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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 103.)

God's World

If we are to understand Christianity we must bear in mind two things. It is an historic creed in the sense that it dominated Europe, at least, for many centuries. Next, it is a religion based upon a book, and therefore the reference must be twofold—to the Bible and to the Church as interpreter in its authoritative creeds. We have been dealing with Christianity from these points of view and shall continue to do so. So far as we have gone, we may summarise real Christianity as historically committed to the following situations:—

- (1) The world was called into existence by God about 4000 B.C.
- (2) The earth was flat and immovable; and it was the centre of the universe. Above it was a solid place, Heaven; and below it another solid place, Hell.
- (3) Every species of animals was brought into existence by a magical "Let there be—"
- (4) Man is a special creation, made from the dust of the earth, and woman formed from a rib taken from the side of Adam.
- (5) The woman, urged by Satan, persuades Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit growing in the garden in which they are placed.
- (6) For this act God curses the whole human race that is to be, with special punishment for women.
- (7) The people of the earth, as a consequence of God's curse, go from bad to worse, and God resolves to wipe out this creation, save two of every kind, in order to repopulate

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. •

the earth with a better stock. The new generation, however, revolts, and tries to invade heaven, but God frustrates them by causing each of them to speak different languages. None could understand the other.

(8) Natural law is unknown. Miracles are everyday occurrences, good and evil spirits are everywhere, and most diseases come from their activities.

Substantially this cosmogony was taught by all the Churches in their creeds until modern times, and it is not without representatives to-day. But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, three men, Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, smashed God's universe to pieces, and the "oracles of God" began to look like a bundle of fairy tales. But it was not an easy task to defy the Church. Copernicus held back his theory as long as was possible. Bruno was burned at the stake for saying there were more worlds than ours. Galileo was imprisoned, and Newton's new theory only got into Cambridge by a trick. It was said he was taking the control of the universe out of the hands of God. But deadly blows had been struck. The Bible was being reduced to a fairy tale.

Later, the world was to see the same kind of opposition to every important move in geology and biology. But the Churches were then fighting a losing battle. "And the Lord said—" was being met with "What does it matter what the Lord said? Here is the plain truth." To-day we can see the clergy of the established Churches seeking testimonials from scientists with all the insistence of a quack medicine vendor pleading for praise of his concoctions. Science no longer asks permission from the Church to speak. It issues orders. And the Churches know that to get evidence for the truth of their religion is impossible. So the plea goes: "If you cannot bring yourselves to say that our creed is true, let us at least count on your saying it is useful."

Here is an example of the strength of the opposition of Christian people in this country to scientific plain speaking less than a century ago. One of the early books on evolution—not the earliest—was "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation". The book was published in 1844, one year short of a century ago. The *Vestiges* was a very mild plea for evolution, and it ran through many editions. The authorship was carefully hidden. The author's copy was rewritten by a friend so that the authorship should not be traced through the handwriting. It was then passed to another friend in Manchester, who sent it to the publisher. The publisher was bound to silence also—under penalty of a forfeiture if he should discover the author's name. The book excited a nation-wide interest, with some because of its suggestiveness, with Christians because it threatened the authority of the Bible. Nine editions of the book appeared between its publication in 1844 and 1853. (I have the first edition, and I think the last, issued in 1884.)

Who was the author? It was Robert Chambers, the founder of "Chambers's Journal," one of the best-known and most popular journals in Scotland. Thoroughly to appreciate this incident, one must consider this kind of terrorism carried on generation after generation, one must consider the selection practised by the Christian Church century after century, the killing off, so far as they could be killed off, of the more daring spirits, the premium paid to fools and rogues to encourage orthodoxy, and then one may be able dimly to calculate what has been the power of the Christian world for evil. That power is not yet exhausted. It is exerted in politics, in education, in every branch of social life. The world has paid a fearful price for the triumph of the Cross.

Christian Origins

Let us get back to our main topic. My apology for the digression is that it is only when one remembers the character of the Christian Church, when it could wield unquestioned power, that we appreciate the drag it has been on civilisation. But, cries the Christian, there is the moral teaching of the Bible. Certainly. Fundamental morality is common to every group of humans, no matter where one finds them. Mutual life means at least a minimum mutual trust. A society can no more exist without some sort of moral code, spoken or practised, than a man can reach old age by cutting his throat. In any case, just as there were gods before the Bible God, just as there were gods that also made a woman out of a bone from man, and a man from clay, just as there were gods who sent floods before Jahveh, so morality is to be found better expressed before the Bible God came upon the scene than it was when the Christian fetish book reigned.

We will give a few examples of this. It has long been noticed that the wiser sayings in the Bible occur in the "later" books, Proverbs, Psalms, etc. But investigation has shown that not only does the Bible repeat the superstitions of ancient Egypt and Babylonia, it also borrows some of the better and wiser teaching—without acknowledgment, and these appear in almost the exact words. Take this from the Egyptian book of Amenemope:—

Incline thine ear to my sayings,
And apply thine heart to their comprehension,
For it is a profitable thing to put them in thy heart.

Compare PROVERBS xxii. 17-18:

Incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise,
And apply thine heart to my knowledge,
For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee.

FROM EGYPT:

Remove not the landmark or the boundary of fields,
Be not greedy for a cubit of land,
And trespass not on the boundary of the widow.

