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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Plight of the Church

THE Golden Age of the Medicine Man has gone. If it is to be found anywhere in a state of virginal purity it must lie in some unexplored corner of the earth that has not yet attracted the commercial instinct of the Christian missionary or the spiritualised appetite of the promoter of corporations and companies. Here and there are found certain obscure tribes in which the primitive priest rules the roost, or such examples as the primitive Australians that enable us, among other things, to understand the curious legend of Jesus, who came into the world without the encumbrance of an earthly father, but these survivals are few. In all above the very lowest type the power of the priest is limited by contact with more advanced experience, until we meet a stage such as faces us in the civilisation of ancient Greece and Rome, where two priests could hardly meet each other without a grin. The force of fact and the impact of knowledge will have its way—to at least some extent. The bulk of the higher social and intellectual qualities demand more delicate conditions than is to be found in sheer barbarism. But the decay of the Greco-Roman civilisation paved the way to a revivification of primitive religious ideas and enabled Gibbon to sum up his great work, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," by saying "I have described the triumph of barbarism and religion." Unfortunately for the world, the innings of the Christian religion has been a lengthy one. The finer players are gone, but the whole team is not yet "out." Its batting grows feeble, and many of those in the "field" seem fearful of making an easy catch.

### A Sad Future

The "Church Times" shows itself in a state of great perturbation with regard to the present state of religion, and by true religion it means what every professing Christian means, *My* religion. In the first place, it seems likely that the plot laid by Christian leaders, in conjunction

with the Board of Education, is not working out as smoothly as was anticipated. In spite of the encouragement given to the plot by the nation-wide insertion of articles, most of which bear the impression of coming from the same source, things are not going smoothly. To begin with, the Roman Church, which in this country wields an influence out of all proportion to its numbers and social utility, will not have anything to do with the State management of schools, save in the supply of funds, and a very moderate measure of improving their material outfit. It insists on appointing its own teachers, who shall all be approved Catholics, and that the schools so endowed shall be saturated with a "Catholic atmosphere."

The Established Church also declines to give up all its schools, but is willing to surrender those that are in a state of general dilapidation and are very ineffective. Against this is the growth of public feeling that from the elementary schools to the universities admission should be open to all, and that the sole key to entrance shall be the ability of the pupil. That would at once put an end to the monopoly of higher public schools by those who have the good fortune largely to dominate the government of the country. That at present rests largely upon influence and affluence. The war has, in fact, led to a much needed critical review of the whole of our educational system, and if that review is as it should be, we might well count that the war will have at least placed something on the credit side of the social ledger.

The particular instance of the uneasiness shown by the "Church Times" is a review, in its own columns, of two autobiographies written by members of the University of Oxford. It is noted that in these books there is evidence that religion—that is the Christian religion—is losing its hold on Oxford. "Religion," says the "Church Times," "is getting completely separated from her sister sciences," and "the younger representatives have somehow failed to make religion respectable to their contemporaries in other fields." We believe that this is not true of Oxford only, it applies to nearly all our higher schools and universities. How could it be otherwise? How can workers in the scientific and sociological fields treat religion with respect if "respect" means teaching students that the religious doctrines of the Churches are either essential to a complete life or that they contain any truth that has not its roots in sociological, physical or psychological science? Teachers and professors may not go out of their way to expose the now known origin and nature of religion, they may even treat religion with silence, but the silence is in itself a condemnation, for religion, if it is to live in a civilised society, needs the trumpet to be loudly and frequently sounded. The time has gone by when the sciences have to ask for the patronage and sanction of the Church. It is now the turn of the Church to attempt the proof that religion is in agreement with science. The idea of the ordinary student of theology in one of our universities



making religion "respectable" to a student of science is simply grotesque. The most the Churches can get is silence.

Both Mr. Woodward and Mr. Rowse, the two writers named, have been at All Souls, Oxford, for over twenty years. With both, their religion—judging from the review—has grown very thin. But both of these "twilight" cases illustrate the timidity of many who, having lost all real belief in Christianity, either remain silent or, one suspects, as an apology for not coming plainly and boldly as non-believers, pay lip homage to the religion they have discarded. For example, Mr. Rowse says that he was "as a boy" deeply affected on the emotional and aesthetic side of his nature by the Anglican ritual. He even had an ambition to become Archbishop of Canterbury. But, he says, "the Church of England is the Church I don't go to." The reviewer says he is "emotionally an Anglo-Catholic." But what on earth is this? If Christianity, whether High Church or Low Church, means anything at all to anyone, it should—one might almost say it must be—an intellectual conviction of at least the probable truth of Christian doctrines. But how does one become emotionally a Christian, whether the brand be Anglo-Catholic or any other? Christianity consists in a belief that a miraculous sort of an individual who came to earth for a particular purpose, remained on earth to assure himself that this purpose would be served, and then departed for heaven, via a crucifixion and a resurrection from the grave. He also left behind him an endorsement of a number of ethical and semi-ethical maxims, which he expected his followers would preach or practice. Now, these essential things must either be believed or not. But you cannot accept them on a basis of emotion only, even admitting that some degree of emotion may be found in the acceptance of every intellectual proposition. The real reading of this situation is a rejection of Christianity as intellectually unacceptable, and a dislike to say so because of the emotional drag of early associations.

The quotation from these semi-autobiographies lead us to a similar conclusion, but it is put in another way. Mr. Woodward is quoted as saying "So far as most men of my generation are concerned, Christian theology is a hindrance to understanding." That, so far, is quite clear, and we think it is really true of the majority of those who hold positions in our Universities. We have here a case where one should plainly and openly announce himself as being a non-Christian. Mr. Woodward did, once upon a time, cherish an ambition for entering the ministry. He spent a year at Pusey House and boarded in Paris with a number of priests. But both experiences led to nothing more than a giving up of all desire to preach Christianity and to conclude that it was a hindrance to understanding. He actually goes so far as to say in another quotation by his reviewer that when he attends commemoration ceremonies in his college chapel he feels about them as he felt when in a Moslem country he listened to a circle of devout men reciting from the Koran. He gave up all desires for the priesthood, he found Christianity a "hindrance to understanding," when the business of his life was to study and teach history. Why not call himself an unbeliever with regard to Christianity? It looks impossible to marry the attitude to the confession.

Perhaps the answer is found in a pure unreasoning sentimentalism. For he says: "I do not know any

ceremony on earth more profound, more humble and more magnificent than the Christian Mass." This is easily understandable, but it is no justification for attaching intrinsic value to emotions that might be as easily raised by a Wagnerian opera in which the old German gods figure. One may find pleasure in music whether one has cultivated taste and understanding for it or not, but it is a poor plea for not openly rejecting a religion that uses music to entice people into accepting what one believes to be utter falsity. After all, there are Atheists who stand high in the musical world both as writers and critics. And to a sensitive mind there must be something that is on the repellant side when one realises that the performance he is witnessing is used as a means of "hindering understanding."

It may also be noted that music performed in the way that Mr. Woodward admires may have an effect, similar in kind, without reference to Church teaching. What Mr. Woodward finds impressive in a Christian performance may be produced by a plain appeal to the simplest of human feelings. Albert Chevalier, with his "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road" and "My Old Dutch," doubtless produced a powerful effect on his unsophisticated listeners. After all, music and pageantry that does not touch the feelings of listeners is of no use to anyone. Given the change of audience, Chevalier would have knocked the Archbishop of Canterbury out of the ring.

