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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 130)

Holy Church and the Inquisition

EVER since the war commenced we have had from B.B.C. preachments, articles in the (religious) press and tales from different chaplains with the Forces that the men ("boys" is the more affectionate term while the war is on) are taking more interest in religion than they did in the 1914 conflict. We accept this as solid truth—so far as talks about religion are concerned. But if only a part of our reports are true, and if our experience by post and by conversations with the "boys" may be trusted, we do not think the clergy have any great cause for jollity. For the interest in religion is shown more by way of criticism than by that of acceptance. We are not at all surprised to find that many of the clergymen with the troops are quite decent fellows, and this may well lead to their being hailed as such "decent chaps." But it is also the case that if the clergy give them religious talks they are likely to find they get the cold shoulder and open themselves to very awkward questions which are anything but pleasing to God's representatives in the war zone. After all, the rise in the education of the people as a whole has found its repercussion in the greater intellectual independence of the people. Of course, commanders who may have no great belief in religion themselves are to be found ordering large religious processions, under some sort of a feeling that it helps to keep the men in order; but if church parades and the like were left to the men themselves most of the padres might as well come home. Religion to-day is very considerably a sham. Politicians treat it with respect for fear of losing votes; tradesmen because they are afraid of losing customers; many of the "upper" classes because they believe it keeps the common people in order; writers because it evades the boycott—and the clergy call high heaven to witness the importance of it because it is their trade so to do. Writing in the middle of the last century, Heine said that if one spoke to an Englishman on politics he was almost certain to hear something sensible; but if you spoke to him on religion he was as certain to say something foolish. Things have altered very little since Heine's time—save that there is a greater proportion who say something sensible.

The Crime of Heresy

It was one of the more intelligent number in the armed Forces who sent us a copy of the Roman Catholic pamphlet "Stella Maris," with its— We will leave the reader to call it by the name it richly deserves. It would seem that the writer, W. Lawson (S.J.), had been asked why the Inquisition—a strictly Christian creation—put so many men to death for heresy. It is this reply, written for the benefit of the Forces, with which we are dealing. Mr.

Lawson gives two answers. In the first place he says that "in the earliest days of the Church anyone holding false doctrines was excommunicated." Well, that was all, at that stage, the Christian Church could do; but for brutality—and often obscene brutality—nothing the world knows can equal the Christian Church until we reach Hitlerism. Then we have the picture of men giving vent to obscene brutality in the name of Jesus Christ and on the authority of the Church. We cannot expect good Christians to accept our valuation of the ethical quality of Christianity, so we give a small part of an excommunication curse out of a collection that lies before us:—

"By the authority of God . . . of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost . . . and of all the heavenly Virtues, Angels, Cherubim and Seraphim . . . we expel him from the Holy Church of God . . . and as fire is quenched with water, so may his light be quenched for ever and ever. Be he accursed of God the Son . . . of St. Peter, and St. Paul and St. Andrew. . . . Let him be accursed wherever he be. . . . Let him be accursed outside and inside . . . living and dying, eating, drinking, fasting . . . slumbering, walking, standing, sitting. Let him be accursed in his brain . . . in the crown of his head, in his temples . . . in his stomach and liver, in his kidneys, in his loins, in his hips, in his —, in his thighs . . . let him be accursed in every joint of his body. . . . Amen. So be it."

That is about a tenth of the curse. It covers the accursed from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet; nothing is left out. As an exhibition of sheer erotic malignity we know nothing like it in human records. We must remember also that this was born of Christianity; there was nothing to equal it in antiquity. And Mr. Lawson (of the Society of Jesus) points out that excommunication was in use in the early days of Christianity. If excommunication was in force when the Church itself was struggling for existence, it would be foolish to look for improvement—ethically—when it wielded full power. As a kind of justification for the savagery of the Church, Mr. Lawson remarks that as early as the fourth century Christian sects "used to have gangs of toughs who broke up Catholic meetings and wrecked Catholic churches. Sometimes they went as far as murder." Quite an interesting sidelight on the picture of kind and lovable Christians who are said to have astonished the pagan world by their gentleness. Mr. Lawson adds that "the Christian (Catholic) emperors from Constantine onward dealt severely with them, and others, putting some to death and punishing many with beatings and imprisonment." So we get on. The earliest glimpses we get of Christians disclose a quarrelsome, brutal mob of fanatics; and when Constantine was converted he showed his zeal by making heresy—for the first time in Roman history—a criminal offence. Mr.

Lawson, as a good Catholic, sees nothing wrong in this, for, says he, the heretics were disseminating poison, and the secular Government, inspired by the Catholic Church, made heresy a capital offence. One is not surprised to find the cultured Roman, Ammianus Mæcellinus, saying that "no savage beasts could equal the cruelty of Christians one to another" (cited by Dill: "Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire"). The gentle, loving Christian becomes a rather shadowy kind of a creature when one honestly looks for him. At any rate, we have a responsible Christian telling us—or, rather, telling some of his dupes—that to advocate opinions which do not agree with the Roman Church is equal to giving poison to children, and that heresy is a crime to be forcibly suppressed. This puts the continuous practise of persecution of the Roman Church in a quite favourable light. The Church, says Mr. Lawson, was really working for the perpetual purification of human society. But there is some doubt that what the Roman Catholic Church calls a "purified human society" would be recognised as such outside the limits of Roman Catholic rule.

