

THE FREETHINKER

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IEWS AND OPINIONS

Another Prayer Orgie

BY the time this issue of "The Freethinker" is in the hands of its readers the country will once more have gone through the farce—or tragedy—of a day of national prayer. It is also announced that later—no date given—the King may order a National Day of Prayer. It will be noted that there is a slight difference in the reading of the notices—the one in hand and the one that is yet to come. There should be a difference because, while the one on September 3 is just arranged by Christian preachers, ordained by God, the King is—in terms of the significance of the Coronation Service and the address of the late Archbishop of Canterbury—an incarnation of God and the British people. It is a service that carries us back to the early history of Egypt, when the king was openly an incarnation of a God. And we still speak of—and it would be expressed in certain indictments—the "sacred" person of the King. Those who care to look up a book such as A. M. Hocart's "Kings and Councillors" (Cairo, 1936), or "Kingship" (Oxford University Press, 1927), will find the whole story placed before them. Incarnation of gods in human bodies was once very common; now God has put up with a mere representative. So it may be that the caution of having this new day of prayer, being asked for by the heads of the Churches, is that nothing may happen that would not have happened had the people sung "Knocked 'Em in the Old Kent Road."

What are these days of prayer expected to do? Millions of men and women engaged in war work—so essential that large numbers of women are compelled to neglect their homes and men would be summoned and punished for coming late to work—are now to be practically compelled to waste time, each about twenty-five minutes, in order to participate in a day of prayer! If all the controllers of labour were to announce that all workers in war products could take fifteen minutes off there would be an outcry, and questions would be asked in Parliament—by all who are not expecting to hold or do hold Government posts. Give the workers fifteen minutes for Gracie Fields and they would rush to listen. Give them other alternatives to spend the fifteen minutes and the churches would be as empty as usual.

A day of national prayer is always a day of national hypocrisy. We suggest to all who wish to put an end to this farce to stay away from the churches when the workshops are closed. Multitudes of workers do not believe in prayer. We are suggesting to them that they make their protest against this tomfoolery by declining to be gathered together like sheep and then paraded in the interests of this stupid ceremony. It is rather costly to sell one's independence for a sing-song and fifteen minutes off work.

God May—or May Not!

Our people appear to be doing very well without bothering God; and it is really time that we made up our minds whether our Fighting Forces, and a multitude of home war workers, are winning the war or whether it is being done for us by God. After all, in terms of "God" the war might have been won by us in a day, for nothing can, theoretically, withstand his power. Nay, the war should never have occurred. God, we are told, could have prevented the war if he would, but he chose not to. It is a case of—

"There was an old woman of Sydney
Who had a disease of her kidney.
She prayed to the Lord
That she might be restored—
And he could if he would, but he did na'."

Granted that someone or some people were responsible—so far as a few can be responsible—for the world war, what have the millions who have suffered from the war done to justify God for permitting it to occur? We are told that in God's good time he will end the war. But his "good time" should have been at the beginning of the war, not at its inevitable end. So far as man is concerned it is, we believe, part of our man-made law that if one of us sees a man committing murder, and if it is easily and plainly within our power to prevent the murder and do not, then we may be charged with being an accessory to the fact, and common feeling would applaud the indictment. But God knew the war was coming and did nothing. He watches the war on its way and does nothing; but when we have massed enough men and guns and ships to blast the enemy out of existence, then he will step in and demand praise and thanks for our conquest. Oh, what a fool is man! And what a pity it is that man's God never reaches the heights of sense and decency achieved by the best of humans! If God can lead us to victory in 1943 or 1944, why could he not have done so in 1941. Better still, why could he not prevent Germany going to war with anyone? Or is it the case that God watches each side, notes the one that looks like winning, and then throws his influence on the victorious side? In mundane affairs we call that "playing for safety."

We recall a case that occurred in the last war. In a Swansea church a woman who had lost a son in the war interrupted the service by asking, "Why does not God take the German Emperor by the scruff of the neck and force him to come forward and make peace?" That was, and is, a pertinent question; and it is of the kind that multitudes of people whose religion has not quite drowned their common sense are still asking. Assuming that God can, or will, do something that would bring the war to an end—and if he cannot do that our day of prayer is so much admitted nonsense—why can he not do it without prayer, and do it at once? Will it make the situation better to

slaughter a few more millions? If so, why hurry to end it? Or will God take offence if we bring the war to an end without returning to the savagery these praying days illustrate? "In God's good time" peace will come. That sounds much like Hitler's explanation and apology for his treatment of Communists, Jews and all who frustrate his rule. When he has enslaved the world we shall have a better society than now exists. So says Hitler; and God, according to his worshippers, promises us a new and better world if we thank him for permitting the slaughter in order to bring us to the grovelling attitude of the confirmed religionist. Our papers ring with contemptuous denunciation of the man or woman who will not do his or her "bit" to end the war. Does it never strike these representatives of Christianity that men of courage and intelligence may develop the same feeling of contempt for a deity who can if he would, but will not until mankind pays him the requisite amount of homage?

