

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Folly of Faith

WE received the other day a pamphlet with the alarmist title of "The Moral Condition of Britain To-day." Its author is Canon Peter Green, a man for whom I have some respect—when he is off theology. Canon Green has been a contributor to the "Manchester Guardian" for many years, and his essays touch a higher level than is usually exhibited by the "Lord's anointed." But, after all, ability, like folly, will out, and a naturally intelligent man will be less foolish in his folly than one who is doomed by nature to fill a pulpit. Canon Green's pamphlet is concerned with showing two things. One that the moral state of England has seriously declined, the other that this decline in morals is due to the decay of belief in Christianity; and in trying to prove this to be so he is guilty of repeating one of those pulpit adventures that are common with the lower order of preachers.

What I mean by "pulpit adventures" is the use of imaginary experiences designed to show the evils of unbelief. Here is Canon Green's specimen. During the last war he was travelling to Manchester in the company of a number of officers. While they were all together the conversation was entirely military in character. Then all but a young officer was left, and he began to talk to Canon Green concerning private affairs. This is not a very common thing, but without it Canon Green would have no moral to hold up to the world. The young man explained that he was engaged to be married, and asked Canon Green: "What do you think of having a good time before you die?" Replied the Canon: "If you talk to me you must speak English. Do you mean getting drunk and having a woman?" The young officer flushed up and answered: "Well, yes. The other fellows say you may be dead in three weeks, so you may as well enjoy yourself while you can."

Now, it might have struck the Canon that this young man in all probability had Christian parents. He may have attended church; might even have been in one of our public schools, where religion is practically compulsory; and in any case had lived in a Christian atmosphere. Considering these things, and the many centuries of Christian rule there has been, one might reasonably take the case as proof that whatever benefit belief in Christianity might be in the next world it is of very doubtful value in this one. It would appear that Christians can be kept under restraint so long as they believe they are constantly under the surveillance of a priest—or a policeman. One may, if one pleases, place the policeman first—because he and God appear to serve the same purpose; and Canon Green believes that we shall never be able to develop a reasonable degree of morality unless we believe in a policeman-god or a god-policeman. The order is left to individual choice.

But, quite frankly, I do not believe that any such encounter happened. It is a very common practice to assume that these things do occur, and it serves he who saves and he who is saved. It serves a priestly purpose because it is believed to strengthen belief in the power of God, and the purpose of the convert because it makes his capture of greater value. There is greater glory for the man who rescues from Atheism one whose sins are as scarlet than for him who brings before a religious gathering one whose misdemeanours are a very pale pink. The great Spurgeon used to tell his followers that every saved sinner was a jewel in the crown of Christ—but the jewel would not rouse much enthusiasm if it had been "pinched" from Woolworth's sixpenny tray.

Now I, too, have talked with soldiers in trains, both in the last and in the present war. I have spoken to officers—sometimes in groups of three or four, sometimes to single individuals—but never did any of them speak to me as the young officer spoke to Canon Green. Surely Canon Green does not wish us to assume that, although when talking to plain individuals the conversations of soldiers—and civilians—follow the ordinary road, the sight of a clergyman suggests irregular conduct. I hardly think he wishes his readers to draw a very natural conclusion from this. In any case, he invites a reminder that some of the most salacious writing in English literature has been furnished by Christian clergymen—Donne, Swift, Sterne, for example. To the scientific psychologist, the interest displayed in sexual irregularities is not without its significance. Suppression has its consequences, and they are never of a very high character. I really think that Canon Green is doing himself an injustice in telling this story. I have a kind of belief that if it were "Mr. Green" writing he would never have discovered the moral collapse of the English people. He might then have contented himself with saying that war time, while it brings certain virtues to the front, lowers the immediate value of others. But to be a canon is a terrible burden, and few there be that do not suffer from the load.

### Is There a Decline in Morals?

In the first lines of his pamphlet Canon Green says: "We are confronted to-day by the question whether there is a serious relaxation of the moral standards of the whole nation," and, while admitting that this is in dispute, he is "convinced that not merely in the matter of sex morals, but in every department of moral conduct there is an alarming deterioration to-day as compared with two generations ago." (We ask readers to bear in mind that expression "two generations" because it plays a good part in producing the Canon's conclusions.) He is convinced that the real cause of the assumed decline in morals is "far deeper than the present war or even the war of 1914." He points out that women lay traps for men so that, after getting them "into trouble," they compel the men to marry



them. And, of course, the alleged increase in V.D. cases is further proof of the weakening morals. With this last topic we may say a few words later.

What and where, then, is the evidence in favour of the statement that there has been a decline in morality in the general body of the people? Values, of course, differ in importance. Certain qualities on which great stress was once placed have lost their prominence. The course of two or three generations may well bring about a re-valuation of values. Again, the Christian Bible has had a deal to say concerning the duty of children to parents; and the Church has emphasised this in calling upon parents to send their children to church. But very little has been said concerning the duties of parents to children.

For our own part, we altogether deny that there is any real deterioration morally or otherwise in the present generation. We are old enough to be able to give an opinion on this matter, and we do not find, and see no reason for believing, that the youth of to-day is of poorer quality than my contemporaries of, say, 60 years ago. The youth of to-day are different from the youth of my boyhood, but difference should not spell inferiority. I note that young boys and girls are more familiar with each other, and are the better morally and physically for it. They know more than did the youth of my boyhood, and they are the better for that. They know more, and are therefore more independent in their speech. And I am sure they are cleaner in their thoughts. But I feel proud to see that in travelling—this a personal note—the younger people are more genuinely helpful to old people than they were when I was young.

