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THE

FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Great Lying Creed

IN one of his deadly thrusts Heine prophesied that one day the Christian era would be described as the sickness period of humanity. Pre-Christian civilisation had its dark shadows, but it also had its brilliant foreground, and offered a promise—suggested rather than stated—of the creative power of the human mind. But with the Christian churches there is not and never has been any such compensating consideration. The possible greatness of man was never conceded. On the contrary it was flatly denied, and the very opposite was affirmed. Man as man, was a lost soul, too weak to save himself from the doom that hung over the head of every living human creature. And note that this "lostness" and helplessness of man was not a consequence of the ill-doing of each individual, it was part of the heritage of mankind. The first man and woman (a matter beyond the bounds of possibility) "sinned," and God was so angry that, to use a colloquialism, He lost his head, and declared vengeance on the whole human race for uncountable generations. As the Westminster Confession of faith set forth in the seventeenth century, says, "Our first parents sinned and they being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed . . . to all their posterity." If historical Christianity be accepted there was and is no way of mankind saving itself by any amount of wisdom or good conduct. Salvation is not to be earned, it is given, and the way to salvation is to accept the legend of a messenger from God to a Jewish maiden to inform her that a child was to be born through the activities of the "Holy Ghost."

It is a foolish story, factually, but it has dominated Christianity. It could not follow the Greeks and hold that mankind must be its own saviour. In the Christian creed neither goodness nor wisdom can bring salvation. Salvation is a gift consequent upon believing in the magical birth of a Jew who was said to have lived two thousand years ago. That doleful story still holds good where official Christianity exists. To deny it is the rankest of all heresies. It is droned out morning after morning by that exhibition of developing imbecility, the B.B.C. 7.55 preacher. No wonder Heine called the Christian era the sickness period of humanity. And if anyone marvels at so ridiculous a story being accepted generation after generation, he should reflect upon contemporary Germany where the mythology of Nazism has become firmly imbedded in the minds of millions of young men and women in the course of a single generation.

No enterprising publisher who set about publishing an encyclopædia of lying and trickery could afford to leave out the Churches. Perhaps that is the reason no such exhaustive volume has ever been attempted.

When Hitler and the Nazi leaders set out to create a new Germany, consciously or unconsciously they followed the plan of the Christian Church. As the early Church took for its authority the Christian God, so Hitler took the "good old German God" for his patron. As the Church destroyed the cultural development of the ancient world, so Hitler burned books and denounced culture that did not fall into line with the new gospel of a newly chosen people. As the Church tortured heretics, so the new Germany tortured those who would not embrace Nazism. Step by step the parallel runs. If Christianity—or Nazism—were placed in a position of security unlicensed new ideas must be suppressed in sheer self-defence. You cannot successfully create a new world by order without forcibly suppressing the old one. One cannot—to follow an old saw—make omelettes without cracking eggs, and you cannot enthrone a lie without taking care that truth does not make an appearance at the coronation ceremony.

From the earliest times the Christian Church recognised the potency of what we have just said. To please the pious and interest the credulous, "saints" were made by the hundred and miracles performed by the thousand. My Dictionary of Miracles covers over five hundred pages, but it does not claim, nor is it, an exhaustive catalogue. And let us note there is no question with large numbers of these miraculous events being merely mistakes, nor the interpretation of events by ignorant people. A large proportion were manufactured for the purpose of deception. They were conscious impostures, but the imposters were licensed, and that made a great difference. While I write my morning paper gives me an account of a woman who is charged with being a fraud because she deceived a number of people at a spiritualistic gathering. But, granting the justice of the charge, was she more of a fraud than the Church which provides a magical string of knots guaranteeing benefits in the next world on payment of a stated sum of money? (I have one of these before me while writing). Or such obvious frauds as the recent miracle of Fatima, which we have already exposed, but which has received the papal blessing?

When the Church provided the faithful with bottles of the Virgin Mary's milk, bits of wood from the true cross, the impress of the face of Christ on a handkerchief, when it manufactured saints by the gross, how can we separate this kind of fraud from that which comes before the courts? Whatever legal distinctions exist, these things cannot come under the heading of honest dealing.

Of course, Christians of the better type have expressed their dislike of the historic methods of the Church. But this is late in the day, and the dislike to the frauds and the preying upon the ignorance of the people, cannot be lost sight of if one wishes to understand the historical significance of the Christian religion in history. It was upon the ignorance of the people that the Church built its

supremacy. The Churches continued in their grosser form of teaching so long as it was possible, and so far as it was practicable they continue in proportion as the habits and tastes of the people tolerate them. If anyone wishes to test the matter he should take the Roman Catholic literature as publicly displayed in the press and otherwise, in, say Southern Ireland, and in England. Finally, and to put the matter bluntly, while the liberal Christians deprecate the use of miracles and other gross superstitions by the Church, they ignore the fact that their own cause is based on the historic Christianity of which they appear to be ashamed. In this matter they resemble a wealthy land-owner who is willing to admit that the land came to him by almost sheer robbery, but still insists on his right to draw his income regularly.