THE BIBLE:

Remove not the ancient landmark,
And enter not into the fields of the fatherless.

FROM EGYPT:

Better is poverty in the hand of God
Than riches in the storehouse,
Better are loaves when the heart is joyous
Than riches in unhappiness.

FROM PROVERBS:

Better is little with the fear of Yahveh
Than great treasure and trouble therewith,
Better is a portion of herbs where loye is
Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

FROM EGYPT:

A Scribe skilful in his office,
He shall find himself worthy of being a courtier.

THE BIBLE:

A man skilful in his business,
He shall stand before kings.

FROM EGYPT:

Weary not thyself to seek for more.
If riches be brought thee by robbery
They will not abide the night with thee.

PROVERBS:

Weary not thyself to be rich.
Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?
For riches certainly make themselves wings
Like an eagle that fieth towards heaven.

FROM EGYPT:

How manifold are thy works.
They are hidden before men.
Thou didst create the earth according to thy heart.

PSALMS:

O Lord, how manifold are thy works.
In wisdom hast thou made them all,
The earth is full of thy riches.

Very much more could be said on these lines, but the specimens given may indicate how the Bible should be read. The truth appears to be that there was a pre-Babylonian and pre-Egyptian culture in Palestine long before the Jewish culture existed. The case is thus put by Breasted:—

"Babylonian culture had an important and lasting influence on Canaanite Palestine, and it was chiefly through the Canaanites that the influence of Babylonian art, literature and religion was received by the Hebrews. The region had, furthermore, long been dominated by Egyptian civilisation. The Egyptians had begun to hold the Phœnician coast over 2,000 years before the Hebrews entered Palestine. . . . The Hebrews, on entering Palestine, were in immediate contact with a highly advanced composite civilisation. . . . It was without doubt the Canaanitish speech which the Hebrews adopted and which has descended to us as the Hebrew of the Old Testament."

But the Hebrews were at a lower culture stage, and this may account for the discerning reader finding in the Bible a mass of the most primitive superstitions with a dash of higher religious and ethical thought.

Unfortunately for the world, when the Christian Church developed it took its stand upon the more primitive stratum of primitive thought, and so merely gave the world a mass of superstitions that the civilised people of the pagan world was beginning to shake off. But the Church, by its Hitler methods, established teachings that acted as a successful bar to scientific development for well over a thousand years, and from the influence of which we have not yet recovered.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued.)

JAMES BRANCH CABELL—GODHATER

I.

IT was, I think, Hilaire Belloc who said, referring to Ernest Bramah, that in every age and in every country there are writers whose fame is less than they deserve. He might have added that the phenomenon can generally be traced to very definite causes. This refers especially to my subject, James Branch Cabell, the American man of letters.

He is an author known to few, but those few, though they may differ from some of his views, will spare no pains to obtain copies of his works. A few minutes spent in every bookshop in Charing Cross Road asking for his works will support my contention, but there is a more striking proof. Listed in one of his later novels is a half-dozen monographs on his works—and this while he still lives. A tribute rare enough to be well worthy of mention: why then is Cabell not more widely read?

The answer is to be found in the character and manner of his novels. His two volumes of essays, "Beyond Life" and "Straws and Prayerbooks," forming prologue and epilogue of those novels which, he asserts, are all separate chapters in one autobiography of symbolised mankind, are, it is true, no less significant than the fiction; but they are more obscure and less obviously shocking to the pious mind. In his essays, Mr. Cabell reveals his theories of literature and its relation to the workaday world; in novels, abstract principles are clothed in flesh and bone, to behave in a manner no less disturbing to the average mind than stimulating to the seeker-out of the bizarre and the beautiful.

Let me illustrate. When, in "Straws and Prayerbooks," the author contends that the literary artist plays with puppets for his own diversion only, without thought of duty to God or man, the religious reader, though probably disapproving, will, if he be not a hopeless bigot, continue to read on. But what devout believer can, without disquiet, peruse the novels dealing with mythical medieval Poinctesme?—this land where the populace, Christians and pagans alike, are at the mercy of a god who is no benign, white-bearded dealer-out of justice, but an ironical, rather unhappy person, dealing with individuals and with nations in the manner of one forced to an irrational task. What is our respectable reader to make of the episode in "Jurgen," where Koschei, who made all things, is confronted in the vastness of space with Jurgen's grandmother, Steinvor, lately dead, and indignantly demanding the heaven which her parish priest had so often and so minutely described to her. "Bring Earth to me," says Koschei. This was done, and Koschei looked over the planet and found a Bible. Koschei opened the Bible and read the revelation of St. John the Divine. "I see," said Koschei, "the idea is a little garish. Still—" So he replaced the Bible, and bid them put Earth, too, in its proper place, for Koschei disliked wasting anything. Then Koschei smiled and created Heaven about Steinvor and her illusions, and he made Heaven just such a place as was described in the book.

How can the armour of faith withstand the spear of irony so superbly thrust? It is this satire, never spoiling the balance of the narrative, never lapsing into the obvious, that gives the novels their subtle but distinctive flavour. The art of allegory is rare in our day, and I can think of no other writer who can combine it with irony of such an edge. There can be only one drawback; the very subtlety which sharpens the blade renders it ineffective to the less acute mind. Still—! I, at least, would not have my Cabell altered by one jot.

