

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIII.—No. 45

Sunday, November 7, 1943

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Again Atheism

I THINK that last week's "Views" justifies a return to the subject of Atheism. The Russia that has compelled notice by our politicians and by the Churches—very unwillingly—and which has become familiar to that elusive creature "the man in the street," has brought everyone into contact with a Government that has accepted as a title of honour "Atheism," and has carried out reforms which for thoroughness and efficiency set a target for others. To some extent Russia has laid the bogey of "Atheism." Events have shown the "man in the street" that, as Bacon said, "Atheism leads a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural piety, to reputation, all of which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, even though religion is not." That is a sufficiently qualified testimonial, but it will serve, particularly when we remember that Bacon lived at a time when the reputation of an Atheist was a rather dangerous thing. A heartier testimonial is that given by Coleridge, that "Not one man in a thousand has sufficient strength of mind or goodness of heart to be an Atheist." And now we have a nation, the largest in Europe, the leaders of which boldly initiate an Atheist State.

It is worth while noting that the Christian section of our population did what it could to prevent the English people appreciating the nature of the Russian Revolution of 1917. No fiercer campaign of lying has taken place in recent years than that which followed the establishment of this Atheistic State. Russia did not forbid religion, but it took steps which would turn the most illiterate population in Europe into an 80 per cent. literate one. The Government worked to instruct the Russian people on the nature of religion and the part it had played in social life. And in the circumstances, control of the Churches was imperative. To-day the pious campaign of calumny has been dropped, or it suffers an underground existence. Even Lord Halifax has been forced to silence and the talk of our being associated with Russia for military purposes only has given way to a promise that Russia shall take part with Christian England—after the war—for the regeneration of Europe.

I said last week—not for the first time—that Atheism is a one-way road. I mean by that the fact that the development marked by Atheism once achieved cannot be destroyed, save by some process of mental decay. The man whose nose has once been pulled remains pulled for ever. One may not understand Atheism, one may not be aware that the origin of the gods is as well known as the fact that the highly cultivated rose is a descendant of the wild flower that is found in our wayside hedge. But once that knowledge concerning Atheism is achieved, Atheism can no more be set aside than positive knowledge in other directions.

An Atheist is one who is without belief in god, just that and nothing more. It is the plain, logical opposite of the belief in gods. And so long as we are honest to ourselves, which is usually far more difficult than being honest to one's neighbour, every god appears as a magnified man. Not better than man—let it be noted—for there never has been a god who was as good as the best human we know or can conceive. Every religious expression that has reference to god implies man's parentage. Such expressions as "God help us," "God commands," all our prayers and petitions to god imply his human origin. Prayers would be meaningless if they were not directed to a human. Days of prayer, petitions to god, all carry with them the same inference. Those who tell us that the god they believe in is a "principle," not an individual, are talking arrant nonsense. You can believe in a "principle," but you cannot pray to it. Any attempt to do away with the maulike character of every god is evidencing either a muddled mind or deliberate dishonesty. Sir James Frazer set a fine example when he defined God as "A supernatural being who controls the world or some part of it . . . who is endowed with intellectual faculties, moral feelings and active powers, who resembles man in nature." And he gives the world of godites a lesson in honesty when he says that if we have ceased to believe in such a being as God we should cease applying the old word to the new, faith. That advice runs with the simplest manifestation of mental honesty, but it has no place in the religion of a sophisticated godite.

I have, for example, seen and heard men who have passed the known gods in review and dismissed the lot, wind up with an "Of course, what we have said does not prohibit the existence of God in the abstract." But what is God in the abstract? Can we ask a God who is without passion to be good and kind to us? One might as reasonably ask the wooden Scotsman outside a shop to direct one the way home. It is also said by some that when they use the term "God" they have in view something or someone that is immeasurably greater than man. Granted. But make God as great as you please, multiply his size to infinity, endow him with unbelievable strength, give him life for a thousand years—which is a very long time for any god to exist without undergoing a radical renovation—still you will not have altered the basic idea of a God as a magnified man. In the Bible there is a story of some people who tried to build a tower that should reach to heaven. But these people were not foolish enough to cease calling it a tower because it was a very large one.

Gods and Their Makers

It may be said by critics that I am asking people to prove a negative. I am doing nothing of the kind. I am only trying to induce people to use words that have a reference to something that is understandable. Size and

power, goodness and badness cannot by any extension lift things out of the category to which they belong. Abstractions do not exist as things. The abstract rests on the real, and the real must be something singular and definite.

Those who oppose Atheism should remember that there is not a single argument upon which the Theist may rest his case that is not well known to the Atheist. In addition the Atheist *knows* how the gods came into existence, and also how they go out of existence. As surely as he knows anything, he knows that the study of the belief in gods is the study of an illusion. And this knowledge is not confined to the Atheist. It is to be found in any competent book of modern anthropology. He who runs may learn. He who will not run might at least observe the saving virtue of silence.

The belief in god moves on the same level as the belief in witchcraft. Men testified to have seen witches—sitting round a fire, roaming through the air on a broomstick, turning the milk sour, and raising storms that would sink a ship. In its day the truth of witchcraft was testified by men of learning and position. Also parallel with the belief in gods there are millions of people in the world who still believe in witches. Yet all the evidence that once proved the existence of witches is still obtainable. The evidence is there, but the judgment that criticises them is a riper, a more balanced judgment. The phenomena exist, but the judgment that criticises it is on a higher level. Gods and witches are born of the same material and they perish of the same poison.