The Christian Church has always preached the value of faith, and truth to tell, it has needed all the unquestioning faith it could get. It taught man to be always upon his knees pleading his weakness, when he should have stood erect exerting and glorying in his strength. It has exalted the power of mere belief when the road to a happy future lay in understanding. If the Churches have praised "truth" it has been Christian truth; of truth, as such, it has never shown the slightest desire. Could any Christian Church that has ever existed, or that still exists, say with the Buddha:—

"Do not believe in traditions simply because they have been handed down from many generations, nor in anything which is rumoured and spoken of by many, or because the written statement of some old sage is produced. Do not believe that it is truth simply because you have been attached to it by habit, on the authority merely of your teachers and elders. But after observation and analysis and when the thing agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of all, then accept it."

Can anyone imagine a Christian teacher saying that at any time in the history of Christianity, and meaning what he says? Could one imagine any page in the New Testament in which the Buddha's teaching would fit? In the New Testament Jesus promises to take a convicted criminal with him to heaven merely on account of his belief. There is no hint that the thief felt sorrow for his offences; he believed, that was enough. The other criminal, who did not profess belief, went straight to hell. Had the teaching of Buddha dominated the western area, the position of the world to-day would hardly be what it is. What united Christendom can give us is a world war.

The modern world often takes pride in its greater love of truth, of its toleration, and its increased freedom from systematic falsehood. The experience of the past twenty years would certainly lead to some questioning of the validity of the claim, but whatever be the degree of this improvement, there is the glaring fact that it is contemporary with the steady decline of the belief in Christianity. But it is to be feared that the mass of the people have still but a scant reverence for truth, as such. What they are mostly concerned with is ease, and it is only when, as at present, serious issues are forced upon them that there is manifested a desire for security in a world that has suddenly demonstrated its insecurity.

But so far as this desire for truth is real and widespread the credit must be given to science, not to religion. Religion

to-day repeats its historic teaching, "Blessed is he that hath not seen and yet hath believed," and is met by science with a "Cursed be he that hath believed without seeing and assents without understanding." In all its phases of approach to a reasonable view of life, or from what we called advanced Christianity, the real impetus has come from outside orthodox circles. It is not a truer form of Christianity we have had, but a confession that Christianity is not impervious to the advance of scientific thought. Whether Galileo did or did not say "It still moves" that truth is embedded in heresy and unbelief—Gods do not live for ever.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ROME GETS THE WIND UP!

"GETTING the wind up" is perhaps a rather vulgar term to use in "The Freethinker," where we are used to a better standard of lingual expression than is found in many other journals, but the phrase is so expressive of a certain state of alarm which appears to exist in the Roman Catholic hierarchy that I am tempted to use it, and I know I shall be forgiven.

I have been exploring the Lenten Pastorals of the Roman Catholic Bishops, recently published for the edification of customers of the Old Original Church, and there can be little doubt that some of these dignitaries really have got the "wind up" about what is happening in the ranks. Changes are taking place in this great unchanging Church which are causing alarm and despondency, and which bear out what I have many times argued—that the decay of religious belief is affecting all the Christian Churches, including the Roman.

Perhaps Thomas, Archbishop of Birmingham, voices most clearly the anxiety of the Hierarchy in his Pastoral. He is truly a Doubting Thomas where Catholic progress is concerned, for he is led to deplore that the Catholic Evidence Guild in his diocese "can hardly be said to flourish." It has, he says, only a few active supporters who keep it alive in two or three centres. Similar remarks apply to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, which exists to assist in the work of religious instruction of children and adults, Catholic and non-Catholic. The Archbishop says, ". . . it makes little appeal to our people, and with very few exceptions it is not flourishing. . . ."

Thomas of Birmingham also sees "symptoms of weakness" in the "steadily decreasing number of conversions." In 1935, he says, the number of conversions was 1,107, but since then it has fallen gradually to 763 for the year 1943. On the basis of evidence offered by Forces' chaplains he says there are many thousands of men and women in the Services who, although they call themselves Catholics, do not know a priest, nor anything about their faith. Just what has been said in "The Freethinker" many times, but coming from an Archbishop it may now be considered authentic. Again—

Catholics who have been well educated, who have specialised in science or arts at the universities, are often deplorably ignorant of Catholic theology.

Agreed. But it is just as well they are ignorant of Catholic theology. If they understood it many of them would not remain even as nominal Catholics. Archbishop Thomas also deplores that children often can give question and answer on the Catechism, but fail to answer if the wording of the question is altered. He wants to change this "parrot-like" method, apparently by making Catechism study a more intelligent matter. My advice would be to leave well alone; to take the parrot out of the Catechism, and introduce intelligence, might have devastating results to the Church, speeding up the disintegration process which he is seeking to rectify.

Bernard, newly-appointed Archbishop of Westminster, Grand-Panjandrum of All England, is more cautious. Alert to the danger of giving too much detail, he deals in generalities, subtly attacking birth control, one of the Church's worst enemies, by talking about "abuse of the sexual instinct" both within and outside the married state, which "strikes at the very root of family life." I suspect, however, that what is really struck at is the uncontrolled production of future customers for the churches, and this is what troubles his eminence.

Bernard also objects to the tendency for modern youth to "despise" their parents. I had not noticed a tendency to despise parents, but I have noticed a tendency to criticise. Perhaps this is what Bernard means, and what he fears is that the critical spirit also applies to parental religious ideas, as well as other things. Such criticism he cannot approve, as it leads away from the path of the One True Church. "The virtue of obedience," he says, "is of the very essence of home life, and is necessary for the right ordering of the family." To say nothing of its value to the priest, and for the right ordering of the church.