### Music and Religion

By way of a footnote, it may be noted that the association of music with religious rites and ceremonies is a very ancient practice. It originates as a species of magic, and it may be vocal or instrumental. To get rain, there is a rain dance, in which the imitative sound of water falling is prominent. As a preparation for war a dance picturing the attack on an enemy and his destruction is the main feature. Of course, the performance becomes more elaborate as the tribal culture becomes more developed, but there is an unbroken continuity from the savage up to the High Mass in a Roman Catholic cathedral. In ancient Egypt, in early Greece, in primitive India, among the Jews, so soon as they appear in history, we have the same feature. David dances naked before the altar. The Jews used trumpets largely in their earlier religious forms. Polynesians depend mainly on drums, which are believed to have a soul. The African negro comes to America—not by choice—and brings his religious music with him. Other tribes use music as a form of exorcism that wards off disease. The bushmen use musical instruments for the same magical purpose. Whichever way we turn we find the same features marking the magical use of dancing and singing as part of primitive religious services. The doctrines and practices of the Christian Churches lead us straight back to the quality and nature of their doctrines and practices, if we will read the lesson.

Finally, there is no such thing as religious music. There is only music that is used in religious services. The plea so often heard, "I go to Church because I enjoy the musical service," is only another way of saying "I do not believe in religion, but I go because I do not wish to be found out." Religion begins honestly enough, but always ends in humbug and untruthfulness.

CHAPMAN COHEN.



## ROME IN ITS DAYS OF DECLINE

THE causes of the downfall of pagan civilisation and the long interregnum of unrelieved darkness that ensued, have been variously interpreted. Dr. Toynbee traces the eclipse of Greece to the Peloponnesian conflict and the inception of the overthrow of her Roman supplanter as a consequence of the struggle with Carthage. Gibbon regarded Rome's downfall as the triumph of barbarism and religion, and dates the beginning of the decline with the discreditable reign of Commodus, the unworthy son of the sainted Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. On the other hand, Mr. H. M. D. Parker, in his recent scholarly "History of the Roman World from A.D. 138 to 337" (Methuen, 1935; 15s.), considers that the decline had seriously set in during the principate of Marcus himself. "The peace that had prevailed with few interruptions under the equitable rule of Antoninus [Aurelius's predecessor] was succeeded by a period of incessant warfare. The northern frontier was overrun, and for the first time in 300 years the sanctity of Italian soil was violated by German invaders. The legions returning from the Parthian War brought with them plague, that spread over the Western Empire and decimated its population, and when on the death of the Emperor the government passed into the hands of his profligate son . . . the way was paved for the advance of military despotism."

Progressively, the frontiers of the Empire became less and less resistant to barbarian encroachment, while its rulers grew increasingly dependent on the good graces of the legions who made and unmade them. For the army, when wearied of its appointed commanders, usually put them to death. Apart from Severus and Diocletian and his successor Constantine, few emperors of this period died in their beds. The chronic civil strife and the warfare waged both East and West against their assailants sadly reduced the Roman population, while myriads of Teutonic barbarians were admitted within the Empire either as settlers or mercenary troops until, in A.D. 410, the Roman legions were withdrawn from Britain, when the Goths were besieging the gates of the Eternal City, the erstwhile majestic mistress of the world.

Under the sovereignty of Septimius Severus firm rulership was restored, but with the end of the dynasty he established, succeeded fifty years of military anarchy, and with the appearance of the plague, barbarian invasion and famine, the Imperial provinces were plundered and reduced to beggary.

During the period of the Severi, the Principate of the great Augustus and his successors was superseded by military despotism, while the social transformation commencing in the Age of the Antonines had been widely extended. The blended spirit of Roman Hellenism became impregnated with Oriental culture, and the development of a cosmopolitan outlook tended to undermine the former patriotism of the people. There was a revived interest in art, letters and religion, and the spread of various Eastern cults, Christianity among them, bore witness to the fluidity of the time. Crowds of gods and goddesses were adored by the motley multitude. In Rome, the older and long-revered deities were greatly eclipsed by the Egyptian Isis and Serapis and, above all, by the solar divinity Mithras, whose pre-eminence became very conspicuous.

Meanwhile, the Christian sects increased in number and influence. Sporadic persecution on a minor scale occurred, and even this was occasioned by the obstinacy of the more fanatical who refused to comply with the mild requirements of the State. Apparently, a far greater menace to Church authority than the hostility of the pagan authorities was the presence of several heretical sects within her own communion. "The most important of these heresies," observes our historian, "were Montanism and Monarchianism. The former, beginning in Phrygian Mysia as a form of ecstatic and prophetic revivalism with a belief in the imminence of the Second Advent, developed in Africa into a rigid

asceticism under the great apologist Tertullian who, despite his vigorous denunciation of heresies, was converted to its cause about A.D. 205."

A born ruler and organiser, though perhaps less efficient as a military leader, Diocletian, an Illyrian soldier, proved an exceedingly able administrator. Although under his direction the Roman rule became absolute in character, this despotic sway was practically indispensable for the restoration of comparative tranquillity in the distracted State. No unscrupulous adventurer, merely bent on self-aggrandisement, Diocletian honestly endeavoured to restore order out of chaos after he had degraded the military usurpers who challenged his authority. But the Emperor soon realised that the vast and varied Roman domains needed subordinate governors, and Cæsars were appointed as his colleagues.

Among these was Constantius, the father "of a five-year-old son, the future Emperor Constantine, by a concubine, Helena." Diocletian's plan of appointing Imperial rulers to the provinces was fully justified by the events of the ensuing years, as these commanders were constantly engaged either in re-establishing the integrity of the Empire, or in defending its frontiers from barbarian aggression, while internal troubles also were not unknown. Despite these domestic difficulties, however, Diocletian's twenty years' reign was comparatively peaceful, and when he abdicated at Nicomedia in the presence of the legions in A.D. 305, another distribution of the Provinces of the Roman State succeeded.

Diocletian's leading colleague, Maximian, retired with the Emperor, but his bold, ambitious son Maxentius was greatly affronted by the elevation of Constantius's "bastard offspring" Constantine to the rank of Augustus by the Roman legions in Britain on the announcement of his father, Constantius's, death at York in A.D. 306. Maxentius ruled in Africa and Italy, so the diplomatic Constantine acknowledged his status as Augustus and minted coins on which Maxentius was depicted as sovereign. Another military ruler, Galerius, invaded Italy, but the City of Rome was barred against him and he was driven to retreat. For some unknown reason, however, Maxentius refrained from pursuit of his baffled enemy. Constantine was urged by his advisers to invade Italy across the Alps, to shatter Galerius's disappointed army and then overthrow Maxentius. But Constantine decided to wait, and such was the widespread anarchy that prevailed that Diocletian was eagerly but unavailingly implored to resume authority. The contending generals plotted and counter-plotted for supremacy, but the astute Constantine gained the greater headway. He added Spain to his sphere of administration and later determined to advance on Italy.

Galerius died in 311 and the number of Augusti who aspired to govern the State was reduced to four, but no permanent agreement concerning their respective claims was possible as this was precluded by their mutual animosity and mistrust. In A.D. 312, Constantine marched from Gaul to Italy. Turin was taken and Milan and other cities surrendered without resistance. Verona capitulated, Modena was soon captured and the way to Rome was now open to the invader. Fantastic tales have survived concerning Constantine's easy conquest of the Eternal City with forces immensely inferior to those of Maxentius. But the latter made the fatal blunder of leaving the strongly fortified and amply provisioned capital to defeat his assailants in the open field. Parker dismisses the story of the deceptive prophecy in the Sibylline Books as the cause of Maxentius's folly, and notes that: "It was a mistrust of the temper of the populace that impelled Maxentius to leave Rome." His victory assured, Constantine entered Rome in triumph. The head of the dead Maxentius was exhibited and his memory anathematised. As our historian relates: "Christianity had won its first official victory, and a statue of Constantine was erected in Rome with the cross in his right hand as the symbol of his triumph."

