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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity and Cant

ALL things considered, it is not at all a bad investment for a man who merely wishes to get on in the world, particularly in the political world, to profess faith in religion. Preferably in this country it should be the Christian religion. It need not be a hardshell, orthodox form of Christianity; it is enough, on the whole better, to profess a liberal form of Christianity, which consists in making one's religion so indefinite that no one can be quite sure what it is he believes, except that it is some sort of Christianity, and that he pays homage to the character of Jesus Christ; though, again, it is wise not to be too precise. It is best to refer in one's speeches or writings to "that greatest of all teachers," which might mean one of a fairly large company; or some similar piece of indefiniteness may be used which ardent Christians will surely take as referring to Jesus Christ. As an advertising asset, Jesus Christ still has its points.

For example, on looking over a newspaper the other day, I came across a eulogy of General Dobie. Now, of the General's qualities as a soldier I cannot speak with any authority. He has been praised as a fine soldier, and also for the defence of Malta. I cannot tell whether the man created the occasion or the occasion created the man, or whether, if the soldiers in Malta had been without a General Dobie someone of lower rank would have served. But General Dobie was an avowed Christian, that is, he took care to advertise—probably with the best of religious intentions—that he was a Christian. One presumes he was justified in so using his Generalship, although he might have remembered that the teaching of his Lord and Master distinctly laid down the rule that his followers should, when struck on one cheek, turn the other for a second wallop. Of course, a more sensitive character might have reflected that after all there were many of the soldiers in Malta who were not Christians, and who might reasonably have felt that in attributing everything to the Christian deity, their General was not playing the game fairly. Even the more thoughtful of his Christian soldiers might have reflected that if it needed supernatural aid to reach the high level that other men managed to achieve without the said supernatural help, this was not paying them a very high compliment.

Now, a Chaplain of the Southern Command is the Rev. D. B. L. Foster, and of General Dobie he says, in one of those papers that every Sunday packs a page or so with all kinds of religious nonsense, that General Dobie's "objective in all his work was Christ and his adventure." That frames a picture of Jesus playing the part of one of the paladins of the days of the Crusades when knights went out performing deeds of derring-do for the

glory of Our Lady. But, of course, there was really nothing of that in the theological character of Jesus Christ, for he was "God of very God." He came down from heaven with the full intention of getting crucified, and if he had not been so treated the whole scheme of salvation would have broken down. It was really a critical moment when Pilate asked the Jews which prisoner they would have—Barabbas or Jesus? For if the Jews had chosen Jesus, the scheme of salvation would have broken down. And as for Jesus, he would not then have ascended to heaven, but would have died in the orthodox fashion, and the Christian Church would never have existed. More, the Rev. Foster would never have been a Chaplain to the Forces. The whole Christian scheme depended upon Jesus being killed, and Christians have to thank the Jews for seeing to it that he was duly and properly killed. It is also just possible that when Jesus said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," he was just reminding God not to be rough on the Jews because it was part of his plan that they should act as they did.

Cant and Christ

But what "intrigues" me is the statement that the objective of General Dobie's defence of Malta was based on "Christ and his adventure." Surely he would not argue that the Mohammedans, the Jews, the Hindoos, the followers of other gods, and those who did not believe in any sort of god, were urged to do what they did in the shape of fighting by reading the adventures of Jesus Christ? There are many millions engaged in this war who do not care the value of the traditional brass farthing about the adventures of Jesus Christ, and who in the course of a battle never think about Jesus. They might, of course, in the course of a battle—regardless of the verbal outrage implied—have thought they were doing "a good job of work," and they might have abused the English language in other ways. They might also have called out "For Christ's sake, give it to the perishers," but the use of Christ in this way would only be the sense of a forcible phrase in moments of extreme tension. We do not doubt for a moment that General Dobie means what he says, or that some of his soldiers may have prayed for God's help, any more than we doubt that some of them might have carried a rabbit's foot for protection and others wear one of Cardinal Hinsley's magic medalions for safety's sake. As an Atheist, I should quite agree that given a certain mentality, many soldiers have felt safer in using the magic of a rabbit's foot, a holy medal, or one of the numerous semi-magical things that our weaker brethren habitually carry. My Atheism takes a much more hospitable form than that of a Catholic Cardinal or a military General.

But to be a good military general and a good philosopher does not of necessity run together. The philosopher may turn out to be a good general, or the good general may

become a good philosopher, although there is widespread opinion that that society is best which has fewer generals and the larger number of philosophers. And I feel that the Rev. D. B. L. Foster pays General Dobie a poor compliment when he suggests that he would have supported the Chaplain when he said "It seems certain that as the Christian spirit fades so do our homes." We have never made the acquaintance of the General, but we sincerely hope that he would not be quite as foolish as the Chaplain pictures him. At all events, it is a remarkable discovery that the good quality of our homes depends upon the Christian religion. For, after all, the home, in some form or other, did exist before Christianity came into the world. And but for the lengthening of childhood—which of necessity lengthened the period during which the young are dependent upon maternal and paternal care—civilisation could never have existed. After this initial stage the social development of the family goes on step by step and in many different forms. But mankind and womankind met and loved and begat children and cared for them long before the Christian Church or any other Church existed. Civilised pre-Christian antiquity has left the world writings that depict male and female love and parentage as fine as anything that Christendom has to offer.