In Defence of Man

But after this day of mixed folly and cunning the King may "order" a Day of National Prayer. Is that a promise or a threat? Does it mean that we may be asked to go from impudence to deception? We say "deception" because it has been admitted by a number of our leading clergymen, and not denied by any, that far less than half the population indulge in prayer and only about 10 per cent. go to church. What, then, is meant by the King ordering a Day of National Prayer? The order will not make people pray who do not believe in it. It merely establishes hypocrisy and humbug on a wider scale and gives it a high position. We know that the King has his religion picked for him by Act of Parliament, but that has not prevented the majority of his subjects losing their faith in prayer; nor can it arrest the steady disintegration of religious beliefs. And the King's advisers might consider that it is taking advantage of his position to induce him to stand as the public champion of beliefs that are outworn and, on a large scale, discarded. One day we hope to see that the King has been allowed the right to choose his religion that every British citizen possesses. The religious sanctity of the kingship is dead; it is time that in selecting a religion the King had the same freedom of choice that the poorest of his subjects possesses.

It may also be remembered that just before the war we had not a day of prayer, but a non-stop day-and-night prayer for a whole week. England, said some of our newspapers, "was on its knees." We were "a people at prayer." If ever God had a full measure of prayer it was then. And that seven days' bombardment of heaven gave us Munich, with its sequel of the rape of Poland, the seizure of Czechoslovakia and the inducement of Hitler to strike for the conquest of Europe.

No country has suffered more in this war than Russia. No country has done more or faced danger and death more heroically than Russia. Yet it has had not a single day of national prayer; its leaders have never called for the prayers of the Russian people. It has never grovelled before God in disaster; it has never returned thanks to God in victory. Love of country, the desire to be free from rule from without, the conviction that the making of a better Russia than had ever existed was possible, and the determination to repulse any coercion from the outside, were

enough to place "Atheist Russia" high in the estimation of the world.

We refuse to count the British people as poorer or lower or less worthy than the people of Russia. What Russian men and women can do, British men and women may do. This implied slander by our religious leaders on the British people should be given the lie. What we have done has been done without God. What we shall do, good or ill, will also be done without calling superstition to our aid.

All religious argument begins in folly and ends in confusion. Its folly was less evident in past ages, but the world is more complex and better understood to-day than in the years when religion ruled. A God who impresses an early generation with his power, in a more sophisticated life is met with understanding and rejection. And amid all the religious cant and foolishness that this war has brought forth there is also the fact that it has led multitudes to check their religious beliefs by an understanding of life; and that is always fatal to religious claims. The godlike moves in a world of confusion; the Atheist is at least free from the nightmare that religion creates. If he works without any hope from gods, he works without fear and with a consciousness of his own strength. Human development is from the brute upward; and if there remains in human nature enough of the brute to remind us of our origin there is also a knowledge of man's triumphs that inspire to greater and still greater ends.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE PRIEST PLEADS POVERTY

IN a recent paragraph in "Sugar Plums" attention was drawn to the wriggling of the Roman Catholics in Manchester, per Canon Peter Green, to escape the indictment against Catholics of producing a larger percentage of juvenile delinquents than other sections of the community.

Mr. Horsfall, of the Manchester Teachers' Association, by a reference to the facts, repudiated the suggestion of Canon Green that in poor districts the schools were almost exclusively Church schools, and that this explained the larger proportion of Church school delinquents. Mr. Horsfall showed that Council schools were in the majority in poor districts, and that Canon Green's assertion did not, therefore, hold good.

But mere facts will not stop Romanist lying for "the greater glory," and it might be useful to nail this lie by going a little further into the question on the basis of the Henshaw Report. I have had numerous inquiries from Freethinkers about this question, with a view to using the information in Secular Society propaganda, and to put the position clearly here will not only save me a good deal of private letter writing, but will make the information available to a wider range of Freethought workers.

Since Mrs. Henshaw produced her devastating report, showing that in Bradford the Church schools produce more than twice the delinquents from the Council schools, I have heard, and have had to answer, the Catholic argument that, as Roman Catholics form the poorest section of the community, it is natural that they should provide the largest number of delinquents.

The answer, in a nutshell, is simply that the Catholic case doesn't bear examination. Apart from facts, if religion were responsible for good morality, as is alleged, Roman Catholics should be the best behaved section of the community, as they

have more religion pushed into them than the rest. If religion formed character, it would do so independently of poverty, or other factors; indeed, it should overcome the effects of poverty and other factors if it were all that it is claimed to be. But let us leave the mere logic of the case and look at the facts. For here, also, we find the Catholic case leaking badly.

Bradford is a city of 300,000. A twelve months' investigation by Mrs. Henshaw showed that the rate of juvenile delinquency in Council schools was 6.6 per 1,000; in Anglican schools 7.5 per 1,000; and in Roman Catholic schools 15.3 per 1,000. Prima facie, on these figures, the assumption is that the more religion they get the worse they become. But the Catholics counter this with the poverty argument, so let us look at that question.

Mrs. Henshaw, after setting out tables dealing with the economic and home life conditions of delinquents, states:—

"The interesting feature in comparison of Table XIV. with Table XIV (a) is the low percentage of delinquents in the under 10s. a week (rent and rates) group. In so far as standard rent and rates is directly relative to income level, the figures seem to indicate that poverty is not a direct cause of delinquency. . . 82 per cent. (of delinquents) come from clean and good homes, and 18 per cent. from fair, poorly-furnished, dirty (homes), etc."

There are the facts. Interpret them as you will, they cannot possibly support the Catholic poverty argument. To my mind, in the final analysis, they indicate that there is something in the fibre of religious teaching (could it be the idea of forgiveness of sins by God, regardless of the interests of the injured party?) that tends to select weaknesses in child character for more active expression; whereas, with less religion and more social training, such weaknesses tend to be conquered by a better developed sense of social obligation? After all, to the simple child mind, social behaviour must be much easier if the child believes man to be more important than God. That much should be clear even to the muddled minds of our religionists, were they but honest.

