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## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### New Year Notes

THERE is a feeling abroad that 1943 may see the substantial ending of the world war. We share that expectation, and, assuming that hope justified by fact, it should mark the opening of another war without which the war of force will have been fought largely in vain. Long before the war of 1914 we said that the period of national wars had come to an end. The boundaries between countries had been broken down by international travel, commerce, and by scientific inventions. Nations were being linked together by developments that set aside the restrictions of boundaries which had hitherto been regarded as fixed. A war between two European communities had become as much a "civil" war as was the War of the Roses. The present war has not merely justified that statement so far as Europe is concerned, but it has extended that generalisation to the whole of civilised humanity.

But whenever the present war ends—and there is, in our judgment, only one probable ending—it will have been fought largely in vain if it is not replaced with another war that is always in process of being. Let us hope that the war of social reconstruction—which has been with us for several generations—will be recognised for what it is. It is true that this social war is already being talked about, but it would be foolish not to recognise that there are forces in being, moderate enough in expression for the moment and ready to pay lip-homage to the creation of a society worth the making, that will resist genuine reform with all their power. Those who before the war openly expressed their sympathy with Fascist theories, who praised publicly the work of Hitler and the ideals of Mussolini, are still with us—in confinement—awaiting the day of their liberation, and so unleashing tongues that for the time being are silent. The forces of reaction are not dead; they are merely quiescent.

Let us take first the religious forces that are at work. It was the good fortune of this country to gain, at a more critical moment than now exists, an alliance with Russia.

But it must never be forgotten that it was the alliance of religious and financial forces that gave Germany its attraction to a section, and a powerful section, of our own people. It was always a mistake to assume that they wished Hitlerism to plant itself in this country. They did not; and a section of that company was attracted by a genuine desire to keep British institutions where they were and what they were. But it was believed that Germany might be used to ward off a close association with ideas—particularly ideas concerning religion—that might otherwise infiltrate this country. In the end it was not we who used Germany; it was Germany who used us. When history comes to be written with truthfulness this period will be recognised as the baddest and the maddest in our modern history. The change that has taken place—whether it be momentary or not—will mark a more-conscious appreciation of the fact that more and more conflict between humans becomes a warfare of ideals and ideas. Material weapons are therefore the servants of mankind. Whether these ideas are progressive or retrogressive is not material to this generalisation; both illustrate the same fact.

Both the Roman Catholic Church and most of the different Christian sects have given illustrations of the truth of what has been said. The Established Church and other Protestant sects contribute to this evidence. In the world of the future, Russia must play a great part either for permanent peace or for a constant preparation for war, with the absolute certainty of war sooner or later. But the British Catholic newspapers have made it quite clear that there must, so far as a nation which has declared itself non-religious to the extent of giving the Churches neither financial nor special legal support is concerned, be no real alliance. We may have the closest collaboration during war, but without Russia there can be no world peace. The other Christian Churches also cannot tolerate—when the war ends—a permanent and ready co-operation with a nation that covers a sixth part of the world, and about a tenth of the world's population, but which will have no State Church and will not permit the teaching of religion in its schools. The opposition to "Atheistic Russia" is not killed; it is merely openly inactive. But there are too many vested interests threatened by the admitted success of the new Russian State for a real friendship not to excite their activities against its establishment. And with the co-operation of the present Government in the plan—or plot—for giving the Churches at least a powerful influence in the schools, we have the promise of opposition to a genuinely new Britain from the bulk of Christian religionists in this country.

There is one other matter which arises from our existing constitution. We have in existence one of the least defensible and most stupid of all political or social institutions: that of an hereditary monarchy and an hereditary nobility. I am not, be it understood, objecting here to



either a nobility or a monarchy. There is something to be said—perhaps much to be said—on behalf of both. But if we are genuine in the praise we have lavished on Democracy since this war began we must do away with the hereditary principle in our social life. The government of a country must be elected by the people of a country, and that must include all its public officials from the highest to the lowest. And whether the chief of a country is called President or King is a matter of small moment. But to give a man a commanding place in the government of the country, and to saddle the public for ever with him because his ancestor won a battle some couple of hundred years ago, either on land or sea, is of all social devices the most ridiculous.

Many of our readers will remember that this issue was raised some hundred and fifty years ago by one who forestalled a great many of the recommendations of the newly published Beveridge plan that has just been placed before the King. I mean one of the greatest of English reformers, Thomas Paine, the man who did much for the French Revolution, and much more for the American Revolution, and the first man to write the "United States of America," and who a century ago advocated the "United States of Europe."

Paine was violently attacked by Burke, who so bitterly attacked the French for their Revolution and who was rewarded with what Paine properly called a "disguised pension" of £1,500. Not at all a small sum in those days. Burke argued that there could be no radical alteration of the British constitution because by the Act of 1688 the English people had agreed to "submit themselves, their heirs and posterities forever to an hereditary succession." Paine replied in flaming words that burn now as brightly as ever and are as unanswerable in their logic and in their humanism as ever. He said:—

"There never did, there never will, and there never can exist a parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country possessed of the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the end of time, or to commanding forever how the world shall be governed and who shall govern it. . . . Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the age and generation that preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and the most insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man. . . . The Parliament or the people of 1688, or of any other period, had no right to dispose of the people of the present day, or to bind or control them in any way whatever. . . . Every generation is and must be competent to all the purposes which its circumstances require. It is the living and not the dead that are to be accommodated."

Those words remain as true to-day as they were when they were written. They offer a charter of liberty to action which reduces the Atlantic Charter to a mere wordy document that may mean anything or nothing. Those words contain more than the charter of freedom of a single country; they contain the raw material for the charter of mankind, white and coloured, religious or non-religious, rich or poor.

There is another question on which something may well be said. The avowed intention of German Nazis to

annihilate the Jewish people (ridiculously called by careless writers and others a "race"); and the carrying out of that avowed policy is one of the most sickening things in human history. There have been massacres in plenty—very many of them in connection with religion—and often Christian wars. In these massacres women and children were slaughtered with the name of God on the lips of the murderers. But never has this slaughter of millions of people been decreed with such gusto, or carried out with such elaborate brutality and vindictiveness, as this slaughter of Jews—men, women, and children down to babies. On a small scale this slaughter of Jews has occurred before. It happened under the rule of Christian Czars in Russia and his Christian subjects, but never on the scale such as has occurred since the outbreak of the present war and as the fulfilment of a religious duty. I use that term because all the symptoms of an historic religious massacre are present.

I do not care to rest longer on this beastliness. It has been sufficiently expressed elsewhere, and only an unconscious sadism lingers on the record. All I have to say on that head is I doubt whether the vow of the United Nations to treat those concerned in and with these brutalities will be checked by threatening them with death. Exasperated human nature cried for some relief to be given and some assurance that these criminals should be promised retaliation; but I do not think it will stop them. If the police are after a man for murder, it is well known that he is more likely to shoot at the policeman than he was before committing the first offence. A man can only be hanged once, and whether he has killed one or more brings no greater severity to the murderer. But I can well appreciate the feeling that demanded some assurance that punishment should be meted out to these criminals of criminals.

But one may well ask why these continuous attacks on the Jews generation after generation, century after century? Jews have numbered amongst themselves all sorts of criminally minded people, but there is certainly no evidence that they have outvied Christians in that respect. Why the perpetuity of this? Why has it been so easy, generation after generation, to awaken this lust for persecution: not merely among ordinary folk, but amongst all classes from priest to peasant, from rich to poor, from the most "spiritually" minded to the merest human animal, from the highly placed to the mere labourer? That is surely a question that must have come to the minds of many. It might even attract the B.B.C. Brains Trust if it were not so complete an organ for keeping the people off "dangerous topics."

