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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Christian Truth

"I HAVE said in my haste all men are liars," says the Bible. Confessedly this was said in haste, but an unbiased student of Christian history and theology could say it at his leisure without feeling that he had greatly overstrained the position. Yet I, who count it for good never to have believed in Christianity or any other religion, would not accuse the bulk of Christians of being liars. For a liar is one who deliberately falsifies facts in order to reach a given end. He must believe he is telling a lie. There is distinction between the liar proper and they who misrepresent for the greater glory of God. The position was stated by Paul in theory that if his lie had "abounded" to the glory of God, on what grounds could he be called a liar? With a desire to be as charitable as maybe, I prefer to take this view of the innumerable departures from the "truth" that has characterised Christians in all ages where the Glory of God was concerned. Probably we have in what has been said provided a reason why religious lies live longer than secular ones.

From one point of view I cannot withhold a certain measure of respect for many historical, political, literary and religious liars. After all, ingenuity is ingenuity irrespective of the purpose for which it is exercised. But I decline to take all these characters as liars whether they be politicians, Bishops or newspaper scribblers. They may be purveyors of falsities, vehicles for the transmission of inaccuracies, but they follow the Pauline philosophy, of inaccuracy, but they follow the Pauline philosophy, "If my lie hath abounded to the glory of God, why am I called a liar?" If the Churches had stuck to unadulterated truth about their religion they would have disappeared centuries ago. If any Government followed that rule it would be out of office in a month. I do not believe that either politicians or parsons deserve that ancient, clear-cut character indicated by the word "Liar." "Humbug" is a more suitable term in most circumstances.

### Goethe and God

Little things may point to great issues; and what I have said has been suggested by a Saturday article which

appeared in a recent issue of the "Evening News." It was a religious article, and the writer—unnamed—commences with what we may call a Christian truth. He says: "To-morrow is Advent Sunday, and already men's minds are turning to the immortal story." The phrasing suggests that at least the majority of men on that Saturday were deeply interested in Advent Sunday, and that is certainly not the case. It may be doubted whether a majority of people could say what "Advent Sunday" stands for. Still, it is good propaganda. It may induce with many the feeling that *other* people are interested in this Church ceremony.

But I was specially interested in a passage dealing with Goethe, one of Germany's greatest and most attractive thinkers. Goethe was not a Christian, that much is certain. He was a great admirer of Spinoza, and he was said by some to be a Pantheist after the style of that great teacher Spinoza. But the God of Spinoza did nothing but exist. Spinoza's God does nothing, wants nothing; he is not a person, he has neither will nor intention. In the language of his time Spinoza might have described God as the substratum of all existence, and that is all. Finally, Spinoza was an uncompromising determinist. His religious contemporaries called him an Atheist, and substantially they were right in so calling him. But in those days Christianity meant something. To-day it means anything that will attract an adult congregation.

To the "Evening News" preacher Advent Sunday suggests light, and light reminds him of the last words of Goethe, which he gives, correctly, as follows:—

"His speech was becoming less and less distinct. The last words audible were 'More light.' The final darkness grew apace, and he, whose eternal longings had been for more light, gave a parting cry for it as he was passing under the shadow of death."

This is taken from the "Life of Goethe," by George Henry Lewes, and its sole use for the preacher is that it presents—if correctly interpreted—Goethe, just before dying, crying for more light concerning God or immortality. In reality it was nothing of the kind, and the suggestion in the article is the more obnoxious because in the account from which this passage is taken there is simply no room for misunderstanding. Goethe was not in his last moments at all disturbed or concerned with anything connected with religion of any sort. And there is no possibility of anyone honestly reading the account of his death coming to a contrary conclusion. But here are the whole of the passages in Lewes's account of Goethe's last moments. They will be found on p. 559 of the "Life of Goethe," second edition, 1864:—

"The following morning—it was the 22nd day of March, 1832—he tried to walk a little up and down

the room, but after a turn he found himself too feeble to continue. Reseating himself in the easy chair, he chatted cheerfully with Otille on the approaching spring, which would be sure to restore him. He had no idea of his end being so near.

"The name of Otille was constantly on his lips. She sat beside him, holding his hands in both of hers. It was now observed that his thoughts began to wander incoherently. 'See,' he exclaimed, 'the lovely woman's head—with black curls—in splendid colours—a dark background.' Presently he saw a bit of paper on the floor, and asked how they could leave Schiller's letters so carelessly lying about. Then he slept softly, and on awakening asked for the sketches he had just seen. These were the sketches he had just seen."

(Then follows the passage cited in the "Evening News.")

"He continued to express himself by signs, drawing letters with his forefingers in the air, while he had strength, and finally, as life ebbed, drawing figures slowly. At half-past twelve he composed himself in the corner of the chair. The watcher placed a finger on her lip to intimate that he was asleep. If sleep it was, it was a sleep in which a great life glided from the world."

Now, if the writer of the article we are criticising dealt with some passage in the life of Goethe, or the meaning of something he had written, his presentation might be passed as a mere misunderstanding. But in this instance there is no room for misunderstanding. Goethe was not concerned with how he should face death; he was not discussing what God was like. He simply desired to see more definitely the beautiful scenes his imagination had conjured up. Literally Goethe was asking for more *light*, not for more enlightenment. It takes an advocate of Christianity to transform a request for an extra candle into a desire for more knowledge of God.

### Christianity's Nemesis

Matthew Arnold said that the Bible as a book inspired by God was the Nemesis of the Christian Church. He might well have taken this belief in the power and value of death-bed conversions as its moral nemesis. Nothing more morally degrading than this can be found. It is intellectually degrading and morally revolting. Yet it is part of fundamental Christianity. It is taught in the New Testament by Jesus Christ Himself. In the account of the Crucifixion Jesus is hung between two thieves. And one of the "malefactors" said to Him, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." What is this but the lesson that no matter how great a "malefactor" one happens to be, he may be saved by a simple act of faith? That is the historic teaching of a religion that is now being mouthed by professional advocates as the only real foundations of human morality. Consider the teaching of a very great preacher who will be remembered by some now alive—Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Men, he argued, could be lost or saved in a moment. Conduct had no logical connection with

salvation. He asked: "Shall the devil destroy in a moment and Jesus be unable to save in a moment? Christ delights to save the biggest sinners . . . If you have gone through the foulest kennels of iniquity, no stain can stand against the power of the cleansing blood. You great sinners shall have no back seats in heaven. There shall be no outer court for you. You great sinners shall have as much love as the best, as much joy as brightest of saints. You shall be near to Christ; you shall sit with Him upon His throne; you wear the crown; your fingers shall touch the golden harps . . . Thirty years of sin shall be forgiven, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it. Fifty, sixty, seventy years of iniquity shall all disappear as the morning's hoar-frost disappears before the morning sun."

If Christianity be true, that teaching is sound. It is a teaching held by the greatest of preachers and the most scholarly of theologians. And if that teaching is not sound, then the need for belief in Jesus is gone. If ethical conduct, as such, is all that is required for salvation then, granting the historical truth of this hashed-up specimen of mythology, respect for Jesus is no more than respect for Socrates, or the myriads of people who have stressed the understanding of good conduct. If conduct is enough to save a man, then faith in Jesus is unnecessary. Earlier generations of Christians knew what they were talking about. The various official creeds were not drawn up by fools or by men who had no understanding of what Christianity meant. Take the supernatural quality of Christianity away, and as a religion it disappears. Present-day leaders of Christianity know this as well as we do. But Christianity is presented in a more subtle form than in the days when Christian leaders could afford to be intellectually straightforward. When, for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury says that morality is impossible unless based on belief in God, he is, in essence, back with Spurgeon and Pusey and other intellectual representatives of the primitive. But he speaks more carefully.