We have left a long way behind us the stage at which the gods may breathe and act the part of a living organism. We leave a long way behind us the stage at which we could profitably balance the reasons, pro and con, for the existence of god. Of course, we have that unfortunate mental attitude that operates under the name of Agnosticism. But in relation to "god," agnosticism is not a philosophy, it is an evasion. It pleads a suspension of judgment and makes the assumption that fresh evidence might arise to prove the existence of a god. But in the name of all that is sensible, what is it that we may suspend judgment about? The agnostic rejects the anthropomorphic god as readily as does the Atheist. He is with the Atheist in accepting the findings of the anthropologist in his account of the origin of gods. He agrees with the Atheist that so far as "God" points to anything, it must be a copy of man—his maker. At no point does the agnostic say, as the Theist may say, "At this point I accept the existence and the activities of God." In every reasonable way he marches side by side with the Atheist. There is no room for a suspension of opinion, because the agnostic does not know about what he is suspending judgment. We can suspend judgment about there being men found who are twenty or thirty feet in height. We may suspend judgment as to whether a man has built an aeroplane that will enable him to fly to the moon. In all of these instances we can suspend judgment. But how does one suspend judgment about something he cannot comprehend? To argue as Spence did, that however great our knowledge may become, there will always be a beyond about which we are ignorant, is beside the mark. Granted this is so, yet so far as we *think* about the unknown we can only base our reason upon what we know and allow for variations of that knowledge in terms of thinkable possibilities.

It was, I think, Cardinal Newman who said that when he looked at nature to discover a God, all he could see was a reflection of himself. Had Newman been better informed about the gods he would have realised that the only gods men have are reflections of themselves. No believer ever saw anything else. A god, whenever and wherever found, is composed of man's loves and hates, of his wisdom and his folly, of his littleness and his greatness. Newman was right that when he looked to nature for a god he found only a reflection of himself. So long as man looks at nature and succeeds in discovering a god there, he will find but an exaggerated copy of himself. Take away this vision of man's own fears and understandings, and the concept of god fades and leaves nothing behind. Newman's confession is superb in its indication of the birth of gods. The pity is that he lacked the courage to appreciate the quality of his own experience.

I commenced this note with the intention of discussing the reaction of the British public to the existence of the first nation with an avowed Atheistic government. But my machine ran away with me, and I have space for only a few lines. I think that one result of the appearance of an Atheistic government, and which has commanded the respect of all, will be a greater readiness to understand Atheism. No one can continue to revile a people because they have given up all gods, and at the same time admire them for the good they have done in creating a new form of social life that lifts a nation of nearly 200,000,000 people to a higher level than they ever before attained. Immediately, not exactly to our credit, we began to admire Russia because of its deeds on the battlefield. The sociologist will look forward to the new departure in social life that has been inaugurated.

A second result in this country will, I am sure, be a great increase in the number of avowed Atheists. There will be less timidity in avowing Atheism than there has been. That will make for intellectual honesty, one of the most important of qualities, but one that is most frequently ignored.

Finally, to the scientist and to the sociologist Russia has offered the finest experiment in social development that the world has yet had. One may set aside the question of the exact value of what has been done. Too many shallow-pated ones have lost the vital truth in concentrating on the subsidiary one. The great lesson of Russia is that human nature is malleable; indeed, social reform would be impossible were it not. Whatever kind of social structure we think best, we have the opportunity of realising our ideal if we set about it with knowledge and determination.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CHURCH AND STATE IN SPAIN

MR. GERALD BRENNAN'S "The Spanish Labyrinth" (Cambridge University Press, 1943; 21s.) is an outstanding study of the complicated causes that led to the devastating Civil War in the Iberian Peninsula. Among these antecedents was the chronic conflict between central administration and local autonomy. For Spain has never been really united, and the geographical and climatical diversities of the country, with the poverty of so much of its soil, as well as the composite character of its people, have accentuated its wide differences of interests and outlook. Hence, the continuous unrest that has characterised Spain ever since the 17th century.

The State's corruption, in which the Church participated, the dire poverty of the peasantry, have occasioned the growth of Anarchism and Socialism among the masses. At the opening of the present century religion was rapidly declining in a community long regarded as the most priest-ridden in Europe. The middle classes were first emancipated from clerical authority and the industrial orders soon followed their example. But Brennan thinks that Catholicism had so pervaded the minds of the poor that they craved for a substitute for this soporific, and they found it in the Socialist and Anarchist aspirations of the zealous apostles of these rival evangels.

State despotism on the one side and strikes and upheavals on the other, inevitably led to the terrible ordeal Spain endured when insurgent militarists, aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, plunged the peninsula into war. As Brennan intimates:

The Civil War was an appalling calamity in which every class and every party lost. In addition to the million or two dead, the health of the people has been sapped by the famine and disease that have followed it. Hundreds of thousands are still in prison. Both physically and morally Spain is the wreck of what it was. The hope of a resurrection lies in the indomitable vitality of the Spanish race and in the fulfilment when the war is over, of the promises of lease-lend assistance that have been held out to all European nations by the Allies."

The writer of the volume under review speaks from personal knowledge of current events. He also surveys the causes contributing to the fall of Isabella II. in 1868, the Carlist Conflict, the proclamation of the ill-starred Federal Republic in 1873, the reign of Alfonso II. from 1874 to 1886, the Regency, the reign of Alfonso XIII. to his abdication and Primo de Rivera's dictatorship until it culminated in the advent of the Republic in 1931.

It concludes with the rising of the military in Morocco and its sequel the Civil War and, let us hope, the transient triumph only, of the forces of militarism and religion.