I have space only for outlining an explanation of this perpetual persecution of a people for so many generations. The main factor is religious. It is the only constant one, and its roots are to be found in the book by which Christianity stands—the Bible. It was the accursed Jew who sacrificed Christ. It was the Jew who stood as the living instrument of protest against the divinity of Jesus Christ. There were two things that would have prevented this long tale of Jewish persecution. One is the Jews outgrowing their own superstition and so ending Judaism. The other is the complete success of the Christian Church in stamping out the Jewish religion. Neither of these things happened, with the result that the more the Jew was persecuted the more attached was he to his creed. And



the more stubborn he became the easier it was, and is, to make the Jew a political and social scapegoat. The Jews became a people apart. Both Jew and Christian denounced intermarriage; and intermarriage is the great sign of social solidarity and equality. The Jew was not more criminal than Christians! he was not a worse citizen than Christians; but he held an antagonistic creed, and he paid, and is still paying, a price for his obstinacy. He also provided an outlet for that sadism which is deeply embedded in Christianity, and which found vent also in the doctrine of eternal damnation. The use made of this inherited Christian hatred is there for all to see. Hitlerism has only carried this outlet for religious brutality to a greater length than it had ever before assumed. There was a sombre truth in Heine's comment that Judaism is not a religion; it is a misfortune.

I feel I must apologise for this rapid summary of a great historical position, but I have overstepped my space, and may return to the subject again.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### RELIGION IN SOVIET RUSSIA

THE keenly controverted question of sectarian persecution in the U.S.S.R. has been critically and dispassionately studied by Sir John Maynard. In his "Russian Peasant and Other Studies" (Gollancz, 1942), this able and conscientious administrator with his prolonged experience of Indian life (1886-1926) has transferred his attention to Russian social and political affairs. That Maynard's testimony concerning the absence of any real persecution of religion in Soviet Russia may be accepted as quite reliable is clearly evidenced by the appreciative foreword to his work by Dr. Ernest Barker, who is certainly not to be numbered among the extremists on either side.

The Orthodox Greek Church in Russia in Tsarist days was notoriously reactionary and corrupt, while all other religious bodies were subjected to serious disabilities. The downfall of the Imperial Power, however, gave promise of better things. As Maynard observes: "The first dealings of the Revolution with the Churches seemed to promise their liberation. The Provisional Government of March allowed the restoration of the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, abolished by Peter the Great. Bishop Tikhon, along with a synod to assist him in the ecclesiastical administration, was freely elected to the restored office. The first religious decree of the November Government placed all confessions on an equal footing, disestablished and disendowed the Orthodox Church, gave freedom of *religious and anti-religious propaganda*, prohibited all but secular instruction in the schools . . . but allowed citizens to give and receive religious teaching privately." This decree placed all the previously penalised creeds on an equality, while depriving the Orthodox Church of its immense wealth as well as its ascendancy over all other communions. Ecclesiastical buildings and their ritual appliances could be consigned to any congregations prepared to maintain them.

The extent of ecclesiastical landed estate in 1905 has been estimated at 23 million acres, though this figure is not officially admitted. In any case, all the Church's estates with their factories, farm-stock, houses and hostels were confiscated by the State. In addition to this deprivation, Maynard mentions that "something under a quarter of a ton of gold and 150 tons of silver was levied for famine relief in 1921-22."

Patriarch Tikhon appears to have remained loyal to the Soviet system during the Civil Wars, but many embittered priests supported the Whites, while Roman Catholic dignitaries encouraged the Poles in the 1920 conflict. Feeling naturally became intense when Denikin menaced Moscow and Yudenich

was threatening Petrograd. Then anti-religious sentiments deepened, and it was alleged that more than 300 ecclesiastics had suffered death since the beginning of the Revolution. But, as Maynard judiciously notes: "Regarding the higher figures sometimes cited, a sceptical attitude is justified. It appears certain that these ecclesiastics were executed for opposition to the Revolutionary Government or for assistance to the Whites in the civil war."

The Bolsheviks consistently endeavoured to weaken the influence of the Orthodox Church, and this was one of their motives in their encouragement of dissent. At one time it seemed as if the Biblical sects were to be favoured by the authorities, and the Baptists enjoyed privileges they were never granted by the Tsarist régime, but the State soon restricted their teaching facilities, and in 1929 their Training College in Moscow was closed. The Dissenters (Rashkolniks) from the old Orthodox Church, however, were released from the disabilities previously imposed upon them by the predominant Church, and apparently they still preserve their privileges.

For reasons of State, the Tsarist administrators adopted a highly hostile attitude towards Russian Roman Catholics in the period preceding their overthrow. Poland is an intensely Catholic country and the intransigence of leading Polish nationalists towards Russia was deeply resented in Tsarist circles. Now that the Russian Greek Church had been reduced to the level of its various sectarian competitors, the Vatican, despite its earlier denunciation of all forms of Socialism, welcomed the humiliation of the Orthodox Russian Church, as this seemed to furnish an opportunity for the extension of Romanist influence in the East. The Soviet Government appeared inclined to consider the Papal approach in a favourable spirit as a means of lessening the influence of the Orthodox hierarchy in Russia. This Roman overture aroused amused interest in Italy, where "the Italian papers emphasised this aspect by cartoons in which the Pope was shown blessing this attack upon orthodoxy."

The Bolsheviks, however, announced their willingness to reconsider the status of the Roman Church in Russia. There was, indeed, little of an anomalous character in this, for not only had Romanism at an earlier period exercised a potent influence on the Orthodox Church, but the Jesuits had also played a powerful part in Russia. Rifts within the lute, however, soon appeared, and in 1923 several Polish Roman Catholic priests were prosecuted "for espionage during the Russo-Polish war of 1920." Tikhon and other Greek priests were also charged with political offences until the Patriarch composed his differences by publicly stating that he had fully decided to obey the behests of the Government. "These trials," Maynard avers, "represented abroad as part of a religious persecution, caused a remarkable outburst of indignation. There were protests from Great Britain and Poland, and the long delay in the recognition of the Soviet Government . . . by the U.S.A. was probably due to the odium which these events excited. The Vatican—evidently desirous at this time not to offend the Bolsheviks—did not join in this chorus of condemnation."

Negotiations with Rome were resumed in 1925 and education, finance, clerical appointments, the publication in Russia of Papal Bulls and an unhindered communication of the Curia with a Catholic hierarchy in Russia were under discussion. Then, however, without the knowledge or consent of the Soviet authorities, a Roman Catholic Bishop arrived in Russia and "undertook on behalf of the Vatican the reorganisation of the Catholic clergy in the U.S.S.R." This high-handed proceeding was resented and the Roman intermediary was expelled, and all attempts to establish a concordat ended in 1927.

Then, in 1931, a Papal encyclical reaffirmed the repudiation of Communism pronounced by the Bull *Rerum Novarum*. The subordination of man's soul to economic values was severely condemned, and in all parts of the Catholic world it has since



been asserted that no Communist can be considered a true believer.

In all the totalitarian States the secular authority stands supreme over its cults. There are about 18 million Moslems in Russia who suffer little or no interference. Maynard thus summarises the religious conditions which prevail or did prevail in European Russia before the German invasion. These comprise, he writes, "freedom of conscience for the adult individual, together with the right to impart religion personally to his own offspring; but otherwise no pecuniary or other means of making an appeal to the public or of influencing the younger generation.