(Continued on page 231)



## IN DEFENCE OF H. G. WELLS

## Wells v. Graham and Others

MAY It Please Your Lordships, the People of England:—In this case I appear for the defence of H. G. Wells, an author of genius, who has committed the unpardonable crime of daring to write what he honestly thinks in England in war time.

The prosecutor is one Captain Alan Graham, an obscure politician and the Member of Parliament for the unfortunate Wirral Division of Cheshire, and he complains that Mr. Wells has written an article in the "World Review" ridiculing a French citizen, General Charles De Gaulle.

Now Frenchmen are proverbially sensitive to ridicule. Still more are French generals! Especially to-day, which is not exactly the age of Napoleon and his Marshals! Perhaps French generals must not be laughed at in England because French generalship has been no laughing matter in France.

People of England: you need not read the article by Mr. Wells before deciding the issue raised by the gallant English captain and honourable politician. You are able to understand the plain issue in this case without reading the article. For the issue is freedom—the right of Mr. Wells to say what he damn well pleases by voice or pen concerning Anybody (subject to Law Court proceedings restraining libel, or slander, or other public or private delicts) without any interference by any politician, whether he be Alan Graham, Brendan Bracken, Herbert Morrison—or even that world-bestrident Colossus, the great Winston Churchill himself, who would agree with me.

True, Mr. Wells is that distrusted creature, an original genius. Also he is an author. Also he is a sincere and powerful critic of the World-As-It-Is and Things-As-They-Are. Also he seems to have little (if any) respect for your God, or your King, or your Government, or your Parliament, or your Financial, Commercial or other established institutions. To some or all of these abominable crimes, black and disgraceful as they are, he might have to plead guilty if he were charged with them.

To an even worse crime—that of not always writing as well as he can, and even to being slipshod and superficial in his work sometimes—Mr. Wells may also have to plead guilty.

But here he is not charged with any of these high crimes and misdemeanours. He is charged with daring to write freely about a Personage. Other Personages are naturally indignant. Brendan Bracken has a "Chief Press Censor" to look into such matters. Regarding Mr. Wells, Herbert Morrison tells you, the once-free People of England, that "careful watch will be kept," for he is "anxious" (what fiction!) about the "prejudice" created by such "irresponsible attacks." Watch the carefully-watching Morrison, people of England. You need to. Especially you of his own party, unless you have forgotten how Ramsay MacDonald sold you! Watch that he does not steal your birthright of free speech and free writing, and that he does not put you in prison without trial—and end as an Any-Old-Party Prime Minister helping the nation towards World War No. 3.

Freedom of written speech is as important as freedom of spoken speech. Little of either is left in England to-day. The "Daily Worker"—once suppressed by this same Herbert Morrison, and let that never be forgotten by those who have a use (or no use) for that journal, for it was an offence not only against the Left but against us all—has dared to criticise some Poles. Other journals whose Polish names I don't know (and they don't matter) have dared to criticise some Russians. Such wicked conduct "by small obscure papers" does "infinite harm," says the great Brendan Bracken. How a small obscure paper can do infinite harm I do not know; but I imagine it must be on the same principle that a newly-born babe will shoot you dead

if it is handed a revolver immediately it is born. And the "infinite" harm is done to what? To the war effort, people of England, and to the unity of the United Nations! Yes, indeed. Believe it or not. Brendan Bracken has said it. In that Temple of Wisdom, the House of Commons.

Be careful, people of England. Call English Tom, Dick or Harry, a donkey—and you may! But call Sikorski the Pole, or Stalin the Russian, or De Gaulle the Frenchman, a donkey—and the war will be lost! You must laud and magnify these war-time gods, even though they are foreigners. Careless talk costs—Allies! One smile at him, and Sikorski will quit. One satire on Stalin and that sensitive plant, the Russian Army, will wither. One unkind word about De Gaulle—and he'll even go so far as to speak to Giraud and take to drinking Vichy water. . . . Hush, please!

But the right of H. G. Wells to write as he pleases of General De Gaulle, or anyone else, is the right of every Englishman in the street or the public house to say what he pleases about Graham or Bracken or Morrison or Churchill or "The Times" or the "Daily Mail" or the "Daily Worker" or anybody (even our sacred Government!) or anything. The right of H. G. Wells is your right and my right. It is a fundamental and inalienable human right. It was a right of your fathers; it is the right of your children. Let no scurvy politician filch it on any pretence such as "The War." (The priests used to try in the name of religion.)

You can well understand the desire to muzzle H. G. Wells. His voice counts. He speaks with the tongue of men and of angels. He dares to want a World State. He dares to want the abolition of war. He does not believe that we have the Best Possible World, the Best Possible War, the Best Possible Government, the Best Possible Society, the Best Possible Religion. And his free-thinking voice on such subjects provokes the multitude to think. And if people begin to think, what may not happen to the World, the War, the Government, and the rest? Do you wonder that they—the politicians whose world, whose war, whose Government, it is—hate and fear such a voice as that of H. G. Wells? His voice is not "official."

Though I appear here for the defence, people of England, it is a piece of superogatory impertinence for me, or anyone, to defend Mr. Wells. Your own instincts, your own knowledge of his character and achievements defend him. By his books, pamphlets and articles over a lifetime of literary activity he has provoked your thought, stimulated your imaginations, entertained your leisure, made his potent, novel and progressive ideas part of your lives and part of the thought of the English-speaking world. He has made you better and happier while the politicians have made you wicked and more wretched. Compare the living words of Wells to the arid, sawdust, political commonplaces of our venial Members of Parliament!

I ask with confidence for a verdict for Mr. H. G. Wells. And when that verdict is given let Graham, Bracken and Morrison face a Bill of indictment for their black and treasonable conspiracy against one of the fundamental Liberties of Humanity.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

## EXAMPLE

Time, which cures and effaces all ills, will shortly no doubt restore to the Prussian States their abundance, their prosperity and their first splendour; the other powers will be similarly restored; then other men of ambition will incite to fresh wars and cause fresh disasters; for that is the peculiar nature of the human mind, that examples correct nobody; the follies of the fathers are lost to their children; every generation must commit its own.—FREDERICK THE GREAT.



## COPERNICUS, 1473-1543

(Concluded from page 215.)

To describe this theory as ingenious is not enough: it was, in fact, an example of intellectual audacity. Copernicus had to do more than draw inferences from observations: he had to let his imagination hurdle forward over weighty obstacles and across great gaps of knowledge. There was so little up-to-date information to his hand. He had to rely on Aristarchus's measurement of the distance of the sun—which happened to be about one-twentieth of the true distance. He knew no more about the distance of the stars than did Ptolemy, 45 generations behind him. The telescope was undreamt of. No man in all Europe knew even the size of the earth, and any competent astronomer could produce half a dozen objections to the theory in as many minutes.

If the earth rotates daily and revolves round the sun, then why does the Pole Star stay fixed, winter and summer? Why doesn't the moving earth leave the clouds behind? Why do Venus and Mercury not show phases like the moon? To these and other questions Copernicus could do no more than guess at answers and declare his belief that future investigations would resolve the discrepancies. It is a measure of the man's greatness that, decades later, Tycho Brahe, with an abundance of new material at his disposal, worked out a plausible geocentric system and declared strongly against Copernican heliocentricity; and 60 years after Copernicus's death, Galileo was at first reluctant to champion the system for fear of ridicule.

Despite his confidence, Copernicus would not publish. The vested interests in Ptolemaic cosmology would not be lightly opposed. They were two: the Church and the astrologers. It was the morning of the age of Nostradamus, and they were by no means independent of each other, the Vatican, for instance, having an official soothsayer on its pay-roll. The Church, of course, was the more powerful. It had been built up on the delightful supposition that natural knowledge was incapable of further advancement. Fortunately, it so happened that early news of Copernicanism disseminated at a time when the Papacy was worldly-minded and sybaritic on the one hand, while on the other it already had an overloaded plate of heresy, the aftermath of 1517, in which year a young priest had unhallowed the hallow'een by nailing rebellious theses on a church door in Wittenburg. (Incidentally, Copernicus had no antagonist more vehement than Martin Luther.)