The Inquisition

"Inquisition" is a word that stinks in the nostrils of all freedom-loving men and women. We may even include in this generalisation the majority of Protestants, who, as they never happened to have had the same opportunities for intolerance that the Roman Church had, have gained credit for not doing that which it had opportunity of accomplishing. It is true that the Protestants indulged in intolerance so far as opportunity offered itself, but the difference between bodies of Protestants made it very difficult to be as completely intolerant as the older Church. In one instance it did create a policy that was even more insidious in its influence for evil than that of the parent Church. It invented the evil of a State Church. The Roman Catholics would not accept any such institution unless it was embodied in itself. In any case, the Papacy demanded unfettered control over religion, morals and education; and, that once gained, there were ways in which the Church could get the State to fall in with its proposals. Above all, it possessed the terrible weapon of excommunication. The Church claimed the religious allegiance of the people, and among the people was the secular ruler. Conflicts between these two powers occurred, but for centuries the Church won. It was, therefore, not impossible for the Church to enforce its rule over the secular prince—not as a prince, but as an authority from God. As a Catholic, the ruling prince must do nothing that would interfere with the spiritual power of the Church established by Jesus Christ.

There is another point to be borne in mind. Mr. Lawson, in common with other Catholic defenders of the faith, denies that the Church ever killed anyone for the crime of heresy. That is true; but it is one of those truths that are more objectionable than a straightforward lie. The Church could and did imprison for heresy, for denying the truth of the Christian religion, or for making statements against the teaching of the Church. (One may remember the case of Galileo, made by the Church to deny what he knew to be true, of Bruno, burned at the stake after being tortured in the cells of the Inquisition.) But it is a truth that is the equivalent of a lie. It is what one might call a "Christian truth," since it is true in the letter but a howling, deliberate lie in the fact.

Pulling down a book dealing with this topic, I discover in its pages a cutting from "The Universe," a few years old but which will better expose the lie that Mr. Lawson offers his dupes as a truth. First, says "The Universe," "the Church must be doctrinally intolerant. It cannot admit other religions on an equal footing with itself. It alone has the right to teach mankind, and the human race has the collective duty to accept the divine message"; and it goes on to say that, with the secular government of a Catholic State, "heresy might well take the form of a civil crime as well as a spiritual offence."

We will undo this rather torturous passage in a moment. At present we must note another pertinent fact if we are to understand how a lie in the mouth of an ordinary citizen becomes a "Christian truth" when we are dealing with Catholic Church matters. The Church was concerned with morals, religion and education. The State governed the rest—taxes, war, and the normal secular doings of civil life. This division was unknown to the ancient world. We owe it to the bare fact that the Christian Church came to maturity gradually, establishing its own independence but leaving the State with its own sphere of activity. The word "secular" is of Christian origin.

This will explain why the Church could charge a man with blasphemy or heresy, or both; could retain the right to examine suspected "sinners" and find them guilty or not guilty—but if guilty could go no further than torture and imprisonment. The individual still remained, so to speak, the property of the secular State. To have executed a subject of the State, whether serf or freeman, was trespassing upon non-religious ground; and the owner of the prisoner was robbed of his property by the execution of a person. In addition, it was part of the Church law that a priest must not shed blood, that he must not kill, and the Church considerably handed over the condemned prisoner to the State, asking only that there should be no shedding of blood. The victim was burned—and the priest kept within Church law.

Now, we think, readers will understand why our Jesuit says the Church did not execute its prisoners. It did not. It handed them over to the State with a declaration of their proven guilt of committing a religious offence, and demanded the death of the sinner at the hands of the secular powers. There is a great deal in such a phrase as "Christian truth"!

Next week we will deal further with the Inquisition—still following Mr. Lawson.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded)

THE DISINTEGRATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THE year 1938 is certain to be remembered as a sinister period of European history. It witnessed the Nazi rape of Austria and the unfortunate Munich compact, when these dire events paved the path for Hitler's premeditated invasion and conquest of Poland and the subsequent German occupation of the Low Countries, Norway, Denmark and France.

In what Hitler termed "a great, incomparable, proud year," he annexed considerable territory and 10,000,000 Germans to the Reich. Prior to his invasion of Austria and the Republic of Czechoslovakia, he pelted their leading public men with pitiless abuse. On each occasion, he solemnly intimated that with the

annexation then accomplished, Germany's territorial ambitions were completely satisfied.

Poland was approached with fulsome protestations of eternal friendship, and Hitler declared that it was essential to establish firm and lasting relations with Warsaw. This understanding could be easily obtained, he said, because he was dealing not with a fickle democracy, but with a realist statesman. The Dantzig question need cause no trouble, for he averred that: "A State with a population of 33,000,000 will always strive for an access to the sea." In the light of later events, these pious protestations assume an ironical aspect. The Fuehrer's brazen mendacity, shameless duplicity and loathsome hypocrisy seem almost to eclipse the performances of all past practisers of these malevolent arts.

The main documents concerning the startling events that led to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia now appear in Vol. II. of "Documents on International Affairs, 1938" (Oxford University Press, 1943). Thus, the reader is now in a position to form a fairly unbiased opinion concerning the pursuit of a policy which reduced a progressive Republic to a pitiful ruin.