The organisations of the Churches, however, have not been broken up, and there are numerous instances since the attack by Germany in 1941, of the continuing activity of these organisations; and freedom of belief and worship and of family instruction survives. The Government is unfriendly, but if persecution means the punishment of persons on charges of believing, or of holding or attending religious services, there has been no persecution."

On the other hand, anti-religious propaganda has been conducted on an elaborate scale and its educational value is evidenced in its publications and in the various anti-clerical museums, where the sinister activities of the orthodox clergy and the immense revenues they formerly enjoyed, which were deducted from the national income, are vividly displayed in the exhibits.

Yaroslavsky, the President of the Union of the Godless, estimated in 1937 that one-third of the adult denizens in towns, and two-thirds in rural districts, were still in the religious stage. Nor is it true that faith is now confined to old people. The latest figures indicate that there are still "30,000 religious congregations, with 8,338 churches, synagogues and mosques." Yaroslavsky cites Lenin's appeal for toleration, and he himself prefers the art of peaceful persuasion to any form of aggression. That these precepts are practised Sir John Maynard attests. "I have myself attended religious services," he writes, "including a baptism by immersion. It is untrue that they are restricted in any way." Moreover, the Jews are now more humanely treated than ever before in the chequered career of the vast Russian State.

T. F. PALMER.

## ROGER BACON AND THE AWAKENING OF EUROPE

TO the student of modern European history there is no period so full of interest, so replete with fascinating problems and character studies, as that between the close of the 13th century and the opening of the 17th century. It is but 300 years all told, a mere episode in the life of a nation; yet what a contrast is the end of this period to the beginning! The 13th century shows us the Church all-powerful in Europe, reigning without a rival save for the declining Mohammedan power in the south-eastern portion of Spain. The Feudal system was still unshaken, and the people, as a people, had scarce begun to exist. In science the Ptolemaic system, with its flat and stationary earth, still held sway, and all cultivation of the physical or mathematical sciences was open to the charge of necromancy or magic—a charge that meant a long imprisonment, if not death. Literature was practically unknown, the legends of half-mad monks being the chief material supplied to such as were able to read, who were as few as they could well be. Ignorance, despotism and superstition on all hands, and with them their accompaniments of almost unbridled evil, misery and degradation.

The end of the 16th century leads us in a new world. In science the labours of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler and Galileo had completely shattered the old conception of the universe upon which Christianity rested, and had laid the

foundations of a structure that was to be completed in our own day by Darwin, Lyell and Spencer. In philosophy the names of Descartes, Da Vinci, Montaigne, Bruno and Bacon mark the inauguration of new methods of thinking that were bound to prove fatal to the claims of the Church. In religion the revolt against the paralysing power of Rome was an accomplished fact; and, although Protestantism was at bottom quite as illiberal as the older form of Christianity, its success made religious unity for ever impossible, and to that extent made for a wider intellectual life. And in literature, to take England only, the names of Sydney, Spenser, Jonson, Shakespeare and Marlowe are brilliant indications of the new world of life that had replaced the reading of monkish legends—partly the ravings of dementia and partly deliberate imposture.

It is difficult to name a precise date for the commencement of an historical movement; but I do not think that we shall be far out if we select the 13th century as giving the opening of the attack upon Christian beliefs, and of the downfall of a Church that had ruled Europe, almost unquestioned, for over 800 years. From the opening of the 5th century the Church had dominated Europe, and before its growth and rule the learning and civilisation of antiquity had nearly disappeared. The museums, libraries and colleges of Rome, Alexandria and Athens had all been burned or otherwise destroyed; the civil and municipal independence of the Roman people had vanished; the whole status of society—mentally, morally and socially—seemed to sink lower with the passing of each generation, until the predicted end of the world in the year 1000 seemed but a fitting conclusion to a society that was in the last stages of social degeneration.

It is usual for religious historians to attribute the inconceivable ignorance of these centuries and the decay of the ancient learning to the barbarian invasions; but I have never been able to find adequate justification for such a statement. The barbarians who overran the empire in the 5th and 6th centuries—itself an advent that could not have occurred had not the stamina of the Roman people been sapped by the growth of theology—the barbarians were far from unteachable, as their subsequent history proved. Indeed, it was Theodoric the Ostrogoth who made an attempt, and for some time a successful attempt, to revive the prosperity and learning of Rome during its last days. And secondly, it would seem that the barbarians underwent a marked deterioration after their contact with the Christian communities.\*

It is impossible to relieve Christianity of the lion's share of the responsibility for the ignorance and social degradation that existed from the end of the 4th to the 14th century. From the earliest times Christian leaders had set themselves strenuously against all Pagan learning, and there was none other. "Philosophy," said Tertullian, "is the patriarch of all the heresies"! and under the actual persecution of Christianity ancient learning flickered out its life in the barbarous murder of Hypatia (414) and the closing of the Greek schools of philosophy (529) by the Emperor Justinian. Henceforth the Church ruled, "and the disastrous influence she exercised on letters and science may be estimated by the simple fact that during the nine centuries of her undisputed dominion, not a single classic writer, not a single discoverer whose genius enlarged the intellectual horizon, not a single leader of modern thought, arose to dignify her reign. The darkness of the Dark Ages was deepest when the power of the Church was least disputed; that darkness began to break when the doctrines of the Church began to be called in question; the dawn was coeval with an insurrection."†

\* Gieseler says that from the Christians who came into contact with the invaders there proceeded "pernicious influences rather than enlightenment to the Germans" ("Ecclesiastical History," chap. 2, page 158).

† G. H. Lewes, "History of Philosophy," chap. 2., page 5.



From the long nightmare of the Christian ages Europe was aroused by the influence of Mohammedan civilisation, brought about chiefly through the Crusades, but assisted also by commercial and scholarly intercourse when Christian vigilance could be evaded. There is scarcely a writer of note and ability from the year 1000 down to the close of the 14th century who did not owe his learning directly or indirectly to the Mohammedan universities. It was in this manner that Christian Europe was once more brought into contact with the fertilising literature of Greece and Rome; it was in the classics of the pagan world as preserved by the Mohammedans, and in the civilisation reared by the followers of the prophet, that Christians found the impulse to development that their own creed had failed to supply them with. The world had to take up the story of civilisation where Christian bigotry had dropped it centuries before, leaving the eight or nine hundred years that intervened a hideous nightmare, with hardly a redeeming feature to relieve the haunting horror of its remembrance.

All great movements have their precursors, and in this instance the first clear indication of the new spirit that was moving over the chaos of Christian barbarism was given by the Franciscan monk, Roger Bacon, the most commanding figure of the 13th century; in many respects the most remarkable character of the Middle Ages. Born at Ilchester, in Somersetshire, about 1214—the precise date of his birth, as of his death, is uncertain—he must have belonged to a wealthy family if we are to judge from the amount of money he is said to have spent in acquiring information. How far he was representative of a school it is impossible to say; at all events, there would have been few in Christendom that equalled him in the thoroughness of his grasp of a scientific method, or his knowledge of physical science. Educated at Oxford, the memory of him is still preserved in the name of Brasenose College. The brazen nose is all that remains of the wonderful brass head that Bacon is said to have constructed, and which possessed the power of emitting sounds similar to those of the human voice. Many wonderful stories are told concerning this head, but the only clear result is that it fastened on Bacon the dangerous charge of commerce with the devil. Roger soon exhausted all that Oxford had to give him in the shape of knowledge, and, as was then the custom for promising students, travelled to Paris and carried off high honours there. But neither Paris nor Oxford could give to a man of Bacon's mental temper all that he desired. It was in acquiring and disseminating this wider knowledge that he paid to the Church the toll it has levied upon all thinkers and reformers who lived in the days when its power for evil was still uncurbed.

