

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Empty Churches

I THINK it was Douglas Jerrold—the wit—who said that the majority of men who attended Church did so because their wives took them, or because other men's wives took them, or because they wanted wives to take them. Even at that far-away time the falling off of Church attendance was noted, but the word itself had a certain aureole of respectability, and Sunday was still one of our "sacred" days. God was still held to do something. He had not completely lost control of the weather; and could still produce an epidemic when occasion called for it. His unhappy venture in literature, the Bible, was not yet exposed to the "man in the street"; miracles, if not completely out of date, still had a great vogue in that treasury of primitive beliefs and stupid customs—the Church—and the English clergy had not yet moved in the direction of substituting old age pensions schemes, for better housing, and bathrooms, as a substitute for washing in the blood of Jesus. The position is that the clergy, as clergy, have never stood so low in the estimation of even genuinely Christian folk as they stand to-day.

The clergy have often been likened to doctors, the one aiming to cure diseases of the body, the other curing diseases of the soul. The analogy is not a good one. It may be useful to knaves and is appreciated by fools. But there is a very marked distinction between the two forms of human industry. The ideal medical man—there are exceptions even in the medical world—aims at affecting a permanent cure, and if he finds a cure beyond him he confesses the truth and counts it that so far his science has failed. A doctor aims at cultivating in his patient an ability to do without him, and counts it as a conquest when he informs his patient that he need not come again, or that his own visits will cease.

The parson works along completely different lines. He lives not by the complaints he cures but by those he perpetuates. He will guarantee the well-being of his client only so long as he is a regular visitor to his spiritual surgery. He values patients who will work with him to develop an irritation in their spiritual skin to a chronic disease of conscience. The rule of the medical doctor is "Count yourself completely victorious only when the patient is able to do without you." That of the priest is "We count a success only when our patients feel they are unable to do without us." When the spiritual patient feels he is able to stand alone it is the priest who goes on the sick list.

Our Empty Churches

The Churches appear to be getting really anxious over the decline in attendance. It will be remembered that at the last Church Assembly it was frankly stated that not

more than 10 per cent. of the population attended Church. Worse still, nearly half the population were either completely unconcerned about religion or actively opposed to it. We have also noted of late an unusual number of letters in the Press from clergymen moaning about empty churches. We have had days of prayer, numerous processions, some with the King and Queen taking part, but the attempt to bluff the public has failed. We have also had the old cry that we must not estimate the number of Christians in the country by their attendance at church. Perhaps not, but the falling attendance is at least an indication of the way things are moving. Also the trick that was played during the last war is being played in this. The clergy with the troops talk of the revival of Christianity at home. Those at home tell the people what a great and comforting thing our men at the front find in religious services.

There has also been quite a number of letters in the Press from clergymen on the falling off of church attendance. Thus the Rev. Mr. Ashby—who writes a weekly religious article for the "Daily Telegraph"—attacks those who excuse themselves from going to church by saying they reflect on God during their Sunday walks. In the most polite way Mr. Ashby tells them they are liars, and offers the opinion that not one man out of a hundred ever thinks about God when he spends Sunday in walking instead of going to church. For once we side with Mr. Ashby. Individual religion can only live where the social atmosphere is strongly charged with religion, and that is hardly the case to-day. As civilisation advances the social atmosphere tends to diminish the power of religion rather than to increase it. It is this sociological fact that has led the Board of Education to give the Churches a helping hand by so revising the schools that they may be saturated with religious influences, in the hope that it will to some extent cancel the effect of the social environment. So far we agree with the "Telegraph" preacher that if we are to have a revival of Christianity it can only be by an increase in church attendances. And professionally the Rev. Mr. Ashby may well ask, in effect, "What is the use of people being religious if they do not come to church?" The outlook is very black.

Rocks Ahead

Among the many letters dwelling upon the decline of church-going quite a number have appeared in "The Times." On one day there appeared three—all from clergymen. They were all very sad over the present position of affairs, and are even doubtful whether the processions, the introduction of Church services into the Home Guard, etc., have really made for Church-going. The Rev. A. S. Duncan Jones writes from The Deanery, Chichester, expressing doubts whether these ordered processions to church really benefit religion. Mr. Jones

complains of "invasion of the rights of ecclesiastical authorities by the organ of the State, which will, if continued, undermine Church authority." (The Dean appears to forget that it is by the authority of the State that the Church of England exists. Its Prayer Book was authorised by the State and cannot be altered save by the consent of the Houses of Parliament. The King is the head of the Church. The Dean cannot expect to have it both ways.)

From Melbury Abbas, Dorset, the Rev. (?) R. Bettenson gives a welcome to showy processions to church because it reminds the public that the Churches are alive to "spiritual issues." Their spiritual quality is not obvious, but it is possible that these public shows may attract a few. It is, however, quite clear that the reverend gentleman believes in advertising. A third reverend writes from Wilmington Vicarage and goes right out as to the advertising value of the special days of prayer. The settled days of liturgical prayer, he says, have no attraction for outsiders, "but if the Church has special Sundays carefully planned, with special days of prayer, then the Gospel of Christ may spread and may become a source of good to many who are now out of reach." The Rev. J. H. Gooden believes it pays to advertise.