One of the few things that can be ascertained about this remarkable man is that his occupations have included that of genealogist. His knowledge in this branch of learning is well illustrated in the character and detail of his books. Whereas some authors cannot describe the lives of one family without getting hopelessly entangled in contradictory names and dates, Cabell's biographies are each correct in their own chronology;

the most diligent search cannot reveal a flaw. Out of the abundance of his imagination he has created a host of characters, mostly related, living in ages varying from that of imagined Poinctesme to the author's heyday of the early 1900's. Of each character there is a clear and lifelike portrait, shown against a background varied, brilliant as a pageant and always with that piquant sense of the grotesque which is Cabell's own.

Starting with the enigmatic and too tragically successful Dom Manuel, the swineherd who wins his way, through the vagary of time and the gods, to the fief of Poinctesme, we trace the biography through his daughters, down through the 15th, 17th and 18th centuries, seeing the world of those days through the eyes of persons outlined, sometimes in a whole book, sometimes in a single chapter or short story, but always with that genius that can bring a puppet to life in a couple of lines. Not less is the line of Jurgen honoured; that worthy himself is destined—through the foolishness of the American Court, which banned "Jurgen" for over a year on grounds of indecency—to live for the world above the other of the author's creations; but the lives of his descendants are no less stimulating. All of this incredible bright host moves and clamours before us: brave, resigned Gonfal, the Margrave of Aradol—note the musical and graven phrase, so characteristic of Cabell—crotchety, heroic old Coth, the Alderman of St. Didol and Jurgen's father, who alone of all Dom Manuel's band obstinately pursues his vanished master till his stinging persistence causes the gods to bring back for a few precious moments the vanished lord. Coth, resigned if not comforted by Manuel's words, turns homewards to his two castles and those eternal verbal bouts with the wife of his bosom and the precocious young Jurgen. I will not quote from the passages dealing with Coth's old age and death; suffice it that I say, in all sincerity, that, contained though they are in a few brief chapters, they are among the most beautiful and heartbreaking in all the English language.

Perion de la Fôret, too, pursues his seemingly unattainable love, as related in the saga "Domnei," a careful re-rendering of the earlier "Soul of Milicent." A more classic form of romance, it is yet, despite its romantic manner, as individual as all the other works. Therethrough move the heroic lovers and the evil magnificence of the heathen Demetrios; here, too, is Ahashuerus the Jew, his lean and yellow face graven by the centuries to an immovable mask, covering both his scheming brain and his perpetual suffering under the scourge of Divinity. Like glowing figures in a tapestry they move and live, speak and die, in a world infinitely removed from reality, yet correlated to it by Cabell's irony—subdued here, but never softened.

O. HAY.

(To be concluded)

ACCEPTANCE

(An Answer to "D. R.")

Should I, who loved the waxing moon,
Because it wanes complain?
My waxing strength brought Life's chief boon,
Its waning ends my pain:
The moon, the tides, the life of man,
Each follows a predestined plan;
The Summer comes, the Autumn goes,
And through all life a rhythm flows:
Youth's Spring by Summer must be followed,
And Autumn's age
By Winter's rage
Be swallowed.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

AT the Glasgow Unionist Association our Minister of Education said he was glad that the welfare of the children came under his department. To demonstrate his care, his wisdom and his honesty, Mr. Butler arranges with the Churches to hand children over to them so that freedom of mind may be crippled before they leave school. It reminds one of the story of Red Riding Hood, with the Minister of Education playing the part of the wolf.

The following resolution has been passed by the House of Laity of the Church of England at a meeting on March 4:—

"That this assembly, recognising that the practice now adopted in H.M. Forces of giving systematic instruction to recruits of both sexes in the use of prophylactics is the considered policy of those in high authority, appreciates the difficulties of the situation. . . . It considers this a challenge both to the clergy to give more constructive help to young people at Confirmation and before marriage, and to effective lay organisations of the Church to arouse public opinion on the matter."

It is also announced that the Archbishop of Canterbury will address a mass meeting in Hyde Park, assisted by other clergymen.

We recall the attack made on Bradlaugh and others some seventy years ago because they dared talk on lines similar to that announced by the Church Assembly—but minus the religious cant—and to say that young people needed education on sex relationships. Even in the last war the religious authorities fought tooth and nail against instruction on the dangers of venereal disease, and that methods of prevention should be given to the troops. We do not expect it will be long before the Archbishop of Canterbury will inform the world how much we owe to the Church for its activities in this matter. It is the old game, played by the same class of performers.

At the time of writing Cardinal Hinsley appears to be regaining his health. This is due to the prayers of the faithful, who had advised God that they wished the Cardinal to stay with us a little longer. There have been prayers for the Cardinal's health before. Each time God has listened and acted, and each recovery was an example of the power of prayer. But one of these days the prayers will not be answered and the Cardinal will be "translated." But what of that? It is only one instance of prayers being unanswered with six or more that have been recognised by God against one that has not. Clearly the pious have it. We are silenced.

As was the case during the last war, the clergy, including our leading archbishops, are very concerned with the spread of venereal disease which, in its way, is quite a laudable attitude. But the concern appears to be more about the way in which the military authorities are dealing with the problem than with the problem itself. Broadly speaking, every attempt is being made to show to soldiers and civilians alike the dangers to society arising from promiscuous intercourse and, by the use of prophylactics, to prevent any disease right at the start. The clergy, however, are vehemently against any instruction being given to nip the disease in the bud, so to speak. What most of them want is the "patient" to suffer for his "sin"—and then cured. But this is a case where prevention is superior to *cure*.