“QUONDAM.”

(To be Continued.)

### “OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN”

Oh, Thou art pitiless! They call Thee Light,  
 Law, Justice, Love! but Thou art pitiless.  
 What thing of earth is precious in thy sight,  
 But weary waiting on and soul's distress?  
 When dost Thou come with glorious hands to bless  
 The good man that dies cold for lack of Thee?  
 When bringest Thou garlands for our happiness?  
 Whom dost Thou send but Death to set us free?  
 Blood runs like wine—foul spirits sit and rule—  
 The weak are crushed in every street and lane—  
 He who is generous becomes the fool  
 Of all the world, and gives his life in vain.  
 Wert Thou as good as Thou art beautiful,  
 Thou couldst not bear to look upon such pain.

—ROBERT BUCHANAN.

### ACID DROPS

IT will be remembered by many of our readers that the Archbishop of Canterbury—Dr. Temple—was asked, by arrangement, whether it was true that the Church benefited from the profits of slum property. The Archbishop replied that he “believed” that some time ago there was some poor property, he thought in Paddington, the ground rents of which came into the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners—they have the control of Church funds—but they had parted with the property a long time ago.

This was true—that is, it fell into line with Christian truth, which means it contained a little truth, but was in sober fact deliberately untrue. For the Church owned slum property, and masses of other land all over the country. Even if the statement had been formerly correct, it would still have suggested an untruth. For when the land was sold by the Church, it obviously received the benefit of the sale, and therefore is still drawing interest year after year from the sale of the property about which the question was asked.

What has been said above is apropos of turning over some old volumes of “The Freethinker,” and in the issue dated February 19, 1911, we find the following paragraphs:—

“Ecclesiastic property includes public-houses, brothels and slums—all yielding a welcome rent to the uniformed soldiers of Christ. Some very bad cases have been reported in London, and here is a very bad case at Nottingham. The local ‘Daily Express’ reports an address delivered by Councillor W. Hobson, at a meeting of the Bridge-Ward Liberal Association, on ‘The Housing Question.’ In the course of that address, Mr. Hobson related an incident that occurred about three weeks ago:—

“The medical officer of health inspected some houses near Poplar-square, and, finding the conditions very bad, he at once informed the city engineer, who pronounced them to be dangerous structures. Notices were served upon the tenants to come out, and it was found that the two rows of buildings, one on either side of the street, were let to a shop woman, who sub-let them at 4s. 6d. a week on one side and 4s. on the other. The rent had been paid regularly for 20 years, and nothing had been done in the way of repairs during that time.

Wooden partitions had been erected so as to divide the rooms into two compartments. In the whole of the houses there were living 248 people. There were nine houses on one row, and one water-tap between them!

Proceedings were taken in connection with these houses last Friday, and it transpired that it was an agent who let the houses to the shopkeeper, and that the real owner was the Dean of Norwich!

Rents from the vilest slum property flowing into the pockets of the priests of God! Yet the religion of these men is said to be the only one on earth that is worth while.”

“From an interview with the Dean of Norwich, printed in more than one Monday newspaper, it appears that the property in question does not belong to any ecclesiastical body but to the Dean personally. “This is a very old property,” he says, “and has been in my family a very long time.” Its general management has been in the hands of “an agent of high repute.” Which is not a very noble confession. Church dignitaries ought not to preach severe morality to other people, and then own property without recognising its responsibilities themselves. The Dean of Norwich had better have held his tongue than offer such a miserable excuse.”

So much for Christian truth. Science, philosophy and ordinary people get along with just “truth.” It is not for nothing that we have Christian truth placed in a separate category.

In the same issue is the following:—

“The Bishop of London, preaching at Glasgow, hoped that the Holy Spirit might combine them together into a solemn league and covenant to work for the bringing of the Kingdom of God into the slums of London and Glasgow.”





As these good people must have been heard by God, it would seem that he was not really interested, and the slums diminished at a rate that would have found any ordinary builder ashamed at the rate of displacement. God could turn a woman into a pillar of salt because she displeased him, but we never heard of him interfering in the least with the worst of slum property owners. And the determination to do away with the London slums for ever has been brought about, not by God, but by Hitler—that is, if Hitler is right when he says that in doing what he has done he was simply carrying out the purpose of God.

Those, by the way, who have back numbers of "The Freethinker" over a period of years must often be surprised how much interesting matter lies embodied therein. We think we could safely wager that nowhere in the journalistic world would it be easy to find an old volume that would read with the same freshness and interest as the columns of "The Freethinker." We fancy that is mainly because "The Freethinker" has its eye on principles more than on the particular item on which it comments.

The "Catholic Herald," in its issue for December 18, explains to a reader that by Canon Law 1258 a Catholic is forbidden to take part in any non-Catholic service. Passive or bodily presence at non-Catholic funerals, weddings and similar functions can be tolerated for sufficiently serious reasons, and provided there is no risk of scandal or of the Catholic party endangering his faith. We may take this as evidence of the truth of Christian leaders that belief in Christ breeds brotherliness, honesty, kindness, etc., etc. And what confidence the Roman Church must have in the strength of its own teachers.

Lest anyone should run away with the idea that this type of mind is peculiar to the Roman Church, we draw attention to the fact that all the sects are agreed that if you cannot twist a child's mind in the direction of Christianity, it is no use expecting him—or her—to expect when they get old enough to understand what they are being told.

Here is another piece of military and religious impudence about which a question might be asked in the House of Commons. From the "Daily Telegraph" of December 17 we take the following, it is from the paper's "Ecclesiastical Correspondent":—

"Religious instruction as part of the regulation military training is being introduced in the Army. It has already become the regular practice in all units of an airborne division with which I spent a few days.

In a letter to the brigade commanders the G.O.C. directed that one hour should be directed to religious instruction during training hours, this hour to be shown in weekly training programmes.

He suggested that the chaplain should explain the fundamental questions of religion and the men be given the opportunity of discussing them and asking questions."

We are getting on! We have the Minister of Education ready to place the schools under the virtual control of the Churches, and now we have the Army chiefs directing that time should be set aside for religious instruction during training hours. The man must be a fool who does not see in this a method of forcing religion on the men. Cannot some member of Parliament raise the question in Parliament? It would, of course, have to be a member who had no chance and no desire of getting a "job." Things really do not look too rosy for the new democracy we are promised.

"Secularism," says the "Universe," "cannot make a lasting peace." Up to the present it has not had the chance of making one. Wars have been ushered in and out with prayers, and the worst of wars have been those that have had most religion mixed up with them. This time Secularism might be given a chance. It could not do worse than religion.

An almost useless discussion, we note, is going on in some of the provincial papers as to whether Russia is "godless" or otherwise. Now that we are on better terms with Russia, there is as much anxiety in certain quarters to prove that Russia is

not "godless" as there was to prove, while she was kept at arm's length, that God was banished from that country. Of course, the truth is that Russia always had a share of whatever God was going, and a people do not throw off established beliefs and frames of mind in a day or even in a generation. Broadly, one may say of Russia that the younger generation are substantially without religion, and the older generation, while less attached to organised Churches, mostly remain with some degree of religious belief.

But the important point is that the discovery by religious folk in this country that there is still religion in Russia overlooks the meaning that our own religionists have attached to the phrase "a religious country." They insist that we are a Christian country because we have a State Church. Well, in that sense Russia is *not* a Christian country, for it has no State Church, there is no religious instruction in the schools, and its principal teachers are convinced that the country dominated by religious beliefs is on the downward road; and it is this Russia, without religion, that has astonished the world by the progress it has made, and the improved quality of its men and women. Sociologically they have *accomplished* in a generation what we have been mainly talking about for several generations.