So runs the tale, and in sober truth there is something in it. These processions and full-dress performances with musical entertainments and communal singing may attract many who have not yet outgrown church-going. No other class offers the Churches ground for hope. But the ugly fact facing the Churches is that belief in Christianity decreases, and those who have ceased to believe will not be tempted by a procession or other circus performances. Cinemas are plentiful, access to the countryside on non-working days will be even greater after the war than it was before, and all that is left to the clergy will be to stand in the doors of their churches—and see the people pass.

The Essence of Prayer

Collective petition to local gods is one of the earliest phases of religious belief. It runs back to the beginnings of tribal religion, to that stage in which everything that occurs is attributed to gods, good or bad. Those who wish to find illustrative examples of collective praying to primitive gods will find scores of illustrations in any modern work on anthropology. The marching of a procession to a "sacred" place such as St. Paul's Cathedral, headed by priests and a King, is an exact replica of the primitive medicine man leading his people, accompanied by the chief of the tribe, to some "sacred" spot to pray for the help of the tribal gods. In essence, the mental attitude of these praying processions in 1943 is identical with the behaviour of primitive tribes in the dawn of civilisation.

But with this distinction. The behaviour of the primitive praying procession was an expression of the culture of the time. A praying procession in 1943 answers to nothing in our scientific culture or our social development. Concerted prayer to-day is nothing more nor better than an elaborate lie. Not more than the average educated man or woman does the priest now believe that his prayers have the slightest supernatural influence on the course of events. Disbelief in religion is to-day in the air we breathe. It is assumed in modern science and in the behaviour of the modern mind.

Nearly two thousand years ago that master of superb satire, Lucian, pictured a council of the gods called together for the discussion of a situation identical in kind with the situation that has aroused the fears of the priesthood of to-day. The gods were concerned with the decline of prayer and offerings. Like the Jehovah of the Bible, they delighted in smelling the "sweet savour" of offerings from the people. That is, indeed, the food upon which the gods have always lived, and there is no substitute for it. In Lucian's story the gods discuss at length the cause of decline. (With nothing but a change of words, Lucian's satire might be taken as a report of the last Church of England Assembly.)

All sorts of reasons for this falling off of worship is given by the distressed major gods, until one of the minor gods join in. "Let us," he says, "be candid. All that we have really cared for is a good altar service. Everything else has been left to chance. And now men are opening their eyes. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church or don't go to church, makes no difference to them. And we are receiving our deserts. Our advocates are silenced. If you wish mankind to reverence you again you must remove the cause of their disbelief."

That might well be, with a very slight alteration of a word here and there, taken as a summary of the position to-day. The gods of Lucian's day have died out, to be succeeded, it must be admitted, by other gods. But step by step these later gods have been driven back. They have fought a retreating action, but face nothing but ultimate defeat. If the gods wish mankind to reverence them they must remove the cause of unbelief, and the clergy of to-day might as profitably try to cart themselves round the room by the waistband of their trousers as to wipe out all that is known of the birth of the gods, their nature and evolution, and their certain destruction.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE CATHOLIC "CONSCIENCE"

THE Editor's comments in the September 26 issue on the humbug that so often surrounds the word "conscience" were both timely and appropriate, and I beg the forgiveness of readers for being prompted by Mr. Cohen's remarks to return once again to the Squabble of the Schools, this time to examine in a little detail that weird and wonderful quality known as the Catholic Conscience.

I have previously made it clear that in this controversy of the schools only the Roman Catholic Church really matters among the religious bodies. The old Nonconformist Conscience is now but a ghostly memory, and had it not been for Catholics, and their more recent attack of conscience, stimulated by a sense of power among the politicians, the unification of our schools system might have been accomplished by this time; although we should still be faced with the general question of religious instruction in schools.

With the disappearance of the Nonconformist desire to possess schools of their own, and with the rapid weakening of the denominational position of the Church of England, which has been only too willing in recent years to hand over many of its schools to local authorities, we were well on the way to the removal of that anti-social, undemocratic and primitive dual system which tolerates religious propaganda centres under the honourable name of education.

But it was not to come as easily as some had hoped. At the first sign that the country as a whole was inclining toward the unification of the schools system (not the unification of education, which is a characteristic peculiar to Church schools rather than State schools), Catholics suddenly became afflicted with a conscience. Previously, they had been contented to have a so-called grievance; but when the penetration of the democratic idea into education threatened danger to their totalitarian institutions, they decided to play up to democracy, and to the good nature of the British people, by developing a "conscience," which is nearly always a sympathetic chord to strike in this country.

So to-day we have to regard Catholics as conscientious objectors to the national education effort. In brief, R.C.s have become C.O.s. This is not an unjust description, because they are taking great pains to make it clear to everybody that their "conscience" does not allow them to place their children in any schools other than Catholic, staffed, controlled and "atmosphered" by Catholics, *yet paid for by the nation.*

Unlike other conscientious objectors, however, they are not prepared to pay the price of being conscientious—and this makes their claim a worthless one. We can all (I hope) admire the integrity behind the pacifist objector, who declares that his conscience forbids him to take part in war, and who is prepared to stand outside the war-time social group, asking nothing in the way of concessions or favours, and ready to bear his self-assumed burden. But what would we think if C.O.s banded themselves together and demanded that the community should provide them with the expenses and facilities for carrying on their anti-war policy; or if they demanded that they should have the "right" to oppose the national effort, *at the nation's expense?*

Yet such is the Catholic position to-day. The Catholic educational "conchy" demands that the rest of the nation shall pay the cost of his opposition to the national education system. Nay, he asks for more.

