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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 82.)

Some Flood

WE must again remind readers that we are not writing a history of the Christian religion. We are concerned only with presenting a plain statement of what until yesterday was accepted as the essential parts of Christianity. We aim at presenting *fundamental* Christianity; but it is a curious fact that the chief leaders of the Christian Churches look with scorn on that fairly large number of Christians who pride themselves on being "fundamentalists." But "fundamental" means no more or less than going to the roots of things, things that are of primary importance. It is, therefore, instructive that Christian scholars should look down with contempt upon those who stand by the historic significance of the Christian religion. The fundamentalists of to-day are the lineal representatives of the great religious leaders of the past. Their beliefs are echoed in the historic creeds of the Christian Churches. Where honesty of belief is concerned we are with the fundamentalists.

When God made the world he "saw every thing he had made, and behold it was very good." This outburst can represent no more than the exclamation of a tired craftsman completing a job in record time. That "divine" utterance has been in the mouth of many a jerry-builder when looking at a row of houses that had been constructed for a quick sale to inexperienced persons. For almost immediately after finding all that he made was "very good," God was to find everything was very bad and daily grew worse. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth," and "it repented the Lord that he had made man." So completely bad was his handiwork that he made the same resolve that Hitler did with regard to the Jews. He determined to destroy all, not merely the humans who had

This series of notes is in reply to a question: "What is Christianity?" There are so many forms of Christianity, we declined the task of answering. But Christianity is an historic religion based upon the Bible. The clergy are crying: "Back to the Bible." We take them at their word, and give the essentials of Christianity as presented in the Bible.

offended, but with true heavenly justice all human beings, save a single family, and of living things all except two of a kind. (Another statement says seven.) Noah was instructed to build an ark, and take all the animals in with him. Then the doors were shut and the whole world was covered with water.

But once again the Christian God shows a remarkable lack of originality. A large number of these flood stories have been collected, and they all run along the same lines. After all, a flood is a flood, and when it is attributed to a god there is not much scope for originality. But there is no doubt whatever to-day that the Bible story is derived from the Babylonian version, which precedes the one given in the Bible. That the Babylonians had a legend of a great flood was known for centuries through remnants in the early Greek mythology, but the actual story we owe to a great archaeologist, George Smith, who reconstructed the Babylonian origin of the Jewish tale in 1872. It is too lengthy to tell it in detail, it is enough to say now that the Jewish story follows step by step the Babylonian one. The anger of the gods, the selection of a favoured family, the building of a great ship, the sending out of birds to discover dry land, are all there. Gods are very conservative in their habits and characters, and it is only fitting that in any community the priesthoods should be of a conservative character also.

A great many of these stories have their origin in local floods. Others seem to be no more than a desire of a people when they reach the stage of what we may call collective consciousness to possess their own tribal traditions, much as in modern times some men who have acquired wealth or achieved distinction provide themselves with a pedigree of nobility, even though it be nothing more than a medieval robber baron or a prostitute who had won the favour of a lecherous monarch.

A significant feature of these flood stories is that—eliminating those that are obviously of late origin and derived from the Bible legends—they occur in lands where local floods are well-known occurrences. But the Egyptians have no flood legends, neither, among others, have the Chinese.

The "New Commentary of Holy Scripture," edited by Canon Gore and other eminent Christians, sums up the matter thus:—

"That this story of a universal deluge . . . cannot be historical hardly needs demonstration. . . . The Hebrew story seems to belong to a general tradition of deluges of which accounts survive in many countries—Greece, Australia, Polynesia, India and America—and is closely parallel to the Babylonian flood narrative."

So ends a fantastic story to preserve which Christians have lied and lied and obstructed scientific development to preserve. But even now the book is there in every Church, and not a single clergyman dare, from the pulpit,

tell the people directly, plainly, honestly that what Archbishop Lang called the Oracles of God is made up largely of folklore and primitive superstitions.

More Trouble

Ill-fortune dogged the steps of the Bible God. He found everything he had made "very good" only for the greatest of his works to turn out very bad. He had afterwards decided, on drowning every living thing, save the specimens for propagating humans and animals. Even Noah celebrated his liberation from the Ark by getting blind drunk (Gen. ix., 21). But as the human race increased it grew in wickedness. The new generation believed in preparedness, and in case God should return to his water-cure, they commenced to build a tower that should reach heaven (another idea derived from Babylon). But "The Lord came down" from heaven to see what was going on, and deciding that this attempt to storm heaven could not be tolerated—"nothing will be restrained from them"—God decided to confound their tongues, so that, as he explains, "they may not understand one another's speech." A Jewish legend describes the scene as follows:—

"At last the long-suffering Lord lost patience. Turning to the seventy angels who encompassed his throne, he proposed that they should go down and confound the language of man. No sooner said than done. The misunderstandings which arose were frequent and painful. One man would ask for mortar and the other would hand him a brick, whereupon the first, in a rage, would hurl a brick at his head and kill him. As for the unfinished tower, a part of it sank into the earth and another part was consumed by fire. The place of the tower has never lost its peculiar quality. Whoever passes it forgets all he knows."

But never were languages learned so quickly. And still more wonderful was the fact that mankind, from being of one speech, could suddenly begin to speak quite a number of other languages. No wonder they could not understand each other. The more wonderful thing is that they understood themselves. The only kind of explanation we can think of is that given by an alleged old lady who suggested that Adam would easily find out the names of some animals because anyone who saw a pig would at once know it for a pig.