If one wishes to understand the real nature of historical Christianity, and above all the long pertinacity of the death-bed salvation superstition, the Christianity of the leaders of the Churches must be borne in mind. The story of the thieves on the Cross gives the key to the situation. It was belief in Christ that was essential, not mere conduct. It was always the fear of hell that made the Christian heaven attractive. At its best the Christian scheme is a moral. At its worst and fullest it is a definite denial of the value of conduct as such. That leading Christians of to-day have been made ashamed of this primitive but essential Christian teaching is to the good. What has yet to be done is tear the mask from those who aim at re-dressing this ancient superstition in moral clothing.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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Without free speech no search for truth is possible; without free speech no discovery of truth is useful; without free speech progress is checked and the nations no longer march forward towards the noble life which the future holds for man. Better a thousandfold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech. The abuse dies in a day, but the denial slays the life of the people and entombs the hope of the race.—CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

## THE NAZI RAPE OF AUSTRIA

THE Germans' seizure of Austria in 1938 was signalled by all the atrocities that have since been inflicted on nearly all the territories they have overrun. A system of despotism was immediately established; mob violence became customary and a relentless harrying of Israel, long prevalent in the Reich, soon extended to Austria. So appalling became the sufferings of the Chosen People that the Nazi authorities for very shame sent a level-headed official, Herr Burekel, to restrain the rabble. But while he was absent in Berlin the terror was openly encouraged, and it seems probable that such official restraint as existed was exercised for the purpose of securing the property of the plundered Jews for the German Exchequer.

That sinister personality, Himmler, soon arrived in Vienna with the notorious Heydrich as his associate. As Professor Allan G. B. Fisher intimates in his able and discriminating study of European events, published in the "Survey of International Affairs in 1938" (Oxford University Press, 1941; 28s.), the appearance of these worthies indicated "that the terror which had been part and parcel of the Nazi régime since Hitler's advent to power in the Reich in January, 1933, was to be extended immediately to the new territory which the Reich had just acquired through the annexation of Austria. In the event, this Nazi terror was exercised in the new 'Ostmark' with a wilder fury and a fiercer malevolence than it had displayed, even at its worst, in the old Reich."

Prominent Jews, including eminent men of science, business men, bankers and physicians were arrested in Vienna. All Jewish Judges, State Attorneys and other functionaries were summarily dismissed. The poorer Jews endured most shameful mistreatment, and in less than a week nearly 100 Jewish suicides were officially recorded in the capital alone. The Viennese Jews were compelled to subscribe 800,000 schillings to the Nazi Party funds. But the outrages in some provincial centres appear to have been even more heinous, and wholesale arrests and consignment to cruel concentration camps constantly occurred everywhere in Austria.

Educated Germany in pre-Hitlerite days displayed a pronounced tendency towards Rationalism in religion. In fact, that keen observer, the late Lord Acton, averred that Christianity had been more deeply undermined in Deutschland than elsewhere. But with the ascendancy of the Nazis, a marked reaction set in and the works of Heine, Schopenhauer and even those of the long-adored Goethe were publicly incinerated. Within the Reich there developed an increasing desire to subject all speculative opinion to State dominion with the restoration of the dethroned deities who reigned in Germany in pre-Christian centuries. In Austria, however, the mass of the uncultured population still lingered in the twilight of Catholicism, and a wealthy clergy retained much of its old-time power.

When the Hitlerite invasion occurred, the Catholic dignitaries, despite the prolonged persecution of both Romanist and Protestant cults in Germany, decided to give Hitler a hearty welcome when he appeared in person in Vienna. Having lived so long in conditions of unchallenged security, the hierarchy was completely unprepared to cope with the Nazi onrush. So every effort was made to conciliate the invaders. The Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Innitzer, without waiting to discover what Hitler's Church policy was likely to prove, "ran forward to strew roses in his path with almost reckless prodigality."

The Cardinal not only issued a signed appeal to the faithful "to offer prayers giving thanks to the Lord God for the bloodless course of the great political revolution and making his intercession for the happy future of Austria," but when the Fuehrer arrived in the Viennese suburbs the Cardinal ordered the pealing of all the church bells in the city. "For these courtesies," it is stated, "Cardinal Innitzer was rewarded by being granted a quarter of an hour's interview with Herr Hitler . . . before the

close of the conqueror's first visit to the capital of his native land as its temporal lord and master." For the Austrian Concordat with the Vatican had automatically terminated through the ending of Austria's independence. In these critical circumstances the clergy decided to take counsel together in Vienna concerning their future policy. This seemed urgent, for already portents of coming trouble were already in evidence. "On his way to the conference of prelates at Vienna," observes Dr. Fisher, "the Archbishop of Salzburg (the titular primate of all Germany) was searched and temporarily placed under arrest, while the Archbishop of Gratz saw his palace attacked and ransacked by a mob, and was compensated for this outrage by being taken to prison and temporarily confined in a cell."

The hierarchy, however, still persevered in its plan of appeasement, and texts were composed for recitation during religious services which, among other laudatory tributes to Hitler and his henchmen, contained the following paragraph: "We recognise with joy that the National Socialist movement has achieved and is achieving outstanding work in the sphere of national and economic reconstruction . . . and particularly for the poorest sections of the people. We are also convinced that the danger of an all-destroying and godless Bolshevism was averted by the labours of the National Socialist movement. These labours will in the future be accompanied by the heartfelt blessings of the Bishops, who will exhort the faithful in this direction."

The document was posted to the Gauleiter, Herr Brückner, with a covering note which concluded with the words "Heil Hitler" inserted in the Cardinal's handwriting above his signature. With the facsimile reproduction of the two documents in the German Press, the Nazis naturally rejoiced, if the faithful suffered depression. The Vatican viewed these proceedings with anxiety and the "Osservatore Romano" published a covering letter which, so it was said, Cardinal Innitzer had forwarded to the clergy on his own initiative in which he had intimated that in the declaration projected for Sunday's services it must be remembered that it was "made under the full guarantee of the rights of God and the Church."

This statement that the Vatican was party to the Austrian hierarchy's pronouncement was repudiated at Rome, and Cardinal Innitzer wrote to the Gauleiter to the effect that the assertion of the Havas Agency in Berlin that the Bishop's declaration was designed to "relieve the tension," was inaccurate, "for I hold it beneath my dignity," continued the Cardinal, "to make gestures in such an important historic situation."

The clergy were now in a sad dilemma, as a Vatican broadcast in German censured their conduct. Thus, the broadcaster intimated that all honourable men would consider this "attachment of the pastors to the powerful men of the day as a lack of dignity and a breach of trust." Spurious political Catholicism, it was urged, is in every way reprehensible.

Then to make confusion worse confounded, it was subsequently stated that this wireless castigation was unofficial "and had been delivered without the knowledge of the Cardinal Secretary of State." Yet, Cardinal Innitzer was constrained to repudiate his impolitic proceedings in a recantation published in the "Osservatore Romano," in which he conceded that the Austrian clergy's pronouncement "was not to be regarded as expressing approval of what was not compatible with the law of God or the liberty and rights of the Church."

After his return from a penitential journey to Rome, Innitzer nevertheless authorised his clergy to hoist the swastika banner on suitable occasions, observe the Hitler salute and peal the bells. All in vain, however, for the Fuehrer soon made clear his determination to place the Church under a completely secular control. For, having gained all that was forthcoming from clerical submission, Hitler promptly proceeded to plunder the Church. Throughout the Ostmark, as Austria was renamed, in May, 1938, commissioners were appointed to visit "all the monasteries and abbeys to make inventories of valuables in their

possession, in order to make sure that none of these should be placed beyond the Nazi Government's reach without the Government's permission. On May 24 it became known that the Benedictine Abbey of St. Lambrecht in Styria had been confiscated with all its possessions, including the shrine of Maria-Zell." Every Catholic students' association was dissolved and its property confiscated. Earlier in the year 60 Catholic priests were arrested and put on trial for alleged acts of an immoral character. Convents and priories were summarily closed and a priest was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for the misappropriation of Church funds. The largest Catholic organisation in the Ostmark was dissolved and all clerical schools in Styria were closed.