The B.B.C. announces that it intends to enlarge the number of members of the Brains Trust. But it is not more hands on the Brains Trust, with grossly extravagant payments, but a wider and freer range of subjects and replies that is required. The lying answers given to the public demand for this, some of which we have published and more of which we have, prove beyond doubt that for unfairness the B.B.C. can give any other institution points. Faked discussions, pretended presentation of all sides of debatable questions, the cutting down of "copy," and deliberate misstatement of facts are all parts of the B.B.C. policy. We may in the near future give more examples of the unfair manner in which the B.B.C. conducts its propaganda.

Ex-Dean Inge asks the readers of the "Evening Standard" the question: "Is Christianity dying out?" and it is apparent that, so far as the historic form of Christianity is concerned, and there is none other that matters, he believes that it is. He says that the majority "are frankly uninterested in religion; they never go to church and do not say their prayers." The "authority and dignity" of the clergyman has gone, and the Bible is "hardly read at all." We take it that these statements are indisputable. When the clergy wield authority it is, as in Dr. Temple, not because he is preaching the historical gospel, but because he is asking for what *might be* some socialistic reforms. And having got support on that ground he, like so many others, converts it into an appreciation of Christianity. Offhand we would say that those who follow Temple in his religion do not care a damn for his economics, and those who care for his somewhat muddled economics do not care a fig for his religion.

There was always—at least for some years before Dr. Inge retired from St. Paul's—some doubts about the ex-Dean's orthodoxy. And we feel fairly certain that long before he resigned he had the views he now holds. But he has too keen an intellect not to know that what he gave to his congregation meant one thing to them and another thing for himself. It is quite possible that Dr. Inge, while in the pulpit, felt that he was doing more for religion where he was than if he had told his congregation that historic Christianity was played out. But the rule for those in high places in the Church seems identical with that held by many of our politicians: "When you have a good post hang on to it as long as you can." In each case conscience is silenced by: "We are doing the best for the Church (or political party)." But neither the politician nor the parson should be surprised if outsiders take another view of the matter.

At the end of his article Dr. Inge finds comfort—religious comfort—in saying that "spiritual things are spiritually discerned," which would read quite as well as "foolish things are foolishly discerned" or "wise things are wisely discerned," and so on. These phrases are not examples of wisdom—they are examples of sheer muddle. Dr. Inge seems to think this puts religion on a sounder basis. We are inclined to agree with this, for if you are looking for something you would not recognise if you saw it, or get a message you cannot understand, then you can make either what you like. But we should like to know from Dean Inge, although we have not much hope of his accepting the inference, what frame of mind is there that occurs in connection with religion that does not occur without it?

It must, however, be in sheer irony that Dr. Inge ends his essay by saying: "I should not be surprised to see a revival of religious communities, especially if we were doomed to another Dark Age." Neither should we, and that is about the only thing that would bring about a revival of religion. It is not without significance that Christianity took its rise in the decay-ing years of the Roman Empire. Nor is the fact that the period during which the Christian religion held unquestioned power, known as the Dark Ages, without its lesson. Here is an apparent paradox, the wisdom of which Dr. Inge, we fancy, will appreciate. Religion begins in the early dawn of human wisdom, and decreases in proportion as human intelligence approaches maturity.

Quite a little storm seems to have gathered in "Time and Tide" over Mr. A. A. Milne, the well-known writer, announcing that he had given up the Christian religion. But perhaps "storm" is too lofty a word. The criticism of Mr. Milne is mainly a trickle of words that approach imbecility—at least, it would if it were connected with anything other than religion. "Science is an investigation of the divine appearances. Religion is an experience of the Divine." Here is a gem from another correspondent: "What then is religion? It is an intuitive apprehension of the soul, that behind all the law and terror that surrounds it, is a spirit with a Will." The editor must be trying to exhibit how much nonsense can be written when the subject is religion.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

FRANK KENYON.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.

R. B. KERR.—Next week.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

THE financial year of the National Secular Society ends on March 31, and we have a standing promise to print a reminder to enable subscriptions not already sent to be forwarded to the General Secretary in time for inclusion in the annual balance sheet. A notable feature this year is the number of members who have increased the amount of their subscription. Quite apart from money value, it is encouraging as an indication of confidence in the Society and its work during difficult times.

An excellent "Open Letter to the Bishop of London" from the pen of Mr. Ivor Thomas, M.P., appears in the "Evening Standard" for March 10. The Bishop is opposed to Sunday performances—except in his own highly endowed theatre—and on that Mr. Thomas reminds him that three-quarters of the theatrical profession work in the provinces in repertory or touring companies; that repertory companies, as often as not, rehearse on Sundays; the touring companies travel on Sundays; and for three-quarters of the theatrical profession "Sunday opening would mean far more opportunities for rest and worship than they get at present." That should be enough for the Bishop—and for the broken-backed logic of Donat.