One other point. The admiration for the Russians, so far as our leading Christians are concerned, is not for its social theorising, or for the improvement in the condition of the Russian people. It is because they have shown themselves good soldiers, intelligent in their warfare, and useful allies. What will happen when the war comes to an end? Will the B.B.C. revert to its pre-war policy of ignoring Russia, and the public, with its huge capacity for forgetting, permit themselves to set aside the fact that as 1789 in France was substantially a European revolution, so the Russian revolution is a world uprising for better or worse? Honestly, Russia cannot be ignored.

Everyone must have noted the intimate and unflinching manner in which Christian preachers manufacture situations without the slightest warrant for so doing. But Mr. Weatherhead, preacher for the City Temple, in the course of a B.B.C. sermon—disguised as a "talk"—went a step too far when he said, "There is no doubt that Jesus called Joseph 'Father.'" Of course he might have done so—assuming that both of them actually lived. But it is a curious fact that in the New Testament he does not do so; and if the New Testament is to be followed, Jesus knew that his mother's husband was not his father. But after all, Mr. Weatherhead was a true specimen of the preaching Christian. This class live upon their own fancy and the unthinking attention of their supporters.

We wonder whether it was because of what we said concerning the Brains Trust rule of asking a number of men and women to exhibit how much they know by getting them to answer "unseen" questions, much as a teacher tests the degree of intelligence shown by his pupils, is responsible for changes that are to be made. If the Brains Trust were really aiming at instructing the public they would give the questions out beforehand, and the following week hold a discussion about them. There would be less fooling, probably less dishonesty such as is involved in discarding all awkward or dangerous questions, and more real enlightenment than exists now. With the aid of a good encyclopædia one could get much better information than the Brains Trust usually gives. It is time this business was mended or ended.

The "South Wales Evening Post" for December 3 reports Mr. Justice Charles at the Swansea Assizes as giving a tongue lashing to a clergyman—no name given—for certifying that the accused man was a quiet living man who had never been in trouble. The man in question was 21 years of age, and had been sent to prison for nine months for assaulting a ship's galley-boy with intent to rob. Mr. Justice Charles said it was perfectly plain the clergyman did not know the man, and "never made the slightest attempt to find out the life of the accused." Probably the man was one of the parson's congregation, and in these days clergymen cannot be too particular.



## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### TO CORRESPONDENTS

T. H. WOODLIFFE.—We do not think that one would get a conviction on the ground you name. We believe the Act has been modified somewhat by the passing of other laws.

H. LUCAS.—Pleased to learn that our help was of use. Sorry to hear of your ill-health, but the times are very trying.

R. H. STANFORD.—Thanks for season's good wishes, which we warmly reciprocate.

C. L. THOMAS.—Toynbee's "Study of History" is to be completed in nine volumes, of which six have been issued. There is no date given for the publication of the remaining books. The price is one guinea per volume. The Study is easily the most important study of history issued.

CHARLES SWEETMAN.—Thanks for letter; your kind wishes heartily reciprocated.

E. A. GARRISON.—Received with thanks. Good wishes reciprocated.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—F. W. R. Silke (South Africa), £3 3s.

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### SUGAR PLUMS

QUITE properly the Isaac Newton tri-centenary has been duly honoured in the Press. And quite inevitably, from the religious and from the pseudo-scientific side a great deal of nonsense has been written. One would really have been shocked if the greatest nonsense had not appeared in connection with religion. Of course, Newton was a Christian, but it does him small honour as a thinker to have written what he did write in defence of Christianity. Those who really respect Newton would prefer his religious lapses in the background. They form no part whatever of the *great* Newton, and they serve only to illustrate the common fact that while a man may be great in science and foolish in religion, no man can be foolish in science and great in any other intellectual exercise.

But we may note that none of those who in the Press have praised Newton appeared to be aware (if they were they kept it dark) that Newton's principal work was denounced as being atheistic in its character, and that its substance got into Cambridge University only by the medium of a trick. Dean Inge once said that Christianity died with the Copernican astronomy. That is rather too bold a generalisation, but Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Darwin left it impossible for intellectual integrity and ability further to entertain a Christian creed of historic value. Newton said that the work of science was "from the phenomena of motion to investigate the forces of nature, and then from these forces to demonstrate other phenomena." Could anyone state, or has anyone ever stated, a more completely Atheistic philosophy than is involved in that passage? We should like to see the new religious Brains Trust grapple with that position—honestly, of course, but honesty and the B.B.C. do not run together.

An item in the Press the other day reminded us that there is in the United States a "National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People." There is a long history behind the existence of such an association. Such an organisation has existed only in Christian times; it did not exist in pre-Christian times. That, says the Christian advocate, proves the supreme superiority of Christianity. Not at all. It no more proves the excellence of Christianity than the existence of an organisation for the relief of the starving poor indicates the high development of the society in which such an organisation is necessary.

For one damning fact stares in the face all who read history with intelligence. There was no colour bar in the world of pre-Christianity. It never occurred to the Greeks, the Romans, or the Egyptians that because a man's skin was black, brown or yellow that he was an inferior animal. There were men of different colours, and there the matter ended. The inferiority of coloured men in relation to "whites" was developed in Christian times. It was backed up by an appeal to the Bible as being a result of the curse placed upon Ham. And Christians became ashamed of it only when the growth of humanitarianism forced the pace, and it is Christians who keep the colour bar in being.

The B.B.C. is to create another Brains Trust, and it will be on the lines of the existing one—the same pretence at discussion, when all those taking part know they must not say certain things or plainly express certain opinions. The B.B.C. has mastered the lesson that if you wish to keep people "safe" give them something to do, let them feel they are getting on and they will be content to go round in a circle, and movement will take the place of advance. The present batch is so carefully selected that even should a "dangerous" question get so far as the table, those taking part in the performance—at 21 guineas per 45 minutes—are careful never to cross the danger line.

The new Brains Trust is to be concerned with religion. It has a standing staff of representatives of different Christian bodies—one, of course, a Roman Catholic—and there will be some others invited to take part in the sham. But there will not be a representative of a non- or anti-religious body, and, of course, if any one of the visitors shows a tendency to let a little of the truth in that will end his invitations. In the days of declining Rome, the governors said: "Give the people bread and the circus and they will remain quiet." So the B.B.C. says, let the people discuss something that is quite safe and they will keep off dangerous subjects.

When this new "fake" starts we shall be obliged if those who send in questions that are not dealt with, will let us have copies. We have plans that would make them useful.

The new B.B.C. farcical display calls itself "The Anvil," and the "Church Times" comments on this:—

"The 'anvil' may be intended to symbolise the hammering out of spiritual problems, but the immediate suggestion which it engenders is that of a melodious tinkling based on a few conventional themes with superficial variations." That is not very kind on the part of the "Church Times" considering that the aim of the B.B.C., so far as religion is concerned, is to keep people busy "discussing" harmless questions in order to keep them from talking about "dangerous" ones. But it is near enough to the truth in prophesying that the new "Brains Trust" will be little better than an elaborate fake. If we thought there was the slightest chance of the new "packed" tribunal dealing with questions bearing on religion, we would send in a dozen or so questions that would really help to the understanding of religion. But as the B.B.C. said years ago, its aim is to "prevent the disintegration of Christianity." The only way even to attempt that impossible task is to prevent people learning the truth about religion. The pity is that it can hire so many men and women to help at the task.