Church and State were now at daggers drawn. It was now plainly obvious that all attempts to arrange a compromise had failed, and the clericals presented a firmer front to the enemy. A clerical demonstration in the capital, 10,000 strong, was in consequence very roughly treated by the Nazi police, who dispersed the gathering. Next evening a Nazi multitude gathered in the Stefanplatz in Vienna and wrecked the Cardinal's palace. Having broken in, the rioters "began hurling pictures, books, chandeliers, furniture and sacred objects through the windows to the crowd below, who made a bonfire of the debris, while policemen, S.S. men and S.A. men stood by without attempting to restore order." All Catholic seminaries were soon swept away, and wholesale defections from the faith followed, while the future for the Church within the Ostmark seemed very dark indeed.

T. F. PALMER.

## THE SURVIVAL OF RELIGION

CHURCHMEN and Nonconformists are often to be found trotting out the old herring that the survival of religion is proof of the truth of it. As if antiquity were the hallmark of truth! On such a hypothesis it might be contended that war is a good thing because it survives after thousands of years. At any rate, there are older and better religions than Christianity.

But why has religion survived? It often declines. Many a time it has seemed to be breathing its last. Yet it has survived.

The Rev. Charles Finney, in his famous "Revivals of Religion," says that religion is maintained by revivals, by God taking advantage of man's excitability.

While the present writer holds no belief in God at all, he does believe with Finney that religion has been saved (i.e., the Christian religion) by revivals. By mass hysteria. By the presentation of fearful doctrines by a forceful personality.

Revivals come and go. The tide rises and ebbs. When revival comes the same doctrines seem to hold the pre-eminent place in the preacher's message. Let us glance at these doctrines as expounded by these great apostles of the faith.

Of course, the love of God is preached, but only against a background of "eternal damnation" for the poor sinner who cannot believe in the tyrannical God of the Bible. Yes, hell has always had a prominent place in the preaching of the great revivalists. Fear has been the emotion mainly worked upon. In Johnathan Edwards' meetings men and women held on to chairs lest they should there and then slip into hell, so forceful was the preacher's presentation of "Their foot shall slide in due time."

In a classical sermon on "Hell," John Wesley preached as follows: "All the pleasures of the imagination are at an end. There is no grandeur in the infernal region; there is nothing beautiful in those dark abodes; no light but that of livid flames; and nothing new, but one unvaried scene of horror upon horror. There is no music but that of groans and shrieks, of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth; of curses and blasphemies against God, or cutting reproaches of one another . . . there is no friendship in hell . . . it has been questioned by some 'whether

there be any fire in hell'—that is, 'any material fire.' Nay, if there be any fire it is unquestionably material, for what is immaterial fire? The same as immaterial water or earth! Both the one and the other is absolute nonsense, a contradiction in terms. Either, therefore, we must affirm it to be material, or we deny its existence. . . . And consider this: does not our Lord speak as if it were real fire? Does he design to fright his poor creatures? What with—scarecrows?"

Enough of this drivél. Wesley rambles on telling us how that these torments of the damned are for ever and ever. That there is no respite. No chance of acquittal. None whatever.

God, Wesley assures us, would not scare us but with realities. He would not fright us with imaginary shadows. But he would fright us; and so we have the doctrine of hell. God's chamber of horrors. Or, as R. A. Torrey called it, "the madhouse of the universe."

Whitefield, Moody, Gipsy Smith—all have taught the same thing, all have brought the fear of hell into the lives of good men and women; and when they have brought this fear to evil men they have not made them good—they have merely made them cowards. A good man seeks good for its own sake—not as a bribe to induce God to kindness.

We will glance at just one more sample, namely an extract from a sermon (typical of many more) by C. H. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers (or leader of the credulous).

We find Spurgeon speaking thus: "There is no atonement for the man who died in unbelief; there is no mercy for him. Had he been guilty of every other sin he would have been pardoned; but this is the damning exception—he had no faith. Devils seize him! O fiends of the pit, drag him downwards to his doom! He is faithless and unbelieving, and such are the tenants for whom hell was built. 'He that believeth not shall be damned.' . . . The wrath to come! . . . Methinks I see the last great day. The last hour of time has struck, eternity is ushered in . . . a throne, and on that throne sits one like the Son of Man. I know him, and I smile with gladness that he is come to be 'admired of all his saints.' But there stand a throng of miserable wretches, crouching in horror to conceal themselves. . . ." Then follows the typical Spurgeonic appeal to trust in the love of the God of this Hell.

Unbelief in a pack of absurdities, then, is to be regarded as the worst sin. I may murder, steal, lie, exploit, etc., etc., but I must not doubt. If I only believe in this Jesus of the Cross, this hideous sacrifice of blood for the sins of the world, this impossible birth, resurrection and ascension, and coming again of the mythical Christ. (Yes, where is the sign of his coming?) If I do not believe, then devils wait ready to show me my eternal abode. Hell was built for such. Specially designed by an all-loving God for all his subjects who turned out to be too wise to swallow superstition like an aspirin. All the scientifically-minded men and women; all who have spent their lives seeking the truth and have been driven to reject the claims of Christians as so many falsehoods. These are the tenants of hell. At least, I shall have good company. There will be plenty of irony and fun. Intellectual genius will be in the ascendancy. The clowns will be above the bright blue sky with all the priests and other liars of like feather. The "Sunday Observance zealots" and the "Educate the Young in the same old lies" crowd will be up above. Boredom in heaven will be supreme.

Good old Spurgeon. He has at least made us laugh. We tremble not, nor fear. We do not expect to be crouching in horror to conceal ourselves from this Son of God. As a matter of fact, we should have too many questions to ask him.

But enough. Let us turn to Wells. What does he say of death? He says that men fear death because "they imagine death as a new sort of living." He says, "They conceive death rather as a conscious paralysis, a stiff awareness of impotence. But no man will ever know that he is dead. You may know you are dying, but that is because you are still alive . . . there

is an idea that we are made up of two (or three) elements . . . and there is an idea of 'dissolution,' a wrenching apart of these two (or three) constituents. It is painful, one gathers, and we have such phrases as 'the last agony' to kindle our apprehensions. The vile body remains. Soul and/or spirit depart in some direction not specified. . . . Priests discourage inquiries, and are apt to become evasive and irritable when they are made. . . . And yet that disembodied life ought to be of the intensest interest to everyone who subscribes to it. Consciousness, one gathers, goes off with the detached material, but how it carries on without a periodically aerated brain is wisely hidden from us. . . . As a boy I heard a shrill missionary in Portsmouth Cathedral trying to impress us with the tortures of the damned. Every moment the damned individual is to experience all the pain that has ever been on earth, and more also. Even at 14 it was impossible not to feel that this Christian God of Hell was an utterly detestable maniac, demanding hate and defiance at whatever cost. I am told that now things are very different, even in Catholic teaching, and that the God of Hell and Salvation has been making himself better understood even in the most authoritative circles. Hell, it seems, has been closed for repairs and reconsideration, and may never be opened again. That is good news for countless scared little children—if it gets to them."

However, to return to the point of this article. Religion has survived mainly through the fear of death and of hell that it has fostered in the mind of man. To-day, the doctrine of hell is losing ground, and the Church is losing ground at the same time. The doctrine must stay if the Church is to keep her power. If it goes, then the Church will be injured beyond recovery.

And it is such a church, with such a doctrine (among others), that wishes to educate our children by pouring its terrifying stories into the ears of the young.

LLOYD COLE.