Mr. Thomas ends up with a personal note to the Bishop of London. He says that if the Bishop cannot be reconciled to Sunday performances, then—

I submit that your Lordship should treat yourself not less rigorously than you treat actors and playgoers. Your Lordship will, of course, read neither Sunday newspapers, because they are distributed on the "Sabbath," nor Monday newspapers, because they are produced on the "Sabbath"; your Lordship will not use the telephone on Sunday, nor listen to the B.B.C. on that day, nor accept Monday morning's post, because this means subjecting people unnecessarily to employment on Sunday; your Lordship will not travel on Sunday; and your Lordship will, of course, hand over to charity that portion of your Lordship's emoluments which can be regarded as derived from work on Sunday—I suggest the Actors' Church Union as a suitable recipient.

The only error that Mr. Ivor Thomas may possibly be making is the assumption that the Bishop and his kind are as disinterested in this matter as he is. They are running rival shows, and do not desire to see people patronising rival performances—where the acting is on a higher and better level.

The writer of the "Log" column in the "Scotsman" regrets that the centenary of Richard Carlile passed with so little notice

in the ordinary Press. He points out that Carlile played a great part in securing the freedom of the Press, and ranks Carlile, for his services to freedom of the Press, with Milton, Wilkes, Payne (Paine?), Cobbett and Hetherington. Good enough, but it really is a pity that so great a personage, one who became famous in Britain, France and America, as Paine, and who did so much for the people in each country, has his name spelled wrongly. It almost looks as though the paragrapher, in spite of his desire that these men should all be better known—we may leave Milton out—has yet to learn something more of what these people did.

But the treatment measured out to Carlile, and the group of men and women who worked with him, and the reformers who followed him, is characteristic of the method adopted by those who have either attacked the Churches or have been anti-religious in opinion. In early centuries the pronounced heretic was killed offhand whenever possible. But in this country, particularly in modern times, the heretic is buried before he is even dead. Our upper schools ignore their work, and even in universities there is little encouragement to students to put militant freethinking reformers in the place they should occupy. It is not too much to say that in our educational system, from the elementary schools right up to the universities, considerable care is given to see that pupils are not interested in the work of men whose religious and other opinions are considered "undesirable." In Council schools the names of famous unbelievers and other "dangerous" men are kept in the back-ground. And public school education shows the same solicitude—in the wrong direction.

"The Inquirer" (Unitarian) gives the Archbishops of Canterbury and York a deserved rap on the knuckles with reference to their well-advertised, but somewhat cloudy, social campaign. "The Inquirer" suggests that the two Archbishops are merely playing up to the change of power from a class to the people, or as it is put, from the classes to the masses. In any case, "The Inquirer" suggests that the Archbishops are late in the field, and that their slogans should have been issued fifty years ago; they might then have been a prophecy, but there is no prophecy in saying them to-day. As a matter of fact, one could go back for more than a century and find the reforms that have been so tardily won, and others that have not yet been won, were proposed by men of nebulous religion or of no religion at all, and the bitterest opposition came from the Churches. If the Archbishops meant business they would come out of the Church. Up-to-date reforms cannot be achieved by being linked to ancient superstitions. And the Archbishops fight shy of saying anything—that is true—concerning the wealth and privileges of the Church, and what justification can we give of these things if we are aiming at cardinal reforms?

We are indebted to the Glasgow "Forward" for calling attention to the probable Russian influence on the large number of German prisoners now held in Russia. The paper cites Winston Churchill as saying that large numbers of the German prisoners in Russia "returned home infected by the Lenin virus. In large numbers they refused to go again to the front." We may add to this the constant statement in our papers of the fear which German prisoners display when taken by British troops or ships. On many of these a knowledge of some facts should have an educational influence on those younger men. Certainly a fair number of prisoners should be partly re-educated by their imprisonment.

Another attack on a genuinely national system is offered by a circular which is in circulation from "The Association of Church School Managers, Church Schools Emergency League, Church Union, Mothers' Union, and the National Clergy Association," demanding sectarian education, when asked for, shall be granted and "fully maintained at the public expense." The National Union of Teachers has protested against this circular, and we hope that teachers will do what can be done to end this dual system of State Education as early as possible. If the people lose this battle for a sound system of education it will lose most of what real reformers are striving for. Worst of all we have, for the time being, a Ministry of Education that is backing this step back to pre-1870 conditions.

One of our readers points out that in attributing "Why don't God kill the Devil" to "Topsy" we were wrong. It belongs to Man Friday of "Robinson Crusoe" fame. We are obliged for the correction.

A Freethought Brains Trust and Anvil are among the most successful items in a very encouraging report from the Bradford Branch N.S.S. The proceedings are held in Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate, at 6-30 p.m. on Sundays. A Methodist, Roman Catholic and an Agnostic have already been on the carpet. Other branches might follow the example, meeting in a member's house if other accommodation is not available, and inviting the local clergy to take part in turns.

Turning over the pages of one of the collections of South Place addresses by Moncreu Conway, we came across the following. Christianity, he says,

means what you like. It means one thing here, and another thing there. In a convent or a nunnery the ceremonies of altars may be still translated in abnegation of love parted from the play of the human life. Christianity means to monarchy its throne; to the Republic its President; to the Quaker his drab garb and silent meeting; to the revivalist his shoutings; to the Catholic miraculous fountains and altar toys; to the Bishops their palaces, salaries and seats among the Lords. The army marks its cannon with the cross of Prince of Peace. We slay the heathen in the name of him who said "love your enemies," when we want their territory. . . . We talk of Christian charity as if charity were unknown to other religions; Christian love, Christian duty, Christian Socialism, when we are Socialists, Christian Conservatism, when we are Conservatives, Christian Progress, when we are Progressives. That we do not speak of Christian steam and Christian telephones can only be that these inventions have proceeded from the one institution that refuses to be Christianised—Science. But already we hear of Christian evolution, and no doubt the discoveries of science will all be labelled Christian as they become adopted into that general system of convenience which Christendom really worships.

