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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 122)

Christianity and Persecution

IN my two previous articles I have been dealing with Mr. William Lawson, a member of the Society of Jesus, and the matter of Christian persecution. Historically, among non-Roman Catholics, Jesuits have a bad name. It is associated with double dealing, using language in a way that is intended to deceive, intolerance and fanatical devotion to the Church of Rome. It is not a very nice list, this characterising of one group of Christians by other groups, and it throws light on the probable nature of Christian influence on the unwary. It should also be remembered that the pamphlet we are criticising is one intended to be used among the armed forces, where there is not the same freedom of speech that is to be found amongst civilians. Our forces bear witness that there are still many officers who do not believe that a man should be without religion, and even when talking to the padre the soldier is not likely to forget that he is talking to an officer, and his life is not likely to be made the easier if he is plainly and strongly antagonistic to established religious opinion. What has become known to the world as "Jesuitism" is not unknown to Christian communities in general, and it is an historic fact that whether Christians persecute the "unorthodox" depends very largely on opportunity. When Members of Parliament are afraid of abolishing our Sabbatarian laws because they might lose their seat, and that in a Protestant community, it is not for Protestants to cast stones at Roman Catholics. I think it was the great Spurgeon who said that his sect was the only Christian body that had never persecuted—and they had never had the opportunity.

Christian Love in Action

Before dealing with the historical *facts* concerning persecution for religious differences, it will be profitable—in any case interesting—to bear in mind the assumption of all Christian argument that non-belief in Christianity is dangerous and poisonous, and therefore the unbeliever and misbeliever must be dealt with as the law deals with purveyors of poisonous foods. Mr. Lawson mistakes an explanation for a justification. He says the Inquisition was built by the Church to protect the people against "what was unwholesome and poisonous." But the question at issue is whether we can be so sure that a particular Church, or any combination of Churches, can be certain in fact that it is justified to forcibly suppress any opposite opinion. Mr. Lawson, like a good Catholic, holds that when the Church—his Church—has decided what is right, then it is right, and when it says some (mental) food is poisonous, then it is poisonous, and people must be forbidden to market it. Which all reminds one of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Mikado" when some of the officials explain why they lied

about certain things they should have done: "When your Majesty says a thing shall be done, then it is done, and if it is done, why not say so?" Such clumsy argument is not worthy of a Jesuit. But probably he knew that those to whom the magazine was sent would not question anything said by a Jesuit authority.

I think the matter was put more forcibly—or more cunningly—some time ago by that almost Roman Catholic paper, the "Church Times." It put the matter thus:—

"Persecuted by the Roman Government, the apologists of Christianity demanded toleration on the ground that religion was a voluntary matter."

Nothing sounds fairer or more plausible. We must decide that from the outset the Christians were a united band of brothers that stood for freedom. But we are pulled up a little by the reflection that the New Testament presents us with Christians quarrelling with each other, and the sectarian quarrels among the Christians before Constantine were a byword among the pagan Romans. For Rome, as we said last week, had no legal machinery for religious persecution, and Lecky points out that "the Church proselytised in a society in which toleration was the rule, and at a time when municipal and provincial and personal independence had reached the highest point, when the ruling classes were, for the most part, absolutely indifferent to religious opinions."

So the "Church Times" appears to have somewhat—quite accidentally—misunderstood the situation. It does say, with almost childishly trustful innocence, that "for centuries no elaborate theory of persecution existed." Quite so, but we must enlighten the innocent by pointing out that the suppression of independent thinking had been so persistent and so complete by the Church, the old culture of Rome and Greece had been so well suppressed, that the Church found no great difficulty in keeping heresy in check. As we said last week, when the Church really—thanks to the revival of Roman and Greek culture outside Christendom and the brilliant scientific development of the Arabs and Jews—felt the pressure of the new learning, some semi-legal machinery had to be created.

Certainly the Christian leaders asked the Pagan rulers for freedom of speech; how else could they have carried on propaganda? But when the Church gained power under Constantine the Great things began to change. We quote Lecky again:—

"From the very moment the Church obtained civil power under Constantine, the general principle of coercion was admitted and acted on, both against the Jews, the heretics and the pagans. [Of the Arians and the Donatists.] Their churches were destroyed, their assemblies were forbidden, their writings burnt, and all who concealed their writings threatened with death. . . . The Theodosian code, which was compiled under

Theodosius the younger, contains no less than sixty-six enactments against pagans, Jews, apostates and magicians. . . . First the pagans were deprived of offices in the State; then their secret sacrifices were prohibited; then every kind of divination was forbidden; then the public sacrifices were suppressed; finally, the temples were destroyed, their images broken, and the entire worship condemned."

That is not a very bad first step for a religion that was standing for the freedom and dignity of man. It may be true that the Church had no legal plan of torture and punishment for heretics, but the work went on. Bingham, a reliable ecclesiastical historian, in his "Antiquities" (1855), thus sums up the various pains and penalties inflicted upon heretics and pagans following the accession of Constantine the Great, and within a period of about 200 years:

"All intercourse was forbidden with them. They were deprived of all offices of profit and honour under the State. They were unable to dispose of their property by will, or to receive property through the wills of others. They were unable to receive donations. Most of the heretical sects were deprived of the right of contracting, buying or selling. Special fines were imposed on them. They were proscribed, transported or banished. They might be subjected to flogging, and were liable in certain cases to be put to death."

I am afraid of calling into the witness-box H. C. Lea with his dozen bulky volumes of the history of the Christian Church, for I should never stop quoting. But in reply to the witness we have been examining, I put into the box the following from a mid-Victorian clerical historian, Milman. Speaking of the fifth century—directly after the rise of the Church to power—he says of the gentle, loving, long-suffering early Christians:—

"Monks in Alexandria, monks in Antioch, monks in Jerusalem, monks in Constantinople, decide peremptorily on orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Persecution is universal, persecution by every means of violence and cruelty. The only question is in whose hands is the power to persecute. Bloodshed, murder, treachery, assassination, even during the public worship of God. These are the frightful means by which each party strives to maintain its opinion and defeat his adversary."

And, apart from fanciful pictures of the early Christians roaming the world to give to people "glad tidings of great joy," this gives us some idea of the real picture of the early Christians. Indeed, it was not the kindly individual filled with love for his fellow-men, but the narrow-minded believer in forms of superstition—a god who came to earth, the miracles he performed, the promise of reward if men obeyed the commands of the Crucified God, and a threat of hell for those who did not worship Jesus, that stands out vividly. "How these Christians love each other" was one of the pagan comments on Christians. With the break-up of the power of the Roman Church we have the same lesson of hatred between the two rival groups—Roman Catholics and Protestants. And if that series of internal enmities has weakened of late years it is because self-preservation has taught Christians, to repeat the old saw, to hang together under peril of hanging separately.

Our Jesuit writer of the apology for the Inquisition and the intolerance of the Roman Church is a fine example of the truth of what we have said. He asks us not to think of the Inquisition—the historical Roman Catholic Inquisition as connected with "tyranny and cruelty," and says that as "there have been many teachers in the history of Christianity who were ignorant or foolish or wicked, the Church has had often to take action against preachers of false doctrine." But among these patrons of brutality and intolerance was the great St. Augustine, who decided, to use Lecky's summing-up, that heresy was the worst species of murder, being the murder of souls; it was also a form of blasphemy, and on all these grounds heretics might be punished "even to death."