I fancy that what Canon Green is complaining about is that the youth generation of to-day is thinking less of the Church and more of life. It meets religious dogmas with an easy contempt that was almost unknown among young people two generations ago.

With marriage there is a marked increase—a rapidly growing increase—of marriages before a registrar than in a church, where the parson is legally a registrar for the purpose of contracting marriages. The couple may have a religious service if they like. They may stand on their heads if they please. They may break a plate with the Chinese or a glass with the Jews; they may go through any foolish practice they please. All these things are at their discretion; but, says the modern State, whatever you do or do not do, there must be a registrar present before a marriage is considered legal. From the cradle to the grave important ceremonies over which the Christian Church once ruled are being taken out of their hands. There has been going on a secularising of life, and the parsons do not like it.

The truth is that Canon Green is considering the matter from a business point of view, but is indiscreet enough to place the beginning of what he says is a decline in the "last quarter of the 19th century." We suggest that he goes back further, say to just over a century ago, when the power of the Churches as a whole had been scarcely touched so far as the mass of the people were concerned. He is quite as well acquainted as I am with the state of the people in the first 40 years of the 19th century: the conditions under which they lived, the selling of orphan children to work in the mills as though they were so much cattle, the employment of women in the pits, the ignorance of the masses of the people, and the use of

Christian belief not to uplift the social state of the people, but to make them content in the state in which it had pleased God to place them.

We were reminded by a passage from Professor Laski's latest and his most brilliant book, "Reflections on the Revolutions of our Time," of the true character of "Christian" help so far as the people were concerned. At its best it seldom rose above charity; and very often that charity had a purpose. This purpose is found in Wilberforce's "Practical View of the System of Christianity." Wilberforce's human attitude towards reform was indicated by his fervent support to the infamous Combination Laws, created for the sole purpose of preventing joint action of the smallest number of working men asking collectively for a rise in wages. Wilberforce's recommendation of this book to Prime Minister Pitt was on the ground that Christianity made the social state less galling to the people. It taught them that their path had been marked out by God; that religion offers peace of mind to all; that if the upper classes—"superiors" is Wilberforce's word—have more comforts they are also exposed to temptations from which the poor are exempt; and that, finally, we are all children of the same Father and will be admitted to our heavenly inheritance. Wilberforce said that all the provision a poor man's child needs is "industry and innocence." The advantages of the rich, says Wilberforce, are "unreal." Like Canon Green, Wilberforce believed that no greater disaster could happen to the country than the decline of Christianity.

When Canon Green speaks of the decline of morals he appears to have most in mind the advertising of the extent of venereal disease. And on that—certainly so far as the alleged growth of V.D.—there are only one or two things that can be said here with certainty and profit. In this matter we are dependent upon statistics, upon the methods of compiling data and so forth, not the least factor being the readiness with which such a disease is hushed up not merely by the sufferer, but by public authorities. Consider what would have been said if, to take the Canon's selected period, it had been proposed that a Church Assembly should discuss the prevalence of V.D.? Yet after many years of clerical denunciation of Freethinkers for taking up this tabooed subject that stage has been reached. One remembers, or ought to remember, how Bradlaugh, a representative Atheist of his day, was scandalised by Christian leaders in this country merely for commending a book to be read dealing with that subject. This was running true to form so far as the Christian Church is concerned. I say the "Christian Church," for it is difficult to understand why by becoming a member of a Christian Church a man should be less humane. It is true that many of the early Christian saints came very nearly losing their humanity, but even they had their human moments. It is not easy to kill human feeling, as many Churches have found.

It is not historically reliable, but it is commonly stated that syphilis was introduced into Christian Europe late in the 15th century. The English called it the "French disease," the French called it the "Neapolitan disease," and the Neapolitans finished the circle by calling it the "English disease." The Roman Church remained silent, for it had clients in every country. What we do know is that the disease spread like wildfire. Our own Henry VIII.,

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## MUSSOLINI'S COMPACT WITH THE PAPACY

PROFESSOR BINCHY'S "Church and State in Fascist Italy" (Oxford, 753 pp., 1941; 31s. 6d.) is an elaborate study. Although the recent transformation in Italian affairs revolutionises the future outlook, Binchy's analysis of the complex conditions which led to Mussolini's specious compromise with the Vatican remains of considerable historical importance.

Dr. Binchy is evidently a Catholic, and his anti-Fascist attitude is plainly pronounced. Still, his study of the Roman Question and its sequel, the Lateran Agreement, is studiously free from party bias. Here and there his prepossessions appear, but in the main his work remains a deliberately dispassionate exposition of a very vexed problem.

With the proclamation of United Italy in 1870, Papal rule terminated, and the Pontiff became a self-imposed prisoner in the Vatican. Centuries before, as Dr. Binchy admits, the Church's temporalities, "for which the legalists of the Middle Ages invented elaborate and even fraudulent titles, arose out of the practical needs of the Roman community." Yet the day came when the secular rulers aspired to end the disunity of the Italian peninsula which reduced their country to a geographical expression.

From the time of Garibaldi's triumph to the Concordat between the Duce and Pope Pius XI. in 1929, the Italian Government pursued a policy more anti-clerical than that of most other European Powers. But the cry of persecution raised by so many Catholic propagandists possessed little justification. Even the most drastic measure—the Penal Code of 1889—passed by the State appears to have been called for, as Dr. Binchy virtually admits, by the antagonistic and even treasonable conduct of many clericals. As our historian avers: "While Catholic writers have much to say about the iniquity of this measure (and the impartial student will probably agree with most of their strictures), they maintain a discreet silence about its practical application. How many clerics have suffered under its provisions? Very few, it would seem, if any. Indeed, I think it may be taken as certain that far more ecclesiastics have been imprisoned in Mussolini's Italy during the ten years of 'reconciliation' than during the entire period of *dissidio*" (1870-1929).