Spain lost the last of her originally vast colonial possessions in her conflict with the U.S.A. in 1898, and this humiliation shattered the pride of her people. Catalonia, the storm-centre of insurgent Spain, demanded autonomy and the Crown was severely shaken throughout the land. Brennan cites the confession of Romanones, a prominent Iberian statesman, that "The Conservative Party, in order to remain in power a little over two years . . . passed through five total crises with five Prime Ministers and 66 new Ministers. Moreover, from 1905 to 1907 seven successive Cabinets were formed, and in the first 21 years of Alfonso's reign—from 1902 to 1923—there were 33 entirely different governments."

In theory, Spain possessed parliamentary representation, but the elections were so manipulated that the rival politicians and office-seekers took power in turn, while the clericals supported this nefarious system. Strikes and riots were frequent and the underground movements increased their activities. Also, for a generation before 1900, the clergy had been strengthening their authority. "Its militants—the monastic orders and the Jesuits," writes Brennan, "were more numerous and more disciplined than ever, and its treasure chest was full. It had never resigned itself to the loss of the dominating position it had once held in the State. . . . On the other hand, the forces of anti-clericalism had been growing also: they had on their side the whole trend of contemporary European thought, and the recent triumph of their party in France and the disestablishment of the French Church had greatly encouraged them."

In 1901, the celebrated Spanish novelist, Galdos, presented "Electra," an anti-clerical play, shortly after the King's confessor, Montana, had publicly stigmatised Liberalism as a sin. In response, the Spanish progressives assailed the Church, but for a time fought a losing battle. Brennan observes that: "The only advance made, and that was not made without the violent protests of the Bishops, processions of fashionable ladies through

the streets of Madrid and remonstrances from the Vatican, was the concession granted to the Protestant Churches to erect a cross or other symbol over their doors."

In the 16th and 17th centuries Spain's civil government lacked cohesion, for the peninsula was split up into several kingdoms, each possessing its separate Cortes and local administration, while a semi-sacred King stood over all. On the other hand, however, the Church was ubiquitous, and its Catholicism was strongly national. As Brennan points out, both the Crown and the Inquisition were frequently at variance with the Papacy, and he suggests that, had not the Protestant Reformation assumed the form it did, Spain might have seceded from Rome. He notes that: "The reform of the regular clergy carried out before 1510 by Cardinal Ximénez, the desire of the Spanish clergy to be allowed to marry, the dislike of the Italians, and the disapprobation of the corruption and luxury of the Papacy, the strong following that Erasmus had in Spain down to the 1530's all point to the beginning of a Reformation before Luther."

At an earlier time than ours, the Spanish Church sometimes sponsored economic reform, but with the loss of its very extensive landed estates—one-third of the best soil—in 1835, it lost all interest in the prosperity of the peasantry and turned to the wealthy classes for sympathy and support. This led to estrangement towards the poor and even when the Carlist War still raged, and cholera invaded Madrid, a rumour that the Jesuits had poisoned the wells led to the destruction of convents and churches. Also, in 1835, there was an epidemic of church and convent burning in the leading Spanish cities, and Brennan stresses the fact "that the men who burned them were probably all practising Catholics," and that this incendiarism was the act of the populace and not that of the Spanish Liberals.

Both intellectually and morally, the clergy had sadly declined since 1700. A clerical association was actually instituted in 1821, with a Bishop as president, for the extermination of every Liberal in Spain, while a deistic schoolmaster was hanged, after being sentenced to burning alive, by the Bishop of Valencia for heresy, as late as 1827. The clericals had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing of their persecuting proclivities, while the miraculous was also employed to intimidate backsliders from the faith.

Even in the period 1874 to 1931, the Church greatly increased its wealth and political power. The Jesuits invested vast sums of money in Spain, and it was estimated in 1912 that they controlled one-third of the capital wealth of the country. Their working capital invested in railways, shipping companies, banks, agricultural undertakings and other lucrative concerns was thought to reach 60 million pounds sterling, and money in Spain, as in most other countries, counts. Brennan grants that the various Jesuit colleges and missions needed monetary support, yet "it seemed scarcely in the national interests that one section of the community—and that a militant one—should control so large a share of the industrial life of the country, and then one must remember that a good part of the wealth had to be acquired by cadging for gifts and bequests among the rich, and that these favours are not given for nothing. In return, the Church was expected to defend the interests of the rich against the poor."

But this invaluable volume of 345 pages, with its excellent bibliography, must be read in its entirety if one is to realise the evils, paradoxes, opposed interests and ideals, that characterised Iberian life before the coming of the Republic, and which conspired to nullify its most laudable endeavours when it obtained its precarious lease of power. T. F. PALMER.

The doctrines of immortality, of freedom, and of a God who is, in his relation to ourselves, separable from this process—is not only a system which is unsupported by any single scientific fact, but is also a system for which among the facts of science it is utterly impossible for the intellect to find a place.—W. H. MALLOCK.

ACID DROPS

EX-DEAN INGE quoted the other day the saying that there were three things invincible: "The Standard Oil Company, the German Army and the Roman Catholic Church." Well, the German Army looks like going, and the Standard Oil Company ought to go if only on the grounds of the way in which it built up its monopoly. The ex-Dean says that he would back only the Roman Catholic Church. We agree that the Roman Church may outlast the other Christian Churches; but it has already had to modify many of its ancient teachings, and nothing short of something in the nature of Hitlerism would have to arise within the Church to secure permanency for an indefinite period. We would support Dr. Inge if he would frame his ideas so as to express the belief that so long as mass ignorance prevails, and there are found strong organisations to take advantage of it, the Roman Catholic Church will survive.