Mr. Lawson's claim is that Christianity is not responsible for persecution and intolerance. Our Jesuit, with fine impudence, and with a feeling of safety, as he is writing for the benefit of Catholics who will not, who dare not, question the fundamental truth of what he says, can quote from Augustine that "men may be converted by argument but not by blows." We, of course, agree with the sentiment, but it does not lie in the mouth of honest men to use it as part of the wisdom of the Church.

The "Church Times," in the article from which I have already quoted, differs slightly in fact, but not in quality, from Mr. Lawson. It apologises for the cruelty of the Inquisition by saying that "probably it was the action of the mob, rather than the desire of the theologians, that called the Inquisition into existence." The theory that the Church invented its elaborate system of torture and persecution and murder in order to protect the heretic from the Christian mob is a gem of special pleading.

We may conclude, for the present, with some words of a Christian, but also a man who favoured truth, even though his religious friends might shrink at his words. Lord Acton remarked that the Inquisition was peculiarly the work of the Popes, and that is hardly denied by anyone. But he went on to say that—

"the principle of the Inquisition is murderous, and a man's opinion of the Papacy is regulated and determined by his opinion of religious assassination. . . . If he accepts the Papacy with confidence, admiration, unconditioned obedience, he must have made terms with murder."

I think that gives what would be Lord Acton's opinion of William Lawson (S.J.), and his apologies.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued.)

PONTIUS PILATE

Sir Walter Scott had a client to defend, a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, who was prosecuted for using improper language in his sermons. Speaking of Pontius Pilate, he said: "I have always looked upon P. P. as a much injured character: I have ever considered him as a greater benefactor to the Christian religion than any of the twelve apostles." This man fortunately died before the trial came on.—From "Letters and Recollections of Sir Walter Scott," by Mrs. Hughes.

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

ANOTHER LETTER TO ISOBEL

DEAR ISOBEL,—The problem that was puzzling you the other evening—you remember, about the “beginning”—is not a new problem for those who find themselves in the earlier stages of the conflict between scientific thought and religious belief.

That remark of yours, made with such emphasis,

“But there *must* have been a beginning!”

is one that has been made thousands of times before, with just the same emphasis that you gave to it, by others who have been baffled by this somewhat difficult question.

Personally, I don't see that the question of a beginning of things is really important in itself; to me a more vital question is the present and future of things. In connection with the present and the future we can, by giving these phases of existence proper consideration, exert an influence upon life that may tend to make it happier and more useful to us; whereas delving into the question of a “beginning” can never be useful in a practical sense, though it can and does waste a lot of time.

I realise, however, that owing to certain unscientific ideas which still prevail, and have a large measure of authority, some time must be spent on this subject if we are to encourage more support for the idea that it is the present and the future that are important, and not the “beginning.”

So, while I repeat that it doesn't matter much whether or not there was a beginning of things, I feel we might discuss the matter with a view to saving your time later on.

You say you cannot imagine the universe existing without its having had a beginning. I can quite understand that attitude, but I want to explain it away, because in so doing it might explain away a lot of other things.

The idea of a beginning, as of an ending, is simply a human idea, and can only be understood in connection with human relationships. That is to say, we humans, having the ability to make definitions and classifications to suit our convenience, or our human purposes, make beginnings and endings of things by fixing points at which we say that such-and-such began, or such-and-such ended. For instance, we agree, for the sake of convenience, to say that a motor-car's life begins when it comes off the assembly line at the factory. But that is merely what we call an arbitrary statement.

We know that the material that has gone to the shaping of the car existed in various forms before the car was made; and if we look carefully into the question we find that no new material has been created, but simply that previously existing materials have been re-shaped, or have taken on a new form. From the time that the form is recognisable as a motor-car we say that it has begun to be a car.

You said you could not conceive that the universe “never began,” that it “had no beginning.” But I don't suppose you could conceive a motor-car that “never began,” could you? This brings us to the real question, then.

You would not believe that a motor began to exist *without its having come from previously existing materials*; yet you are prepared to believe that about the universe. In other words, if I told you I had a motor-car that began out of nothing, you would laugh at me, but you take your minister seriously when he asks you to believe that God has a universe that he made out of nothing.

I know this seems to be a puzzle. I know it is hard for you at first to abandon the idea of the universe having “had a beginning.” This is due to the difficulty caused by using the language of ordinary human affairs when investigating things beyond the range of ordinary human activity. But to help you to get the thing right I must ask you how much harder it is to imagine a universe that *did* begin—out of nothing.

Saying that God began it doesn't help at all. If God existed it might have been possible for him to make a universe, but it could not have been from nothing. To be nothing existing, there could not even be God, because he would be something, wouldn't he? And if there was nothing but God, and he made the universe out of himself, God could no longer be what he was, because he must have used up some of himself to make the universe. If that be so, then the God who made the universe cannot any longer exist, because he isn't what he was before he made it.

Silly, isn't it, Isobel, when you come to think about it?

Then we come to an old question. If you must have a beginning to explain the universe, and that beginning needs God to account for it, surely you must have something to account for God in turn. If it is essential that the universe had to have God to begin it, it is equally essential that God had to have a previous God for his beginning. Logic demands both—or neither.

So finally we come to this position. Either there was a series of everlasting gods, one after another, going back endlessly, each being responsible for “beginning” the God who followed him, until finally one of them stopped the ridiculous business by creating the universe instead of another god; or else the universe must be regarded as something that cannot be explained by the everyday terms of “beginning” and “ending.” The impossible idea of god creating god way back into eternity, never being able to get back to a First God, is much clumsier than to accept the view that the substance of the universe has always existed, and to act accordingly by cutting out the waste of time spent on the question.

There is a religious dogma that “God is, always has been, and always will be.” This has been a very harmful dogma to mankind, because different people have believed it to be true about different gods (even Christians don't all believe in the same god) and this has caused them to fight about it, and to kill each other. How much easier it is to restate the position by saying, “The universe is, probably always has been, and probably always will be.”

Very few people would be inclined to fight over that idea, and any arguments about it would most likely be friendly affairs, because, for reasons we cannot explore just now, most men are more tolerant when they talk about the universe (with a small u) than when they talk about God (with a capital G).

So let us put the words “beginning” and “ending” in their proper places; they simply indicate stages that are reached in the evolutionary processes that are always going on in the materials of which the universe is composed. They simply mean the beginning and ending of forms or shapes or conditions which have, for us humans, a special significance. A building begins when it has been given a certain form by the builder; a river begins when natural processes have carved out a water-carrying channel; a mountain begins when the folding of the earth, or volcanic upheaval, disturb the shape of the landscape. But the stone of the building, the water of the river, the rock and earth of the mountain, were all in existence before the new forms in which they are now expressed “began.” There is nothing that begins out of nothing.

A day “begins” when the sun lights our part of the earth; but it is only to-day's effect of the same sun and earth that made yesterday and the day before. The beginning and ending of the day are just names to identify phases of a process that takes place regularly in our little corner of the universe; terms for our convenience. A new day begins out of what yesterday left. We do not go forward to newly created material that has come from nothing; no material had disappeared behind. It is the same material, being constantly fashioned and remoulded to “begin” and to “end” phases of existence. Even a thought is “begun” from the pre-existing material of our

memory and experience—our senses. It is the material of the senses, as it were, re-shaping under the influence of other changes in the universe around us.

There is no evidence whatever, Isobel, of a beginning in the sense you thought of—something out of nothing. Not even the God you were taught to believe in could come from nothing. So let us bear in mind a wiser saying than the Biblical "In the Beginning." This is the saying of a wise man that "everything is becoming."