Jack Donovan, the Catholic trade unionist, speaking on behalf of Catholics, has actually demanded not only present maintenance, but compensation for the former cost of Catholic conscientiousness! A sort of "back pay" by the State to Catholics, in consideration of their having been Catholics. To what base ends...?

How on earth a trade unionist can even countenance the giving of public money at all for a private institution is beyond my comprehension, let alone "back pay." If it were proposed to subsidise, say, Imperial Chemicals, wholly and regularly from public funds, without public control (Catholics refuse public control of their schools), I should think Jack Donovan would blow himself up in protest. Yet he stumps the country, with others, demanding it for that private institution which is his Church. There can only be one possible explanation—Jack Donovan is a Catholic!

A truly democratic Catholic (if that is not a contradiction in terms) would honestly recognise his position in society, and would probably make a statement as follows:—

"I am a Catholic, and have a conscientious objection to sending my children to the school provided by the State, as this is against my faith. But the great majority of people in Britain are not of the same opinion. They have national schools for all citizens' children, irrespective of religious creed. As a citizen, I am offered these schools for my children, but as a Catholic I cannot use them. I must, therefore, pay the price of standing outside the national education effort. The community does not object to my *being* different, but it reasonably objects to *paying* for my difference. Demanding something other than the community as a whole provides, for the citizens as a whole, I must be prepared to pay for it myself, unless and until I can persuade the majority that my ideas are better than theirs."

Such a Catholic would show that he grasps a basic principle of social behaviour, and I feel sure he would obtain more satisfaction by virtue of his willingness to pay for his refusal to share in the communal schools. This is always the price, and one of the satisfactions, really, of being different from the main group.

But when the "Greater Glory" walks in, democracy walks out; and an upstart Roman Hierarchy knows neither fairness nor decency of citizenship in earthly matters when it is seeking to promote the interests of "other worldly" matters.

With the exception of the kingship, disabilities and discriminations against Catholics do not exist in this country. Quite properly, we have granted Catholics complete and full citizenship; they have the right to enjoy every advantage of British citizenship along with non-Catholics. All of that—but no more.

And if Catholic "conscience" continues to demand more by seeking public money to subsidise machinery for reproducing its religious kind, and by insulting others with the implied suggestion that our children are not fit school companions for Catholic children, then that conscience has something coming to it; for there is no fiercer anger than that of the tolerant community, when it is finally goaded to action by the unjust and selfish claims of a well-done-to minority.

And Britain's 95 per cent. of non-Catholics will not sleep for ever through the rapacious rascalities of Roman racketeers.

F. J. CORINA.

ACID DROPS

WE have often commented on the B.B.C. Brains Trust, its "cooking" of questions and the substitution of the talk about commonplace things that would scarce disturb the serenity of the famous Victorian maiden aunt. So we welcome, without being surprised, the contemptuous summing-up of the Brains Trust by an *Evening News* editorial note for October 6. It says that if the Brains Trust "were a serious institution, instead of being a weekly joke," one might be annoyed at some of its deliverances. That is as good a description as we have yet had of this child of the B.B.C. Questions of any real value for discussion are barred altogether, and others are mauled in a way that would be a disgrace to many a moderately read average person. It is a "weekly joke," but a disastrous one, and a joke that reflects very hardly on those who take part in it and those who value it.

But worse than the one which brought forth the contemptuous comment of the "Evening News" was a question which asked whether parents should "sacrifice themselves" for the benefit of their children. Opinion was divided, but not a single one of those present, including one woman, repudiated that miserable word "sacrifice." All these very respectable people, so delicate that they would not in public breathe a word against religion, saw nothing unsuitable in speaking of parents "sacrificing" themselves to give their children a good education. We can assure the Brains Trust that the majority of parents do *not* feel they are sacrificing themselves in giving to their children. It is a policy that blesses those who give and those who receive; a case where conduct brings out all that is worth having. Perhaps it is the type that dominated the meeting that justifies the saying of Bernard Shaw that parents are often the worst enemies of their children.

It may be said in defence of the members of the Brains Trust that either they have had the misfortune of having been brought up in a Christian saturated atmosphere in which human nature, as such, is valued at its lowest level in order to enhance the value of belief in Jesus; but not even the deeply rooted Christianity of the B.B.C. will ever make decent parents *feel* they are sacrificing themselves in giving to their children all that is possible. In a deeper sense than one can imagine the Christian controllers of the B.B.C. realising, he gives most who has most, and the having is realised in the giving. Perhaps the greatest evil of the Christian religion lies not in what it

has taught men to do, but what it has prevented their seeing. It brings to the level of prostitution all that is fundamentally best in human nature.

The Archbishop of York has been to Russia. He was there for a few days, and, we assume, spent most of his time among Christians. He did not offer apologies for the lies that Christian leaders told about Revolutionary Russia, and so encouraged support being given to the establishment of Hitlerism. No one expected that he would do so. All Christians are ready to say "All we are sinners," but what number would have the courage to add publicly "and most of us, where religion is concerned, are liars"? Still, the Archbishop did discover that "Atheism is out of date in Russia and that thousands are turning back to religion." We expect that before long we shall hear that *all* the Russians are Christians, that Stalin has his own private chapel, and that the chief members of the Government are longing for a religious revival.

Perhaps it might be worth reminding everybody that these good Christians only began to appreciate the greatness of the New Russia when we were at war, in great danger of defeat, and found out that the Russians were great fighters—not merely the men, but also the women. We mention these things so that those who believe Christians never learn anything new is not true. They do learn new things—when it pays, or when they must.