## THE PAGAN ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS

WHEN and where did the keeping of Christmas begin? Many of the details of its early history remain in uncertainty, but it is fairly clear that the earliest celebration of the Birth of Christ on December 25 took place at Rome about the middle of the fourth century, and that the observance of the day spread from the Western to the Eastern Church, which had before been wont to keep January 6 as a joint commemoration of the Nativity and the Baptism of the Redeemer. The first mention of a Nativity feast on December 25 is found in a Roman document known as the Philocalian Calendar, but embodying an earlier document belonging to the year 336. It is uncertain to which date the Nativity reference belongs; but further back than 336, at all events, the festival cannot be traced. . . .

The French *Noel* is a name concerning whose origin there has been considerable dispute; there can, however, be little doubt that it is the same word as the Provençal *Nadan* or *Nadal*, the Italian *Natala*, and the Welsh *Nadolig*, all obviously derived from the Latin *natalis*, and meaning birthday. One naturally takes this as referring to the birth of Christ, but it may at any rate remind us of another birthday celebrated on the same date by the Romans of the Empire, that of the unconquered Sun, who on December 25, the winter solstice according to the Julian Calendar, began to rise to new vigour after the autumnal decline.

Why, we may ask, did the Church choose December 25 for the celebration of her founder's birth? No one now imagines that the date is supported by a reliable tradition; it is one of various guesses of early Christian writers. As a learned 18th century Jesuit has pointed out, there is not a single month in the year to which the Nativity has not been assigned by some writer or other. The real reason for the choice of the day most probably was, that it fell upon the pagan festival just mentioned.

The *Dies Natalis Invicti* was probably first celebrated in Rome by order of the Emperor Aurelian (270-5), an ardent worshipper

of the Syrian sun-god Baal. With the *Sol invictis* identified the figure of Mithra, that strange Eastern God whose cult resembled in so many ways the worship of Jesus, and who was at one time a serious rival of the Christ in the minds of thoughtful men. It was the sun god, poetically and philosophically conceived, whom the Emperor Julian made the centre of his ill-fated revival of Paganism, and there is extant a fine prayer of his to "King Sun. . . ."

The strictly religious feast of the *Saturnalia* was held on December 17, but the festal customs were kept up for seven days, thus lasting until the day before our Christmas Eve. Among them was a fair called the *sigilliariorum celebritas*, for the sale of little images of clay or paste which were given away as presents. Candles seem also to have been given away, perhaps as symbols of, or even charms to ensure, the return of the sun's power after the solstice. The most remarkable and typical feature of the *Saturnalia* was the mingling of all classes in a common jollity. . . . The festivities were marked by "drinking and being drunk, noise and games and dice, appointing of kings and feasting of slaves, singing naked, clapping of tremulous hands, an occasional ducking of faces in iced waters," and the slaves had licence to revile their lords.

The spirit of the season may be judged from the legislation which Lucian attributes to Chronosolon, priest and prophet of Cronus, much as a modern writer might make Father Christmas or Santa Klaus lay down rules for the due observance of Yule. Here are some of the laws:—

All business, be it public or private, is forbidden during the feast days, save such as tend to sport, solace and delight.

Let none follow their avocations save cooks and bakers.

All men shall be equal, slave and free, rich and poor, one with another.

Anger, resentment, threats are contrary to law.

No discourse shall be either composed or delivered except it be witty and lusty, conducing to mirth and jollity.

There follows directions as to the sending of presents of money, clothing or vessels, by rich men to poor friends, and as to poor men's gifts in return. If the poor man have learning, his return present is to be "an ancient book, but of good omen and festive humour, or a writing of his own after his ability. . . . For the unlearned, let him send a garland or grains of frankincense."—*"Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,"* by C. A. MILLS, pp. 20-22. pp. 165-6.

## ACID DROPS

IN most cases where religion interferes in social life it interferes for the worst. Recently the newspapers published an account of a will containing a clause that often crops up with Jews and Roman Catholics, and occasionally among Protestants. The first forbids a Jew or Jewess to marry a non-Jew, the second forbids marriage with a Roman Catholic, and the third forbids a Protestant marrying a Roman Catholic. In each of these cases the right of the citizen is interfered with, and it is to be hoped that in all such cases the court follows the example of the judges in the case just named and has the offensive clause wiped out.

Unfortunately, in this recent case the judges decided that as the testator did not leave clear instructions as to what degree of adherence to the creed, the clause was void. But that seems to us a very lame way of settling the matter. We write under correction, but it seems that this kind of clause should come under the "against public interest" principle. For it is against public interest for a testator to carry his control beyond the grave and to obstruct the exercise of a right that should be beyond question.

Free choice in marriage should be the unquestionable right of every adult woman or man. It is one of the indisputable marks of social solidarity, of a real democracy, and a recognition

of human independence. No person and no section of people can have a real right to call themselves democratic who do not acknowledge this right. We do not mean that marriage is to be without real choice and a proper appreciation of the value of character. But all the talk we get of "blue blood," "royal blood," etc., are exhibitions of an ignorance that should be recognised as such. And of all these phases, divisions on a religious basis is the worst and the most objectionable. Really, we have a fair way to travel before we have any solid claim to call ourselves a really civilised society. We can say we are on the way towards civilisation, and that is about all.

Here is another question that shows how very thin is our veneer of civilisation. We refer to the Sunday question. We note that the Government is to be asked to give time for a debate on a motion to amend the Sunday Observance Act so as to permit Sunday theatrical performances; and also to amend the Defence Regulations to prevent local authorities stopping cinema performances for soldiers. The Sunday regulations are a hall-mark of the low degree of culture that exists, for holy or sacred days belong to a very low level of intellectual culture. They are not a bit better in quality than sacred sticks, sacred clothes, or sacred persons. And to-day we cannot honestly claim that our legislation ought to be decided by these fetishistic considerations. Even those who believe in these things are ashamed of avowing their real reason for championing such fetishistic prohibitions. And the same people who really believe in these sacred days—our Lord Chief Justice is among them—when pressed for a reason fall back upon some such foolish and false tale as robbing the working man of his day of rest. That plea was much louder when men and women were working like slaves and living like brutes.

It will be noted that in this movement the plea of some members of the House of Commons is that soldiers need the Sunday for recreation, etc. With all respect for soldiers or sailors, we have an equal respect for tinkers and tailors and for any man or woman who is playing his or her part as a member of society, whether we are at war or living as peacefully as we know how. If it is bad for soldiers to be roaming about on Sunday with no places of entertainment to attend, it is equally bad for civilians. Soldiers should have as much freedom as others, but we fail to see why they should have more. Sabbatarianism did not prevent the growth of our slums, it did not prevent drunkenness, it did not make men and women better—it merely taught them to be humbugs and petty tyrants instead of decent, thoughtful citizens. Sunday trains, Sunday omnibuses, Sunday lectures, Sunday papers, Sunday recreations, everything connected with a brighter and better life was denounced by ardent Sabbatarians.

And the cause of this and of the opposition to a more enlightened view of life was what? The survival of the most stupid form of superstition, and the fear, in recent times, that if healthy entertainments were permitted on Sunday the Churches would lose their power over the people. That is true, and to-day the maintenance of Sabbatarianism has become even more important to the Churches than any other. So presently we shall, if Parliament is permitted, be able to see just how many members who believe as we believe, and who would agree with all we have said, are possessed of enough moral courage and mental strength to treat this stupid fetish of a "sacred" day with the contempt it deserves. If twenty so speak we shall be surprised. A much larger number will vote for some revision of Sunday laws, but those with courage ought to say what they believe. Parliamentary life does not seem to make for moral courage in such matters.