Formerly a part of the old ramshackle Austrian Empire, the State created by the Treaty of Versailles was certain to lack coherence. And in the Danubian region, a nationalist spirit is so powerful and pervasive that it assumes a fanatically religious character. In consequence, the stability of a highly composite State, such as Czechoslovakia was ever in danger. Indeed, when the well-advertised grievances of the Sudeten Germans resident in the Republic were made the pretext for Nazi intervention, and the world trembled on the brink of widespread war, the difficulties of a pacific settlement baffled the ingenuity of those statesmen whose chief anxiety was the avoidance of a European conflict.

That the Czechoslovakian problem was beset with difficulties, and that those who desired peace at any price, were confronted with an almost insoluble problem the following facts testify.

It has been said that minorities are certain to suffer: it is the badge of their tribe. That the Sudeten Germans experienced disabilities is admitted. Still, they were better treated than in any other adjoining State containing a mixed population. For, as Monica Curtis states, "the distinction of being not only the largest but also one of the least badly treated of all the German minorities which had been placed by the peace settlement under non-German rule" was undoubtedly theirs. Their subjection aroused unusual attention from the fact that they constituted the largest minority in a State which consisted, according to the 1930 census of 7,447,000 Czechs, 3,231,000 Germans, 2,309,000 Slovaks and more than a million Magyars, Ruthenians and Poles.

Moreover, as members of the old Austrian Empire, the Germans were the dominant community, and they bitterly resented the reversal of fortune. Also, they enjoyed ampler opportunities for the ventilation of their alleged grievances under the liberal and enlightened administration of President Masaryk, while other minorities were practically ignored.

The advent of Hitler naturally intensified trouble in Czechoslovakia. The sufferings of the Sudeten Germans, such as they were, were magnified beyond recognition by Nazi agitators and propagandists. To this was added the circumstance that the Sudeten Germans were greatly impoverished by the world trade depression, and they were readily persuaded that their economic troubles had been deliberately engineered by the dominant Czechs. Also, it is cogently urged that "the frenzy of emotional racialism which had swept over Germany affected a large section of the Sudeten German population, too, and gave their already strong nationalism a dynamic and irreconcilable character. But the third and most important factor was Herr Hitler's ambition to dominate Europe; for this required the destruction of the obstacle constituted by the Czechoslovakian State with its relations

with the Western Powers and Soviet Russia. It was because the internal controversy between Czechs and Germans offered Hitler the means of disrupting the Republic that this controversy became an international factor in the European struggle for power."

A German pretence of a desire to preserve the integrity of Czechoslovakia was solemnly announced at the time of the Austrian annexation. Goering and Ribbentrop each assured Czechoslovakia that Germany would certainly respect the Arbitration Treaty between the two States of 1925. Yet, despite these solemn assurances, the Sudeten Germans were greatly stimulated by the overthrow of Austria, and they generally anticipated that the armies of the Reich would immediately invade Sudetenland, and Henlein's party, which had been weakened by internal scandals, recovered its earlier strength. Again the Sudeten members of the Czech Parliament grew aggressive, while the other German sections which had previously collaborated with the Czech authorities now joined the opposing party.

The Czech Prime Minister, Dr. Hodza, announced the intention of his Government to introduce ameliorative measures, but this promise failed to pacify the truculent demeanour the Sudeten Germans had adopted. And now the Slovaks, while proclaiming their loyalty to the State, demanded autonomy and the Poles proffered a similar request.

The Czech President, Dr. Benes, earnestly appealed to the various minorities to co-operate in solving the perplexing problems which confronted the distracted State. Political prisoners were released and the postponed elections were soon to follow.

Negotiations were conducted but with little success, and then Henlein demanded the right of self-determination for his "oppressed" compatriots. In truth, Henlein's claims were utterly incompatible with the preservation of an independent Czechoslovakian Republic. For instance, he asserted their right to hold and openly express the Nazi philosophy. And, as Monica Curtis points out, this doctrine "implied a racial loyalty centred in the Reich which would take preference over loyalty to the Czechoslovak State; and it was based on the anti-democratic principles which meant the suppression of opposition opinion and were thus incompatible with the whole ethical basis of a democratic State."

Henlein's oration aroused a chorus of condemnation in Czech circles. Tension increased, and the May Day demonstrations, both Nazi and anti-Nazi, added fuel to the fire. The Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, M. Krofta, feared a German invasion, and Henlein visited London and strove to assure the English opponents of German aggression of the real moderation of his claims. Presumably, he was also anxious to ascertain the extent of Britain's probable resistance to Nazi interference in Czechoslovakia's internal affairs. On his return he passed through Germany, and it is more than suspected that he conferred with Hitler.

So strained became relations, despite official German denials of evil intentions, that the Czechs partly mobilised their army. Throughout the May crisis it was feared that the arch-schemer Hitler was only awaiting a convenient opportunity for the disintegration of the Czech State. This, as we unfortunately know, he succeeded in accomplishing, while Nazi encouragement given to the Polish, Hungarian and other minorities in their demands for territorial cession so weakened and impoverished the Czechoslovakian State that it was reduced to complete insignificance before its ultimate extinction by its rapacious German enemies.

This shameful story makes painful reading. For, in their anxiety to preserve peace, in their September compact, France and England made Czechoslovakia the victim of Nazi greed and aggression without the consent of the State that was disintegrated by the concessions granted to the Reich.