But the "Christian" home intrigues me. When did it exist? What was it like? And what did it stand for as offering the ideal of a happy, healthy family life? Of course, Christians got married—sometimes one feels inclined to wish they had not. But what was the attitude of leading Christians on the question of marriage and the home? What did Christianity stand for with regard to a happy family life? One does not get much from Jesus save that of a negative order. He was never married himself, and authoritatively asserted that in heaven there was no marriage or giving in marriage, and in the last book of the New Testament we hear of males round the throne, but not females. In any case, heaven seems populated by old maids and bachelors. What becomes of the family feelings that all healthy men and women have, no one tells us? And when Jesus called his disciples and told them to drop their occupations and follow him, he showed no consciousness that these men may have had wives and families to consider. No one ever took a poorer view of marriage than St. Paul, who did as much to establish Christianity as anyone. His dictum was that all men should remain as he was, a bachelor, but if they could not contain themselves, then it was "better to marry than to burn." There is, in fact, very little said in the New Testament concerning marriage, save that a marriage feast is mentioned and several stray references, none of which contradicts what we have said. Indeed, if the Rev. Mr. Foster will go through the New Testament marking the passages which refer to marriage, he will be surprised to find how little there is bearing upon the subject. How could it be otherwise when the New Testament teacher plainly told his followers that he would return from heaven very shortly to bring them before the Judgment?

What, then, was really the influence of the Christian Church—not when it had been chastened and rationalised by the sheer force of human life and the common sense of the people, but in its earlier stages, when it was, religiously, most powerful? I think I can answer that question more briefly, certainly more authoritatively, by citing Lecky. In

his "History of European Morals" he says that under the influence of Christianity, in its least adulterated form.

"To abstain from marriage, or in marriage to abstain from a perfect union, was regarded as a proof of sanctity, and it was viewed in its coarsest and most degraded form. . . . The immense place this order of ideas occupies in the hortatory writings of the Fathers, and in the legends of the Saints, must be familiar to all who have any knowledge of this department of literature."

Of course, this teaching had ultimately to be toned down, for if it had been completely followed, the family would certainly have ceased to exist; even as it was, the world had to pay a terrible price in the shape of racial degeneration as a consequence of Christian teaching. It is worth remembering that even to-day the most important Churches are without a woman in their pulpits, and virginity is still ranked as a form of "purity" that married women forfeit.

Of course, General Dobie may be unaware of this phase of history. But is the Rev. D. B. L. Foster quite as ignorant of the course of Christianity? I must leave the reader to answer the questions. But both General Dobie and Preacher Foster ought to make a public apology for the implied insult to the majority of the British people.

CHAPMAN COHEN

AN INTERESTING INDIAN CULT

SIR CHARLES ELIOT'S historical study, "Hinduism and Buddhism" (three vols.; Edward Arnold), is a work of outstanding scholarship. Its author is evidently well acquainted with the Far East and was British Ambassador at Tokyo when his volumes appeared in 1921.

It is a pleasure to peruse a writer who is singularly free from European bias, who consistently strives to view Indian and Chinese philosophy from an Oriental standpoint. That Eastern cults profess beliefs that appear contradictory in terms is conceded, but as Eliot points out, inconsistencies of this character are not unknown in Europe. With reference to China he submits: "Europeans sometimes mention it as an amazing and almost ridiculous circumstance that an educated Chinese can belong to three religions—Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. But I find this attitude of mind eminently sensible. Confucianism is an admirable religion for State ceremonies and college chapel. By attending its occasional rites one shows a decent respect for Heaven and Providence and commits oneself to nothing; and although the rigid Confucian may have the contempt of a scholar and statesman for popular ideas, yet the most devout Buddhist or Taoist can conform to Confucianism without scruple, whereas many who have attended an English coronation service must have wondered at the language they seem to have approved by their presence." What the Chinese lack in one cult they find in another, and although this eclecticism is not conducive to orthodoxy it certainly affords variation.

Sir Charles Eliot opines that Christianity is never likely to prove acceptable in Asia, nor does he think that Oriental philosophies or religions will ever commend themselves to European thought, and he doubts whether the Theosophists and other exponents of pseudo-Buddhist teachings "always understand what they try to teach."

Buddhism was once described by Bradlaugh as an intellectual revolt against Brahmanism. Its founder was an Indian noble who became emancipated from Hinduism. For Gautama, the Buddha, rejected both belief in a deity and the existence of the human soul. Yet, in its later developments, popular Buddhism

possesses a number of minor divinities, and this has been interpreted as an illustration of a natural craving for theism. But Eliot considers that this phenomenon "is rather an illustration of that craving for personal though superhuman help which makes Roman Catholics supplement theism with the worship of saints." Moreover, we must remember that Buddhism—spreading as it did from India to Burma, Ceylon, Cambodia, China, Tibet and Japan—was certain to be influenced and adulterated by the native cults of the countries into which its missionaries had penetrated.

The Jains of India stand apart from the predominant Hinduism of the peninsula. This non-theistic denomination arose in the sixth century B.C. and slightly preceded Buddhism, and their philosophic doctrines seemingly influenced the mind of Gautama. Neither Gods nor official priests enter into this so-called religion, but mysterious beings, perhaps the survivals of an earlier faith, lurk in the background. Unlike the eternal gods, however, these shadowy beings are subject to senility and death. The existence of man's soul is assumed, and our waking lives are viewed as episodes in a repeated transmigration towards blessedness, a consummation devoutly to be wished. Yet, we gather, Jains believe that: "Even in the body the soul can attain a beatific state of perfect knowledge, and above the highest heaven (where the greatest gods live for immense periods though ultimately subject to transmigration) is the paradise of blessed souls free from transmigration."