Conway, when we knew him, was a grand old man, always fearless in the expression of his opinions. His monumental life of Thomas Paine, and the fine edition of his (Paine's) works, will keep his name alive, but it is a pity that his other writings are not so well read as they deserve. Freethinkers, also, will never forget that when, in 1881, the editor of this journal, G. W. Foote, was imprisoned for blasphemy, and many "respectable" Freethinkers were shivering at the possibility of being identified with "The Freethinker" campaign, Conway spoke strongly and plainly, denouncing the use of such phrases as "indecent," "obscene," etc., which had frightened so many timid souls into silence or repudiation.

THE ARMY AND VENEREAL DISEASE

IT was chiefly due to the appalling increase of cases of venereal diseases in the Army that the Contagious Diseases Act was passed in Parliament in 1862. This Act provided for the compulsory medical examination of prostitutes and their detention in hospital when found to be diseased. The terms were put into practice by a Justice's Order which was granted on sworn information that the woman named was a common prostitute. The Act was only applied on its introduction to certain specified garrison towns and a few ports. It was extended to others some years later. In those places where it was in operation the medical authorities noted a marked decrease in the number of cases.

Yet in spite of the facts, there was throughout the country considerable opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act. The chief opponent was the Church, which raised strong objections on moral grounds. These objections were principally that persons who contracted venereal disease had done so by committing a

moral sin and consequently they righteously had to suffer. It was pronounced that to make widely known the preventative measures against these diseases was to encourage vice, just as the setting and healing of broken limbs encourages persons to indulge in the habit of jumping off garden walls.

The continuous agitation stimulated by the Church became so powerful that in 1883 Parliament was forced to suspend the Act. And the diseases again began to spread more widely.

About 1900, one-third of the British Army's hospital cases were due to venereal disease, and an average of 450 men were being discharged annually as medically unfit through these diseases.

In 1903 a medical officer who had been in charge of the venereal diseases wards in the Royal Victoria Military Hospital, Netley, published a pamphlet with the object of bringing the subject into the public eye. He revealed many alarming facts and urged the re-introduction of the Contagious Diseases Act. No widespread feeling in the matter was aroused, however, but some time later the Army authorities were brought to realise the serious threat presented by these diseases to the Army's efficiency. They realised also the dangers of ignorance in these matters. So with considerable foresight they arranged for proper instruction of all recruits, which was accompanied by emphasis on the injurious results of venereal diseases if not checked by prompt treatment. They fitted out early treatment rooms in every unit and ruled that in cases where men did not, at the appearance of the first symptoms, report the contraction of infection, they would suffer stipulated forfeitures of pay and, in addition, would be required to contribute towards the cost of their hospital treatment.

The Army had learnt that although chastity is the best solution to this important problem, it is not a practicable solution. So while the Army has—like the Church—continually advised continence, it has not been content to leave it at that. The reality of the situation had to be faced; and the Army authorities were forced to realise that while prevention is better than cure, a prompt cure is better than moral sermons.

To-day the most serious aspect of the situation lies in the spread of these diseases amongst the civilian population. The civilian has never had the opportunity of facing the true facts until now, when the Government are taking stronger measures. And the Church is stepping in again. It has announced that it is "greatly concerned" whilst it "appreciates the difficulty of the situation." This difficulty would not have arisen but that the sudden impact of these vicious maladies has met a population ignorant of the prevalence and seriousness of infection.

And the Church has always been one of the main obstacles in the way of public enlightenment on sex matters.

In the British Army lectures are given frequently on venereal diseases. In these lectures it is stressed that as far as the Army is concerned it is no sin to contract one of these diseases. The sin lies in not reporting the matter when the first symptoms appear. When cases are reported there is no whispering, no question of incorrect moral behaviour, but complete frankness and impartiality.

The Army has got to know how to look after its men or it would soon lose its efficiency.

The spread of venereal diseases in all the fighting Services is now being checked. This is not due to the "Christian character" of Service men. It is due to a sane and balanced outlook on the part of the Service medical authorities, who are combating the menace with all the facilities of modern science, and are aiming at the same time at prevention through greater knowledge.

The Church, with its advocacy of a "monstrous petition" to the authorities from "mothers' unions" and more "guidance by clergymen," can learn a lot from the Army that it so imprudently criticises.

S. B. WHITFIELD.

CONDITIONING

OUR "conditioning"—as modern psychologists call the process which makes us, at least partly, what we are—begins long before we are born and, to a degree, it goes back to the days of our ancient ancestors; some say to the Primates.