The Bishop of Penrith says the essential thing in teaching is to see that what is taught is true. Capital! Next we should like to know how one can prove Christianity is true? Why, Christians have been fighting and quarrelling ever since they began to discuss the question of what constitutes Christianity. Adults have never agreed. Our Minister of Education has found one way out of the difficulty. His advice is: Ram religion into the heads of children before they can understand what you are doing or why you do it. That is the point at which one should start. Christians have always laid stress on childhood and old age as the best periods for establishing faith in Christianity. Under six and over ninety.

The Rev. Donald Soper is convinced that "you cannot find family life in its true and essential characteristic until you find it within the framework of religion." Mr. Soper is an accredited clergyman, so with the utmost delicacy, and with no desire to hurt a sensitive man's feelings, we, in view of the immense number of happy homes that do not bother about the framework of religion, we say in the softest voice and in the kindest manner that Mr. Soper is just an ordinary common theological liar. Normal young men and women do not fall in love, get married and become parents because of a theological framework, but because they are just human beings with just that amount of decency about them that enables them to live cleanly and happily without bothering about religion at all.

We hope that all people have noticed that our Prime Minister is not ready to take any drastic move that touches the well-being of labour on the ground that we are at war. The Government is a Coalition Government, and therefore radical changes must wait until the war is over and a new Government elected. But—there is a big "but" here—he is quite willing to get an Education Bill passed at once which would effect a very radical change in the schools; and the proposals have not been before the electorate, and if they were the electorate would most likely object to place the clergy in control of our schools. Politics involves much shady doings—add religion and it reaches the lowest level.

Many of the papers—we expect the different notes come from a single hand—have taken to publishing the information that Stalin has now decided that the Russian people need more religion. Of course, this is sheer rubbish and intended as part of the propaganda of the Churches. The strong hand came down on the Churches when the Communists came into power because they had to face the hostilities of the "whites"—backed up by British and other agencies, with the priesthood plotting for the downfall of the new régime. That danger has now disappeared. The people have realised so vividly the advantages of the new rule brought to Russia that there is no likelihood of any plots against the Soviet Government coming to anything serious. More rope is given to the Churches because the rulers know that the danger emanating from the Churches is now negligible. The real attitude of the Government is now more definitely contempt than merging towards a decline of Atheism.

Perhaps the greatest masked insult that the clergy offer to the general public is the assumption that in some way the moral quality of the people depends upon them. All we can say is that, if either for our understanding of morals or for

the practice of morality, we are dependent upon them it would be a very bad thing for us. What the clergy are concerned about is not morality, but with what they please to call "sin." Even in terms of morals, they are less interested in the nature of morals than in the maintenance of theological attitudes in relation to conduct. We can say without qualification that any religious crusade in behalf of "purity" is most likely to be inspired by a fondness for being in contact with its opposite.

We were reminded of this fact when listening to a B.B.C. discussion on venereal disease between a doctor and that terrible bore the "radio padre." A discussion between a doctor and a layman would have been quite in order, but who save the B.B.C. would dream of inviting a padre, as though his talk would safely be of interest. As it was, the doctor wisely and properly regarded venereal disease as a medical question and would not be dragged off the line by the well-paid parson. Actually, the padre appeared to suggest that, in lieu of preventing infection, men and women should be permitted to contract the disease first and so suffer the penalty for their "sin." We should like to get the doctor's private opinion of the padre. Of course, the B.B.C. would take care it was not broadcast.

The Convocation of Canterbury wishes to have drawn up "a simplified order of baptism." So runs the story; but the probable reason is that Convocation wishes to cut away all indications of the nature of baptism. It is a process identical with the one that enables Christians to take an incarnate god and convert him—or it—into a teacher of current economics.

The origin of baptism is fairly well known and understood. It is found among many savages and has a logical place in their lives. It is really a cleansing practice which washes away not the evil, but the dangerous power of spirits who are responsible for the birth of the child. The mother also has to be washed clean of this supernatural influence. The old term for the churching of women was the "cleansing" of women; but that gave the game away, so it was altered to "churching."

The Archbishop of Canterbury has agreed with the Government that 50 per cent. of the costs of maintaining sectarian schools belonging to the Church of England shall be paid by the Government. That is very gracious of him. What the Church wanted was that the whole of the costs should be paid by the State. That is what the Roman Catholic Church is demanding, but they will have to be content with half the costs—not even Butler dare plan for giving them more.

Of course, it is an outrage for either of these Churches to be subsidised by the State, and, in addition, for the State schools to be saturated in Christian religious teaching. We question very much whether, if this matter was placed before the public, it would be endorsed. We believe that the Churches and the war-time Government know this as well as we do. That is why the existing Government, which was retained for the single purpose of winning the war, is using its power for another purpose, and which would probably be opposed by a majority of the electorate. At any rate, the clandestine agreement that has been made helps us to understand what the Government understands by "democracy."

Quick to mimic anything that is likely to attract the public, the Churches have seized hold of the word "commando" and have induced a number of laymen to join a "commando" organisation. The idea is that Christians must do something desperate and dangerous if they are to break down Freethought. Certainly the "commandos" are desperately foolish in both their actions and their aims. But the Rev. A. Ashton, at a meeting held in Derby, explained that it must not be expected that "commando" meant security "in a material sense"; it meant only "that one would be given strength to face whatever came along." But that has always been one of the functions of the Churches—to be content under injustice for the sake of Jesus Christ. St. Paul implied the same when he advised Christians to honour the powers that be, for the powers that be are ordained of God. All the same, it was foolish of the Rev. Ashton to let the cat out of the bag in this fashion.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2801. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of 5s. from Mr. D. S. Young to the Benevolent Fund of the N.S.S.