If the Jain scriptures are correctly interpreted, happiness is not synonymous with worldly prosperity but with release from mundane cares. Animism is prominent and plants, animals and even inanimate matter possess their spirits. Ceremonial and priestly authority are disregarded, and these peculiarities appear to be a peaceful development from the highly sacerdotal Brahmanism from which the Jains departed.

In ethics the Jains resemble the Buddhists, and every ascetic vows never to shed blood; never to utter untruth; to refrain from theft; to remain chaste and to renounce pleasure in external things. These vows are carefully defined. "Thus," notes Eliot, "the vow not to kill forbids not only the destruction of the smallest insect, but also all speech or thought which could bring about a quarrel, and doing, causing or permitting of any act which could even inadvertently injure living beings." Of course such rigid rules are only possible to the consistent ascetics, and with them the strictest celibacy, profound meditation and humility are all deemed imperative, but those who had undergone twelve years' penance might enter into Nirvana.

The founder of this curious cult was Mahavira, a slightly earlier contemporary of the Buddha. His missionary efforts were successful but, after his death, a schism occurred and two distinct sects emerged who remain divided to this day. Yet, although their creeds and customs are almost identical, they refuse inter-marriage, nor will they eat together.

Like one of the prophets of Israel, some Jain ascetics were nudists. Clothing is now and has long been worn by the laity, and only high ascetics of the Digambaras sect occasionally appear completely naked.

The Jains are first mentioned in the inscriptions of the Buddhist Emperor Asoka (273—232 B.C.), when in stating "how he has provided medicine, useful plants and wells both for men and animals, we are reminded of the hospitals for animals still maintained by the Jains."

Their cult spread widely in India and aroused a pitiless Brahmanical persecution, and Brahmins and kings alike tortured and murdered the Jains in large numbers, but the broad-minded Moslem monarch Akbar maintained toleration, and he himself received instruction from three Jain teachers from 1578 to 1597."

Still, persecution and the constantly operating absorptive influences of Hinduism have greatly diminished Jainist adherents

and, in a recent census, their number is recorded as a million and a-third only in a population of 360 millions upwards. It is, however, suggested that many may have returned themselves as Hindus, thus reducing their real numbers. Bombay, Rajputana and Central India are their chief centres; they recognise caste and among their communion are many opulent merchants who lavish substantial sums on temples and their upkeep, habitations for wandering ascetics and refuges for lower animals. It appears that: "Wherever Jains gain influence, beasts are not slaughtered or sacrificed, and when old and injured are often kept in hospitals or asylums, as, for instance, at Ahmadabad. Their ascetics take stringent precautions to avoid killing the smallest creature: they strain their drinking water, sweep the ground before them as they walk and wear a veil over their mouths. Even in the shops of the laity lamps are carefully screened to prevent insects from burning themselves."

The earlier precepts of the Jains appear to Western minds as utterly impractical, whereas present-day Jains are severely practical. Like ourselves, they profess one creed and practice another. They are shrewd and successful commercially, and the architecture and cleanliness of their temples present an appearance of comfort and cheerfulness unusual in Indian shrines. In fact, their founder is said to have taught "that place, time and occasion should be taken into consideration, and his successors adapted their precepts to the age in which they lived."

Famous examples of Jainist art are the Towers of Fame and Victory and the Mount Abu temples, while in Southern India stand immense monuments. The largest of these colossi is carved in granite and rises to a height of 70ft. and portrays "a sage so sunk in meditation that anthills and creepers have grown round his feet without breaking his trance."

Eliot observes that it seems remarkable that Jainism still survives in a land in which its celebrated contemporary cult, Buddhism, has vanished. But when the Buddhist monasteries in India declined or were destroyed, a mere remnant of the long powerful cult of Gautama remained with no rallying ground, and soon faded away. The Jains, on the other hand, were hardened and made more persistent by persecution. Unlike the Buddhist monks, the wandering Jain ascetics were few in number, while the laity devoted more and more attention to mundane life, and doubtless their monetary power commanded respect. "As a result," concludes our authority, "we have a sect in some ways analogous to the Jews, Parsees and Quakers; among whom we find the same features, namely, a wealthy laity, little or no sacerdotalism and endurance of persecution."

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

THESE be great times, and the Vicar of Wood Green has been "translated to St. Pancras." The vicar says: "I really believe God has answered our prayers by guiding me to St. Pancras." We suppose God knows his own business best, but most people would rather he helped to shorten the war than waste his time in interfering with who shall, or shall not, be his representative in St. Pancras. But it would not be the first time that God has made the wrong choice when picking out his representatives.

There are three candidates for the political election in Woolwich, and each of them are Catholics. So each of the candidates agree that they will not be satisfied with the promise of the Government to give the clergy practical control over the schools unless the whole of the expenses of the Catholic schools are met by the State, and the priests must have the appointment of the teachers. We should say that if providence exists these three candidates have been selected by God. They were destined—or doomed—for Westminster.

A letter appears in the "Teignmouth Post" for November 12 from Mr. E. Aylmer Lugard, which is written regretfully. Mr. Lugard says that he attended an evening service with special prayers for our soldiers. The entire audience consisted of the vicar, the curate and Mr. Lugard. We consider that letter unkind, particularly when the clergy have agreed on telling the public that there is a revival of religion all over the country.