(Continued on page 148)

ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of Canterbury prepared a special prayer for the Jews to be used on Good Friday. But it was not the kind of prayer that an honest and intelligent believer ought to offer. The prayer should take the form of thanking the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. For it was part of the plan arranged by God the Father and Jesus the Son that the latter should come to earth, and after giving a first-class exhibition in the miracle line, should be put to death, and that through his death God the Father would forgive all who followed Jesus for the crime that their first parents committed a long, long time ago. It is quite obvious that if the Jews had not spurred the Roman Governor to sacrifice Jesus—although he personally found no evil in him—the whole plan of salvation would have broken down. The Jews saved the situation. They also saved the followers of Jesus. They have been saving Christians ever since, although whether it was worth while to save the like is quite another question.

The Rev. Dr. John Heenan thinks that we have much to thank God for. We quite see the point. A sense of helplessness, and the fact that all war causes civilised life to take a lower step, with a dash of fear, gives religion a chance, and the war has at least enabled a Tory Government to replant religion in the schools in a way that would have been impossible had the war not occurred. We quite appreciate the religious point of view.

According to Urbanus, one of the writers of the "Church Times," the days of the old parish clergyman are over. The accent now is on Youth, and we are to have a new type, an "Admirable Crichton," young, vigorous, alert, with a knowledge of many up-to-date things, not only including sports of all kinds, but all sorts of activities of the mind (arts and crafts, broadcasts, debates, sex education, and dozens more similar things) and activities of the spirit, such as community living, church service squads, Sunday programmes, and all the usual church activities. It is a brilliant idea, and the only snag seems to be this—would any young man with all these qualifications wish to remain in the Church? Would any intelligent young man who could learn all these things swallow the religious nonsense which forms the bulk of organised and historic Christianity? Young Crichton may have beaten the trained theologian of his day in public debate, but would anybody with a quarter of his intelligence really believe in Christianity *these* days?

The "Church Times" is not satisfied with the B.B.C. religious services. They are not "liturgical" (in common language, not "bluggy" enough). But a correspondent reminds the editor that beggars cannot be choosers. He reminds everybody concerned that—

the attendances at church have fallen to a desperately low level, and this is chiefly because the people *en masse* are out of touch and sympathy with language, forms and statements which were acceptable to their ancestors 400 years ago.

Put in plain language, the writer is telling us that Christianity is out of date and is rapidly declining.

That much is obvious to everyone, and not only to those interested in the maintenance of Christian doctrines, either because their intelligence cannot rise to the level of modern thought on the subject, or because their self-interest prevents their acting honestly to the public, or because vested interest persuades them to pretend to believe in a religion that belongs to the dark ages. There is, of course, another indication of the position of affairs, and that is the new Tory Education Bill, which aims at so saturating the people's schools with religion that they may, to some extent, stop the religious rot.

Another example of the "rot" is the desperate attempts of the Churches to seek new converts in the field of war. But here they have to some extent defeated their own ends. The Forces are deluged with tracts and the kind "padres" are as busy as can be, while the B.B.C. almost eclipses its own religious lying by backing up the Army padres and other methods. But here again there is a fatal obstacle. First, the average "Tommy" is on the whole on a better educational level than he was in the

last war. Second, there is a far greater number of discussions on religion taking place, and the poor padres are often compelled to beat a rather ignominious retreat, and there is, as we know, a much larger number of avowed Freethinkers among the officers. Finally, although we have no official figures, and have to judge from reports, a much larger proportion of soldiers have declared themselves as having no religion than was the case in the last war. And politicians might well consider that these will not be more friendly to the Government when they find the schools of the people soaked in the more ignorant forms of the Christian superstition.

Complete and accurate information concerning many of the "sacred" characters is sadly wanting. The Catholic Church, which has such detailed information concerning the denizens of the after-world, are strikingly ill-informed about the "sacred" characters on whom the Christian story rests. So we are not surprised that when the Catholic "Universe" is asked the age of the Virgin Mary when she died, can only reply that there is a "tradition" that she died at the age of 58. One would have thought that the date, place, etc., would have been very clearly noted. After all, without her the whole Christian story would collapse. And what about poor Joseph? Suppose he had been less accommodating than he was when the angel told him that the child with which he had nothing to do was his, decided that his vision was just a "pipe dream." What then? All husbands would not have been quite as accommodating as he was. It is really curious that so little is known about Mary and her husband. And when the mother of God does appear in the gospels her son greets her with: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" which is not a very polite way of addressing one's mother, to say the least of it.

Lucky charms, Catholic beads and medals, to say nothing of Bibles, have all played their part in saving soldiers' lives—though we have heard that many a tin cigarette box or pack of cards have been equally opportune. Then there is the power of deep, deep prayer—that is almost infallible. Another striking example has just been circulated in the religious press. A U.S. Marauder bomber had scribbled on it by an unknown airfield mechanic: "God bless the crew of this plane I will say a prayer for your safe return." This did the trick. The bomber had 50 weeks of constant combat, never suffered a casualty, and got back to the U.S.A. quite safely. What a pity similar homage to God is not written on all Allies' planes—it would mean no losses whatever; while if the Germans did the same they would suffer no losses either. It's a beautiful thought, but we have an idea that even a full-blooded Catholic would see the snag in the game if everybody did it.

The Provost of Bradford (Canon Tiarks), speaking at a Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society meeting, suggested that singing evangelists should be sent to our prisons as one way of persuading the inmates to go straight after their release. At first we thought this was just the Provost's little joke—until he mentioned that when his father was chaplain at Ipswich Jail he himself used to go and sing to the prisoners. For our part, we can only draw the Provost's attention to a statement made by Mr. Herbert Morrison, who said: "The prisoner is sent to prison as a punishment, not for punishment."

