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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and His Religions

WITH a fine display of anemic courage the B.B.C. staged a series of "talks" on what it called "Great Religions of the World." Save for the fact that two out of the seven—Buddhism and Confucianism—were *not* religions, the general title was correct, and to have achieved two-thirds of the truth where religion is on the carpet is a noteworthy performance for the B.B.C. That would never have been permitted had Reith been in power. As a matter of fact, the whole of the seven were more or less "mugged" by the appointment of a visible "ghost" in the person of Sir Frederick Whyte, who appeared with each talk and whose main duty seemed to be that of keeping Christianity in front of listeners on every occasion, with a kind of a hint that any system that was not to some degree sympathetic towards Christianity was deficient. The famous "I believe that Carthage should be destroyed" of Cicero was never worked harder than was Sir Frederick's determination to suggest the superiority of Christianity to everything else. But then the avowed aim and duty of the B.B.C. is to keep their presentation of Christianity down to the level of the least educated section of the community. There were seven lectures—Primitive Religions, Hindooism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and Judaism.

It is 74 years since E. B. Tylor wrote his important "Primitive Culture; Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Religion, Language, Art and Custom," and so laid the foundations of a real science of anthropology. Since his time there has been a perfect spate of works dealing with the origin of religious ideas, right up to the gigantic work of Frazer, and the development is still in process. But while there is much more work to be done—for in science there is no finality—we know to-day the process by which the gods—all the gods—came into being, and by what steps religions took on their present forms. As Tylor put it in plain language, there is not a single feature

of the Christian *religion* that cannot be traced back to the primitive savage, and that applies to all religions.

So one would have imagined that the first of the series of talks—Primitive Religions—would have been handed over to one of our many authorities on anthropology, as a needed introduction and understanding of the succeeding lectures. That would, of course, have put the twittering of Sir Frederick Whyte out of court, and so have prevented the B.B.C. keeping its religious outbursts down to the level of the more ignorant of believers in Christianity.

So for the task of explaining primitive religion a Christian clergyman, the Rev. Cullen Young, was selected. One might as reasonably have selected a sixteenth century chemist to explain the position of the chemistry of 1943. Helped with the interjections of Sir Frederick Whyte, Mr. Cullen Young was professionally satisfied to centre his contribution on the bald statement that all primitive peoples believe in gods and some in a supreme god. And that is simply not true if we are to consider crigins. The belief in "Mana" precedes the gods; it is, in fact, the state of mind—still existing in even Christian Britain—from which the gods develop. A consideration of this is so important that we must digress a little from our main theme to explain the nature of "Mana."

Curiously enough it was a Christian missionary, the Rev. R. H. Codrington, who first brought "Mana" clearly before the scientific world. He describes it as "a power or influence, not physical, but which shows itself in physical force or in any kind of power or excellence a man possesses." Codrington was of opinion that "Mana" belonged to personal beings, a belief that obviously originated with his belief in God, but later research has taken a wider view and identified it with mere force, which does something, in fact, which does everything. Codrington actually gives an illustration which supports this opinion. To give us an example of "Mana" he says: "A man comes by chance upon a stone which takes his fancy; its shape is singular, it is like something, it is certainly not a common stone, there must be 'Mana' in it. So he argues with himself and he puts it to the proof; he lays it at the root of a tree, to the fruit of which it has a certain resemblance, or he buries it in the ground when he plants his garden; an abundant crop on the tree or in the garden shows that he is right, the stone is 'Mana' and has power in it."

"Mana," then, stands originally and principally for mere power. It does not stand for personality or the exercise of the influence of a "God," it is just power. Whatever a thing does, a stone falling on a man's head, an instrument that cuts, a fire that warms, is just "Mana." The belief in a personal being controlling or using the "Mana" of objects comes later. Those who wish for more detail will find it in the easily read and carefully compiled instances in Edward Clodd's "Magic in Names."

Why, then, did the Rev. Mr. Young, assisted by his prompter, or interlocutor, Sir Frederick Whyte, insist that all primitive peoples believe in some sort of a god? It is not in accordance with what is known of primitive—real primitive—thinking. There seems only two possible reasons. The first is the B.B.C.'s avowed intention of keeping its religion in the line of the "Christian tradition," by which it means avoiding disturbance of believers belonging to the more ignorant sections of the Christian world; and second, the ridiculous pulpit lie that man at all times is engaged in seeking for the true god. Mr. Young's illustration of his thesis is not worth the paper on which it is written or the breath used in stating it. Yet with scores of accredited anthropologists who could have described the real nature of primitive religions, the B.B.C., true to its Reithian tradition of dishonesty and falsehood where Christianity is concerned, presents the world with a clergyman who reads like a survival of the sixteenth century.

We need not bother with the talk on Christianity. It was really Christian in its bombast and unwarranted assertions. What is surprising is the impudence of putting Buddhism and Confucianism in the list of great religions. For both of these are Atheistic philosophies. Neither has any teaching about God save to set him, or it, on one side as of no consequence whatever. And a system without a God cannot by any honest means be called religious. The Buddhist who gave his understanding of the teaching of the Buddha would, quite properly, have nothing to do with gods, in spite of several fatuous interpositions by the faithful Sir Frederick. He specially emphasised the central teaching of Buddha as a philosophy of life based on an inflexible law of cause and effect. There was no room for miracles, no special creation, no forgiveness of sins, nothing to be gained by mewing and crawling before an imaginary god, and no personally degrading helplessness such as meet us in the Christian service that is served out to us by the B.B.C. 7-55 morning terror.

Buddhism, in short, is not a religion, and no honest interpretation of it can make it one. It has nothing to say about God creating the world and cursing or blessing the people he had made for their not being better than he left them. The great Buddhist Emperor, Asoka, under whose rule India reached its peak point of development, defined the lesson of life as consisting of goodwill, truthfulness, love, purity, nobility and goodness. Christianity—historic Christianity—has had much to say about purity and goodness, but it has had little to say about truthfulness, and had less to do with it in practice. It valued conduct only so far as it involved a salvation which it emphasised could not be gained by human values or deserts alone. "Man," said Buddha, "reaps as he sows." Just that and nothing more; he must make his own life whatever it may be. All that teachers could do was to help by their council and by their example. When Buddha was asked could he perform miracles, he replied: "I despise and reject miracles of magic power. I and my disciples have recourse only to the miracle of instruction." The speaker might well have contrasted this with the thousands of fraudulent miracles that have been worked, and are still being worked by the Christian Church, and the daily lie of the priest and parson that God has called them to do his work. "Buddhism," says the writer of

the article "Magic" in the "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics," "ignores all the magical theories connected with sacrifice, worship and asceticism as a means of salvation. . . . All kinds of magical arts and performances are regarded as pernicious."

We have a parallel in Europe in comparing the greatness of Greece and Rome with the decline to the Dark Ages under the rule of the Christian Church. Had Buddha lived in Christian days his comment on this would have been "Men must reap as they sow." We may note that Buddhism has a history that reaches back 500 years beyond Christianity. Yet nowhere, under no condition, has Buddhism been responsible for persecution. We leave the reader to complete the parallel.

Naturally the B.B.C. would not say plainly that Buddha was a great Atheist. It would be too much to expect that degree of honesty, particularly while all its preachers are driving home the lesson that man cannot be happy without a bugbear in the skies to keep him along the path of decency.

We will deal with the Talk on Confucianism next week. Meanwhile we close with this from Buddha, the like of which is not to be found in the whole history of Christianity. One Kesa came to Buddha and said:—

"Lord, Brahmins and sectarian teachers preach their doctrines, each one asserting that what he teaches is the only truth. On this account doubt has overtaken us, and we do not know which to believe."