The Duce is the most chameleon-like public character of modern Europe. Inconsistency never troubled him in the least. An aggressive Socialist and Atheist, he hurled furious charges at the monarchy and Church. He was the arch-enemy of Nationalism. Then, when he attained supreme power, he hailed the kingship as an ideal form of Government and stressed the need for the restoration of a Roman Imperial Empire exercised over a widely increased domain, and essayed the appeasement of the clericals estranged by the secular administrations of the previous 60 years. Even those who knew him most intimately must often have marvelled at his acrobatic proceedings, especially when he encouraged and consummated a "reconciliation" with the Vatican.

Yet those that hoped for a Fascist recognition of an independent Church were dismally disappointed. In his speech in the Chamber, Mussolini asserted that: "Those who had spoken of a 'free and sovereign Church' were to understand that 'within the State it is not sovereign, nor even free.'" Then, referring to the Christian faith, the Duce said: "This religion was born in Palestine; it became Catholic in Rome. Had it remained in Palestine, very probably it would have been one of the many sects that flourished on that ardent soil, such as the Essenes and Therapeutites, and very probably it would have perished without leaving any trace behind it."

Long before, Garibaldi had used even more forcible language when he described the then reigning Pope as "a cubic metre of

dung," and in his speeches to his Masonic brethren of the Grand Orient of Italy he vehemently denounced the Church and its "papal monster." These outbursts Dr. Binchy deploras, nor does he recall with equanimity the "insult" hurled at the Vatican by the intellectuals who erected the Giordano Bruno statue on the spot where he was burnt alive as a contumacious and pestilent heretic.

With the official settlement of the Roman Question, many Catholics regarded the removal of the Bruno monument as assured, and that this, and the equestrian statue of Garibaldi would at least disappear from their original sites, with their menacing proximity to the Vatican. Or, as Dr. Binchy puts it: "In the first flush of enthusiasm many Catholics prophesied that the Concordat would at least entail the removal of the statue of Giordano Bruno. . . . On the face of it, however, this was highly improbable, for many intellectual luminaries of the Party had already included Bruno in the Fascist Pantheon of 'great Italian thinkers,' and had even placed his works on the programme of the State secondary schools. Still more fantastic was the hope that the famous equestrian statue of Garibaldi on the Janiculum, which represents the former Grand Master of Italian Masonry with his face turned menacingly towards St. Peter's and the Vatican, might be moved to a less challenging site. The Duce's speech in the Chamber rudely dispelled these illusions. The statue of Giordano Bruno, he said, 'melancholy like the fate of that friar,' would remain where it was. As to any change in the monument to Garibaldi, 'even in the direction of the horse's head,' it was simply not to be thought of; in any event, the rider 'can now gaze tranquilly in that direction, because to-day his great spirit is placated.'"

Moreover, a monument was erected of Anita, the anti-clerical wife of Garibaldi, by the side of her husband's statue, and this memorial was unveiled by Mussolini in 1932. The King and Queen were present at the ceremony, but the papacy was not represented. With the settlement, the crucifix was restored to the elementary schools and religious instruction was imparted, while the Sisters of Mercy re-entered the hospital wards; but the teaching in the secondary schools remained secular.

Binchy's chapter on "The Custody of the Child" is headed with the following lines from Browning's "The Ring and the Book":—

Go practise as you please  
With men and women: leave the child alone  
For Christ's particular love's sake.

This admonition presumably applies both to Church and State. But in Italy, as elsewhere, we are far away from this ideal, especially in Hitler's Germany.

Professor Gentile was Minister for Education in the Duce's first Government, and his sceptical philosophy had given great offence to the godly. For he asserted that while the infant "must be taught the religion of his native country . . . later, when the child advances in years and increases in maturity of spirit, he will be able of his own accord to pass beyond the puerile conception of religion that has been taught him in the primary school and to transcend it by his own thought." In our own island, Gilbert Murray seemingly shares this view. Gentile, however, was succeeded as Minister by Fidele, who made some slight concessions to the clerics. But education remained under complete State control, and any concession could be cancelled at any moment.

One bright feature in papal policy was the blunt refusal of Pius XI. to countenance the anti-Semitic frenzy introduced into Italy from Nazi Germany. "Through Christ and in Christ we are Abraham's descendants," asserted the Pontiff. "No, it is not possible for Christians to take part in anti-Semitism. Spiritually we are Jews."

T. F. PALMER.



## ACID DROPS

WE see that at the forthcoming meeting of the I.L.P. in Glasgow, the Govanhill Branch is to move a resolution demanding a "purely secular system of education be established in all State schools." The avowed determination of the present Government to increase the strength of the Churches in the schools proves the urgency of the resolution.

Mr. Butler says the Government has, in its proposals for the increase of religion in the schools, "chosen the hour when the whole country is looking to the future." That is double-barrelled bunkum, and Mr. Butler is quite aware of its quality. The Government which, apart from the war, has no representative quality whatever, has chosen the hour when the main thought is the war, to re-establish the clergy in the nation's schools in the full knowledge that it is, for the Churches, a case of now or never. It is the most contemptible political trick that has been worked for some time.