But here I am, ruminating, when I intended only to offer facts, so I will conclude with one very unpleasant fact which does no credit to the Catholic Church, and proves that even the common decencies of citizenship count for nothing where the Catholic religion is concerned.

Unable to find a factual and effective answer to Mrs. Henshaw's statement, the Bradford Catholic Parents' and Electors' Association, when asked to comment on the report, made the following statement:—

"Mrs. Henshaw has arrived at a conclusion (on religious instruction) without satisfactory evidence, and in view of this and her further remarks, it is obvious that she has neither the qualifications nor experience to pass judgment on the effect of religious training in the schools."

This is a dirty, slanderous lie. Mrs. Henshaw reached no definite "conclusions"; she simply offered the facts, to speak for themselves. The facts shout their message from the house-tops and need no support from "conclusions." But it is typical of the Roman Church that where it cannot justify it will vilify. History is full of precedents; but, unlike some of the martyred reformers of the past, Mrs. Henshaw has not taken this calumny lying down. She made a public protest the dignity and force of which must have won for her the support, respect and sympathy of every decent-minded person, including Catholics, and put one more big blot on the escutcheon of the Church that can do no wrong.

To slander the high qualifications of this trained and expert investigator was indeed shameful and a confession of abject failure in the controversy. Hitting below the belt is the dirtiest of dirty tricks.

F. J. CORINA.

ACID DROPS

The latest piece of impudence on the part of Christian propagandists is that of inducing employers to put religious tracts in the wage packets of workmen. This does not appear to be the result of independent action by employers or managers, but the impudent intrusion of clergymen and the disinclination of certain people to refuse them. We learn from the "Evening News" that some managers have refused to play the game of the clergy, and there are many workers who object. We would advise all who resent the intrusion of the clergy to object strongly to this clandestine propaganda. The position is getting quite interesting. The Government commences with the children to see that they are not better equipped than their parents, where religion is concerned. Then the propaganda enters the workshops, with a threat to both managers and men, and in the end the instituting of a form of superstition of which all educated adults should be heartily ashamed.

We have often dwelt upon the bunkum concerning the talk about the forces looking forward with pleasure to religious services, when the truth is that if men were given complete freedom to stay away from them the services would be no better attended than they are by civilians. After all, the army is made up of civilians, and one must expect the same proportion of believers and unbelievers in the army as one finds in civilian life. The men are *ordered*, and at this point discipline plays its coercive part. Soldiers are taught that obedience is the first duty, and most officers, however good may be their relations with the rank and file, cannot but feel that anyone disobeying an order, even though the man is well within his rights, is an indication of independence not to be encouraged.

We were reminded of this oft-stressed truth by an article in the "Daily Mirror" for August 19. One man writes:—

"We have to parade wearing respirators at the alert position, gas masks and rifles. As the church is four miles from the camp, our feelings are not conducive to the atmosphere of worship."

Another man writes:—

"Yesterday there was a twenty minutes' church service after rifle inspection. During the inspection our officer announced that all of us must be at the service in a reverential manner, or he would order an hour's P.T. before breakfast next day and an hour's arms drill at night after work. You can bet your life that we all exhibited a most reverential manner at the service."

The whole system is one of humbug and lying. The greatest adepts at this are given the platform of the B.B.C., with every precaution taken that the humbug shall not be exposed.

The curious thing is that church parade is no more beloved by the officers than it is with the men. It is part of a routine, and it is carried on a kind of "his not to reason why" principle. It would be insulting to the intelligence of officers to assume that there is less Freethinking among officers than amongst men, but they evidently feel impressed with the conviction that to sanction independence of thought in one direction might encourage it in other ways. And in this they are probably correct. But we are convinced it is a very foolish conclusion to reach. Of course, assuming the hunger of soldiers for religion opens a way for the chaplains in the army to continue their fanciful yarns of how eagerly the soldiers attend religious service. We will cease to doubt this when soldiers, released from control, go to church of their own accord.

What highly placed clerics will give and endure for the sake of their religion staggers one. The Archbishop of York recently donned a miner's dress and for the first time saw miners at work. He returned full of praise for the miners. We may take it that the Archbishop will now advocate the return of all mining royalties received by the Established Church to be expended for the benefit of pitmen. But, in any case, we should not allow anything to diminish the fact that the Archbishop has shown his sympathy with the miners.

Good Roman Catholics, and many of the English Church, do not fail to speak of Mary as "the Mother of God." But we must not get things mixed, and to avoid our doing so the "Universe" advises a correspondent that Mary is not the mother of God the Father, but only of God the Son. But that leads us to confusion, for God the Father and God the Son are one; they have been in existence together since the beginning. So if one-third of the Trinity is a son of another third only, and if the two of the three parts are not one part taken together, what becomes of the Trinity of three in one? And if one is the son of the other third, how does it happen that they both began together and continued together as one—save for the time when the Son separated from the Father and came to earth. We seem to get more mixed the more we try to make it understandable. Perhaps the answer is that salvation is not brought about by understanding. What an interesting puzzle for the long, dark evenings that are before us.

Another inquiry of the same kind, and asked of the same authority, is if Joseph, the father of Jesus—or at least the husband of the mother of Jesus—was immaculately conceived, as well as the Virgin Mary. The reply given is that anyone may "privately" believe this to be the case, but it is not a doctrine of the Catholic faith. But why not? The teaching is that Mary, the mother of the God Jesus, was immaculate because she was miraculously freed from the sin of Adam. What is there to prevent our believing that this was a family habit and goes back to the beginning? If we believe the first case it should be easy to consider the others.