But so much has been done since the days when God ruled the world that we do know that the articulate language of man has gradually developed from the cries and howls and gestures of the animal world. And anyone can note how the baby's earliest tuition and its attempts to make itself understood commences with gesture language. A cry of delight is always distinctive from that of fear, the growl of a dog angry is different from that of one when it is playing with a beloved master. And apart from the host of scientific books on the origin of language, which would have been double Dutch to the Bible God and his angels, there is a lovely small great book, "My Friends the Baboons," by Eugene N. Marais, which should make every boy and girl of about ten years of age long to have a baboon for a pet. What a pity the Christian God was ignorant of the development of species and also the development of speech, with the part that speech plays in the development of civilisation. He would then have

inspired a better book, one that looked forward to the future, instead of being concerned with a perpetuation of the past.

What we have said with regard to the difficulty of the people whom God caused to speak different languages understanding them applies to Adam. What language did he speak, and being the first man, how did he come to understand the language he spoke? The Bible does not help us. God spoke and Adam spoke—what? The Christian belief was that they both spoke Hebrew. A favourite theory was that God walked in the garden of Eden and they talked to each other in Hebrew. For centuries the Christian Churches held that Hebrew was the original language spoken by man. It was used "between man and God and between men and the angels." St. Chrysostom said:—

"God showed the model and method of writing when he delivered the law written with his own finger to Moses."

St. Augustine agreed with this, and this remained the orthodox attitude with regard to the matter. The Protestant reformation, because it was influenced somewhat by the semi-pagan revival known as the Renaissance, brought some questioning, but in the main the Adamic-Hebrew theory held the field. In the seventeenth century the celebrated Dr. Lightfoot said that Hebrew was "for sanctity the tongue of God, and for antiquity it was the tongue of Adam. . . . It began with the world and increased and continued in glory till the captivity of Babylon." In 1657 it was held by a Bible authority, Walton, Bishop of Chester, that "the first parent of mankind was the inventor of letters, and this was Hebrew." There were here and there claims put in for Welsh, Danish and German, but apart from these Hebrew held the field. In France the great Bishop Bossuet championed the Hebrew and Adamic origin of language, and said, "Hebrew I hold to be simply and solely the source of all." Queen Anne's favourite preacher, Dr. South, was certain that "Adam came into the world a philosopher, which sufficiently appears by his writing the nature of things upon their names." Evidently a pig could be called nothing but a pig. Yet a fool remains a fool whether in the dress of a dustman or a Bishop.

Many similar instances could be given running well into the nineteenth century. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Gladstone, Prime Minister, made a half-hearted attempt to rationalise this story of the Adamic origin of language. Finally, there are very large numbers of Christians, in and out of this country, who are, with regard to these things, very much where our seventeenth-century forefathers were. All that can be said on their behalf is that they display a larger measure of intellectual honesty than do those clergymen who spend their energies in trying to make a religion that is on all fours with primitive superstitions indispensable to the development of civilised life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued.)

The misfortunes of life make us support the thought of death; the thought of death makes us support the misfortunes of life.—
LA LOZERE.

CHRISTIAN CEMENT

A CHRISTIAN friend recently took out of his wallet a newspaper cutting and, with a somewhat triumphant smile, he asked me to read it. I did so.

It was a cutting of rather stupid platitudes uttered by a Scottish minister in defence of Christianity; but my friend wanted me to note particularly the minister's concluding remarks:—

"It seems clear, then, that the Christian religion has been the cement of the social order in the civilised world during the past 2,000 years; the material, as it were, in the brick-work of society, which has unified the whole structure of peoples by holding them together by its cementing qualities."

Passing back the cutting, I reminded my friend of the story of the little boy who, when told that it was the mortar that held the bricks together in a wall, remarked that *he* thought it was the mortar that held the bricks apart. I told him I felt the same way as the little boy. The religious cement had not held people together at all, but had simply held them apart.

I quoted several historic examples of the fact: the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the persecutions of the Moors and the Jews in Spain, by Christians, and even the driving into exile, by British Christians, of their fellow Christians of other denominations, and notably the Quakers. But historic examples failed to move my friend.

"Look into your own experience during your own lifetime," he said, "and see if you cannot find untold examples of Christianity bringing people together to do good."

I promised that I would do so, and that I would let him know the result, but the outcome of this memory-searching process has been so revealing that I thought it might interest more than my friend. In retrospect, my personal experience of the cementing influence of religion is much more surprising than even I, as an Atheist, had expected.

St. Patrick's Day and St. George's Day stand out as red-letter days in the cementing process, though what happened on those days, when I was a schoolboy, was more directly concerned with "plastering" than with cementing. The great saints' days were unique for bringing together, in the name of Christianity, all the Roman Catholic boys and all the Protestant boys of the district in which I lived—but not for purposes of unification.

When school had finished on these occasions there was a mad rush of boys from each school, the object being to gain possession of a hillside, which was a vantage point to the possessors in the holy war that ensued. Those who gained the top of the hill had the advantage of being able to hurl down stones on their fellow Christians; those left with the bottom of the hill as their battlefield had the much harder task of trying to main: their fellow Christians by upward throws, though they had the advantage of some protection afforded by hen huts. The number of occasions on which the top of the hill was secured by the Catholics led to the belief that the Catholic teachers rather encouraged this exhibition of Christian love by allowing their boys out a few minutes sooner on the vital days.