"An Etonian" writes to the "Daily Mirror" denying that there is any brutality exhibited or any ill inflicted in schools by birching. Birching, he says, does harm to no one except the physically unfit. He confesses that when he was first birched, at Eton, he found it a "bit hard," but after a bit "one gets hardened." We might close there with a "that is my case." You must get "hardened," which is another word for brutalised. He might have added that both the teacher and the student must go through this process of brutalising. The chief evidence is provided by the advocates.

The "Methodist Recorder," in its issue for November 11, has what is, on the whole, a rather good article on "Religious Toleration." The writer says that for more than a hundred years "Britain has enjoyed the boon of freedom of worship. . . . The man of no religion is equally free not to worship. Only blasphemy is against the law." It is to be noted that this liberty has developed only during the past hundred years. It took about seventeen centuries to humanise and socialise Christians to that extent. It doesn't seem much to boast about.

But there is that phrase "only blasphemy is against the law." Well, what is blasphemy? Legally there are two orders of blasphemy. The first is the 17th century law, which is so brutal and so malignant in the penalties imposed that no modern court would tolerate it in action. Still, it is part of the law, and perhaps Mr. Churchill in his worship of freedom would consider wiping this Act off the Statute Book. Then there is the Common Law of blasphemy, which depends entirely upon the possibility of a Christian being sufficiently un-Christian to permit freedom of expression, without which free thought is a farce. Bad language and abusive language is looked after well enough in the ordinary law. But a law against "blasphemy" has its origin in religious bigotry and is maintained by the same agency. The writer of the article—it is without a name—seems fully able to appreciate so axiomatic a law as this.

The "Standard" publishes an interesting note on the Constitution of the House of Commons. A critic of a new book by Sir Richard Acland has accused the author of being "woolly"—he is apparently in the habit of kicking over the party traces. Mr. Priestley retorts that Sir Richard is anything but "woolly," and avers that at the side of the "grinning and hear-hearing M.P. who does not see a yard beyond his whip's nose, is a curly little baa-lamb." The description of the average Member of Parliament contains much truth—particularly those who take to politics as a "career" and are brought to heel with the promise or the presentation of a "job."

Bishop Golding-Bird complains in a letter to the "Daily Telegraph" that "to a large extent there is a lamentable amount of non-Christian matter in the Brains Trust broadcast." The rebuke is unjustifiable. No criticism whatever of Christianity is permitted by the Brains Trust, and care is obviously taken to select members who, no matter what the pertinency of a criticism might be, have not sufficient self-respect to break the rule. What more does the Bishop want?

There seems no limit to the absurdities that people in high positions will not cheerfully utter when one happens to be very Christian. Thus the Earl of Airlie, on November 9, informed his brother peers in the House of Lords that figures showed that of the youths who came up before the Army Authorities, only five per cent. had ever, practically, heard of the Bible. No one laughed and no one told the Earl what he ought to have been told. The Bible is forced on all. It is rejected as a revelation by more than half the population. The Earl of Airlie may be

one of those who have not yet reached understanding in this matter.

Sheriff Jameson has not what one could call a well-stocked mind. At a meeting at Greenock he told an audience that since the country had become Godless, morality had sunk to a low ebb. A more intelligent man would have been more careful. If it were true that the nation had really become Godless, it would seem that the moral influence of Godliness would appear to be as lasting as snow in front of a fire. Next, if he looked up prison records he would find that the inmates of our prisons nearly all believe in a God, and are quite surprised, as are the authorities, when a new prisoner describes himself as an Atheist.

The plea of a prominent trade unionist, Mr. George Gibson, given in a radio broadcast the other evening, in which he insisted that only Christianity could save the world from disaster, offers nothing new. Of course, had he taken the opposite view and argued that the fact of the world being in its present state offers a condemnation of religious influence, he never would have been permitted on a B.B.C. platform. And yet if any other than the Christian Gospel had been in force for, say, fifteen centuries and had the world as it is to show for its rule, it would have been at once branded as of no use whatever. No system in the world has enjoyed the long period of control equal to that exhibited by Christianity, and it is worth noting that whatever improvement has been achieved has been in the face of opposition from one or more of the Christian Churches.

Sir Stafford Cripps is another prominent personage who loves to play the part of a preacher rather than that of a teacher. He says that what we need is the application of "Christian principles," also that we must practice a "bold Christianity." Well, the Roman Church does that, so does the English Church, but the leaders of these Churches show a much greater definiteness when they are pleading for more power and more cash than at any other time. Perhaps Sir Stafford will inform the world of a single secular improvement that has been blessed and carried through by any branch of the Christian religion. It is time that these politicians got down to commonsense and displayed more intellectual courage than they do at present.

Apropos of what has been said, we note there was recently a "flag day" for "our gallant seamen." We also have flag days for soldiers, sailors and others of the same character are always springing up. We feel humiliated, and so should all intelligent men and women, when one of these flag days are in being. It is a standing disgrace that such men as soldiers and sailors should be sent to beg in the gutter to eke out the amount they receive for their services, and the situation is worse still, if possible, when it is to find comforts for aged seamen and soldiers. We say they beg in the gutter, for whether the begging is done in person or by proxy amounts to the same thing. Yet if it were proposed that the men named should receive higher wages and a sufficient security for old age, it is from Christian quarters, as much or more than others, that opposition comes.

Yet religion has its element of helpfulness. Thus the Roman Catholic "Universe" advises its followers that "if the Sacred Particle sticks to the roof of the mouth, moisten and loosen it with your tongue." But a people who could swallow the Roman Catholic doctrines ought to be able to swallow anything. Or, *per contra*, the magical quality of the miraculously transformed wafer should be itself a preventative to it sticking in the throat of those who swallow it. There seems something wrong somewhere.