Mr. Carr-Gom thinks it is high time that if we are to preserve the Christian religion we should have fewer sermons. We agree that many sermons are enough to drive sensible people out of church, but the non-sensical and the "fat-headed" form a very considerable section of the population, and it is for these nowadays that the Churches have to look to for the larger part of their supporters. And if the clergy drop their sermons, what are they to put in their place? They might, of course, walk round the church on their hands holding the collecting box by their feet, but we are afraid that would not be called dignified. These are hard times for the clergy—unless they get appointments to broadcast.

Some of our religious journals are very concerned with an omission in the "Daily Telegraph's" volume "The Story of the War" (2nd part). It deals with everything but religion. This deplorable "neglect of the moral and spiritual issues" makes it impossible, says one pious critic, to get "a true evaluation of the war." That may be so, but if the above book had attacked the lamentable part played by the Churches—particularly the incessant squabbling among themselves—would that have been a "true evaluation"? Only if the Church had been honorably mentioned and given full marks would any religious writer have been satisfied, and the fact that the "Telegraph" volume omits all mention of Christianity eloquently proves its utter failure in one of the most momentous events in human history—this war.

The Rector of Patching (Sussex) says that if we are to have a "Christian system of education," the first demand must be for "a supply of Christian teachers." Really, the Rector of Patching will be getting himself into trouble. Anyone of intelligence is aware that if the principal people interested in the education plot succeed, and unless the body of teachers show more fighting courage than they usually display, it will be the clergy who will be in command, and the teachers will become, in the majority of cases, their servants. But it is very unwise to give the game away as this vicar has done. He is forewarning the enemy.

"Our children," says the Rev. Leslie Jollie (Sheffield), "must have Christian truth." There is no such thing. Truth is conformity between facts, whether the factors are of a "material" or other order. There are Christian falsities—misstatements in the interest of Christianity, Christian absurdities, ridiculous positions created because they favour Christianity, and so forth,

but there is not, and never has been, a Christian truth. Truth is the agreement between statement and verifiable fact. But beware of the "truth" that carries a religious label.

The worst of Christian falsities is that there is no kind of sensible agreement among its advocates. We do not mean agreement as to doctrines; that has never existed, and when we reach the time when only two Christians are in existence we may take it that each will be denouncing the Christianity of the other. What we have in mind is the character of Christian propaganda. It is true no attempt on the scale of the Mons Angels has been made during this war, although the Roman Church has done its best with completing the tale of the Fatima story, certainly among the most impudent examples of "lying for the greater glory of God," and the Roman Catholic Church, that we have heard of.

An example of the propaganda we have in mind is found in the stories of religion in the Forces. On the one hand we are told of the way in which the men delight in the religious services, on the other we have—as illustrated by Professor Jessop, of whose quality we recently gave a sample—lamentation over the fact that the majority of our men in the Forces have no definite attitude towards religion. We find that a generation has grown up without religion. It is said they have not ceased to be religious. They never have been so. There may be a little exaggeration, but it is far nearer the truth than the stories we get from religious sources.

For example, Generals Montgomery and Alexander are said to be very earnest Christians. That may be true or not. We are not in a position to say. Their attending church after a victory may only be a mere matter of form. But we are dead certain that a large number of the men who attended would not have been there if they had not been ordered to attend, they would have preferred a free and easy concert party. When the Generals began their forward march from Egypt they had always plenty of Bibles there. It was aeroplanes, guns, tanks and willing soldiers they waited for. And, having got these, a good marching song would have done just as well as a hymn.

The Halle Orchestra is morally entitled to call itself a national institution. It is subsidised, and music-lovers place a high value upon it. But the magistrates had forbidden it to enter Carlisle—at least to the extent of it visiting the town on Sunday—the only day on which the orchestra can fit into a planned tour. The orchestra plays in London, Manchester and other places on Sunday; in Carlisle it was banned by a handful of local bigots and worshippers of one of the most primitive of superstitions. We are pleased to conclude this paragraph with the news that the magistrates were induced to withdraw the ban, and the desecration of the Sunday followed.

Blackburn, like so many of our seaside resorts, has an annual mission. This year there were 16 missionaries and three Bishops in attendance. The Bishops declare, as they do every year, that the mission was of great value. General result—fewer than ever people go to church. The heads of the Churches openly confess that unless the children are under complete control, on the Hitler pattern, the game is up. Keep them in hand during their years of immaturity and they may not develop beyond church or chapel. That seems the philosophy of the whole movement.

There is another mission being run at St. Albans. Inspired by the way in which the B.B.C. gags opposition from "dangerous" subjects, and the readiness of public men to lend themselves to the game, St. Albans, instead of merely singing and exhorting, actually permits questions. But they complain that the questions usually centre round the "Incarnation, the Old Testament miracles, the plagues of Egypt, or arguments about God based on the Old Testament point of view." But why dodge these questions? They are an important part of real Christianity. We invite questioners to stick to their guns, and make the preachers stick to the religion they are paid to protect.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. R. GAINES (Boston, Mass.).—Your letters are always welcome. We are pleased to know that you find this journal constantly interesting. This, we are glad to say, is the opinion of many readers in the U.S.A. We hope we deserve at least some of the kind things you say. Thanks for reference to book. Will try and get a copy.