Buddha replied:—

"It is in the nature of things that doubt should arise. Do not believe in traditions merely because they are old and have been handed down for many generations and in many places. Do not believe anything on account of rumours or because people talk a deal about it. Do not believe because the written testimony of some ancient sage is shown to thee. Do not believe in what you have fancied, thinking, because it is extraordinary, it must have been inspired by a god or other wonderful being. Do not believe anything merely because presumption is in its favour, or because the custom of many years inclines you to take it as true. Do not believe anything merely on the authority of your teachers and priests. But whatsoever, after investigation and reflection, is found to agree with reason and experience, as conducive to the good and benefit of all, and of the world at large, that only accept as true, and shape your life in accordance therewith. Do not accept my doctrine from reverence, but first try it as gold is tried by fire."

That was the teaching of the Buddha, 500 years before the date given for the birth of Jesus Christ. Contrast it with the trail of Christianity which has been marked by falsehood, forgery, persecution and opposition to learning. And no man, woman or child has ever had to suffer in the name of the Buddha. Nearly 200,000,000 to-day repeat his name in reverence and are the better men and women for the repetition; better in their breadth of view, better in their tolerance of differences, better in their respect for man as man. Can anyone honestly say that of Christianity?

Next week we will deal with Confucius—the Atheist.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

GEORGE FOX AND HIS DISCIPLES

THE story of the Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, is replete with interest and instruction to all well-wishers of humanity. Despite the exclusiveness they have sometimes displayed, the Friends have rendered invaluable services to the cause of freedom, and their undeviating devotion to peace and philanthropy has ever been a distinguishing feature of their persuasion. An extensive literature relates to their activities and opinions, and this has recently been enriched by Professor Elbert Russell's "History of Quakerism" (New York, Macmillan, 1942; 15s.).

This important production embraces the entire domain of Quaker endeavour, extending, as it does, from the persecuting period of its founder, George Fox, in Stuart days, to the benevolent and pacific activities of the Friends during the First World War and its aftermath, the present struggle, down to the year 1941.

Fox was born in Leicestershire in 1624. He lived through the conflict between Charles I. and the Parliament, and felt the full bitterness of religious animosity until the Toleration Act was passed just before his death in 1691. Of Puritan ancestry, Fox was early influenced by theology, was scrupulous in all his dealings and began his missionary career at the age of 19. His melancholy, so common to adolescents, was occasioned less from any sense of sin than the problem of reconciling the professions of so many of his Puritan intimates with the very unspiritual lives they led. Moreover, the worldly, greedy and persecuting proclivities of the Anglican clergy filled him with dismay, while the royalist claim to divine rights, and the cruelties and miseries of the Civil War sadly disconcerted him. But the main cause of his despondency was perhaps traceable to the inflexible Calvinism of his childhood. As Dr. Russell observes: "He had been steeped in the doctrines of human depravity, predestination and eternal punishment. In its popular forms it made much of reprobation and little of election; so that in effect it consigned the great mass of humanity to eternal torment. Popular Puritanism believed theoretically in God's omnipotence; but in practice, as the writings of Milton, Cromwell and John Bunyan show, it believed more seriously in the devil, in hell and in sin. To Fox's sensitive soul this was a gospel of despair."

Anglican and Puritan pastors seemed of little worth when consulted, but Fox's craving for divine illumination and guidance was at last appeased by an apparently inward voice that assured him that Christ was alone the true comforter of despairing souls. He asserts that his heart leaped for joy at this emotional experience and gave him encouragement to continue his search for spiritual verity. The devil was dethroned and God grew supreme over all. For Fox felt himself no longer a wanderer in spiritual twilight, but the joyful possessor of divine grace and communion. Hence the Inner Light which so long characterised the Quaker cult.

Fox was both a religious and a social reformer, for he recommended care for the aged and penurious, penal reform, humane treatment of the American aborigines, provision for the mentally afflicted, while he combated capital punishment and the slave traffic. Honesty in trade and truthfulness in life generally he acclaimed as major virtues. Oaths so plainly repudiated by Christ must be renounced for good and all.

So earnestly was Fox bent on the wide world's conversion to the new evangel that he sent letters to the Pope, the Grand Turk, Prester John and, indeed, "to all nations under heaven." He was also its chief apostle both in Britain and America. His writings influenced many; he was the main organiser of the movement and he became its leading martyr. As Dr. Russell states: "He was imprisoned eight times for an aggregate of six years." Yet despite these sufferings in the insanitary and exposed

prisons of the time and the many other indignities he endured, his indomitable spirit afterwards sustained him during the terrible hardships he met with during his mission in America in 1671-73.

Women preachers in America—and women have always played a prominent part in the Quaker movement—in the opening years of the Friends' awakening were subjected to shameful treatment. They were flung into gaol in Boston and their books were burnt. They were stripped naked and their bodies were searched for signs of witchcraft. Under severe penalties master mariners were forbidden the right to carry Quakers into the colony. If a Friend returned after banishment he was sentenced to whipping and the loss of his right ear, while ultimately some who came back after banishment were put to death. But when Charles II. was informed of these drastic proceedings he ordered the New England authorities to send accused Friends to Britain for trial and, ironically enough, he sent this order by means of a banished Quaker. Executions were suspended and the Friends were given a brief interval of relative toleration. Other colonies were equally intolerant, but persecuted Quakers found security among other heretics in Long Island.

In several respects the Quaker movement constituted an intellectual revolt against Calvinism. The relentless deity of Calvin was converted into a sovereign Lord of redeeming love. As Dr. Russell phrases it: "They knew the universality of sin but did not believe that God held men guilty because of an ancestor's sin. They believed that salvation was open to all men, and that in spite of the evil in them, men were capable of apprehending and answering to the invitation of divine love." Indeed, with all their enthusiasm, the Friends have ever avoided any recourse to physical force.

To the average 17th century Christian, rites and ceremonies conducted by appointed ministers in a consecrated edifice were essential to salvation. The clergy were intermediaries between the Divinity and his worshippers. Fox and his adherents, however, contended that personal experience proved that divine guidance could be conveyed by an Inner Light made clear to consciousness without any assistance through clerical intervention. Even the Bible was best interpreted by the Inner Light, "for spiritual things are to be spiritually discerned."

Two centuries' persecution of the Friends by Church and State and the religious conformity of candidates for public positions ostracised the Foxites. Not that they refused to recognise the lawful authority of government or refrained from obeying its commands when these did not infringe their duty to God. Yet they never ceased their efforts to convert their oppressors by purely peaceful means to what they deemed the gentle precepts of Jesus.

Cromwell strove to establish toleration under the Commonwealth for all sectaries save Catholics, and in this effort he was supported by the Independents, but the Anglicans and Presbyterians proved too powerful to permit this. So the Friends continued to suffer prosecution and imprisonment. Interruptions in church were the offences most frequently urged against them, although the law permitted others to speak after the preacher had spoken for an hour. The refusal to pay tithes to hireling ministers was a common misdemeanour, as the Quakers contended that the Gospel should be without money or price. Their refusal to bow and scrape to magistrates and other exalted personages; their aversion to swearing an oath; their pacific principles which induced them to refuse enlistment in the army and even the charge of blasphemy were the pretexts for pitiless persecution. Moreover, they were actually suspected as Jesuits disguised as Quakers. It is greatly to Cromwell's honour that: "Many times he interfered to save or protect imprisoned Friends; there were many friendly Justices and about half the major-generals were tolerant."