If we understand that feature of life, that "everything is becoming," we shall behave more wisely, for then we shall ask ourselves not how things "began," but what they are to "become."

F. J. CORINA.

TEACHERS AND THEIR TASK

[Thanks to the courtesy of a friend, we are able to publish the following from the Presidential address of Mr. H. L. Davis to the members of the Cardiff Teachers' Association (N.U.T.).]

UNTIL we as teachers are willing to treat education as a science, and are prepared to abandon any or all of our cherished opinion, rather than to cling to them, we cannot make real progress. We must remember that in most matters there is no immutable truth. Fresh evidence causes a collapse of cherished belief. The profundity of to-day is the jest of to-morrow, the myth of to-day was yesterday's religion. The time is opportune for great and far-reaching change; never before has such a chance for man to control his own destiny.

We have seen in our own time a country take its courage in its hands and, beyond the expectations of the wildest optimist, we have watched a transformation the rapidity of which is unknown in the world's history. In the course of one generation we have seen Russia jump from the slavery of an oppressive regime which beggared description to the first combined-aid State in the world. In spite of great difficulties she gave the world a lead which, one would think, would show to others more favourably placed than themselves what can be done. All that is wanted is courage.

No doubt it was this that made our Government see that something must be done. It has given us in matters of education the new Butler Bill. This Bill makes one thing perfectly clear. Whatever else happens the child must be enslaved to the great tradition long before he is old enough or wise enough to gauge its wisdom. We see the bitter controversies of the past brought into the classroom. We also note that although the good points of the Act must wait until opportune times, these retrogressions are to be put into operation at once. In the great sphere of religion the teacher will have no right to use his intelligence and to approach this subject with reason; he will be compelled to teach religion of the canned and ready-to-serve variety. We are to be tabulated and ticketed according to Faith. I suppose the custom of H.M. Forces and the prison will be extended, and all those who are not quite sure what they are will be ticketed "C. of E." I hope our schools will have reserved Moslem and Hindoo teachers. Occasionally, the head teacher will be expected to open the day with, no doubt, say, a Hindoo ceremony.

In other spheres this new Act is equally lacking in force and vision.

Our democracy is to be made safe for plutocracy. The Juvenile Employment Bureaux of Eton, Harrow, etc., are to remain for the benefit of the wealthy. They will be expected to supply a number of politicians imbued with the correct traditions and with the necessary outlook to prevent human progress if their class is threatened. The small snob school is to remain, and . . .

Yet while guarding class privilege this Act makes no mention of the abolition of child labour—a provision long overdue. . . . Nothing is visualised that will give teachers a professional status similar to that given to doctors and lawyers. It will still be possible for local authorities to staff their schools with unqualified persons. All established loopholes for cheap labour will remain. . . .

We must realise that the future of our country is in the hands of its teachers. The day when the battles of England were fought out on the playing fields of Eton has gone. The 95 per cent. are beginning to matter. If we permeate our children with the rubbish man has accumulated in his struggle upwards from the animal world, then Britain will soon be famous for, say, the curious historic survival of primitive ceremonies in the same way that some of the kings of the Pacific Islands supply American visitors with displays of prehistoric dances. Other than as a museum piece, our country will have little value.

But there is no need for such a gloomy outlook. The fullness of the world is open to us. We can live in plenty and comfort. Our children are our hope. But if they leave school at 14, 15, 16 or 18 with reverence for the state of affairs at present in existence, then, although they may be brilliant at figures, impeccable in spelling and splendid in diction, then we shall have failed. We must instil into the rising generation a hatred of the man-made unfairness of our lives, so that when they are old enough they will give us an Education Act which will be a landmark in human history. We must be imbued with the desire to lead through the valley of the shadow of superstition, ignorance, error and class distinction to the great land of sublime truth and complete mutual aid where man, by his own efforts and the might of his intellect, shall earn for himself the title of Homo Sapiens.

THE LORD'S CANTEEN

EVENTS in the European theatre of war must have disturbed many followers of the Lord recently. Those events may have been divinely planned, but their publicity value to The Faith is nil.

For instance, the Red Army, without God and without any religion, is astonishing the world with its achievements and writing a new text-book of military strategy, whilst we, with God to lead us, and the heavenly hosts on our side, have been mudbound in Italy for weeks. Both the Axis and the Allies thought God not worth bothering about during the bomb-or-not-to-bomb Rome discussion. The point to mark is, that the speakers were sensible, and took the line that if bombs were released over Rome they would descend true to the sights, regardless of what was on the target, the will of God, the power of the Pope, and the total clerical influence of Christendom being discounted. With the wholesale destruction or damage of churches by bombing in this country, there was no reason to suppose the holy edifices of Italy were better bomb conductors than those in England. Altogether God seemed to have dropped out of the picture, but a possible explanation for that has come to light.

In addition to his manifold responsibilities of piloting the universe, God is running a war canteen as a sideline. The scheme started in quite a modest way, a New Zealand soldier was grousing in a post office. There is nothing sacred in going into a post office to grouse, but it stimulated the almighty grey matter to think in terms of dough nuts and coffee, with a game of darts thrown in.

From the forty-five millions of inhabitants in this country the Lord selected Mrs. K. Parson's, the British Israelites, and

Sister Mary as sponsors for his canteen. When the call came Sister Mary was busy in her kitchen, which was so full of the Lord's presence that furniture had to be restricted to one chair and an orange box. All the details here related are given to the world by Mrs. Parsons in a sixteen-page pamphlet, which is a fair sample of human mentality afflicted by Christianity.

Things soon began to move, an ex-Welsh church, full of dirt and cobwebs, was taken over as promising premises. Begging for equipment began—the divine kitty was apparently empty—and a lorry went round collecting old chairs, tables, crockery, games and a chopper. After a holy clean up, Mrs. Parsons says: "The Lord had finished the canteen," and it was opened by the Mayor of Brighton.

It stands in the name of the British Israel Canteen, but that is only the trading description, God is the proprietor.

Coffee sold at one penny per cup resulted in a loss, so Almighty God, the creator of the universe, was asked if the price could be raised to three halfpence per cup. "No; keep it at one penny per cup," replied the Lord, but with a business touch he inspired a local dairy to contribute four pints of milk a day, and so the loss was passed on to the dairy. No money is taken on Sundays, all refreshments are free. The first Sunday of opening one soldier only turned up to the service, but apparently the news of free refreshments soon got round. "And now," says Mrs. Parsons, "when I see our canteen packed every Sunday, my thoughts go back to our first service of one soldier."

Goods and cash on short supply are referred to the Lord through prayer. He remits the appeals to generous-hearted citizens on earth who forward donations direct to the canteen.

"We could not have done what has been done unless volumes of prayer had gone up," said Mrs. Parsons.

The lady was so full of gratitude to the Lord that she felt she should write another pamphlet, price 8d., plus postage. The Lord was of the same opinion, and the result of their combined thoughts was that "Miracles in a Canteen" was born into the world of Christian literature. The title explains the pamphlet, and the pamphlet explains the mental state of the writer. It calls for sympathy, but not for censure. Our censure and contempt must be given to all those who at this very moment are planning and plotting to produce a future population of similar intellects. It is a social disgrace, with many of its champions in Parliament.