T. WATERS.—Of course, we regret the bombing of Rome, but not because it is the location head of the Roman Catholic Church. Our regret is far more for the destruction of relics of the ancient world than for the Vatican. After all, Rome is the head of the Fascist Movement, as it is the head of the Church. And both heads get on very well together.

F. H. CAIN (Auckland).—Pleased to hear from an old Victoria Park member. The only way to check the priests is to go on making Freethinkers.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Mr. Barnett Cemel, £1, Mrs. M. Poynton, 3s.

G. H. CEATE.—Thanks for pamphlet. May deal with it later.

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.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WE published an account of the attempt on the part of the postal authorities of U.S.A. to prevent the circulation through the post of books criticising the Roman Church, a ban which includes our "Bible Handbook"—circulated in the U.S.A. for over 50 years—also the fact that the New York "Truthseeker" intends to take legal action in the matter. We promised, on behalf of "Freethinker" readers to be responsible for a subscription of at least £100, and invited promises—no money to be sent until further notice is given. We have received a number of promises, although but little time has elapsed, and we are under no doubt as to the £100 being subscribed. The larger part of the £100 is already guaranteed. We shall give a fuller account next week.

It is evident that the feeling, if not the disgust, aroused by the nursing of certain forms of the Christian religion, allied to its determined stand against allowing the other side to be heard, is growing. In this matter the B.B.C. is both unfair and dishonest in its official statements. The following from "Countryman," a magazine concerned with gardening and related matters, we think is worth reprinting:—

"Cast down your hearts! As we have so often said, the wireless is more to country people than to townfolk with their greater recreational and educational opportunities. But several of our subscribers complain about certain religious broadcasts before the 8 o'clock news. Many addresses have brought refreshment; others, it is suggested, have been related to the science and human experience of 1800. One question asked is: 'Is the choice of speakers fairly representative of the denominations?' Another: 'Why should the addresses be restricted to members of the denominations? Can no one speak helpfully to his fellows on the good life without denominational tenets?' It is a pity that

a suggestion made to the B.B.C. to publish a table showing the way in which time was allotted in 1942 between different sections of religious opinion was not adopted. 'How often is a Quaker on the list?' a subscriber inquires. 'And why should not men like Wells, Shaw, Gilbert Murray and Julian Huxley be heard?' Two members of the Government are vice-presidents of the Rationalist Press Association; what of the lodestars of their lives? The early hour is no difficulty, for recording is now customary. The nation, going through deep waters, deserves all the moral and intellectual succour it can have, and it must be agreed that 'Lift up your hearts' is not always the B.B.C. at its best. The Minister of Information has given the assurance that the B.B.C. has 'no religious bias.' A speaker at the recent British Association meeting stated that 'the Home programme includes seven hours of religious broadcasting a week and twenty minutes of scientific.'

But the B.B.C. has always on hand a good stock of lip-praise for democracy. It is largely a Government tool part of the time, and a fanatical servant of the Churches all the time.

Rev. Leslie J. Derret writes to the "Daily Telegraph" from The Vicarage, Church Hill, E. 17, with regard to church parades:—

"It is high time that those responsible for the continuation of the system of compulsory church parades become conscious of the harm which is done by them. The average soldier regards them as an invidious imposition, and in many cases hostile to the Church. From the Churches point of view they are indefensible."

We agree with this, with the exception that compulsory church parades are not, from the Churches' standpoint, indefensible. From the point of view of the Church, they are not merely defensible, they are advisable. They are carrying on the policy of the Christian Church in all ages.

But if other witnesses are to be believed, Mr. Derret is wrong. Consider the tales told by the B.B.C. preachers, particularly the travelling Padre, who is, we believe, well subsidised by the Government. He has told us with that unmistakable ring of truth—Christian truth—of how soldiers flock round him, wait for him, dwell upon his message, and how longingly they listen to his counsel when they have fallen out with their best girl, or had a row with their wives. No, such men do not lie, they receive the stamp of the majority of B.B.C. preachers. Mr. Derret it is who is trying to mislead the people. He is really not fitted to be in the Church. He should come out. Once upon a time he would have been thrown out.

We have said many times that we have no objection to religion being taught in the schools, provided it is a religion as a whole, not merely one section presented as unquestionable truth. One cannot understand the development of society unless there exists an acquaintance with the origin of religious beliefs from the plain superstitions of the savage to the disguised superstition of the most "advanced" form of Christianity. At present children leave schools without any acquaintance with the origin and development of religion, and without really understanding the nature of the religion they are taught to believe.

So we were the more pleased to see an excellent letter in the "Spectator" for August 20 by Mr. A. P. Kielly, in which he says:

"If we are to achieve world co-operation it will be not by a totalitarian victory of one religion, but through a synthesis of religions. . . . The religious curriculum should be directed towards diffusing among children a general knowledge and appreciation of the common spiritual and ethical elements of the great faiths of the world. . . . This country is the centre of a great Empire, millions of whose inhabitants profess religions other than Christianity. It is the ally of Confucian and Buddhist China, and of great Mohammedan peoples. The links between, in years to come, should be, in the common interest, greater than ever before. . . . The children should not be obliged to subscribe to a single one of the faiths. Nor should their minds be bemused."

That is a good outline. The only other suggestion we have to make is that there should also be lessons on the religions of primitive peoples and what we know of their origin. The child would then leave school equipped with a knowledge of the beginnings of religion, instead of being made ready to be dominated by a generally irresponsible priesthood.

