

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIV.—No. 17

Sunday, April 23, 1944

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Concluded from page 142)

### More About the Roman Church

WE are afraid that some of our readers may think we have been very desultory in these notes on the Church and the Inquisition. To them we can plead only that we have not been irrelevant. The pamphlet we have been criticising is specially published for the Forces, and the repetition of falsities known to all who oppose the Church must be met with a restatement of facts, and so help, at least, the younger men of to-day to understand what the Roman Church really is. The Church may bow to circumstances and pretend a liberality it never possessed, but its foundations, its aims and its methods remain unchanged, and it uses a deadly logic in its actions that makes it a standing danger to human freedom. That is the grain of truth in the boast of the Church: "The same yesterday, to-day and to-morrow." Woe to the country that forgets it.

The apologist we have been criticising, William Lawson, member of the Society of Jesus (Jesuitism has long been a term that stands for dishonesty of speech and practice), does not deny that from the beginning the Roman Church has been intolerant, but he holds that those who deny the teaching of the Church are "disturbers of social order," and are therefore rightly subject to punishment and extermination. This is one more fact that lines up the Church with Hitler in both theory and practice—the degree of the punishment is not of great moment here. Hitler says that they who disbelieve in Nazism are enemies to the German people, and must be annihilated. The Roman Church—through Mr. Lawson—repeats the historic warning that they who openly deny the truth of the Church are feeding the public with "poison" and must be exterminated. They are the enemies of the Church, the Pope and the priesthood—I had almost forgotten God. Such offenders, says the Church through Mr. Lawson, may be imprisoned, tortured, denied civil rights, but they must not be put to death by the Church. So the Church hands such sinners to the civic Government with the demand that the sinner shall be put to death without the shedding of blood. Hence the burning of heretics, with a Christian audience treating the whole matter as a holiday. The "incurable" heretic thus was under no circumstances allowed to escape the clutches of the Church—even though the final punishment came from the State.

This is very clumsy pleading, and while I dislike ordinary liars, I hate clumsy ones. For when a man tells a lie of the kind noted, he is not merely exhibiting his own want of intelligence; he is insulting the common sense of the one to whom he tells the tale.

We must travel a little further with Mr. Lawson, remembering that we are dealing with not merely *Christian* truth, but with Roman Catholic Christian truth, and are thus getting a strong dose of that kind of truth which differs from that everyday truth which seems to suffice with honest men and women. Mr. Lawson, relying upon the ignorance of the readers of "Stella Maris," says that when anyone was brought before the Inquisition, if he or she confessed guilt, they were sent upon a pilgrimage or paid a fine. That is Christian truth number one, since it was only in minor and harmless cases that the Inquisition was so lenient. The penalty was death or lifelong imprisonment for serious cases. We are told that: "Imprisonment was intended to segregate heretics and give time for reflection." That is lie number two; the imprisonment often lasted for life, and in prisons that would make the worst of Hitler's camps look like fashionable rest-homes. When there was no confession of guilt, says Mr. Lawson, sworn witnesses were heard in evidence. That we may call the lie suggestive, because witnesses were not heard in the presence of the accused. He heard of what he was accused, but was never permitted to meet his accusers face to face. We advise our readers to read up some accounts of the mediæval prisons in which heretics were confined.

Finally, Mr. Lawson, very foolishly for a Roman Catholic, says that "the Church authorities knew what punishment awaited the incorrigible heretic whom they handed over to the civil power, but the sentence of death was made and carried out by the State."

That is very, very clumsy. The civil State had no power over religious offences. It was concerned with secular offences only. The State could not say what religion was right or wrong. That capacity of the State came in with Protestantism. If the civil State issued orders about religion, it was at the request of the Church. I take it that Mr. Lawson was writing in "Stella Maris" to soothe those members of the Forces who had got into discussions with their companions. There is a great deal of the questioning of religion going on in the Armed Forces, and probably Mr. Lawson took it for granted they would swallow the potion he had prepared. But there are many readers of "The Freethinker" in the armies of the Allies. A most disturbing reflection for all religious leaders.