The Provost is also very fond of talking about "the moral landslide," but, as we have suspected, it is not a moral landslide that he is concerned about, but the religious landslide. In order to justify the "back to the churches" stunt, it is necessary to-day for the clergy to allege that there is a moral landslide. Obviously, people cannot be more moral without religion—according to the religionist! But that it is a religious, and not a moral landslide, that disturbs the Church is evident when the Provost, looking for a cause for the alleged immorality of the people, says "one has to go back further for the real cause—to the teaching of the old Secularists, like T. H. Huxley, who attacked Christian doctrine." If the Provost will substitute the words "religious landslide" for "moral landslide," and add a few more distinguished names (some of them present-day) to that of the elder Huxley, we will heartily concur in his statements

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SUGAR PLUMS

LET a Freethinker appear with the grace of Shakespeare and the wisdom of Plato, so long as he is criticising Christianity, he is ignored by the professional champions of Christianity. But let him write something foolish about religion and he is given the widest possible publicity. Of course, a passage in a book or in a speech regarding religion that is clearly foolish may bring the writer or speaker on a level with a defender of orthodox Christianity; it carries with it what is called a deep sense of religious values, which in nine cases out of ten is no more than a display of elaborate nonsense. But it is that which really brings the Freethinker, for a time, on an habitual level with the modern defender of the faith.

Here is an example of what has been said, offered us by the "Daily Telegraph's" preacher, the Rev. L. B. Ashby, who every Saturday provides a half column of foolishness to help his Christian brothers over a Christian Sunday. In a recent issue he cites the following well-known passage from John Stuart Mill concerning Jesus. Says Mr. Ashby:—

"Let an avowed agnostic, John Stuart Mill, be heard: 'Whatever else may be taken from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left, a unique figure. It is no use to say that the portrait of Him in the Gospels is not historical, for who among His disciples or their converts was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Him or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels?'"

It is a help to understand the twisted intelligence of a professional theologian to note that this is not a matter of weighing up the values of a particular utterance, so much as an exhibition of complete unacquaintance of the subject in hand. Mill, quite wrongly, attributes to the gospel Jesus an originality of which none of his followers, or of the people around him, were capable. But, as a matter of fact, substantially all the chief sayings attributed to Jesus are to be found in the Old Testament, and therefore were quite well known to the Jews he was addressing. For example, Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," but it was already in the old Bible—"The meek shall inherit the earth." Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," but the Bible already said, "The spirit of the Lord . . . will comfort all that mourn." Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," but the Psalms had already said "that the man with a pure heart shall ascend the hill of the Lord." Jesus promised a penalty to him who was angry with his brother, but so does the Book of Leviticus, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine

heart." So one might go on with saying after saying and find they had been said, not merely in the Old Bible, but in pre-Christian and pagan writings.

Now it is rather difficult to believe that Mr. Ashby is not acquainted with these parallels, although one has to allow for the deadening effect on the mind of having gone through a religious training. But it is quite clear that when Mill, a man who was a real lover of truth, falls a victim to the falsities of the Christian propagandist, one ought to deal gently when the ordinary man falls a victim for the systematic untruthfulness of professional Christian advocates. There is comparatively nothing new in the story of Jesus from his birth to his resurrection. Mill we can forgive, for he was not brought up a Christian and so probably had no great familiarity with the old Bible. But what are we to say of the paid professor of religion who quotes as indisputable a statement which has only sheer ignorance of the contents of the old Bible for its foundation? Mr. Ashby says that it was the uniqueness of Jesus that impressed Mill and also his followers. Exactly the contrary is the case, and Mr. Ashby ought to know that is so. We shall have to hurry up with the second part of "Christianity: What Is It?"

In an excellent little work by Humphrey House entitled "The Dickens World," dealing with the many problems which confronted Charles Dickens as a reformer, there is a chapter on religion, and Mr. House claims that "Tom Paine, a convinced deist, had little lasting popular influence" in England. We are afraid the author has got it all wrong. Paine's "Age of Reason" has been a best-seller ever since it was first published, and its influence has been so enormous that, except with some of the little Bethels, the whole conception of the Bible of Paine's day has profoundly changed. Paine is indeed one of the first and greatest of the Bible critics.

Professor Raven, Cambridge, says that the Christian leaders are less in a position, from the Christian standpoint, to meet and co-operate with scientific workers than they were ten years ago. We agree, but what can Professor Raven expect? We are yearly learning more about the origins of religion, and understanding of its development, and no one realises this more than Professor Raven: that the more we understand the origin and evolution of religious ideas, the more certain are we that our scientific knowledge cuts right across all religious beliefs.

Professor Raven suggests that the situation is more and more against the priesthood making offer of a favourable partnership. Now is that possible? What can the Churches offer science as regards either method or matter? It was not the clergy or any system of religion that enabled us to explain the origin of religious ideas. Some clergymen and some professing Christians have helped by their researches, but they did so at the cost of weakening the religion they swore by. It is not for the professional preacher to suggest to the scientist the significance of his own researches. No priest, as priest, gave to the anthropologist any help along the road that begins with savages and ends with the scientist. Health is not made by disease, although disease may urge one to discover the road that leads to perfect health.

In the course of his lengthy illness, confined as he was to his bed, Heinrich Heine remarked to one of his friends that if he could only get out on crutches he would go straight to church. His visitor was greatly surprised and exclaimed, "You would go to church?" "Yes," replied Heine, "where else should one go to—on crutches? I faith, if one could walk without crutches, I should prefer to stroll along the lively Boulevard."