The idea of an almighty god running a canteen, attending to its every detail, may be extremely silly, but it is quite Christian in substance, and that is important to remember. Certainly it is an insult to informed intelligence to-day, but that is exactly what Christianity is. It is not foreign to Christianity for a believer to seriously assert that God supplied his canteen with three breadcutters, eleven dozen cups and saucers, and prevented chocolate from going mouldy, or miraculously producing penny cakes, and even giving a hand in the canteen during rush hours. They are all in line with commonly accepted Christian proofs. Proofs that were accepted by ignorant people 2,000 years ago, and are accepted by the same class to-day in Britain, and will be accepted 2,000 years hence, providing the necessary state of ignorance can be maintained. And to maintain that state of ignorance is the professional job before the churches, and a voluntary task taken up by many self-styled progressive politicians, who are trying to make a safe corner for their species in the New Britain after the war.

We hope the good relations existing between Mrs. Parsons, the Lord and Sister Mary will stay put until the end of the war, and that business in the canteen will be particularly brisk on Sundays.

R. H. ROSETTI.

ACID DROPS

THERE has been considerable talk of late—partly in the Press, but still more outside the Press—of a possibility of enmity between Russia and a restored Poland. We suggest to those interested to pay attention to the Roman Catholic Press, and they will find much to enlighten them. First of all, Poland is one of the strongholds of the Church, and a new Poland in perfect amity with the Soviet Government would not suit the Catholic plans. It is certain to weaken the power of the Church in Poland, and with a weakening that may arise from a new, and possibly more democratic, Italy, would add to the troubles of the Vatican. The leading articles of the "Catholic Times" will open the eyes of those who can read between the lines.

Further light will come when it is remembered that Poland, before the German invasion, had a Fascist form of government, not, of course, as villainous as the Nazi Fascism, but still predominantly a Fascist Government. The masses of the people had no ownership of the soil, and anti-Jewism, while not reaching the criminal villainy of Germany, was yet in being. Put all these things together and it will enable one to understand the significance of the anti-Jewish writings published in this country by refugees. This is not the place in which one can further elaborate the matter.

Very graciously the Archbishop of Canterbury has announced that to Christians "sex as God created it is not an evil thing. It is blasphemous to suggest it is unclean." The Archbishop knows his audience, and he is evidently awake to the fact that good Christian believers, where their religion is concerned, seldom care to-day what occurred yesterday. Otherwise Dr. Temple would never have risked calling to the minds of his listeners, or readers, the denunciation of Freethinkers for saying what the Archbishop says with the air of a great reformer.

That sex is something essentially "unclean" is a fundamental historic fact in the history of a bachelor God who became a father. And nothing more filthy than the historic Christian attack on the relation of the sexes is to be met with in history. Had he been, what no Christian leader to-day can afford to be, that is intellectually honest, he would have reminded his people that the fight for the rationalising of sex relationships was entirely of Freethinking origin. Brave men and women suffered imprisonment, social ostracism, and all the filthiness of Christian malignity in their attempts to rationalise sex. And now an Archbishop says it is blasphemy to think of sex as unclean. Still, it is cheering to note that even Archbishops have to move, and that they cannot for ever sit with their back to the light worshipping the darkness.

Most people who have studied the question of the "movable" date of Easter know that this is because Easter is a purely pagan festival based on the sun myth, and has no more to do with a real human being than Christmas Yule logs. Attempts have been made over and over again to make the Easter date a fixed one—only the other day Admiral Beamish raised the question in Parliament—but the response has been very poor. The Vatican also has held back. The date of Easter depends on the position of the sun after some particular day. It is a purely pagan festival, and was so kept for centuries before Christianity emerged. The Pope and his Cardinals are fully aware of the facts, but you simply can't have Easter with the sun in the wrong place—as it would be often with a fixed date.

The "Sunday Post" places on record the fact that two boys who had just left Sunday school were fined £2 each—parents to pay—for setting fire to a hayrick. Now what would the magistrate have said had they been non-attendants at Sunday school? Perhaps we should have had a miniature sermon on the need for more religious teaching, and some of our pudding-headed M.P.s would probably have used it as a reason for having more religion in the schools. Yet it is quite possible that had these boys been sent to a playing field, and so worked off their superfluous energy in a healthy game, the hayrick would never have been burned.

On one point at least we agree with the Minister of Education. Mr. Butler recently told the House of Commons that the talk of the State schools being "Godless" was nonsense. We agree, but it is only those Christians who have not been getting enough compulsory religion who told this deliberate lie. They know, and Mr. Butler knows, that thanks to religious influences a number of teachers are made dishonest and are compelled to assist in what they know to be untrue. And Mr. Butler says to the House of Commons: "My remedy for this is to give the schools more religion." What Mr. Butler is fighting for is dishonesty among the teachers where religion is concerned, and more humbug for the pupils. In this way the Tory Party and the Church—which always have worked together—hope to keep the alliance in being. And the pity is that Members of Parliament who are neither Christian nor Tory seem ready to help.

The Secretary of the Methodist Church Education Committee wishes to see the clergy and the teachers working together. Of course he does. That is one of the aims of the new Education Bill—to see that the teachers work along such lines as the clergy desire.

Kilmarnock is not to have Sunday entertainments of any kind. The churches will be open, but attending them can hardly be called entertainment—unless one goes to "guy" the preachers. The difficulty in the way is a local law that no place of entertainment shall be open on the Sabbath. But the authorities hang on to the old Burgh law. There the matter rests. We are a liberty-loving people, but where religion is concerned "liberty" means that religious bigots shall rule the roost.

The Sunday entertainments asked for were for the Armed Forces only, which adds absurdity to absurdity; for if lounging about for a whole day is bad for soldiers, must it not be equally bad for civilians? We do not like to think that civilians are so much better than soldiers—that where they can live harmlessly in given conditions, soldiers will fall to pieces. We do not believe that soldiers are any better than civilians, and we see no reason for believing they are worse.

Of all the examples of cock-eyed reasoning we have come across lately, one by Mr. Arnold Lunn deserves a very prominent place. It occurs in the "Catholic Times." Mr. Lunn says:—

The purely human values . . . can only be preserved within a religious framework. The great culture of Christian Europe began, as every great culture has begun, in a religious age. . . . The Art, Architecture and Literature of the great centuries was the result of an attempt to translate into paint, stone or words a vision of timeless beauty and eternal truth.

Now it would require a graduate in some college of absurdity to write anything to beat so much sheer nonsense. Consider—"The great culture began in a religious age." Of course, but how else could it come? Learning begins where ignorance reigned, but no one would be foolish enough to say that learning was a product of ignorance. Atheism began among people who believed in God, but no one ever claimed that Atheism was a product of religion. When Europe had declined largely through an overdose of religion, the impetus came from a recovery of Greek and Roman learning—not to mention other non-Christian revivals and improvements. And in our own history it happens that culture has developed only so far as science, philosophy or sociology have, wholly or in part, cast off the controlling influences of religion. We compliment Mr. Lunn on having at last written something that may live—as a warning to others. We are placing his gem inside the covers of Pitkin's "History of Human Stupidity," which, although it extends to 574 pages, has no brighter example within its covers. Bravo, Arnold Lunn!

What a tremendous amount of wisdom a Christian preacher can pack into a few words! Here is the new Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster assuring the world that we cannot have "sound international relations amongst the nations themselves,

nor charity and justice, unless there exists justice within the nations." That display of divinely inspired wisdom is very striking. But then God has selected Mgr. Griffin to his exalted position because he has the kind of intelligence that fits him for his job. While this kind of wisdom is current the Christian Church—any Christian Church—will be safe. But we can imagine the Recording Angel giving a wink to his superior and saying, "I suppose we had better file this message, but I'll be damned if I know what he means."

