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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### What is Christianity?

WE love clear-cut definitions. They are not merely a help to understanding, they are also an indication of clear thinking. They mark out those who love to wallow in cloudy phrases under the delusion that avoidance of definite statements is evidence of liberal thinking. Like the "gentle dew from Heaven," clear definitions benefit those who give and those who receive. But the road to clarity of thought and speech is not usually a path of roses. It is found often at the cost of making many enemies and few friends. You will be labelled as a nuisance when you are simply trying to play the part of a real friend. You may be told, you will be told, that you are splitting hairs, or quarrelling about words—which, if words fulfil their proper function, is what one cannot help doing. Splitting hairs requires a firm hand and a clear eye, and may well prove that you are conscious of knowing how to handle a delicate instrument with care. To insist on a definition is a test whether two disputants understand what they are talking about; and few can stand that ordeal. Consider what a disturbance there would be if our politicians and our parsons developed the desire for and the capacity to give an exact "reference" for the words they use? In the House of Commons he would be voted a bore, and in a church he might be summonsed for "brawling," which is still an indictable offence.

But we have had our position challenged. We have been asked to give a plain definition of what we mean when we use such a term as "Christianity." We are also advised to put that definition into plain language so that the writer can get down to "brass tacks." A further spur was given by the assurance that the request was a *simple* one, capable of being answered by anyone of average common sense. For a moment or two we felt that whoever answered that question in the prescribed few words was asking for trouble. It looked as though he would be sitting on the aforementioned "brass tacks"—with the business side upward.

For the definitions of Christianity are as numerous as the Christian sects, and the smaller the sect the more tenacious they are of their sectarian definition of "true" Christianity. We should have to wade through some hundreds of Christian declarations of faith, and if one was selected, to deal with the rest as frauds or fools. Is thy servant a lunatic that he should attempt this thing?

But the challenge tempts one. If I could not give a definition that would suit *all* Christians, would it not be possible to present a picture of Christianity that is historically sound, even though it would not be accepted by all Christians? That, we thought, might be possible. It was no use getting back to the apostles, for they themselves differed as to a detailed meaning of Christianity. The earliest Christians were quarrelling as to the meaning of their creed, the latest ones are still at it. They all believed in following Jesus, but when they came to settle what that involved the fat was in the fire. But there was one glimmer of hope. For good or evil, Christianity and the Christian Church are historical facts. What could be made of that?

So straightway we turned to a "Dictionary of Sects and Heresies." It was a formidable volume, about ten inches by eight, printed in double columns, and in not too large type, and it ran to 628 pages. It was an awesome collection, but it made no pretence of being complete. The list of sects went right through the alphabet, and the subjects ranged from the earliest centuries until 1874. Many new sects have come into existence since then, but there seemed enough here to get on with. The list began with Abecedarians, a Christian sect which held the belief that they had a direct message from God to teach that human learning acted as a direct obstruction to God's will. (Whether that inspiration came from God or not it certainly contained a great historic truth. These Abecedarians were wise in their generation.) The encyclopædia ends with the Zwinglians, a Swiss sect that fell out with the Pope of Rome.

The contents of the volume were rich and varied. There are sects that do not believe in marriage and others who believe that a man once "saved" may have as many wives as he pleases. There are the Klisti, a quite modern Russian sect, who at their chief yearly gathering cut off the breasts of a naked virgin and eat them in the name of Jesus. There are Flanians, who believe that evil comes from God alone, and an opposition sect who believe the Devil has a hand in it. There is a sect which believes in performing a religious service in a state of nudity, with a branch division that favours ordinary dress. There are Brethren of the Free Spirit who believe that once a man is saved he can do as he darn well pleases, since that sect believed that it could do nothing wrong. This sect is balanced by another who believed that man can do nothing right. In short, one has in this volume sects of all sizes and qualities. You pay no money, but you have your choice.

## Christians and the Bible

Who then are we to set forth in clear and simple language what Christianity is? We hold no commission from God; he has never bothered us and we have never bothered him. We cannot say with the Archbishop of Canterbury that God has "called" us to explain his wishes to mankind, although it might be remembered by God that we have never accused him of sending wars and pestilences, or that he grew angry with man for not being better than he had made him. At any rate, a study of the sects gave us no help in finding that clear and simple definition of Christianity for which our correspondent writes.

It is true there is the Bible and the New Testament. That, Christians tell us, is what they believe in. But *all* the different warring sects believe in the Bible. That is really their only point of agreement. At the same time, what the Bible really teaches is the cause of the existence of these numerous sects. The sects agree in name but they differ ferociously in understanding. Christians may disagree in small sections or in armed battalions, but the disagreement is always there. Also it would sound as a satire to say that they *agree* to differ, for over and over again it is the power of the secular State alone that has maintained peace between them. If that bitterness of opposition is less manifest to-day than it has been in past years, this is mainly due to their being forced to hang together as the only way of avoiding being hung separately.

The professed belief of all Christians in the Bible gives us little help in finding a definition of Christianity that will command general assent. For if the fact of the Bible being God's Book keeps that book in circulation, the interpretation of the book differs with the passing of every few generations. Of course, every author may be granted the right to revise his work from time to time, but in the case of the Bible we have no evidence that the alleged author of the book does the revising. It is the readers of the book that do the revising, and they do it on the unproven grounds that it is done under the leadership or guidance of the original author.

Still, the fact remains that the Bible of to-day is not, so far as its interpretation is concerned, the Bible of a couple of generations ago, and that the Bible of a century ago is not that of a century earlier is undeniable. If we are to rely upon the judgment of his followers, God is the most unfortunate of authors. What he says and what he means seldom appears to run together.

It was said by one of the few men of intellectual quality who has done the Church of England the honour of accepting payment from it during the last three or four generations—Dean Inge—that Christianity logically died with the establishment of the Copernican Astronomy. The truth of this cannot be denied. When the earth lost its position as the central body of the universe, man's religious greatness went with it. There are parts of the New Testament that are simply ridiculous in the light of modern astronomy. And when Newton said that science, "from the phenomena of motions to investigate the forces of nature, and then from these forces to demonstrate other phenomena," he gave Materialism its order of the day and placed large parts of God's book on the level of fairy tales. The revolution of thought that was set going in the sixteenth century left no logical room for the fantastic legends that constitute the very essence of Christianity.

The change-over has been so great that few believers in Christianity are alive to its importance. It is unrecognised by multitudes, and the clergy do their best to prevent its recognition becoming general. On the public platform or in open magazines they profess one thing, in the pulpit they profess another, and by inference deny all they have written in the public press or said on the public platform. They are ready to claim that Christianity is an historic religion, but they do not or will not realise that an historic fact is a *moving* fact that is born of certain conditions and must vary as the historic circumstances undergo alteration. But in the pulpit, with their out-of-date phrases, outworn language and implied belief in the most absurd of miracles, they are back again in an atmosphere of three or four hundred years ago. They will not recognise the truth of John Morley's statement that modern thought explains religion out of existence. The survival of religion in 1943 has the same significance in the social body that a rudimentary tale has in man. We have tailed minds as well as tailed bodies.

It is true that something that is called Christianity still exists. It is still powerful, and with the great majority of believers the older phraseology is still in use. In some situations this would not matter. The references of words and phrases differ with the development of social life, but with the perpetuation of Christianity we are on different grounds. For here the old terminology is used to perpetuate outworn ideas, effete institutions and unwarrantable social privileges. The result of this is dishonesty in intellectual outlook and a confusion of general thinking that has its reverberation in many directions. We have a striking example of this in the deal that is being made between the existing Government and the combined Churches to place the clergy in a commanding position in the people's schools. The children in the State schools are to be carefully trained to believe in the historic Bible, and to be trained so well in their early years to regard the Bible as a specially "sacred" volume that will outgrow their infancy. We have some of the more cultured representatives of the Christian Churches publicly admitting that the old conception of the Christian Bible cannot otherwise be maintained.