The Archbishop said that in Russia he found out that people were free to worship as they wished. That freedom was never denied them under the Soviet. There were restrictions, and it is these that are being lightened. But the Archbishop did not deal with the situation that led to the Soviet placing restrictions on the Churches. That would have raised awkward questions.

We like to chronicle answers to prayer when they are really genuine. The recreation grounds of St. Mark's, Blackpool, have been ploughed up to provide allotments, and the Vicar asked "God's blessing." Result, not one crop failed. In other parts of the area no prayers were said. Result, many failures were experienced. Good! But it does seem rather mean on the part of God to wait to make crops fertile till people grovel before him. Surely he ought to be joining in the war effort and do what he can to help without waiting for prayers to jog him as to his duty.

We are indebted to one of our South African readers, who writes from a hospital bed, sending us part of a published speech by Abbé Breuil, who reminds the world that fifty years ago Leo XIII. warned theologians that the claim to seek scientific teaching in the Bible was to risk turning all into ridicule. But the Abbé did not, of course, say that this pointed to more "slickness" than honesty on the part of the Pope. For it was the Church which insisted that the Bible gave us a scientific—that is, a truthful—account of the creation of the world and its development, and lied and tortured and murdered to prevent anyone shaking the faith of the people in the Bible. Abbé Breuil may be broad-minded, but he is also very, very artful.

Mr. J. E. Tinsley asks in the "Church Times": "By what authority does our Government, claiming to be a champion of democratic liberty, attempt to mould in accordance with present prejudices the minds of the vast majority of our children by imposing on them an agreed syllabus of selected aspects of Christian teaching." The answer is: None at all. It is a deal between the Board of Education and the heads of some of the Churches. It is an offence to a real democracy and an outrage on the helplessness of the child. But the Christians have always had a preference for age and infancy—and vested interests in general.

An arrangement has been made for Roman Catholic women to make a public pilgrimage of women throughout the streets of London to implore the aid of the English martyrs (of the sixteenth century) for the preservation of the Catholic schools in England. But why a *public* procession? These martyrs

are all dead, and it is not pretended that they will be visibly present in the procession. It looks as though the real aim is to appeal to the English people who are neither saints nor martyrs. Otherwise the Roman Catholic women might just as well do their petitioning at home or in their churches.

We have been asked to give a good definition of "God." The best we can think of at the moment is "a being who always acts in accordance with the wishes of those who worship him." At least, that is the kind of god that lives longest.

We should also remember that the Christian Church has always begged most when it felt itself losing the power to burn.

We are often rebuked for laughing at serious things. In defence, or by way of explanation, we would say that serious things are the only ones that deserve laughing at. Trivial things are not usually serious ones; they are just ridiculous and advertise their quality in the act of achieving publicity.

The B.B.C. preachers are carefully selected, and therefore we have no cause for surprise when they broadcast the customary stupidities and advocate a view that should have been buried several centuries ago. It is of no avail to complain to the heads of the B.B.C. for, in various ways, they explain that a great number of listeners are simple-minded, uneducated, and generally a long way behind the present-day level of modern thought, and must not have their primitive minds disturbed. So the blot on English culture pursues its path.

Here is one instance of the mental types that get "on the air." It is taken from "The Listener" for September 30. The Rev. G. L. Russell remarks that "The only sanction for any moral law is, ultimately, that it is God's will." There is nothing new in that saying; it was once very, very common, but in scientific circles it is dropped and left to Archbishops and the general body of preachers. After all, it does seem rather probable that robbing a man of his possessions, running off with another man's wife, assaulting anyone you disliked, etc., etc., would be discovered by any collection of human beings as undesirable without God interfering. But Mr. Russell says that ultimately braining a man whenever you disagree with him would never have been thought wrong if God had not made a "law," just as a Government makes a law, saying that taxes must be paid by a definite date.

There has been a lot of "God saved England in 1940." Poor God, he is always late in arriving, and when he does arrive the work has been done without him. Why could not God have done the trick in, say, 1939? In that case there would have been no war. We are quite aware that in that case we should not have had any cause for thanking God, and God *does* like an advertisement. In this matter he is worse than a third-class actor or actress, or a politician looking for a job.

Christianity commenced as a purely religious creed. It is as such that it meets us in history. It had its god for leader, and he presented his credentials in the usual way that gods have so often presented them: by coming from heaven, by working miracles, by threatening dire punishments in this world and in the next, by being crucified (religiously), by rising from the dead, by sending to hell those who would not accept the god and reserving comfortable places in heaven for those who worshipped him. A series of accidents led to it dominating the secular powers—directly in some cases, indirectly in others—and we enter upon that period of history which is known as the "Dark Ages." That in itself is significant. Theoretically, the period in which the Christian Church had the upper hand should have been known as the ages of light, of humanity, of progress. But the ancient learning was neglected: the scientific advances made in Greece, in Alexandria and elsewhere; the culture developed in the Pagan world was almost forgotten. Jesus had told his followers that many of those standing before him would be living when he returned to earth, and man's chief duty and interest lay in turning their backs upon the things of this world and reflecting upon their chances of occupying a good place in the worshippers of the Christian deity.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- A. HENSON.—We note the misspelling of your name as "J. Hanson" in the subscription list. Thanks for correction.
- J. KIRTON.—We had not seen the cutting. See "Acid Drops."
- C. L. W.—The first part of the book dealing with the Bible is now on sale. The price is 2s.; postage 1½d.
- T. H. BURGESS.—Much obliged for note. Will bear what you say in mind.
- J. HAUES.—Thanks for pamphlet. May deal with it later.
- The General Secretary, N.S.S., acknowledges the receipt of 10s. for Benevolent Fund from Mr. P. Ineson.
- C. T. LANGLY.—We have always advised all parents who do not believe in State-taught religion, whether they are believers in religion or not, to withdraw their children from religious instruction. If this had been done the present Government would never have dared to plan for giving the clergy a substantial measure of control over the schools. It is not yet too late for many parents to cease playing into the hands of the common enemy.