### The Inquisition and the Church

In one sense the "Inquisition" is one of the oldest of Christian institutions, for so soon as we meet with groups of Christians we find indications of denunciations between existing groups of Christians. It meets us in the New Testament when Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, speaks of those who would "pervert" the Gospel, and that even though "an angel from heaven preach any Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." In the circumstances, that is as far as



Christians could go. In fact, what impressed the more civilised pagans was precisely the savage quarrels between one and another group of Christians. That remained true right up to date, although at present many Christian leaders are recognising that they must hang together if only to avoid hanging separately.

Mr. Lawson, evidently relying upon the ignorance of those Roman Catholics for whose benefit "Stella Maris" is printed, suggests that while the Church claimed the right to inflict punishment on its members, the Church had nothing to do with the death penalty. Quite naturally, Mr. Lawson does not explain that the Church, and the Church alone, instituted the practice of the most brutal and obscene torture *before* handing the victims of its malignity over to the civic powers. And that, as we have already pointed out, was due to the fact that while the Church claimed the right to regulate and punish—short of inflicting death—for breaches of morals, religion and education, the secular State retained the right to control individuals in the remaining aspects of life. We, in fact, owe the emphasised distinctions of *secular* and *religious* life to the Christian Church. Mr. Lawson, with this distinction in mind, adopts the not very original Christian device of picturing the Church as fulfilling its duty to God in preventing wrong ideas of religion to flourish, and placing the death penalty to the credit of the State. And, of course, nothing is said of torture and of the large number of men and women who were left literally to rot in Church prisons. In the end, the Church confined the hunting-down of heretics to priests in order to prevent injustice and unfair trial, says the Church apologists to-day, but, in fact, because too many escaped through the mesh of the secular power. And, in fact, not to expose a suspected heretic was often to lay one open to a charge of heresy. Whenever the State did interfere directly it was done because the prince was "obeying the canons of the Holy Roman Church." I need only add that my specimens are, mainly taken from H. C. Lea's exhaustive and authoritative volumes, the veracity of which has never been questioned.

### Intolerance in Flood

What space I have left may well be used in giving a brief outline of this peculiarly Christian institution. As already said, it commences in the New Testament, and it is strongly manifested when Christian intolerance had the opportunity of fully expressing itself. Directly after the Council of Nicea, controlled by the Emperor Constantine—the first Christian Emperor—all heretic and schismatic priests were deprived of their privileges, their meeting-places were confiscated for the benefit of the Church, and their assemblies prohibited. From that time the practice and intolerance grew generation by generation. Whenever the State showed any disinclination either to assist the Church in its arrests or to carry out the penalty of burning alive—after the Church Inquisition had proved blasphemy—there were always means at hand to enliven their activity; in Venice the Ducal oath of office contained a pledge to burn all heretics. It may also be again remarked that this emphasis on the *burning* of heretics was insisted on by the clergy, as they were not permitted to shed blood. Burning at the stake was not an outcome of civil life. The Church threatened the secular Princes who showed any lack of diligence in stamping out heresy, and not many of them cared to risk a quarrel with the Papacy on this question.

It was not, as apologists nowadays are fond of either saying or suggesting, that it was the secular rulers who insisted on the weeding-out of heresy. The Council of Rheims (1148) forbade any secular ruler to permit on his land any heretic, or to give him shelter. The Council of Tours (1163) passed a similar decree, and expressed the view that if all heretics were treated in this way they might abandon their heresies. The third Lateran Council (1178) gave a two years' indulgence to all who took up arms in defence of the Church. The Council of Verona (1184) commanded all princes to take an oath before their bishops to administer laws—passed by the order of the Papacy—against heresy. Substantially, the Church held that extirpating heresy was one of the conditions on which they held their Crowns.