Though withdrawn from religious instruction, and without any Christian tendencies, I usually found myself fighting with the Protestants from the State school, and, if it gives any satisfaction to the Archbishop of Canterbury or to the President of the Free Church Council, I have borne honourable scars in defence of their creeds.

For some days following St. Patrick's Day gangs of boys from both schools went around tackling individual boys at random, and putting the question, "E. or I.?" These initials, of course, represented "England" and "Ireland," which again meant "Protestant" and "Catholic." Woe betide the boy who wrongly guessed the faith of his interlocutors and gave the wrong answer, for he would be badly mauled by his fellow Christians for being the wrong sort of Christian.

I never joined any of these gangs, but I was once captured by one, and I had the honour of making the leader yelp with pain for "the greater glory." It was a Catholic gang, the leader a big lad, stronger and taller than myself. He seized me by my collar and tie and, towering over me, put the fatal question, "E. or I.?"

I owe it to Charles Bradlaugh that, my principles being severely tested for the first time, I came up to scratch. A picture of Bradlaugh adorned a wall at home, and I had often heard with admiration my father's stories of how Bradlaugh had fought his enemies. Although I was in a blue funk, knowing the dire penalty of a wrong answer, I saw Bradlaugh's picture in my mind. Jesus on the Cross could never have inspired me in the same fashion!

"Neither!" I shouted, and at the same time I gave the leader a rousing kick on the shin. He let go my collar and tie and fell down, yelping. His friends were too amazed to move for a moment, and I took advantage of their stupor to run like hell until I reached the safety of my own street. Since then I have never feared a Catholic; and I think a good many of our public men would have been cleaner in character to-day if they had dealt with their first threats in a similar fashion.

But he who kicks and runs away (to parody an old saying) lives to kick another day, and much kicking has fallen to my lot since those schoolboy days. And it is a striking tribute to the cementing qualities of Christianity that an Atheist can at any time be a reasonably good fellow in the eyes of some Christians if he happens to be kicking some other type of Christian.

Not only does Christian cement hold apart groups of people, however. It holds apart people in their individual relationships, too. It must be within the personal experience of all of us that marriages have been prevented because Christian oil and Christian water cannot mix; that marriages have been ruined for the same reason; and that children have suffered because of the inability of assorted Christian parents to agree upon labels and schools for their children.

Ordinary neighbourliness—a very human quality—is often prevented because Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So "are Catholics, you know, although you wouldn't think it"; or because "the Smiths are stuck-up Methodists, and think they run the chapel." My own wife was ignored for months by a Sabbatarian female neighbour some years ago because she washed some baby clothes on a Sunday! And I have a friend who now reads "The Freethinker," but who, when he was a practising Baptist, would cross to the other side of the road if he saw a Catholic approaching, and who frankly admitted that he hated them, whether he knew them personally or not.

I think the prize bag of cement, however, should go to one of my acquaintances who, as an ardent Low Anglican, insists upon spitting contemptuously if he passes a Roman Catholic priest!

A Christian education system continues to put cement between the citizens of the future by continuing the dual school system—a system which enables Christian-haters (of other Christians) to keep their children apart from others.

The various Christian "atmospheres" for the upbringing of children have resulted in a hell of a social atmosphere, and have done untold damage to the progress of working-class education—all of which suits the purpose of reactionary elements. "Divide and rule" is still a magnificent precept of politics, and Christian cement is a fine dividing medium. It was the cement of Christianity that made it necessary not so long ago to divide the Liverpool dock workers into Protestant and Catholic gangs. Their Christianity made it impossible for them to work together; but, in sectarian gangs, inspired by Christian hatred of each other, their team work paid good dividends to the bosses.

(Continued on page 100)

ACID DROPS

IF for one thing only we would be grateful to the members of The Anvil—that crass piece of religious humbug which has now had its final session on the B.B.C. These authorities, representatives of the main denominations, have laid down a dictum, by their unanimous opinion on the subject, that it is “really necessary to go to church to be a Christian.” Now we know where we stand, and we hope the churches will be ready to accept the implications of this ruling of the Religious Brains Trust. For the ruling means that only 20 per cent. of the people of this country are Christian, either nominally or actually, and 80 per cent. are not Christian, thus putting the Christian churches into a very restricted minority. Will the churches now recant their claim that the war is for Christianity; will they relinquish their offices of power in the State, and their privileges in the community, now that they admit (by their Anvil decision) that they are a small minority? Will they cease to claim that they represent the people?

Cardinal Hinsley says, “I am deeply convinced that the peace and security of the world depends in large measure on the mutual understanding and close co-operation of America and the British Commonwealth of Nations.” We doubt if the Cardinal says exactly what he means. He really wants the United States and England to be under the control of the Roman Catholic Church, for the Church will not admit certain functions—life, marriage, education, morals—can lie outside the controlling power of the Church. The Roman Church may not openly oppose the Secular State, but it is merely quiescent because it has not the chance of interfering with profit.

In the next place, it is strange, but not very strange, that the co-operation of Russia and China is left out. How can we have world peace with over six hundred millions of the world's population left out? Can it be because Russia is a “godless” State and China one that is not and is never likely to become such? The leaders of the Roman Church know that a complete world union would involve complete liberty of thought, and in the end that would mean an end to all the Churches.