Consider the following admissions, which we take from "A New Commentary on Holy Scripture," published in 1928, written by representative Christian scholars, under the general editorship of the late Bishop Gore:—

"The book of Genesis contains no account of the real beginnings of either the earth itself or of man or human civilisation. (Page 38.)

"The idea of Eden is common to more than one primitive race. (Page 43.)

"That this story of a universal deluge covering the whole earth . . . cannot be historical hardly needs demonstration. (Page 46.)

"Exodus is not history in the sense that the records of the reign of David, or the Acts of Apostles is history. (Page 64.)

"The Passover was an ancient Semitic feast. (Page 75.)

"The tradition of Moses cannot be maintained. (Page 22.)

"The Sabbath probably goes back to the early moon cultus of the Semites in Babylon.

"The book of Joshua does not contain an historically accurate account of the Hebrew settlement in Canaan. (Page 91.)"

And so on, and so on. There are hundreds of specific repudiations of teachings by which the Churches once stood, and by which some still stand. And yet while many pulpits do not openly maintain the accuracy of these stories, in most there is in their preaching a tacit assumption that the Bible remains substantially true. The clergy dare not openly proclaim to the people the true nature of the Bible records. So long as the public can be fooled by these Semitic legends they will be fooled. The clergy will preach one thing and imply another.

We cannot, then, say precisely what Christianity is in a manner that will satisfy Christians. And yet something may be essayed, for if we find it impossible to say what Christianity *is*, we may be able to say what it *was*, and by comparing what Christianity *is* with what Christianity *was*, we may be able to indicate how much of genuine Christianity remains.

(To be continued.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## JAPAN'S BID FOR FAR EASTERN SUPREMACY

WHEN that long secluded State, Nippon, was compulsorily reopened to the Western World after 1853, the Occidental Powers made the open commercial door in China the mainspring of their Eastern policy. Apart from the Japanese incursion into Cathay in 1894, the developing Empire of the Islands of the Rising Sun loyally co-operated in this plan. But with the annexation of Manchuria in 1931, there was made a marked breach in the system of trading with China which had so long prevailed. Subsequent events indicate that Japan had determined to make herself the majestic mistress of the Oriental domain. Yet, for the moment, Japan did not openly violate the Treaty under which international trading relations were regulated. For the Japanese spokesmen persistently asserted that their military expedition in Manchuria was in complete accordance with the law as laid down in the Nine-Power Treaty.

But in 1934, however, Japan overtly announced that she had been specially appointed to promote the pacification of Eastern Asia, and that the intervention of foreign Powers in the policy she had decided to pursue might be regarded as an uncalled-for intrusion. This pronouncement was not taken very seriously by the Western Governments concerned. Moreover, as Mr. G. E. Hubbard observes in his elaborate essay, "The Far East" ("Study of International Affairs," 1938, Vol. 1; Oxford University Press, 1941), this proclamation, "in the eyes of the public at large—at all events in Great Britain—was largely discounted in view of its very magnitude, which gave it the air of being little more than an exhibition of national megalomania."

Much to our cost, we know only too well what has happened since in the Far Eastern World. But even after Japan had openly attacked China in July, 1937, her representatives still professed adherence to the provisions of the Nine-Power Treaty, although in rejecting the invitation to attend the Brussels Conference of the following November, the Japanese Government protested that, while the Treaty still functioned, it had no bearing whatever on their Chinese policy, which was adopted in "self-defence." Also, Japan more and more insisted that her apparently divinely ordained mission for the pacification of Eastern Asia need in no way embarrass her relations with the Western Powers.

In view of the marked weakness manifested by the French and British Governments at Munich, the Japanese adopted a bolder attitude and, at a Press interview, the Japanese Minister intimated "that Japan considered the Nine-Power Treaty to be obsolete, although no decision had yet been taken in regard to denunciation." Again, where official pronouncements lacked lucidity, the Japanese Press swept reticence aside. One leading organ stated that: "The so-called Open Door and Equal Opportunity principles must be revised."

In December, 1938, however, Japanese demands in China were openly and unashamedly proclaimed. The Japanese Prime Minister announced the basic terms under which his Government was willing to terminate hostilities. These proposals certainly did not err on the side of moderation. For China was called upon to fully recognise the newly-created State of Manchukuo which Japan had recently overrun; to observe the anti-Comintern Pact; to sanction the presence of Japanese soldiers at specified Chinese stations as a safeguard against the spread of Communism, while Inner Mongolia was to be converted into "a special anti-Communist area." Finally, Japanese nationals were to be granted full facilities for residence and business transactions in inner China, while Japanese subjects were to be accorded participation in the exploitation of the natural resources of the country. These very comprehensive requirements were unequivocally rejected by General Chiang Ka-shek, for the Japanese, he declared, aimed at "creating a vassal China with which to dominate the Pacific and to dismember the other States of the world."

Britain, America and ultimately France, now reminded Japan of her obligations under the Treaty, when her unblushing ambition to overcome China and convert it into a vassal State had become obvious to all. So Japan's action was condemned as a flagrant breach of international law.

The Tokyo Government put forward the plea that a united China, Japan and Manchukuo were absolutely indispensable as an economic, cultural and political shield against the encroachments of a vile and pestilent Communism. Also, this bloc was essential to create and sustain "a close economic cohesion throughout East Asia." Furthermore, the British and Americans were reminded that even if their Far Eastern commercial activities were restricted, there remained ample scope for trading transactions in other parts of the globe.

Japan's large and rapidly increasing population, her earthquake-shaken islands and comparatively poor soil, combined with her dependence upon foreign sources for the raw materials of which she stood so sadly in need, all appear to have greatly contributed to her determination to obtain practically all her requirements from the products of the neighbouring continent and islands. Indeed, self-sufficiency was the goal of her ambition. As Mr. Hubbard judiciously notes: "The growth of trade barriers against Japanese goods—resulting from the spread of economic nationalism throughout the world and from the Western industrial nations' special protective measures against 'cheap labour' competition—threatened seriously to disturb the economic structure of Japan by checking her export trade and thereby her capacity to buy the increasing quantities of raw materials which her war-swollen industries needed. Still more alarming in the eyes of her ruling classes, was the fact that the democratic Western Powers, if they wished to coerce Japan, had it in their power to cripple her fatally by excluding her exports. Thus even among the more liberal minded elements in Japan the conviction had grown that Japan must have recourse to the second alternative and create for herself an economic empire on the mainland of Asia."

This self-centred view unavoidably brought Japan into antagonism towards the nations possessing important interests in the Orient, while it involved the opinion that the Chinese were the natural bond-slaves of a superior Japanese race. In

any case, the Japanese desire for economic security little justified her wanton invasion of Chinese territory, where her obvious intention was to reduce China to helpless vassalage or worse. But now the die was cast, and now it seemed a certainty that, at no distant date, an armed conflict would occur with the democratic Western States.

Apparently the Japanese expected an early collapse of Chinese resistance. Yet the war, still undeclared, has raged from the late 1930's to the present time, with no immediate prospect of its termination. The strain upon the resources of both combatants must have been enormous, and now that Britain and the U.S. have been forced into the fray, Japanese resources, despite the spoils from the regions she has overrun, must be more heavily strained than before.