Thomas Edward, Bishop of Lancaster, appreciates the need for rigorous training of the children if the Church is to survive. "See that your children go to Mass and the sacraments; say your prayers with them; watch over the company they keep. . ." In other words, drum Catholicism into them, and avoid Protestant or other heretical companionships if at all possible.

Henry John, Bishop of Leeds, takes a broad view of things but, no doubt, a correct one. Referring to the spate of planning for the post-war period, he says that all other plans will be useless unless Catholics play their part in the great "Catholic plan for the conversion of England," that inspiring dream of popes and prelates, that remote and misty prospect which becomes more remote and misty as time goes on. But the bishop is right; all other plans will be useless, to the Church, for, unless England be converted, Romanism is doomed within her sea-swept boundaries. If the parasite fails to conquer the host it is inevitable, eventually, that the host shall conquer the parasite.

Daniel, Bishop of Menevia, sees danger in using the Lord's Day for others things than the Catholic religion. Despite the pretence at toleration of "harmless pursuits," such pursuits as "clubs . . . Sunday newspapers, or listening unduly to secular programmes over the wireless . . . cinemas on Sunday," and so on, are deprecated. Even the tough fabric of Catholicism cannot stand up to too much of that sort of thing, and in the bishop's remarks is implied a recognition that the Church is fast losing ground to such counter attractions.

Ambrose, Bishop of Shrewsbury, is uneasy about the schools position. He says that for the first time in modern history the rights of parents to decide to what school their children shall go have been taken away, and he likens this to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Surely he must forget that in Fascist Italy it was the Roman Church, in collaboration with Mussolini, that robbed Italian parents of such rights a few years ago. We do not remember Ambrose squealing then.

Nor the Bishop of Salford, Henry Vincent, who squeals with him about the "attack on one of the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic Church."

But just a moment, there is something fishy here. Ambrose says it is "parents' rights" that are being attacked, but the Bishop of Salford says it is one of the "fundamental doctrines" of the Roman Church.

I have said before that the Bishop of Salford has a habit of opening his mouth and putting his foot in it!

F. J. CORINA

STINK-BOMB IN ORANGE

IN Southern Ireland an occurrence of extreme improbability is likened to a snowball in hell; in the North the expression is common that one must not expect holy water in an Orange Lodge. But we can no longer use that figurative language, for in the seaside town of Portrush, the Catholic Mass has been celebrated in the local Orange hall. This fact was disclosed in the Ulster house of Commons recently, and might have passed without comment had not Mr. Lowry, the Minister of Home Affairs, interjected: "Preparations are being made to have it (the hall) fumigated."

This gem of Christian toleration raised a storm of protest. Mr. Campbell (Nationalist) and Mr. Beattie (Labour) were extremely indignant. Mr. Lowry tried to extricate himself by equivocation, but came out of the subsequent controversy very badly, and days later apologised to a Catholic bishop. But the Labour member's indignation must not be taken as evidence of a broad-minded Protestant. The materialistic conception of contemporary politics shows clearly that Mr. Beattie thinks night and day of the Catholic vote which sent him to the British House of Commons. His Dantesque display is good window-dressing. Good old Jack, won't the Mickies cheer you when next you speak in St. Mary's hall!

But back to the Mass and the alleged insult. Ordinarily the function of fumigation is to destroy offensiveness, but the mere mention of the word has "made a stink" that will cling the Minister for the rest of his political career. Mr. Lowry says that he has been respecting other people's opinions for fifty years. Solemn thought, but the learned K.C. has as little logic as he has tact. For the wise man, while believing in the rights of others, is not constrained by a "respect" attitude that is invariably a concession to folly.

Ideas must be discussed impersonally. Let us think again what caused Mr. Lowry's *faux pas*. Mass was celebrated in a Protestant hall for Catholic soldiers who were billeted there. As a boy I frequently officiated at the "miracle" of changing an attenuated biscuit into the body of Christ, but for fifty years I have had no respect for the doctrine of transubstantiation. Now, had cannibals been enjoying their favourite dish, there would have been no protest had there been a suggestion of disinfecting, deodorising and fumigating after their fearsome feast. Yet Mr. Lowry, the Minister of Home Affairs, in a Protestant parliament for Protestant people has the effrontery to tell King Billy's disciples of his respect for Catholicism! And he eats humble pie before a bishop whose followers boast that they are corpse eaters!

Mr. Campbell, in the heated exchanges, accused Mr. Lowry of tergiversation. The *mot juste* as Jack said after he had looked up the dictionary. A tergiversator is one who turns his back upon his opinions and certainly Mr. Lowry has done that. My sympathies are all with the members of the Orange Lodge. After all, I am compelled to respect the cannibal's plea that he only eats fresh meat. On hygienic grounds the Catholic who swallows a portion of a two thousand year old corpse is a menace to himself and the public health. His best friends ought to tell him. A butcher's shop displaying food a month old would be condemned and the premises cleansed.

And so, it would appear to a sensible person, that premises where a stale God had been exhibited for human consumption, and had actually been sampled need purification.

But fumigation is no use in this case. That only makes stink on stink's nose accumulate, as Macbeth would have said. What is needed is to open the windows. Not of the Orange Lodge, but of the mind of the priest's dupes and let in a current of pure reason.