The Rev. W. Wallace, Sheffield, says that “scores of influential leaders in Sheffield are outside the Church.” That is, of course, true of the whole of the country. The pity of it is that so many of them kowtow to the churches, either by their silence or by hollow, humbugging talk about “true Christianity.” There is no form of Christianity that does not, in sum, do more harm than good. If their ideas on social matters are sound they should be stated as such. To make them dependent upon some “god” who came to earth about two thousand years ago, is to advertise their fear of religious intolerance. To say that the reforms for which people happen to be fighting depends in any sense on Jesus, is an insult to their understanding and appreciation of sociology.

Here is another example of the way in which religion and things that matter are muddled together. The “Baptist Times” for February 11 has an article by Arthur Porritt on “Carrying Religion into Economics.” Mr. Porritt says that the Archbishop of Canterbury is “carrying religion into the domain of commercial and economic life.” We do not agree. The Archbishop's plan would be better described as an attempt to harness the Church to economic and social theories that were developed against the strong opposition of Christian leaders, which have been rapidly developed of late years, and which in their essence deny the pertinency of religious beliefs and doctrines in any shape or form. The Archbishop is cute enough to realise that if the Church cannot hitch itself to the new sociological and economic ideas, it will be left in the cold, and even the vast wealth of the Church may be affected. He is playing for safety—for the Church. That is all.

What we have said concerning the Archbishop's tactics in economics is equally true of another common statement with regard to education and religion. “It is being increasingly

realised that the spiritual aspect of our children's education must receive serious attention.” “We” sounds impressive, and it is intended to convey the idea that parents are much concerned about the matter. As a matter of fact, it is almost entirely a clerical concern on the one hand, and a concern of sociologists on the other. The sociologists find, and always have found, the religious interests in the way of a proper development of education, and the parsonry feels that unless it can force religion upon children before they are old enough to understand it, they have no chance whatever of capturing the educated adult. That really puts the position in a nutshell. The concern about education, apart from the two forces mentioned, is just bunkum.

A recent issue of the Roman Catholic “Universe” told a story of a Colorado murderer, whom it describes as an Atheist, and who while awaiting execution embraced Christianity—of the Roman variety—and then walked to his death calm and collected. That is quite orthodox in every detail. The power of God and the saints was not adequate to prevent the murder, but it could manage to cheer up the murderer and enabled him to feel that his crime was forgiven and he would be welcomed by Jesus and the Saints with greater joy than a believer who just died. It is quite a Christian story with a Christian moral.

All the same we feel injured. Atheists pay for the upkeep of prisons and for a police force. Pro rata they pay as much as any Christian, R.C. or Protestant. But the number of Atheists in prison are few, the Atheist murderer rare. Consequently, it would only be just if, when an Atheist does commit a murder, that he should be left alone to die an Atheist. The power of God did not prevent the murder, and common decency demands that when the murderer is an Atheist he should be let alone. From the vast number of Christians who are criminals the Churches might well spare a single Atheist to decorate the criminal record. We dislike monopolies. We protest against being robbed of a single criminal while our stock of them is so low.

In the “World Digest” for March, Sir John Hammerton has an article on “Hate,” and in these days it is not surprising that he should refer to Ernest Lissauer, the author of the notorious “Hymn of Hate” so popular in Germany during the last war. But Sir John points out that Lissauer was a Jewish poet—and this is not quite fair. Lissauer was a Jew, but when he wrote his “Hymn of Hate” he had been converted to the religion of Love—Christianity. That is very conveniently forgotten but it explains a lot. Perhaps Sir John Hammerton did not forget. At any rate, perhaps someone will explain in what way Lissauer was bettered by becoming a Christian?

As an item of news for Christian and other readers, one of our evening papers the other day explained that natives of the Solomon Islands, though they have opportunities of using direction finders and other scientific instruments, prefer to place on the bow of a canoe grotesque figures in human form to guide them out of danger. Poor, ignorant souls! And yet here in England we have Cardinal Hinsley, at the head of the Roman Catholics in this country, fitting out thousands of soldiers with magical medals, duly prayed over and sanctified, to guard Roman Catholics from danger on the battlefield. It looks to us that if the Solomon Island natives are at one end of the boat, then Cardinal Hinsley should be at the other end. The mental or cultural difference between the two puzzles us altogether.

We fancy that the crusade for the complete and—in practice—compulsory Christianising of the schools is backed up by prepared questions being sent round for use whenever possible. For instance, we noted four papers, issued in different parts of the country, containing the same phrases and used in the same order. One of these is “Education without a Christian background is useless.” Well, we would ask what is the matter with the Russian effort which converted an almost completely illiterate population into an 85 per cent. literate one—and without any religion at all. Are British people so inferior to Russians that what they can do by human effort, English people need supernatural assistance to accomplish? We do not believe it. We believe our English population is just as good as the Russian—given equal opportunities.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. C. HENWOOD.—Obliged for copy of circular. It is what we would expect.

C. S. MORTIMER.—There is not much use in having "opinions" if they are not passed on to others. Neither do we rate very highly keeping one's opinions to one's self because the time is "not ripe." When the time is ripe opinions will assert themselves. The honour lies in making them ripen by fructifying the human soil so that the ripening process arrives quicker than it would otherwise.

To distributing and advertising "The Freethinker": Bolton Branch N.S.S., 4s.

H. ACKERLEY.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent.

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

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

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

SUGAR PLUMS

AFTER some delays—quite normal in these abnormal times where printing is concerned—the third edition of Mr. Cohen's "Materialism Restated" is now on sale. We think it can be honestly and successfully claimed to be one of the few books that states clearly and briefly the meaning and function of Materialism. The work contains a much needed chapter on the theory of Emergence and a special chapter on the Problem of Personality. It extends to 210 pages. Price 4s. 6d., postage 2½d.