During the Chinese campaigns, the arrogance of the Japanese was encouraged and increased in consequence of the farcical Munich settlement. Canton was now assailed, and Hubbard concludes that: "The more militant party in Tokyo may have reckoned that events in Europe had shown Great Britain to be too strongly wedded to peace or too helplessly unprepared for war, actively to oppose such a Japanese move."

Germany, even under Hitlerism, was for a brief period fairly friendly towards China, but as the Reich's attachment to Japan increased, the German officers engaged in training the Chinese army were withdrawn and closer commercial connections were established with Japan.

Italy also now made very friendly approaches to the Japanese, and concluded a new commercial treaty with the Eastern Power. It appears that in 1939 that the two States "undertook co-operation in the strengthening of their cultural relations through the instrumentality of science, music, literature, drama, cinematography, broadcasting, youth movements and sport." One may well wonder, however, whether a title of these high aspirations is ever likely to be attained when one considers what the state of the world has become; and even when armed conflict has ended, problems will appear for solution which the wisest of men may fail to solve. Yet this and coming generations will probably so adapt themselves to a changed and changing environment that they will persevere in the trying task of muddling through the morass.

T. F. PALMER.

## MAN AND HIS NATURE

In order to love Mankind we must expect little of it.—  
HELVETIUS.

ON how characteristic a note was the New Year heralded in by the B.B.C.: "Happy New Year, and good hunting of the Hun." But we have long since accustomed ourselves to this sort of callousness. In describing a recent engagement in Russia where the dead numbered only a few hundred Germans instead of the usual thousands it was thought necessary to add: "Not such a bad haul, considering the difficulties." Members of Parliament stand in ostentatious silence as a protest against the treatment of the Jews, then go with light heels to their lusts and their rations. How much do they really care about the Jews? How much have they ever cared? After hearing of atrocities that must penetrate to even the most besotted brain they are pricked to a momentary demonstration, but if they had been really aroused in the matter they could have prevented in 1933, not only the persecution of the Jews (over which the majority of people are not seriously concerned), but the entire war as well. Even now they content themselves with a few self-righteous messages and the promise of a bloody revenge in the future when the harm that has been done is at last swallowed up in oblivion. Has not enough blood been spilled already "to turn mill wheels"?

"Revenge at first though sweet  
Bitter ere long on itself recoils."

The Christians mutter a few prayers to their terrifying God with a heart so stony, and an egoism so monumental, that even when they grovel before him they cannot attract his attention.

How contemptible, indeed how frightening, man can sometimes appear. Yet it is not to be wondered at that he is cruel to his own species when we consider his cruelty to the animal world. How ferociously he has trapped and tortured the pacific beasts and surfeited his own belly—"make rich the ribs, but bankrupt quite the wits"—with the dead carcasses of mild herbiferous creatures like the calf, driven with cudgels and raucous shouts from its distracted mother's side; and the playful lamb, capering at one moment with little skips of delight over the soft downland grass, and at the next served up on a platter with "mint sauce" to masticating savages with hearts as dead as God's. Oh, yes, we know that "if thou wert the lamb, the fox would eat thee . . . wert thou a horse thou would'st be seized by the leopard. . . . What beast could'st thou be that were not subject to a beast?" But it is our pretensions that mark us out as singular—our pretensions of humanity, of compassion. Does our pity really constitute our superiority over the beasts? Monkeys carry their wounded home and keep their cunning and their leisure for better purposes than inventing instruments with which to torture each other. That would certainly be something to see—monkeys putting an edge on their sabres, or trotting docilely, with dinner pails over their arms, into those dungeons of desolation—the coal mines—where only the presence of impending catastrophe can alleviate the monotony of the hours; or sweating themselves to insensibility in stupendous factories amidst the thunder of gigantic machines—and all with the sole object of exterminating their own species. Perhaps they would take more naturally (for even monkeys must have their price) to those *causeries intimes* where the great—crafty, rapacious, and ingratiating—hatch their nefarious plots.

What is it that redeems the race of men? Is it reason? Here is something to make us smile—"obtruding false rules pranced in reasons garb." As some 18th century French writer said: "What was reason given to men for except to find reasons for what they want to think or do?" The Archbishop of Canterbury can make very pretty use of his reason—and Dr. Joad even prettier. Is it our aesthetic sense? That is a point to ponder upon. It stirs up some "very interesting discussions" in the B.B.C., that organisation that corrupts while it enlightens and informs while it withholds.

Do we find this superiority in the professional classes?

"Crack the lawyer's voice,  
That he may never more false title plead  
Nor sound his quilllets shrilly."

Or, as Don Quixote put it: "He whose father is judge goes safe to his trial." And the professors of our universities? How they must miss (unless they have enough stored away) their good wine; but if they cannot have their dry vintages, they are never without their dry jests. And the doctors?—these pale dissectors with their forceps, their sour pills, and their stabbing needles that they push in with so portentous a negligence—and their perfect bedside manners behind which they cover up their bored pre-occupied thoughts. As Montaigne said: "He who has not learned to be his own doctor by the time he is 40 had best prepare himself for a speedy grave."

Man, as has been often pointed out, differs from other animals in having a hand which he has learned to use. With how much skill is he able indeed to employ this sinister appendage, fashioning with it an instrument of destruction which, by a mere turn of his wrist, he can let loose to annihilate whole majestic cities with their ancient towers and their living populations. But he can also build with his hands superb mansions and imposing cathedrals. And do these increase either his happiness or his wisdom, let alone his humanity? Poor and rich alike are subject to the same tempers, the same accidents—"in prosperity insolent

and intolerable, dejected in adversity, in all fortunes foolish and miserable." But man being quarrelsome by nature, there are perhaps more hidden corners into which he can escape in the palace than in the cottage, yet in the cottage he has fewer hours to pass with his family, and his daily labours are so exhausting that he cannot remain long contentions before sleep overtakes him.

Is it his "recollective consciousness"? But this often causes him more misery than pleasure, as Milton shows:—

"Ease to the body some, none to the mind  
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm  
Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone  
But rush upon me thronging, and present  
Times past, what once I was, and what am now."

What beast has ever suffered in just this fantastic way?

Is it his free intellect of which man should be so proud? But where do we see any signs of his using it to further his own happiness? Do not men, from one end of the globe to the other, march forward like so many drugged demons to their own frightful destruction? "One murder makes a villain, millions a hero." Dormice would know better in which direction to run. Even the system of liberty man has fashioned for himself, as Holbach so long ago pointed out, is against the religion to which he so intractably and weakly clings, "for the system of man's liberty seems only to have been invented in order to put him in a position to offend his God and so to justify God in all the evil he has inflicted on man for having used the freedom which was so disastrously conferred on him." "You are for dreams and slumber, brother priest."

And yet one way there is in which man may be said to excel the beasts. "Bees indeed make neat and curious works, and many other creatures besides; but when they have done, they cannot judge them." The power of detaching himself from his own interests is alone the prerogative of man, that quality of meditation which annihilates his own personality and gives him a view of his place in existence free of arrogance, covetousness, and rancour. As George Santayana, the great Epicurean philosopher, wrote: "It is not the fate that overtakes us that makes our dignity, but the detachment with which we suffer it." But whoever wishes to retain the integrity of these rare and fleeting insights, had best have a care with whom he consorts, for

"it is meet

That noble minds keep with their like  
For who so firm that cannot be seduced?"

ALYSE GREGORY.

