(Concluded from page 485)

"... When they feign

That Gods have established all things but for man,

They seem in all ways mightily to lapse

From reason's truth."—(LUCRETIVS, c. 75 B.C.)

I BEGIN by a warning, but brief. I often refer to "lines" between different periods, classes, party-sections, etc.; between mental and material, ideologic and economic, etc.; and in relation to other aspects of the Human World. In all such usages I am not postulating an "absolute" line, nor any metaphysical one, but merely a theoretic or scientific-abstract line, which is not only useful but essential to a scientific understanding of any problem in our human social-existence—past, present or future. This warning is needed because the overwhelming majority of humans think—if or when at all—in terms of the individual and concrete, which is the most serious difficulty in relation to Godism (Religion), Morals, Economics and Politics. Messrs. Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Attlee are only three

interesting and instructive cases of this in the great multitude of great and small.

In the "Problem" of the Multiplication Table we are dealing with the twofold aspect of human life—human individual existence and human social-existence; i.e. the individual person and the group (family, tribe, nation, etc.). These two existences are separate, but mutually interlocked and inseparable in action and reaction. Anthropology (with other branches of science) enables us to understand how humankind has developed—individually and socially—from the primitive to the present. It also tells us all we need to know about the social and mental disease of Godism. Our liability to appendicitis, hernia, varicose veins and some troubles in pregnancy, are part of the bodily inheritance from the past: Godism (Religion) is the collective mental inheritance, socially; and the remedy for Godism in the social body is similar to the one generally used for appendicitis in the individual body.

We know of human "communities" in which the only "counting" was the difference between none, one and some. "Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought," by Chapman Cohen and "Savage Survivals," by ? (my copies are at my permanent home address—if such there be these days—more than 200 miles away) tell us quite a lot about our inheritance. Of counting or "numbers," we know that all "groups" who can count at all, do so in periods of five and/or ten. It is so that coal and cargo are still "tallied" (counted) on board ship all over the world. Ten is one tally, 100 tallies is 1,000 of whatever unit it may be; the tally being made by four strokes and one across diagonally, or nine strokes and one across diagonally. The cause (not "reason") is obvious to anyone who can think at all. The average normal human has ten fingers and ten toes—in peace time; so, as they learn to count, they use their fingers instead of, or along with, "other pebbles on the beach." Fingers, and figures up to ten are both still known as "digits."

Just think how it is rubbed and stamped into us all—even now and even from birth. The mother, bathing her first babe—the finest and the loveliest ever born—gently dries *each* finger and *each* dear little toe. As the babe grows, its hand goes out to grasp whatever it can—a habit often continued throughout life. This power of grasping is itself part of our inheritance, along with hernia, from our very remote ancestors who took to the trees and so survived. Thus the infant, "mewling and puking" on its mother's lap, grasps its five toes with its five or ten fingers and tries to swallow the lot. A little later, after the nightly bath, the mother plays with its little toes and, tweaking *each* one in turn, teaches it the old nursery tale about "This little piggy went to market," etc. Almost with our mother's milk we soak-in the "idea" that twice five equals ten. Perhaps the

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obscurantism is an enlightened attitude to life which seeks to systematise its thinking into a scientific view of the universe and which sets forth its interpretations in social and economic terms. A freethought which does not undertake these tasks is an academic thing; it is useless to expose corruptions and to leave their roots uncovered. The present time is revolutionary. The alliance with the Soviet Union has gone deep into the contemporary mentality; it is unlikely that the reactionaries will triumph finally, even though they may attempt to gain a measure of post-war control. The part played by the Church in this coming struggle for power will be interesting; it will most probably be on the ultra-reactionary side. Freethinking, the rejection of the conception of theological orthodoxy, can make its greatest contribution by subjecting ecclesiastical history to a scientific analysis and laying bare the results, as seen in the prevailing Church mentality. Such works as Benbow go far to supply useful data; it is for this reason that it is as well to recall them to-day.

"JULIAN."

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK

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earliest and deepest imprint in our infant brain-cells forms the basis for the decimal system of numbering and its multiplication table. Any Godist who says this is incomprehensible without some spiritual agency is as senseless as the mother who dopes her child by sips of gin. Spiritual and spirituous complacency—dopes have much in common.