To-day (March 7) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Subject, "Rocks Ahead." Chair will be taken at 3 o'clock. This will be the 62nd anniversary of the opening of the hall, and we hope to be able to report "Full House!"

Mr. Cohen's next lecturing visit will be to Glasgow on April 4.

The Bishop of Bradford, Dr. Blunt, should pay a little more attention to the aims Revolutionary Russia had, and has, with regard to religion. He hits on a truth by saying that Russians always were "Communists," by which he can only mean they were inclined to live in groups that resemble a communal cluster. (That is true of all small groups of people, and Russia was for centuries made up of villages.) But people leading a communal life, and "Communism" as set forth by Marx and Lenin are not the same thing. The next blunder is that Russian progress does not prove that a people can get on without religion, but only that "the Russians are at heart a religious people." And that is undiluted clerical nonsense.

Let us remind Bishop Blunt of one or two things. The leaders of the Russian revolutionary movement for several generations were avowedly non-religious, while the mass of the people were overwhelmingly religious. The greatest enemies of the revolution were the religious leaders, and among the greatest opponents, outside of Russia, were the religious leaders in this country. They, with others, could only find good in revolutionary Russia when it showed itself great in war and the Russians were our allies. Finally, the greatness of revolutionary Russia was not its marked ability for conducting a military campaign, but because

of the great social transformation accomplished without any appeal to or the use of religion.

And now we venture on a forecast—always a rather dangerous procedure where the future is concerned. When this war is over there will be a change in the attitude of the clergy here. We are not aware of any of them who have had the courage to confess they were mistaken about "Atheistic Russia." We shall find less praise of Russia and a greater readiness to suggest that the less we have to do with Russia the better, and the foremost in this matter will be the Roman Catholic Church and those politicians who are busy trying to reinstate the clergy in the schools.

There seems to be something in the clerical make up which impels them, in a vast number of instances, either to give a good reason for a bad thing or bad reasons for a good one. Here, for instance, is E. L. Maccassey, Vicar of Mapledurham, writing an excellent letter to the "Daily Telegraph" on the question of our medical service. With justifiable indignation he says we have the greatest death rate from cancer, and tens of thousands suffering from rheumatism, etc. We take his figures for granted—not having checked—and we agree that what is preventable is not prevented. He might have added that this Christian country is far more anxious to secure good health and strength for fighting purposes than for anything else. Finally, the vicar is angry because the clergy have done so little to help the Beveridge plan through, particularly with regard to health and disease.

Now we do not think that the vicar is quite fair to his brother parsons. It is not their business to foster medical skill or medical attention to all. Their position, as laid down in the Prayer Book, is that whatever disease a man has, has been sent by God, and to pray to him who has sent the disease to send the cure. And the distinct teaching of the New Testament that if a man be anointed with oil and prayed over, the Lord shall save the sick. While Jesus himself said that in *his name* (that magic word again!) his disciples should cure the sick. Mr. Maccassey should be just. The parson's job does not lie in the direction of scientific medicine or social cures for social ills. The text in the last instance is to obey "the powers that be, for the powers that be are ordained by God."

Just one final word to the vicar. Can a man do all that he wishes to see done, and can it be done without appealing to God, or bothering about God? Non-Christians and anti-Christians do a deal of decent and helpful and wise work without God, and we really do not like our fellow humans—even when they are labelled Christians—to be thought of as innately useless as the vicar appears to think his believers are. We have always believed that Christians can be as good and as strong as Atheists if they will only try to be good in an open and honest way. We have a better opinion of Christians than they seem to have of themselves.

Norwich Freethinkers interested in discussions on Spiritualism are invited to 37, Catton Grove Road, Norwich, Norfolk, on Sunday morning, March 7, at 11 o'clock. A member of the N.S.S. has arranged to meet two spiritualists and hopes to contact other Freethinkers with the view to some local activity.

We have very frequently said that any attempt to establish a real democracy in this country must reckon with the spoiling operations of the essential Fascism of the Roman Church, as well as from our own Church of England. Evidence of this is given by the attitude of the Catholic Church towards education. The Papacy claims complete control of education over its own people, at least, and it is vigilant in its activities, open and secret where that control is opposed, directly or indirectly. Some years ago the Trades Union Congress passed, year after year, a resolution in favour of Secular Education in all State or State supported schools. Then the Roman Church took action, and mainly by threatening to withdraw Catholics from membership and to form a new Catholic Trades Union, the repetition of the resolution was dropped by the T.U.C., but the principle was never disowned.

BERNARD SHAW AGAIN

(Concluded from page 89)

THE passage that will most interest readers of this paper is the following:—

"The people who asked him to lecture frequently got more than they had bargained for, or something they had never bargained for. 'I remember causing an awful rumpus,' he told me, 'when the National Secular Society, looking round just then for a successor to Bradlaugh, sampled me among other possibilities. I lectured them on Progress in Freethought, and proved that all the beliefs they condemned as base superstitions were simply statements of fact: the Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, and so forth. Needless to add, I was not chosen. The old materialist Bible-smashing Freethinkers never quite forgave me.'"

Mr. Pearson is a critic at times of his hero, and one wishes he had chided this churlish perversity, for it is not an admirable trait. Had he been more familiar with the history of organised Freethought, he could hardly have accepted a myth which has before been laid in these columns. Surely it might have been apparent that it was very unusual for a society requiring a leader to canvass amongst those who were not even members.