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded)

THE MOON-GODDESS

I.

SOME of the writers trying to probe the origins of Christianity leave out of serious discussion the question of Mary, the Mother of God. It is true she is dealt with, but mostly in a very perfunctory way. Yet, as the mother of Jesus as well, she ought to be considered almost as great a personage. Indeed, the Roman Church does so consider her, and though always disclaiming that its adoration for her is as great as for Jesus, yet has failed to convince the rival religions that this is the case.

Still, who was Mary, and why is there no mention of her outside the New Testament and a few passages—not contemporary—in the Talmud which disclose the fact that the Jesus story did not find any favour with the old Rabbis?

To answer this question properly would require a volume. One must go into the whole of the Goddess mythology better to appreciate Mary's inclusion into Christianity—an inclusion bitterly resented by certain sections of Christian converts in the first centuries, and as bitterly resented by many Protestant sects during the 19th century.

Just as fictions were woven round the sun and his adventures through the signs of the Zodiac, so many stories came to be woven round the moon in connection with various feminine functions. There can be no doubt that the moon was considered at one time as having a very powerful influence on fertility. For the ancients, the fertility of the earth was a very big problem and they connected it with that of woman in no uncertain way. In her very interesting study of the whole question, "Woman's Mysteries," Dr. M. Esther Harding insists that for primitive man, "when he speaks of the moon as possessing and bestowing the power of fertility he means exactly *that*. It is no *façon de parler* for him. Plants and seeds would not grow without the influence of the moon. Animals and women cannot bear young without the energising power of the moon."

Needless to say, this was noticed by Tylor who, in his "Primitive Culture," shows that some of the natives of Brazil worship the moon—and there are many other accounts of various peoples who "esteem the moon more than the sun." In fact, not a few tribes actually believe that "no husband is needed for procreation, as the women become pregnant by the moon." But one could go on filling many columns here on what primitive races, past and present, think of the moon.

Dr. Harding points out how difficult it is for us to realise the logic or rationale at the back of all the beliefs about the moon, but "primitive man knows nothing about what we call logic." All the same we do know that even with us there are a few beliefs certainly not founded upon logic connected with the moon—such as the idea that the weather changes after the new moon. I have certainly found this true on occasions, but I expect it is just pure coincidence.

It is interesting to note, though, that in spite of the moon being definitely feminine in the opinion of primitive peoples, yet they would at the same time, as we do, talk about the Man in the Moon; and their kings would claim direct descent from the moon, some of them wearing in proof of this a horned headdress as a symbol of the crescent moon. And owing to the shape of their horns, the bull and the cow were also associated with the moon. On this point Dr. Harding thinks "the jumble of our own nursery rhyme shows perhaps a remnant of the old idea, 'the cow jumped over the moon.'"

Just as there were fictions written around the Sun-God being killed in winter and resurrected in spring (as in the case of Jesus), so fictions were written around the disappearance of the

moon during half the month. Dr. Harding, who subjects these stories to psycho-analysis, says:—

"The changes observed month by month in the actual moon were narrated as though the moon were a living being. They were garbed in human guise, for they were felt to be in some way typical of things that happen to men upon the earth. We now recognise that this sense of appropriateness refers to a psychological correspondence, not to some half-forgotten historical event of the heroic age. The myths which grew up about a natural phenomenon represent a perception of an inner subjective truth 'projected' to or perceived in the outer world. But the primitives naturally did not know this. They merely reported in story form the truth whose origin they never suspected. So the waxing and waning of the moon is anthropomorphised, making a moon who is a sort of hero figure, living in the moon, while at the same time he is the moon himself."

- This passage could be applied also to the sun and, indeed, except for the suggestion of psychology, could have been written by Robert Taylor in 1830, instead of by Dr. Harding in 1936. It will, I fear, take yet some little time to give the "Devil's Chaplain" his due in approaching and explaining religion from such a modern point of view.

The moon gods appear very early, and it is interesting to note that the Chaldeans called their moon god Hur and named their chief city after him, and from which, we are told, Abraham came. The Babylonians called their moon god Sinn, and Dr. Harding comments, "is familiar to us in Mount Sinai, which means Mountain of the Moon." It may have even suggested the words "sin" and "sinners." I shudder to think what some of our Rationalists would have said of Robert Taylor had he advanced such "word-play" as it has been contemptuously called. Sinn was giving laws long before Moses and Mount Sinai was therefore "a very appropriate place" from which the divine laws had to be given.

Osiris, though later identified with the Sun—when he was rivalling Ra as the Sun-God—was originally a Moon-God, and like so many others, went to the underworld half the month. It will strike the reader that the journey of Jesus also to the underworld—or hell—has here a quite rational explanation. Dr. Harding says: "This function, which is characteristic of all the dying and resurrecting gods, probably dates back in its earliest form to the old moon-gods." And, in addition, it is these moon-gods who are associated with the fertility festivals occurring at spring, which we still celebrate at Easter, only changing the gross phallic symbols then used for such a "harmless" one as the egg.

Robert Briffault, in his standard work, "The Mother," points out the part played by women in the fertility rites which have reference in some form or other to the union of women with gods—rarely to the union of men with goddesses. This throws just a little light on to the story of Mary conceiving by the Holy Ghost.

It is easy to see why eventually the moon-gods became moon-goddesses when the fertility motive is recognised behind the change. Gradually, for example, Sinn was replaced by Ishtar, though some of these deities retained both their male and female characteristics, like Artemis, who is so explained by Plutarch. Here again we see the influence of these stories on the Bible, for the Elohim of Genesis is a plural God who created man in his image—that is, "male and female." Christians have tried to show that Elohim is really a "Trinity," but their contention in the light of the above can be dismissed with a smile. More and more can it be shown and proved that in the religion of Judaism and Christianity we have the old pagan and primitive cults dished up anew.

H. CUTNER.

A SOVIET POET

A taste for letters and the fine arts annihilates the love of our first duties and of true glory.—ROUSSEAU.

I never wrote a single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought.—KEATS.

True poetry is present in everything that does not conform to that morality which, to uphold its order and prestige, has nothing better to offer us than banks, barracks, prisons, churches and brothels.—PAUL ELUARD.

THE role of art in the struggle for Communism has long been a wrangling post in revolutionary circles. The staple arguments, obvious enough, largely turn on the hypothesis that artistic activities seduce the comrades from the pressing tasks of the day. Still, art, even more than murder—*pace* Scotland Yard—will out. Moreover, a vast store of raw material has now accumulated. It is not easy to parallel from other sources the stirring tale that the Red annals hold. One turns with a shudder from the bloody barricades of the Paris Commune to respond to the touch-and-go excitements of the abortive Petersburg revolt of 1905; with a gasp from the Ten Days That Shook the World to wax indignant over the fate of *rote* Rosa Luxemburg; with half a sigh and half a laugh from Bela Kun's short-lived triumph to contemplate thoughtfully the coherent might of 25-year-old U.S.S.R. No pen or brush or chisel or camera need be idly used with themes such as these to hand. Art theory, however, embraces more than thematic analysis. Whatever the approach, sooner or later one has to tackle the concept of art as a vehicle for self-expression, which in the present case raises the knotty problem of the meshing of individualism and Communism.