But wisdom is not confined to the Catholic Church. Here is the Rev. S. W. Hughes, General Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council, informing the world that "If this great nation is to retain its international influence 'we must get back' to that simple Christian faith which is the only clear explanation of Britain at her best." But this also leads to some uncertainty. Where is the simple faith that is to bring us back to our greatness? Look at the different forms of Christian faith we have had during the past few centuries; and also the number we still have. Probably this problem is a kind of acrostic that people amuse themselves with at Christmas time. Still we expect the Recording Angel will just place it with other puzzling things that mount to heaven.

Yet one more sample of Christian wisdom, this time from the Rev. Wallace who holds the post of Chaplain to Hatfield's Ltd. (We fancy this is some arms producing company). Mr. Wallace says that churches are too interested in getting people to heaven. But we have always understood that this really was the aim of all the Christian Churches, and we feel certain that Hatfield's—and other firms—are not disturbed by the teaching. But if the clergy do not look after our future in heaven what are they here for? The clergy, as such, have never pretended to be of any earthly use. When the report reaches heaven we expect the R.C. will close his book and go out for a drink of Nectar, that is the only drink we hear of in heaven, and even that had to be introduced by pagans before Jahveh took control.

Canon Blofeld, the Vicar of Edgbaston, is convinced that the Church is essential to keep Christianity alive. We agree with him, and that is evidence that Christianity is dependable upon constant advertising with occasional doses of compulsion. But things that are of themselves essential in themselves can generally hold their own once the people are made acquainted with it. Christianity can hold only a part of its influence by force, social, economical, and occasional doses of sheer force.

One of our contributors suggests that one of these days Mr. C. S. Lewis, who has gained very high approval from certain hard-pressed Christian leaders, will one day run up against Freethought, and what will he do then? Our contributor appears to have forgotten that Mr. Lewis says he was an Atheist until he reached the age of twelve, and then he became, not merely a Christian, but a Christian of the most primitive type. We do not think that Mr. Lewis will ever run against Freethought—at least he will never know that he has run against it. It seems a terrible thing to say of any man, but if we believed in God we should feel convinced that God picked Mr. Lewis out for one of his champions. Learning without wisdom is just what is required in the Church nowadays, unless one happens to be another version of a Commander Campbell, and then he can dispense with either learning or wisdom.

Said Mr. Sorensen in the House of Commons: "Compulsory religion will tend to rank hypocrisy." We must warn Mr. Sorensen that he will never get a Government job if he lets out this amount of truth where religion is concerned. Even avowed Socialists have learned this lesson, and have learned to pay lip homage to religion. Perhaps it might be a good thing if a given number of candidates for election promised their constituents that on no account would they accept office. For when they do, they are appointed to a post and are nearly always damned so far as straightforward and useful work is concerned.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. GRAY (Dumfries).—Not advisable at the moment. Why not get into touch with the Glasgow or Edinburgh Branch? The Executive might contribute towards the cost.

T. R. HARRISON.—Pleased to learn that your first experience of a Freethought lecture, at Bradford, was so satisfactory. We hope you will follow up the matter.

D. W. COLEMAN.—Thanks for advising us of the issue of "Punch." The world moves. Trust you are well.

S. SIMKINS.—We saw the complaint that the Church is not getting sufficient candidates for the ministry. We know that the quality of the clergy is going steadily downwards—now even the "weaker" intellectual brothers seem to be shy of the preacher's job. We may take it that the intellectual level is rising. But, as it is, the better men in the pulpit have least to say about "true Christianity." Their sermons are usually third-rate addresses on social or ethical subjects of a vague and elementary quality.

S. G. MASON.—Thanks for the note on Paine. It will be useful when we have occasion to again deal with the great reformer.

A. COORICK.—Shall appear next week. Crowded out.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—E. Sisson, £2 14s.; C. Morrison, 4s.

"FREETHINKER" FUND.—E. Sisson, £1.

F. E. ELLWILL.—You are mistaken. The passage was from Byron's "Vision of Judgment." It runs:—

"God save the King"; it is a large economy
In God to save the like, but if he will
Be saving, all the better; for not one am I
Of those who think damnation better still;
I hardly know, too, if not quite alone am I
In this small hope of bettering future ill
By circumscribing, with some slight restriction,
The eternity of hell's hot jurisdiction.

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WE have been noting for some years the campaign that the Churches have carried on in the Press. Weekly papers, in particular, have had their Sunday sermons, and men and women on the staff have repeated the parsonic products with a great air of philosophic insight and impartiality. But the other side is seldom heard, or if critical (?) letters are admitted they are of a very mild and useless character. This has considerably helped the present Government in its efforts to reinstate the parson in the school, and in such a way that it does not ask for more work from the parsons, but to turn teachers into official tools of the parsonry.

We were the more pleased to see selections from a criticism of one of "John Bull's" "Helping God Efforts" by C. H. G. Only selections from C. H. G.'s letter are admitted, but what is given is concise and very much to the point. It would be well if all Freethinkers would keep up a bombardment of the Press. It would be bound to tell in the long run, even though much may find a resting-place in the wastepaper basket.

We have been pulled up by a new reader of this paper—and we have made a great number of new readers during the past four years—for being "biased" in our criticisms of religion. Well, instead of pleading "Not guilty" we plead "Inevitability." It is impossible to give a judgment of any shape or form that is not open to an accusation of bias. A Judge is of all men expected to be unprejudiced in his valuation of the evidence before him, and yet his opinion must lean more strongly in one direction if he is to give a judgment. A man who writes a work dealing with historic matters must be biased in one direction unless his work is a catalogue of mere happenings. All opinions imply a bias in one direction or another. There is nothing wrong in having a bias in this or that direction. It is essential to every conclusion we reach where more than one conclusion is possible. Our correspondent has evidently mixed up prejudice with bias.

We regret that owing to a mischance the notice of a members' meeting of the new Keighley Branch, N.S.S., was omitted from last week's issue. It is too late now to insert it, but we call attention of Freethinkers in Keighley and district to the existence of the branch of the N.S.S. There are plenty of Freethinkers in the neighbourhood, and so far good progress has been made in putting the new branch into fighting form, and we urge those who have the cause at heart to get into touch with the branch. Secretary's address: Mr. A. E. Dent, 16, Oak Street, Haworth, Keighley.

The "Birmingham Post" recently published the information that an Ethical Society has been formed at Birmingham. The aims of the new organisation is "the dissemination of ethical principles and the cultivation of a rational religious system." The "ethical principles" part of the programme is all right, although in our experience the person whose lips rip with moral maxims generally needs a great deal of looking after. But what in the name of all that is sensible is a "rational religious sentiment"? All religions are rational inasmuch as they are built on certain experiences and conclusions. So far all religions exist on a common level with non-religions. But all religions also assume the existence of a natural and supernatural, and it is the emphasis placed upon the existence and importance of the supernatural that forms the core of all real religions. Is this society, then, trying to form a new supernaturalism? If, on the other hand, they merely wish to have "ethics" taught, that can be found with and without religion in any civilised country. Finally, we should have thought there were quite enough religious bodies in the world as it is without spending energy in creating another "religion." It really looks like another version of the man who explained that he had given up the errors of the Church of Rome in order to embrace those of the Church of England.

On reflection, we are afraid we have not always been quite just to Christians. We have said that the different bodies of Christians cannot be brought to anything like agreement. But that is not quite true. For example, where education is concerned, all Christians would like his own version of religion taught by the State. But as this cannot be attained they are willing for each to get something, leaving a struggle as to which can get most. All Christians agree that the only true religion is Christianity; they merely differ as to what is meant by Christianity. Again, all Christians agree on a love of freedom, but there is no agreement among them as to what constitutes freedom. Finally, for the moment, every Christian believes in "truth," but most of them find a lie very convenient in times of stress.