## THERE ARE CHRISTIANS

IT was Christmas Day, and, as one watched the passers-by on their way to the various Christian places of worship, one could not help but wonder as to what really was this Christianity? One knew, of course, that a "Christian" was commonly supposed to be a believer, or follower, of Jesus Christ; and that the best type of Christian was one who emulated that legendary and mythical person. But—together with those simple souls who are incapable, either naturally or apathetically, of basing their belief on the sure foundations of reason and knowledge—one noticed quite a number of others. Politicians and bureaucrats—sweaters and exploiters of industry—slum property owners and members of the various grades of present-day society who at least have the reputation of possessing functioning brains.

What is this bond of Christianity that binds them so closely, the maintenance of which is, in their opinion, one of the important reasons for waging this bloody war that now engulfs the world? One searches in vain those tenets attributed to the founder of their faith but which were, and always have been, the property of humanitarians of all races and creeds throughout

the ages. The Bishops, with their princely emoluments and rich vestments—do they emulate that leader who, when he died, was only worth the clothes he wore? Yet they proclaim themselves "Christian." The politicians, custodians of the people's rights—how many are true to the trust with which they are entrusted? Yet they style themselves "Christian." The bureaucrat, signing himself "Your obedient servant" but arrogating to himself the powers of a despot, likewise classes himself as "Christian"—and so on, right down the scale—in their lives and actions denying the beliefs they mouth so unctuously, yet proclaiming so vehemently their "Christian" religion.

What point is it then that enables them all to concur so unanimously? Surely it is the point epitomised in that episode reputed to have taken place at the crucifixion—the thief acclaims the leader, and all is forgiven. No retribution—the past is wiped out, and the future—one with the elect.

International scholars have traced the origin of Christianity to the ancient Egyptian religion, so it is necessary to remember that the priests of that day enunciated the principle of governing the masses by means of their own credulity—and their modern prototypes still adhere to the ancient teachings. The uninstructed masses are promised something in the future which has no factual evidence, whilst their "Christian" leaders consolidate their hold on the present. Prey on mankind—dupe your fellow creatures, but—acknowledge the Church, and all will be well. Yes—there certainly are Christians—of a kind. "ISHMAELITE."

## ACID DROPS

WE are pleased to see that those who are engaged in the cinema business are organising their forces to secure earlier opening of cinemas on Sunday. The only reason why they should not open at a reasonable hour, when the people, under normal conditions, have a full day before them, is that the interest of the Churches might be injured thereby. There is no reason whatever for the late opening of some places of amusement on Sunday, and the complete closing of others, apart from the interests of the Churches. People cannot be forced to go to Church; if they do not go, then a number of religious bigots are allowed to rule the roost, and are empowered by the government to prevent, so far as it is possible, people going where they would wish. Our notions of liberty are our own, and very, very peculiar.

Cinema proprietors are also organising a protest against the special tax paid by them if they will open on Sunday. It is what the Chicago gangsters called a "rake-off," and we challenge anyone to point to a substantial difference between the two forms. Yes, there is one difference. The Chicago gangs stood outside the law. In England the "rake-off" is made with the authority of the government. It is the government of England that plays the part of the gangsters and which says to the showmen: "If you will open on Sundays, showing the same pictures that you do during other days of the week, then we authorise the local authorities to demand from you a certain sum of money for the privilege of following your otherwise lawful occupation." Our advice to the cinema proprietors has always been to open on Sunday and refuse the tax. It can be done legally, and it should be done. And they can do it within the law. We are fighting a war for freedom, we might make freedom from Church and chapel control one of our purposes. We shall never be free till we do this. What the people have learned concerning Russia should help.

Here is another example of what many of those who have power regard as freedom. The Beveridge after-the-war plan is now before the public, published by the authority of the government. Now it appears that the Army Bureau of Current Affairs is forbidden to discuss the Beveridge proposals by the War Minister, Sir James Grigg, until "some additional guidance has been provided by a debate in Parliament." Anything more nonsensical it would be difficult to think of.

Let us note a few things. First, ever since the war commenced we have been howling about our love of and devotion to democracy. But the present is, more than ever it was before, a people's army. And ever since Russia has been, to our good fortune, one of our allies, our talk about the freedom of the people has filled the air. Next, Discussion Parties are permitted in the army, and social matters are permitted to be debated. Why is this discussion of the Beveridge policy tabooed? Sir James Grigg says he will not permit the discussion "until additional guidance is given by Parliament." But Parliament has no right to interfere, and what kind of democracy are we if we have to wait for the government in power to express its opinion on the value of the proposals? The brains of England does not refuse to function till either Sir James Grigg or the government gives permission for it to do so. The men in the army are intimately concerned with those things with which the Beveridge proposals deal and are of great importance to all. The Minister of War should be called to order by those members of Parliament who are not afraid to offend the government, and so jeopardise their chances of promotion. Sir James should be made to realise that the Army is a section of the British people.

Says the Pope: "Those who aim at building a new world must fight for the right of free choice of government and free choice of religion." Those who do not know the papacy might be inclined to believe that the Pope means what he says. Those who know the papacy know that nowhere, so long as Roman Catholicism dominates, would freedom of choice in either direction be permitted. It is a possibility that the Church might permit a certain measure of freedom in political matters. But it is an absolute certainty that no Roman Catholic State would permit free choice of religion. Once again we may remind readers that the papacy claims the absolute right to control the family, religion and education. When that is granted and in force, what is the amount of freedom left?

The Rev. Dr. Hutchison, of Glasgow, is convinced that during the centuries the Christian gospel has "slowly and painfully built up standards of life, they have achieved certain successes of decency and honesties." Well, what then? Is Dr. Hutchison foolish enough to believe that if the Christian Church had never been heard that no decencies of life would exist? To ask the question is to exhibit the foolishness of the assertion. And is it really something about which to crow that it has taken the Christian Church many centuries to educate its followers up to the very moderate standard of decency that has been realised. What a lot of crowing over so poor a result!

No one with any appreciation of the essential quality of religion, backed with a working understanding of psychology could ever have doubted that Hitler is fundamentally a religious character. He was bred a Catholic, and is still a member of the Roman Catholic Church. He has over and over again asserted that "God" is upon his side, and whether he now favours the Christian God or some other makes no difference whatever to the scientific student. Gods are numerous enough, varied enough, and even though he has his own particular variety of God, the fact of his being a godite remains.

So we beg that no one will smile at Hitler saying in the course of his New Year's address:—

Germans can address themselves to God in the certitude that He will grant them victory as in previous years.

It is the authentic Hitler who was speaking, and it is something worth bearing in mind.

A plan is afoot for a reunion of the English Church and the American Presbyterians. One would imagine that the effort would be made either here or in the United States. But, no. God is just as mysterious in getting his children to attempt a reunion as he is in other matters. The place of meeting is in Persia! On reflection it may be worth remembering that Persia is a place in which wonders and miracles happened before

Christianity was heard of, and it is a place where Genii, and Demons, and other supernatural individuals were very active. So there may be something appropriate in the place of meeting.

Most leading Roman Catholics in this country are against the bombing of Rome. It is the headquarters of the Roman Church, and one can understand the Pope feeling hurt if British or American bombers dropped bombs in the "sacred" city. But we have not heard of protests to Mussolini made by the Pope when bombs were dropped on the countries of the Allies, nor was he disturbed when Italian bombs were dropped on the revolutionary Spaniards, or on the practically unarmed Abyssinians. But to bomb the headquarters of the greatest miracle business on earth is a very different thing.