Consider the poet. He it is who comes first to mind in a speculation on artistic cramp in an oceanic welter of politics. The question arises: Does he come firstly with any more right than that provided by our habits of thought? Glancing at our own calendar, we indeed find name after name associated with a strong, perhaps even a passionate, interest in the contemporary social set-up: we note in particular that Shelley is at once the most ethereal lyricist and the most socially-minded among the truly great. The leading poets of the 1930's certainly made no bones about their Left proclivities: Mr. George Orwell has somewhat cattily suggested that their ideology was a surrogate religion with Moscow as Heaven, Berlin as Hell, Stalin as God and Hitler as the Devil. (Politically speaking, the trouble with what might be called the Spendaylauden school of poetry was its intellectualism. That elusive figure, the Man in the Street, whose sympathy is the *sine qua non* of reform, never got beyond the first lines. Admittedly the gentleman is difficult to arouse: unless convinced of the hopelessness of his own future under the current regime, he is apt to be bored by propaganda. One of J. B. Priestley's Yorkshiremen reflected the substance of several chapters of English social anthropology in a "reply" to a Communist's homily: "I think," he said, simply and devastatingly, "that 'proletariat' is a bloody daft word.") But these digressions are not answering our question. Let us look at an actual sample of poetry fashioned in the one country where Communism is not a theory for the pamphleteer and debater but the norm of everyday life.

Through "Mayakovsky and his Poetry" (Pilot Press, 1942), the English-speaking world can obtain a glimpse of, to quote Stalin, "the best and most talented poet of our Soviet epoch." The compiler, Herbert Marshall, has made the glimpse variegated and informative—no easy task in view of the fact that his 150 pages had to be representative of 14 bookfuls of "not only poetry but essays, speeches, film scenarios, sketches, plays, advertisements, articles, drawings, posters, stage designs, portraits." For Mayakovsky was no rarified poet living in a

be-booked ivory tower; his room was Soviet Russia, his furniture the machines of industry and his room-mates the millions he served and delighted. Arrogant without being patronising, he strode among them, declaiming and arguing, satirising and jesting, an apparently inexhaustible source of energy. Until, fantastically, the pounding mind tripped and jammed: on April 14, 1930, in his 37th year, he seized a revolver and put a bullet through his own heart.

Can you imagine an English poet besieged with requests from hundreds of factories to come and recite to the workers? The answer is all too emphatic. Yet Mayakovsky was so honoured, and in fulfilment he travelled the length and breadth of the Republics. He seems to have rightly conceived of tongue and larynx, rather than ink and paper, as the material medium of poetry. He himself could recite magnificently. This book contains a very impressive sketch of Mayakovsky on the platform; his demeanour must have been superb, his repartee breathtaking.

It has been suggested that Mayakovsky's verse is "utterly untranslatable." Nevertheless, some of the fire has here managed to burn through the language barrier. From a safe distance even a bourgeois heart might thrill a little to the call:—

"Beat on the street the march of rebellion,
Sweeping over the heads of the proud;
We, the flood of a second deluge,
Shall wash the world like a bursting cloud."

That was written in 1917. After the establishment of the Soviet Government, the need for such firebrand verse disappeared and Mayakovsky proceeded to write about—well, just about everything under the sun. It is impossible to quote fairly, but mention must be made of "A Little Chat with the Eiffel Tower," in which the author pleads with the Tower—

"S-s-s-sh . . . tower, stalk quietly!
That moon's a guillotine leer.
(I lowered to a whisper.)
Listen to me
(And murmured buzzzzzz in her radio-ear)."

—to vacate Paris and return with him to Moscow: a poetic fancy that, like the Tower itself, is *magnifique*!

The longest item is part of a 4,000-line threnody on Lenin, boldly described by Mr. Marshall as "an epic that will rank with the great poems of the world"—and who am I, having no Russian, to argue? What strikes me rather forcefully are the strong emotions of the author himself:—

". . . I, who rarely came close to him
Would give my own life, in a stupor of ecstasy,
For one little breath of his."

—and the extraordinary sense of personal loss he attributes to the Russians as a whole:—

"They were people hard as flint—and then
They bit their lips till the blood ran.
Children grew as serious as the old men,
And venerable greybeards cried like children."

I can understand Lenin's being mourned, but. . . Perhaps an Englishman is too bogged in repressions? Still, the poem has many fine and memorable passages.

To judge from this selection there is no doubt at all that the poet *can* flourish in the ethos of a Communist State—and even when the State is in its early authoritarian stages; and, to reinforce the judgment, Mayakovsky is clearly the kind of man to have found fame in any country at any time. Moreover, he was an unabashed individualist. My heart warms to this the only poet I know of who required as part of his stock-in-trade "an umbrella for writing in the rain."

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

ACID DROPS

THE "Schoolchild and Juvenile Worker" has the following in its May issue. It is from a picture drawn by an Anglo-Catholic headmaster, and it was published in the "Eastern Daily Press":—

"I am now headmaster of a village school, in which I have a staff of four, all church people, and under 200 children. The school managers are seldom called together, despite the regulations. There have been not more than four meetings in the last five years. The best of the managers have resigned, and the present body know precious little about education, religious or otherwise. The outside of the building has not been painted during the vicariate of the present man, although the Education Committee paints the inside at frequent regular intervals. The playground and offices are in a bad state of repair, if not in a dangerous conditions, and nothing is done about them, despite pressure. We cannot possibly take P.T. properly.

"The parson makes himself responsible for the teaching of the Church Catechism, but very seldom comes in to take it. He has not been in ten times in the last year. . . .

"I—a communicant Churchman—am eagerly looking forward to the time when my school is taken from the Church, and I am quite sure that the religious instruction will not suffer when it is. Unfortunately, my school is not alone!"

The real truth is that not one parson in twenty has a genuine interest in education. Their aim is to prevent children in the school getting information that is antagonistic to their Church. They wish to breed Christians as others do plants or animals.

Truth will out. Professor John Baillie, the new Moderator of the Church of Scotland, is an honest man, but he is not likely to receive the approbation of his colleagues, for in his concluding address to the General Assembly he made the following pertinent observation:—

"There was a day when the men of goodwill were the men who went to church, while the men who stayed away were for the most part men of mischievous will. But now the world was full of men of goodwill whose high idealism and social-mindedness were such as often to put believing and worshipping Christians to shame, but who themselves neither worshipped nor believed."

Professor Baillie, after deploring the notion that these people might be approached and interested with addresses from the pulpit similar to the kind presented to pagan races in other lands, said:—

"Our address must rather be such as to display the most understanding and sympathetic and imaginative adaptation to the peculiarity of the situation we actually find to exist. What our nation needs to-day is spiritual revival."

Quite a long and round-about way of saying, "We are in a very precarious position, and God only knows how we are going to get out of it."

The Vicar of Adlington has awakened to the conclusion that the great menace to mankind is not Bolshevism, Nazism, Fascism or Communism. It is Atheism.

We agree. The ultimate quarrel is, so far as religion is concerned, with Atheism. So far as religions are concerned, Atheism is the threat offered to them all, and it is the one thing that all Christians are afraid to face. Such twilight terms as "Humanism," "Rationalism," "Ethicism," and the like, may be played with and made to include the possibility of "God" when occasion serves. But there is no possible compromise with Atheism. It involves a fight to a finish.

If impudence will guarantee a front seat in heaven, the clergy will certainly be sure of a good place. Here is a sample of clerical "cheek" from a West of England newspaper: "There appears to be an increasing recognition that secularism in education has not been a complete success." One might retort that very little man does is a complete success, but why pick out "secularism"? It has never, in matters of education,

had an opportunity of determining anything. It has influenced education as it has influenced other things, and certainly where it has failed Christianity has not succeeded. In schools education has been frustrated by clerical and religious interests which are fearful of children not receiving the right kind of teaching—which invariably means the right kind of religion—and so crabbled the work of the teacher. And if anyone cares to look into the records, the least satisfactory products—other things equal—come from schools most noted for the emphasis they place on religion.