The reigning Pope himself read Copernicus's abridged conclusions and was short-sighted enough to accept them as forming an interesting *hypothesis*, useful possibly as an aid to astronomical calculations, but not germane to physical reality. Copernicus realised the theological implications better: he lay low. When invited by the Lateran Council to assist in a proposed revision of the calendar, he declined, archly pleading that the motions of the sun and the moon were as yet too imperfectly known. His famous book might never have been published but for the efforts of an enthusiastic young professor named Rheticus.

With admirable subtlety, and perhaps a tinge of irony, "De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium" was dedicated to His Holiness Paul III.—the Pope under whose auspices the Index was later established. The book made no immediate stir in the Church or among astronomers. Giordano Bruno, some 40 years later, was the first man to become consequentially interested. The story of his somewhat fiery advocacy of a super-Copernican theory "that there is no body that can be said to be in the centre of the world, or at the frontier thereof, or between two of its frontiers," and how he finally when to the stake for his opinions, occupies an important niche in the history of intellectual emancipation. But it was not until the *affaire* Galileo that Rome definitely laid it down that the Copernican system was

"absurd and both philosophically and theologically false," a dictum that was not rescinded for two centuries.

The churchmen can hardly be censured for declaring against the motion of the earth; in so doing they were at one with the majority of pundits from Francis Bacon downwards. But they were wrong to persecute; and their successors cumulatively discredited the Catholic cause by holding out against overwhelming scientific testimony. The inevitable surrender was made in 1822. In the meantime, Kepler had refined Copernicus's circular orbits to ellipses, Cassini and others had pushed the sun back to something like its proper distance, Newton had girt the whole structure with his theory of gravitation, and the French and German astronomers of the 18th century had smoothed off all the outstanding raw edges. Still, it is unnecessary to dwell on the conduct of the Church to this particular branch of science out of so many towards which it has been, like that of Lear's Old Person of Chile, both painful and silly.

To-day, in the era of photographic, spectroscopic and Einsteinian astronomy, we are very knowledgeable about the universe and the solar system. The cosmology of 1943 can easily out-Bruno Bruno in its immensity, its scorn of frontiers and in the number of its constituent worlds. Its complexity and abstractness would have appalled Copernicus could he have had an inkling of them. Yet he, an unassuming citizen of pre-telescopic Europe, made one of the greatest and certainly the most fundamental of all abstractions when he boldly unanchored the earth and sent it rolling round the sun.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

## ACID DROPS

THINGS are really moving in the Scottish Christian world. In spite of all that John Knox had to say of the innate wickedness of women, and particularly that they must not in any circumstances be permitted to hold power over the men, the Church of Scotland is on the point of deciding that women may hold the rank of Elders. More startling still, a commission is to decide some time in the near future whether women may not be admitted to the ministry.

Christians do move, and when they are bitten with a mania for reform nothing can hold them back. It is quite true that it took the semi-world war of 1914 to secure women the vote in this country, and it is also true that Christians are driven to confess that women are very useful in the present war—even to the extent of handling guns. It is true also that Jesus never selected a single woman as one of his official disciples, and Paul thought it would be a good thing if men never married. True also it is that the greatest Christian Church in the world ranks celibacy as higher than marriage, true also that Jesus said that in heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage. But it may be that if there had been a war on at the time he lived he might have altered his gospel a little to add women among his immediate entourage.

After the downfall of Tunisia, General Giraud ordered a thanksgiving service to Joan of Arc, the protectress of France. Surely "Protectress" is the wrong word, for neither Joan nor Jesus nor his father (in heaven) *did* protect France. France fell, and so nearly did we. And in the end the situation was largely saved by Russia. Mind, we are not blaming the heavenly parties named. Perhaps the news was late in reaching them, perhaps they got mixed up as to which side was winning. Perhaps the heavenly host saw our immense growth in the production of lethal weapons and did do something, much as some of our leading politicians did all they could to help Hitler in order to keep Russia at bay, and finally were compelled to fraternise with that godless government when Hitler turned on us. These be puzzling questions to solve. We can only state them.



The Archbishop of Canterbury is something like one of Dickens's characters, Major Bagshot, "sly, devilish sly." Addressing the annual meeting of the Christian Evidence Society, a body which restricts all the "evidence" to the title, the Archbishop stressed "the need to lead men and women away from merely intellectual debates on the existence of God to a definite personal response." That is decidedly Bagshotish. The number of men and women who have given up religion as a consequence of attending to intellectual debates on the existence of God is very great indeed. So the advice of Dr. Temple means "Don't indulge in intellectual debates with an informed Atheist. Get into a state which you will be told is one of personal response, and you will then have no doubt that God exists."

Good advice, indeed, and we notice that the Archbishop practices what he preaches. So far as our memory serves, he has never ventured on a discussion with an Atheist, and we prophesy that he never will. It is better and easier and more profitable to go on affirming that he has established personal contact with God, than to make assertions that he would find it impossible to substantiate.

But, after all, this is a very old dodge. Some readers may recall one of the essays of Lucian, written in the second century of the Christian era, in which he depicts a debate between an Atheist and a Theist in the streets of Athens. The gods are disturbed by the poor show their defenders make on the lines of "intellectual debate," and the people seem to recognise it. Suddenly the defender of the gods goes round and begins to blackguard the Atheist. Then the chief god, Zeus, brightens up and cries, "That's it, that's it, call him names. That's your strong point. Don't reason or you will be as dumb as a fish." So says Dr. Temple to his followers, "Get away from intellectual debates." That is wise advice, even though it may lack intellectual honesty. And Christians are saved by belief, not by understanding.

The "Universe" reports that "every Catholic U.S. army flyer receives a priest's blessing before his plane leaves on an operational flight." That is very interesting, and one would like to know the percentage of accidents to these "sacred" flying men and those who go without any priestly blessing.

The "Catholic Herald" for May 21 (quoting from "Order Cristiano" of Buenos Aires) informs us that in Munich only 2.9 per cent. of the population are "pagans." Dachau, the notorious concentration camp centre, has 2,000 pagans in a population of 40,000. We are not surprised at the statement. When Hitlerism came to the front, and when it was being looked upon with a degree of favour by a number of influential people in this country, we stressed the fact that it was essentially a religious movement, and that it had carried to a greater extent the policy of the historic Christian Church.

A difference of worded doctrine, and a greater severity in practice, could not alter the essential quality of the movement. The suppression of all literature that went against Nazi teaching, the burning of books, the taking severe charge of children from their earliest years, the suppression of all opinions that were unauthorised—so far as that was possible—the execution or imprisonment on the charge of "heresy," the creation of a bogus history concerning a "superior" people, all these things were familiar to anyone with a general knowledge of the Christian Churches. At most the difference between Nazism and Christianity was one of degree; there was no difference in fundamental character. The *form* of the religion had changed, but in its essence it fell into line with the Christian Church. And the greatest horror of all—the treatment of the Jews—would hardly have happened without Christianity, for without the Jew-baiting that took its worst and stereotyped form under Christianity, the Jewish religion would probably have died out long since.

In a recent issue of "Reynolds" Mr. H. M. Brailsford calls attention to the slackness of our Government in relation to the Continental Jews. He complains that the Government has never taken the matter seriously, and has refused to appoint an official

of Ministerial rank to take the subject in hand. Palestine, which, he says, could have taken in 30,000 Jews, has received a mere dribble, although it was understood that the Bulgarians were ready to allow "some thousands of Jewish children to go with a limited number of adults." The difficulty of ships that has been pleaded could have been met by using the vessels of neutrals.