It must also be borne in mind that when a heretic was condemned, all his worldly goods were forfeited and his heirs were disinherited. His children, to the second generation, were declared ineligible to any position of dignity. In this way the curse of the Church—as with that of Hitlerism of a later date—followed the children for generations. We agree with Mr. Lawson that the Church did not put heretics to death—that was because the priest was forbidden to shed blood; but they handed over the offender to the civil power with injunctions to deal with him—or her—firmly "without the shedding of blood," the formula for burning; and at that Christian ceremony the procession was headed by priests, they were there gloating over the burning victim.

There are two other points raised by Mr. Lawson with which I must deal very briefly. Mr. Lawson thinks it will help us to understand the attitude of the Church if we remember "the founders of Protestantism—Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others—thought that the death penalty for heresy was just." We agree; it is good to bear in mind the fact that intense belief in Christianity has always resulted in an intolerance determined by the prevailing intellectual conditions. Persecution has followed Christian faith, and devotion to God has sanctioned some of the worst qualities of which human nature is capable. The Protestants, on the whole, have been less brutal than Roman Catholics, and have shown less systematic brutality, but when they appear before their God they will be able to plead that they did their best.

The other brief comment by Mr. Lawson is his apology for not dealing with the Spanish Inquisition. He admits that this was the means used by the Church to preserve the faith and protect her children, but says that the villainy of the Inquisition has been exaggerated, and half-heartedly pleads that the Inquisition was used as a political weapon. One would have expected a more plausible argument than that, for, as it happens, the political side of Spain was opposed to the drastic methods urged by the Popes and by the Spanish priests. Those who consult Lea's classical work on the Spanish Inquisition will find that for many years the civil power in Spain tried to ward off the persecution of the Jews and Moriscoes, not for any innate love of freedom or a desire for freedom of thought, but because it recognised that the expulsion of Mohammedans and Jews meant the ruin of the country. But the Popes were insistent and the famous—or infamous—Torquemada had drawn a promise from the Queen of Spain, before she came to the throne, that she would do what she could to suppress



heresy. Christian laudholders and merchants were equally alive to the consequences of intensifying the persecutions of the Jews and Moors, and their fears were warranted. The ruin of Spain followed the intolerance of the Papacy and the priesthood, and from that ruin the country never recovered.

On the whole, we do not think very much of the efforts of William Lawson, of the Society of Jesus. Clever liars and special pleaders are, as we have often said, interesting, even educative. But the more foolish variety is neither interesting nor informative. CHAPMAN COHEN.

## SEX EDUCATION AND THE BACHELOR PRIESTS OF ROME!

WHILE thoughtful people outside the Christian Church have been working for years to produce a more intelligent outlook on the question of sex-education for young people, the Church itself has stood by, inane and helpless, neither daring to assist in the work of remoulding opinion on the subject, for fear that its doctrine of Original Sin might be smashed, nor yet daring openly to oppose a mode of thought which was rapidly growing, lest such direct opposition should produce the self-made label, "reactionary."

Now that the donkey work has been done, however, and the general idea of the need for sex-education has been admitted by various authorities, and, consequently, has been assured of acceptance by that sheep-headed section of the people who accept the word of "authority" in the way they formerly accepted the word of the Church, the Church has begun to move.

True to type, after doing nothing to bring about the newer outlook, the Church now rushes in to claim the idea as its own, hoping against hope that there will still be time to influence the modern trend in a manner that will preserve the supposed Christian influence in the sphere of morals, and provide a hold on this new feature of education.

Of the fact that the last die-hard rampart of Christianity has been stormed in this connection there is no better proof than in the recent action of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, which has issued a statement in connection with sex-education. When Mother Church is impelled to make a shift on any question affecting the fundamentals of faith it is clear that the faith is in danger from advancing thought or social development; and it is also clear that the progressive battle has been carried into the heart of the enemy's camp, and a victory achieved.

But it is in the moment of victory that danger may lie; for when the defeated Church gives up resistance, and embraces a principle under necessity of advancing thought, then it is that the religious quislings mingle with the victors. Then it is that this outworn, ancient and primitively ineffective creed pollutes the stream of clear and realistic thought by emptying into the social well its obnoxious moral effluvia, tainting reality with religion, besmirching sex with sin, and retarding dawning intelligence with intimidation.