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

SUGAR PLUMS

It was in the early part of this year that the Editor received a letter asking for a definition of Christianity. He declined the task, as offered, but as a substitute wrote a lengthy series of articles showing what historic Christianity *was*: There were many requests for a reprinting in book form, and orders placed in anticipation. These articles—revised and enlarged—are now in book form "on the market," price 2s., with 1½d. extra for postage. The title is "Christianity: What Is It?" From the advance orders, it is expected to rank as one of our "best sellers." Very shortly Mr. Cohen will commence, in these columns, a series of articles dealing with the New Testament and the Christian Church, with their historic reactions. That will be Vol. II. of the book now published.

The new Bristol and District Branch, N.S.S., opened its indoor session with an encouraging meeting in the Kingsley Hall. The speaker, Mr. G. Thompson, was in good form; some interesting questions followed; new members were made, and a steady demand for literature kept the sellers busy. Unattached local freethinkers might consider adding their strength to the branch and increasing its activity and prestige. There are enough local freethinkers to make Bristol a really live centre of freethought propaganda.

A lady paragraphist who writes regularly in the "Universe" is angry with Haumen Swaffer for writing of a Roman Catholic journalist, recently dead, that "he delighted in Rabelais and would talk with humour about a Mass he had just attended." The lady

calls this a "curious abstention from civilised manners." We grant that Catholic manners would have been to print a tissue of untruths concerning the deceased journalist's devotion to the Roman Church.

Bishop McCormack (R.C.) begs the Ministry of Education to seize the "golden opportunity" of satisfying Roman Catholics by footing the complete bill for the maintenance of Roman Catholic schools. It really looks as though the Catholic Church wishes to seize all the gold it can to keep its sectarian schools going at the public expense. It is quite touching to find the wealthiest Church in the world pleading poverty when it comes to education.

We are pleased to see that the opposition to the Government plan for definitely strengthening religion—the Christian religion, for none of the other religions will meet with equal treatment—is growing among teachers. Ever since the proposals were first carefully announced we have been pointing out that it means selection of teachers because of their efficiency in teaching the *right* kind of Christianity, which in turn means the poorest teachers will be most certain of advancement. So far as teachers are concerned, it will mean the survival of the least desirable. We are nearing the time when religious tests will be established, if the Government-cum-clerical plot has its way. There should be no radical alteration of our educational system until the war is over and a new Government elected. To do this might convince some that there is more than mere words in the Government's profession of democracy.

As we have said, over and over again, the power to stop the revival of sectarian teaching in the State schools lies with the teachers. And we have no doubt whatever that the best of our teachers are all opposed to the Government plan for the restoration of a form of religious teaching that is being discarded by the majority of educated adults. Here, for example, is an excerpt from a speech by Mr. H. Allison, President of the Federation of Class Teachers, as reported by "Education" for October 1:—

"I do not think it has yet been realised that religious tests will be imposed on intending teachers, on applicants for teaching posts and on aspirants for promotion. Within each school there will be two classes of teachers—those competent to give religious instruction, and the others, by implication, incompetent. I fear that in the future not only the headships of the auxiliary but those of the county schools will be reserved for practising members of the Churches. . . . It would seem that further concessions to the Churches are contemplated, concessions which would establish the dual system firmly for many years."

The accuracy of this analysis of part of the situation of the Churches is indisputable. And if the N.U.T. had the moral courage it ought to display it would as a body fight the Government proposals on religious instruction as plainly and as boldly as possible. The matter really lies very largely in the hands of the teachers. The issue is: Shall the interests of education come first, or is the teaching staff as a whole to become the tools of the Churches?

The Bishop of Chelmsford says that "our homes are the creation of the Christian religion," yet we seem to have heard of young men and young women getting married, setting up homes, and getting children before Christianity was heard of. But the Christian home is breaking up, so Christianity has not been strong enough to maintain the home—and yet there appears to be homes knocking about. The Bishop says "The sanctity of marriage has almost entirely disappeared. Parents have little if any concern about the training of children, and the majority of children treat their parents with good-humoured disdain. . . . The very keystone of our whole social structure is crumbling." The state of things seems terrible, or is it that the Bishop is just telling lies? We must remember that after all he is just a Bishop. What he is really trying to say is that his business outlook is not very bright. Still, he need not despair. There are many different ways of getting a living—and all of them are not honest ones.

A BOOK WITH A PUNCH

II.

IN his "Idiocy of Idealism," Dr. Oscar Levy devotes three chapters to Jesus Christ. (Incidentally, though he often calls him "Christ," he does *not* believe in him as the veritable Messiah expected by pious Jews.) For him, or at least for the purpose of his book, the accounts given of the Christian God in the Gospels are taken as substantially true, and his flaying criticism is not unlike that of Dr. Binet-Sanglé in "La Folie de Jésus."