Among the war-time promotions, the latest worth noting is that "Our Lady," the mother of Jesus, has become General of the Argentine (Chilo) armies. We should not be surprised if one outcome of this is a whole series of miracles. But we should like to see a picture of "Our Lady" in full regimentals. It would be more interesting than the picture of her with the "divine" baby in her arms.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. W. KIRTON.—Thanks. It will prove useful in making out a case.

C. H. WILLIAMSON.—There is no substantial difference, so far as we can see, between the quotation you send and the original.

W. NELSON.—For "The Freethinker." 2ls.

E. CLANOWETH.—Thanks. Very generally it will be found that many of the saints were in a greater or less degree pathological specimens, mistaking their own abnormal feelings as evidence of intercourse with God. That also occurs with other notable religious leaders—Christian and non-Christian. We dealt with this at some length some years ago in a volume entitled "Religion and Sex."

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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SUGAR PLUMS

AN unpleasant way of spending a day just now is to take a lengthy railway ride, and Mr. Cohen had an example of this on his visit to Glasgow. But some consolation was given by the meeting of old friends, the good audience which the occasion provided, and the obviously keen interest in the lecture. And when a speaker has something to say that is worth while, a Scottish audience takes first place. The meeting in the Cosmo Cinema was a complete success. There was also a good sale of literature, with a rush on Mr. Cohen's book on "Christianity," the copies of which soon ran out. The Glasgow Branch seems to be doing excellent work, and well deserves all the support that can be given it.

We take this opportunity of expressing our obligation to those of our readers who from all parts of the country send us items of news that would not otherwise help us. "The Freethinker" has a very small staff, from one point of view, but from another angle it has a very large one. Those who send us items of news, from local papers or otherwise, are doing us a service that no news-cutting agency could give. We thank them all, and take the opportunity of saying that the name and date of the paper from which the items are taken should also be given.

We do not know who it was invented the phrase "A job of work," but we note that it is most frequently used by members of our upper "classes" when they are addressing the "lower" ones. The "upper" ones appear to think that by its use they are proving themselves true democrats, the "lower" that they are in touch with the great ones of the earth. Thus the principle of equality is advertised on the platform, and largely ignored in everyday life.

When all is said and done, a "job of work" has neither the virility or directness that slang often displays. It is simply bad English, as bad as the pronunciations the B.B.C. impudently forces upon the public during many of its broadcasts. In

passing, we may note that whenever the B.B.C. wishes to introduce a working man into one of its performances it usually puts into his mouth a series of sounds which is *not* spoken commonly in the East End, although there is a distinctiveness between the sounds of the East and the West.

But a "job of work" is not slang; it belongs neither to the East nor West, North or South, although there are differences of pronunciation in each quarter—as Bernard Shaw has pointed out. "A job of work" is just bad English, and by the conjunction of the two words, sheer nonsense. For "job" means any sort of work. It applies to any task one may undertake. And "work" includes anything that involves an expenditure of energy, from carrying bricks up a ladder to writing an essay or painting a picture. So when the Prime Minister, or anyone else, speaks of a "job of work" they are really saying a job of job or a work of work, and exhibiting a sense of superiority when they are under the impression they are advertising their commonality of feeling with the "lower classes." Worst of all, those of the "lower classes" who talk of a "job of work" are exhibiting how far *they* are from a genuine feeling of democracy.

We see that Dr. L. P. Jacks has resigned his post of Trustee of the Manchester College, Oxford. His reason is that, whereas Manchester was hitherto an undenominational college, the Trustees have decided to become "Unitarian." A Unitarian is one who rejects the three-headed God of orthodox Christianity, believes in one God, with Jesus as just a good man who got into serious trouble. Well, there are and always have been a great many gods about, and although a three-headed one is more picturesque, yet the evidence for the one is just as convincing as that for the other. But what dare-devils the Trustees must be!

The mention of Manchester College brings an incident to mind. A few years back Mr. Chapman Cohen was invited by the "Students' Fellowship of Youth" to give them an address. He went; the hall was quite full of young people of both sexes. The address aroused great interest; there were plenty of questions, followed by discussion, and Mr. Cohen was informed it was the largest and most interesting meeting that had been held there. Would he come again? The reply was: "Yes, but you will not be permitted to invite me again." Mr. Cohen was assured that the Fellowship could do as it pleased, to which the reply was given: "You may think so, but this meeting has aroused too much interest for you to be permitted to invite me a second time." The prognostication was justified. No second invitation came. The Trustees, or whoever were in control, did not forget they were Christians. But the lecture was printed and it had a good sale—many copies going to people at the University. We wonder whether Dr. Jacks could throw any light on the matter.

One of the latest revivals of Christianity is occurring at Sheffield. It runs along the usual lines and will end in the usual way. There are, to begin with, a number of Christians who call meetings, made up of other Christians, and they all agree that nothing but Christianity—their Christianity—will save the country and the world. Then the local newspapers are induced—many of them are very careful not to offend their Christian readers—to publish some special articles boasting the conversion of the already converted, who are getting a thrill from going over the old, old ground. Then the revival fizzles out and things are as they were—with Christianity weaker than ever. It is an old game.