The claim of the Home Office that they had admitted refugees generously Mr. Brailsford meets with a flat denial, as most of these were Dutch and Norwegian seamen, who are in the war, and Breton fishermen, who joined the Fighting French. He says, quite plainly, that "on the score of mercy and humanity" none has been admitted. It is only after months of pressing that the Home Office has at last admitted refugees "who have a son serving in our Forces or in Allied Forces." It is a very serious statement, and the Government should be forced to face it.

The B.B.C. is getting into hot water with regard to its broadcasts on religion. The Free Church of Scotland has officially protested against the broadcasting of religion on a "modernistic and Romanistic" basis. We are not surprised. What every Christian wants is *true* religion, and with Christians the only true religion is *my* religion. Man must have real Christianity if he is to be saved, but what that is Christians have been quarrelling about ever since they have existed.

The British Bible Union has also protested against the B.B.C., particularly regarding the broadcasts on "Man's place in Nature," etc. We sympathise with these backwoodsmen of the Christian world. How can one expect children to grow up real Christians if they are not in their early years kept in ignorance of what is elementary scientific teaching all over the educated civilised world? The Bible Union says that "with rapidly increasing crime, immorality, etc., the B.B.C. appear to be directly strengthening the forces of evil." Perhaps one day even the B.B.C. will discover that honesty all round is, after all, the wiser and more profitable policy.

When the war began and we were covered with a mass of jacks-in-office with all sorts of fantastic regulations, and all news, more or less truthful, was issued by Ministers of Information, we said that it was quite easy to appoint these men—and perhaps some of them were necessary—but the trouble would be to get rid of them when the war is over. They were appointed in the nation's interest, and it will be hard to convince them that the nation can ever get on without them.

So we were not surprised when the "Evening Standard" for May 27 reported Mr. Thurtle—of all men—telling a Manchester meeting that the Ministry of Information is looking forward to exist *after* the war. He said: "It will be essential for the Government to have some instrument for spreading knowledge and explaining policy." We were pleased to find the "Standard" against the creation of a permanent "Ministry of Information" with a very strong opposition against any such thing. The Editor (?) says that during war we are obliged to submit to a lot, but when the war is over,

Heaven spare us from a system under which news, and therefore opinion, is rationed, controlled, strait-jacketed or cut according to utility patterns.

And of Bracken:—

Nothing in his life will become him like leaving it.

We do not think for a moment that Mr. Thurtle would have ventured on saying what he did on his own account. It was most probably a bit of "kite-flying" to see how the public would take it. Probably, after the slating of the "Standard," Mr. Bracken will repeat a statement he made some time ago, that when this war is over the censorship and the Ministry of Information will cease to exist. We thank the "Standard" for so plainly speaking. If we do not believe in a muzzled and miseducated public, we shall bury our Ministry of Information as quickly and as happily as possible. Mr. Thurtle should have refused the task.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

**W. B. COOK.**—Thanks for cutting. We are pleased to hear that after ten years reading you find this journal "improves with age." Your experience that "The Freethinker" passes through many hands before reaching the salvage stage is a common one.

**ERNEST MARTIN.**—We cannot say when the book will be published. Part has yet to be written, but it will appear as early as possible.

**W. J. FREEMAN.**—It is, of course, one of our war-time scandals that the clergy should be permitted to invade the factories, waste the time of people and, as licensed persons, induce a man to forsake his job and frustrate the war effort. If a factory goes on strike we are met with the picture of how many thousand working hours are lost. The clergy can waste hundreds of thousands of work-hours with impunity. In fact, they boast of it. Sorry to hear of your ill-health. Best wishes for improvement.

*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.*

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## SUGAR PLUMS

THE arrangements for the N.S.S. Annual Conference are now practically complete, and we believe the provinces will be well represented. The date of the Conference is June 13, to be held at Reggiori's Restaurant, 1 and 3, Euston Road, facing King's Cross railway station. The Conference will open at 10.30 a.m. prompt. Only delegates and members are entitled to be present, and they should bring their current card of membership with them. Luncheon will be served at the close of the morning sitting, price 3s., but it is important that those who wish to join in this should let the General Secretary know in good time. It is wartime. The Conference bids fair to be a successful one.

Members of the Executive and the President will be at N.S.S. Offices until 8 p.m. on Saturday, June 12, to meet visitors. The address is 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn. Furnival Street almost faces Gray's Inn Road, and a good bus service passes the street.

We are glad to be able to say that after many delays we have received a large consignment of the "Bible Handbook" from the binders, and all orders have been discharged. If any have not received their copies, will they please write at once. This is the ninth edition of this book, and the rate of sale has beaten all records. It would be well for those interested enough to send a copy to a relative or friend with the Forces. It will help to wipe away an unengaged hour, provide much material for discussion, and make many a padre hate the sight of it.

Letters received as a result of last week's "Views and Opinions" lead us again to say that there is no such thing in English law as a religious marriage; there is only

a civil marriage. If the couple about to get married wish to have the ceremony in a church there is nothing to prevent them, provided the person who performs the marriage ceremony is licensed by the State, and also that the marriage is performed in a place licensed for that purpose. That is the plain law on the subject. A minister of the Established Church is on the same level as a registrar of marriages, and holds the same licence as does the registrar. If, in addition to this, the couple who wish to be married also desire to stand on their heads, jump over a broomstick, or dance a can-can, there is no law to prevent them doing so. But the English legal marriage is a secular marriage, not a religious one.

Of course, the Church does not advertise this fact, which is why so many people are under a delusion on the matter. Thus the "Telegraph" for May 8 contained an account of a couple—both New Zealanders—who were married in a chapel belonging to the Church of England and by a Church of England clergyman. Shortly after the ceremony the couple discovered they were not legally married as the chapel was not licensed, although the clergyman was. A child was born and the matter was explained to the Home Secretary by the Bishop of Derby. The Home Secretary has, it is stated, made a provisional order legalising the marriage. We doubt very much whether the Home Secretary has any such power. And if anything turned on it and the order was challenged in a court, we think the "order" would be set aside as invalid. Our political Ministers have all sorts of powers nowadays, but we question the power of the Home Secretary in this. He has also promised to bring in a Bill to confirm the marriage.

The lesson here is that there is only one legal marriage in England and that is the civil marriage, although most clergymen hide the fact from their people. No minister of religion can perform a legal marriage unless that minister has been licensed to do so in a place which is also licensed for that purpose. In that case the minister is a licensed person deriving his authority from the secular State. The religious ceremony is in no degree different in value from the custom of throwing a pair of old shoes after the bride and bridegroom.

The young people of the West Riding are awkward little rascals who keep upsetting and confounding the theories of religious moralists. A few months ago it was revealed that only 3 per cent. of children interviewed by youth movement officials had any connection with religious organisations. Now it is reported by the police that juvenile delinquency has diminished during the past year. The official Christian theory is, of course, that lack of religion increases juvenile delinquency. It's bad enough to have "The Freethinker" blowing up stupid Christian theories without these confirmatory kicks from Yorkshire youngsters.

A number of Manchester businessmen recently met and decided to do what they can to "influence the affairs of the nation on Christian principles." We are sure that all the clergy will welcome their effort. In order to lend a helping hand, we suggest that their slogans should be, "Take no thought for the morrow"—that should settle the Beveridge Plan, "Resist not evil," which should please and strengthen the bishops, and "If any smite thee on one cheek turn to him the other," which would please our forces on the ground, in the air and on the sea. We don't know how many this band of reformers muster, but the paper from which we take the news mentions "several prominent Manchester laymen."