WHY I DO NOT BELIEVE IN GOD

IT is an axiom in everyday life that the onus of proof is on the one who makes a statement. The Church, in religious matters, claims the privilege of reversing this, and demands from the unbeliever, proof that God does *not* exist, as if anyone could prove a negative. One soon finds out that this is not necessary, as the believer soon gives his case away by saying that he does not know that God exists; he only believes that he does. If that is only as far as the Christian can get after thousands of years, the "atheist" or "agnostic" is entitled to wait for some little knowledge on the subject (as opposed to belief, which is not even half way to knowledge) before he troubles about the matter at all.

With the usual religious inconsistency, the one who professes to believe, but not to know, after starting with the proposition that "no man can know God," then proceeds to describe God in concise terms, which imply, at least, a very intimate acquaintance with the "Almighty." That these attributes should be absurd, and cancel out each other, is what one would expect from any attempt to describe the indescribable.

Let us begin with an understanding about terms so that the "believer" and the sceptic can at least talk the same language. Before anyone can believe in anything, however absurd, it is necessary to be able to form a mental concept of the thing believed in. Thus, a golden elephant a mile high is an absurdity, and if anyone stated that such a beast existed, he would be asked for proof, and of an unmistakable kind; but that is something quite different from a belief, provided that such belief is based on a definite conception. My imaginary elephant is based on three conceptions: (1) The elephant, (2) the colour of gold, (3) a height of one mile, all of which can be pictorially realised in thought. When, however, these attributes cancel each other out, as in the instance of a long-short anything, then there can be no mental picture at all, and my "belief" can only be a pseudo-belief; I only believe that I believe. In the absence of a mental picture—no matter how absurd it may be—there can be no belief at all.

* Now let us examine the belief in God and see if any mental picture exists at all. The "religious" person, having started with the proposition that no one can apprehend God, then proceeds to endow the Almighty with certain attributes, which, apart from the fact that one cannot assign attributes to anything which cannot be conceived in thought, are, in essence, self-contradictory and, in consequence, cancel each other out, just as with a tall-short man for example. Also, before one can assign attributes to anything or anyone, one must have just that mental picture which is impossible in the case of God, as the believer says at the outset. Apart from this manifest incongruity, let us examine these Almighty attributes.

The Christian clergy commence with the statements that God is Almighty, Omni-present, All Knowing, All wise, All merciful, etc., etc. Leaving for the moment the important question how does the clergyman know all this, having just confessed that he knows nothing about God, let us see how these attributes cancel each other out, in the same way as with our tall-short man.

GOD IS ALMIGHTY.—Modern clerical exponents seem to dispute this proposition, and go so far as to state that man's free will (whatever that may mean, as it implies actions without causes) is capable of disarranging the almightiness of the Almighty. I suppose they must have a dim idea that an Almighty Deity must

be responsible for every act, good or bad, of everyone in this world—or in any other, if any such exist—therefore, in the absence of such responsibility the Almighty ceases to be almighty.

GOD IS OMNI-PRESENT.—If words have any meaning (in religious circles they appear to have little or none), if God is everywhere, he must be everything, from individuals to munition factories, as otherwise God cannot be in the space which these occupy and, therefore, cannot be everywhere.

GOD IS ALL-KNOWING.—To be this, He must know all the good and all the evil in this world and every other, from planets to outer galaxies. Yet he allows all evil to persist, although, being Almighty, he can alter it all at will. Here one might fittingly ask the Christian for his definition of "good" and "evil," and if this agrees with, say, the Mohammedan. It is quite possible that the Christian idea may differ from that of the Arab, and there are quite a number of Mohammedans in the world, to say nothing of hundreds of other religions, so the Christian is far from being in a majority.

GOD IS ALL-MERCIFUL.—It needs a "clerical intellect" to reconcile a Divine Mercy together with all the other Divine Attributes, with the state of the world as it exists at present, and also to state the nationality—if any—of the Almighty, and also why He has always been on the side of the biggest battalion. One can only wait for a battle fought on the one side with tanks and H.E. and with prayer only on the other. The issue, even the most devout cleric could predict.

After this farrago of "inspired" nonsense, I can only reiterate that my "belief" in the mile-high elephant is quite reasonable compared with the belief in an indefinite God, on the strict understanding that I am not to be called upon to prove its existence. In this, I stand shoulder to shoulder with the minister of the Gospel. The so-called "beautiful world" is no proof at all, as if it be beautiful the clerics of all ages have done little or nothing to make it so (unless burning at the stake is one of the "beauties"), and I must be allowed to cite all that is ugly, such as wars. Yet we wait in vain for any denunciation of wars, as such, from any pulpit; all that we get from pulpits is prayers to the Almighty not to forget the one side only—their own. If prayer be mighty—as we are told—what about German or Japanese prayers, and if the reply is "false Gods," then why does the Almighty of the Allies allow such to exist?

In conclusion, one must really compliment the Churches on their ability to describe the indescribable. That is why I do not believe in the Christian or any other God, and here I really stand in the same galley with the parsons themselves. I would suggest to the Church that a few prayers to the Almighty to abolish such details as the private ownership of shares in munition factories might be a step in the right direction. That would do as a start; there are many other evils which could follow. May I mention that Christian hymn: "One step enough for me."

HERBERT CESCINSKY.