The people of Doncaster have entered on a course of dissipation by opening cinemas on Sunday. Owing to staff difficulties, only a few were open on the first Sunday, but 6,500 people passed the pay-box. When the remaining eight other cinemas are opened the number will be increased. What a pity it is so many Members of Parliament permit themselves to be bullied into silence over Sunday entertainments, and so uphold one of the most stupid of our national superstitions.

TWO BEQUESTS

IN John Buchan's well-known biography of Augustus, there will be found a statement which is presumably meant to be taken seriously, but I cannot help regarding it as ironical. The author points out that in 30 B.C. Rome had little to learn from the Near East, but he then continues: "The enduring bequest of the East was to spring half a century later, not from the effete successors of the old monarchies, but from the bare Palestinian hills."* This is a very fine sentence, though it is surprisingly misguided, and certainly out of place in a study of a great pagan emperor. One hears of many strange bequests, but none has ever been so harmful to humanity as Christianity.

Clergymen, of course, tell us that our civilisation is Christian, or even that Christianity is the basis of all civilisation, while politicians and public men are all too prone to follow suit, but the present case is quite different. The writing of the life of Augustus involves a thorough research into the records, not only of Rome, but Greece, Egypt—indeed, the whole of Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. John Buchan's book amply proves that he has done this. He understands, and explains clearly, the terrific problems involved in the governing of the Roman Empire. He delineates the tremendous achievement of the rather delicate kinsman of Julius Cæsar who, although not a military genius, became probably the greatest ruler of all time, achieving "a polity so reasonable and so well adjusted that it continued for centuries, and in its fall left behind it massive foundations on which men are still building." The much sung-about British Empire has cracked in less than two centuries and those of Athens and Spain were considerably shorter lived, while Alexander's lasted less than half a century and Napoleon's a mere decade. Mr. Buchan says: "In the brief span of recorded history empires have had a shorter life than many monarchies, theocracies and even republics. The Augustan alone reached a venerable age," and he assesses that "The true achievement of Augustus is that he saved the world from disintegration."

Nor is Mr. Buchan under any misapprehension concerning the establishment of the Christian Church. He is fully aware that it was built up on the remains of the Empire. He also knows that the decay of the empire which "gave the world a new and rational way of life" was followed by "the night of the Dark Ages." Where then is the "enduring bequest" of Christianity? Mr. Buchan acknowledges that "the Roman concepts of public duty and service are still a living force among us," and attributes this to Augustus, regretting that "Historians have denied him the name of genius which they grant readily to Alexander and Julius and Napoleon," maintaining: "If it be not genius to re-make and re-direct the world by a courageous realism and supreme powers of character and mind, then the word has no meaning in human speech."

The Christian "bequest" is obviously becoming more and more incomprehensible. What *did* Christianity give to the world? What was the revelation about which we have heard so much? At the Nativity the heavenly hosts announced: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Christianity brought, instead, wars unending. The wise and mainly benevolent Roman government was replaced by fanaticism and tyranny. A tolerant polytheism gave way to an intolerant monotheism. The self-designated "jealous god" superseded the deities of Paganism. Previously, the many and varied peoples of the Empire had been allowed to continue worshipping whatever gods they pleased, providing always that they did not stir up political ferment. The Roman Pantheon was full of the gods

of other countries, and religious persecution was almost, it not entirely, unknown. With Christianity it became the rule instead of the exception, and infidels were damned here and hereafter.

Other changes took place as well. The splendid Roman roads and aqueducts and the beautiful edifices were allowed to fall into ruin, and in many cases were actually destroyed. The baths and sanitary systems suffered the same fate. Christianity was concerned with the next life, not this one, and faith and filth went hand-in-hand. The manliness and fine character that the Romans so admired fell into disrepute, and in its place came the humility which Machiavelli so rightly and so strongly condemned, while superstition replaced the grand old philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism.† The devastation and insanity of the Crusades was impossible in the old Empire. Uprisings, of course, had to be quelled and order maintained, but the Romans, wherever they went, were essentially a civilising force—as is clearly evidenced by their roads, buildings, baths, etc.—and, when the Empire was firmly established the standing army was considerably reduced, for the countries were peacefully and intelligently governed.

I do not think that Mr. Buchan would dispute all this. He grants that our legal code is based upon the Roman, and he compares the problems of the modern world with those which faced Augustus, saying: "In the actual business of administration there is no question of to-day (1937) which Augustus had not to face and answer." No condemnation of Christianity could be more complete. After 1,900 years of existence and 1,500 years of power, assisted by all the inventions of modern science, Christianity has left the world virtually no better than it was before the establishment of the Roman Empire. Augustus answered the questions and inaugurated a peaceful and prosperous rule, many years before a few Eastern mystics began raving about a Saviour Son of God. We, too, have to answer them. Our answer will be different from his, because conditions have altered, but there is much we can learn from him. War, he hated, and he indulged in it only when absolutely necessary. His object was peace, and his methods were wisdom and justice. That is a legacy, simple perhaps, but of great value, and, if civilisation is to be saved and life truly improved, we must make use of it. The "enduring bequest" of Christianity is, in contrast, the greatest obstacle to a great new world.

C. McCALL.

† I use the word in its true sense—the philosophy of Epicurus—not in its slanderous modern sense.

LIVING ON LIES

CERTAIN obscurantists find a practical proof of the utility of superstitions in the almost animal anxiety displayed in guarding religious and ethical premises from inquiry and criticism. Bad as are the quarrels of men of science and of artists, these are confined to the interested specialists, and the rest of mankind do not tear each other to pieces about Post-impressionism or the transmission of acquired characteristics. It is only about religious and moral questions (patriotism in its various modern aberrations partaking of both) that we find, in the field of mere belief and opinion, such universal tigris—and—young fear and ferocity. The result of all this jubilates our obscurantists, and is proof also of a racial instinct defending these matters. Possibly; but in that case how does your racial instinct set to work? And ought it not to have resulted in the survival of fetishism and taboo, or at least the disappearance of the races who first got rid of such useful superstitions.

Instead of racial instinct, so plentifully invoked (like every word compounded of those great Xs (Race and Races) nowadays, it is not possible that the persistence of superstitious attitudes may be explained by a mere individual instinct of which ails

* "Augustus," by John Buchan. Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1937. Page 125; subsequent quotations are from pages 343-5.

life furnishes many examples; the instinct to avoid taking trouble? And is not such conservatism born of lazy convenience of ready-made rules and averages; of the hurried and wearied reluctance to verify one's compass; of the discomfort, sometimes the paralysing discomfort, of readjusting opinions and conduct; in fact born of inertness such as makes the poor sluggard suffer agonies at being waked, and turn desperately on to the other ear?

Perhaps the obscurantist might answer that inertness, fatigue, sluggishness, are themselves Racial advantages, and due to the great Racial Instinct. Shall we conclude, that if people had been more alacrous and elastic, the human race would have ceased to have offspring, been gobbled up by Paleolithic monsters or (what obscurantists like less) that its finer varieties, for instance, the noble Aryan, would have philosophised themselves into non-resistance against the Negro, or even into inter-marriage with the Semites? This leads to the dilemma, either that the superior sub-race was not superior in intelligence and adaptive power, or that too much superiority may be a bad thing, with the manifest corollary that a dash of the Negro, a preponderance of the Semite, might have done the noble Aryan a world of good.