Our skins are white or black, yellow or brown, it is theorised with a considerable degree of confidence, because of the climatic conditions which obtain in that particular part of the globe where the race—using the word "race" in its restricted sense—to which we belong live or lived, and moved and had or has its being. Men of colour—West Africans, for example—have darker, some very much darker, skins than Englishmen have, simply because nature has provided them with pigment to protect them from the much greater heat of the African sun. In this respect the West Africans are "conditioned" by their natural climate—just as we all are, no matter what our colour may be. Or, as Mark Graubard puts it in his "Biology and Human Behaviour": "Eye-colour or skin colour is due to pigments deposited as a result of the chemical composition and the internal and external environments in which the reactions occur."

Men's bodies are unquestionably—again to an extent—conditioned by their environment and their calling. That is why, for example, there are big, brawny men in the Scottish Highlands and much smaller men—many with bent and lacerated bodies, gnarled and calloused hands and pale faces—in the mining districts of South Wales. They are what they are by virtue of their environment and their occupations. The Scandinavians differ from the Chinese for precisely the same reasons: because of the different climates in which they each live, their ancestry, their social surroundings, their occupations—yes, and their bodily and mental substances.

In short, long before we make our entry into the world we are predestined to be of a particular mould, and after we arrive we are "conditioned" in this direction or that by a thousand and one different influences: by our parents, the company we keep, by what we eat and drink, the books we read, and so on and so forth. And it is surprising how small—and, on the face of them, how insignificant and unworthy of a second thought or serious attention—some of these "influences" appear to be at the outset. For instance, some years ago a foreign statesman was charged with, and found guilty of, the murder of another man with whose beautiful wife he had become infatuated; and it all started—so it was revealed—by the murderer and the other man's wife exchanging an admiring look and a rather too friendly handshake! Trivial and insignificant in themselves—the look and the handshake—but they led eventually to an execution!

Of course, thousands of marriages have started in precisely the same way: by a clasp of the hand and a look of admiration, and some of these alliances have resulted in lifelong happiness, others in utter misery, depending—naturally—upon the physical and mental make-up of the pair and their ability to run together in double harness, so to speak. It is simply amazing how greatly one person can, on occasion, influence another—the husband the wife, or the wife the husband, for example—for good or ill, and to what ends the one will go for or against the other because of, or in spite of, the marriage tie, or because of the spiritual bond between the two. Some will go to the ends of the earth, nobly or ignobly, as circumstances require, for his or her partner or party. Quite recently it was reported in the press that the wife of a prominent Norwegian had turned Quisling while her husband was confined in a concentration camp for refusing to betray his country. It does not require much imagination to understand what influences had been at work in this case, and how it is almost sure to end! Yet the beginning was probably, and to all outward appearances, trivial. A look and a word and the "conditioning" began.

A look, too, can have a profound effect—especially if one is forcibly fed on its fare. "Mein Kampf" is one such. The

people of Germany and especially the youth of that country have been nurtured on that stuff for a decade or two, and have thus become "conditioned" for aggression and spoliation. The people of Russia, on the other hand, have had an entirely different bill of fare presented to them, and hence it is that they are able to more than hold their own in the onslaught. Besides books there is the daily, weekly and monthly press, the radio, the cinema, business, sport, travel, friends and relations and what not—all of them, singly or together, preparing us as it were—unconsciously, maybe, but preparing us nevertheless—for some demonstration or other.

We are, to be sure—even when young—queer creatures, made up of varying physical and mental characteristics and appetites: cold-blooded and unresponsive, or warm-blooded and passionate and exceedingly demonstrative, or somewhere between those two extremes; and we are further "conditioned" as we go through life, partly because of what we are already, by virtue of our ancestry, birth and upbringing, and partly because of our developing likes and dislikes and the opportunities which come our way to satisfy our desires, be they base or beneficial.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

CORRESPONDENCE

POPULATION AND THE BIRTH RATE

SIR,—In your March 7 issue Mr. H. Irving refers to the fuss being made about the ageing of our population, and about the immense number of old people there will be thirty years hence. That is unquestionably true, but it has nothing to do with the low birth rate of the present. It is due to the high birth rate of the past.

The greatest number of births ever known in England and Wales were in the opening years of the present century—the highest year, with one exception, was 1903. It is therefore obvious that in 1973 the number of people of seventy will be the largest ever known. Immediately after that, however, the number will begin falling, because after 1903 the number of persons born began falling. The number of people of seventy will continue falling as rapidly as the birth rate fell in the early decades of the present century, and will soon be far less than it is at the present day.

The fall in the number of people of seventy will continue till 2003, and will then come to a standstill because the birth rate stopped falling in 1933. After that there will be a slight increase in the number of people of seventy, because since 1933 there has been an increase in the number of persons born.—Yours, etc.,

R. B. KERR.

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, 11-0, Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE—"The Eternal Opposites."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

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

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. H. McSHANE, a Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. NORMAN CHARLTON—"Christian Science."

Nelson Branch N.S.S. (Rhoda Street): Sunday, 2-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON—"A Challenge to Freethought."

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Cafe): Sunday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—"Evolution."

THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST

THE entirely necessary, creative and uplifting sense called moral, the sense that mainly distinguishes man from the brute creation is, strange to say, of lesser importance in the organisation which goes by the name of the Church. Jesus of Nazareth, a universal figure, who, if history is to be accepted, went about Arabia with the sole purpose of doing good and seeking to destroy the irrelevancies, the shams and the sophistries of religious and philosophical thought and worship which were current in his time. But never was he the founder of the Christian Church as men understand it, much less of its theology, rites, ceremonies and governance—in fact, he instituted no Church whatsoever, but preferred to wear the marks of an itinerant preacher more humble than Socrates and as lowly as the commonest slave.