Something has gone wrong with religion in the Services. Either that, or our B.B.C. preachers do not stick to the truth. But there must be something seriously wrong when the English "Churchman" publishes two letters from sergeants who lament the small interest in religion shown by the men in the Services. One says, quite plainly, there is "no wonder that our soldiers are losing their faith." And this when we have had pictures of masses of soldiers lined up for a religious service by order of those in command. We fancy that the explanation of these "round-ups" is that the officers think they may help to keep the men in order, and the men are there—certainly more than half of them—because they received orders to attend.

THE STORY OF RAS SHAMRA

RAS SHAMRA is a tiny village in Syria. The peasants are followers of Ali, son-in-law of Mahomet. Their Pope at the present time is the Aga Khan, who, in return for their Peter's pence, sends them a little white book of religious instructions, which they carry with them night and day.

One of these peasants, while ploughing his field, came across a large slab, underneath which he discovered a subterranean chamber. He informed the local authorities who, after putting a guard round the field, sent word to Paris. The French Government appointed two well-known excavators, MM. Schaeffer and Chenet, who explored the neighbourhood from May, 1929, until war began. They have uncovered a city which has been buried under the sands of Syria for more than 3,000 years.

This city was the ancient seaport Ugarit, opposite the most easterly cape in Cyprus. A temple, near which was a theological seminary with a well-stocked library, dedicated to the worship of the sun, was found. The tablets found in the library at Ugarit are covered with alphabetic writing; in fact, the earliest alphabetic writing so far discovered, forming a West Semitic dialect closely akin to Hebrew.

Professor Charles Viroilleaud has translated many of these tablets and published them in Paris. Poems, liturgies, histories, myths, lists of gods and goddesses, as well as documents relating to commerce, are found on these tablets. The poems deal mostly with the religion and mythology of the ancient Canaanites round about the year 1400 B.C. whilst they were under Egyptian rule.

Their heaven was connected with earth by a permanent staircase, up and down which gods and goddesses went to visit the sons and daughters of men. In this heaven El was the supreme god, the father of gods and men. El and its plural Elohim are found hundreds of times in the Hebrew scriptures and have been both translated into the one word "God" in the Authorised Version of our Bible.

The well-known story of Jacob seeing a stairway going from earth to heaven and calling his resting-place Beth-el, which means the house or temple of god, is an apt illustration of the connection of the Canaanites with the people of Israel. In Exodus xxxiv. 26, we read: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk." Sir James Frazer calls it an eleventh Hebrew commandment. Yet, at least 600 years earlier, the priests of Ugarit practised this rite, as can be seen on the tablets of Ras Shamra recounting "The Birth of the Beautiful and Gracious Gods."

In the dedication of a temple to Baal, a description of the sacrifices is given, and a tablet from Ras Shamra mentions sheep, bulls, lambs, doves, wines, oil and bread. One of the sons of the gods, in another tablet, says: "I am the lamb given as a holocaust with pure wheat." The methods of sacrifice were similar among the early Hebrews, Canaanites and Phœnicians, the Philistines of the Bible. Circumcision was common to all three places.

It is worth while remembering that Egyptian soldiers occupied Syria, Palestine and the country of the Philistines for centuries, far longer than Rome held Gaul. Egyptian ideas and literature were found on papyrus rolls in Palestine, long before there were any Hebrews there. Amos and Hosea, the earliest Jewish social reformers, lived centuries after the time of the Ras Shamra tablets.

The people of this period, round about 1400 B.C., in all parts of the Egyptian Empire, including Syria and Palestine, would learn all the wisdom which originated on the banks of the Nile. They would be taught the philosophy of "Maat," enunciated about 3000 B.C. at Heliopolis, the Egyptian centre of the worship of the sun, and put into writing by Ptahhotep.

"Ptahhotep," says Professor Breasted, "the earliest great social prophet of the ancient East, or of human history anywhere,

summed up his ideal of conduct in this word "Maat" when he said: "Established is the man whose standard is righteousness, who walked according to its way." This remarkable word, comprising in it, as its usage shows, "right, righteousness, truth and justice."

Whilst these tablets were being inscribed at Ugarit, the great appeaser, Ikhmaton, the first apostle of pacificism, occupied the throne of Egypt, writing his famous Hymns to Aton, full of the spirit of truth and nature. Christian writers point out that the mighty difference between the doctrines of Ikhmaton and the Canaanites on the one hand, and the ideas of the Israelites on the other hand, is the total absence of the doctrine of "Sin" in the former.

"Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree

Whose mortal taste brought death into the world; and all our woe."

At this time Egypt was declining, and anarchy began its reign in Palestine and surrounding lands. "Israel" made its first appearance on the world's stage about 1200 B.C. The Pharaoh Merneptah, in an account of his victories in Asia, mentions them. This is the first historical record of their existence. The Egyptians left Syria and Palestine finally about 1000 B.C.

Probably parts of the Bible written on papyrus rolls were in existence round about 800 B.C.; not the Bible as we know it now, but books full of Canaanite myths and ritual, vestiges of which still remain in the Psalms, the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament. The great prophets from Amos to Jeremiah, about the year 600 B.C., purged the Hebrew religion of nearly all the Canaanite ritual. Compare the books of Job and Genesis. In the first we have a Ras Shamra Satan, in the second a Babylonish Lucifer. Renan, in his "Study of the Book of Job," says: "Satan, who figures in the prologue, is by no means the Ahriman of the Zeno Avesta; he does nothing except at the command of God; he is an angel of a more malicious character than the others—a sharper, and inclined to curse; he is not an evil genius, existing and acting through himself."

Renan thought the Book of Job was composed in the eighth century before our era. There are many more Canaanite practices mentioned in Job which must be omitted in this short essay.