E. F. MACK.—Thanks for letter, but our very limited space prevents publication.

J. E. RHIND.—We have already had some notes on the Presbytery of the Church of Scotland refusing the admission of women to the ministry. Thanks all the same.

DANIEL MARR.—We cannot trace your letter. Is it too late to repeat it?

J. DAVIS.—Thanks for note on the B.B.C.

H. C. SHACKLETON.—Received with thanks and shall appear as early as possible.

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

ONE of our readers, in a very kindly fashion, finds fault with our saying, in a recent answer, that it is difficult to say exactly what "Rationalism" stands for. He thinks that we may hurt the feelings of "genuine Rationalists, who are at least antagonistic to orthodox religion and supernatural myths and doctrines." We were replying to a newcomer to our ranks who was trying to discover what was the difference between Atheism and Rationalism. As usual, we met the question with a straight answer and in a straight manner; and we cannot conceive any reasonable person being upset at our reply. And we hope to be as frank in replying to Mr. Johnson. We feel certain he will appreciate it.

To begin with, "Rationalism" is in substance a very old thing, although not always named. It is the operation of reason in relation to any problem or subject. Christians used it against pagans in proof of the quality of their god against the other deities; disbelievers in Greece used it against the pagan gods and also in the attack on Atheism. But its distinctive activity began in the 18th century, when its significance was an opposition to a knowledge of God by revelation. Later it came to be used as a kind of distinction from Atheism, but involving a rejection of revelation. If the Christian attacked it the attack of necessity involved reasoning, but with the implication that reason proved revelation to be a fact. It was actually a case of a rationalistic orthodox Christian against a rationalistic Atheist, Theist or even Atheist. But the process of reasoning was involved, with the implication that both sides believed in reason and would abide by its dictates. The only distinction lay in the statement that, while Rationalism asserted that all knowledge could be reached by reason, the Christian assumed that pure reasoning would lead to belief in a revelation from God.

The later stage dealt with the growth of Atheism in the early part of the 19th century. The beginnings of a scientific anthropology opened new fields. It was no longer necessary to stop at saying one could not find adequate evidence for the existence of God; the world was beginning to recognise that, if the new science was true, we had full information of how the belief in gods came into existence. They were on all fours with

the origin of old women flying through the air on broomsticks and of no greater reality than the belief in witches.

But in this world—and particularly where religion is concerned—belief in some sort of god was considered necessary. To be without a god was indeed a very grave matter. It was a grave and dangerous matter—socially. To say "I do not believe that gods exist save in the sense that myths exist" required more than the usual amount of courage. The creation of Agnosticism came to be used in the sense of an inability to find evidence enough to say whether God existed or not. Rationalism appears to have come into existence from the same feeling. We think that a great number who call themselves "Rationalists" have no belief in a god and would agree with us that the idea of God is due to sheer ignorance of the cause of certain phenomena. We also believe that many of them are looking for evidence of a god and may be called "semi-Theists." There are others who believe that they can "rationalise" the Christian religion, as certain philosophers some 2,000 years ago thought they could "rationalise" the more respectable of the pagan deities. Others may be "Rationalists" only in rejecting the godhead of Jesus, and are quite ready to worship him on other grounds. The "Rationalist" finds a distinction, usually of misstating Atheism.

We prefer "Atheism" because we have a weakness for clear-cut ideas and, so far as is possible, prefer definite and unmistakable terms. It is not fashionable; it may bring one into trouble. But we have a sneaking liking for trouble. It offers a glorious fight by way of mastering it. Really, a life without trouble would hardly be worth the living.

By the kindness of one of our readers we have become the possessor of a document which states that in March, 1942, a man aged 71 was, before the Sheffield magistrates, charged by a clergyman for sending through the post to the said clergyman "certain indecent written communications." The villain was fined £5. All good Christians would say "serve him right."

By the way, we have omitted to say that the "indecent communications" consisted of selections from that book of God, the Holy Bible—God's solitary effort in authorship. The offender had written out the verses. If he had merely given the references he would have escaped a fine.

"Challenge to Religion" is the subject upon which Messrs. J. Clayton and J. V. Shortt will speak in the Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate, Blackburn, to-day (November 7), at 3.15 p.m. Both speakers are well known to Blackburn audiences, and the meeting will be well served from the platform. Freethought literature will be on sale. Admission is free; and the local secretary, Mr. J. Sharples, will be happy to help anyone or in anything. Members and sympathisers should make a point of being present and of bringing orthodox friends.

MR. WELLS'S "CRUX ANSATA"

Indictment of the Roman Church

IN a "Penguin Special," purchasable for ninepence, entitled "Crux Ansata: An Indictment of the Roman Catholic Church," Mr. H. G. Wells presents some aspects of the case of Humanity against the Church of Rome.

This little book is not the whole case for the prosecution by any means. Nor does it give all the counts in the indictment that could be laid. Nor does it present one-hundredth part of the evidence against the Papacy. Nevertheless, this is an important polemic.

First, because the book represents the view of one of the foremost writers of this generation who, by merit alone, commands a vast audience of readers throughout the British Empire, America and, indeed, wherever English is understood. What H. G. Wells says is certain of the world's attention. Secondly, Mr. Wells, with the unerring instinct of a genius for what matters, puts his finger on the chief count of any indictment of the Roman

Church: namely, its falsity to its professions. Mr. Wells does not write from the standpoint of Jesus nor even as a Jesus-follower; yet either Jesus or a sincere believer in his teaching might make exactly the same complaint against the Roman Church.