If any of our readers are looking for pious nonsense and ethical slush, they may find it in an article by the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead written for the "Sunday Graphic." Perhaps there is something in the very name of Sunday that leads to this kind of thing. Certain it is that the Sunday religious articles are usually more foolish than the average sermon—perhaps it is because the writers (clergymen or semi-clergymen) feel that they are writing for a section of the public that delights in the matter provided. But whatever the reason, the fact is indisputable. Week-day religion is bad enough, but sermons written for a Sunday paper are the lowest of all religious efforts that find their way into the general Press.

Take these examples, given by Mr. Weatherhead: "The Beveridge Plan takes religious ideas which need the power of religion to make them work." (The Beveridge Plan might have operated 150 years ago had the writings of Thomas Paine been followed by Christians.) "Religious ideas are the strength of our Western civilisation." (But Russia has in a single generation transformed the life and outlook of nearly two hundred millions of people without religion.) "Plans like the Beveridge Plan fail because they demand love." (The Beveridge Plan has not failed, it has not been tried, and it never will be tried unless people think less about their religion and more about simple social justice.) "To love is really a very difficult thing." (It is not, but the preacher makes it a very ridiculous thing. One should respect one's neighbour, when he is worthy of respect, but love is a more intimate feeling, one that cannot be turned on as one turns a bath tap. As used by the professional preacher, it is the greatest mixture of cant and humbug that we have, and it is worked most often from the pulpit.) Finally, Mr. Weatherhead comes to the usual untruthful account of a parson's experience. It occurred (? to a brother parson. At the end of a lunch-hour address a man rose and said: "We don't need religion. We've got everything we want. We've got enough money and food and fun. What need have we of religion?" (All we need say is that it is as true as the gospel. In other words, it is just a pulpit lie.) It never happened, and the preacher knows it.

We suggest that there should be established a central organised Christian institution which should work on the lines laid down by Palmerston to his Cabinet—"It doesn't matter what kind of a lie we tell so long as we all tell the same lie." For example, there is the trumpeted statement that Christianity is all-powerful. That comes from many quarters. But there is another favourite, that Christianity has never yet been tried. This is illustrated by the tame parson who writes for the "Daily Telegraph." He says "Actually, except by a handful of quite exceptional individuals, the precepts of Christianity have never really been put into action." Now all this needs organising, otherwise the general public will come to the conclusion that there is something wrong somewhere. The same lie, whatever it is, should be told by all.

Another test of the power of prayer has been announced. It is advertised that the Roman Catholics are organising nine days of prayer to God to prevent the Government Education Bill

passing, so far as certain features are concerned, and so far as it touches Roman Catholic funds. All the Roman Catholics are asking is that improvements of Roman Catholic school buildings must be paid for entirely by the Government, and the Catholics must select their own teachers, who must be Catholics. That is all. The British ratepayers should consider themselves fortunate that they are not asking for all the priesthood to be paid from the national funds. We shall see what God will do about it.

Meanwhile, the Liverpool "Legion of Mary and St. Patrick" are planning for the conversion of the general public. Archbishop Downey—a rather suggestive name—has sent the Legion of Mary and St. Patrick crowd his blessing. We will inquire how many of our Liverpool readers have been converted.

Here is something worth bearing in mind. It is taken from the "Catholic Herald" for January 14:—

"Russia is called upon to play a preponderant part in world affairs. Whatever view we may take of this, we are all at least agreed that the full guarantee of a beneficent Russian policy depends upon the restoration of a Christian belief and a Christian practice in that country."

That is, so far as it dare go, a declaration of war, and we may take it that the difficulty of Russia coming to terms with Poland is largely due to Roman Catholic activities. The Catholic Church led the way in the vile attack upon Russia by religionists and others in this country and elsewhere. Catholics here protested against an "alliance" with Russia when Germany attacked her, and it may be taken for granted that the Roman Church will do what it can to prevent too friendly arrangements between Russia and Poland. Why not? After all, Roman Catholicism and Fascism are two forms of the same thing.

By the way, the "Catholic Herald" persists in saying that in Russia "the ban on religious worship has not been raised." Of course, one lie more or less does not matter to the "great lying Church," but the fact is there never was a ban on religious worship. Its privileges only were removed. But when the lie that religion was prohibited could no longer stand daylight, another lie had to be found by way of compensation.

A deputation of British Jews was informed by Mr. Butler that the Government was "determined to preserve the individuality of our educational institutions." We wonder whether that means that where there are Jewish children in a school some Rabbi will be able to teach them the Jewish religion? We doubt it. The real reform, which is to make every educational institution in the country open to all, and on equal terms, to students irrespective of wealth and position, will certainly not be secured. The class element is to remain as strong as ever.

For an example of real humour—not wit—give us an ecclesiastical gathering in full war paint. Here is a recent example. The Lower House of Convocation of Canterbury had before it the question of legalising cremation. Of course, cremation has been legalised in law and practice for many years, but this was not ecclesiastical legislation. And as cremations *will* take place, whether the Church likes it or not, the Convocation was asked to make them religiously legal provided "there is no intention to deny the resurrection of the body." Presumably there will, or should, be stuck on the coffin a certificate: "Guaranteed that this body will rise again without damaging the immortal soul of the deceased."

The other day in the House of Commons a question was asked concerning the shortage of books and stationery in schools. The reply was, of course, the shortage of paper. Lady Astor then asked whether the Minister had seen some of the "disgusting books that were being printed," and added, "even Bibles would be better than some of this filth." Nothing happened. Thunder was absent and lightning was out of form. Commander Locker-Lampson then put the finishing stroke. He asked whether books came before bombs? Presumably this included the Bible. But still nothing happened. The days when the Lord took this kind of profanity in hand have passed.



## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. LEONARD.—We are very pleased to have the opinion of a new reader. We are pleased to be able to say that we have got very many similar letters since the war began.

G. L. MARTIN.—One of the most readable books we know of is "Pagan Generation," published by the University of Chicago Press in 1929. It brings out the identity of the mystery religions and their likeness to Christian dogmas without overloading the book with elaborate displays of learning on the part of the writer. The author is H. R. Willoughby, Professor of New Testament literature in Chicago University.

C. W. HOLLINGHAM.—"The Freethinker" Fund, £1.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary, N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of 5s. from Mr. E. Chinnery to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

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### SUGAR PLUMS

IT is too early to say all that may be said about the new Education Bill, which has now passed its second reading, and as the religious vote always bulks large in the eyes of most of our "independent" members, and the Churches and Chapels know how to organise political terrorism, we were not surprised that where religion is concerned, the proposal to retreat to the pre-1870 position passed without opposition. And it is to be noted that the religious interest is the only one that will be gratified at once. Other reforms must wait on circumstances.

Another point that deserves notice is that there is evidently no intention to abolish the substantial sacredness of the public schools and so take a decided step towards establishing a genuine democracy. At present, calling this country a democracy may be taken as a sarcasm that is so well known that most people appear to have forgotten its character. One member did call attention to the fact that while the public schools provide about 60 per cent. of people in high office, the elementary schools are represented by about 2 per cent. That member is not likely to hold office, unless it is thought that by giving him a "job" his professed opinions will undergo a change. We have noted several members of late years whose opinions appear to have undergone a remarkable change after an appointment has fallen to them.

We see that, in the case of Jewish parents, Mr. Butler has promised that they may be able to withdraw their children from the stock Christianity that will be always on tap, and facilities will be offered to them to give their children lessons in their religion. But that is precisely a feature of school life that should not exist. School should be a place which gives children their first lesson in citizenship. They should be taught, not so much in set terms, as in the daily life they lead, that they are

all members of a society in which all stand on a level of civil equality, but where minor differences do not separate those who make up a common social life without reflecting upon status.

Admit religion into the schools and children receive their first lesson in separateness and bigotry. If they all have the same religious instruction they get it with the teaching that it must not be questioned. The pupils are told what they must believe, and no questions are permitted. Questions of a kind that would be permitted—and which ought to be encouraged—are not allowed in the case of religion. If parents withdraw—as they should—their children from religious instruction, there is a lesson in separateness in a form and a direction that can bring nothing but evil. To argue that the Government would be denying liberty of opinion if they leave religion out of the schools, is the shallowest of argument. In other matters no teacher who is worth his or her salt would object to a pupil questioning what is given it. But should questions that raised doubts about religion be encouraged, or even permitted? And if teachers did permit questioning on religion, how long would they be permitted to hold what is idiotically called their "job of work"?

It seems impossible for most people to touch religion without being defiled. If they are deeply religious, absurdity is sure to make itself manifest. If they are half-way on the road to emancipation, quite unnecessary qualifications will make their appearance. For example, Senior Master G. Wortly, of Whitley High School, addressing a meeting of school masters, criticising the attempts to force a stronger dose of religion in the schools, said:—

"The Roman Catholic hierarchy accuses teachers who oppose the dual system of acting as trade unionists. The accusation is false; we act as educationists. We do not believe in the segregation of children in different schools in accordance with the religious beliefs of their parents. Excessive segregation has been the curse of the English educational system. It is not good for the children to develop that complex which must inevitably arise under such circumstances. To inculcate into the minds of the children of a minority, of a conscious minority, of a minority for whose opinions and beliefs we have every respect, that the world consists of Catholics and non-Catholics is wrong."

That is quite good. The aim of school life should be to create a feeling of social solidarity; the influence of religious lessons in State schools is to suggest differences and to create the material for divisions where none should exist. And in sectarian schools, Roman Catholic or otherwise, there are created bars that lead to much evil in social life.

On these points Mr. Wortly is quite sound. But then comes the kick that takes back a great deal of what he has said, thus:—"I believe in a daily act of worship, but I disagree entirely with the method by which it is to be secured." But you cannot have a daily act of worship in a school without inflicting harm all round. If the act of worship takes place in a Roman Catholic school, the severance of Catholics from the rest of the community is plainly marked. If in a Protestant school, the divisive influence is less strongly marked, but it is still there. Distinctions are created that serve no useful social purpose, but which do tend to create divisions of a purely social character that should never occur.

Those who wish to find evidences of this need only consider a few plain facts. The Roman Catholic religion offers the plainest. Here the Church is placed before everything, and probably 85 per cent. will vote and act as the priest desires them to act. And surely nothing could be more mentally degrading than the miracles of "Our Lady," of which we have recently given some official examples. Of Protestantism, we might give scores of cases, but for the moment we are content to note the injury done to honesty and ability in local political life by the power exerted by churches and chapels. The ablest men are outside local administration because they will not become the tools of one or more petty religious organisations. In most cases, to offend local religious bodies is to make election almost impossible. The readiness with which Socialist candidates developed an admiration for Jesus, as a cloak for their disbelief in all gods, is a case in point.