But the "Church Times" puts its foot into it when it says, "Religion is not well served by indefinite and unconsidered platitudes." Emphatically that is not true. Religion in a



modern environment consists of little more than platitudes, attitudes and latitudes. Let anyone examine any of the defenders of Christianity, and if they take away from the attitude of superiority, the platitude of telling us that to be good is not to do evil, and the latitude which takes in anything that is in favour for the moment, and consider what is left.

In the "Acid Drop" section of this issue we give an account of the attempt to make religious "education" part of a military training. We hope this manœuvre will be stopped. But it may be that the Churches and some of our religious generals are genuinely frightened by the number of men who have applied to have their identity discs and registration changed from C. of E., or some other denomination, to Freethinker or Atheist. For many reasons we are not citing figures, but the number is considerable. And Freethinkers in the Services should not forget that it is their legal right to see that their description is altered whenever their views on religion have altered. Any difficulty should be stated without delay to the General Secretary of the N.S.S.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

### I.

IT is a good general rule when discussing a problem to stick to the main question as much as possible, and not be tempted to wander off into side issues. Yet very often it is these same side issues which lead to wonderful results, not in the least suspected or expected, and which give some valuable clues and implications of far-reaching effect.

Take, for example, the case of John the Baptist. As the "forerunner" of Jesus, he ought to lead us to some very valuable information on Christian origins, a problem, I need hardly remind the reader, which has not so far been solved. Whenever I have studied the question, John has confronted me with a sort of "don't miss me out of your investigations" air, and I must confess I have put him aside as of small consequence. Yet in some way his presence in the Jesus myth has always haunted me. Is he quite as valueless as he appears, I have often asked myself. Why is he, a real personage, in the myth at all?

As is well known, John is mentioned in detail by Josephus, and that has given him an historical status without question. Such a "prophet," with his mode of living on locusts and honey, dressed in camel's hair, preaching repentance and claiming to be a "voice" of God, must have been commonplace in and around old Jerusalem and other cities in Palestine. So also must his "baptism" as a purifying rite from sin. There is therefore no need to doubt Josephus—and yet I wonder. Why should Josephus be considered so often an infallible authority whenever he supports in some small way the Christian story? And if we find so much of this story obviously mythical or allegorical, why should not the Baptist be a myth as surely as Jesus Christ?

In his article on John in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, Dr. Cheyne is very cautious. He acclaims him, it is true, as an historical figure, but this eminent Biblical scholar with his very sceptical mind simply does not know where exactly the Baptist stands in the story. It may be an "idealised picture." We can gather "something" from "recorded fragments." But if this or that be accepted, the story is "impossible."

It is all very mystifying; but then, whenever we try to get behind a Bible story, it seems to be always something of a mystery—unless it is merely a record of some obvious everyday event like the kings of Judah and Israel (petty little tribal chieftains in reality) quarrelling.

This problem of John the Baptist has been very carefully discussed in many works, and by Freethinkers like Dupuis and Robert Taylor who, in spite of Josephus, flatly maintain that it can be explained almost entirely by the astro-myth theory. Professor Arthur Drews insists that the passage in Josephus

has all the marks of a forgery. "Not only does the way in which it interrupts the narrative plainly show it to be an interpolation, but the chronology of the Jewish historian in regard to John is an irreconcilable contradiction to that of the Gospels," he says in his "Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus."

The reader, however, should procure if he can Mr. Hugh J. Schonfield's "The Host Book of the Nativity of John," which is "A Study in Messianic Folklore and Christian Origins," published as late as 1929, for an exceedingly enlightening discussion on the Baptist. I expect Mr. Schonfield is a Christian, but his monograph plays havoc with Christian tradition; not only for what it says, but for what it implies.

And here I should like to make a few comments on some remarks made in these columns the other week as to the task of Freethought. They are relevant to this question.

Every Freethinker has a right to have his say on any problem without incurring a cry of "heresy." I have always maintained this right. But it does not follow that he is thereby to be immune from criticism.

Personally I welcome criticism, the stronger and more informed the better. I am not infallible, and on such a baffling problem as Christian origins anybody can make mistakes. But I do claim that we Freethinkers must advance with the available evidence or scholarship. Biblical criticism did not cease with "The Age of Reason," however admirable that work is. If a Freethinker has no time or inclination to read more, he will find therein a fine trenchant attack on "Holy Writ." But some of us have left Paine a long way behind, as was inevitable.

In the same way, however sincere a man may be in believing that there was a genuine but "obscure" man called Jesus, is no reason why the question should not be pursued further in the light of later knowledge. Paine, Strauss and Renan did not give us the last word on the Christian deity; in fact, they are now on many issues completely out of date.

And there is still another point. I always hope—perhaps foolishly—that something I say on the Jesus problem will reach Christians. As far as Freethought is concerned, it really does not matter two hoots if Jesus was only a man and not a God. But it does matter to Christians. They do not like to be told that they are worshipping a myth—as big (or little) a myth as Sindbad the Sailor. And our propaganda is surely mainly for them.

There will be plenty of people who simply cannot be troubled on this question of John the Baptist, and are quite content to leave it where it has been for many years. But Mr. Schonfield has given us a genuine addition to the scholarship, academic if you like, which delights in pursuing a problem—or the truth—for its own sake, and the way he has done so will not make pleasant reading for the orthodox.

What is his thesis? Simply that John the Baptist was regarded, as the Messiah before Jesus, that he had a numerous following and that his story was taken bodily over and applied to Jesus, the Christian Church doing its best to destroy any traces of the change. As I have said, it is not only the mere recital of the facts—or conjectures if that word is preferred—but the implications which follow the story. But first of all, what is this story?

There can be little doubt that the Jews were expecting a Messiah, but there seems to have been no "very clear definition as to who the Messiah was or what he would do." When people are blinded with religion or religious fanaticism they cannot very well think clearly, and in the nature of things the term "Messiah" could not have been very clear either. Most Jews expected their favourite King David to return, but others might well have expected Moses, or one of the Prophets; and, of course, as now, the expectation was turned to good account by impostors, of whom there were many. As Mr. Schonfield says:

"Signs and portents were seen in everything. The most



ordinary celestial phenomena received a Messianic interpretation . . . nothing was deemed impossible for the Messiah to accomplish. A cure became a miracle, thunders became voices from heaven. Disciples were ready to tell you that this He spake of the temple of His body; this of the Holy Spirit; this of His resurrection; this event fulfilled that prophecy, and that of another. Legends clustered thick about the men whom the people delighted to honour. . . ."

None of these stories, adds Mr. Schonfield, were more popular than those of Jesus, the son of Joseph, and John the son of Zachariah—"those concerning Jesus are well known to us from the canonical Gospels, but it is not generally known that similar stories were originally told of the birth of John the Baptist."

This should prove, if true, very galling for those who believe in the "uniqueness" of the Gospel Jesus.

H. CUTNER.

## BREEDING

THE word "breeding" is one of the many words in the English language to which we have, by education and custom, given an unwarrantable importance. We speak of a man's "breeding"—meaning usually his parentage—as though that and that alone accounts for his character—be that good, bad or indifferent. Judged by our particular standards—and we appraise him or blame him accordingly.

If we entertain the notion that our parents can and do "acquire" certain characteristics and pass these on to us, willy-nilly, Mark Graubard stands by ready to correct us as to this. He says (in "Man the Slave and Master"): "We must banish the notion that acquired characters are 'gradually' inherited. A tribe may speak a language for many generations, but children will have to learn it in each generation. For centuries Christians have read and studied the Bible, believed in God or learned geometry. Yet knowledge of these things is not inherited and children have to learn them all over again. On the other hand, for many centuries each of the four fingers of the human hand has had three segments, but a mutation may suddenly for no apparent reason produce an individual whose fingers will have only two segments. In the world of biology mutations generally appear first in one or a few individuals and then spread among the species, which has to make the best of it. The environment can modify many characters, but it cannot change their transmission from generation to generation."