In spite of the B.B.C. giving the pulpit a pretty free hand and guarding the Christian religion from being attacked, even in the mildest manner, it still does not please all the Churches. For example, at a meeting of the Deer Presbytery (Scotland) a complaint was made that the B.B.C. did not always use the authorised version of the Bible; moreover, there were times when Bible reading was accompanied by "colloquial and slanging diction." That is very bad indeed. But when an author's work is distorted it is the author who should complain. Why not get a complaint from headquarters?

Besides, there are certain parts of the Bible which, if read in public, would invite a prosecution for indecent language. And the Postmaster could summons a man for sending such language through the post. We are not fancying this, we are simply stating a fact at law. And we are quite sure that if those parts of the Bible were read in Church, that portion of the congregation which were awake would probably get up and walk out. And there are many parts of the Bible that, if translated accurately, would cause some consternation in the religious world.

Two people—a man and a woman—have been sent to prison for three months for persuading some people that they could bring them into contact with the dead. The essence of the fraud, so far as this case was concerned, was that money passed. We do not think there would be any legal prosecution otherwise. One would like to know what essential difference there is between, say, introducing the dead to the living and claiming, as does the Roman Church, that a piece of bread and a drop of wine is changed into the flesh and blood of Jesus by the ceremonies of the Church? To this may be added the performance of "Masses" with direct and indirect payments, based on the claim that they will benefit the dead. We agree that in many cases it is just a matter of law whether what one does is moral or immoral, but the Spiritualists may well ask why they are picked out for specially hard treatment.

The people who talk so glibly about the Axis bloc being "pagan" should consider the case of Hungary. Hungary was our enemy in the last war and is again our enemy in this. But the Christian element is so strong there, the Hungarian Minister of Education claims that more schools should be established—on a religious basis. "How," he asks, "can a body be educated if no soul dwells therein?" In this matter the Hungarian section of the Axis is in cordial agreement with our own Christian leaders and our Minister of Education.

The Pope gave a broadcast recently for the benefit of the Portuguese. He reminds them that "Our Lord saves the world from day to day offering his Eternal Father his own precious flesh and blood." That *may* be cheering, but we confess to not being able to see why. First, there is the son placating his father by offering the said parent his own "flesh and blood from day to day." What a nice kind of parent the "Father" must be. The giant of "Fee-fo-fi-fum" fame is pale at the side of him. Why this daily renewal of prayers and sacrifice from the Son? A pardon from day to day doesn't look secure enough. One day the Father may alter his mind, or the Son may omit to offer his daily dose of flesh and blood. And what will happen then?

A member of the R.A.F. writes to the "Universe" that he always thinks of God as his "best pal," and imagines God to be "a young man dressed in uniform like myself." There is nothing substantially new in that, although it differs considerably from the elderly gentleman with a hooked nose and flowing beard, dressed in a large nightgown, that used to decorate the pages of illustrated Bibles. Men have always made their gods in their own image. How else could they make them? And the likeness is not merely physical—they are always the same in character. A brutal man has a brutal God and a benevolent one has a God to suit his own character. The young member of the R.A.F., without knowing it, had given an illustration of a process that has existed ever since man called gods into existence. He ought to become a regular reader of "The Freethinker." He will then learn more about God in a week than he would in any church in the country.

Someone, anxious to help the war effort, suggests the saving of fuel by putting all the old unused windmills in the country into operation. The suggestion seems to us a good one, and it should be forwarded to Archbishop Temple and the heads of all religious organisations. For there must be a very large number of old windmills in churches and chapels who offer marked examples of a misuse of energy.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

T. S. THOMAS.—Thanks for the suggestion, but the 7-55 terror is such a mixture of foolishness and deliberate misrepresentation that it defies criticism. The best we can say of these five-minute addresses is that they are only five minutes in duration; and the kindest thing we can say of the speakers is that they do not believe what they say.

J. MARLOW.—We are not surprised you find this paper "poisonous." It is intended to be so. It aims at poisoning as many stupid ideas and retrogressive attitudes as is possible. But keep on reading it and you will find yourself taking a wider and better view of life. Your feeling the sting at the moment is an indication that you are not quite insensible to common-sense. Persevere and better results will follow.

D. D. MURRAY, J. DARKER and ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.—Too late for this issue. Will appear next issue. Thanks.

A. D. CORRICK.—We know the publication well. Have written you.

H. ELLIOT.—You are quite right in what you say. But our space is cramped and strict arrangements cannot always be made. One day we shall get back to easier conditions.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—MRS. A. SHIEL; 5s.

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*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.*

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## SUGAR PLUMS

WE are in great distress—or we ought to be—for that well-known Canadian newspaper, the "Globe," spends a full column of one of its issues in proclaiming to the world that it does not think much of us. Our chief offence seems to be that we treated C. E. M. Joad as though his sayings were the prattlings of a schoolboy. We might put in a plea for reconsideration of that because it would depend upon the age of the schoolboy. If a young boy, then one would expect statements about science and philosophy that needed correction; but with the passing of years, there comes a stage when not to feel one's shortcomings and confusion calls for correction. In defence, we would say that we dealt with the person in question as kindly as is consistent with one's duty to one's readers.

Our second offence is that we gave Miss Dorothy Sayers "a rap over the knuckles" because she did not answer as we expected our statement that "honesty remains honesty, kindness remains kindness, truthfulness remains truthfulness whether the teacher be God or man." Again, in self-defence we must say that the "rap" was given because Miss Sayers, after saying that morality depended upon belief in God, did not—or could not—supply any reasonable proof of the statement being true. We agree that it is an offence for an Atheist to ask for proof of the truth of statements made in the interests of religion, but the habit of looking for evidence for statements made is not with some easily discarded. That may, therefore, be attributed to our weakness.

The article ends with the reflection that "It is sad to see Mr. Chapman Cohen, who recently celebrated his 74th birthday, engaged in such a profitless occupation and giving so little evidence of having found joy in life." Now, we do feel inclined to demur at this characterisation. For our occupation for over 50 years has not been profitless (unless the phrase is used in a strictly financial sense), and so far as we are aware there has been no lack of joy. We do wish that these religious folk—or these folk who write about Freethinkers without knowing what Atheism really means—would drop this foolish talk about lack of joy or profitless endeavour. Advocating Freethought is not profitless, for it takes men such as the "Globe" writer, who moan and groan about the littleness of life without God and a future life, gives them a shaking, and often gets them to stand up, look at God, and find him just—nothing at all; and as that myth is dispersed so life becomes real and earnest and man, instead of being a puppet of the gods, becomes the shaper of his own destiny, and in doing that shapes the destiny of others. If the "Globe" writer is a young man, our best wish for him is that he will get over the infantile stage he is in and so learn to appreciate what the struggle for opinion means. And if he is an old one we can but regret that so many wasted years have been spent with no great prospect of a genuine enlightenment being achieved.

We find we were in error in a recent issue in giving the price of our lively contemporary "Reveille." It is published fortnightly at "Reveille," Clifford's Inn, Fleet Street, price 2d. Published primarily for the Forces, it usually contains much interesting matter on other important issues.

From a Scottish paper we learn that "workers at a big West of Scotland munitions works" have asked the local Presbytery to send ministers so that they may have regular religious services. So six Church of Scotland and two Roman Catholic priests are going monthly to administer the dose.

We cannot say this statement is false; in fact, we accept it as true—in the Christian sense. For example, the story reads as though the people employed in the factory all, or nearly all, wanted this religious service during work hours. In that case, this firm must be unique. What we expect is the case is that several workers got the tip to ask for the service; in other words, the suggestion comes from the clergy and the few faithful ones carried it out. We suggest that, as a counter-stroke, the dissenters in the works should ask for an address on Freethought while the other handful are on their knees.

Friends from Preston, Burnley, Bolton and Accrington were present at the Public Hall, Blackburn, last Sunday. Mr. Rosetti's lecture was very well received and a number of questions were dealt with. Mr. J. Clayton was an efficient chairman, and the local secretary, Mr. J. Sharples, was happy at his well-stocked bookstall.