## THE RÔLE OF THE INTELLECTUAL

IT is one of the greatest misfortunes in the cultural life of Christian and capitalist Britain (and, I suspect, of other countries in this century) that the term "intellectual" has acquired a somewhat sinister significance. We are rather inclined to think of the intellectual as the man who vaguely argues *in vacuo*, thinking in abstract terms which have no real relationship to the political, economic and social events of the time. And, in recent days, the invention of the term "highbrow" as a purely abusive phrase has tended to extend this suggestion that the man whose ideas are largely concerned with the more intelligent aspects of the arts or the sciences can necessarily have nothing at all to do with concrete things, and must not concern himself with anything which is directly practical.

Even the political work of such writers as Herbert Read, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden and their like has been condemned, both by those whose work is directly political and by those hang-overs from Victorian times whose outlook on the arts is still governed by the old idea of the "Ivory Tower" beloved of Henry James and his successors in modern days.

I feel (and I am sure that many of the writers and scientists among the younger generation will agree with me in this) that the world can only gain from the fruitful ideas of the intellectuals, and that it is not at all easy for anyone to be completely detached from the political and economic arguments which are the dominating thoughts of our era.

It would, however, appear highly probable that the association of various political factions of our day with certain schools of writing has led to some unfortunate results. The way in which Fascists and Nazis have taken to themselves some of the more reactionary philosophers, such as Nietzsche and Hegel, has led to the counter-demonstration on the part of the orthodox and docile Communists of taking over the sole right of interpreting the doctrines (or should I say dogmas?) of Marx and Engels. The result has been that we are presented with two counter-orthodoxies, not unlike the furious opposition between Catholic and Protestant in the early history of the Church; and there is the added difficulty that there is now little to show that any of the intellectuals realise the necessary aloofness from these neo-Marxist arguments which should be preserved by all who have any pretences to intelligent integrity of mind.

This, I think, is where the modern Freethinker has a duty to the community of which he is a member. There are, of course, various political attitudes which have to be taken up by everyone who has any ambition to be a fighter for true freedom, and the most important of all of them is to be strongly in opposition to all tyrannies, from whatever source they come. In the era of the "Popular Front" there were a large number of people who, sensing the way in which the wind was blowing, were quite prepared to deny their convictions in order to be in the fashionable mood. That is something which should never again be permitted to happen. Those who feel in their very bones the value of freedom, intellectual, political and economic, should say so; and should stick by their guns to the bitter end, no matter how bitter that end may turn out to be. Herbert Read's "Poetry and Anarchism" is, I imagine, the best statement which has appeared up to date on the general position of the intellectual who has qualms about the acceptance of any kind of political orthodoxy.

In the past it has been largely in religion that such difficulties have arisen. In the Middle Ages there were some who suffered martyrdom for their religious convictions, but since then martyrdom seems largely to have gone out of fashion. However, it may be that the age of martyrs is returning and, if so, there will be some intellectuals who are prepared to suffer rather than to sacrifice their convictions on the altar of expediency. I am not,

of course, suggesting that the intellectuals of the T. S. Eliot school are entirely serving some purely expedient end in supporting the Church of England. Mr. Eliot's philosophical works show, beyond all doubt, that he is absolutely sincere in his attitude towards religious orthodoxy, and, since the directly religious pressure has decreased and various political pressures have increased, it is abundantly obvious that men are now (at any rate, superficially) free to accept or reject religious dogmas as they please. Political dogmas of the Right and the Left are now the bone of contention, and it is only if there are men and women who are prepared to stand firm on their convictions that we can hope for emancipation from outworn political fashions in the months and years that lie ahead.

As I see it, the intellectual has a definite duty towards his fellow men. He must explain, to the best of his ability (and, after all, everyone's ability is limited), where lies the duty of man, faced by the totalitarian demands of the modern State and Church. He must use whatever artistic gifts he has to point out the dilemma of modern man, placed in a world where poverty in the midst of plenty is the most characteristic feature. And, if he has secured some intellectual certainty, he must proceed to draw the moral, to show what should be the freedom-loving individual's reaction to the manifold problems of our day.

Beyond those elementary facts, there is little that he can do; and that, perhaps, is the only foundation in fact for the general feeling that the intellectual is an ineffectual fumbler with questions that are too great for his solution. And yet . . . and yet . . . Consider the greatest intellectuals of the past. Consider Kropotkin, philosophising on political lines and proving that man can become the master of his environment if only he will take the initiative within his own hands. Consider Beethoven, expressing in matchless musical phrase the personal convictions of freedom which preserved him through all his chequered life. Consider even such a theological philosopher as Swedenborg, opposing the Churches of his day by a new attitude towards all religious questions, and using his acute vision to show that in his view the world was intended to be a place of pleasure and peace. All these people were, in their own way, intellectuals, and I have taken them merely as examples of the manner in which the intellectual mind can capture some aspect of reality and convey, in convincing tones, its value to mankind as a whole.

There are many lessons which the intellectual of to-day can draw from such noteworthy intellectuals of the past; not least is the duty of the intelligent individual (and the individual who has been fortunate enough to be granted an extra dose of education) to point out to his less lucky fellows the true implications of all that is happening in the world. Only thus can we hope to see men marching towards the better state which one day will assuredly take the place of present competitive chaos. Only thus can imperialistic capitalism be replaced by a really co-operative society, and a society in which the arts are the rule and not the exception.

The role of the intellectual is thus seen to be something in the nature of a signpost, pointing the way to a happier world future. Naturally, there will be many who find themselves being transformed into false signposts, pointing down roads that lead to moral and ethical morasses. But the reliable signposts will be there none the less; and it is to be hoped that sooner or later mankind will recognise which way its true salvation lies.