This is natural enough. For essentially Jesus Christ and H. G. Wells aimed at the same objective, but Jesus called it the Kingdom-of-God-upon-Earth and Mr. Wells calls it the World-State. Mr. Wells is a man of a thousand-and-one ideas, but his leading idea seems to me to be a basic belief in the freedom, equality and brotherhood of all men as citizens of a World-State. From this great idea of the unity of mankind, Wells has never really departed, and it is his passionate belief in this idea that makes him resentful of the Church that pays that idea lip-service and constantly and consistently betrays it. A Church that divides mankind instead of unifying them, is the chief obstacle to a better World-Order. For this, and not because it is pro-Axis instead of pro-Ally or pro-Roman Church instead of pro-Jesus, Mr. Wells attacks this Italian Church.

Beginning with "Why Do We Not Bomb Rome?"—a question that immediate events have made (temporarily perhaps) out of date—Mr. Wells takes the reader rapidly through a potted history of the Church from the Council of Nicaea. To my mind, it would have been more effective to begin with Jesus and to show the Church as the very negation of his teaching and, indeed, as the equivalent of all that he hated and despised in his lifetime, the exact replica of the Chief Priests, Pharisees and rulers of the people whom he denounced. But this is not Mr. Wells's thesis. And Mr. Wells's history ends abruptly with the Counter-Reformation and a chapter on the Jesuits. Then he interpolates a chapter on the Church's numerical shrinkage and then jumps back into history to deal with the Church's struggle for Britain. There follows a chapter on Shinto Catholicism—one of the most striking, but a re-hash of a chapter in Mr. Wells's "Homo Sapiens." Then we have a chapter on the faith in America, with a conclusion on the "Pretensions and Limitations" of the present Pope Pius XII., whose "profound ignorance and mental inferiority" Mr. Wells deduces from general priestly life rather than from the extant evidence of it in his papal pronouncements.

The weakness of Mr. Wells's book is that its author has not the prosecuting mind. He is no Vishinsky or Judge Jeffreys. He is too discursive, too digressive, too interested in this and that to keep his mind on building up his case and forcing his readers to return the only possible verdict. He rather assumes the verdict (before the end of the trial), and talks to the jury about whatever interests himself, serenely confident that what interests him will interest them. Nor does he observe any sense of proportion, and I think he begins his historical research too late and ends it too early, besides breaking into it with a misplaced chapter on the numerical strength of Catholicism. As compensation for these faults we have brilliant Wellsian patches such as the penetrating analysis of the British character in its relation to religion.

Wells is, of course, a great writer and a great man. He is one of those minds the sincerity and courage of which dissolve with the fierceness of acid, the base metal in other minds, thereby liberating the gold from the dross. All of us owe him much for his liberating and cleansing influence, for his provoking and stimulating work. He is a daring and adventurous Freethinker in every sense of the word. We must be grateful for this book, for it takes courage in a popular writer to offend a large section of his reading public; yet I am bound to say that it is journalism rather than literature, and that it is not the great book, the immortal classic, the compound of Gibbon and Voltaire, that the case against the Roman Church could be. That remains to be done. But who in our day has either the material or the power or the leisure to do it?

C. G. L. DU CANN.

BAKER WULLIE'S PRAYER

(Concluded from page 430)

13

And when into the "Bull" I tum'le
I see them in their pooches fum'le,
Then twa-three words o' "It" they mum'le
And at me stare;
Oh God, I hae guid cause to grum'le
About that Prayer.

14

Bob An'erson and Hervey there
Can rattle off by heart the prayer,
And Lindsay writes oot copies mair,
For ither folk;
E'en Bagshaw speaks me noo less fair
Since this last stroke.

15

The "Prayer" is circulated wide—
And never noo Oh God! can hide,
Frae Little Sorn to Waterside
The folks are lauchin';
Oh they enjoy my humbled pride,
Aye e'en John Clachan.

16

Think God! whit I will hae tae staun',
When I fa' in wi' auld McGaun,
He'll lauch to see me in the pawn
And rub it in;
For Allan is an awfu' haun'
An able yin.

17

My bluid within me boils and churns,
My valiant heart grows sick and turns,
To think that I wha ootshine Burns!
Should heed this youth;
My noble spirit simply spurns
Him and his truth.

18

Oh God! I'd like to turn the table,
And yet I doot if I am able,
I must invent some fiendish fable—
And that wi' speed;
I'd like to cowp a "Tower o' Babel"
About his heid.

19

But God! I've fa'n upon a plan
To hae revenge—and kill my man,
I've picket oot a fighter gran',
To gie me aid;
And I'll craw croose ower Thomas whan
He low is laid.

20

So—Brave my arm for this great deed,
Stand by me in my hour of need,
Help me to crush this jealous weed,
This rat—this skunk;
But God! Whit ails my dizzy heid?
I'm drunk; I'm drunk!

T. F.

CORRESPONDENCE

BELGIUM

Sir,—I think that Mr. G. H. Taylor's account of Mr. Motz's book, "Belgium Unvanquished," should not pass unanswered. Mr. Taylor does not deal with the main subject of the book, which is the resistance of the civil population under enemy oppression. He indulges instead in a series of unfounded statements about the conduct of the military campaign in Belgium and the personal attitude of King Leopold. Such statements are scarcely conducive to good relations between allied people fighting for the same cause; and those who make them should take the trouble to acquaint themselves with the facts. These are stated objectively in "Belgium" (the official account of what happened, 1939-1940), published by the Belgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs as early as 1941, of which I send you a copy for your own information.