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A DICTIONARY FOR THE DAMNED

- Abyss.**—A bottomless gulf, at least half a mile deep.
- Age.**—A rusty saw that cuts no ice.
- Agnostic.**—One who proclaims what many have the courage to think.
- Anathematisation.**—A process of neutralisation, as when a Roman Catholic damns a Baptist, a Baptist an Anglican, an Anglican a Methodist, a Methodist a Christian Scientist, and a Christian Scientist a Roman Catholic.
- Ancestor.**—An unavoidable accident, usually fatal.
- Angel.**—The earliest known flying machine invented by man.
- Apostasy.**—Abandonment of one's religion for something better.
- Assumption.**—The beginning of a truth—and the end.
- Atheist.**—Not one who merely disbelieves in God, but one who disbelieves in all the gods, including the 99 One and Only True Ones.
- Atom.**—A particle of matter so small that it cannot be cut or divided, except into two or more particles of matter so small that they cannot be cut or divided, etc.
- Authentic.**—Not so patently faked as to be immediately obvious.
- Bachelor.**—One who, for better or for worse, lives in daily fear of the worst.
- Banns.**—A misnomer.
- Baptism.**—A sacred process whereby an innocent babe is cleansed of imaginary sins it has not yet had an opportunity of committing.
- Belief.**—An opinion passionately entertained, to the entertainment of others.
- Bigamy.**—Among males, kleptomania in its most pathological form.
- Bigot.**—A stupid and obstinate fellow who prefers his own opinions to mine.
- Bishop.**—Theoretically, one inflated with God and the Holy Ghost; one full of hot air.
- Bridegroom.**—A ham, about to be strung.
- Burial.**—A rebuke, i.e. the putting of a man in his proper place.
- Calendar.**—Throughout the arena of Christendom, the only known means of distinguishing the Lord's Day from any other.
- Candle.**—An ingenious combination of grease and wick which will in no circumstances blow out until after it has been lit.
- Cannibalism.**—A recognition of the fact that alive, man may be good for nothing, but that dead, he is at least good to eat.

P. E. CLEATOR.

CORRESPONDENCE

"THE NEED FOR TOLERANCE."

Sir,—In my article on the above, I stated that I was "not concerned with the Archbishop's particular fancies," but with "one of his wider statements." Dr. Temple's remarks on "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" come under the first category and have received sufficient criticism elsewhere. I approached his article from a different angle. I agree with S. B. W. that Dr. Temple's opinions are his own, but I attempted to discern the influence of Christianity in his general attitude towards literature, and to contrast it with Freethought.

C. McCALL.

"A CHRISTIAN LEGACY."

Sir,—May not the Christians have learned some of their unpleasant tricks from the Jews? Gibbon, unchallenged by Dr. Bury, says in the 16th chapter of "The Decline": "From the reign of Nero to that of Antoninus Pius, the Jews discovered a fierce impatience of the dominion of Rome, which repeatedly broke out in the most furious massacres and insurrections. Humanity is shocked at the recital of the horrid cruelties which they committed in the cities of Egypt, of Cypress, and of Cyrene, where they dwelt in treacherous friendship with the unsuspecting natives; and we are tempted to applaud the severe

retaliation which was exercised by the arms of the legions against a race of fanatics, whose dire and credulous superstition seemed to render them implacable enemies not only of the Roman Government, but of human kind. In Cyrene they massacred 220,000 Greeks; in Cyprus, 240,000; in Egypt, a very great multitude. Many of these unhappy victims were sawed asunder, according to a precedent to which David had given the sanction of his example. The victorious Jews devoured the flesh, licked up the blood, and twisted the entrails like a girdle round their bodies."

Making due allowance for exaggeration of numbers, they seem to have done their best, and proved the truth of Harvey's dictum that man is just a great mischievous baboon.

H. ORMEROD.

[Taking the quotation given, and without discussing it in any way, we do not see that it gives any explanation of the many centuries of the persecution of the Jews. Again accepting facts as stated, the first Christians were Jews, and the conclusion must be that religious persecution was intensified by the religion of both Jews and Christians. The Christians did not need to learn intolerance from anyone. From the outset it was a persecuting creed.

A much more scientific attitude is that monotheism (monotheistic so far as one "god" is concerned) will always be found more fiercely intolerant than a frankly polytheistic order.—EDITOR.]

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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), Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. E. C. SMITH and supporting speakers.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bigg Market, Newcastle, September 5, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, 7 p.m.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place, Blackburn): Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON—a Lecture.

Blyth, The Fountain, September 6, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, 7 p.m.

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

Bridge, Fatfield, September 7, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, 7 p.m.

Bristol and District Branch N.S.S. (Durdhams Downs), Mr. G. THOMPSON, 6-30 p.m.

Chester-le-Street, Bridge End, September 4, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, 7 p.m.

Enfield, September 3, Mr. J. CLAYTON, 7-15 p.m.

Glasgow Secular Society (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Meetings held weekly, weather permitting.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. W. A. ATKINSON: A Lecture.

Nelson, September 8, Mr. J. CLAYTON, 7 p.m.

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

North Shields, Harbour View, September 8, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, 7 p.m.

Padiham (Waterside), September 5, Mr. J. CLAYTON, 11-15 a.m. Read, September 9, Mr. J. CLAYTON, 7-30 p.m.

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THOSE EMPTY CRADLES

(Continued from page 344)

WHY should we heed the ravings of the Church upon the subject of the "Empty Cradles"? Shall we thank them for their attitude of ignorance and meanness towards women in childbirth; seeking, as they did, to deny woman the blessing or annulled pain? Shall we thank them for the countless birthbeds that have been, at their behest, little hells for mothers? Shall we thank them for their false guidance over the questions of chloroform, ether, contraceptives and inoculation as applied to childbirth?