It is safe to say that when pupils leave the secondary schools they have to undo much that they have been taught if they wish to be in touch with a real understanding of the world in which they begin to play an independent part. So far as religion is concerned, and so far as we consider school teaching in relation to it, they have to undo all they have been told. This miseducation begins in the infant school and goes on through their other schools. If they proceed to what is called their "higher" education in public schools or universities, the lesson that is pressed on them—first and last—is that if they wish to "get on" in the world they should make friends with those who have influence (that, indeed, is the reason why many good parents struggle to meet heavy school fees). In any case, they must keep the latest teachings of social evolution to themselves. Above all, they must close their eyes and mind to all that for over seventy years the scientific study of religion has taught us. In time they find, as is evidenced by such institutions as the Brains Trust, a good way of getting known is to be very respectful to all established superstitions—religious and other—and satisfy the appetite that some have for knowledge by feeding them with information that will keep them off dangerous topics. And if they go into politics they will find that all this kind of training helps them to become rulers of their country—or to think they are—and that is quite satisfying.

Kidderminster has been having a full-dress debate on the opening of cinemas on Sunday to children. The only reason for this was given by Councillor Smith, who said plainly that he believed it would be "detrimental to children, and nothing further should be put in their way to induce them stopping away from Sunday schools." That is at least frank, even though it may be stupid to say it.

What one would like to know is what different effect would going to cinemas have on children on Sunday that would not exist when they go to cinemas on week-days. It is the same child and also the same pictures. Unless a parent objects to a child going to the cinema on any day, it boils down to a mixture of paternal tyranny and superstition. In moving his resolution, Mr. Smith said that he might be called "old-fashioned." That is not the right word. The correct term is just "foolish."

Mr. Smith added that he was disgusted seeing "the number of children queuing up on Sundays for the pictures." Poor, sensitive Mr. Smith. But a Roman Catholic priest is quite sorry when he sees children going to a Protestant church on Sunday, and a Protestant is quite as grieved when he sees them going to a Roman Catholic building. We are grieved, also, when we see children going to either of these places to be told lies by those who preach to them. The cinema does at least give the children entertainment, and there is not five per cent. of the children who are driven to church who would not be at the cinema. In a cinema the children are interested and happy. Is that their state of mind when they are ordered to church?

We were very pleased that the resolution against the enjoyment of the children was lost. We were also pleased to see that the Mayor of Kidderminster agreed with the majority. He said: "Don't let us be hypocrites. Let us be men and women and play fair." Capital! But we shall be surprised if the Mayor does not hear about it from the parsonry. If the clergy do not grab individuals when they are young, what are they to do for congregations? They do not, they cannot, capture adults who have not been dosed with religion when they were young. And, after all, the parsons may say: "We must live. If we can't breed our followers how are we to get any!" It is a serious situation for the clergy.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

T. TURNER.—Thanks for addresses. Literature has been sent.

T. R. WILSON.—You will probably find what you want in "The History of Torture in England," by A. Parry, published in 1933. Some of the worst examples were, as one might expect, those connected with religion. Religion has never made men less brutal; it has merely sanctified their brutality. The move for humanity with regard to criminality came from the Free-thinking side.

ONE of our readers.—J. Davies, of 7, Crawford Street, Newport (Mon.)—is anxious to get a copy of "Good Sense," published in the early part of last century. Perhaps some of our readers have a copy they would part with.

J. HANSON.—Thanks for suggestion. We shall deal with the effect of Christian teaching on medicine when we resume the articles on "What is Christianity?" which will be at an early date. We are not surprised with the action of the "Daily Sketch." The only way to serve the Christian cause is to prevent criticism wherever possible.

R. W. WOOD.—"Bible Handbook" sent as requested; thanks.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Fumival 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, Fumival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

THE account of the 1943 N.S.S. Conference will appear in our next issue. The Executive's Annual Report appears on other pages of this one. Meanwhile, we are pleased to be able to say that in point of numbers the gathering was an improvement on last year's attendance, with that number of young people without which the future of any movement is not promising. What was missed by all was the rounding off the day by a public demonstration. We hope to see this renewed next year. After all, even this war must stop some time. Then we ought to proceed with renewed vigour to the war that really matters. That should be able to occupy the stage.

Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland were all represented—one elderly lady having travelled all the way from Northern Ireland to be present. She appeared satisfied with her journey, and we had the pleasure of shaking hands with her before the meeting broke up. There has not been any formal or official propaganda in Ireland for some time, but personal propaganda goes on, as it always will where men and women gather together and use what brains they possess; and, of course, the world-piercing "Freethinker" goes to both Northern and Southern Ireland. That form of our propaganda is always at work.

Personally we were very pleased to see once again friends of many years' standing, who began by being just members of the same organisation, sharing many of the same ideas, and who have now each become one of those human links without which life is hardly worth the living. Time may rob us of much, but it can never rob us of what has been, and what has been is so often repeating itself in the precious memories that compensate for so many ills.

We wonder how many of the people of to-day recall these verses that belong to the last war that was to end war:—

To God the embattled nations sing and shout
"God strafe England!" and "God save the King";
God this, God that, and God the other thing,
"Good God!" said God, "I've got my work cut out."

Some things never change in substance although they may alter in form.

But there is always the opinion of Heine, when asked whether he would not ask God to forgive him: "Oh, he'll forgive me; that's his trade." If Christians did not think God may not act up to his calling they would cease to send the incense of their prayers to heaven; and a God who is not prayed to, decays like a rose bush that is denied water. God must forgive—or die.

Three useful pamphlets have just been added to "The Thinker's Forum" (6d. each, Watts and Company). "The Church and Education," a composite essay by the late J. M. Robertson and Mr. A. Gowans White, is a timely and useful survey of a situation that is of first importance. The essay is concise, with the main issues carefully stated. "The Papacy in France," by Joseph McCabe, provides readers with an account of the underhand and overhead tactics of the Roman Catholic Church in France—mostly, of course, *underhand*. The pamphlet is another illustration of the methods by which the Roman Church threatens the peaceful evolution of the secular State. "The Church and the New World," by Archibald Robertson, is a very successful endeavour to prove that neither in the world that does exist, nor in any other devised one, can Christianity function with honesty as a religion or serve as an instrument, or as a factor, for a genuine humanising of life. Three useful pamphlets we recommend to our readers.

Another book we do not recommend—save for those who wish to be acquainted with the twists and turns of Christianity in action—is "Religion in Soviet Russia," by N. S. Timasheff (pp. 162, price 6s.) It is a fine example of how to build up a colossal lie by sticking carefully to truthful statements. The book is a long record of the sufferings of religious leaders in Russia from the beginning of the revolution until today, but without supplying the story of the fight for life the revolutionists had to fight, both at home and abroad, in the struggle against the Christian leaders who did all they could to overthrow the revolution at a time when nothing but extreme action could keep it alive. Revolutions are seldom tender things, and in this case the revolution had to build up from the crown downward. In the state Russia was in, there was only one thing that would have been worse—granting all the asserted cruelties—and that is not to revolt.

There is, of course, no recognition by Mr. Timasheff of the good done by the revolution, but this, we ought not to stress, considering the British people as a whole have now awakened to the "miracle" of transforming a people—in less than a generation—from eighty-five per cent. illiterate to eighty per cent. literate, and of the devotion of the people to the new order. The courage of the Russians has commanded and commands the admiration of the civilised world. (We can set the Churches on one side.) The "miracle" of revolutionary Russia provided the people of this country with good cause for praising the revolution, and the people have not been slow in showing it. We take it the after-war effort of the Churches will be to make the people forget it.