The proposition that prejudices may have been necessary for keeping up the standard or strain of superiority, would thus require eking out by a counter proposition that prejudices must be broken through to diminish that unpractical superiority. And both propositions would require the supplement of a remarkably terre a terre statement, namely, prejudices are sometimes mischievous. Or, put in more dignified language, superstitions may be the result of Racial Instinct, but if that be the case, then another result of Racial Instinct is the rebellious criticism of that self-same superstition.

So perhaps it is wiser, let alone more modest, not to let Racial Instinct, that vast smoky genius, out of his allegorical bottle. The persons, however, who insist upon having dealings with Racial Instinct, do not regard that huge personification as at all able to take care of himself, at least, not nowadays. In any case, they . . . seem always ready to lend him a hand in keeping up old superstitions or fabricating new ones. . . .

On this undeniable fact that half our belief result from mere personal or collective passion, habit, and convenience, latter-day Obscurantism finds its modest claim to believe useful and consoling things which do not happen to impose themselves on our reason as true. But beyond this point it passes immediately to the right of teaching such desirable things which we ourselves cannot believe, but other persons luckily still can. If you and I see no good reason why virtue and vice should get their deserts in Heaven and Hell, it does not very often happen that the advantageous results of such a doctrine enable us to believe it. But 'tis a fact of daily occurrence that these advantageous results induce us to teach eternal punishment to those who do not already disbelieve in it: or at all events to oppose ourselves to do anything that should awaken such disbelief. And from the right to teach or abet of what we cannot ourselves believe, Obscurantism goes one step further to the duty of doing so. . . .

In this propaganda of Vital Lies, lies the chief danger and odium of such applied Pragmatism; in this zeal for the moral edification of others, rather than in any individual paltering with truths, of which every one of us already unsuspectingly carries about as much as is possible. Moreover, besides the intellectual objection to such Obscurantism there is a moral—that is to say—a social one. Deceiving a man is tampering with his property, and jeopardising his freedom. It is taking an undue advantage, accepting the principle of fair play and not playing fair. For we cannot teach what we know to be a myth or a fallacy, without first making those whom we teach believe in the good faith we are breaking.

—“Vital Lies,” by VERNON LEE. Vol. II., pp. 142-8.

BAKER WULLIE

Again at the Throne of God,
Under the influence of his “Great Inspirer.”

Again, Oh God. I bow my knee,
Again I close my watery e'e.
Again, Oh God, I come to thee
Wi' praise and prayer;
Jamm't, God; yon answer you sent me
Was guid, but sair.

A lot has happened, God, since syne,
And I hae muckle on my min'—
That I would like to tell you fine,
Wi' a' my pith,
Oh make your fiercest light to shine
Upon “Tom Smith.”

'Tis he that has brewed a' this trouble,
'Tis he that's played me fause and double,
'Tis he that's caused this hellish hubble,
This wicked lark.
'Tis he that's burst my poet's bubble
And stripped me stark.

But God! I think the nasty whelp
To write the Prayer, mun hae got help.
I hardly see hoo he could skelp
And hit sae hard.
But I will leeve to mak him yelp,
Or I'm nae bard.

I canna noo, oh God, deny
That I was mean wi' him and Guy,
And wi' some ither friends forbye,
And damm't to hell!
I tell't fou mony a whuppin' lie
To screen mysel.

Oh God! 'twas my mistak, but then,
I didna rightly judge my men.
I thocht that they would quately hen'
And bear the brunt.
This book's been a' alang ye ken—
A money hunt.

To think that e'en the “King o' Hearts”
Has noo fun' oot my double arts,
And that he's takin' baith their parts—
And me accused,
The tear into my e'e, Lord, starts.
I'm sair abused.

I see my cronies laugh and wink.
I've little doot it's true, they think,
Particularly about the clink.
Is it well done?
Oh God! I whiles would like to sink
Into the grun'.

Oh God, I see within their e'en
They dinna think me a true frien'.
They ken ower well whit I hae been
An' nae mistak.
A silly B's the caird they preen
Upon my back.

DISILLUSIONMENT

TO have to face up to it that something that you have been taught to believe as unquestionably true has no more foundation in fact than the man in the moon, is, to say the least of it, at first disquieting and sometimes painful; but once the process of disillusionment has begun there is no telling what the end may be. It depends, of course, upon the general make-up of the person with the inquiring mind and the strength of his or her desire for enlightenment.

As children we are, or the majority of us are, taught traditional beliefs, not—let us be quite fair about this—because our parents or professional teachers have any desire to enslave our minds, but because either they know no better or they are not entirely free agents in the matter. Our parents may be the most devoted couple that ever lived and keenly desirous of helping us in every possible way, but if they are not themselves emancipated they obviously cannot be of much real assistance to us in our mental development. Similarly, if our schoolteachers are slaves to age-long thought and practice, or, alternatively, are forbidden by those who employ them to speak the truth and compelled—as so many of them are in fact compelled—to substitute fiction for fact, we start off with a serious handicap.

This handicap may remain with us to the end of our days and we may be quite unaware of its existence. If, in the passage of time, it is even hinted to us that we are lacking in knowledge on some subject, we may quite likely resent the implication of ignorance most strongly and—stay put; alternatively, if, appreciating our limitations, we seek a helping hand, we may perhaps become nervous and—crawl back into our shell; but if we have the courage to go on to the end with our quest for the truth the compensations are enormous.

To be sure, there is no easy way for the truth-seeker. On the contrary, in his determination to solve the problem of existence—and it is with that in mind that the enthusiast so often starts out—he is bound to receive some pretty hard knocks. For example, to discover—as he will do, of course, sooner or later—that instead of being specially created, with a God-implanted soul and the ability to do the right and proper thing at all times if only he had the will to do it, he is nothing more or less than a glorified animal, that he has a kinship with the rest of the animal kingdom and is in many ways a slave to the past and, further, that he must try to “save” himself and not expect someone else to do this for him—to discover all this, and much more besides, is sure to give the orthodox inquirer a terrific jolt. It is inevitable—having regard to what the new knowledge displaces and what it means once it is properly absorbed. It is inevitable, too, that when the seeker after truth realises how relatively insignificant and unimportant he is—relatively, that is to say, to the immensity of the universe and the countless other creatures of all sorts, shapes and sizes there are on just this one planet on which he lives—he will receive another and perhaps even greater shock. It all depends on what his birth and early training have made of him and how he has hitherto regarded himself.

And having got rid of his encumbrances—his religious precepts and practices—he will probably next turn his attention to his fellow men, although possibly the truth-seeker may have studied these at one and the same time so as to determine his own relationship to the rest of the community. In any case, he will discover at some time or other that they, like him, are but the products of the earth, with a very long, cruel and careless past, far more inclined to think of themselves than anyone else; pleasure-seekers mostly, that the consciousness with which he is possessed is a comparatively recent development of man, and that that—called by the ancients and some moderns “soul,” “spirit,” “still small voice” and what not—is the only thing that he has to depend upon for his “salvation.”