We print with pleasure the following from one of our old and staunch readers, Mr. H. Elliot, of Manchester. We see no reason why Mr. Elliot should not again appear as a contributor to these columns.

I have just been reading your book "An Atheist's Approach to Christianity" and wish to say that although it is only a small book, yet it ranks, in my opinion, as a great work, and while it will, of course, be highly appreciated by all who have discarded the Christian and all other religions, it should do a good work amongst any who are still orthodox because of its close reasoning and the cogency of its arguments.

You may be interested to know that I have been a reader of the "Freethinker" for close upon fifty years, and that well over forty years ago (when Mr. Foote was editor) I had the pleasure of seeing myself in print with the "Freethinker" when Mr. Foote accepted an article of mine entitled "Christianity Reconsidered."—Yours, etc.

HAROLD ELLIOT.

## PYRAMID PROPHECIES

IN the good old days when religion was really taken seriously, when people really believed that God could be approached through a priest—just as in these days an officer in the Army can be approached by a private through a non-commissioned officer—prophets were quite common and could be both heard and seen.

There may have been exceptions, but most prophets appear to have been very dirty, unkempt and obviously very hungry. I have often thought a good cure for a prophet would be a juicy steak with Worcester sauce and plenty of delicious chips. Living unfortunately on grass and a few roots with cold water to wash them down, it is no wonder these unfortunates commenced to prophesy. I think I should have done the same thing in their place.

Luckily for us, the greater part of their prophecies have disappeared, and those which have survived owe their existence, I think, to the fact that there is an element of poetry and a feeling for the choice of words in their make-up. Otherwise there could be no excuse for a great deal of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Obadiah and other religious heroes.

Nowadays, prophets are at a discount, whether they are religious or military ones. The world's greatest astrologers have been proved to be wrong so often that, if they are read at all, it is merely to have a good laugh. Even astrologers make splendid entertainment—like the Brains Trust, sometimes. The curious thing is that so many people still exist who for some strange, unfathomable reason, insist on having a prophet or prophecies to guide them. We meet them in those stern Bible believers who are never at a loss to find a verse from "Holy Writ" which fits in with their present troubles—or those of the nation, for that matter. Everything we are experiencing in these troublesome days was "prophesied" in the Bible; and, of course, the remedy is there. The Bible is the Living Voice of God, given to us by the Creator of all things so that we can do his will—and God help us if we don't!

But prophets have been rather shy lately in coming forward; I mean, of course, those who believe themselves to be speaking for God, or are believed by other people to be "inspired." Perhaps it is because in this country there are no deserts or roots to live upon. Perhaps also because if a prophet tried to live like St. Simeon on a pole, he would be considered literally "up the pole." In fact, it has been irreverently suggested that Jesus himself, if he tried the Saviour business in these days, would probably be interned in a lunatic asylum with Roman Catholics heavily against him.

Be that as it may, there is a section of the community who have discovered a marvellous prophet in the Great Pyramid of Gizeh. We might—with reason—call some famous prophet a lunatic, but it is no use calling a pyramid names. There it stands, still one of the Great Wonders of the world, but far greater than anyone could have thought it because, we are told and asked to believe, it is packed with God's own prophecies. Everything that has happened in the past, and everything that is happening now, and everything which is going to happen in the future can be found somewhere in the Great Pyramid through a few simple measurements. In fact, the Biblical prophets were mere children in comparison.

A huge literature has sprung up on the Pyramid. Here in England and in France before the war were published dozens of books describing the monument in detail. I cannot pretend to have read more than a few of these books, but what I have read makes me wonder why their writers do not believe in the Arabian Nights, in wizards and witches, in the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life—indeed, in the whole body of occult literature. Perhaps they do.

The Great Pyramid has been taken bodily over by the people who declare that the British nation are Israelites, the descendants

of the Ten Lost Tribes. Of all the fantastic nonsense the Bible is responsible for, this has always seemed to me the silliest, but you will find men and women perfectly sensible on all other subjects become gibbering idiots on this question; and the way they quote the Pyramid in support of their wildest statements, makes me gasp to such an extent that I cannot make an adequate reply. There are some stupidities which defy sane criticism.

To attempt a rational critique of the positions taken up by the believers in the Great Pyramid would be a sheer waste of time. Before me is one of the latest books, "Great Pyramid Proof of God," by G. R. Riffert, describing its wonders; and its author has gathered together in one volume a sort of résumé of many of the more detailed books dealing with its marvellous construction, and proof of not only God, Jesus and Creation, but also of the absolute accuracy of the Bible in every respect. Every line, every word, letter and comma in the Bible is "inspired" and supported by the Great Pyramid. Every prophecy in the Bible, when tested by the Pyramid, can be proved to be fulfilled. Every great event in the history of the world was first prophesied there—all the wars, plagues, catastrophes, religions and anti-Christes, as well as aeroplanes, tanks, the wireless—and I should not be surprised to learn that Worthington's advertisements are also there. With a little more ingenuity I am certain that even the names of all the great writers, artists, musicians and inventors the world has known and will know in the future, are all carefully inscribed in some way in the King's Chamber or in some other passage.

Let us look at a particular prophecy related in all earnestness. It seems that the Pyramid has an Inch almost the same size of the English measure. The British people, being Children of Israel, of course could do no wrong here. How different with the Atheistic French nation. Mr. Riffert says that "the French Sceptics during the Reign of Terror in 1790" introduced the metrical system. God seems to have wrongly inspired Mr. G. R. Riffert here, as the Reign of Terror did not commence in 1790 but in 1793; while it was not till 1837 that the metric system was finally adopted. However, the real offence was in rejecting God's unit of measure and adopting the "Atheistic" one with terrible results to France: "We need not be surprised to learn that it harmonises quite well with their frightful and tragic administration of French affairs." Mr. Riffert's book was published in 1932, but no doubt he would point to the mess France is in now as the result of adopting the metric system instead of sticking to the English—that is, God's—inch. If this does not convince you that the Great Pyramid was built under God's direction, then nothing will.

The birth of Jesus is exactly given in the Pyramid. It is—I repeat it here mostly for the benefit of those who insist that he was a real person—Saturday, October 6, 4 B.C. He was crucified on April 7, A.D. 30. There is not the slightest doubt of this—it is all in the Pyramid. It is calculated by measuring certain galleries or chambers, and is absolutely infallible, guaranteed by God himself; and to come to something later it appears that two periods of "tribulation" (how these people like this word!) are also clearly marked. The first began on August 5, 1914, and ended November 11, 1918, and the second began on May 29, 1928, and ended September 16, 1936. On this date the "Messianic Kingdom" will succeed the "events predicted"—whatever this rignarole means.

The interested reader will perhaps wonder why the "tribulations" commencing with Munich in 1938, which resulted in the present war were not carefully detailed by Mr. Riffert, as, of course, they are all in the measurements somewhere in the Pyramid. These particulars will be trotted out, naturally, after this war has ceased—just as all the prophecies of the last war, with their accurate dates, have filled dozens of books on the Pyramid ever since they occurred. There is not a line in any book on the monument which I have read which prophesied any event whatever until after that event—which makes the Pyramid



of Gizeh only more fervently believed in by the British-Israelites. It may be heartbreaking for prophecy believers in general and for British-Israelites in particular, but the reader can rest assured that there is actually no evidence whatever that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel ever existed. They are quite as mythical as God Almighty and Jesus Christ.

H. CUTNER.

## THE NEW CANDIDE Or the Best of All Possible Worlds

(Concluded from page 511)

OVER luncheon—an excellent repast which I will not harrow your feelings by describing, my war-rationed readers—the conversation inevitably turned to the war. The Rev. Father Giroflée stuck his knife in a good quarter of a pound of freshly-made butter, and proceeded to lay it lavishly on some crisp all-wheaten bread.