Jesus started by preaching to the down-trodden and oppressed, and inculcating love for the poor and the weak. But he did not stop there. He cured "the sick, the paralytic, the mentally afflicted, and those possessed by the Devil." And that was too much for the spiritual leaders of Jewry, who felt that such cures should have been done by them as "the priests, of course, were the interpreters of God's will."

The result was that there was a holy row between orthodox Israel and Jesus Christ which sent the latter into fits of anger, in which the priesthood, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Scribes were accused of all the vices, vanity, fraudulency, mendacity and hypocrisy. As Dr. Levy says: "To send his enemies to Hell was a favourite stratagem of this Herald of Love and Goodness." And we know from the "authentic" Gospels the kind of language, in addition, he used against them.

On the other hand Jesus, or as Dr. Levy calls him, the Divine Demagogue, "had the talent of making unpleasant present things palatable by the promises of futuro prosperity" for those who believed in and followed him, one of the delightful prospects being "that ye might eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This rather reminds me of the promise that Hitler or Goering gave to his airmen who attacked Britain in 1940—that they would all be Gauleiters in the finest British towns when Germany won. For my own part, I have never quite seen why "judging" the twelve tribes of Israel in Heaven—or whatever "my kingdom" meant—was worth two hoots, or whether even an Archbishop or a Cardinal would be electrified into heavenly praises of Jesus for such munificent bounty.

Dr. Levy, after quoting many of the "hate" passages in the Gospels, points out, "Now this is certainly the reverse of the medal of the gospel of love, which to the psychologist nowadays appears as the gospel of envy, sadism and vindictiveness," and he cites the well-known parable of Dives and Lazarus as a specimen of hate and revenge. He thinks it is because some Catholic Freethinkers like the Abbé Loisy and his French and modernist school were so "shocked by their Saviour's vindictive nature" that they tried "to save the situation by drawing a line between Jesus and Christ, between a Jesus human and divine, between the Christ of faith and the Christ of history: but this cutting up and juggling with Divinity will not save the Saviour from critical crucifixion."

Dr. Levy contends that other theologians feeling that "somehow or other they had to get rid of the compromising personality that blesses and curses alternately through the columns of the three synoptic Gospels, and that even disfigures the fourth," gave out that Christ never existed. I can assure the iconoclastic doctor that we have some very good evidence that the whole story of Jesus is a fiction, and that this evidence has nothing to do with the picture of the Divine Saviour as being a good or a bad force.

In passing, I have often been accused of saying that some Rationalists when dealing with Jesus are very, very reverent. It is good to find that Dr. Levy has noted the same fact. His words are, "Respectful as even freethinking philosophers have always been to the Son of God. . . ."—so am I in very good

company. He adds that these Freethinkers "have suggested that the Gospels have been falsified, and that the repulsive language [Christ used] was not Christ's own but had been put into his otherwise sweet mouth by over-eager followers, spiteful disciples and poisonous evangelists." Those of us who have done a little controversy on the subject will at once recognise the truth of this.

Dr. Levy, quoting many of the "hate" passages, adds: "This Preacher of Love was a preacher of hatred, and he knew it (Luke xiv. 26). His Jewish contemporaries knew it, too. So did the Romans. Only the Gentile world was mistaken about him and had chosen this minor specimen of Jewry for its God!" Not since Evan Powell Meredith wrote that masterpiece of cold analysis, "The Prophet of Nazareth," has there been such contempt for the Gospel Jesus as Dr. Levy shows.

Bolshevism, he contends, "is a disease due to Christianity," not, it is interesting to note, to the Christian Church, "which to a certain extent is its antidote," but to "the Christianity of Christ." And Jewry, by providing the world with Jesus, and the early Jews who became Christians, is to a large extent to be blamed for the troubles in the world—and its own troubles, of course.

Luther and Calvin fare very badly at Dr. Levy's hands. Luther was "a superstitious monk" angry at the way in which the Catholic Church in Italy was at the time all for a cheery—and, therefore, a more or less ungodly—life; and so, "with a tongue as foul as Christ's, began to attack the Church. The great Rome of the Renaissance became the whore of Revelation in the eyes of the Reformer." As for Calvin, "During the first year of his reign in Geneva, he had 13 people hanged, 10 beheaded, 35 burned alive and 71 driven from home." Also, "within 60 years the registers of Geneva show that 150 poor wretches were burned for witchcraft, that the application of torture was an incident of almost all criminal trials, and that 31 people went to the stake at one time for the fantastic offence of spreading the plague." Dr. Levy comments:—

"It is important to draw attention to these leaders of the Reformation, for they are the forerunners of the national redeemers who later on, and again in our own age, so successfully imitate them and even improve upon the methods of their pious persecution. Calvin's theocracy in Geneva is the embryo of the totalitarian state of to-day."

Laying about him much as Samson of old did, Dr. Levy spares very few of our "ideal" heroes. Oliver Cromwell, among others, gets a very bad innings, for there is very little, if anything, at all in Puritanism for which the doctor has an atom of respect. Not many Freethinkers will agree with him, perhaps, when he declares that "a greater actor, liar, traitor or hypocrite could hardly be found than Oliver Cromwell." He claims that the pious Bismarck was such another—Bismarck admitted that he had contrived three great wars in which 80,000 men had perished—and thinks Lenin approximated Cromwell in many qualities. On the other hand, Dr. Levy speaks with admiration of Cæsar, Henry of Navarre and Napoleon.