Three or four centuries later, tradition says that a learned Jew, who had lived and been educated in Babylon, called Ezra, re-wrote Genesis. The internal evidence shows that there were at the very least two editors, for we have two different accounts of the creation of man and also two descriptions of the Flood. To simplify matters let us give Ezra the whole of the credit. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy had already been re-edited before Ezra or others started on Genesis. Canaanite myth and ritual seem to have affected these editors like a red rag to a bull. They saw red. The accounts of the Creation, the Fall of Man and the Flood are all taken from Babylonish myth and ritual, including the description of His Satanic Majesty. Ras Shamra was obliterated.

HENRY SPENCE.

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CORRESPONDENCE

TERMS OF ABUSE.

Sir,—“S. H.’s” article in your issue of November 21 seems to me to have been written in a strange and remote political vacuum. One would judge from reading it that we were still living in the eighties of the last century, with Victoria on the throne, Bradlaugh lecturing in the Hall of Science, and “freedom” slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent.”

The course of events since 1914, if no earlier, has proved one thing at least—that freedom does not and cannot broaden down from precedent to precedent, but has to be struggled for like every other good thing in the world. In struggling against enemies we have to use weapons, and what “S. H.” calls “terms of abuse” are weapons like any other. Do Freethinkers never use terms of abuse? Some Freethinkers, I often think, use “Christian” as one—not to say “apologist,” “theologian,” etc.!

The Freethought movement, as I see it, is one aspect, and though an important, not the only, one of that struggle of the common people for liberation from exploitation, poverty and ignorance which has been going on since the 17th century or before. At every turn of that struggle they seem to meet enemies. To recognise the enemy labels are necessary, and under conditions of struggle labels naturally become “terms of abuse.”

Since the Russian Revolution, which I think history will judge to have been the most significant advance by the common people in modern times, those interested in keeping them down have launched a crusade against them comparable only to that launched by Innocent III against the Albigenses. The name of that crusade is Fascism. It is not a vague term at all. It denotes any and every attempt to prevent by force the advance of the peoples towards liberty, equality and fraternity.

To-day the fight between the Fascist crusade and the peoples’ movement is the major fact in the world scene. There are, and can be only, two sides in it. Those who are against Fascism are for us. Those who hamper the fight must not complain if they are called Hitler’s agents. It may be a “term of abuse,” but it is a necessary label enabling those who work for the common victory to spot and deal with those who would wreck its chances.

Life is not a debating society. There is a war on. Most Freethinkers already know their side. Those who do not had better come down from the clouds and find out.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

Sir.—In your November 21 issue one of your contributors, who signs himself “S. H.” indulges in an all-round attack on the Communist Party on the plea of objecting to “terms of abuse.”

If I was sure I had the “freedom” of your columns, I could use a few about your contributor—and they would be justified.

What cannot be justified is to mislead readers of a journal with silly, childish prattle, served up as though it were accepted, unchallengeable truth. True, the Communists attack the “Trotskyites” and the I.L.P. These are the enemies of the Soviet Union. Their policy, see their press or their conference decisions, is governed by “No aid for the Soviet Union, everything for the defeat of the Soviet Union,” camouflaged, of course, with talk about the “Stalin Regime.”

But your contributor says we label all and sundry “Trotskyites,” and then he serves up this:—

“Of course, the fact that many of them have possibly little in common with the theory of international revolution, which was Trotsky’s main contribution (apart from the building up of the Red Army) to the general development of working-class politics, is well slurred over.”

That, “apart from the building up of the Red Army,” is in the same class as the story about Joshua ordering the sun to stay put in the heavens.

What Trotsky knew about the Red Army is to be found in the columns of the “Daily Express” for the Monday following the march of the Red Army into Poland in October, 1940.

Trotsky’s article was cabled on the Saturday; the Red Army entered Poland the next day. The day after came the article

in which Trotsky told the readers of the “Express,” and the world in general, that the Red Army was incapable of fighting. It had no arms, and Stalin didn’t dare supply it with arms. Look it up, and stop playing with childish myths.

And then: . . . “the theory of international revolution.” Trotsky never had such a theory. Nobody ever had such a theory. It’s sheer damned nonsense.

Trotsky quite incorrectly posed the theory of “permanent revolution” as against the building of Socialism in Russia, which was the policy of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party.

Lenin advocated the unity of the workers and peasants and the building of Socialism as the best service to the proletariat of other lands.

Trotsky opposed. He declared that the peasants could never be won for Socialism, that Socialism couldn’t be built in Russia until revolution had taken place in the Western countries, and the proletariat of these countries, holding State power, would be able to come to the aid of the backward Soviet Union. So Trotsky, like the Mensheviks with whom he was so closely associated, was for building up Capitalism in the Soviet Union, but cunningly covering up his desires with loud-sounding phrases of “permanent revolution.”

I will put the matter in a series of simple propositions so that even your contributor may understand it. The Mensheviks said: “You can’t build Socialism in Russia. It is a backward country, and it must first go through the full cycle of capitalist development.”

The Bolsheviks said: “We can build Socialism in Russia. We have the resources and the man-power and, however difficult it may be, we can succeed.”

The Trotskyites said: “You can’t build Socialism in Russia. It is a backward country with a Conservative peasantry that will only be able to take on the task of building Socialism when it has the support of the principal European countries, once the workers have seized state power.”

The operative part of each of these propositions is the first sentence. The Bolsheviks were for building Socialism. Trotsky and the Mensheviks against. That was the cause of all the wrecking and murder for which the Trotskyites were later found guilty.—Yours, etc.,

WM. GALLACHER.