J. EFFEL

ACID DROPS

WE are not raising a political issue when we say that one of the most disturbing incidents that has occurred in the House of Commons took place in the debate on the Pensions Increase Bill on March 3. Opinion was going against the Government. In a hurry Mr. Churchill was summoned. He came, sat down, said nothing, merely looked round, and the revolt was whittled down to comparatively harmless dimensions, and the Government was saved.

We are not criticising the Bill, this is not the place to do so. But one would expect that the Prime Minister would have at least addressed the House. It was not necessary. The members were treated as a pack of noisy schoolboys who were brought to order when the "Head" came on the scene. No one has written a more scathing criticism of the British Parliament than this event registered. It looks as though in the interests of independence our Parliament needs reforming. It looks as though the majority of the House love liberty—with a chain.

Of course the threatened hostility to the new Education Bill—that rather clever cover of a final attempt to place the clergy in the saddle—is largely bluff. The Catholics are merely aiming at getting as much as they can for nothing, and when they can get no more will submit with the serenity of a cartoon depicting the martyrdom of a saint, who seems mainly concerned—judging from his gaze—with the state of the weather. The Nonconformists had an opportunity of showing that they had something like principle left, and the Socialists of showing that they were not looking for jobs, or were not afraid on matters of principle to risk the vote of a certain number of Christian electors. The Bill will, we expect, become law, unless there is another general election. In that case, we might see the whole educational system overhauled—it needs it.

The real strength of the government proposals rests upon a fact that has not been noticed. This is that the background of education for the people in England, until less than two generations since, was so bad that what has been done since 1870 stands out well. But the class quality of our upper schools still remains substantially untouched. We have a state-controlled education for one class, and a practically closed system for the "upper" class from which we draw most of our governors, not because of their superior quality, but simply because they are educated for the purpose of governing. Hence the prevalence of the Duff-Cooper and Samuel Hoare type. We are not certain who it was who said that the British Army of the day—over a century ago—was made up of lions led by asses, but that does go a long way towards an explanation of the existing state of affairs. Mr. Churchill's reason for advocating the election of the Lord Hartington was that the family had controlled one electoral area for about two hundred years is a case in point. We have not yet learned the lesson of the Russian revolution, that the "upper" class has no monopoly of either character or genius.

The new Education Bill provides that if no one on the school staff is capable of giving a religious teaching such as the parents desire, someone may be called in from the outside who will impart the desired instruction. But suppose Atheists wish their children to be instructed in the scientific account of the origin of religion, would they be permitted to send an Atheistic teacher, if no one in the school was capable of acting? If someone had the courage to press that in the House of Commons it might do a great deal of good. But has anyone courage to raise the point? We doubt it.

According to the "Glasgow Bulletin," there are many suggestions that when the new education Bill becomes law the present Minister of Education should have a new title. Why not take a hint from Dickens and take "The Artful Dodger" as fitting the occasion?

The Birmingham Diocesan Council of Religious Education is shocked at the "appalling ignorance" of the people concerning religion. To meet the situation it has appointed a number of priests to play the game of enlightenment. The one thing certain is that after the priests have had their way pupils will be as ignorant as ever of religion, and will be more difficult than ever to teach.

There is no pleasing some people. The B.B.C. have got out a most comprehensive programme for forcing religion on to the British public through subtle propaganda, and here we have the "Church Times" drastically criticising it. So far as we have heard some of the carefully chosen speakers, we must admit the "C.T." is right. Instead of boldly proclaiming the unerring truth of the Bible—properly understood, of course—universal sin, repentance and regeneration in Christ Jesus our Lord, Mass, Sacraments, Incense, Holy Communion, and all the rest of the special beliefs of the Anglo-Catholics, these speakers mostly talk in vague generalisations which, whatever they mean, do not mean Christianity as the "Church Times" sees it. It protests at giving the British public a "man-made uplift instead of a God-made Gospel." There is a "lack of proper co-ordination of the speakers' views" which means that they appear to contradict one another—which anyway, is quite true. The subject of most of their arguments was based on "unrepentant subjectivism" with "persons matter most" and where "God does not seem to matter at all." It is all very sad, but what does the "Church Times" really expect?

How the Church works in Eire where it has a free hand, can be seen in the way the Censor plays havoc with the writings of world-famous authors. There is, of course, the well-known Index which the Holy See always keeps up-to-date, but Roman Catholic Ireland, in addition, has its own little list. During the past ten years it has banned 1,500 books, and the black-listed authors include Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway, Marcel Proust, D. H. Lawrence, and even Irishmen like James Joyce and Liam O'Flaherty. Grown up people in Ireland put up with this—they are only allowed to read what the Church allows them to read. Still, we wonder in what way the Nazi gang in Germany are different? The whole of their propaganda is directed to the same kind of literary censorship, and we know what that has led to in the Reich.

Quite a minor disturbance occurred in the House of Lords when the Bishop of Chichester protested against obliteration raids on Germany. And outside that "sacred assembly" there has been a deal of discussion. In our judgement the whole performance merely set forth in a clear light the humbuggery of the whole situation. Is there really any substantial difference between bombing a people to death or cutting short the food supply of a people with whom we are at war? If it exists we fail to recognise it. After all, threatening a people with severe starvation has been a feature of war in all times. It is one of the features of war that it exhibits at the same time chivalry and brutality, the desire to protect life and a readiness to destroy it. It glories in taking an enemy by surprise and, if possible, annihilating him before he is able to defend himself. Trying to make war humane is an absurd task, and does but illustrate that but for the glamour of war in times of peace we should all shrink from bringing it about.