S. H.

**THE RESURRECTION AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS**, by W. A. Campbell. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

**REVENUES OF RELIGION**, by Alan Handsacre. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

**HENRY HETHERINGTON**, by A. G. Barker. Price 6d.; postage 1d.



CORRESPONDENCE

STR.—In your issue of January 16 you criticise the B.B.C. for refusing a broadcast on the "comparative intelligence of children enjoying public school education and those who had no opportunity of higher education." This, however, is a very dangerous subject, on which feeling runs high in scientific circles. The acknowledged facts admit of more than one interpretation. It is a fact that in the United States one in every seven children of Unitarian ministers gets into "Who's Who in America," but the corresponding figure for skilled labourers is one in 1,600, and for unskilled labourers one in 48,000. The question is whether these amazing discrepancies are caused by heredity or environment. As skilled labourers are at least as well paid in America as Unitarian ministers, and their children have great educational opportunities (and even the children of the unskilled have considerable educational facilities), the opinion is rapidly spreading that facts like the above cannot possibly be explained by environment, and that there are great differences of hereditary strains in different sections of the community. This has long been the opinion of most biologists. Charles Darwin said: "I am inclined to agree with Francis Galton in believing that education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of anyone, and that most of our qualities are innate."

This view is strengthened by the fact that many of those who do attain the highest distinction have the very poorest opportunities. Blatchford never was at school. J. M. Robertson became a telegraph boy at 13. Bernard Shaw never had any education after he was 14. Wells left school at 13, and it was only by private study that he got a scholarship to the Normal School of Science.

Moreover, Havelock Ellis points out that "the proportion of men of ability produced by the lower social classes is actually decreasing." Nearly all professional eugenists have reached the conclusion that, if every person in the country had an Eton and Oxford education, the increase in the number of able persons would be hardly perceptible.—Yours, etc., R. B. KERR.

IS IT A BOYCOTT?

STR.—The article signed "P. V. M." and entitled "Boycott Up to Date," which appeared in your issue of January 9, is so flagrant a misrepresentation of "The Teachers' World" that it demands a reply.

The advertisement of "Christianity—What Is It?" was declined for the reason given by us at the time, and for no other reason. It was obviously a commercial advertisement—the usual publishers' discount was asked for and inclusion in three issues. To have accepted it when we were repeatedly refusing to open accounts with new advertisers, and repeatedly asking our regular advertisers to accept less space than they wished to take, would

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 38)

honoured by the Pope as Defender of the Faith, suffered from V.D. The charge of Wolsey infecting the King by breathing upon him may be dismissed, as one cannot contract syphilis in that way. Christian influence made syphilis a tabooed subject, but did not prevent its visitations. In fact, in the true Christian spirit, one of the arguments used until the other day against publicising an understanding of the disease was that it would increase illicit relations between the sexes. The Christian has always denied the adequacy of a "merely human code of morals." Canon Green is thus in the true line of the Christian tradition. How much better might the world have been had it not been saddled with a religion which insisted upon human weakness instead of upon its latent strength, and that the only way to betterment was unbounding faith in an impossible God.

(To be concluded)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

not only have been inconsistent, but would have made it difficult to refuse further advertisements from the same source.

The member of the N.S.S. who so cleverly "smelt a rat" might have known, if he had taken the slightest trouble to get at the facts, that our war-time policy of discouraging new advertisers does not apply to the small personal advertisements from our readers, which obviously do not involve the opening of a new account. It was ridiculous to believe otherwise.

But the most convincing reply to "P. V. M.'s" rash and offensive assertion that "The Teachers' World" accepts advertisements of religious books while a "publisher of Freethinking books is put off with an evasive and untrue excuse," is found in the fact that the publications of the Rationalist Press Association are from time to time advertised in the columns of "The Teachers' World" (vide page 6 of December 22 issue), and its views quite frequently allowed expression in the editorial column of the paper.

There is not a shred of truth in the allegation that the advertisement of "Christianity—What Is It?" was refused for the reason given in the article, and I think you owe "The Teachers' World" an apology.—Yours, etc.,

E. H. ALLEN (Managing Director).

[All we need say is that we asked for three advertisements and were given terms for the Miscellaneous column, but that no new advertisements could be accepted. It was after this that an advertisement from another quarter was accepted for that column. There was no question of opening an account.—EDITOR.]

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. Dr. R. H. THOLESS: "Education in Reasoning."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Key Books, 115, Dale End, Birmingham).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m. A Reading from Colonel Ingersoll's "Liberty of Man, Woman and Child," by Mrs. B. MILLINGTON. Discussion and Tea.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute). — Sunday, 6-30 p.m. ATHOS ZENOO: "Religion, Life and Appendicitis."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. T. L. SMITH: "Robert Burns."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. T. H. ELSTON: "The Oracles of God in 1944."

FOR SALE.—A copy of "The Devil's Pulpit." by Rev. Robert Taylor. Offers to Box 38, c/o "The Freethinker," 2-3, Fumival Street, London, E.C.4.

PIONEER BOOKSHOP

Charlotte Place, Goodge Street, W. 1

A quantity of Freethought works for sale—Volney, Carlile, Holyoake, Foote, etc.

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## DESTRUCTIVE FREETHOUGHT

A PERENNIAL criticism levelled against militant freethought is that it is merely destructive, and at a period like the present, when the minds of large numbers of people are filled with thoughts of construction and reconstruction, this charge may prove more damaging to our cause than ever before, unless rebutted with all the power at our command. It will not do just to bring out the old retort that there is no need for the doctor to put anything else in the place of the boil he cures on his patient's neck. We may still raise a laugh this way, but it will not bring us converts among the forward-looking young people of our land, in the Armed Forces, in factories and offices, in the Universities and in the higher forms of our schools. It will pay us better to analyse the nature of the accusation, consider how it began and examine the reasons why it persists.