Rev. G. F. Marson, of Granby Vicarage, in a letter to the "Nottingham Guardian," appears to have got things a little mixed. He asks those who praise the Russian fighting men—who work without God—"What of the R.A.F. and the Royal Navy." No one would argue or believe that our soldiers and sailors are in any way behind the Russians in courage or self-sacrifice. But Mr. Marson mistakes the issue, and it is an issue raised by Christians themselves. Our leading clergymen are busy telling the British people that without belief in God their character will deteriorate. In such circumstances the Russians ought to be second to our men of the Army and Navy. As it is they have shown themselves the equals of any army in the field. So it is left for Mr. Marson and his kind to face the question: "Are we to believe that Russians can do with nothing more than social enthusiasm what British fighting men can do only with God helping them?" We do not believe this is correct, but it is Christian leaders who say it is. We believe our men can do quite well without supernatural assistance. It is such men as Mr. Marson who say they cannot. Again, we do not believe it.

Religious journals often contain interesting, but not always reliable, information. One recently supplied us with the statement that the Church of England was the work of God. But it is very plain that the Church of England was made by Parliament, and can be unmade whenever Parliament decrees. We should like to see the House of Commons—and the House of Lords—debating whether the two Houses of Parliament owe most to God, or God owes most to the two Houses of Parliament.

A Christian reader of this journal begs to remind us that Christianity grows with man. We presume that what he should have said is that Christianity alters with man. The first form of the statement is merely a religious misunderstanding and is obviously wrong. The second is an historic generalisation. Whether Christianity be true or false, it is demonstrable that what is Christianity is determined by the social and intellectual state of the generation with which we happen to be dealing. If one could resurrect an early Christian community they would strike an "advanced" Christian of to-day as a body of savages. And if Jesus had returned to London in 1939 and claimed to raise people from the dead or work any other of his miracles he would have been denounced by the general public as a fraud.

Looking over the parliamentary reports in which Joseph Chamberlain—the first of the Chamberlains, and without whom the later ones would not have been heard of—figured, we noted one of his remarks made in the House of Commons during a debate on Education (1906). J. C. was opposed to the State giving religious instruction, and he said: "The principle of the control by the State of religious instruction is opposed to every principle which the Free Churches have ever laid down." J. Chamberlain belonged to the Nonconformists who had some sort of a principle behind them. The Nonconformists were gradually losing every principle they had professed. And to-day it is a case of the different sects hanging together or being hung separately. It is the noose of developing culture that is fast strangling all the religious sects.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. ANDERSON.—We have not the details of the matter at hand, and it would take more time than we can spare to look it up. But the substantial fact being admitted, the value of the property has no important bearing on the question.

R. WYDSAM.—The notice in the other paper was an error. We have not had word from our contributor for some considerable time, and know of no means of reaching him.

C. F. BUDGE.—We received the cuttings and may use them later. Many thanks for sending them, but our limited space does not permit us to use as many as we would wish.

S. A. ROSE.—Thanks for offer. Will bear it in mind. These books, written in defence of a Christianity that is now disregarded by "advanced" Christian preachers, are really valuable historical documents, since they help to the realisation of what Christianity was.

W. T. MEALOR.—Pleased to hear from you. Will deal with letter next week.

A. THOMPSON.—Thanks for interesting letter. Will probably use parts of it, but we are terribly cramped and have to turn down much interesting matter.

F. BOOTON.—Thanks for new subscriber. Kind wishes warmly reciprocated.

"FREETHINKER" ENDOWMENT FUND.—V. H. Smith, 5s.

FOR Distributing and Circulating "The Freethinker."—M. Feldman, 7s.; S. C. Merrifield, 4s. 5d.; F.E.G., 5s.; F. Strahan, £1 3s.; C. W. Hollingham, £1; Mr. and Mrs. C. Potter, 10s.

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

### SUGAR PLUMS

WE regret to announce that no further orders can be accepted for the bound volume of "The Freethinker" for 1942. We had to print very closely to demand owing to the paper shortage, and all the orders for the annual volume that could be executed were booked some time back. The fortunate number will be advised as soon as copies are received from the binders. We have had a very satisfactory increase in the number of subscribers for the "one and only," and we shall have our wits tested to supply newcomers during 1943.

Our business staff work like Trojans—we take it for granted that the Trojans did work—but the work, we are pleased to say, grows in volume, and at a time when it is difficult to secure more help. Perhaps some of the readers of this paragraph may be in a position to put in, say, two days per week, or may know others who are willing to do so. The work required is not arduous, and satisfactory terms could be arranged. Anyone who has time and inclination for the job can pay a visit to 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, any day between nine and four o'clock. Our business manager will give all necessary information.

Broadcasting a New Year's view of the Japanese the B.B.C. speaker said that the Japanese were inspired by the belief that their Emperor is a descendant of the Gods, and the people believe they are under divine guidance. He finished up with the remark that we are in 1943 fighting a people with a B.C. (Before Christ) intellect.

We cannot believe that this is either complete ignorance or unrestrained ignorance. Think of it! In the Westminster Coronation service we had a performance in Westminster Abbey which was substantially a transformation into a (say, semi-) God. It did not make him king of England, he was already that—elected by the people of several centuries since. Our leading preachers inform the world that we are fighting under God's approval, and on our days of prayer we publish the belief that God fights on our side. When a victory happens we praise and thank God for it. When a setback we confess our disobedience to God and promise to do better in the future. The King is officially pronounced as King "by the grace of God." Wherein is the difference between ourselves and Japan in these particulars?

In any case, why finish with the statement that we are fighting people who have a B.C. intellect? Does it mean to imply that there was no fanatical and brutal fighting after the alleged coming of Christ? If so, we invite the B.B.C. to read about the wars of the Crusades, to say nothing of much later wars. We challenge anyone to produce samples of brutality in B.C. wars that cannot be equalled by A.D. ones. One wonders whether where religion is concerned it is quite impossible for the B.B.C. to handle a subject truthfully and honestly.

One of the "gags" used on the vaudeville stage is: "What has he (or she) got that I haven't got?" We have often asked Christians the same question. What has the Christian got that is of acknowledged value that the non-Christian is without? The known categories of good and bad remain and are acknowledged. In action, there is no distinguishing line between Christians and non-Christians. There are, of course, good and bad on both sides. In the commercial world a Christian's credit is not better than that of the non-religious person's. Prison statistics show that convictions are greater, in proportion, among believers in God than among disbelievers. A good action does not become a bad one if one decides God is a myth and the churches a nuisance. And there is the Russia of the past twenty-five years—but perhaps we need not say anything about that. Enough has been said on that head, and we daresay Christian leaders are wondering how they can manage a return to the pre-1930 position when this war is finished. The Churches simply cannot continue to praise a people who have no ruling churches and who so openly avow Atheism.

Bearing on this we note the following in a leading article of the "Universe" (January 1). The writer explains that:—

"The difference between the voice of the Church and the voice of the Communist or Fascist or Liberal is certainly not a difference in feeling or sympathy, it is a difference in analysis and a difference in programme."

That still leaves the "What has he got that I haven't got?" without an answer. But the "Universe" does go on to explain that in place of the ineffectiveness of secular policies (could they be more ineffective than Church policies, they have not managed for millions to even keep God alive) the Pope calls for

"each and every person in the common submission all, individual and societies unchanging moral laws and values, rooted in God's own Providence and goodness."

But still we wonder what there is in all this—and much more of the same quality—that gives something which is not to be found without the Pope, his priests, the Churches generally—and God. There is nothing said by the Pope of any testible value that is not to be found outside all religion. And it is these outside forces that are responsible for any move in the direction of social betterment that has occurred.