We are pleased to see in the "Yorkshire Observer" well-written and lengthy letters on the "Bible and a slave philosophy," by Luke Straight. The name may be an assumed one, but it properly depicts the nature of the communication. We should like to see more letters from Freethinkers in the general Press.

It is largely a waste of time to try to prove that an Atheist is as good as a Christian. It is far more instructive to explain why a Christian is not usually as good as an Atheist.



## SOME OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

LET me once again say that every Freethinker has a right to his or her opinion and should always be allowed to state his case. Not for worlds would I oppose this right—but I do claim that other Freethinkers should be able to use a critic's privilege without angry personalities being let loose. Thus I have never been able to understand why so much opposition to the myth theory of Christian origins should come from so many Rationalists, who in turn object to their arguments being drastically analysed.

Nearly all, if not all, their arguments have been answered over and over again, though it would be absurd to say that we have yet got a *complete* answer to the orthodox position. All the same, we have gone a great deal further than was visualised, say, by Dupuis and Robert Taylor, and it seems to me that the arguments now gathered from mythology, anthropology and psychology, more and more strengthen the position they took up—that the whole Christian story is just fiction, and never was seriously meant to be anything else.

In any case, I always feel it is useless to appeal to Gibbon. He was, as Newman rightly pointed out, the only good ecclesiastical historian England has had, but he was in this connection more concerned with the "natural" rise of Christianity than he was with an examination into its origins from the point of view of comparative religions. Gibbon's famous two chapters remain a masterpiece of magnificent criticism—and terrible irony—and are invaluable to any student who wants to get a grasp of the causes which made Christianity become the conquering religion.

Another point I am bound to urge is that to appeal to the Gospels as genuine history must put all discussion out of the question, even if we are given the reservation "whatever veracity may or may not be conceded" to them. How can you concede any veracity to an account of miracles or such things as the Virgin Birth? If they are not true, then the Gospels have no veracity, especially if we take into consideration the undoubted fact that in the form we have them they were unknown before A.D. 150. When the believer in the reality of the existence of Jesus is faced with this, he nearly always throws overboard the miracles and supernatural happenings, and takes refuge in the position that the "other things," that is, the "natural" things, can (or must) be true because they could have happened—the very point which we are arguing about. It is as if I am told that, of course, Aladdin did not have a wonderful lamp, but it is nevertheless true that he must have existed because his mother really could have kept a laundry.

Anatole France's ironical description of Pilate forgetting all about the Crucifixion, in his wonderful little story in the "Etai du Naere," does not seem to me to be of much use in any study of the problem. It is fiction, and it was obviously designed as a crushing sneer at Christianity by a master who knew the value of such criticism when dealing with the solemn humbug of a ridiculous religion. So what? I really don't know.

We are often asked why the Jewish *nation* did not suppress the Christian *sect* when it arose, as Gibbon says, according to tradition, 40 years after the death of Jesus? The answer is quite simple. The Jewish nation had been for some time under the thralldom of Rome, suffering untold misery, and in A.D. 70 was battling for its very existence. The Jews were heavily defeated by Titus and most of them annihilated. The various sects among them who flourished before and after either disappeared or, like Christianity, battled also for existence until, as Gibbon shows, it finally triumphed. When could the Jews as a "nation" suppress it? Who would be the suppressors? Certainly, if the accounts in Josephus can be accepted, neither he nor any other Jew knew anything during the first century of any Christian sect.

The point at issue should be, when did believers in Jesus begin to assert themselves? We simply do not know—unless we accept the ecclesiastical historians upon whom Gibbon himself depended for his facts. They accepted Jesus as a real figure, as did Gibbon, but a lot of water has flowed down the Thames since then. Are we for a moment to believe that Dupuis, Volney, Robert Taylor, J. M. Robertson, Arthur Drews, W. B. Smith and Couchoud never asked themselves the simple questions which so many Rationalists evidently think are unanswerable?

How do we know that the Jews never protested that Jesus was a myth? We simply do *not* know. There is no contemporary history to tell us except that of Josephus, and he ignores both Jesus and any Christian sect. Even if we accept Tacitus and Pliny, they say nothing about the attitude of the Jews as a nation towards Jesus.

But we certainly do know what a young Jew said to Justin Martyr about the year A.D. 150. Trypho clearly declares that the Jews know nothing whatever about a Messiah, when he was born, or where. I have so often given the exact quotation in these columns from the Christian writer that I must refrain from doing so once more, for even if I did we should, in another year or so, still get the assertion from somebody who believes in a "dereligionised" Jesus, pathetically urging that the Jews never "repudiated his human existence." Is it not remarkable that there is no reference, or only one or two, to some kind of a Jesus in the early written part of the Talmud, while there are quite a few incoherent references to him in the later part? It was only when Christianity was becoming powerful that the Rabbis were obliged to notice and discuss him in the Talmud, and by that time it is quite true that Christian propaganda made them believe that Jesus was an historical figure. How could they prove in the sixth century that he was not? I venture to suggest that even we, with all the material available to us, would have some difficulty in proving that some event which we are told took place in the year 1443, never did.

Another oft-repeated assertion is that the Church would never have received the Canonical Gospels if their central figure had been a myth. The people who make this point seem to forget the undoubted fact, not that of the Church *receiving* the Gospels, but of *producing* them. It was the Church which imposed them upon its followers, just as it was the Church which selected four of the Gospels out of many, thus settling their "canonicity." In other words, there was a Church before there were the Gospels; and it was not difficult to get some people to believe in a new God called Jesus when they had already believed in Osiris or Adonis, just as the believers in Astarte had no difficulty in swallowing Mary.

I hope these few notes will show to new readers that at least some of the objections to the myth theory have very little, if any, validity. As the propaganda for Christianity is increasing in volume everywhere, it is all the more necessary to combat it. I know of no better way than to deny any historicity to its central figure.

H. CUTNER.

## "THE FOOL OF QUALITY"

HENRY BROOKE, author of a novel entitled "The Fool of Quality, or the History of Henry Earl of Moreland," was born in 1708 at Rantavan House, County Cavan. His parents were a rich clergyman and a well-born lady. After being educated at the school of Dr. Sheridan in Dublin, he went to London in 1724 to study law. Whilst still a student he became guardian to a lovely Irish girl of twelve summers, whom he placed in a boarding school at Dublin for two years and then married. They lived together very happily and produced 22 children.

Brooke practised eight years at the Dublin Bar with but little success, after which he relinquished his profession and returned



in 1736 to London. Here he rejoined a previous admirer and frequent correspondent, Alexander Pope, and acquired the patronage of other famous persons, including Littleton, Chatham and the Prince of Wales. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Brooke wrote a tragedy entitled "Gustavus Vasa," which the manager of Drury Lane Theatre accepted, and was on the point of producing when the Lord Chamberlain prohibited its exhibition because of its liberal sentiments. The author, however, issued it as a book very successfully.

He then took a villa at Twickenham, near that of Pope, and stayed there till 1740, when ill-health sent him back to Rantavan House, where he decided to remain. Subsequently, there were changes, favourable and otherwise, in his fortunes. Finally his pecuniary resources became greatly diminished by his generosity in developing his estate chiefly with a view to the public good. In 1772, upon the death of his wife, he retired to Dublin, where he lived in close privacy with his daughter Charlotte, then his only surviving child. The end came in 1783, when he departed peacefully out of a world in which he was no longer remembered.

Brooke was richly endowed with all the attractive characteristics of his people, being warm-hearted, imaginative and humorous. His full of generous emotions, lofty ideals and playful fancies. His admirable novel, "The Fool of Quality," came out in five small volumes, the first four appearing in 1766 and the fifth in 1770. Some critics regard the last as inferior to its predecessors, but to me there appear no adequate grounds whatever for that opinion. The final part was certainly planned at the same time as the others and, when executed, it furnished them with a befitting conclusion. The book is obviously didactic and tendentious, its purpose being to convey the author's ideas about politics, ethics and religion. There are many digressions, sometimes very lengthy, on those three subjects, particularly the last. He also to a large extent adapts his characters and his incidents to exemplify his principles.