Rousseau he puts with Calvin—though he admits his greatness as a writer. And in the pious Robespierre the "incorruptible," he sees another "gifted disciple" of Jesus Christ and Rousseau, filled with the usual Puritan-like and, therefore, hateful platitudes about just government, noble virtues, etc., so beloved of the Reformer.

Hegel, the inventor of the "Divine State," Fichte, with his "Kingdom of Reason," come in for a damaging criticism, as does the idea that in Russia will at last be found "The Kingdom of Heaven." The Gospel of St. Marx, Dr. Levy contends, simply "renews slave morality"—and there is a deal more on the same lines.

As I intimated in the first article, Dr. Levy's book will be intensely disliked by many "reformers," but it is good to feel

that it was written, all the same. Do not let us talk about freedom if we cannot bear our own beliefs attacked—and even annihilated. For in the end, if I dare use a familiar platitude, the truth must and shall prevail.

H. CUTNER.

AN ITEM OF CASUISTRY

IN papist theology, casuistry is the department of cases of conscience and how to deal with them, both in the confession box and out of it. They have text books on the subject giving typical examples ("cases"). As may be expected, "mendacium" (i.e. lies, dishonesty) provides many "cases." The ex-priest, Thomas Connellan, in his booklet, "The Jesuits," quotes a case from Gury's "Casus Conscientiæ" (Vol. I. 280-1), which, he says, "was the text book in Maynooth in my time." It is a case of "mendacium" based on a case of adultery and exhibits the putridity of both papist "honesty" and "marriage." This is the case:—

Anna, who had committed adultery, replies to her husband (who suspects her) that in the first place she has not broken her marriage tie; in the second place, when she had already been absolved from the sin, she replies: "I am innocent of such a crime." Then, in the third place, her husband still insisting, she utterly denies the adultery and says, "I have not committed it," meaning, adultery such as I should be bound to reveal, or, "I have not committed adultery to be revealed to you." That is the case posed, and next comes the question: Is Anna to be condemned? And the answer is as follows:—

"In the three cases Anna can be excused from lying. For, in the first case, she could say she had not broken her marriage tie, for it still existed. In the second case, she could say she is innocent of the crime of adultery, since, having made confession and received absolution, her conscience is no longer oppressed by it when she has a moral certainty that the sin has been remitted, and this she may confirm with an oath. In the third place, she might more probably deny that she had committed adultery, meaning such as she was bound to reveal to her husband." Connellan comments: "Such is the teaching of two prominent theologians whose works are in every seminary, standards from which priests draw their teaching in the confessional. The extracts were drawn from me by the challenge of a local priest. I could and can quote even worse teaching from these and other theologians of the Jesuit Order, but jelly fish Protestants have repeatedly charged me with bitterness, while, as a matter of fact, I have always had to put a tight curb on when dealing with such abominable sinks. Well has Pascal written, 'Their books of casuistry resemble the sewers of a city which when exposed become more dangerous than the filth they were intended to remove.'"

It is charged against the Jesuits that they attained influence by being "easy" with sinners. In the case just given, it would be understood that when "Anna" told of the adultery in the confession box, then the obliging father confessor would put her up to the tricks of speech whereby she could bamboozle her husband. From which, a good many observations could be made, both about Catholic "truth" and that weird jobbery known as Catholic "marriage." We will perhaps come back to the subject some other time.

C. R. BOYD FREEMAN.

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"WHAT CAN YOU SEE IN IT?"

WITH the above words Mr. Gordon Hogg concludes an appreciation of that fine classic "Looking Backward," by Edward Bellamy (September 12). As it is a question, and a very pertinent one, I will endeavour to answer him.

I have read both of the books referred to in Mr. Gordon Hogg's article and appreciate fully and sincerely the sentiments expressed by both authors, yet I feel that in spite of their well deserved success as literature, both failed and now fail in their efforts to bring about any social change that would effectively solve mankind's problems.

Consider "Looking Backward." It is a Utopian fantasy of the true Wellsian type. Published as it was in 1888, when America was still industrially undeveloped, when unemployment was practically unknown, when there was still opportunity for the "lucky break" to wealth and security, what scope for effective action, political or otherwise, by people who could think only in terms of "get rich quick and to hell with the other fellow."

In my opinion, Bellamy's book was premature by possibly 60 years, but this is not its main fault. Much more serious is the desire, beloved of so many propagandists, to graft Utopian fantasy on to their propaganda.

Let me make it quite clear that by the word "Utopian" I have in mind the highly imaginative literature (that is in relation to the period in which it was written) of this type. This can be made clearer by an example, not necessarily from "Looking Backward."

To conceive of airplanes travelling at 5,000 miles per hour, of trips to the moon and to Mars, of control of the weather by artificial means, of universal perfect health, are all to my mind aspects of Utopian fantasy. Such developments may be possible, but it is difficult to conceive of such tremendous developments of the known.

(Continued on next page)

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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. SAPHIN and supporting speakers.

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South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Professor G. W. KEFON, M.A., LL.D.: "Six Great Englishmen—(1) Sir Edward Coke."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. R. CONSON: "Random Reflections."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mrs. WIDDUP: A Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Mr. H. J. ADAMS, B.A., M.R.San.I.: "What Must I Do To Be Saved?"

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Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3-15 p.m. Mr. J. V. SHORTT: A Lecture.