We doubt if Christians would ever have registered their supreme pleasure at finding God if it had not been they believed they were dodging the devil. On the other hand, we have reflected on the slur on Satan's taste when the Christian assumed that Satan was overjoyed at his capture.

We have never said that priests believe all they preach. We do not care to slander even those with whom we disagree on matters of opinion.

COUCHOUD'S "CREATION OF CHRIST"

I.

MOST of the Deists of the 18th century and the Freethinkers of the 19th were content, in attacking Christianity, to confine their analysis of the Bible to demonstrating its absurdities, inconsistencies and contradictions. If there were a God, he simply could not have been the author or inspirer of such a work glorifying, as it did, characters like the adulterer David, or the butcher Joshua. The way in which the Jews massacred the Philistines or Jesus consigned heretics to hell for eternity proved, beyond the shadow of reasonable doubt, that the Bible was merely a pack of ridiculous legends and myths, and as such should require the allegiance of no man.

What a good many of these critics shirked was to explain the origin of the Bible. Who wrote it, how did it come into being, when and where and why was it written at all?

It is true a few attempts were later made, particularly by the—so-called—Higher Critics. They certainly put considerable scholarship to the task, but even they were not altogether happy in explaining Abraham, Moses, David or Jesus. For the majority, the Bible heroes represent real people who had the misfortune to be written up with the help of all sorts of more or less barbarous stories, till the real personage behind was overwhelmed with myth and legend.

This is how so many people describe Jesus. Not only Christians, but most Freethinkers, are quite convinced that, behind the Bible story as related in the Gospels, there is a great and good man, possibly the greatest man who ever trod the earth, who went about "doing good," and who gave to the world the most marvellous system of ethics and morals ever produced in the Universe. Christians claim that Jesus must have been the Son of God because of this, and numbers of Rationalists agree in nearly everything except the Divinity part which is just a little too much to swallow.

It is interesting to note that even Atheists like Ingersoll and Bradlaugh preferred to discuss anything rather than face the fact that nearly all the Bible heroes, including Jesus, are myths. Bradlaugh did indeed often send his readers to the work of Sir W. Drummond, Dupuis and Robert Taylor, but he insisted that "it was not his duty to advocate any theory of interpretation." I have never been able to see why.

No doubt in the very advanced French circles of which Diderot and d'Holbach were such distinguished members, there were many before Dupuis in the 18th century who thought as he did—that Jesus was a myth. Here in England it was Robert Taylor, with his profound knowledge of the literature of the subject, who was one of the first to make that a public declaration, and he certainly was not thanked even by Freethinkers for so doing. It was not until the last quarter of the last century that Gerald Massey, who made Egyptology his special subject, wrote and lectured on the problem pointing to Egypt as the source of nearly all the Christian myths—including Jesus; and following him we had the massive encyclopædic works of John M. Robertson. He was supported from various standpoints by many writers on the Continent—notably Drews, Dujardin, Couchoud and W. B. Smith in America.

All these writers did their utmost to explain how the Jesus myth originated, and it must be confessed that they are by no means in agreement. The problem is surrounded by great difficulties, it requires very great patience, an enormous library, and a good private income. The rewards are very meagre, as no subject under the sun seems to arouse such antagonism as that advocating the Christ Myth. Even quite mild Rationalists get angry—look at Conybeare's "Historical Christ" for example; and, of course, there are many other attacks.

It is many years since Dr. P. L. Couchoud gave to the world his "Enigma of Jesus" with a notable preface by Sir James

Frazer—who had been till then the greatest shining light in the galaxy of historicists. That position must have been considerably shaken when he wrote this preface, for Couchoud is one of the strongest living advocates of the theory that Jesus is nothing but a literary creation. And he develops his reasons with copious proofs and close documentation in "The Creation of Christ," most ably translated by C. Bradlaugh Bonner (Watts, price £2 2s.).

To understand how the myth arose Couchoud at first deals with some of the Apocryphal literature—books which for some reason or other were never admitted into the Hebrew canon. It is safe to say that few people outside students ever read these works, and certainly a book like that of Enoch is very little known to the general reader. Yet in it, and in apocalypses like the Assumption of Moses, will be found a great deal of that kind of Christian terminology more or less popularised by Paul and other "mystics." "The Son of Man," "The Light of Nations," "The Throne of His Glory," and so on are all found in Enoch, which Christians "should read, examine, study in detail as holy scripture," advises Couchoud. He adds that Paul, John, Matthew and Luke all knew "the verses of Enoch by heart."

When we come to the "forerunner" of Jesus, John the Baptist, Couchoud points out that "our lack of knowledge of St. John the Baptist is a great handicap. Christianity has altered his office and played hanky-panky with his words and deeds." That is so. As a matter of fact—as I showed in these columns some months ago—John was actually considered the Messiah by a considerable body of Jews and other people, and his Messianic attributes were quietly transferred to Jesus later by what Couchoud calls "Christianity." He quotes passages from Matthew and Luke which he thinks preserves John's utterance "which is of remarkable energy." Here—if I may be allowed a small demur—I must confess that the evidence for the existence of John the Baptist seems remarkably small. I feel we have in all this talk about Baptism a strong connection with Aquarius, the Water Bearer of the Zodiac.