"Guns or butter!" he laughed. "Those Germans prefer guns. But butter is better. You cannot imagine Englishmen being such fools as to prefer guns."

"A pound of butter is worth more than all the products of all the arsenals of Krupp, Armstrong-Whitworth, Vickers and Schneider put together, in my opinion," said Martin. "You might leave me a very little, Reverend Father."

"I hear that the Germans are already having ration cards' Just fancy having to be rationed over food. They must be half-starving already, those Nazis. Our blockade will soon starve them out, I expect," said Candide.

Dr. Pangloss proceeded to prove that the Germans would be starved out within six months in this best of all possible wars. A discussion arose as to what should be done with Hitler when the six months' war was over.

"Hitler for St. Helena," said Candide.

"Let him be tried by his enemies and put to death," urged Father Giroflée, who never tired of showing his good Christian spirit.

"A lunatic asylum," said Dr. Pangloss.

"Leave him alone," growled Martin. "When we've won the war he'll sink back into the obscurity whence he rose. Why make a martyr and a hero and a legend of him? Jesus was tried by his enemies and put to death. Look at the result. Do you want posterity and history to worship Hitler?"

Paquette said she hated his moustache, and remarked that you couldn't kiss a man with a stiff toothbrush on his upper lip. She had tried and received no real satisfaction from the attempt. Even if Hitler had not been the enemy of her country, she could have no use for him unless he shaved and put that untidy lock of hair back into its proper place. She simply couldn't call him by the absurd name of Adolf; and if he were her boy friend she would insist on his answering to the name of Jackie.

Cunegunde traced Hitler's moral downfall to the fact that he was not a respectable married man. A wife (as always) would have "made all the difference." Also she did not like his habit of biting carpets, which showed that, like all bachelors, he did not have proper regular meals as well as exhibiting his innate depravity. Her mother, my lady the baroness—God rest her—had once had a governess who had a cousin who knew a man who had a dog that bit the carpets; and that dog, like the one in Oliver Goldsmith's ballad, got hydrophobia and died. So would Hitler.

"Mark my words," she said, "that's what'll happen to him with his carpet-biting."

Martin said that half the statesmen of Europe were mad dogs and really rabid for war while chattering peace. Candide differed, and said Chamberlain had striven, nobly if too late, to keep the peace. A warm discussion on "appeasement" ensued, in which many different views were expressed. But on

one point all agreed: that Britain would win. Britain always did—in the end.

After the seven courses of soup, fish, entrée, meat, sweet, cheese and fruit, had been taken, with sherry, beer and French wines to wash them down, Father Giroflée said a Latin grace thanking God—as well he might, considering the generosity of the lunch—for all they had "received." Then they went into the garden to take thickly-creamed coffee and liqueurs in the sunshine. But for this the Rev. Father did not thank God. No, because the coffee and liqueurs were not deserving of thanks, for indeed they were, just as much as the rest of the meal, nor because God throws in coffee and liqueurs "free gratis and for nothing"; he doesn't, as you may have observed, gentle reader—but because it is not conventional to say two thanksgivings to God for one meal. It is no use the good God expecting too much from his followers: he won't get it. One meal: one thanks.

During coffee a young friend from the B.B.C. called to join the company. His job there was to broadcast talks to the Moslem Arabs on behalf of the Christian British Government. Though his Arabic was faulty, his fiction was not, and so his diurnal Arabian Nights Entertainment was well-paid and everyone prophesied a great career for him as a propagandist or professional liar.

He brought great news, which was secret, he said. He would impart it because he knew that they would not.

"The war will be over in a month," he declared. "In fact, it won't start. All is ripe for a revolution in Germany. Everyone hates Hitler: he hasn't a friend even in his own Nazi Party. Our British Intelligence Service—X73 we call it amongst ourselves—positively reports this. We are sending out 50 million leaflets explaining in quite good German how bad Hitler is, and these will be scattered all over Germany by aeroplanes. In addition, the Maginot Line is equipped with loud-speakers to tell the Germans the same thing. Once the Germans are told how bad their Government is, the game's up. They won't fight—our Intelligence says not."

Everyone except Martin was impressed and delighted at this good news. Martin said:—

"If the Germans told us how bad the Chamberlain Government is, it would make us, for the first time, think they might be some good after all."

"This is very different," said the B.B.C. young man superciliously. "Hitler is a Schizophrenic, while Mr. Chamberlain comes of a very respectable well-to-do Birmingham family. Everyone has heard of his father, Joe Chamberlain, his eyeglass and his orchid, and his tale that "Tariff Reform means work for all," as well as his brother Austen. You can't compare the two. How can you?"

Martin subsided, and they all thought him properly silenced. The B.B.C. young man smelt of all the perfumes of Arabia, and in honour of him and his good news, Paquette sang that delightfully appropriate balad, "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby."

So cheered were they by this news that they almost forgot the war for the rest of the day. Indeed they would have done so altogether had it not been for patriots outside in the streets singing, "We'll hang out our washing on the Seigfreid Line"—which in its robust certainty cheered them up again.

Next day, and the next and the next, there was plenty of cheerful news in the newspapers. The Maginot Line was impregnable. The Seigfreid Line was in a dreadful state. The morale of the French was magnificent; that of the Germans low indeed. Already the French had advanced into Germany: Saarbrucken would soon fall. Our English Expeditionary Force was in the highest spirits and Hore-Belisha had sacked all the incompetent generals. They would be home by Christmas—unlike the Boer War and the last Great War, when the other soldiers mistakenly expected to be home by Christmas. Gamelin and Gort were marvellous generals, but whom had Germany got? Also British Tommies, veterans of the last war, said that Fritz, unlike the

Fritz of 1914-18, had no fight in him and was very different from his father. Obviously he had no faith in Hitler and his cause. He just wouldn't fight—the coward—all the British war correspondents said so.

Candide and his little company began to feel that the war was not such a bad thing after all. It certainly made the wireless and the newspapers more interesting. Even Martin and Candide, with their detestation founded on experience of war which caused them to say with Winston Churchill: "War is a great evil," began to believe that this war would be different.

"Anyhow, our job is not to fight nor to be distracted from our gardening. Let us dig for victory," said Candide, coining a phrase later to be the slogan of the Ministry of Agriculture.

"You dig graves for Victory," Martin pointed out.

But they very properly went on with their work without heeding him. Soon he joined them. For life must go on in war as in peace; and in war as in peace we must cultivate our garden—whatever our garden is. Life is more urgent than war, and we must live—if war and disease, and old age, and accident, and our governments and the rest of mankind's enemies will let us.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

### "YOU CAN'T GET AWAY FROM IT"

TO many people the word atheism conveys an idea of cynic disregard for the bases of culture vaguely known as spiritual, which is an inadmissible construction. Atheism is an ancient and excellent word meaning, quite simply, disbelief in the existence of a God. It has no bearing on the subject of morality, any more than has the word theism. The words are merely statements of opinions. The atheist believes that the word "god" represents a false idea, although it may be admitted that at some time in the past it has been of service to mankind, but should now be discarded, together with all other supernatural anachronisms. The theist is convinced that the god-idea is true, mainly because he subconsciously wishes it to be so. Here we are at the very root of the matter. The theist cannot countenance atheism because it is a refutation of his desires; therefore, quite naturally, he identifies atheism with all that he considers undesirable. In connection with this, it is interesting to note that one sometimes, very rarely, meets an atheist who wishes he could believe in a god and an after-life, but never a theist to whom conversion to atheism would be welcome.