Shall we really thank them for the way in which they have filled these "Empty Cradles"? Or shall we thank them for the ways in which they have emptied the cradles by their advocacy of superstition as against science?

When have they fought for woman and not against her?

Never!

Let woman be educated to deny to the Church that which the Church has denied to woman—Loyalty. Let woman be educated to support that which has supported her against the Church's desire—Science.

Science, and not the Church, has been the friend of woman. Church, and not Science, has been the enemy of woman. Science, in the form of chloroform, ether, contraceptives, diet, health and such, will inform her when and how often to fill those "empty cradles" in strict accord with how the politicians treat her income, her "points," her "coupons" and her offspring.

Notice that, Mr. Brown, please!

It is of no use asking, begging, praying or demanding full and fuller cradles of the intelligent woman unless you free her from the lurking fear of "the means test bogey"; nor is it much use trying to get intelligent women to bear other than unwanted children if she knows that her destiny is bounded by a 10s. old age pension and a tiny insanitary dwelling.

If the rationed food be ever so full of vitamins, and her books ever so full of coupons, yet, unless these will fill her and her baby, clothe and keep them clothed without sheer anxiety and constant worry, then no amount of "inquiry" will fill those "empty cradles."

No amount of bribery or of "special" concessions to mothers-to-be will suffice. No amount of relief from certain duties or taxes will basically alter the empty cradle. It will still remain empty. The mother-to-be demands these rights as her own natural gift from nature. The mother-to-be demands these things as rights from her own mother, Nature; and not as a series of special favours handed out to her by the politicians with the kind permission and agreement of the Church.

Intelligent woman has the natural right, and she demands this right, to breed her own brood in strict conformity with the freedoms and rights of her husband. She has no wish, desire or need to say "Thank you, sir" to either politician or Church, who would tell her that "We have decided to 'allow' you to go to such-and-such a home to have your baby"; or "We have decided to 'allow' you an extra bottle of milk, two eggs and three 'nappies' for the occasion."

This attitude is an effort to impress upon the mother-to-be the slave complex. To educate slaves has always been a crime in the eyes of the slave owners; and, in that truth lies the essence of the reason why the Church has always stood in the way of Science; why the Church has fought so fiendishly against chloroform, ether and contraceptives.

Intelligent woman knows that the bribes of politicians are not real bribes—they are her rights. They belong to her. They are her own property with or without the consent of politicians, with or without the blessing of the Church. She does not thank either politician or Church for such "concessions" of nothing,

but only wishes to thank her own particular and peculiar God for such without let or hindrance from either Church or State.

To these she says "Thank you for nothing," and in horrified amazement at her attitude the Church and State throw up their hands, bow their heads, and murmur, "What ingratitude!"

He who would fill those "Empty Cradles" with the only kind of baby worth having, and with as many of those as are worth having, must first make woman the master of her own body. Not just the overseer of her own body during the brief period of pregnancy, but from her cradle to her grave. From her infancy to her old age.

To tell her, to bribe her, to cajole her to "go, get pregnant and 'we' will look after you," is of no use to the intelligent woman. Her brief answer is, "Sez you!" What she really says is this: "I have seen how your Church has treated us in the past over such as twilight sleep; I observe how it would treat us in the present over such as contraceptives; I dread how it will treat us in the future after we had filled our cradles and your pews. I have noticed that lately the Bishops talked out of the House of Lords my old age pension as having no interest at present unto them.

"When you talk to us about 'empty cradles,' your talk is not national only, it is the universal talk of States and Churches. It applies itself to all nations, and all for the same reasons and ends.

"Therefore, we beseech you to alter your attitude, alter your outlook, correct your mistakes; make it that the pursuit of happiness is not a dream; make it that Liberty is a sacred thing, and that Freedom is a reality, and we will fill your cradles with a race that shall be of superlative quality and do grace to your own vision.

"Return to us these things that are our rights, and our babies' rights, and we will happily show you that

"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

B. B. B.

DOROTHY PARKER

ONE of the most interesting comparisons that can be carried out by any literary critic of the present day is that between American writers of short stories and their English contemporaries. It is, of course, quite impossible to get exact equivalents of writers on either side of the Atlantic, but the student of English literature might find an amusing exercise in finding who in Britain was the nearest equivalent to Miss Dorothy Parker, whose recent death has been so much regretted by students of the short story everywhere, and whose collected tales have just appeared here under the title "Here Lies" (Penguin; 9d.).

Miss Parker had a wicked wit and a satirical dislike of all conventional and pretentious people which should have an appeal to Freethinkers. Nothing could be more impressive than her study of a "broad-minded" woman who disliked those who looked down on negroes, yet who equally despised the coloured people herself. All who have any kind of race prejudice in their veins would gain by a reading of the story "Arrangement in Black and White," while "Soldiers of the Republic" gives an angle on the Spanish War which is more impressive than many a volume of political analysis.

In these days of space restriction I will not attempt to deal with this volume in any more detail, but I will content myself with recommending every Freethinker to read the book. We are sometimes told that fiction is of little value to serious-minded folk; but I am sure that everyone can gain by reading Dorothy Parker. She is one of the great figures of contemporary American literature, and she has a lesson to teach everyone who is interested, either in political and economic developments, or in the evolution of the short story in our time.

S. H.