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

"WHAT CAN YOU SEE IN IT?"

(Continued from previous page)

But to conceive of reasonable developments of the known is not Utopian. Thus, to conceive (now) of a world so organised that there need be no poverty, unemployment, malnutrition or war, is I think, not Utopian. It can, in fact, be proved feasible, but needless to say it would need the wholehearted co-operation of the majority of people throughout the world to make it so. And is it Utopian to conceive of such co-operation? Frankly, I do not think so. If the millions of England, America and Russia can co-operate for the purpose of war at the behest of their respective governments, I see no reason why, with a knowledge and understanding of the possibilities, they and the rest of the world could not co-operate for the purpose of peace—perpetual peace at that, and no half-baked Munich! That this would involve a World Commonwealth of all mankind is obvious, but that it would also involve a moneyless, wageless and tradeless world may not be quite so clear. For enlightenment on this point, I would refer Mr. Gordon Hogg to a book, "Money Must Go," by Philoken, shortly to be published.

That Bellamy could not conceive of a "moneyless" world in the true sense is clear from his introduction of the credit card, but who can censure him for this oversight? Living at a time when scarcity and even famine were still possibilities, it would have needed more than Utopian imagination to foresee the tremendous potentialities for wealth production that we now have available. Who can deny that it is now possible to satisfy all the needs of mankind and, moreover, with only a fraction of the work put in nowadays? What need for credit cards when all could take "free" all that they need, as and when required. Utopian? Why? What could be more simple? Can simplicity be Utopian with complexity so universal? There would be problems to be solved without a doubt, but how simply solved compared with the intricacies of wars and waste, financial jugglery and black market jiggery-pokery.

The defect of the other book referred to is one common to quite a number of books of like nature and to many left wing organisations. Tressell, in "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist," spends far too much time and effort in criticism of the present system and offers only the merest glimpse of the potentialities inherent in the changed world that he envisages. Such an attitude can lead only to despair, since life offers so little to so many in our present "money" world, and few can visualise constructively from mere destructive criticism.

Hence the need for the book "Money Must Go" already referred to. It takes the world as it is *now* and demonstrates how a Moneyless World Commonwealth would work in practice *now*. By means of chatty dialogue, a world without money and in which goods are produced for use and for free distribution is described, and its practicability *now* is indicated.

On the subject of religion, the author, unlike Bellamy, is forthright, and with his permission a passage is here quoted:—

"With the coming of World Commonwealth will go the money power of the Church; will go, too, the stranglehold that religion still has on present day education, and in a straight fight between the forces of superstition and the power of knowledge, there can be only one outcome. Out of man's ignorance religion was born; out of fear has it been maintained. The World Commonwealth will be the product of man's intelligence and understanding, of his desire for joy and happiness in this, the only world we know. That world will soon be a new world, a world without money and in which goods are produced for use and for free distribution. Then, and only then, will belief in the supernatural give place to understanding of the natural, and ignorance and fear give way to knowledge and confidence."

Both Utopianism and criticism serve some purpose, but both are minor factors towards bringing about social change. The

majority of people are not concerned with life in the year 2000, nor are they concerned overmuch with criticism of the present system, presented either as "learned" treatises by "able" economists or with the pathos of novelists such as Tressall; too many are aware of its deficiencies but can see no light in the all pervading gloom.

But give them more than a glimpse, give them a picture, crude maybe, of the possibilities for joyful living, *real* living inherent in a World Commonwealth, a world based on "*now*," and the response has to be seen to be believed.

Mr. Gordon Hogg asks us to look into the mirror of life, and I have no doubt many of us have often done so. But do we not tend too much to hope with Bellamy and Wells—or to despair with Tressall?

Is there a happy mean? Is there a short road towards filling the gap of understanding in the minds of the many towards real social change? I believe so, and believe, too, that Philoken has found it.

The author looks into the mirror of life *now*, sees life as it is *now*, and bases on it a vision of how life could be lived *now*, with the means and instruments available *now*, and with present day people.

Is it Utopian? Read it—and with me say "No."

J. PHILLIPS.

WAR FARE

"Belgium Unvanquished." (Motz, 1942; Lindsay Drummond.) This member of the Belgian Government defends Leopold against those who accused him of treachery.

I do not see, however, that he produces much evidence in support of this contention, and the book was written largely to please Maurice Maeterlinck, now a refugee in America.

So far as yet known, the facts are that Leopold did not give his Allies anything like adequate notice that he intended to capitulate, and this was particularly unfortunate for Gort's forces, who had just abandoned Weygand's plan to close the gap in order to patch up the Belgian collapse on the Scheldt.

However, a far more serious criticism of the Belgian King comes from his past record. Three Fascist papers flourished in Brussels, one of them owned by the leading Rexist, Leon Degrelle, a paid agent of Berlin, who enjoyed the covert protection of the Palace. Leopold chose for his advisers men who were pro-Nazi, such as the infamous trade union traitor, de Man. Add to this the shockingly corrupt Belgian Civil Service, and the refusal of Leopold to co-operate in staff talks with Britain and France, and we begin to see why the German High Command welcomed the invasion of Belgium by British and French forces, who passed through unimpeded by the Luftwaffe.

The author is particularly hard on Reynaud, who denounced Leopold in no uncertain terms, but says little of the similar denunciation by his colleagues in the Belgian Ministry, Pierlot and Spaak.

G. H. TAYLOR.

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