Quite clearly it was not first made by professors of philosophy or advocates of new political systems, although it is the fashion to-day for many of them to take it up. Originally, beyond all doubt, the condemnation of freethought as being exclusively concerned with destruction was a device of the clergy to work on the credulity and fear of their congregations. The picture of a band of destroyers, enemies of everything that was good, hallowed by tradition and necessary to salvation, was highly effective in preventing the superstitious, conservative, church-ridden populace from tolerating the small scattered groups of Freethinkers that were forming all over the country in the early 19th century. It was largely this idea, manufactured by the clergy and spread by their dupes and supporters, that led to the fining and imprisoning of Freethinkers, the banning of their publications and the breaking up of their meetings.

Throughout most of the 19th century it did not occur to men and women who were taking part in the struggle for a free press, a wider franchise, the right to organise trade unions, better wages and conditions for workers, a national system of education, a more humane penal system, Poor Law reform and other progressive measures—it did not occur to them to depreciate the militant freethought movement; rather they felt they could regard it as an active and trustworthy ally. On the other hand they were under no illusions so far as the Churches were concerned. With the rarest exceptions they saw that the clergy and influential Church members were solidly ranged on the side of reaction, established privilege and obscurantism. The fact is that the social reforms of the 19th and 20th centuries would have been quite impossible if the Churches had been able to resist the freethought attacks on what were some of their vital articles of faith—the unimportance of this life compared with another to come, the duties of obedience and contentment, the superiority of simple ignorance over worldly knowledge, the worthlessness of individual judgment as against traditional authority.

Thanks to the destructive quality of militant freethought, the Christianity that had served power, privilege and wealth so loyally by keeping the masses docile had largely ceased to exist by the dawn of the 20th century. So the Churches had to make a change of front or go out of the picture. The way to survive was discovered by a few of the clergy who took up Socialism. At first they were attacked by their colleagues and called to order by their superiors, but when it was noted that they drew larger congregations, at a time when a dwindling church attendance was becoming the rule, they found many imitators. To-day, "Social Security" might be said to be the Fortieth Article of the Church of England, despite the absence of any reference to it in the New Testament; and the parson of the old "Thank-God-for-your-hovel-and-doff-your-hat-to-the-Squire" school is an exception and a liability.

The effect of this on large progressive movements has been deplorable. In return for clerical patronage and Church votes,

they avoid all entanglement with measures that run counter to religious beliefs. They make compromises over education, Sunday recreational facilities, divorce reform, sex instruction, compulsory church parades for the Forces, national days of prayer and the mediæval flummery of coronation and other state ceremonies in which the clergy are prominent. And they, too, have taken up the cry that militant freethought is merely destructive. Thereby they have secured the support of large numbers of people with little conception of the meaning of a free and progressive society, and have thrown away the privilege of advancing causes for which the pioneers of their movements fought with courage and tenacity.

The accusation also comes with monotonous unanimity from enthusiasts attached to the smaller political parties claiming to point out the one and only road to social salvation. Whosoever does not spend the whole of his energies in the service of their political creeds is a confessed saboteur of progress and, if his case happens to be a sound one, like that of militant freethought, more to be obstructed than the worst of reactionaries. Against this extremely religious attitude the Freethinker is as powerless to argue as when he encounters the Salvationist full of Jesus, the man who can prove that all human history is foretold in the Great Pyramid and the lady who finds consolation and guidance in daily exercises with a planchette. The prerequisite of all progress is that the people's minds shall be open to new ideas, free from ignorance and prejudice, fearless of real or imaginary opposition to what their judgment approves and critical of every creed and institution, no matter how hallowed by time and entrenched in popular favour.

The final, and perhaps queerest type of critic of militant freethought on the score of its destructiveness is the individual who belongs to no religious sect and will tell you that he has thrown off every trace of supernatural belief and superstition. You will find a high proportion of such people amongst the readers of the "New Statesman," the "Literary Guide," "Penguin Specials" and the publications of the Ethical Movement. I hope I am not underestimating the excellent fare that these publications provide when I affirm that they do not approach any subject—religious, moral or political—with that independence, fire and determination to burk no fact or argument out of consideration for the prejudices of others which characterise "The Freethinker" and make it so unpopular with the orthodox and so admired by those whose freethought fills them with missionary ardour. I always feel like asking people who disclaim any supernatural belief themselves, yet plead that we shall not be "destructive," how they reached their own position of freedom from the thrall of orthodoxy. Was it not because someone did them the inestimable favour of destroying the arguments with which others sought to mislead them in their earlier years? Do they feel that they have lost anything worth keeping because this destructive process gave them a truer vision of the world they live in?

Far be it from me to lay this concern about destructiveness to deliberate treachery or even conscious timidity. Almost invariably it is, I believe, due to an underestimate of the evils accompanying the survival of religion in any form. The disappearance of the Inquisition, the rack, witchcraft, the persecution of medical research, fines for non-attendance at church and the Victorian Sunday did not end the warfare between religion and progress. There are still Blasphemy Laws on the Statute Book, still interference by the Churches with rational demands for a full and happy life, still clerical control of secular institutions, still an Established and privileged Church, still stupid, out-of-date superstitions being taught to the children, still overdue reforms being held up by religious intolerance. And the removal of these evils will be delayed by just so long as any considerable body of the public continues to play the parsons' game by disparaging militant freethought as "merely destructive."

P. VICTOR MORRIS.