How did we get the name of Jesus? "It is an extraordinary thing," says Couchoud, "that the name of Jesus should have been accepted in its Greek form and is never referred to in the Hebrew form. This shows the large part played in the development of the Church by Greek-speaking Jews." Again I feel that if there were any Greek-speaking Jews in the beginnings of the Christian Church, they were precious few. I think the whole of the New Testament breathes too much of Jew hatred.

Couchoud—like so many Christian writers—refers to the famous 53rd chapter of Isaiah, which became "the Christian Charter." Generally it is quoted as "prophesying" Jesus; the truth being that it was used by the Gospel writers as a model for their hero. The other prophetic writings were also searched for hints like the passage in Hosea vi. 2: "After two days will he revive us; in the third day will he raise us up." But I cannot see that this was done until long after the conception of a Christ began to form in the minds of the religious fanatics who brooded over their mystical experiences and eventually transferred them from "heaven" where they really belonged, to the "flesh" of this earth.

Couchoud claims that these "prophets" swarmed during A.D. 40-130, and many of them experienced the kind of "apparition" which Paul so proudly tells us he saw. And just as the Christian Churches are divided at this day, so "in those days" (as Holy Scripture has it) were there also divisions between the sects, between Greek Christians and Greek Jews, who all had somehow the same visions. These heated differences can be seen in the accounts given in the New Testament, though its final editors did their best to obliterate all traces. It is this tampering with the documents which makes investigation into the Jesus myth so difficult.

H. CUTNER.

CORRESPONDENCE

JEW, ARABS, AND THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING

Sir,—Mr. Chapman Cohen, in his very remarkable article "Religion and Culture," alludes to the revival of learning, science and freethought under the Moors in Spain; a period which "brought the more cultured Arabs and Jews into touch with the better kind of Christians." The Church, however, resented this, and answered with the Inquisition and new laws against heresy. I quite agree. "One should investigate," Mr. Chapman Cohen continues, "how far Christian Anti-Semitism derives from the fact that the Jews participated so much in propagating the ancient civilisation of Greece and Rome. . . . No one seems to have noticed it!"

But someone did notice it: a man who was, and is, neglected or caricatured to this very day, and that by Jews and Gentiles alike:—

"In the darkest times of the Middle Ages, when Asiatic clouds had gathered darkly over Europe, it was Jewish Freethinkers, scholars and physicians who upheld the banner of enlightenment and of intellectual independence under the severest personal suffering and defended Europe against Asia; we owe it not least to their efforts that a more natural, more reasonable, at all events un-mythical explanation of the world was finally able to get the upper hand once more and that the link of culture which now unites us with the enlightenment of Græco-Roman antiquity has remained unbroken. If Christianity has done everything to Orientalise the Occident, Judaism has assisted essentially in Occidentalising it anew: which, in a certain sense, is equivalent to making Europe's mission in history a continuation of that of Greece."

The author in question is Nietzsche, and the quotation comes from "Human, All-Too Human," Vol. I., aphorism 475.

Mr. Chapman Cohen adds that apparently the "medieval Jews suffered from the hands of the Christians more for their virtues than their vices." Nietzsche confirms it with these very words, but extends it to the modern Jews as well. Present-day experience confirms this, too. Only what the Church did once, is now done by the State—and much "better"! No Church or Pope had ever so much power and so little wisdom than Germany under Hitler, who drove out of the country the whole freethinking community, consisting of playwrights, poets, sculptors, painters, composers, scholars and physicians, most of them of Jewish race.

And this age once believed in progress!—Yours, etc.,

OSCAR LEVY

(Editor of the authorised English translation of Nietzsche's works).

B.B.C. BRAINS TRUST

Sir,—There is very little wisdom from a Freethinker's point of view in suggesting that the Brains Trust should be buried. The idea that the members should be given an opportunity of studying the questions beforehand is a definite improvement upon the previous denial that the questions are answered spontaneously. But would not the adoption of the idea make the proceedings very dull? I recollect the time when a portion of the session was given over to questions being put, and a gentleman read out the answers from an encyclopædia. Then the Brains Trust resumed the session and a marked difference in entertainment value came over the scene. Not all the questions can be answered by reference to an encyclopædia; e.g. fundamental questions of opinion, of which there are a large number, and these are of value to a discerning listener.

The B.B.C. is imperfect in many respects, but they should be encouraged to develop ideas like the Brains Trust, for it is their nearest approach to free speech. I have frequently heard Dr. Joad, Professor Julian Huxley, Professor Haldane and others give spontaneous answers which would not be permitted in any other B.B.C. programme. Many examples could be given. A question was asked about the origin of Easter, and we got the right answer, which ordinarily would be given only in a paper

like "The Freethinker." Some of the questions are silly, but many are profound, and the answers often rise to the occasion.

Speaking for myself, I find the weekly Brains Trust the most entertaining item of the B.B.C. programmes, and I want to see it improved and broadened by public men like yourself taking part, because the answers to the questions are not edited or blue-pencilled. I have sent up to the B.B.C. the names of people whom I think would add lustre to the Brains Trust, and I hope other Freethinkers will do the same.

With kindest thoughts and best wishes from—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED CORRICK.

[We are afraid that our old friend does not appreciate the fact that the Brains Trust is little more than a modern version of the old "Bread and the Circus" business. In this case the answer to questions is to give the listeners the feeling that they are merely being played with to the extent of carefully selected "safe" questions, and equally carefully selected talkers. For our own part we have always been impressed by the degree of ignorance displayed by the specialists who are invited. We remain unconvinced that it would not be better if the talkers had the questions before them a week in advance. There is just as much room for discussion on subjects if the questions are known a week beforehand. As it stands, we have been most impressed by ignorance displayed by men who chatter when having a subject suddenly placed before them. What is wanted is a larger range of subjects and a more honest expression of opinion. If amusement is the thing required, why not empanel Tommy Handley?—EDITOR.]