I presume that this document, and many others, have escaped Mr. Taylor's attention.—Yours, etc.,

EM. CAMMAERTS
(Professor of Belgian Studies at the
University of London).

AN APPEAL

Sir,—I know your readers are not believers in the Christmas myth, but a holiday time gives us a chance to think of the poor children of the East End who may be in hospitals in East London. They are in great need of small toys. I have been able to purchase only very few. Will your readers who love children look in their cupboards and send what they can spare to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Hackney Road, London, or to me at 27, Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, W.C. 2.

Thank you.—Yours, etc.,

HELEN LUCAS.

NIETZSCHE AND GENERAL SMUTS

Sir,—General Smuts, in his Guildhall speech of October 19, repeats his denunciation of Nietzsche, the "father of the Superman and the Blond Beast, which still hurls defiance at the Christian code with its gentle virtues."

The famous statesman and philosopher (author of "Holism and Evolution") was probably encouraged to accentuate his last year's condemnation of Nietzsche by the fact that in the meantime Hitler has sent to Mussolini a set of Nietzsche's Complete Works.

There is, of course, an abyss between Smuts and the dictators. But this abyss has a bridge which unites these three leaders of foe and friend: all three are entirely and equally ignorant of what Nietzsche means and stands for.—Yours, etc.,

OSCAR LEVY
(Editor of the Authorised English Translation
of Nietzsche's Works).

AGAIN JESUS

Sir,—In "The Freethinker" of October 24, Maud Simon, in "This Trypho Business," quotes Mr. Howell Smith's "Jesus not a Myth," p. 20, where the learned author accuses quoters of Trypho of careless scrutiny and says, "The Jesus . . . whose historicity Trypho does not deny . . ." The lady has omitted a vital clause. Before the given quotation the author cites Trypho as saying, "But Messiah, even supposing he has come into being . . . is unrecognised, . . ." Unrecognised! This implies a Jesus who was, however, not accepted by the Jews as Messiah. The translations and quoters which I have seen all give "unknown." Just a slight difference! To paraphrase, Trypho says, "This Jesus whom you are talking about is completely unknown, but if, for the sake of argument, I should admit his existence it would not better your case because he could not be the Messiah you claim him to be for the simple reason that the forerunner, Elias, has not yet come to anoint him and make him manifest to all." Thus, Trypho denies, both the man and the Messiah. Even on the author's own showing, Trypho does not admit historicity! The dialogue in "Writings of Justin Martyr" (copy in reference and one in the lending library here, Brighton) should be read and no one's dictum accepted without examination.—Yours, etc.,

CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

A QUESTION

Sir,—I would like to ask Mr. E. Hanson how he reconciles his statement in "The Freethinker" of October 10, 1943, under the heading "Stalin and the Bishops," "In Russia there is no taboo upon Atheism, no suppression of the intellect . . ." with the following from "News Review" for October 16, 1943: "In 1937 Editor Yaroslavski, of the Atheist sheet 'Bezbozhnik' ('The Godless') admitted defeat," and "No believer in half measures, he (Stalin) banned 'Bezbozhnik.'"—Yours, etc.,

V. KILPATRICK.

"TRIMBLERIGG"

Sir,—Your definition of God as "a being who always acts in accordance with the wishes of those who worship him," is fully illustrated in the character of "Trimblerigg," by Laurence Housman. As a mere reader and not a knowing critic, I rank "Trimblerigg" as a "Jonathan Wild the Great" in a religious setting, and the gentle irony of Housman in line with that of Fielding. Yours, etc.,

H. IRVING.

OBITUARY

ROBERT JOHNSON AND JOHN BARROWMAN

Two old members of the Glasgow Branch N.S.S. have died within a few days of each other. Robert Johnson had the longer record of membership, having joined the Society 60 years ago. He was 80 years of age at the time of his death. Up to four years ago he claimed to have attended every one of Mr. Chapman Cohen's lectures in Glasgow.

John Barrowman was in his 70th year at the time of his death. For most of his adult years he was an ardent Atheist, with a keen interest in the Freethought Movement; even when dying he was anxious to know if his "Freethinker" had arrived. Both men were valuable assets to the Glasgow Society.

In each case Mr. R. M. Hamilton conducted a Secular Service at the graveside.
R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBBY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3-0: A Lecture.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11-0, Professor G. W. KERTON, M.A., LL.D.—"Six Great Englishmen: (2) Sir Robert Walpole."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate, Blackburn): Sunday, 3-15, Messrs. J. SHORTT and J. CLAYTON—"A Challenge to Religion."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute, Bradford): Sunday, 6-30, A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. A. COPLAND, A Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 6-30, Mr. TOM SARGEANT—"The Challenge of Commonwealth."

Christianity—What is It?

By CHAPMAN COHEN

The substance of this book appeared in the "Freethinker" in answer to the question "What is real Christianity?" It is in reply to many requests that the nearly twenty articles were revised and added to, and now appear in book form. It is a criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view.

Price 2/- Postage Three halfpence

PIONEER PRESS, 2/3, FURNIVAL ST., HOLBORN, LONDON, E.C.4

A KICK IN THE PANTS!

CHRISTIANITY: What Is It?

The only short answer to this question is—nobody knows. In the whole of Christendom, not one person who claims to be a Christian could give an answer to the question in such a way as to satisfy all the others who also claim to be Christians.

Indeed, this creed of Christianity has as many facets upon it as it has faults and superstitions within it; so there is little wonder that we have to turn, not to a book by a Christian, but to a book by an Atheist, in order to get somewhere near the problem that is set by the question.