The late J. M. Robertson, in his admirable study of St. Joan—"Mr. Shaw and the Maid" (alas! that about 100,000 have seen the play to one who has read the book!)—called him a "licensed humorist." He was; and invented any story to adorn any moral. An incident that is supposed to have occurred after a return from the Alhambra ballet in 1890 represents Shaw at the apotheosis of his apocrypha:—

"When I arrived at my door after these dissipations I found Fitzroy Square, in which I live, deserted. It was a clear, dry, cold night; and the carriage-way round the circular railing presented such a magnificent hippodrome that I could not resist trying to go just once round in Vincenti's fashion. It proved frightfully difficult. After my 14th fall I was picked up by a policeman. 'What are you doing here?' he said, keeping fast hold of me; 'I bin watching you for the last five minutes.' I explained, eloquently and enthusiastically. He hesitated a moment, and then said, 'Would you mind holding my helmet while I have a try? It don't look so hard.' Next moment his nose was buried in the macadam and his right knee was through its torn garment. He got up bruised and bleeding, but resolute. 'I never was beaten yet,' he said, 'and I won't be beaten now. It was my coat that tripped me.' We both hung our coats on the railings and went at it again. If each round of the square had been a round in a prize fight, we should have been less damaged and disfigured; but we persevered, and by four o'clock the policeman had just succeeded in getting round twice without a rest or a fall, when an inspector arrived and asked him bitterly whether that was his notion of fixed point duty. 'I allow it ain't fixed point,' said the constable, emboldened by his new accomplishment, 'but I'll lay half a sovereign you can't do it.' The inspector could not resist the temptation to try (I was whirling round before his eyes in a most fascinating manner), and he made rapid progress after half an hour or so. We were subsequently joined by an early postman and by a milkman, who unfortunately had to be carried to hospital by the other three. By that time I was quite exhausted and could barely crawl into bed."

A modern Munchausen someone might well explain. Mr. Pearson himself calls it "a tissue of lies." It is certain that such a romancer cannot be safely regarded as an historian of anything. He reminds me of Lamb's commendation of the liars who do not shiver on the brink but plunge boldly in. Such really deceive nobody.

The Shavian apocrypha is for our entertainment, and not for our education. There is the absurd story of a man who was charged with praying in Westminster Abbey. A verger, cross-examined in the witness-box and asked what was the objection to the practice, replied that "if we allowed them to pray there we should have them praying all over the place." I came upon an essay of Lionel Tollemache on Dean Stanley, in which the latter related that a verger once rebuked a man for praying in the Abbey. No doubt he "fopped," as Jerry Cruncher would have said, in a place where the sight-seeing public resorted rather than in a side chapel set apart for devotion. One can understand the Dean's amusement. This was the small seed from which the Shavian efflorescence grew. There is also the legend of an old lady who regularly heard Charles Bradlaugh at the Hall of Science under the impression that she was listening to her favourite evangelical preacher. Only if the lady had been deaf and blind could one accept it. Granted only the former she would have seen no large Bible opened, no rising to sing; blind only, she would have missed the hymns and the prayers.

It is likely enough that, when Shaw dies, some obituary notice will quote the tag from Johnson about the death of Garrick: which "eclipsed the gaiety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure." Johnson was cross-examined once as to the first phrase about the actor which would certainly be passed in the case of our dramatist. On the other hand, the final adjective can be more unhesitatingly applied to Garrick than Shaw. The ground for dubiety, for readers of this paper, was well expressed by J. M. Robertson. "The critical case against him is that under the guise (for the young) of champion of a new enlightenment, he carries on a campaign of new obscurantism." I fear a mere dipping into the ocean of knowledge sometimes conveys to superficial minds a belief in his depth. The story of Newton feeling that he was doing no more but pick a pebble on a shore fits no one less than Bernard. Thus he casts aspersions upon Anatole France's book on Joan of Arc, which Robertson rightly applauded, and coolly tells you that if you read his play this is all you need to know about the "Maid." The oracle has spoken; you must accept the word from the super-manly Shaw. Illumination, however, is not given by throwing fireworks about indiscriminately.

Yet, on the whole, from a Freethinker's point of view, I think there has been a balance of gain in his influence, though I confess to a hesitation in this judgment I should not feel in the case of Voltaire, his nearest analogy.

W. KENT.

MENACE OF AGED POOR

MANY primitive tribes put to death such of their aged members as were out of the hunt, often feasting off the freshly-killed carcases. Funeral expenses were thereby avoided, the food situation was eased and, magically, the desirable qualities of the dear departed entered directly into the young cannibals, fitting them for survival in the struggle for existence.

Some races compelled their aged to "walk the plank" off the cliff top. Here, the attributes of the sacrificed were assimilated by their offspring through a fish diet. Even where, in times of peace and plenty, the aged were invested with authority and dignity, it was perilous to play the part of a Polonius, as witness: A young chief, on being questioned regarding the welfare of an ancient of his tribe, answered: "He gave us so much good advice that we put him mercifully to death."

Time marches on. Britain, 1943. The din of battle is accompanied by the cry of Reconstruction and Social Security. But the problem of the old, outworn and unprofitable citizen still remains; and to post-war reform it looms as a formidable obstacle.

The conviction is growing that a repetition of the last war's aftermath cannot be tolerated. This is confirmed by the findings

of the Interdepartmental Committee under the presidency of Sir William Beveridge, who were empowered to probe the social and industrial situation, and to discover if possible some acceptable road to a better state.