In this situation the Bishop was, unconsciously, exhibiting the humbuggery of Christianity. He believes in God, that is his occupation. He has taken part in asking God to bring this war to an end, and therefore believes that He could if He would. And when the war does come to an end—and however much delayed the nature of that end it is now obvious—he will join in a thanksgiving to God for having brought about the peace. If the assumption be a sound one, why did God ever permit the war to occur? Is it possible that the denizens of the Christian heaven find their life unbearable without an earthly circus to lighten the dullness of their existence? If we were foolish enough to believe in gods, we hope we should also have the courage to insist on them acting at least as decent human beings would act.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Funnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No. : Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. F. SMEE.—You did quite right when you refused to reply to a number of questions put to you by the headmaster, when giving notice that you wished to withdraw your boy from religious instruction. If all "unbelievers" had acted in the same way the attempt to hand over the schools to the control of the churches might not have been made. The Master was quite out of order. We feel sure that the withdrawal will react in the direction of developing your boy's character for the better.

H. HAWKES.—Thanks, it will be useful. We are greatly indebted to those of our readers who send us items of local happenings and also pertinent excerpts from books or newspapers. They are often useful even when not published as sent.

B. S.—We believe it is the same Captain Ramsay. Probably it was a written question that was sent. A member is not compelled to be present when his question is answered. We believe the percentage of British Jews serving in the forces is rather higher than that of non-Jews. The Minister's reply was quite in order.

E. P. GUTTERIDGE.—Sorry, but the pamphlets for which you enquire have been out of print for many years.

B. S. W.—Will appear soon. Thanks for compliment.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS.

LAST Sunday the Leicester Secular Society celebrated the 63rd anniversary of the Secular Hall. The proceedings were opened with a tea, followed by speeches, music, and songs. The whole of the musical programme was so excellent that it would be invidious to select anyone for special notice, but we may note that the fine quality of the pianoforte duets by Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Roberts deserved all the applause they brought. The merry-making part of the proceedings concluded with dancing which was kept up until a late hour of the evening.

Mr. E. H. Hassell, President of the Leicester Secular Society, was in the chair and gave an interesting account of the outlook for our movement in Leicester. Unfortunately, Mr. Chapman Cohen was unable to be present. A sudden attack followed by domestic and medical "Persuasion" compelled him to remain at home. At short notice his place was taken by Mr. Rosetti, both the Leicester Society and Mr. Cohen appreciated the readiness with which Mr. Rosetti stepped into the breach—it was well filled. In order to prevent much letter writing it need only be said that the President of the N.S.S. hopes to be himself again by the time this is in the hands of readers.

A section of our Eighth Army recently entered the little town of Ortona. One important thing there—to Christians—is that there is in one of the churches the bones of St. Thomas, the doubting apostle. It seems that the bones of St. Thomas were not discovered until about the fourteenth century by St. Bridget. The highest evidence to the bones being those of St. Thomas came in a vision of Jesus to St. Bridget. We cannot overthrow such evidence. Jesus ought to know where the bones of St. Thomas were. If anyone doubts this particular miracle we commend to them the bulky volume of Dr. Cobham Brewer, "Dictionary of Miracles," published in 1884, and covering nearly six hundred pages. In that book we can see holy buildings flying through the air, martyred saints carrying messages to their mothers, and other things of like character. We accept them as being "as true as gospel."

We have always insisted that essentially German Nazism is not merely a religious movement, but in its whole policy it follows the main plan of the Roman Catholic Church. From the Roman Catholic "Universe" we learn that by the order of Hitler a new "Back to Religion" movement is being fostered. It has been noticed by many that the papacy has never dared to use its most powerful religious instrument—Excommunication—against either Germany or Germany's leaders. The reaction would have been too dangerous.

We are glad to find another teacher's association having the courage to point to the dangers in the new Education Bill. Here is a full statement:—

"The effect of the Bill, as introduced, it is stated, will be to perpetuate the existing number of denominational schools and, to that extent, to prevent the extension of non-denominational schools under full public control. Of the 10,553 schools of all denominations, 8,979 belong to the Church of England, and more than 4,000 of these are situated in single school areas.

Objection is taken to the Bill because no attempt is made to reduce the number of single school areas in which only an Anglican school is available. The provision that 'aided' schools should receive assistance to the extent of half the cost of reconstructing old school buildings, while leaving the denominational management unchanged, reverses the policy adopted by Parliament in 1936.

It provides for the retention of ecclesiastical tests in the case of reconstructed old denominational school premises which became controlled schools in consequence of the State paying the whole cost of reconstructing, and bearing the whole cost of maintenance out of public funds. It hands over to denominational managers the property in school premises, the value of which is enhanced by large public subsidies.

It provides for the erection of entirely new denominational school buildings upon new sites and debars the public from expressing their wishes. It transfers to the local education authorities the liabilities of denominational managers.

It makes a breach in the Cowper-Temple clause by permitting right of entry for denominational teaching in county secondary schools.