All this, of course, is inimical to the artistic value of the work, which remains nevertheless considerable. The author was a staunch adherent of the system established by the revolution of 1688. The liberality of his views is well attested by the fact that, although he was an Irish Protestant of the evangelical type, yet he opposed the disabilities under which the Irish Catholics suffered at his day. One of the politico-moral aims of his book is to repress the pride of the landed gentry, and to increase esteem for the commercial class. But, all said and done, the principle involved amounts to nothing more than a change of plutocracies; and what has since happened in America is not flattering to that expedient.

The social panacea which Brooke strove to recommend, and which he himself brilliantly illustrated by his own conduct, is the practice of benevolence, especially in the form of munificent charity towards the poor. This was no doubt very helpful in his time, when destitution was appallingly prevalent. But he overlooked the fact that charity, by making the lowly feel more dependent, and imparting to the lofty a keener sense of their own superiority, tends to debase both the receivers and the givers; and also to increase the distinction of classes in the commonwealth. Religion, however, not sociology, is the thing which excites the greatest enthusiasm of Brooke, and occasions the most laborious of his efforts. He has indeed produced "a good religious novel," if the word "good" is here used in the same sense as physicians use it when they speak of "a good bronchitis," meaning that the malady as exhibited in the particular case is strictly true to type, no matter how disagreeable or dangerous it may be for the patient.

Almost all the characters presented in the book experience great calamities whereby they acquire a loving submission to the Divine Will. Then they are usually permitted to enjoy peace and plenty on earth with the glorious prospect of eternal felicity

in heaven; but occasionally they are prematurely removed by death in order that the affliction of their loss may help to perfect the sanctification of their dear ones, who often become endowed with other tender and delightful ties by way of indemnity. Thus, the whole scheme of Providence, as outlined by Brooke in strict accordance with Holy Scripture, consists of subduing the ungodly by overwhelming them with misfortunes and of confirming the godly by severely testing their faith.

Possessing a vivid imagination he was able to illustrate his thesis with a surprising number of varied examples, and if most of these would seem not to have even a bare chance of occurring in real life, this is a defect which he shares in common with a multitude of storytellers who have flourished since his time, and who are by no means extinct at our day! There is a difference between the extraordinary and the improbable; good judgment is required to perceive it, and also to make the unusual likely by assembling conditions under which it appears credible. As a novelist, Brooke, whilst exhibiting great originality, was obviously influenced by his illustrious predecessors and contemporaries, De Foe, Swift, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. He excels in tumultuous scenes, abrupt vicissitudes and amazing surprises. Distress, passion, floods of tears, roars of laughter, are the elements in which he loves to move. Intense was his devotion to the fair sex, and most of his women are adorable, but he subdues my patience when he calls one of them "a finished female." How he came by that unlucky expression I know not, for his style is habitually graceful.

As might have been expected of such a man, he has wit to garnish his humour, and is at no loss for satirical remarks and smart rejoinders. He was certainly not an ascetic! His youthful hero is carefully trained in wrestling, boxing, fencing, leaping and dancing, whilst among his most heavenly-minded characters a modest bottle never comes amiss. It is regrettable that a work displaying such conspicuous merits should be so little known. Hence the question occurs: could it be rescued from its present obscurity? The abscission of the political and religious digressions would not only relieve the book of its inconvenient prolixity, but would also greatly improve the narrative parts by bringing them into closer connection.

A number of shrewd observations which the author, in his own person and in that of his characters, makes upon a variety of topics, ought to be retained in justice to him and to his readers. But after these alterations were made, a feature which many at the present day could not but find repulsive would still remain. This is the presentation of religious traits and pious scenes which the author has introduced for the purpose of what he regarded as edification. Considered from the artistic point of view, most of these could be omitted without loss, and even with gain, but there are some the removal of which would involve a diminution of pathos and poignancy. The case is certainly one where nothing save the principles of art should determine the process of revision.

An alternative plan would be to issue a collection of extracts connected by brief explanations indicating the development of the story. The religious press is not likely to republish the work in any form, but a secular publisher might consider it worth publishing in one or other of the two forms above suggested, and if so, I see no reason why he should have to regret his venture. The first edition ought to be the standard, because the language of the later ones may have suffered from expurgation.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

#### IN IRELAND

"Almost all secular education is in the hands of the clergy."

"The clergy that teach have never received a true education. There are no laymen competent to teach at all."—Quoted in "Priests and People in Ireland" (1903).



## CHRISTIANITY AND DEMOCRACY

IN a broadcast on April 9 the speaker in the first of a series on "Religion and Politics" concluded his talk with the emphatic assertion that "Christianity is the life-blood of Democracy." This is all very well. He was, perhaps, expressing the views of a number of people in the country. But it is grossly unfair that such an opinion, from which perhaps the majority of people dissent, should be allowed to go unchallenged.

In our present struggle against the forces of totalitarianism (as the politicians put it) the most odious and much emphasised bogies of that kind of state are its curtailment of personal freedom, its veto on free speech, its suppression of all forms of criticism and its supreme power of authority over the individual. The unenviable aspects of that form of government are compared with the autonomous conditions of our own parliamentary system, and we are frequently reminded of our free Press, our freedom to discuss and criticise, and of our rights as citizens. It seems we are expected then to wave officially-approved flags, sing "Rule Britannia" with last-line fortissimo, and fight like hell to preserve this cherished freedom. Ostensibly it appears very heartening. But it is not the whole story. We realise, of course, that we have in this country a comparative liberty for which we are prepared to fight. We have a heritage that has greater significance than can be expressed in a patriotic song, or even in an epic poem. It is something for which, without the glib assurances of politicians, we are prepared to fight like hell. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not infallible. We must not allow a dwelling on past traditions distort our conception of the future. History is only the foundation on which to build something better than that achieved by our ancestors. There must be no blind eye turned towards progress. Progress is a vital force in democracy; and democratic progress—a movement towards the freedom, security and happiness of all mankind—can only be achieved by mutual discussion in which all shades of views and opinions can be freely expressed. This is the basis of our present system of government, and in politics we have a considerable freedom of expression. But when we enter the field of religion to try to apply analogous expressions of opinions, there we meet the big bad wolf of orthodoxy. Stop, it says. You may criticise the Government, the B.B.C., the Press, or even the Fighting Services, but when it comes to Christianity you must simply remove your hat, bow, and mutter incoherently or remain just mute. As a result, Christianity does not progress; and it never will progress. For if Christianity changes, its very nature must admit a change for the worse. It must retrogress. That is why it resents criticism.

John Stuart Mill, in his essay "On Liberty" wrote: "Where there is a tacit convention that principles are not to be disputed, where the discussion of the greatest questions which can occupy humanity is considered to be closed, we cannot hope to find that generally high scale of mental activity which has made some periods of history so remarkable." It is the present tacit convention that religion should not be criticised, which attaches stigma to persons holding avowed anti-religion opinions. While such a convention exists there can never be that complete freedom of expression for which democracy should aim. Encouragement is given to intellectual dishonesty by which intelligent men, rather than risk social obloquy by admitting their heterodoxy, clothe their views with an assumed orthodoxy. People are led to simple unquestioned beliefs rather than to profound thoughts. There is a limit to progress when people are taught what they must believe rather than to think for themselves. Yet when people can think for themselves they must be allowed to give expression to their thoughts with complete freedom. It is this expression which is the life-blood of democracy, not a moribund Christianity.