The natural, human, material-cum-mental process is often continued by the use of the Abacus, which is merely an artificial extending of fingers and toes. Six wires in a frame, with ten beads strung on each wire. Top wire (or right hand) units, second wire tens, and so on. The child counts ten beads on first wire and shoves over one bead on the second, and so on again. By that means a child can learn to count up to 1,000,000. As late as 1899 I saw the Abacus used by adults, in the Far East, to do their counting. Next, in the school, the tables are learnt, often slowly and very painfully, mainly by memorising; and so they become "part and parcel" of our mental make-up.

It is true that we do not—yet—fully know how these imprints in the brain-cells become—more or less—immediately active when required, but our understanding of these processes in physiology and psychology steadily increases, and all the advance strengthens the case for Philosophic "Materialism" or Scientific Atheist Philosophy—as indeed in all other branches of science.

From all this it is plain to see that no Godism is needed to understand our ability to count and calculate—instead of guessing, as the Godists do. From the "two-times" table, up to the most abstruse tables, calculations, and Einstein's Mathematical-Relativity; "logical consistency and intellectual sincerity" compel us to declare that the whole process is natural and human, without any supernatural or spiritual forces to confuse the issue.

The same simple but scientific method of analysis enables us to clear away the mental fog of Godism from morals, economics and politics. The "parsons" (all professional Godists) always claim authority in morals, because they claim to represent incomprehensible spiritual powers; but they can't supply even a definition of morals, theoretic and applied, that is comprehensible. Their attempts to justify their claims are, scientifically, as incomprehensible as they admit their gods to be.

If a monument be required for the failure of their Godism, look around the world to-day. Then turn, with renewed energy, to join in building the New World—the "New Civilisation"—by means of scientific understanding, and with "l'audace, encore l'audace, toujours l'audace."

ATHOSO ZENOO.

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

(An Open Letter to the Most Rev. and Right Hon.
C. F. Garbett, D.D., Lord Archbishop of York.)

YOUR GRACE,

The "Cambridge Review" of October 17 contains a report of a sermon preached by you on October 11 before the University of Cambridge. After emphasising the simplicity of the gospel of the early Christians, you said: "As time went on/pious opinions and questionable theories were exalted into doctrines necessary for salvation. . . . To-day, with the exception of the Quakers, every Church has doctrines, institutions and modes of worship which are far more complex than those found in the early Church. . . . much in our Church is quite unintelligible to men and women who are now standing apart from all institutional religion. . . . difficulties in grasping the meaning of Christianity are greatly increased by the frequent confusion made by Christians themselves between doctrines and practices which are essential to the faith and those which, valuable and helpful as they may be to the instructed Churchman, are not necessary for salvation. . . . I am convinced that what is urgently needed to-day is a short, simple authoritative statement of the meaning of Christianity. . . . It should contain nothing which is not

essential to salvation, and should exclude all doctrines of secondary importance."

On reading these words the thoughts at once arose in my mind, firstly that possibly I, though unable to accept many of the doctrines of the Church of England, might yet be saved, and secondly, that who could be better able to inform me on the general position than one of your Grace's pre-eminence in the Church? Hence this letter—an open one because all those outside the Church of England, and the readers of "The Freethinker" in particular, should be interested in your reply. In these days, when the danger of sudden death is greater than usual, I am sure you will not hesitate a moment to instruct us lest some of us unwittingly perish body and soul. To give you some guide I should like to know whether the following are necessary for salvation:—

Baptism;

Belief in the birth of Jesus of a virgin mother;

Belief in the resurrection of the body of Jesus.

A friend tells me I haven't a hope of getting an answer because there is no agreement in the Church on these questions, but I am loath to think that such a consideration, if valid, would override your Grace's courage and humanity. It would be a comfort to some of us to know that we were not regarded by the national Fathers in God as lost souls.

Yours faithfully,
L. HAWKES.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; Parliament Hill Fields: 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park): Sunday, 3-0 p.m., Mr. G. WOOD and supporting speakers.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, Dr. H. MANNHEIM—"Crime and Juvenile Delinquency in a Changing World."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Café, Kirkgate, 7-0.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. A. COPLAND—"The Ways of Providence."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mrs. VERA WOODWARD—"War Commentary."

Nelson (Central Fire Station, N.F.S. Discussion Group): Sunday, 6-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON—"Spiritualism."

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Café, Newcastle): 6-15, Branch meeting.

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Café, Pilgrim Street): 6-45, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place): 3-0, Mr. J. V. SHORTT, a Lecture.

South Moor: Sunday, 10-30 a.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.