This book* has the enormous advantage, in dealing with the question at issue, of being written by one who has no denominational or sectarian axe to grind; one who, in consequence of his not being a Christian, and of never having been one, is able to examine Christianity with calmness and detachment such as can be observed only by a mind which has not been subjected to the creed's prejudicial influences.

These are times when we are being treated to a spate of works—books, press, radio, platform, pulpit—from those who would make the people believe that Christianity has a unified and fundamental basis, and is a worthy creed upon which to rest our social order, and upon which to base our personal lives.

At such a time, and amid such a welter of religious declamation as we are now experiencing, Mr. Cohen's book stands out vividly, to those who see both sides of the modern religious controversy, as a single work which puts to flight the hundred and one claims now being made for a revived Christianity.

For this reason alone, "Christianity: What Is It?" should be pushed as widely as possible among those puzzled people who, knowing little either of the record of Christian belief and practice, or of the Freethought case, may be in danger of looking to the false claims and stupid doctrines of the Christian Churches as an ideological prop in the coming task of world reconstruction.

There is little need to reiterate to readers of "The Freethinker" the contents of this interesting and useful book. Most of us read the articles when published in these columns; we shall enjoy them again in the more compact book form, extended and revised. The tracing of the ideas that lie behind and within Christian belief, and the unsparing exposure of the expression of these ideas in the form of Christian behaviour through the centuries, form a story that is enlightening even to Freethinkers, and provide a book that is not without its exciting and even its macabre situations—for the story of Christianity has plenty of blood and thunder, and torture!

But I want to stress again that it is not primarily a book for the converted. To make it such would be a waste of its best features.

We may know much of the story of Christianity, but to keep it to ourselves would not only be selfish, but unprogressive.

Primarily, it is a book for the Christian himself, who usually knows so little of the story; and secondarily, it is a book for the "in between," who realises that there is something wrong with Christianity somewhere, that it has failed somehow, but does not quite see where or how. Every Freethinker needs a copy for his own library, of course, but he also needs an extra copy for the benefit of that half-baked pal, or that enthusiastic Christian friend. They both believe "there may be something in it" (in Christianity, I mean) and they both need this book to show them exactly what there is "in it."

F. J. CORINA.

* "Christianity: What Is It?" By Chapman Cohen. Part I. Pioneer Press, 2 and 3, Farnival Street, E.C.4.; 2s.

JOURNEY TO MUSCOVY

THESE days, when Russia is in the news, it is extremely interesting to come across a book like "Travels in Muscovy"—an account the Duke of Holstein's ambassadors made of their journeys in Russia between 1634 and 1636. The book itself shows how 300 years ago the Russian people were still labouring under the evils of mediæval serfdom, ignorance and superstition, while intellectually, socially and politically most other nations were rapidly progressing.

On their travels the ambassadors passed through towns and villages that in recent years have been front paged. At Danzig they noted "the River Vistula was so shallow that no ship of any burden could come up to the city." Archangel, despite its frozen harbours in winter, was even then a great trading city, "notwithstanding the customs were very great on all commodities." Moscow, they tell us, had "about 40,000 houses made largely of wood beams and crosspieces of fur laid over them."

Much more significant are their descriptions of the Russian people. "They are for the most part very corpulent and well fed; great beards with moustaches hanging over their lips." The Tsar's factors indeed were all men chosen for their beards and paunches. Persons of quality had their heads clean-shaven, while those of a lower degree only cut their hair. One of the sights of Moscow was the hair market, where most of the inhabitants were shaven and left their unwanted locks.

The women who were "goodly proportioned," painted their faces heavily. Married women thrust their hair up under their coifs, but the younger beauties wore it in two tresses hanging down behind with a crimson ribbon tied to the end. Children of both sexes under the age of ten had their hair cut close, except for two locks over the temples.

Russian clothing appeared to these fashionable Germans as rather drab. Men wore wide, short shirts to their knees with hard breeches and boots made of Russian leather or Persian goat skin. The clothes of the women differed only in the largeness of their coats, which were wider than those of the men. "It must be confessed," says the chronicler, "that scarce anything could be more barbarous than the Russians are in their way of living." Tobacco smoking was prohibited and drunkenness was their chief vice. "Nay the vulgar sort are so much given to this vice that we used frequently to see them come out of a tipping house without clothes, nay, without their shirts and drawers, and appear in the streets without the least shame."

The towns were very disorderly and escaped serfs roamed the streets by day and night. The ambassadors' master cook was killed in Moscow one night, and a few days later the Swedish Ambassador's steward suffered the same fate. On St. Martin's Eve the Holsteiners actually counted fifteen dead bodies in a public place—all victims of banditry.

The country was passionately religious and full of quaint superstitions. All the main resting-places on the way to Moscow were at convents, nunneries or monasteries. In Moscow, the ambassadors saw the New Year's Day procession to present the Tsar with petitions on behalf of the people headed by as many as 400 priests.

Impressive, too, were the wedding customs, especially in the country. For example, a man who chose a bride from a neighbouring village, on the wedding day rode to fetch his wife, set her up behind him and made her embrace him. Preceded by a bagpipe player and two men with drawn swords, they made their way to the house where the marriage was to be consummated. To drive away evil spirits little pieces of red stuff were scattered along the route. Then at the wedding feast the bride and bridegroom left the table as soon as the guests were seated, went to bed for two hours and returned to join in the feasting, dancing and drinking, which lasted till the guests dropped down among one another on the floor.

R. D. W.