Cases of conscription to Christianity are common enough, and have occurred from the time of Constantine to the present day. However, we were interested to note in one of the country's leading newspapers the reminder that the high-minded tribesmen of the Caucasus, the Ossets, were originally Mahomedan, and that they only became Christian on the order of the Czar. We have no need to mention, of course, that this is quite a usual thing for Christian leaders to do. But we would like to point out the connection with the present efforts of religious leaders in this country. First of all there is the question of Sunday observance. A few are desirous of imposing upon a greater and reluctant number the rigid observance of Sunday. It is the same story. The people who do not want to keep the Christian "Sabbath" are not to be considered. The same sort of thing is arising, or has arisen, in regard to education of the young. A minority in high places desire that the children shall be taught to love Jesus, to believe in the Virgin birth, etc. The wishes of the majority are not even sought. Can a leopard change its spots?

In the above connection we can only wish Mr. Will Hay the eloquence and persuasiveness of our Prime Minister when he meets various M.P.s in a coming committee-room meeting to discuss the Sunday theatres question. We notice that no party whip will control the vote. This seems to be another case of backing a horse both ways. Even if the motion is carried, we note from the Press that only a Defence Regulation will be introduced. It seems that after the war we are to return to the same old dull Sundays. But at least this will be a start. Finally, a little more courage by those interested in the theatre would be welcomed.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

### II.

AS was said in the previous article, the thesis of Mr. H. J. Schonfield's "The Lost Book of the Nativity of John" is that it was John who was looked upon as the veritable Messiah by a host of followers, and that the stories about him were "lifted" and applied to Jesus, the Church taking care to obliterate the transfer as much as possible.

Although the "Lost Book" has not been discovered as yet, a good deal of its contents can be surmised from the traces which are, in spite of everything that was done to expunge the records, preserved by various writers. Mr. Schonfield does not think that a full narrative of the Baptist's life was ever composed, but only one "describing the marvellous birth of John in his character of Messiah" and which "ante-date the Gospel Nativity narratives," and "may have helped to produce them."

Firstly, various stories appear to have been written of the father and mother of John, Zacharias and Elizabeth. As there is more than one Zacharias in Jewish history, it is possible that some confusion exists as to which is which; but most of the narratives appear to concur in the death of the father of John as taking place at the time of the massacre of the Innocents, Zacharias being questioned as to the whereabouts of John and, refusing to answer, was murdered. Elizabeth, of course, was saved with her babe. Of this story there are many accounts, one of them, quoted by Mr. Schonfield, coming from the Talmud.

Secondly, in the 9th century, the Bishop of Merv, whose name was Isho'dad, appears to have been one of the latest writers who collected most of the available material of the Baptist's infancy. His sources are carefully examined by Mr. Schonfield, who claims that among them are the Apocalypse of John and the Apocryphal "Protevangelium," known also as the Gospel or Book of James. It is possible that the "Protevangelium" is actually the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary.

According to Bishop Isho'dad, from the wonders that were performed at the conception and birth of John, the Jews expected him to be the Messiah; and in the Book of James, Herod says of Zacharias (or Zachariah): "His son is destined to be King of

Israel." As for the "wonders" at the conception of John, they will be found in Luke, in the first two chapters of which, contends Mr. Schonfield, "we have a composite document made up of the birth stories of two Messiahs, John and Jesus, though it is intentionally made to appear as if the former were only the forerunner of the latter." This sounds like rank blasphemy to me. Luke who, according to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Hinsley, was inspired by God Almighty, is accused by Mr. Schonfield of "pinching" a Messiah story and applying it to his own particular Messiah in an aim "which is clearly polemical." That is, he was trying to blot out the Baptist sect which, as we know from Acts, had many followers.

Matthew also seems to have had a similar purpose:—

"Matthew chooses a different method, but with the same motive. This writer refuses to record the birth of John at all. Instead of which, he adapts the history of the nativity of John, including the Magi incident, and turns it into a history of the birth of Jesus. Matthew's narrative of the nativity of Jesus is much closer to Luke's narrative of the birth of John than it is to Luke's narrative of the birth of Jesus."

Of course, that the wonderful stories of the birth of Gods and Messiahs in the pagan world furnished the Gospel writers with some of their material, is now a commonplace of Biblical criticism; but that similar stories were first told of John the Baptist, and then deliberately suppressed by Christian writers inspired by God and made to appear original with their own deity, is by no means as well known. We should do our best to spread the good tidings.

Mr. Schonfield puts side by side extracts from the Book of James describing the Nativity of Mary, and from Luke describing the Nativity of John. They show astonishing similarities; and it is claimed that the reader will find equally strong points of agreement in Matthew. Even Bishop Isho'dad noted the resemblances: "Others say that at one time our Lord fled before the sword of Herod, and so did his messenger, the one to Egypt, but the other to the wilderness; and the one rode on an ass, but the other on the rush of the wind."

In Luke there is an annunciation to Mary—and in the Book of James there is an annunciation to Anne. "The speeches of the angelic messenger to Joseph in Matthew, and to Mary in Luke, are so much alike that they must spring from a common tradition . . . the supposition [is] that a Book of the Nativity of John is the underlying document."

In the Book of John, a Gnostic document redacted after the Mohammedan conquest from older material, will be found further confirmation of the John Nativity stories as well as some proof that the Book of the Nativity of John had a real existence.

The real problem, however, is again the one aroused by the Jesus stories. How exactly did the birth stories of John originate? Were pagan myths first grafted on to John the Baptist?

Mr. Schonfield is of opinion that the Nativity stories, or most of them, came from Jewish sources:—

"There is no room for any hypothesis than that the Nativity stories were consistent with and reflected contemporary Jewish Messianic conceptions. The object of the Evangelists was to prove that Jesus is the Messiah . . . the problem can only be solved by finding the Jewish background of ideas."

As is well known, there is certainly a conflict in the Old Testament between the kingly and the priestly castes, and the Jews never seem to have made up their minds altogether whether the Messiah was to be of the House of David or of Levi. The result of this conflict was that some Jews expected a Messiah to spring from a Davidic father and a Levite mother, and in the "Testaments of the XII. Patriarchs," composed perhaps in the second century, Mr. Schonfield thinks it can be clearly seen. It



is also shown in the anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews, which he thinks is actually an Epistle to the Samaritans.

In addition, there are many legends about Moses which have been carefully kept by the Jewish race and which contain, at least, the germ of some of the subsequent and more detailed Nativity stories:—

"Amram and Jochebed, like Zachariah and Elizabeth, are of the House of Levi, a worthy pair, and well stricken in years. . . . In both cycles of legend Magi predict to the king the birth of the wonder child, who thereupon decrees the slaughter of all male children. There is an enunciation to Amram similar to the one made to Zachariah. . . . Many of the incidents attending the births of John and Jesus are thus seen to be dependent on the Mosaic Nativity legends, and where these are deficient the birth stories of other Israelitish heroes provide the greater part of the remaining details."

For example, the story of the birth of Isaac, of Samson, and of Samuel all have helped to provide the "authentic" and "lifelike" details which, we are so often told, in the case of Jesus could never have been invented by his "biographers," simple and unlearned fishermen, but were written down by divine "inspiration."

Isaiah also provided valuable material for the "divine" historians, who stole and altered what they felt was best suited to their purpose.

And what is Mr. Schonfield's conclusion?

Simply that "when our nativity legends of the Messiah, be he John or Jesus, are not echoes of Israel's ancient heroes, they are prophetic and apocalyptic conceptions historicised; the dreams of a suffering people made flesh and dwelling among us. . . . The *raison d'être* of the birth stories of both John and Jesus lay in the question which faced their respective disciples. Ought not the birth of the Messiah to have been in this wise? Indisputably, by all the interpretations of Scripture and traditional lore, it ought; and therefore it must have been."

Any reader who still thinks that there must have been an "obscure" personage who really lived and walked about Palestine "doing good," and who was, of course, the real Jesus, ought to ponder well on the above passage. Its implications will form the subject of another article.