Apart from these points the Association gives 'cordial approval' to the many reforms embodied in the Bill."

All we have to add is that the Bill was mainly drawn as a mask for the real purpose of reinstating the clergy in the schools, and that it leaves the public schools with their regular output of "jobbists," whether they are fit for the Government job or not, and that it strengthens the humbug of calling this country "Democratic."

On Sunday, March 19, Mr. Rosetti will lecture in the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow, on "Spiritualism and Common-sense." Admission is free, but there are donation tickets which may be had from the local secretary at 149, Stanmore Road, Mount Florida, Glasgow, also from 75, George Street, Glasgow, and from Collets, Dundas Street, Glasgow. The meeting commences at 6.30 p.m.

LET US PLAY

OPINIONS may vary regarding the statement that "work never killed anyone." People who emulate the Brains Trust technique will ask that it all depends on what you mean by work or that the term is incomplete, loosely worded, or does not mean anything. Very well, but Mr. Everyman will understand. Evidence will be forthcoming to show that it is play that does the killing. A few years ago someone conceived the idea of coupling work and play together. The implication of this work-play suggestion was to be seen in offices and workshops by a card which bore the inscription, "Had you thought it, there is no fun like work." The cynic, upon reading this artless effort, remarked, "What a game!" With this cue the game is opened.

Not long ago a disabled soldier, aged 53 years, was asked by the President of the Court for Pension Awards: "Aren't you rather old for this game?" Is war a game? Evidently, when it is remembered that a great battle was won on the playing fields of Eton. And play was in evidence during the Battle of the Somme in the Great War, when troops advanced across No Man's Land, in the face of heavy fire, playing with a football. Drake was so enamoured with his game of bowls that he said, in effect, that the enemy could wait in the offing until he had finished. At the siege of La Rochelle; during the sinking of the Titanic; in the condemned cell; and on the battlefield in dire peril, man is seen at play. Is life a game? It is significant that people with pretensions to sportsmanship like nothing better than to hear the words, "He played the game." And yet, the game which affects us most of all, and known as Politics, is described as a "dirty game." By whom? Not by the players. There are spectators who are "allergic" to certain shirt-colourings.

Often a thief will say, when caught in the act, "The game is up." Hesitance may be prodded into action by the exhortation, "Come; aren't you game?" The game's the thing, you say. A sentiment echoed by the children. It is no libel on the children to say that school would be empty in a moment should the headmaster say, "Boys and girls go out to play." Play and games. "The play's the thing," said Shakespeare as he likened the world to a stage.

Games which cause the most excitement are the games of chance. One such is known as the main chance. It is matrimony. The rules vary with the players and accounts for much erratic play. A magistrate was heard to say, "Marriage appears to be a pastime with some people." Love games, presumably.

At this point it may be asked: Is religion a game? Undoubtedly; but it is a game not worth the candle. It is a solo game and must not be confused with solo whist which requires four players. Some people prefer to play a lone hand or game. This occasions suspicion in the minds of onlookers, who ask: "What's your little game?" A man may play the fool to the extent of meriting the derogatory remark, "Clever, aren't you?" which is another form of play—upon words!

Virgil did not overlook the importance of games in the sphere of human activity. In his epic, *The Æneid*, there is a thrilling chapter which described the prowess of the Trojans in feats of endurance, strength and skill. The Romans, too, provided a bored populace with circuses (games) and refreshments. Panem et Circenses. A sure shield against harbingers of revolt.

The foregoing rough-cut facets are but one aspect of man's proclivities and serve the purpose of introducing a perfect little gem of a book.

If life is really a game and the world is a stage on which men and women are merely players, we ought not to be so miserable about it. 'Tis true that everyone plays a part in life, although others would say how the part should be played and force them to play it.

There is a desire or want innate in all of us which expresses itself in play of some kind. However, this is but one facet of the

human diamond, rough-cut or highly "polished." Those who wish to understand the precept "Know thyself" are referred to an admirable book on the subject. Written in clear and concise language and combining a whimsical humour with a searching analysis into human behaviour and frailties, the book constitutes a light study of psychological problems for those people who are in the dark. "Psychology for Everyman," by A. E. Mander (Watts and Company) will tell you about little birds in their nests who do not agree, and why they fall out! "Know thyself," baby and grandpa, too!

S. GORDON HOGG.

THE YOUNG TORIES

THE Conservative Party has always possessed a left-wing which (on paper, if not in actuality) presented to the electorate of this country an impression of desiring all kinds of apparently necessary reforms. Disraeli was the most noteworthy of these Tory Reformers in the past, and his successors at the present day include such "democratic" representatives as Viscount Hinchinbrooke, Lady Astor, Sir Ralph Glyn, Bart., Sir Edward Grigg, Sir Derrick Gunston, Sir Joselyn Lucas and Lord Winterton. These folk, calling themselves the Tory Reform Committee, have recently issued a manifesto, under the title "Forward—By the Right!" (Hutchinson; 3d.). This, I feel, should be studied by all who wish to understand post-war prospects. Of course, there is a progressive-appearing facade on this, though it is quite certain that the hard core of the Conservative Party, Imperialist, Church folk, will never allow reform of any sort to be put into operation.