"The fact that acquired characters are not inherited is fortunate so far as man is concerned. It means progress and freedom. It permits us to maintain all kinds of practices, customs and ideas without having them forced upon our offspring for hundreds of generations. The sins of the parents are thus not visited upon the children. Various physical distortions practiced for many generations by human tribes are not transmitted to children born to-day. Neither do social habits or mental activities, such as language, beliefs, or superstitions become subject to genetic factors after prolonged practice. In many respects man can therefore modify his ideas, social relations and habits, and know at the same time that they will not be made permanent and that future generations will improve upon them as they see fit."

Little tiny things, known as "genes" and "chromosomes"—which require a very powerful microscope to detect them—have a lot to do with what we are at birth and what we eventually become, but so also do our home life and general social surroundings. These latter have a far greater effect upon the individual than is generally understood and appreciated. For instance: one child may be born of a tyrannical, foul-mouthed father and grow up to be a cowed, easily-frightened individual with not a spark of initiative in him; another, born in the house next door, may be the offspring of parents who simply idolise him and do

everything in their power to ensure his success in life—sacrifice themselves in order that he may achieve that which is best in him, which they believe to be a great deal—with the result that he does in fact prove himself to be a worthy son and achieves some little distinction in the world of affairs. Or, given a good home, a boy may meet with some outside influence which makes or mars him. Both in school and out of school this may possibly happen. If his teacher is of the overbearing type, with his own pet theories as to how a child should be educated, and for what special purpose, he is just as likely to misdirect the child's future as though he took him by the scruff of the neck and deliberately led him astray; on the other hand: if the teacher is a man who really understands his function and the nature of the human material which he is called upon to handle, he can so shape—or help to shape—the boy's mind and body that he becomes a credit to his school and sex.

There are, fortunately, a good many teachers who do appreciate all this. There are others, of course; and to understand that children vary enormously in physical and mental make-up is half the battle. Or rather, it helps considerably with the task in hand. Some youngsters—through no fault whatever of their own—never can get very far along the road of learning, no matter how much care and attention is given to them. They just haven't got it in them, and therefore it cannot be brought out—or put in. Others are just as hungry for knowledge and receptive, and can be moulded quite easily, and it is a real pleasure to have them under one's care. They are—each and every one of them—what they are by virtue of their long line of ancestry, their constitution and home life, and they are plastic or otherwise in consequence of those several influences. One boy will literally "jump to it" because of his love of learning—and shows his interest by the way he tackles the lesson you set him; another will see you damned first before he will apply his mind to anything—in spite of all you may say or do; and so on—each according to his natural and acquired abilities and aims in life.

Hitherto far too much has been made of the fetish of "breeding," as though that were the hall-mark of an excellent character and the password into "good" society; indeed, in some spheres, unless you have matriculated or, better still, been to Oxford or Cambridge and taken a "degree," you aren't even considered—but what one is depends upon a number of causes, and some of these are quite beyond our control. But as Mark Graubard says, or implies: It is as well that we aren't all chips of the old block, and that the sins of the father aren't always visited upon the children, because that does actually mean that our youngsters haven't to go through life saddled with our responsibilities. If they were inevitably bound by the laws of nature to struggle through their pilgrimage burdened with our sins, or the result of them, how resentful they might very well and justifiably be!

We must be careful and not conclude that breeding doesn't count—much. It does. It counts just as much with men and women as it does with the lower animals, and for the same reason. Eugenically speaking, a man of a certain type should not mate with a woman of an entirely different type but, if the best and healthiest results are to be secured, with one of his own class, and so on. But marriages aren't arranged in that way—yet. One day they may be. Centuries ahead, perhaps, the pairing of men and women will be undertaken just as scientifically as is the pairing of the male and female in the lower animal world to-day. If and when that day ever comes courtship and marriage among the human species should not only lose nothing of its romance and beauty, but it should become far more ennobling than it has been before and hitherto with its hit or miss methods, because then the chances of success from all points of view are likely to be far greater.

In the meantime it is, to say the least of it, helpful to remember that we had no choice in the matter of our parents, we are not responsible for their vices or virtues, and we did not



ask to be born in a baronial hall or workhouse, whichever it was; and that however highly or lowly bred we were the world has to take us as we are, with all our faults, and we it—and do the best we can, using such abilities as nature and experience have provided us with for our use in the struggle for existence.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

### WHAT HAS HE GOT?

TWO world wars in one generation is a grievous misfortune—all will agree on that. But there is nothing too grievous for Church propaganda. It was the late Bishop of London who hailed the last war as one of God's great days, other clergymen gave their services as recruiting agents, and ecclesiastic capital was lent at 5 per cent. Both world wars have been considered as worthy of Church adoption, the Prince of Peace has been put on vacation and both wars were claimed as Christian enterprises; what an ambition for our self-appointed moral guides and architects of a post-war New World. Freethinkers called to the Colours were tricked or forced into making a false declaration of religious belief, unless they had the good fortune to come before an officer who was more of a gentleman than a Christian. God did not mind, and Christians didn't care, so long as the fighting men had a paper record of Christian belief, the target being 100 per cent. Christians in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Between the two world wars it was the Churches that led a colossal campaign of lying against Soviet Russia which misled millions of people in this country into a false and hateful conception of social conditions under the Soviets. The part played by the Churches since 1914 is plain and damning. To any other institution except religion it would be fatal. True, the Churches are uneasy; two world wars in one generation 1,900 years after Jesus died to save mankind, with this country smothered with churches and attendant spiritual practitioners in thousands cannot be met and parried by a ghastly miracle at Dunkirk. If Christianity was a case for sense and intelligence, the only hope for the Churches would be the M.D.s, but fortunately for the clergy, where faith abides, sense and intelligence cannot enter at the same time, and so, with traditional clerical impudence, a come-back is being staged in which it is hoped the past will be forgotten.

By a divine mystery the holy men of God have been working on a wrong formula, and an impure spirit has flowed from the ecclesiastic distillery, until the politicians' talk of a new post-war world inspired the clergy to discover the mistake. This war is to be the top hat out of which the politicians and their clerical confederates are to produce a new world. The act might have been staged before the misery of two world wars; it was badly needed, but perhaps it did not occur to them. At any rate, the preliminary advertising is already in full swing, the circus ring is being prepared, catch phrases such as Christian Faith, Christian Principles, the Christian way of life, Christian Character, Christian Courage, etc., are working overtime. They are all in pickle waiting for the war to finish. A really dramatic touch, with much advertising value, could be introduced by closing all the churches now and fixing a notice to the doors, "Re-opening after the war with an entire new stock."

In face of the supposed proprietary nature of Christian character we might apply the wording of a well-known advertisement, "What's he got that other men haven't got?" Excluding religion, in what way does a Christian behave differently from a non-Christian?