At a time when the general outlook of the people is being shaped reasonably well towards the first practical steps in this matter—sex-education in the schools—the statement of the Catholic Hierarchy comes upon us like a nauseating flatulent belch from a disordered stomach, spreading the after effects of moral indigestion into an atmosphere that is just becoming clean for the first time in Christian history.

The whole case for sex reform has rested, and must rest, upon the principle that the subject needs to be discussed openly and

honestly, like any other subject, if it is to be understood as a set of natural facts, free from the stigma which Christian secrecy has in the past bestowed upon it. Yet the brains of the Roman Church can offer nothing better, in their statement, than a re-hash of the old secrecy and indecency, disguised in a new wording. The Hierarchy plainly state that they see "grave danger" in the proposal to give sex education to children collectively, whether in schools or in youth organisations.

Of course they do! They never worried much about young people discussing sex in groups at the street corner, because that ignorant form of education preserved the sin hoodoo, which was good for the Church. But to allow young people to discuss sex intelligently in groups, or in school, with scientific teaching which would remove the hoodoo, would be a bad thing for the Church, whose very existence depends upon its own artificially manufactured forms of sin.

The Hierarchy say: "Our aim ought to be to lessen rather than to increase the artificial stimulation of erotic emotions," implying that group instruction in schools would have that effect. I would suggest that, if they really mean what they say, they should start by reducing artificial erotic stimulation at one of its gravest sources by removing from their schools and churches the effigies of Christ and Mary, which have stimulated the wildest excesses of unnatural sexual and social behaviour, not only causing people to "wed" themselves to the effigies (of the opposite sex) but also causing thousands to cut themselves away from the natural life of the community by segregating themselves in monasteries, convents and presbyteries, where their true talents lay for ever buried and lost to the world.

The Hierarchy condescendingly agrees that children should not be allowed to grow up in ignorance of the facts of life. But this question is not really involved, except in a very few cases. Most children grow up with a knowledge of the facts of life. The important questions are: what sort of knowledge; how did they get it; what interpretation do they put upon it? Knowledge of sex can be obtained almost at any age, and in a thousand ways. From the Hierarchy's own lips, when they scream about "laxity . . . in the matter of sex relations," it is clear they are aware that there is no lack of knowledge. It is sex knowledge, of a type, that spreads venereal disease; equally, it is sex knowledge, of a type, that produces the illegitimacy problem. And judging by the illegitimacy rate in R.C. countries the Roman religion certainly encourages knowledge of the facts of life—again, of a type. So it is the form of knowledge that really matters, and how it is obtained.

Here the Hierarchy reveal their true Christian colours, for they advocate:—

"When they (children) are sufficiently mature they should be *individually* instructed in the way God wills mankind to increase and multiply by the union of husband and wife in marriage. . . . She (the Church) wishes children to be introduced gently and without shock to the facts of life. And her mind is that this introduction should be provided by the parents themselves (and teachers and youth leaders to give *individual* instruction)."

See how Christianity and Original Sin trickle through this pretended "modern" statement on sex. They should be "individually" instructed, "gently and without shock." Unless it is presupposed that there is something collectively shameful about sex, why the need for insistence upon "individual" instruction? Unless there is some presupposed sinful principle about sex, why "gentle and without shock"? Unless there is some presupposed scandalous feature of sex, why the parent rather than a perhaps more competent teacher in school?

Is it not clear that, despite their pretension at being abreast of modern thought, the Hierarchy are still wearing the sodden



## ACID DROPS

THE quality of present-day professional Christians may be grouped into the very artful and the very stupid. The first obviously appreciates the quality of real religious beliefs by preaching a very much watered-down Socialism, in which talk about love and righteousness, and so forth, plays a very prominent part. The second holds Christianity up to ridicule by presenting it with a primitive outlook and educated ignorance that openly make its appeal to the least intelligent section of the general public. We have given many examples of both these types, as illustrated by the inevitable decay of a religion that at one time ruled a large part of the world.