We said we did not advise readers to spend six shillings on "Religion in Soviet Russia." We wish to qualify that statement. It would be a good thing for any one to read with a sense of justice and understanding. But we doubt if it is written for such. It is written for those who kept this country from being friendly to Russia in the early years of the revolution, and who will try to sow more ill-feeling when this war is over. The repetition here is justifiable.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Executive's Annual Report

THIS is the fourth war-time Annual Conference of the National Secular Society, and the third time—with the agreement of the branches—that it has been held in London. There is some ground for hope that the next Conference may be held in another part of the country and that our evening demonstration—always a good propagandist feature—will then be resumed. But we are living in times when merely to be alive is an achievement, and we may well congratulate ourselves that our work has gone on with satisfactory results. With halls that we have been able to hire in peace time now taken over for war purposes, some of our most ardent workers transported to other areas or are now in the ranks of the Armed Forces, paper shortage and other war-time inconveniences, we have had to work with one hand tied, but still the work goes on.

In spite of all difficulties the number of meetings held on the responsibility of your Executive is greater than that of previous war years, and the Pioneer Press reports a markedly increased sale of literature, with the sale of the indispensable "Freethinker" limited only by the quantity of paper available. There has also been an increased quantity of literature sent, gratuitously, to members of the Armed Forces. This literature is sent, it must be remembered, only on request; it is not, so to speak, thrown into the air. There is a guarantee that what is sent will be read, and that is a fact of great importance. The result is very often a purchase of extra books and pamphlets, and the receipt of many letters which show a real interest in our propaganda. This means extra work on the office side, but the propaganda goes on. The great thing is that our cause advances. Everything else is of minor consideration.

The first year of war showed a falling off in the number of new members. We are now able to report that the number has steadily increased to the pre-war level, while the income from members for the past year has reached the highest figure for a considerable time. During the year the Society has received from the will of Orris Key, of Bolton, a bequest of £200, and from that of Walter Pain, a member of an old Freethinking Manchester family, £723. The substantial legacy from a resident in India is still before the Courts, and it is hoped will soon be settled.

It should be said here that the financial statement which will be placed before you is an account of the amounts received by the Executive only. Each branch collects, handles, and is itself accountable for the expenditure to its members.

In a society that depends upon the work of so many who give their valuable help, cheerfully asking for nothing more than to see the cause in which they are interested progress, and whose names never come before the public, it may seem invidious to select any one for special mention. But a word of recognition is deserved by those who in halls, when possible, and in the open air—where a good general knowledge, good temper and persuasive manner is of great value—have done so much for our movement. Your Secretary has been busy on the platform as well as in the office. Mr. J. T. Brighton has been active lecturing in and out of halls, contributing to newspapers and in other directions doing useful work. Messrs. Clayton and Shortt pay needed attention to a large area of Lancashire. They report many successful meetings. There are indications of growing strength in Glasgow—the demand for our literature there increases—and Edinburgh reports good meetings in the Scottish capital. There should be more branches in Scotland than now exist. In North Stafford and Bradford successful meetings are also being held, and at the latter place it is good to see that the press is not neglected. The Birmingham Branch has been quiet of late but it is now recovering its activity. That should be a good field for work. In London, the South London Branch has felt

the pressure of the war which has taken away many of its best workers, but the East and West London Branches are as active as usual—particularly the latter. The Kingston-on-Thames Branch reports good attendances with satisfactory sales of literature.

A special word of appreciation is due to the North London Branch, where Mr. Ebury has constantly lectured with great success under, at times, very difficult circumstances. One of the few who help so many.

The Executive has continued its policy of sending speakers to outside societies, a practice that is found to be profitable and is commended to all branches. Good work is also done by those who keep an eye on the local press and so to some extent nullify the activities of religious propagandists.

A great deal of useful work is also being done, both by circulating, on request, our literature among the Armed Forces and also in the raising of Freethinking issues among the many discussions that take place. Judging by the reports received many a chaplain has met his Waterloo and must have longed for the protective arms of the B.B.C.

With regard to the Armed Forces, the Executive and "The Freethinker" have received ample evidence in letters and other communications that there has been in this war a great advance in the proportion of those entering the Forces writing themselves down as without religion. There has also been a number of complaints that men have been refused their legal right to register as without religion and have been placed on the records as belonging to this or that creed. In all such cases we have been able, by appealing to the authorities, to get the matter redressed. And we again remind all whom it may concern that the right to be written down as "No religion" is an absolute right; it is monstrous that in a war where so much is said about truth and justice and freedom there should be attempts to prevent men and women entering the Services enjoying that freedom which the law gives them. It is monstrous that obstacles should be placed in the way of men acting honestly.

A peculiarly objectionable case was cabled to the Society from Canada. The man had joined the Air Force and was duly and properly registered as "No religion." In spite of this he was ordered to attend church service. He refused, with the result that he was subjected to the prescribed military punishment. This gross injustice was brought before the home authorities by your Executive and we were promised investigation. The result was that the order was declared to be illegal, and the charge was removed from the man's record. So the matter ends—so far happily. But it is to be regretted that so many difficulties should be placed in the way of those who join the Armed Forces having to fight for their legal rights. It looks as though the officers should be better instructed, and even some of the paid chaplains might raise themselves to the height of honesty necessary to repudiate the policy of forcing men joining the Forces to commence their career with a palpable lie.

Another matter of importance to this Society has arisen, not for the first time. Some of our members—not a considerable number—have written the Executive complaining that too much time has been taken up at meetings in the discussion of political and economic advocacy, presenting special theories as part of the aims and objects of the Society. That is, of course, not the case. No inquisition in the directions named is made when one joins the Society, no speaker should give private opinions as part of our position. There is, of course, no objection to such subjects being discussed on any of our platforms, but it must be done with a sense of fairness and justice to all. To discuss the bearings of political and economic theories is permissible; to use our platform to uphold particular political and economic systems as part of our essential work, is another and substantially different thing. Tact, good humour, balanced judgment and a sense of loyalty to our movement should meet the situation.

There are several things, however, that have to be borne in mind, and these should be obvious to those who know the history of Freethought in this country. For more than a hundred years, the Secular platform has been hospitable to the voicing of opinions of an advanced character. This is true, not merely of the N.S.S. but also of those Secular Societies that existed in the time of Carlile, the amalgamation of which formed the N.S.S. Socialism in its early and later days, the equality of the sexes, the extension of the political franchise, the abolition of the newspaper tax, the agitation for State schools, reform of our prison laws, with numerous other forlorn causes, have been advocated on our platforms.

But there is this historic fact to bear in mind. As these reforms became more popular, a period of specialisation set in. Political and social movements became shy of joining in the attack on the Churches and religion, both of which have served as the mother of privilege and injustice for so long. Specialisation begins, and of necessity as the demand for political and semi-political reforms became more popular, specialisation became more characteristic on the part of the N.S.S. It had done much for the fundamental work that others hesitated in doing and, in addition, the N.S.S. was substantially the only organisation that stood for an uncompromising attack on the truthfulness and utility of religious beliefs.