The object in excluding religion from the test is to remove a severe handicap from Christians. In the secular life of society the conditions are equal; introduce religion and the non-Christian is at a definite disadvantage. Religious zeal is responsible for many moral distortions which would weigh against Christians. For instance, lying for the glory of God does not necessarily

indicate an habitual liar; it may be just a religious practice, and many men quite trustworthy in secular matters will not hesitate to lie for his God and his religion. Again, on social problems the Christian may strive hard to understand them and devise remedies, but in religion he will suffer and make silly excuses for the delinquencies of his God as though one must not expect anything different from a god. Only in religion will the Christian support outgrown beliefs being taught to schoolchildren as true. It is the Christian who wants to interfere with other people's Sundays and so on, but in the secular life of the State what has the Christian got worth having which the non-Christian has not? Nowhere does the Christian stand out above the non-Christian. In manners, conversation or general conduct, indoors or outdoors, in singles, small groups, big crowds or great masses, the Christian cannot be distinguished. At an inspection of the Home Guard nobody from appearance or smartness could pick out the Christians. During our air raids did any specific conduct mark out the Christians? And remember, when the war is over and we settle down to peace conditions, citizenship—not religion—will still be the important social test in society. The Churches are too much involved in the present system to give any lead in reforms, except by words. Formidable obstacles will have to be removed and much tough work put in if social and economic security is to be won, and it is as well to remember that the Churches have added their weight to the obstacles that beset social betterment, and it is tolerably certain their weight will be there till the very end.

R. H. ROSETTI.

### CHINESE CHRESTOMATHY

"Chinese think, act and feel almost exactly like us; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them, except that all they do is more clear, pure and decorous than with us."

—GOETHE.

"That most sombre of all humorists, a Chinese philosopher."—BRET HARTE.

YES, that has been largely the trouble with us Occidentals: ever since the days of Marco Polo we have so loved to cherish illusions about that fifth of the human race that has managed to survive through all recorded history as a well-defined cultural unit. The Chinese have constituted a civilisation rather than a mere nation, a civilisation whereof the inevitable vicissitudes and disruptions and thraldoms are as naught to the broad homogeneity and continuity of its essential features. For many reasons we have not been inspired to pay much serious attention to China; fancy-free, we have either, on the one hand, attributed to her peoples unexampled erudition, artistic incomparability and a habit of anticipating most of our finest inventions, or, on the other hand, squatting round the unrolled mat of Kai Lung, have laughed at them as doers of things backwards and as equippers of soldiers with umbrellas in case rain should stop the fight. But to-day a more realistic attitude is being forced upon us, not the least reason being that we now find ourselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with yellow men who had already set their unhelmeted faces against Fascism about the time when the Chamberlain Government proposed the granting of belligerent rights to a "Christian gentleman" by the name of Francisco Franco. That was over five years ago: in 1943 the Chinese, sorely pressed and still inadequately armed, fight on unflinchingly. Does it not behove us to become better acquainted with their civilisation?

It is not an easy study: the historical milieu has been exclusive enough to make appreciation by the Western mind difficult. We seize on the fact that the Chinese invented paper money and explosives and movable-type printing and astronomical instruments, only to be set brooding over the equally important fact that these inventions were never developed or fully utilised. To turn to another field: how shall we explain Chinese neglect



of exploration and colonisation? Was it due to a deplorable lack of curiosity and enterprise or to a laudable indifference to self-aggrandisement and commercial predacity? And if we can afford to be a little superior over the Chinese not having happened to stumble across the scientific method, is not our triumph mitigated by the tremendous fact that it has never occurred to the Chinese mind to invent a militant religiosity, to meet heterodoxy with sword, stake and proscription and to warp humankind with eschatology?

Fundamental to the study is at least a passing knowledge of the nature and history of Chinese thought. Just as an understanding of Western philosophising from Thales to Whitehead is essential to a full appreciation of our civilisation, so a perusal of the tenets of the sages from Confucius to Sun Yat Sen should give us the first key to the puzzle that is China. Indeed, the latter is more important than the former, for it is one of the quaintnesses of the Chinese that their way of living has conformed to principles laid down by their greatest moralists and philosophers. And these principles—or many of them—together with a hundred-and-one other representative passages from existing Chinese classics are now available in Everyman's Library (No. 973; "Chinese Philosophy in Classical Times"). The editor, translator and general cicerone is E. R. Hughes—and most praiseworthily does he play his part. He keeps us continually aware of the difficulties and snares in translating abstract concepts from an ideographic language to an alphabetical and be-grammared one. Having available a host of English abstract terms pertaining to any given idea—and each term with a dozen definitions—the translator from a wholly alien culture has an unenviable task. We cannot even precisely translate *élan vital* into English: how much less *ch'i*? In this case Mr. Hughes always tells us when his rendering contains an element of guesswork and often quotes other scholars' interpretations of obscure phrases. We can ask no more.

The sages selected range in time from Confucius to Wang Ch'ung, who died about 97 A.D.—that is, roughly 600 years. Their *dicta* do not always make smooth reading; there is sometimes tumidity, sometimes vagueness. One is fascinated by, but can only with difficulty concentrate upon, early strivings after the faculty of logical argumentation. The almost fanatical insistence on the ideal of Filial Piety one finds boring. And one sighs over the persistence of that bugbear of human thought the world over, the holding up of the Good Old Days as faultless in all things. But by and large, one is impressed.

Perhaps the best method of stimulating interest in this meaty volume would be to refer briefly to a few—almost random—items that can be related to our own web of ideas. From this angle the palmary contribution is that of Mo Ti, who forestalled Christ by several centuries with a specific Love One Another doctrine. But he was very practically-minded and his general thesis, as the translator indicates, has much in common with English Utilitarianism. Mohism once had a large following, but it did not live long as a distinctive philosophy. And it had unexpected repercussions: Shang Wang, the great Legalist, did a little grafting and pruning and there blossomed a state-centred utilitarianism that can only be described as Fascism. On these principles the country was governed for a generation.

Then there are extracts from the works of Chuang Chou, "the most brilliant mind the Chinese race ever produced." Among them we note a rumination on Knowledge and Self that Descartes might have envied, and one on the nature of Truth that might have induced Pontius Pilate to stay. Chuang Chou was keenly aware of the relativity of properties and attributes: there is a remarkable passage on the reciprocal nature of the relation between dream life and "real" life which is sophisticated enough for our own times. Later, Hsun Ch'ing, neo-Confucianist and iconoclast, was especially concerned with refuting the fatalism that religion so often begets—that shoulder-shrugging attitude that atrophied the Islamic world and once

all but destroyed the possibility of progress in the Christian world. With his inveighings against the belief in the efficacy of prayer, his discrediting of omens and "other-worldliness," Hsun Ch'ing would have graced an N.S.S. platform; and his grasp of the subjectivity of perception and the semantic dangers inherent in the use of logic is as sure as, if not surer than, that of any European's before the time of John Locke.

Finally there is Wang Ch'ung. The vigour of this rationalist's pen doubtless typifies "the method of throwing lighted fire-crackers at a horse's buttocks"—if we accept Lin Yutang's classification of Chinese critical styles. Not for him a blind adulation of the words of the sages of old; and not at any price will he admit of an anthropocentric universe designed and capriciously guided by a Jehovah. What an awful pagan!

With that our sampling must end. But I hope I haven't given the impression that the book is all severe philosophy, because it certainly isn't. It is quite often magnificently poetic. There is, for instance, on page 287 a passage that is nothing if not a beautiful elaboration of Blake's famous World-in-a-Grain-of-Sand quatrain. Yes, the poetic as well as the philosophical contacts are there, and by their means the East-West gap may yet be narrowed to the bridge-width necessary for the establishment of the "Great Society" of the Chinese sages' [and everyman's] dreams.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

### FELLOW SUFFERERS

The aged Jew was overcome with sorrow and humiliation and bled him to the synagogue to pray.

"Dear Lord. My only son has become a renegade; he has humiliated his family and disgraced his race. He has been a traitor to the faith and brought my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. How can I face thee when the fruit of my loins has brought rebellion to thy name, and covered me with shame? Extend thy mercy to me, O Lord."

And a small voice was heard:—

"Cheer up, Abe! I too had an only son."

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