Here is an example given us by Fr. Oletti, U.S.A., concerning an American pilot officer who had taken part in a Hamburg raid, but had refrained from receiving Holy Communion. According to the priest the airman said to him:—

"Boy, did I sweat that one out! I saw ships go down all round me, and all I could think of was my number is up, and I did not go to Communion this morning. . . . But from now on you will see me every time."

We do not believe for a moment that the pilot was quite so foolish as he is presented, and the priest might have had enough intelligence not to explain to the public that it doesn't matter a damn whether a man goes to Communion or not, and making it quite plain that real religion nowadays is a mixture of fear and foolishness.

A well-known City man once explained to the world that whenever business was bad he spent more lavishly on advertising. The Archbishop of Canterbury evidently follows the same policy, for he has issued a "call to prayer" on St. George's Day, Sunday, the 23rd of April. Why God should want so much praying to in order to lend a hand to the Allies is a little puzzling until we grasp the lesson that all gods, ancient and modern, depend upon service for their very existence. That is the first reason for the people praying. The second is that if the people are to believe in God they must somehow or other be persuaded that he does something worth while. God no longer controls the weather; there are grave doubts whether he can do anything to check an epidemic, and with the spectacle of Russia before the people, it is difficult for even professedly religious men to believe that God is winning the war. So a day of prayer asking for nothing in particular, but hoping for anything that may come along, has to serve. What a display of humbug from Archbishop to bell-ringer the whole business is!

The "Morning Advertiser" continues its plan of mixing religion with its legitimate business, and, like many amateurs, it often "gives the game away" or manifests its religious zeal—on paper—in a way that must make the more intelligent believers shiver. Much as though the "Advertiser" might be repeating "a message from our representative in Judea," the editor writes it was not the crowd whose hearts were melted, "but the rough Roman soldiers who were keeping order." But all the evidence we have for that is made up by stretching a word or two in the New Testament. We fancy the editor of the "Advertiser" has been taking too seriously the B.B.C. performances.

The success of the Government rushing through—up to date—a Bill for the establishment of the clergy—by proxy—in the schools, has inspired the Glasgow Presbytery to see what can be done in that line in Scotland. The body named recently discussed a resolution asking the General Assembly to see what could be done to strengthen the religious side in the schools. We doubt if the Assembly will succeed. There is far more genuine appreciation of the value of education among the Scottish public than there is among the English people, and that may save Scotland from a second Butler, Churchill, and a crowd of clergymen.

Mr. Chuter Ede is responsible for informing the House of Commons that in one case he knew of in Wales that on the appointment of a new teacher the chairman of the managing body,

a Methodist minister, led the way in prayers, and the answer was so prompt that the chairman's own daughter was appointed. It reads almost like a forecast of what will happen when the new Education Bill, passed by a House of Commons that is ordered to follow what the Prime Minister decides shall be done, comes into force. It should be said in explanation that Mr. Churchill himself has no objection to a certain number voting "on their own," providing they do not prevent the Government's proposal being carried. That is what we may call the New Democracy.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster says: "We want that freedom which is the liberty of the sons of God; freedom to live as the sons of God; freedom to do his will; freedom to obey his law." But as he goes on to explain, "This does not mean that every man is free to worship God as he thinks fit," there does not seem much in it. We rather think that what the Archbishop means is that all shall have the freedom to worship God so long as they follow the Roman Catholic God and his army of minor gods. If they worship God in the wrong way, said right way having been laid down by the Church, then they must look out for squalls.

The war commenced, on our side, with the good Christian lie that we were fighting this war to preserve Christianity. This lie was so glaring that many of the better type of men who believed in Christianity protested against it. Then Russia came, and the lie grew weaker and weaker until it was almost dropped. But the Catholic Church still keeps the lie going, and now we see that the whole of the Australian Hierarchy have issued a proclamation for the Allies to preserve Rome because we are fighting for Christianity and must therefore preserve Vatican City from injury. The slaughter of the soldiers of the Allies does not matter very much so long as the prestige of the "great lying Church" is preserved.