It behoves all freedom-lovers to watch these manoeuvres very carefully. On every issue that comes before Parliament, having a bearing on the post-war world, there is a distinct Tory view, which is quite invariably in favour of reaction, orthodox religion, and the preservation of privilege. On such different issues as the Beveridge Report, the Catering Bill, Education and Workmen's Compensation, there has been presented a solid front of Tory reaction, which is impossible for the present House of Commons to oppose.

There are various typical fallacies in the Tory Reform Committee's pamphlet, which I think deserve to be shown up, even in a paper which has no party political affiliations. First of all: "The Conservative Party never has fallen, and never must fall into the error of the Labour Party in claiming to represent one section or class of the community alone." The list of names which I have given above should be sufficient indication of the complete falseness of this claim, which is quite typical of the insolent nonsense talked in the pamphlet.

But more serious are the statements of what it is anticipated will happen after the war. Read this:—

"We regard compulsory military service as an essential part of our democratic system. National unity in our view demands as one of its obligations that every man should undergo military training in order that he can defend the country in which he lives."

In other words, we shall have allowed ourselves to be regimented and ordered about in a war which is ostensibly against Fascism, only to find ourselves landed in a regimented, Fascist State (falsely called "democratic") when the foreign Fascists have been defeated. Too much attention cannot be given to this statement. I hope that it will be blazoned from the housetops, in order that every lover of freedom can see the insidious way in which the Tories hope to maintain the hold which they have now obtained over the people. The only justification for the military and industrial conscription which the people have cheerfully accepted these four years past is to harness all the energies of the nation to the task of beating Nazism and

Fascism. What earthly justification can there be for tying ourselves and our children to a military machine when the war is over? None, save to attempt to retain the status quo for those who will suffer if privilege is abolished. For, of course, if universal military service is made compulsory after the war, the officer class will continue to occupy the positions of power.

The reference to education is also worth noting. Here it is:—

“The best education possible must be provided for every child capable of benefiting from it. . . . At the same time, we insist that the parent should be free to choose any form of education which he can secure for his child, and for which he is prepared to pay the cost.”

Reasonable, you say? But have you tried to analyse the quotation? Do you not see that it means the retention of the ascendancy of the “old school tie”? “For which he is prepared to pay the cost”? How many working-class parents can pay the fees for Eton or Harrow, Rugby or Marlborough?

I wish that I had space to go through this pernicious pamphlet sentence by sentence, and to consider all its sinister suggestions. But I think that what I have said should be enough to convince all freedom-lovers that this is not the way to the “brave new world” for which all are longing. This is “progressive” Toryism with a vengeance. It is to be hoped that when the people are allowed to express their views at the ballot-box they will throw out these would-be little Hitlers with no doubtful majority. If these folk have their way, the war will be one to no effect, for the post-war Britain which they envisage will be in no way to be preferred to the Germany of Hitler or the Italy of Mussolini.

S. H.

TALL ORDER

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I. C. SAUL.

“THE BIBLE HANDBOOK.” For Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians. By G. W. FOOTE with W. P. BALL. Ninth edition. The passages cited with references are under headings: Bible Contradictions. Bible Atrocities. Bible Immoralities, Indecencies and Obscenities. Bible Absurdities. Unfulfilled Prophecies and Broken Promises. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

CORRESPONDENCE

UNDERSTANDING.

SIR,—In the arresting article, “Me and God,” the importance of “understanding” as distinct from “we’re knowing” is finely stressed. Schopenhauer, known as the father of modern psychology, also recommended restraint in regard to reading the works of others, and suggested the cultivation of independent thought. In this connection, it is interesting to recall the statement attributed to Hobbes, “If he had read as much as other men, he should have been as ignorant as they.” Schopenhauer said, “A man may have a great mass of knowledge, but if he has not worked it up by thinking it over for himself, it has much less value than a far smaller amount which he has thoroughly pondered.” Also, “It is incredible what a different effect is produced upon the mind by thinking for oneself as compared with reading.” Goethe was travelling along the same road when he said, “Everything that is worth thinking has already been thought before. We must only try to think again.”—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

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., C. E. M. JOAN, M.A., D.Lit.: “What is Civilisation?”

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic’s Institute).—Sunday, 6-30. Miss M. DUCKITT, B.A. (Headmistress, Salt Girl’s High School). A Lecture.

Keighley Branch N.S.S. (43 Holker Street): Sunday, 3 p.m., Members’ Meeting.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday 6-30 p.m. Mr. JOSEPH McCABE. A Lecture.

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—Desmond MacCarthy in *The Sunday Times*.

“Freethinkers, who are on the look-out for a hard-hitting writer, with no respect for current conventionalities, should buy, borrow or steal Dr. Oscar Levy’s ‘Idiocy of Idealism.’”

—H. Cutner in *The Freethinker*, Oct. 3, 1943.

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RELIGION AND POLITICS

THE other day I overheard the statement that the Government would not permit discussion on these two subjects. This did not cause me any surprise, but what interested me was the linking together of two contentious matters, particularly at the present time. In the first place, it is significant that a ban has to be placed on open discussion, from which it follows that some people at all events are anxious for further information. The Government, on the other hand, whilst using both religion and politics to further their ends, are afraid that further enlightenment will not favour their cause.