H. CUTNER.

#### GENERAL MONTGOMERY'S COD

(As exemplified in his Christmas Message, 1942, to "all ranks" of the 8th Army)

"To God, the praise and glory be"

—Says General Montgomery.

(For thousands maimed and thousands killed  
Is what our god, in mercy, willed).

This Christmas message to all ranks

Please read: "Give God some extra thanks."

(And having given praise to him

He quoted Dickens' Tiny Tim.)

A Yorkshire lass who thinks war fun,

Writes: "Monty keeps 'em on the run."

(A woman once more brings to birth

Christ's spirit: "Peace, goodwill on earth.")

"Well, lads, of course we'll do our best

To give the enemy no rest."

(His dead and ours beneath the sod

We'll shove—and give more thanks to God!)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

For Germans killed (all down below)!

For Britons killed (all up above!).

Praise God: our God of War and—Love!

C. G. L. DU CANN.

## ROGER BACON AND THE AWAKENING OF EUROPE

(Continued from page 20)

BACON is never tired of pointing that withal he is only at the beginning of the possibilities of science. "Nothing in human inventions is final and perfect," he says, quoting Seneca approvingly. "The most recent ages are always the most enlightened"; therefore, "Let not man boast or extol his knowledge. What he knows is little to what he takes on credit, less to that of which he is ignorant. He is mad who thinks highly of his wisdom; most mad who saunts it as a wonder." Yet he predicts great things from the advance of scientific knowledge, and looks forward to a time when "There shall be rowing without oars and sailing without sails; carriages which shall roll along with unmingled speed with no cattle to drag them; instruments to fly with, with which a man shall, by a spring, move artificial wings, beating the air like the wings of birds; a little mechanism three fingers long, which shall raise or lower enormous weights; a machine to enable a man to walk on the bottom of the sea and over the surface of waves without danger, and bridges over rivers which shall rest neither on piles nor columns." So dreams the imprisoned monk in his cell—a dream based upon the possession of much knowledge, much insight into the nature of things; a dream that after ages saw partly realised in fact.

A study of Roger Bacon irresistibly suggests his Elizabethan namesake, Francis Bacon; and the suggestion is accentuated by the close likeness of much of their writings, although the comparison is not always favourable to the later of the two. What Roger lacked in epigrammatical force he more than atoned for by the greater inventiveness of his mind and the greater originality of his genius. One can hardly imagine Roger Bacon in the place of Francis rejecting the Copernican astronomy, or looking with disfavour upon the use of instruments or mathematics in science. But in actual teaching the monk often antedates his namesake. Francis Bacon's "Four species of idols which beset the human mind" are anticipated by Roger with four stumbling blocks to truth—the influence of authority, of custom, of undisciplined senses, and of the concealment of ignorance by a pretence of wisdom. Francis's epigram, "The old age is the youth of the world," is forestalled by Roger with, "No doubt the ancients are worthy of all respect and gratitude for having opened the way to us. But, after all, the ancients were men, and have often been mistaken; indeed, they have committed all the more errors just because they are ancients, for in matters of learning the youngest are in reality the oldest." A good lengthy list of parallelisms between the two has been compiled by Forster in his "Mohammethanism Unveiled," who charges Francis with having borrowed largely from his predecessor. Hallam says the resemblance between the two is "most remarkable"; and Lewes declares that, "Had there been on external grounds the shadows of a probability, there would have been on internal grounds the strongest evidence of Francis Bacon's plagiarism." I think one may reasonably assume some connection between the two writers. Roger Bacon's works, although not printed, circulated in MS., and there is nothing new in one writer borrowing from another without confessing his obligation.

To return to the man. Whether Clement interfered to curtail Bacon's imprisonment is unknown, but he was released in 1267. Not for long, however. For ten years Bacon managed to elude his enemies. But the Franciscans were good haters and had long memories. In 1278 Jerome of Ascoli, General of the Order, held a chapter at Paris for the purpose of considering the various heresies that were troubling the Church. Bacon was cited to appear on the general charge of holding and teaching suspected doctrines. Once more he passed into a long

imprisonment, the precise duration of which is unknown. He was at liberty 14 years afterwards, 1292, and engaged in a great work, interrupted by death, and of which there remained only fragments. He died most probably in 1294, and was buried in the Grey Friars Church, Oxford.

The Church buried both the man and his writings. For centuries his writings were only known to a learned few in the form of manuscripts. To the mass of the people his name lingered on in popular legends as an old-time wonder worker—half real, half mythical. It was not until nearly 450 years after his death that his "Opus Majus" was translated into English by Dr. Samuel Jebb; not for 100 years (1859) did the "Opus Minus" appear in an English dress.

In the whole history of Christianity there is nothing more disgraceful than its treatment of this 13th century scholar. One-fourth of his life spent in prison, prohibited by his Order from writing under penalty of "many days' fasting on bread and water," his instruments seized, manuscripts destroyed—no man ever worked under more discouraging conditions than he. We can well understand his plaintive cry, that "It is on account of the ignorance of those with whom I have had to deal that I have not been able to accomplish more." After 40 years of labour and self-sacrifice, beggared by his studies, Bacon found himself "unheard, forgotten, buried," and died with the trouble-laden lament, "I repent that I have given myself so much trouble for the good of mankind." The name of Roger Bacon should bring a blush to the face of every Christian, and serve as a new inspiration to the mind of every Freethinker.

One is led to think of what might have been. To dream of what the world might now have been like had the Church smoothed the way for the struggling thinker instead of weighting his limbs with chains and clogging his mind with care. To what height of civilisation might the race have climbed had the centuries of energy expended in fighting an ignorant and tyrannical Church been devoted to the acquisition of light-spreading, life-giving knowledge? The Church pursued a different policy. It strove to crush knowledge with the stake; to check civilisation by the murder of those who strove to promote its growth. Happily, it met with but partial success. It did crush many, it embittered the lives of many more. Withal, the tide of civilisation flowed on; knowledge grew "from more to more," and this wider free knowledge has enabled us to rescue the name of Roger Bacon from the neglect of centuries and the obloquy of the Church, and place his name first in the roll of those who strove to bring about the dawn of a new day.

"QUONDAM."

## CATCH THE CHILD

And listens like a three years' child.

—WORDSWORTH'S "The Prelude."

Train up a child in the way he should go,

And when he is old he will not depart from it.

—PROVERBS.

IT is recorded of a Roman Catholic dignitary that he averred he did not mind who had control of the child as long as it had been under his care until the age of six. Here is something to ponder over. But was this an idle boast? Not if one is to judge by the discoveries and speculations of Freud into the working of the unconscious mind.

The potter deftly fashions the clay into a particular mould, and once the finished article has been fired it cannot be altered. Is the analogy an apt one or is there a flaw somewhere? Let us see.

Chapman Cohen, in his "Almost an Autobiography," remarks, "Once (religion) has a lodgement in one's system it is not an easy thing to dislodge," and again, "Of all religions, Christianity

is the most difficult to eradicate." A. S. Neill, in his book "The Problem Parent," says, "Any religion that postulates a disapproving god is fatal to child happiness and is evil in its results," and "the chief effect of religious teaching on a child is to suppress his sex, and sin and sex become synonymous." (Incidentally, in the author's school, there is no instruction in religion.) George Eliot was groping in the dark when she wrote the following: "It is well known to all experienced minds that our firmest convictions are often dependent on subtle impressions." It was left to Freud to unearth very many "subtle impressions."