In this situation, and with our historic record, it is not easy to say in set terms what ought or ought not to be discussed on our platform. The Executive, therefore, came to the conclusion that short of breaking away from a tradition of which we are all proud, it should be enough to remind speakers and listeners that while we may properly permit, and even encourage, the discussion on our platforms of political subjects, we have nothing to do with special political or economic parties. They who think they can forward Freethought by becoming entangled with party politics—red or white or any other colour—are making a grave mistake. We must remember what it is that binds us together and as an organisation to exercise an influence on the progress of affairs. There are plenty of organisations that will use us if they can, but without offering reciprocal services. It will not advance Freethought to lose its identity and its distinctiveness in the ever-changing flood of political trickery.

Reference has been made to the amount of work done in the office, with excellent results. The tendency of this work is to increase, and in the near future—not immediately—the Conference will have to seriously consider an extension of the office staff. Nothing meanwhile is neglected, but it is in the leisure moments that new ideas are born and plans matured.

In the many brutalities and calculated obscenities the war has produced, few monstrosities have aroused more disgust than the Nazi treatment of the Jews, and the avowed intention of the German leaders to destroy, so far as it can be done, the whole of the Jewish people. A conference was recently held in London in which your Executive was represented, the President taking part in the speaking. There is no need to dwell here on the hideous brutality and indecency of the German regime in this matter; it was far worse than the atrocities that took place in Christian Russia under the Czars and even bettered the vileness of the tortures of the Jews under the medieval Church.

But there is one point of importance for Freethinkers to remember. This is that the age-long torture of the Jews is a standing illustration of the evil of religion when it is allowed to control civic life. It was the separateness of the Jew, the standing opposition the Jew offered to the Christian Church that laid the foundations of the long story of ill-treatment and recurring massacre of Jews. The religion of the Jew was at once the cause of his persecution and of his perpetuation. Persecution always has these features. It endears the persecuted to that for which they suffer, either that or extinction. Left alone it is extremely possible that the Jewish religion would have dwindled to nothing; numbered among those dead creeds that are now mere historic

remnants of man's futilities. Christianity kept it alive as a second half of its own superstition.

When, then, all is said and done, this is the great lesson we have to learn as Freethinkers. The persecution by Nazi Germany would have been impossible had it not been preceded by the tortures of Christian Russia and the age long brutality of the Christian Church. Nazi Germany worked to the pattern that Christian intolerance and brutality had made. The matter was well put by Graetz in the third volume of his classic history of the Jews: "The nations of Europe emulated each other in exercising their cruelty on the Jews; and it was always the clergy who, in the name of a religion of love, stirred up this groundless hatred. It mattered little to the Jews whether they lived under proper government or under anarchy, for they suffered under the one no less than under the other."

This is a fact in history that we Freethinkers must not forget. Hitler worked to the pattern provided by the Christian Churches. That he bettered the teaching given him does not materially matter. The torture of the Jews by Christians in Nazi Europe was bred in the bigotry and brutality of the historic Christian Church. Brutality cannot destroy the Jewish religion. Social and political equality with the growth of scientific thought will.

There is nothing new to be said on the Education question, beyond what has already been voiced in these annual reports. The lie of the terrible moral state of the children, who were removed from London for safety from bombing, has worn so thin that it is now nearly abandoned, and the unproven need for more definite religious teaching has been substituted. This takes the form of the rather flimsy theory that decent human conduct depends upon religion, that social security depends upon early religious training in the schools, that teachers must be specially trained to teach the Christian religion—other religions seem able to look after themselves—and substantially we are to have a return to pre-1870 with the united clergy in full command.

Yet the plot between the Board of Education and the Churches seems to be hanging fire. The Established Church will surrender control only such schools as ought to have been closed years ago, and the teachers appear to be awakening to the fact that the new plan will mean placing them substantially under the control of the clergy. Teachers will, in such circumstances, face a greater incentive to hypocrisy than exists at present, and the public will suffer through a poorer type of teacher.

But the greatest danger to the Government-cum-clerical Bill has come from a section of the Churches. The Church of England declines to surrender its best equipped schools, but it is content to hand its derelicts to the State. The Roman Catholic Church demands full State financial support and to have their schools completely under their control, with all teachers to be sworn Catholics and history and morals to be regulated by the Church. In short, we are to have a State within a State, controlling schools in which the teachers must be of a narrower mind than teachers are—at present—in other schools.

To show it is in earnest, the Roman Church in England, in view of the Trades Union vote demanding the abolition of the dual system, is threatening the solidity of trade unionism by forming a separative Roman Catholic trades union. A Labour union is of no use to Rome if it does not back up the Church.

The plain thing is that the Bill, when it is produced, will not be the one that the Churches expected and the Tory section of the Government desired. But no education measure will be satisfactory if it does not prepare the way for the opening of all schools, from the elementary to the University, absolutely free. It is not a question of making those pay who can, and admitting a limited number of entrants who promise well; it is a matter of making personal merit the sole condition of entering all educational institutions. There are differences of taste and ability among us, but these are not dependent upon caste or wealth. They are the growth of society, they belong to society, and society

should see to it that we make the most of our inherited possibilities.

Taking a broad survey, it may safely be said that the outlook for our movement was never so full of promise as it is to-day. There was never a greater demand for our literature, or a wider interest shown in our propaganda. At present the war and the paper supply limit our activities in many directions, but the turn over of the leading members of the clergy from other worldism to a demand for social reform is important and indicative of the position of things.

The Christian Churches are in a desperate situation. To improve their status is impossible. Sectarian bodies, from the Established Church downward, are driven to combination by the force of self-interest. Quite recently in the Upper House of Convocation the Bishops of the Church of England passed a resolution asking for a greater degree of truth-speaking. If that is to begin at home it looks much like an invitation to suicide. It is true the advice was given by the Bishops to the laity; still, truth-telling has an element of attractiveness, and one can never be certain how far appetite may grow or inquisitiveness penetrate.

The fact is that this war, with the miracle of regenerated Russia without the influence of religion, and the revealing to the British people of 450 millions of Chinese, mainly dominated by the teaching of Confucius—the Atheist, and the revelation even to English people of the undeveloped life of large sections of our population; these things have done more than weaken dynasties and confound orthodox economics. They have gone a long way towards destroying the authority of the clergy, they have blasted the pantomimic heaven of historic Christianity and demonstrated the fact that the multitude of gods before which man has crawled are but the projections of his helplessness and ignorance.

OUR FUTURE FIGHT

MANY curious changes occur in war time, but possibly strangest of all are the changes in people's attitudes and opinions towards other nations. This is not necessarily to be condemned, and least of all by Freethinkers, for modification of opinion in the light of new facts is the very essence of Freethought. Yet the changes to which I am referring are not, for the most part, motivated by any desire to reach a logical and unbiased opinion, but are, on the contrary, temporary refuges of safety for the hypocritical.

One great example of what I mean comes readily to mind in connection with the general attitude towards the Soviet Union. It can safely be said that the mass of the populace of this country, at any rate, has suddenly swung over from antagonism to the U.S.S.R. and is now definitely sympathetic towards it. Now this is a very good thing for both nations, and it is a great pity that a war was needed to bring it about; but harmful consequences have followed!

Before Russia became our ally—indeed, ever since the founding of the U.S.S.R.—the British Church and Press made constant reference to the irreligion prevalent in that country. The main task now is to prove that fighting Russia is still Christian. Moscow churches, we are told, are still filled with worshippers, and the Atheists who had previously been the objects of such vituperation have apparently disappeared—or been converted!

Unfortunately, the enigma does not end here. Further complications have set in and, synonymous with this process, our attitude towards Germans has also undergone a reversal. That country is now in a similar position to that previously occupied by the U.S.S.R., and the favourite war-cry of the British clergy is no longer "Godless Russia!" but "Pagan Germany!"