When I left the Church of England at the age of eighteen, I did so because I found Christianity to be untrue. My further inquiries speedily proved that all the other religions were false. Now the Church of England consists almost 100 per cent. of Tories, and having thrown off one superstition I have never believed in the other. This is probably true of most Freethinkers. Politically, the Dissenters are Liberal and Labour, which shows the close connection between Religion and Politics.

In my studies of Religion world-wide I found that the worship of gods is based upon ignorance in an endeavour to explain the cause of natural effects. Thus we have the gods of thunder, fire, water, agriculture, etc. Thus the origin of the mythology is perfectly natural but the conclusions drawn from the facts are incorrect.

I think all Freethinkers will have been surprised after they have been "converted" at the small number of people who are honest and enterprising enough to throw off the stranglehold of religion, and perhaps these remarks will help to make the reason clear. The phenomenon is that whilst paying lip service to a belief and attending Church, people do not believe in what they profess but are prohibited from openly denying the lies that are told by the priests. An instance of this is the declaration of members of the Forces when they join up and the struggle of people who are atheists to force the Government to accept their statement to this effect.

I believe that Politics is a method for the control of people, and that whatever "benefits" governments may pretend to confer on those whom they govern, this is overshadowed by the necessity of the property owning classes all down history to keep the propertyless under control. I do not overlook the statement of Paterson in his "Nemesis of Nations" that "Civilization commences with the crack of the slave-driver's whip." That being so, control can be of two kinds. Either force as the Army and the Police or the mental suggestion that all is best in this best possible of all worlds. Now the latter is much the better way and in this connection I well remember the Roman Catholic statement with regard to having hold of the children.

I do not propose to consider the place of religion in primitive societies except to point out that in some of them the king combines the temporal and the spiritual attributes and in others we get a separate personality on the religious side—the Witch Doctor. An example of the first type is, of course, to be found in the Emperor of Japan, but strangely enough, with all the criticisms I have read of the Japanese, I do not remember anyone pointing out the imbecility of such a claim. Naturally, to the Japanese, making a man divine places him above criticism and the only wonder to me is that Hitler, instead of claiming that God is on his side, does not claim that he is the Almighty. Such a claim, however, might be too much for the German people to swallow.

Referring to the King and the Witch Doctor, I think it is fairly obvious that no man who rises to the former position can be under the illusion as to the "divinity" of the latter, but to preserve his position he uses the superstition of the tribe to consolidate and preserve his own civil position. The same position occurs in connection with the coronation of all monarchs. Religion, spite and politics side by side.

Historically, one finds the Bible a record of prophets, priests and kings. Everywhere are rules of conduct, the classic example being the Ten Commandments and overawed by the reading about the God, people have forgotten its record of the rise and rule of the temporal power. Out of a number of conflicting religions at the time of Constantine, Christianity is made the official religion (if it had not been we should not be discussing it), and the probability is that with all its absurdities it has been altered from time to time to suit the temporal power. It includes in its hierarchy father, mother and child; in other words, the basis of all homes in all ages. There is nothing new in this in the way of a Godhead. Although the Christian church appears to us now to be a separate entity, and no doubt has been since its inception, it clearly owes its position to the temporal power and without it is doomed to criticism and decay.

Every time that the Church has fallen out with the Throne it has lost, and to show what the latter thinks of its members one can take the classic example of the murder of Thomas a'Becket in a cathedral. Henry VIII took over the Church possessions and from the Establishment of the Church of England, despite its tradition of control and association with temporal power in other countries, the Roman Catholic Church has never been able to win back its former position.

Tom Paine can be taken as an example of the critic of Church and State in his two immortal works, "Age of Reason" and "Rights of Man," thus combining the attitude I wish to explain.

It was some time after I left the Church before I heard a sermon, and rather to my astonishment this presented itself as a political dissertation; that is, it told me what I must do with a promise of rewards for being good (which meant do what the parson said) and the threat of punishment if I failed to do so. There is little doubt that a great many people are misled by the idea that the parsons are siding with them in their political aspirations, with appropriate quotations from the Gospels, which these professional gentlemen have been doing for 2,000 years with the result that we are in a worse muddle than ever.

The privileged position of the parson, then, is not due to the fact that he is the representative of the Almighty so much as to the fact that he is part of the dope machine to keep people quiet—"The Opium of the People," as Kingsley said. He has access to every home in his parish, though many of the clergy are not so anxious to call upon the flock as they were. He is intimately connected with all the different "rescue" associations, and it is quite understandable the power of the Roman Catholic Church before it broke with the throne, with its confessional and the unquestioning obedience of the flock.

Having these points in mind, therefore, it is perfectly obvious why the Government is anxious that the British should not follow the Russian people. In Russia the Government being a Proletarian one, does not need the dope machine, and in fact the indictment is that it is a Godless Government and a Godless people. Recognising, however, that people have a right to their religious beliefs, the Soviet does not interfere with religion, except when it becomes political; that is, sides with reactionaries to overcome the Government.

In this country we have the curious spectacle of educated men, some of whom are known to be Freethinkers, approving of the new Education Bill which reintroduces parsonic control. The reason for this attitude is evidently that they place their political career before honesty and that, as I have endeavoured to prove, religion is not a separate organisation as we have been led to believe, but has been used by the powers that be (the politicians) to consolidate and extend their control over people in the interest of a property-owning class, and had it not been for this function religion would have died a natural death with the growth of knowledge.

T. D. SMITH.