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held April 2, 1944

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Bryant, Seibert, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Griffiths, Morris, Miss Woolstone, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Bradford, Chester and Keighley Branches, and to the Parent Society.

Lecture reports were noted from Bradford, Glasgow, Blackburn and Manchester. Correspondence from Bristol, Manchester, India, and London districts was dealt with and instructions given.

In accordance with branch votes, the Annual Conference will be held in London on Whit-Sunday, and the Secretary was instructed to proceed with the arrangements.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, May 11th, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

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.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Dr. C. M. JOAD, M.A.: "What is a Civilisation?" (2).

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. H. SEARLE: A Lecture.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Saturday, 7 p.m. Messrs. F. SODEN and T. W. BROWN.

MODERN PROPHECIES

FROM time to time we have had articles and discussions on the work of writers, ranging from Marcus Aurelius to G. B. Shaw. Each has been interesting to me, so I would like to call the attention of my fellow readers to the writer I find most interesting of all.

My favourite author is H. Seton Merriman (H. S. Scott), who wrote in the last quarter of the last century. His stories are delightful reading, and are written in lovely English. This quality is common to other novelists, but I think he is unique in adding to this the faculties of prophet and aphorist.

War being the absorbing topic of the present time, and Spain the first to indulge in the pastime, Merriman's prophecy, "Spain may follow the lead of France and make an exhibition of herself as a republic," should be a lesson in clarity to our Lyndoes.

Another striking prediction is, "One day Central Asia will be opened out suddenly and completely by the biggest fight the world has ever seen. It has not come in my time, but come it will, as sure as fate."

Again, "This curse of insularism militates against England throughout the world, and will one day fall back upon our own heads in such a manner as to cause a very rude awakening. Already they are beginning to realise that this planet does not consist of England, with a few partially necessary countries existing around her by her kind permission and endurance."

His prescience regarding Russia is uncanny, as the following shows. "And then perhaps the gatherers—the new Russian nation that will spring up and flourish from the ashes of the old aristocracy—will remember those who sowed in tears and tribulation, will remember those nameless thousands of men and women who have died in solitary cell, in dripping, darksome mine, in prison hospital, and on the great road to Siberia. In England the whole question of the future of Russia is as little studied as its present state is known."

Regarding the Russo-Polish dispute, Merriman says, "This had once been Poland, and was now inimical to Russia, but Russia did not care."

His aphorisms are a model of succinctness, as evinced by the following: "Russia remains at this time the one European country unhampered and unharassed by a cheap press—the one country where prominent men have a quiet tongue." What a smack at some of our garrulous generals—and others. To back this up he says elsewhere, "What a quiet world if those who have nothing to say said nothing."

The summing-up of the Russian characteristics in the next three quotations displays his perspicacity. "Napoleon thought that the Russians would act as his enemies of the Latin race had acted. He thought that like his own people they would be over-confident, urging each other on to great deeds by loud words and 100 boasts." "No man of the Latin race will ever understand the Slav." "They were Slavs—of the most calculating race the world has produced—a little slow in their calculations. So he gave them time, just as Russia must have time; but she will reach the summit eventually, when her far-sighted policy is fully evolved—long, long after reader and writer are dust."

Three more trite sayings will serve to show the quality of the man. "For those that are busy time flies quickly enough. And there is nothing more absorbing than keeping the wolf from the door, else assuredly the hungry thousands would find time to arise and rend the overfed few." "Some day the world will learn to have a greater respect for the workers than for the thinkers, who are idle, wordy persons, frequently thinking wrong." "War is the gambling of kings."

And how true this is: "For social purposes he must speak the tongues of the two countries that had promised so much for Poland and performed so little: England and France."

One gem that makes a thrust at our American friends must not be missed. Here it is: "Miss Mangles was just putting down the hot impressions of the moment. For they like their impressions served hot out West, and this is a generation that prefers vividness to accuracy."

These are digressions culled from my author's novels. He died in 1903 at the age of 41, and I think my friends (we Free-thinkers are all friends) will agree that was a great loss to literature.

Before closing this summary of prophecies and aphorisms let me give one remarkable forecast by the writer W. J. Locke, who says in his novel, "The Tale of Triona": "The future of the human race lies in the hands of the millions of Russian babies lying in the bodies of millions of Russian women, just waiting to be born." The book was published in 1922. That leaves Isaiah in the background.

E. WATSON.

COMPOSED ON READING DISCUSSION ON EDUCATION BILL

You are the God of Thunder
You are the God of Pain.
You are the God I must worship
If I want to live again.

—F. B. McCAVE.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

(Concluded from page 143)

In view of the overpowering strength of the German army and air force, Czechoslovakia had no alternative save mournful submission to the harsh terms imposed. President Benes resigned and a new Czech Government was formed. Its head, General Syrový, announced that his Ministry accepted "full responsibility for their predecessors' decision to accept the stern terms of the so-called Anglo-French plan."

Yet, futile as the "settlement" proved, it seems only fair to admit the stupendous difficulties involved when unprepared Powers were driven to deal with a relentless German antagonist readily armed to the teeth.

T. F. PALMER.

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