The committee's arduous labours resulted in a book to which the president contributed 120,000 words.

Whether the book can be called a giant-killer or not, it promises to "attack" five capital-lettered giants: "Want, Disease, Squalor, Ignorance and Idleness," the evil geni of the "common people." Why these abstract giants single out the common people for their ministrations does not arise.

The main weapon of attack is Social Insurance. It is an old weapon, but by refashioning it, hope is entertained that its use will force the wicked giants to cry, "Hold! Enough!" Operations under the new conditions will need a new fund. To this fund the "common people" will pay directly more than twice their present weekly contribution. What will they pay indirectly? The answer to that is, wait and see.

Without examining all the proposed scales of benefit, some of which show little or no increase, let us turn to a matter of national concern, implicit in the report: what to do with the very old and the very young.

Over 100 years ago Malthus proclaimed that population tended to increase faster than the means of subsistence.

Herein lay the cause of the poverty of the "common people." "Lacking moral restraint, marrying too early and breeding too fast, Nature's bounty couldn't be stretched sufficiently to meet their needs." The conscience of the "better" class slept in peace. Clearly the rich could do nothing. The remedy was with the poor people themselves.

Have the common people since then availed themselves of the remedy? Seemingly so, for the Report points to the peril of Britain in its falling birth-rate, and suggests a subsidy for every child in a family after the first-born.

No more talk of lacking moral restraint or marrying too soon. Modern warfare has shown us that a teeming population making for fit men and women is an urgent necessity—therefore more babies.

Does Malthusianism no longer apply? Let us see. The average length of life is greater than in the time of Malthus. In making adequate provision for an increased birth-rate, nourishing the young and cultivating a fighting-fit stock, Nature's bounty will be subjected to such a strain, that to allow the aged poor anything beyond bare subsistence, may have serious consequences.

In the words of Sir William Beveridge (page 92): "It is dangerous to be in any way lavish to old age until adequate provision has been assured for all other vital needs," including the adequate nutrition of the young, as every shilling on the pension will mean £20,000,000 a year on the total cost in another 20 years.

Money of itself cannot be eaten or worn on the body as clothing, therefore it means that there is a lack of things needed to sustain life satisfactorily—that is, for about one-seventh of the population. Thus it transpires that the 5,000,000 existing old age pensioners are to be left without any further help of a material kind—not even a coffin and a bit of spice cake, when they die.

But with words of sympathy, Nature can and will supply them prodigally.

However, in 1965, Nature will surpass herself. The birth-rate will be higher and the number of pensioners will have swollen to eight millions. But as the "common people" will by then have provided a large fund of money, Nature will make it possible to be "lavish" to the aged poor. A married couple of pensioners will be "allowed" 40s. per week, and a swell funeral when they die. All without encroaching on the privileges of the rich, or applying a means test to the lucky pensioner.

This is not a plea to maintain the old and useless at the expense of the young and promising. It is an endeavour to face facts that the report leads one to believe are more than somewhat grave.

If it is "dangerous" for poor old people to use up things to the value of 20s. each per week, including cost of shelter, heating and lighting, wouldn't it be nobler to offer them the chance of emulating the glorious example of their own offspring, who are laying down their lives for their country and meeting death with a smile and a jest?

"You dogs, would you live for ever?"—hurled reproachfully at his hesitant troops by Frederick the Great or the "Duke of Plazatoro," when he ordered them into the cannon's mouth—would never be merited by our aged poor.

The dear old things cannot be "liquidated" with the saving logic of the savage; but if Press, pulpit and platform got together and convinced them that they were endangering the safety of Britain when they could no longer earn their corn, the majority would be ready to "clock in" at the pearly gates.

Gardens of Forgetfulness of Oriental splendour might then be opened in every town where the aged poor could enter on the "poppied sleep." When carried hence to the final resting place it should not be with a:—

"Rattle his bones over the stones,
He's only a pauper whom nobody owns,"

—but in the way we honour heroes. H. IRVING.

TRADE UNIONS AND THE CHURCHES

The recent trade union resolution demanding the abolition of the dual system has brought in another complaint from the Church which has now taken a definite step—on the old lines. A circular has been issued to all Catholic groups asking (really ordering) Roman-Catholics to form an association of Catholic trade unionists with a branch in every parish, and to endeavour to enrol every Catholic trade unionist in the diocese as a member, a nominal subscription of 1d. per week being asked for.

It is hoped by this method to "convince the T.U.C. of the injustice of their proposals." The threat is plain. It is that if the claims of Labour as a body are to be maintained by Catholics, peace must be made with the Church on its own terms concerning education. We hope the T.U.C. will stand out against the threat. The Roman Church owes its power more to underhand influence and the backing it gets from those who strongly dislike a really national system of education, than to its own strength in numbers. We hear that the plot is not making much headway in some counties, and we trust this will be the case in a wide area.

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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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 a.m., Dr. C. JOAN—"Eighty-Seven Years of Bernard Shaw: The Philosopher."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate, 6-30 p.m.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN—62nd Anniversary of the Opening of the Secular Hall.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Cafe): Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.

TOO LITTLE DELIBERATION

THE above title is prompted by the article subscribed by Mr. Lloyd Cole (January 10) entitled "Too Many Incarnations."

It is indeed sad, to say the least, that in the 20th century of so-called Civilisation—with a capital C—after the endless contributions of scientists, ethicists, metaphysicians, philosophers and rational plain thinkers, there are still in the world so many misguided and ignorant human beings, weltering amid the gross superstitions of this incarnation or that, or grovelling in the blind, unreasoning faith of one religious dogma or another.