TO ALL IT CONCERNS.

Sir,—A week or so back you said that several letters on Trypho were held over. If any readers are sufficiently interested in a matter which seems to be of great concern to at least some champions of a human Jesus, I, having plenty of leisure, would be glad to go into details re Trypho, which would bore the average reader stiff and could not hope to occupy your valuable space, if such reader—I hope not many!—would give his address, or you would be so good as to give them mine.—Yours, etc.,

CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

89, Lowther Road, Brighton 6.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: “Six Great Englishmen—(3) Charles James Fox.”

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Lecture Hall, Mechanic’s Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. JOSEPH McCABE: “The Red Pope of Rome.”
Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. T. F. PALMER: “The Services of Rationalism to Civilisation.”

WAS LEOPOLD A TRAITOR?

WHEN I recently suggested in these columns that King Leopold of the Belgians acted in a treacherous manner which resulted in the Belgian capitulation in May, 1940, I was taken to task by the Belgian Professor Cammaerts.

I regard his letter as a straw in the wind which blew first Admiral Darlan and M. Peyrouton into Allied favour, then Marshal (Poison-Gas) Badoglio and Victor Emmanuel, now Salazar, and eventually we must expect Leopold to join this august assembly on the strength of an "objective" document put out by his Belgian admirers.

But a hundred such documents cannot whitewash his past record, of which a few points are:—

1. He refused to co-operate with France and Britain in effective staff talks before the war, in case Hitler—who had already shown his hand—might be annoyed. The result of this was that Britain and France acted without pre-arranged plans; their advance into Belgium was unimpeded, nay welcomed, by the Luftwaffe, and rendered ineffective the extended Maginot on which the B.E.F. had worked for eight months and through which hundreds of thousands of Belgian refugees now passed at will, no doubt concealing some enemy agents among them.

2. Leopold had opposed the strengthening of the Maginot extension because, again, Hitler might not like it—this after Hitler had already shown his warlike aims.

So far, Leopold's admirers might contend, we have done nothing more than accuse Leopold of criminal negligence. However, let us see how the following fit into this excuse:—

3. Leon Dégrelle, leader of the Rexists (Fascist-Monarchists) enjoyed the covert protection of the Palace, and was nothing better than a paid agent of Berlin, and the editor of one of several pro-Nazi newspapers which flourished at Brussels. A King enjoying the internal prestige and power of Leopold (supreme command of the army when invasion came) would not have allowed pro-Nazi business concerns to flourish at Antwerp, and might even have suspected that Civil Servants were becoming corrupted by German usurers.

4. Leopold was subjected to pro-Nazi influences, including the T.U. leader, H. de Man, and quite probably at least one high army officer.

5. The Belgian King failed to give adequate notice to the Allies of his capitulation, and apparently gave no order to those who were able to avoid capitulation. Moreover, his withdrawal compares ill with the scorched-earth policy of Stalin.

It will be understood that I am dealing only with the King, not with the soldiers, nor, at the moment, with the Belgian people.

6. Let anyone compare the way in which Leopold was received and subsequently treated by the Nazis (a most suggestive pointer) with the way in which his Dutch vis-a-vis, General Winkelmann, was treated (imprisoned and then reported dead).

7. A responsible statesman like the French Premier, Reynaud, referred to Leopold's treachery, and Belgian Ministers like Pierlot and Spaak agreed. Belgians now refer most unpleasantly to Reynaud, perhaps in accordance with Professor Cammaerts' policy of fostering "good relations between Allied people."

Was Leopold's anti-Ally policy conducive to good relations? This King was an appeaser long after Chamberlain had ceased to be, and in November, 1939, offered to mediate for peace, at a time when he should have been fulfilling League obligations by supporting military sanctions against the invader of Poland.

And the fact that similar things could be said of other neutrals is no defence of the one being dealt with.

Britain, in spite of tragic mistakes in the years preceding the war, stood alone once: now that she is winning she has suddenly become nice to know, and lukewarm neutrals (or allies by the fact of invasion and not of choice) are tumbling over one another for a seat at the Victory Conference table on the winning side. Are we to beat Fascism in the field only to allow it to ingratiate itself in the form of Fascist-tainted little jackals at the final reckoning?

One more point. Professor Cammaerts says there are many publications which have escaped my notice. This is both true and ludicrously unfair. I have studied some 150, but there is such a spate that even Professor Cammaerts cannot keep track of all of them.

G. H. TAYLOR.

TOPICAL EPIGRAMS

(1) On the Christian Wars

Look, heathen, look! These gentle Christian sheep
Like hungry wolves at one another leap.

Why does a Christian kill his Christian brother?
To honour Christ who bade them love each other.

(2) Badoglio's Surrender

When Italy surrendered we thanked God
As King George told us to. But—very odd!
The Deity, our loyalty to cure,
Showed us our thanks were somewhat premature.

(3) Dr. Garbett's Flight

York's Archbishop flew to Moscow. Why? To meet the
Muscovites.

There he smelt cathedral incense, there he saw bright altar-lights—
There he heard some prayers and sermons, and returned to York
to tell

Godless Russia now is Christian and Joe Stalin's saved from
Hell.

(4) King Victor Emmanuel III.

Victor Emmanuel—a happy name!
To Victor, all is victory.

Axis and Allies are the same
To him and such as he;
None can defeat this royal cheat;
O hapless Italy!

Vicar of Bray we long have known
And now he sits upon a throne.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

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