It is just there where some students have taken fright. Having been taught to believe that they may, if they so desire, rely on someone else for support and secure a suitable reward in the hereafter, they fall by the wayside and, later, beat a hasty retreat. Statistics alone are convincing, but it is probably correct to say that the great majority of people who get thus far—that is to say, who have the courage to delve into the why and wherefore of things and earnestly desire to understand themselves and, as far as this is humanly possible, their place in the universe—never turn back. True it is that everyone who outgrows his youthful knowledge does not openly say so. Indeed, it has to be admitted that for some social, economic or political reason, a few are known to hesitate to state quite frankly what they know to be true. But of this there is no doubt: deliberately to seek disillusionment and to follow the truth fearlessly no matter where it may lead, brings a joy and—ultimately—a contentment which no other pursuit can possibly do. To know, even approximately, what you are, and to have perhaps no more than a nodding acquaintance with the forces which have contributed to your physical and mental make-up, is far more satisfying to the sane and sensible man than mere belief or conjecture. It most certainly helps you to stand up against whatever befalls you in your public or private life. Indeed, without the knowledge, life to some would be quite intolerable.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

UNDER the banner-headline “Learn before we teach,” “John Bull” is “Agreed that religious teaching should be available in all State-controlled or State-aided schools.”

Agreed, herein, that we should “Learn before we teach,” yet also “Look before you leap.”

What do the Churches mean by pressing so furiously that “religious teaching should be available in the schools”? What have the Churches done to deserve this “availability”? How will the Churches use this privilege? How may they abuse it?

Is there not an overflowing enough of this availability “available” already? Are there too few Cathedrals, Chapels, Churches, Synagogues, Salvation Halls, Christian Science Schools, Meeting Houses, Young Women’s Christian Association rooms, Young Men’s Christian Association rooms, Jehovah’s Witnesses hide-outs, Bible-class rooms, Radio lessons, Radio services, all running full overtime without “trade union” hours, seven days and nights to the week to make “religious teaching available” to the child?

Are there not enough popes, archbishops, cardinals, bishops, fathers, rectors, friars grey, vicars, friars black, rabbis, parsons, monks, deacons, nuns, deaconesses, salvation captains, lay-preachers, Sunday-school teachers, to provide enough “availability” for the youngsters?

Does not “The Universe,” “The Catholic Herald,” “The Christian Herald,” “The Christian Monitor,” “The War Cry,” “The Parish Magazine,” plus a host of others, plus millions of Tracts, plus The Bible, provide enough “availability”?

What has the Church done? It filched the Sunday-schools, and prostituted them by “religious” teaching. The original purpose of Sunday-schools was to educate and instruct the illiterate upon the only day these slaves had to call their own.

Certainly, it founded some schools. Schools where facts were denied, science denounced, and stupidity enthroned. It gave us a Devil and a Hell everlasting.

Christianity has controlled Christendom for at least sixteen hundred years. During these centuries it has accomplished nothing at all for the good of man that could not have been

better done without it. It has not added one thing to the sum of useful knowledge.

It pretended to have a revelation from God. It denied others the right to read it. It fought wildly against it being translated. It fought fiercely against the education necessary to read its Bible. A Bishop of London made a bonfire of all he could find.

This Bible was Divinely Inspired. Now only partly so. It would select the parts. Yet all Freethinkers know the Bible to be crammed with contradictions, absurdities, atrocities, unfulfilled prophecies, broken promises, immoralities, obscenities and crude, ignorant writings. It did not know that the Earth is global, or that America existed, or that the sun was somewhat larger than earth. The Church taught the awful doctrine of witchcraft. It punished by death freely and readily old women and young children for the impossible crime of being "in league with the devil." It supported slavery and quoted passages of its Bible to prove itself right in the name of "The Lord."

It invented the mad tortures of the Inquisition. It declared wars "holy," yet secured "exemption from military service." Whatso it undertakes is selected, "coupon free," highly paid, comparatively "soft."

"He smelleth the battle afar off" (Job).

It preaches forgiveness, yet never forgave one opponent—never. It now seeks to thrust its lies and hypocrisy down the throats of infants; and for this reason alone we "Write the vision, and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that readeth it" [Habakkuk], and "Look before he leaps."

B. B. B.

HEAVEN CAN WAIT

Every Christian longs for the time when he will "live with God," but when he is seriously ill his call is for a better doctor than he has at the moment. A really interesting film we saw recently, "Heaven can Wait," describes the situation of the pious. A trip to heaven, with no return tickets, would not secure the patronage of 1 per cent of the Christian community, and we are certain that none of the clergy would ask for a ticket.

CORRESPONDENCE

A QUERY.

SIR,—Some time in the 'eighties the English biologist, Professor St. George Mivart, published, or otherwise recorded the result of certain of his researches in connection with the doctrine of evolution.

The Holy Roman Church, I believe, threatened him, as a Catholic, with excommunication if he did not recant. Can any of your readers kindly tell me what was considered subversive of the teaching of the Church, and if the sentence was inflicted?—Yours, etc.,

EDGAR SYERS.

THE B.B.C.

SIR,—One of the brainier of the B.B.C. Brains Trustees, Commander Gould, has shrewdly described the stages whereby superstition combats progressive ideas until overcome by their general acceptance. The first attitude of the reactionaries is total repudiation, to be qualified later—when the trend of respectable opinion is observed—by a grudging admission that there may be more in the new ideas than they at first thought. The third stage, when their position has become quite untenable, is the barefaced declaration that they believed in the progressive notions all the time.

An apt illustration of this process appears in the "Daily Mail" for March 21 in a contribution by the ponderous Lord Elton, who approves of honest sex instruction for the young, and is glad we are liberated from Victorian prudery by a healthier attitude towards sex, which, he declares, is the true Christian view of the subject.

That statement is glaringly untrue. Victorian churchmen led the resistance to all who advocated a sane view of the subject. They supported the prosecution of Annie Besant, Charles Bradlaugh, and other pioneers of the modern attitude; their influence directed the censorship on Havelock Ellis; now the same hypocrites take credit for the cleansing of the subject from the dirt with which Christian holiness has always invested it.—Yours, etc.,

J. McILWAIN.

"WAR AND THE FUTURE."

SIR,—Mr. A. H. Millward, after a preliminary skirmish, returns to the attack with "universal law" and "international force." Of the latter we have tragic experience, which is merely "the continuation of politics by other means," as Clausewitz remarked. As necessity knows no law, being a force unto itself, force knows no reason, for might beats right. Freedom and justice are not seen in the picture which Mr. Millward's "imagination fondly stoops to trace," and "universal law" remains undefined. We may be sure, however, that man will remain confined in contemplation of the Power which will hold him in "universal awe," because "Power, like a desolating pestilence, pollutes whate'er it touches," said Shelley. The plaintive exhortation to the stalwarts of Freethought to participate in the world butchery is tantamount to a plea on behalf of power-politics and all the evils which attend in its train. And many of us who fought in the last war know the value of promises made by politicians. "Never again," they cried, and must we be held culpable if we take them at their word and echo "Never again?" "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is an excellent maxim if only we could effect it. But what has that to do with "War and the Future"? Everything or—nothing, according how you look at it.—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

OBITUARY

MARK JAMES MATHIE

Our sympathy is with Mr. C. J. Mathie in the loss of his son, Mark James Mathie, aged 15, which took place on March 24 from cerebro-spinal meningitis, after a painful illness. Artistic and refined in character, he was a promising student at the Acton Technical College. The remains were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on Thursday, March 30, where, before an assembly of members and relatives of the family, and students representing the Acton Technical College, a Secular Service was conducted by the General Secretary, N.S.S. The surviving parent, Mr. C. J. Mathie, is son of the late secretary of the Fulham Branch, N.S.S.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon. Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields: Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Mr. L. EBURY.
West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Various speakers.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.
Kingston-on-Thames and District Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Messrs. T. W. BROWN and J. W. BARKER.

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