Thus, the late Cardinal Hinsley attacked German Fascism as anti-Christian, and declaimed Mussolini—after Italy entered the war—but we must not forget that he had previously praised the Duce and said that he was working for God's cause. Now we

read that another Cardinal "has made a strong attack on Atheism and a 'movement' easily identifiable as Nazism." (My italics.) He is Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan.

This would seem to be rather a daring outburst for an Italian priest, but on examination we find that there is absolutely no evidence that the Cardinal was attacking the Nazis! He said: "There is talk of political desecrations and of organisations which encourage blasphemy with political movements in the background," and continued: "Both from a religious point of view and politically, Italy has no need to borrow either her creed or her social orders from other peoples and civilisations. As for all that agitated talk about a plan for the reconstruction of Europe which has been carried on by the newspapers for several years, the Italian people identifies itself with that Latin civilisation which for centuries has been welded together by Christianity. It is on this foundation that our edifice must be constructed."

That is the whole quotation which appeared under the heading, "Nazi 'Blasphemy'—Cardinal." Admittedly, it is at times somewhat vague, but no perusal of it can bring to light any semblance of an attack on Nazism. Indeed, when studied, the Cardinal's remarks are found to be directly opposed to the aspect put upon them, for he states that he has no desire to alter the existing Italian regime, which is not only a replica of German Fascism, but is lined up beside it! Judging by the speech, I have no hesitation in saying that the Cardinal was not attacking Nazism, but virtually defending it—though his main interest is, of course, Catholicism—and his attitude may be taken as representative of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, because his statement was broadcast by the Vatican radio.

It cannot be too strongly or too often stressed by Freethinkers that Christianity—and particularly Roman Catholicism—is still the greatest danger to all freedom and progress in the world. It cannot be too forcibly attacked! For the present, the war has overshadowed all other conflicts, but when the fight against Fascism is over, the greater fight has still to come. From the words of Cardinal Schuster, it is evident that the Roman Church will oppose any attempts at a secular reconstruction of Europe, and the great, inevitable alternative—Rome or Atheism—is already in sight.

It was the famous historian Macaulay who said that the Roman Catholic Church had survived every shock, including that of the Reformation, and emerged with her vital powers unimpaired. He continued: "And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on the broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's."

Protestant sects will eventually divide; some will go over to Rome; others will go to Atheism. Then, as G. W. Foote said, "the illogical sectaries will disappear and leave the field to the two great logical protagonists of Faith and Reason, who march steadily forward to their Armageddon." Between them there can be no armistice or truce; it will be a fight to the finish, and upon the result will depend the future happiness of mankind.

Those who think that the religious conflict is at an end are, I fear, sadly mistaken. Indeed, the task of ridding the earth of superstition will perhaps never be completed. Freethought is not a temporary thing, but a living and growing attitude towards life, which started with primitive man's first thoughts and will exist as long as man himself. What we must not—and dare not—forget, is that once in European history Freethought was almost completely suppressed. This was during the long period when the Roman Catholic Church had undisputed control over the minds of the people, and had it not been for the influx of learning from Moorish Spain, the revival would probably have been further delayed. The Church is ever working for a return to the Ages of Faith—the Dark Ages of Humanity!

Miss Edith Moore, in her valuable booklet, "No Friend of Democracy," has collected and analysed authoritative Catholic

statements and shown Catholic tendencies in all countries. Here is one in particular that must not be forgotten. It is taken from the editorial columns of the "Catholic Herald" of May 31, 1940, and asks: "... what sort of help can we expect from Stalin? Far better go down with our honour intact than clutch at a filthy straw. . . . Would it not be infinitely more worthy of our cause to call Stalin's bluff and, with the help of Turkey, to create a gigantic diversion which might well bring the Bolshevik superstructure tumbling and release in Russia the forces that would prove to be our friends indeed?"

There is no ambiguity here, and even allowing for changes of attitude, it is obvious that the persons responsible for that statement must still be antagonistic towards an understanding between Britain and the U.S.S.R. This is, in fact, inevitable. As long as the Roman Catholic Church remains in existence, a proper understanding between the peoples of the globe will be impossible. When it falls before the legions of Freethought, the greatest step in the triumphal march of humanity will have been taken!

C. McCALL.

LIFE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

THE individual feels that life is a state not to be comprehended. To his reiterated "Why?" no adequate answer is forthcoming. He is born, he struggles, learns a little, unlearns much, yet dies in ignorance of *why* he has lived. Speculations such as these have confounded and seized with dismay the broadest and most sensible minds; and to attempt to solve them, superstition has been given full rein. Thus, in many religions our life is only a test or trial, where our conduct will be judged rigorously, that when we die the Gods may know which souls to acquit to Paradise and which to doom to eternal punishment. In certain Oriental religions, individual life is supposed to flow on in an uninterrupted current through a variety of phases, so that a gluttonous man may expect to be a pig in his next existence; but by being a good pig he may redeem himself back to manhood, or even partake of an angelic nature. In this and other faiths it will be seen that man is placed upon earth supposedly that he might be judged by his merits or his faults. Rationalism is slowly obliterating these crude opinions from the minds of men; yet the question still remains, and is still as perplexing. What is life? Why are we alive?

It may be that man has deified himself for so long as the Lord of Creation as to forget that he is a distant cousin of the apes. He might be chief among mammals, these might rank highest in the vertebrate group, which are the most advanced among living species, yet he and all these were evolved only from insignificant particles of protoplasmic jelly, the first form of planetary life. Could a primogenitive protoplasm have asked of itself, "Why do I live?" a prophetic voice would have replied, "So that the strong and intelligent vertebrates might evolve from you." Let that prophetic voice speak now in answer to the question hanging heaviest on man's heart—and what will the response be? But man has presumptuously supposed for so long that he occupies the ultimate throne in planetary life and that evolution ceases with him, that the concept of terrestrial life as it may be in ten million years time looms over him with a most frightening shadow, as if to show his ephemeral insignificance.

No, poor wretched squabbling masses! Ten million years hence, the geologists will be finding decaying splinters of your bones, in preservative strata, but you and your cities, your parliaments and democracies and plutocracies, the boundaries of the empires that you slaughter each other to possess or dispossess, your religions, customs and systems upon which you place such faith and confidence, will all have vanished utterly, leaving no trace behind to tell another species how you dragged through the bitter swamps of your existence. The names and memories of

nations and breeds, much less those of mere individuals, will long have perished; the wind of time will blow them along like fast-decaying leaves for a few years only. Then Britain, France and Germany will be names perhaps known only to an esoteric circle of archæologists; the sites of their greatest cities will be matters for conjecture, doubt and dispute; and Mr. Everyman, who drudged in a factory for 20 years before he met with a painful death on a noisy battlefield, might never have lived at all, for all futurity may know or care.

For if life has any purpose at all, other than a mere link in evolution, it is this: that the individual should achieve happiness. Each one of us will discover his happiness in the pursuit of various pleasures; yet his happiness will be a mere phantasm unless he first finds one thing—freedom. I do not mean the freedom of anti-social anarchy, or material independence at all, but I believe that to have true happiness we must first emancipate our minds from the prejudice and opinion that they have gathered during the "unawakened" period of our lives, and then start afresh in possession of intellectual freedom and the unbounded desire to think and act rationally: to bow down to no man or philosophy or creed, but to fashion our own ideas from our own observations, and to act to these principles as far as possible. That, in my opinion, is the chief end of man.

GEO. IVOR DEAS.

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