The theist often expresses his objection to atheism by stating that it is purely a negation, as if this were an assertion that the atheist would dispute! Atheism is a negation, and no atheist would deny it. The theist is taken to an empty throne, and immediately he asks what the atheist is going to put in God's seat, as if anything could replace such a being other than a deity with identical attributes. Nothing but a god would fit the throne the theist has designed, and as he believes one god to be as bad as another, the atheist should not be expected to find a substitute for that which he thinks is rightly destroyed. It is quite wrong, however, to say that atheism is destructive, implying that theism is constructive. The fact is that neither of them is constructive, while each attempts to invalidate the arguments of the other. They are not systems of ethics, but rival solutions to the question: "Is there, or is there not a God?" Beyond this they cannot go without becoming theism-plus and atheism-plus; in other words, religion and humanism.

At the close of an argument between a theist and an atheist one often finds that the bases of their beliefs are almost identical, the only difference being the theist's insistence on the Personal Nature of the Eternal, and his pathetic love for Capital Letters. What the fairly reasonable theist means by "God" is often almost the same thing as the atheist's "universe." It is just the little mental failing that makes the theist crave a personal intelligence "behind it all," and he will argue for hours to try

and convince his atheist friend of the impossibility of a mindless continuum, when all he can prove is that his fear of standing alone is too great for him to overcome. In this essay no attempt will be made to criticise the traditional arguments for the existence of God, as these have been fully dealt with by other writers, and the best that can be said for them is that they cannot be dismissed in a few paragraphs. It should, however, be indicated that even if these arguments are accepted, they can "prove" only the existence of a god which is quite useless to those who believe in it. People cannot pray to, or expect love from, an impersonal metaphysical abstraction.

The fact is, of course, that theologians are not content with the final phases of their arguments; they "prove" to their own satisfaction the existence of this remote god and then immediately dress him up in theological finery and present him to the Churches complete with Capital Letter, ready for sale to the credulous populace. The god prayed to is not the god proved.

These capital letters have to perform a very important task. They are relied upon to change very ordinary words into holy ones. What a difference there is between "God" and "god"! The former is a rather irascible, but generally benevolent old patriarch, of enormous size and gaseous nature, hidden away somewhere in space, while the latter may be either a metaphysical nothing or a little brass idol with a protuberant abdomen. The "first cause" is not very desirable or impressive, written just like that, but the "First Cause!" "How attractive!" say the customers, "Of course, that's just the very thing we wanted!" Like chromium plate on a trumpery article, the glitter does the selling. "Holy," "reverent" and "worshipful" words have mesmerised the people into believing that they are beyond criticism, a totally irrational aura which forms an admirable protection for the propagators. The words "absolute" and "infinite" may be dismissed in the same way. "Absolute" is a lovely big, vague, shadowy word that is just outside the ordinary person's vocabulary. There is, of course, no need for the capital letter except to make a personality out of an abstraction. This abstraction, incidentally, is beyond the power of mind to conceive. Absolute is that which is not relative. The nature of things is such that no conception of a non-relative is possible. There cannot be any existence or event which is not a part of the universe and inconceivable without its relations. The only entity that could possibly be absolute is the universe itself. Here, I use the word "universe" in its correct sense, unlike some of the philosophers of the present day who seem to think there can be a plurality of "universes." I mean the total of all that exists and happens. It may be that the mathematical proposition of a spatial distortion forming a continuum of matter, energy and change, is beyond the power of the human mind to picture, but this I call the "universe" and this, being the sum of all things, is the nearest possible approximation to the unimaginable absolute.

The word "infinite" is also an attempt to express an immensity which is beyond the reach of mind. We can know of nothing which is not finite, which has no boundaries or extremities. The mind demands a beginning and an end, being itself finite and bounded. At the same time, it will never be satisfied with those boundaries. Always there must be something beyond, beyond, to the never attainable end of imagining. Infinite is the same as absolute in that it could be nothing other than the sum of all things—the universe!

This, then, is the absolute and the infinite, the God that our theists pray to and worship; just—the universe.

They would have us believe that their god is eternal and that after existing for an unknown time, he decided to create the universe for his pleasure. God's time before the creation must have been a very strange sort of time; for time, as we know it, is a measurement between one event and another. The "first" event was the creation, and therefore, if God had time in which

to exist before that event, there must have been a preceding event. If God was all that existed, the only possible event was His Own Creation. This type of argument leads only to absurdities of repetition. Before the universe existed, there could be no events, and therefore no time. If there were no time before the universe, God could not have had a pre-creation existence. He must have come into being, either at the same time as the universe or at some later date. If he were born with the universe it is quite superfluous to postulate his existence at all, as a creator. If he appeared on the scene at a later-date, we must deny that God's age can be more than a fraction of that which the theists claim for him. We must accept the conclusion reached by the anthropologists, that only a few thousand years ago he was born in the terrified mind of man, in man's ape-like image, when the fear of the unknown was first personified.

R. GAUNTLETT.

(To be concluded)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### A VESTED INTEREST

Sir.—One of Low's hilarious cartoons of Colonel Blimp depicts that champion defending the economic fields of vested interest from invasion by the Church in the person of the Primate. But surely Low must be aware that the potential invader is the greatest vested interest of all. The introduction of such a fat cuckoo to the economic nest would, as usual, surely lead to the extrusion of its inmates. Immense sums have been given or lent, often without interest, for our war effort by companies and individuals; but I have looked in vain for an intimation that the Church has contributed anything from its vast and untaxed wealth—even to such charities as St. Dunstan's or the Red Cross.—Yours, etc.,

EDGAR SYERS.

### ON FREEDOM

Sir.—You will probably make some comment on the much publicised Beveridge Plan, and it seems to me that you will be the only man in the country to point out that Thomas Paine advocated these (and other) reforms over 150 years ago.

"... the portion of liberty enjoyed in England is just enough to enslave a country more productively than by despotism, and that, as the real object of despotism is revenue, a Government so formed obtains more than it could do either by direct despotism, or in a full state of freedom" (Paine's "Rights of Man"—my italics).

It seems obvious to me that the move is only intended to appease popular feeling, and that the Church will attempt to claim some (if not all) the credit for the proposed reforms.

Few people seem to realise that, whatever benefits may be enjoyed if the scheme is put into practice, these benefits will be the result of their *own* labour.

Insurance companies, organised charities and other vested interests are sure to oppose the plan, or at least delay its adoption. Perhaps it would be as well to introduce an amendment providing for adequate salaries to be paid to all the redundant officials of these institutions. For my part, I am more than grateful to "The Freethinker," for it has given me keys to knowledge, the existence of which was unknown to me for nearly 38 years.

If ever I were to run a School for Editors and Newspapermen, "The Freethinker" would be "required reading."—Yours, etc.,

L. SANDERSON.

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## OBITUARY

### LEONARD CHEETHAM

A large number of relatives and friends assembled at the City Road Crematorium, Sheffield, on Tuesday, December 8, to pay a last farewell to Leonard Cheetham, whose death took place, after a long illness, in his 61st year. A regular reader of "The Freethinker" for over 40 years, he was a great admirer of Mr. Chapman Cohen and never missed any of his lectures in and around Sheffield. As a member of the N.S.S. he did some very useful propagandist work in his own quiet way. The large assembly at the Crematorium was an indication of the local esteem in which he was held. We express sincere sympathy with the widow and relatives. A Secular Service was read at the Crematorium by the General Secretary of the N.S.S.

R. H. R.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12 noon, Mr. C. BURN.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, Professor J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc.—"Class Mind and Group Mind."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

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

Burnley (Barden House Social Club, Colne Road): Sunday, 11-0 a.m., Mr. NORMAN CHARLTON—"Christian Science."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. GEORGE SCOTT, J.P.—"Irrational Thought and Action."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. LI SHING (of the Central Union of Chinese Students)—"China To-day."

Rosendale (2, Oddfellows Terrace, Scoutbottom): Sunday, Mr. J. CLAYTON—"Faith, Futility—Or?"

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn N.S.S. Branch (Market Place): Mr. J. V. SHORT, a Lecture.

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