Give to the Church (the potter) the use of the clay (the child) and watch the image which appears under its hands. When the child is "trained in the way he should go" is it a matter for wonder that he remains under the yoke of early impressions? Later on he may modify some of his beliefs when he is beyond the sphere of religious influences and when diverse and worldly contacts are being made. He may even discard many of the beliefs once considered "Gospel truth," and his former zeal is changed to apathy. The belief in God or a "there-must-be-something" attitude persists. The effect of the prayers learned at mother's knee, at the side of the cot, at the meal table, spells God—the invisible being who watched over him, and whom the child apostrophised as "thou God seest me." The many subtle, indelible relationships between mother and child are tinged with religious emotions and are some of the factors in religion which make it so difficult to dislodge. It is a matter for speculation whether evolution of the understanding of the unconscious mind will prove the greater enemy to religion.

The impressions formed in childhood may be likened to a photographic plate or film which has been exposed. Throughout its "life" it reflects or reacts in accordance with the initial impression. Often the "negative" is re-touched and may be so manipulated as to reflect an entirely different image than that portrayed by the first exposure. This is caused by the action of philosophic doubt acting in conjunction with the "thinking-things-out-for-oneself" mentality.

William Godwin, in that revolutionary treatise "Political Justice," said: "There is no original propensity to evil." Unfortunately, the child is taught the doctrine of original sin, and also that he himself was born in sin. In church he will sing the Psalm which runs "And in sin did my mother conceive me." This evil and terrifying doctrine causes fear and is rooted deep in the unconscious mind. The effects of the doctrine, together with other "hells," have an incalculable effect on the mind of man, and constitutes some of the dominating factors which retard mental progress as distinct from material progress.

George Eliot wrote: "We must live from hand to mouth, most of us, with a small family of immediate desires." Ambling genially through life and regarding the earth merely as a jumping-off place, the Christian or "believer in something" has visions of the heaven he may reach if he behaves himself, or the prospect of hell if he doesn't.

The question as to whether the children of Freethinkers should receive instruction in religion at school or be withdrawn is one which is keenly debated. At school religion is taught from the Christian viewpoint. This may be neutralised by the opinions held by the parents. In this case the child is being asked, in effect, to reconcile what is taught in school (i.e. authority) with that taught in the home (also authority). The outcome may be difficult—for the child. On the other hand, if the child has not at any time since birth been brought within the sphere of religious influence, then such a subject is placed in the same category as any other speculative, mythological or out-of-date idea. In this case judgment is exercised and heightened in deeper and broader spheres of human activity, being free from the confines of a narrow sectarianism.

There are many who are born, and who live and die within the Church, accepting the "faith" as "Gospel." Happily the

number diminishes as the years go by. There are many who are not active supporters of the Church, but still retain vestigial characteristics which are more or less developed. On special occasions and by exhortations—e.g., a National Day of Prayer—these characteristics become manifest, being termed as a "deep surge of religious instinct."

The child who starts, as it were, from "scratch," with a mind unencumbered with a soporific supernaturalism and the crudities of Christian humbug and hypocrisy, starts, other things being equal, with a clear vision and knowledge of a doctrine of original virtue.

An anthology of the best that has been written and said on conduct by the great philosophers would provide a fount of wisdom, inspiration and understanding which would last throughout life—a vade-mecum.

Emotion is the mainspring of religion and is steeped in the doctrines of a crude, barbaric superstition.

Can you hear the priest? He is talking to the credulous who accept his word as does the "three years' child."

S. GORDON HOGG.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### AN APPRECIATION

Sir.—During a stay of two or three days in London recently I walked around St. Paul's Cathedral. As I was looking around the crypt, wondering where the money came from to build this magnificent place, and why so much thought, energy and labour had been directed in its building at a time when so many people were in need of better living conditions, I noticed a small group of young children proving rather boisterous. They were seen by one of black-garbed officials who rebuked them thus. "What are you doing here?" Then before the children could reply, he added, "Have you paid?" "Yes," one of the children replied. "How much?" was asked. "Fourpence each," said the child. At which the gloomy one seemed greatly satisfied, for he walked away and left them to their play. I imagined he was thinking that god would not frown on noisy children in the crypt—so long as they had paid their fourpences!

I should like to take this opportunity of thanking you for the great efforts you are making towards freeing the minds of people from so many illogical prejudices and superstitions. I am in the Army, stationed near here, and within my unit there are a few of us working vigorously in our spare time to spread the doctrine of reason. We only wish we had the power to extend our influence further afield. It appals us that there should be so much credulity among people who blindly believe that they are the worthy citizens of an enlightened age.

Incidentally, I saw a notice in a paper the other day which revealed that there is a religious division of the Ministry of Information. If this is true, I suggest that it is worth while investigating, with a view to making it widely known that the Government uses priests and ministers to help with the bolstering of public morale.—Yours, etc.,

S. B. WHITFIELD.

### RELIGION IN RUSSIA

Sir.—May I add a note to Mr. Palmer's excellent article on "Religion in Russia." Firstly, the "Union of Godless" is correctly called the Union of Militant Atheists. "Godless" is one translation of "Bezbozhnik," but Atheist is the right one. The society is affiliated to the World Union of Freethinkers. As to the activities of Patriarch Tikhon, my information was that, from the moment he realised that the separation of Church and State and the confiscation of the Orthodox Church endowments were inevitable, he used all the influence of the Orthodox Church against the U.S.S.R. As a result many priests were arrested for their political activities against the State. In addition, for reasons unknown to me, the Baptists were active on behalf of the Whites, and on more than one occasion were caught gun-running. For this reason, in cartoons appearing in the "Bezbozhnik," the illustrated weekly of the U.M.A., a spitting serpent usually represents the Baptists. The U.M.A., carried on its activities up to the invasion of Russia; its membership was

then approximately 3,000,000. Its activities were manifold; one was the investigation and, if there were grounds for it, the opposition of demands for establishing new churches and mosques or reopening old ones.—Yours, etc.,

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

### A DILEMMA

Sir.—Your reference in the current issue of "The Freethinker" under "Acid Drops" to the permanent interest of "The Freethinker" reminded me of a most excellent resolution in regard to the disposal of a large number of back numbers which I had on hand. I decided to leave one in my daily 'bus to Bradford. But with what result? I naturally just looked at the copy and read a bit, and a bit more, and the result? Well, I took it back home—far too good to be left to a mere chance picker-up! I've been trying for over a year now to distribute without parting, but I've more now than what I started with! The disconcerting thing is that the further back the date the more interesting very often. This is the devil of a dilemma! Can you suggest any way out of it?—Yours, etc.,

A. HANSON.

## OBITUARY

### MR. D. ROBERTSON

On the 6th January, the body of Mr. David Robertson was cremated at Golders Green, London. Mr. Robertson, a Scot, was the chief accountant of the County of London Electric Supply. He was a brilliant man in his profession, a clear, logical thinker, an omnivorous reader and one whose outlook on political affairs was always far-sighted. He was brought up free of orthodox religious superstition, and in this respect was unlike most Freethinkers who have to find truth for themselves after discarding religion. He had many friends, who recognised his sterling character and admired his warm-hearted sympathetic nature. Mr. Robertson's death was a great tragedy. He died as the result of a fall from his bicycle on Christmas Day. He was only 52 and leaves a widow and one son. The service was a Secular one.

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### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11-0, Dr. HERMANN MANNHEIM—"The Treatment of Crime and Juvenile Delinquency Now and After the War."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Café, Kirkgate, 7-0.  
Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Stret, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. R. ERNEST WAY—"The Freedom of Health."  
Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, a Lecture.  
Nelson Branch N.S.S. (21, Rhoda Street): Sunday, 2-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON—"Faith, Futility, Or—?"

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