The most casual glance at religious history will show that our ecclesiastical organisation was originally the work of a number of sympathetic followers of the Nazarene preacher, whose great and difficult objective from his boyhood to his death was to make moral conduct (it runs deeper than mere behaviour) the chief corner-stone of inward happiness, and the foundation of all human reflection and effort. He radiated this supreme idea by apt precept and fearless example, as being the only true and cogent religion; and in order to give weight and proof of its elemental and permanent values and harmonious relationship with reason itself, he thought out and formulated his cherished principles in what is known as The Sermon on the Mount; it was the unanswerable climax of his whole tutorial career and a challenge to the world at large, and it may be accepted, I think, as the most beautiful and the most moving peroration of its kind which has ever proceeded from the mouth of a single man.

But what are we to say concerning the conventional and platitudinous glibbery that so often masquerades in the name of Christian Faith? What kind of faith did the Nazarene himself have in mind when he talked of faith in God Almighty and faith in himself? The answer to any thinker who is free is simply enough and unobscure.

If we accept the idea of a living God we must accept him as an Intelligent and Moral Being, otherwise we do not accept him at all; and it is extremely difficult to conceive of that Supreme Intelligence as being devoid of the Moral Attribute—in point of fact we must, in all reason, postulate God as a Moral Being (any other view in this connection would deprive him of all creative power), and any faith that life incurs must therefore be concentrated entirely upon that moral or ethical factor. Thus, the faith which the Nazarene had in view was a wholesale surrender to and trust in the moral poise of the universe, not an exclusive and synthetic form of faith in himself as being the one source of human salvation.

The truth is that the moral state of the known world in Jesus' time was so low and hopeless that only by a complete revolution in thought and activity could society be saved from itself. The age demanded an honest teacher who would have the courage of his convictions; and so Jesus, the great moral enthusiast, arose, with a clear mind, an extraordinary personality and gifts equal to the task; and though he became a martyr in the cause of righteousness in general, he more truly lost his life by reason of his avowed hatred of and aversion to the prevailing creedalism, doctrinarism and practices of the Jewish hierarchy: he thrust his moral rapier into their tenderest spot, and paid the price.

Jesus, the Nazarene, might well have called himself the "Son of God" or the "Son of the Father" (he also styled himself the "Son of Man," which he undoubtedly was), but having in view—and this is important—the everyday metaphors of Eastern expression, he no more meant the phrase to be taken literally than did Petrarch the sonneteer, when he designated himself as the Son of the Muses; for these statements, and thousands more

like them in the Bible, were meant to be taken symbolically. Thus, we have (1) Morality; and (2) Faith—faith in the moral order of the Cosmos (there can be no other true order and, therefore, no other true faith).

But how does the supposed Christian Church stand on this supreme question? It is a question of great moment in the ordering of our lives, and needs clarifying. In the summer of 325 A.D. there came to Nicea from Spain, Gaul, Italy, Africa and Asia Minor, 318 self-appointed Bishops. It was indeed a strange and solemn occasion, this first formal meeting of the Roman Empire and the Roman Church, inaugurated by Constantine, the imperious "convert" to Christianity, who, if history is to be regarded, was an avowed glutton and the murderer of his brother-in-law and nephew. Strange and solemn indeed! This cosmopolitan band, for the bloody grip of persecution had only just been loosened; these prelates still bore the marks of Roman torture under Diocletian. They even remembered the Decian miseries, and had seen their companions dragged naked through the streets or destroyed in the arena—although the rising generation already lived under the "edict of toleration," which was little better than no toleration.

This band of ecclesiastical gentlemen, who had good cause to hate cruelty and all other bestial immoralities, sat stiff with torture and set about to argue for the space of years as to what was or was not Christianity. To go into details of this discussion which, incredible as it may seem, centred on everything except broad moral principle and practice, would require a series of articles. Sufficed it to say that it seems strange that such a type of council should have been necessary; for the very essence of the religion for which, through their bigotry, they suffered, was fundamentally moral; and the heaped-up dogmas and doctrines which they at first questioned and at length agreed upon and formulated for posterity are, in the plain light of reason, totally unnecessary to salvation or the re-ordering of our lives.

And so, in the Articles of Religion, we find it writ that Spiritual Faith, which mainly implies an unquestioned belief in the "Divinity of Christ," the "Immaculate Conception," the "Atonement," the "Redemption" and the "Apostolic Succession," are to the astonishment of all rational people, granted absolute priority, while good works, or moral conduct, are arrogantly relegated to a second or even last place—as if virtue is to be considered of minor importance in life. In addition to the aforesaid Articles, we have in the Roman Church something still more impossible: the "Miracle" of the Host, the "Confessional Box" and "Absolution"—to say nothing of other forms of sacerdotalism, or relics of barbarism.

If Church teaching wants to save itself from itself, let it get back to the Sermon on the Mount, as being not only a fundamental of the Nazarene's mission, but a basis for true living. Orthodox Christianity is a dead letter, but virtue will remain for ever. But it is well to tell England and her ecclesiastical hierarchy that you do not educate a person by telling him what he knew not, but by making him what he was not.

W. N. BROWN, F.R.S.A., M.R.S.Litt.

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