It is apparent that the believer in the Christian superstition regards Musselmen, Buddhists, Mithraists, Zoroastrians, Confucians, Shintoists, Hindus, etc., as superstitious unbelievers in the True God and, quite innocently and ingenuously, does not begin to see that with at least as much cause, and quite probably more, all these, in their turn, regard *him* as an unbeliever and as an infidel, because *he* has not the true faith, because *he* knows not the True God.

Objectively, the rationalist and the sceptic are in the position to see all these cult worshippers and ideologists as exactly and precisely the same credulous, unthinking and even gullible "ninnies."

To the religious follower of any one of the so-called greater religions, it becomes easy to regard all the others as based upon superstition and founded upon ignorance and fear, but, singularly enough, it rarely occurs to any of the elect that all the others are thinking in precisely the same terms of all the others, including himself. The devotee of one religion can always find ground on which to question and even to ridicule the authority of all the others and to regard their claims as ridiculous and unsubstantiated, but, like the fabulous ostrich, can bury his head in the sand if and when the same proposition is put to him regarding his own professed belief and faith, which in the other he regards as ignorant superstition and unquestioning acceptance of unqualified dogma.

The writer is impressed by the reference on the part of Mr. Lloyd Cole to the circumstance that he himself was a minister of religion for four years before becoming a confirmed Atheist. One wonders how many similar instances there may be of ministers who, having in the practice of their priestly vocation become Agnostic or Atheistic, have had the courage to resign such vocation.

One wonders, too, as to what may be the numbers of (1) ministers who, in the practice of their religious vocations, have become rationalistic and sceptical but remain in their jobs to teach what they no longer believe; (2) ministers who, in spite of themselves, entertain incipient intellectual doubts upon the validity of their acceptances, but decline to investigate too deeply or closely for fear of probable confirmation of such doubts; (3) potential ministers whose preliminary studies have engendered doubts and have subsequently confirmed disbelief; and (4) Atheists, sceptics and rationalists who have—to use canting theological and hypocritical language—recanted and become ministers of religion.

The writer happens to be one of that class who, subjected to early religious influences and brought up in a puritanically Nonconformist atmosphere, graduated as a Sunday school worker and ardent Church supporter, excelled at scripture examinations and became a lay preacher in fairly early youth. Regarded as having a "call" to the ministry, he was nominated for ministerial college and placed under the supervision of his minister and class leader, who were appointed to act as his guides, philosophers and friends in a course of preliminary study until term time came. As recommended, he acquired theological textbooks, bibliographies, concordances, etc., and settled down to a methodical and exhaustive study of the Scriptures which, being somewhat at variance with the prescribed readings as set out by the International Bible Readers' Association, soon gave rise

to dubiety and scepticism regarding the origin and authenticity of Holy Writ.

Intelligent examination of these doubts and reference to the study of comparative religions, gave rise to an interminable series of awkward questions which the writer dutifully submitted to his guides, philosophers and friends for satisfactory explanation and elucidation which, of course, were not forthcoming. Such circumstance demonstrated the proposition that even the guides, philosophers and friends were in no better state of certainty, but the tactful suggestion was made that such degree of higher criticism at such stage perhaps necessitated the withdrawal of the ministerial nomination, at least temporarily, a proposition to which the writer was impelled to agree.

Within much more recent date the writer had fairly close contact with a Nonconformist pastor who frankly declined to discuss religion and belief with the writer because previous exchange of opinion with the writer had even disturbed the pastor's mind on the subject.

From all of which it is very evident that whilst there is too much incarnation, there is too little deliberation. H. DAY.

OBITUARY

THOMAS HENRY HOW

Another link with the past is broken—physically—with the death of Thomas Henry How, aged 82, on February 16. We made his acquaintance in the stormy days of our Victoria Park propaganda, now more than 50 years ago, in connection with the Bethnal Green Branch of the N.S.S. We soon found him to be earnest in his opinions, loyal in his support and dependable in anything he was called upon to do. There were days in which the opposition assumed a rather rowdy form, and the success of our meetings led to organised disturbances. In all these struggles we found T. H. How always on the spot where he was most needed, and always cool in the most trying circumstances. The splendid success of those Victoria Park meetings, which brought attendants from all parts of London, owed much to the work and loyalty of such men as the one to whom we pay our tribute of respect and appreciation.

Unfortunately we were unable to be present at the cremation ceremony at the City of London Crematorium on February 22; but the proceedings were in good hands in the person of Mr. Rosetti. The nights grow darker with the passing of old friends, and that does but make the remembrance of them of greater brightness and value. C. C.

DEATH

O man! hold thee on in courage of soul
Through the stormy shades of thy worldly way,

.....
This world is the nurse of all we know.

This world is the mother of all we feel
And the coming of death is a fearful blow

To a brain unencompassed with nerves of steel;
When all that we know, or feel, or see,
Shall pass like an unreal mystery.

—SHELLEY.

CHRISTIAN CEMENT—(Concluded from page 95)

The terms of investigation laid down by my friend being "personal experiences," it would hardly be fair to mention also the present-day world-wide example of Christian cement—whole nations of Christians seeking to wipe each other out, with God on everybody's side.

Really, the psychology of Christian love and hate is truly wonderful. It deserves a Havelock Ellis of its own to do it scientific justice.

F. J. CORINA.