While our politicians continue to stir up the spirits of the people with grandiloquent speeches about freedom of expression,

we know that it is a limited freedom which really exists. It is an appropriate time now for the recognition of this important fact by all persons of influence. When this arbitrary boycott of anti-religious opinions is relaxed, the present despotic position of Christianity will be seriously affected. But as the position of Christianity has led to so much strife, persecution and misunderstanding, its downfall will be recognised by all true democrats as the heralding of the complete emancipation of the human mind.

S. B. WHITFIELD.

## A NOTABLE REPRINT

A YEAR or so back I dealt in these columns with a little work sent in by one of our readers for the office library, entitled "The Task of To-day," by Evans Bell. It was new to me, but I soon saw that, though published as far back as 1852, it was surprisingly vital and interesting and modern in outlook. Later I discovered that that indefatigable worker in the highways and byways of Freethought literature, J. M. Wheeler, had written a most appreciative article about it; and that I had overlooked what the encyclopædic John M. Robertson said about it in his "History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century." Here are his words:—

"But close upon their works [those of W. R. Gregg and F. W. Newman] came one of a closer and firmer logical issue, "The Task of To-day," by Major Thomas Evans Bell (1852), sold at a shilling in "The Cabinet of Reason." Issued by the Freethinking publisher, James Watson, that poorly-printed little volume did not command the attention of the respectable, educated world. It was nevertheless, though a young man's work, as well written and as valid a piece of argument as "The Phases of Faith," and was, in fact, handled in a more workmanlike fashion, if without the peculiar personal appeal of that moving treatise."

Robertson subjects the book to an able analysis extending over a page, which proves how strongly he was impressed by its clear and incisive argument. It should, therefore be a matter of congratulation that Messrs. Watts and Company have now added it to their widely spread "Thinker's Library," which will, I hope, enable modern readers to see where Freethought stood nearly 100 years ago.

In addition to being well printed and of a handy size, two features which characterise the "Thinker's Library," there is a most informative "Introduction" by Adam Gowans Whyte, who begins by calling it "a remarkable book." And he is specially struck by the way "its subject matter and its arguments retain their freshness almost untouched by time." He continues: "Among the innumerable half-forgotten works of the Victorian Age, few have so high a claim on their intrinsic merits to be remembered and revived; fewer still convey a gospel which is as much needed in the 20th century as it was in the 19th."

Bell proved himself to be as fine a champion for the liberation of India as he was for Freethought. As Robertson says: "An Anglo-Indian of his day was more highly esteemed by the peoples and native princes of India." He wrote many works on this question, his "Retrospects and Prospects of Indian Policy" (1868) being singled out by J. M. R. as "of special importance to the historian of British India."

For this edition, the title "The Task of To-day" has been changed to "The God of the Bible," and its contents abridged. I am personally very much opposed to abridgements, but perhaps the publishers are justified in contending that the omissions strengthen rather than weaken "the message which the book carries for the thoughtful reader of to-day—a message which bears directly on the problem of how to transform religion, which hitherto has divided mankind into hostile groups, into an instrument of unity."

H. C.



## ROME IN ITS DAYS OF DECLINE

(Continued from page 223)

For a century before Diocletian's accession there had been a gradual and almost imperceptible decline in municipal and personal liberty. The ruinous cost of wars, both foreign and domestic, with their constant accompaniments of starvation and disease, had rendered the State insolvent. To restore financial stability the Government compelled the population—both urban and rural—to furnish pecuniary and personal services to the State. The liberty of the subject slowly disappeared until, under Diocletian and his successors, State autocracy was completely established.

A parallel phenomenon was the increasing power of the Christian communities. Despite the truth that these converts to a creed of Oriental origin were still a pronounced minority, Constantine began his evangelising campaign by proclaiming universal toleration and to prepare the path for the subsequent adoption of Christianity as the sole State religion. The pagan rulers had long attempted to establish an official cult which might serve as a support to the tottering State. Now, Constantine was deeply solicitous to secure harmony within the Church, which was already teeming with disconcerting heresies. Councils were convened to calm the disputants, but when persuasion failed, force was applied to extinguish the damnable Donatist schism. "The Donatist churches," writes Parker, "were handed over to the Imperial Treasury, and a military repression of the schismatics was begun. These efforts were, however, unavailing, and four years later, perhaps in fear of acquiring the reputation of a persecutor, Constantine gave up an attempt to restore unity in the African Church."

There was also the notorious Arian controversy which, for a prolonged period, bitterly exasperated and divided the Church. Constantine, unsuccessfully attempted to act as mediator as a self-appointed bishop in this theological dispute. The Emperor's own domestic troubles at this time were little to his credit. The judicial murder of his son Crispus, and the drowning in boiling water of his Empress Fausta shortly afterwards, stained his character. No wonder then that the pagan scribes "rejoiced over these domestic tragedies, and Zosimus relates how Constantine, after vainly seeking expiation for his guilt from the pagan priests, was regenerated by Christian baptism."

T. F. PALMER.

## CORRESPONDENCE

SIR.—In your issue of May 16 Mr. Archibald Robertson says that Hitler (according to Sir Arthur Keith) "rightly stimulates the German birth rate." I doubt if he does, and he certainly does so much less than Mussolini and Mr. Churchill have attempted to stimulate their birth rates.

Hitler has severely denounced the high birth rates of a generation ago. I have never seen the English version of "Mein Kampf" but on page 255 of the 20th German edition, dated 1933, he says:—

"Through the mad increase of the German people before the war, the question of providing the necessary daily bread came in an ever sharper manner into the foreground of all political and commercial thought and action." (Durch die rasende Vermehrung der deutschen Volkszahl vor dem Kriege trat die Frage der Schaffung des nötigen täglichen Brotes in immer scharfer werdender Weise in den Vordergrund alles politischen und wirtschaftlichen Denkens und Handelns.)

Hitler says nothing in his book about raising the birth rate, and he has said very little since. Mr. Churchill, on the contrary, has been clamouring for more babies for years. In "News of the World" for September 25, 1938, he devoted a whole page to the subject, denouncing "the egregious Malthus," and predicting terrible results from the deficiency of babies. A few weeks ago he was at it again. Mr. Herbert Morrison, who seems in many ways to be qualifying for the premiership (Conservative or Socialist?) is also demanding fuller cradles.—Yours, etc.,

R. B. KERR.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

## Report of Executive Meeting Held 27th May, 1943.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present Messrs. Clifton, A. C. Rosetti, Bryant, Ebury, Horowitz, Griffiths, Mrs. Quinton, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Chester-le-Street, North Staffordshire, Edinburgh, Kingston, West London Branches and the Parent Society. Correspondence, lecture reports and future arrangements from Canada, Newcastle, Chester-le-Street, Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, New York and London were dealt with. A cheque for £55 10s. 5d. from the executors of the Easterbrook Estate was acknowledged. The annual balance sheet was presented and passed. Various items in connection with the Annual Conference received attention.

The proceedings then closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary.

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## LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park): Thursday, 7 p.m., Mr. E. O. SAPHIN; Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. G. E. WOOD and supporting speakers.

## LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11 a.m., Rev. F. M. MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.—"From Supernaturalism to Humanism."

## COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway): Sunday, 6-30 p.m. (if wet, Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate), a Lecture.

Burnley (Market): Sunday, 6-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound): Sunday, 7-30. Debate, "Sin and Freewill"—Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE, M.A.; and Mr. F. SMITHIES.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Church Street): Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER, a Lecture.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Bigg Market): Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Read: Wednesday, June 9, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Wheatley Lane: Friday, June 4, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Burnley (Mechanics' Institute Lecture Room): Thursday, June 10, 8 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON—Lecture in Esperanto, *La Nova Psihologio Kaj Religio*.



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