But this is surely a case in which the Roman Church is peculiarly able to do what it asks the Allies to do at the cost of the lives of many thousands of men? Quite recently, at Fatima, Portugal, the Virgin Mary made her appearance to three little children and worked several miracles for the purpose of increasing the number of her worshippers and to expand the power of "her" Church. Other miracles are being continuously on show to preserve the power and prestige of the Church. Well, there is an excellent opportunity for saving Rome and increasing the power of the Roman Church. Every now and again miracles occur for the benefit of the Church. Why is there not a similar miracle to protect the Vatican. A shell approaching St. Peter's might be so diverted as to return and explode on those who fired it. Or all shells that approached the Cathedral might refuse to explode, or an angel could be seen sitting on the unexploded shell, and so forth. But instead of this, all we are getting are appeals to the Allies to be careful not to hit the Roman Catholic Cathedral. This is really bad management.

What mean specimens most of the Christian saints are—certainly when they got to heaven? According to a "Daily Telegraph" reporter, when the lava from Vesuvius was threatening the existence of many villages—a number were destroyed—some prayers were offered to the patron, "Saint Janarius." And the lava stopped short of the village. Now we would not question the truth of this; we only point out what a mean crew are these string-pullers in the Christian heaven. Any decent man on earth who could prevent a village being overcome by boiling lava would have acted without being asked. But a Christian saint will do nothing unless his devotees fawn and flatter him.

Still, let us be fair even to gods and saints. They live on adulation and prayers. When these are few, the poor denizens of heaven shrink and shiver. And when they are entirely withdrawn the gods and saints disappear. Praise and flattery make up the nectar of the gods. Men without a god are a steadily increasing phenomenon. But who ever heard of a living god without worshippers? That is why all our self-elected representative gods are so insistent that we shall offer them worship and, as Disraeli would have said, offer them flattery with a trowel.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. M. SCOTT and W. HERRINGTON.—Letters held over till next week.

G. H. PEATE.—We agree with what you say concerning the quality of Mr. Corina, senior, and also of his son. It might be interesting to compile the names of those who follow so faithfully in the family Freethought tradition, but we are afraid that by far the greater number would be left unregistered. But the influence of Freethinkers, generation after generation, is very great, even though not always acknowledged.

(Miss) S. CLENOWETH.—Have forwarded letter as desired.

S. GREY.—Thanks for information, but we have already read the first-named, and the passage on Easter was not intended to imply that there was any difficulty in fixing the date for Easter.

T. E. EDWELL.—Our quotation, as stated, was taken from Byron's "Vision of Judgement."

T. W. WATERS.—Perhaps you might shake some of the pessimism out of your Christian friend if you tried encouraging him by your belief that he is just as good as an Atheist, and if an Atheist can live a decent life without Jesus, he may well follow suit. But it is astonishing how Christians insist on insulting themselves.

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

MR. FREDERICK LAWS, who has written so sharply, but also fittingly, of the B.B.C. "Brains Trust," has found a fitting name for it. He calls it "the bargain basement of the intellect." Those who know the "bargain basement" of the stores is stocked with cheap rubbish will appreciate the description. But, after all, the aim of the B.B.C. is a very old method of keeping the people off "dangerous" topics and undesirable things. The ancient Romans had it in the maxim, "Give the people bread and the circus." Martin Luther saw it in the policy of the Roman Church, which he likened to a horse treading round and round at the end of a rope. He said it kept the brain active and satisfied without making any progress. And it is, of course, a practice in most families that has an active boy to keep him busy doing nothing of consequence and he will be kept out of mischief. Herbert Spencer said very wisely that while all knowledge is of some value, the important thing is to find out what knowledge is of the greatest value. Mr. Laws winds up his paragraph by saying that even the "Brains Trust" is a joy when compared with the "Anvil" (religious) brains trust. We agree, for we know of nothing that is such a combination of craftiness and humbug as that.

More trouble for the Churches. The Bishop of Durham, Dr. Williams, is now complaining that much trouble and sorrow is being caused by Roman Catholics who inform their followers that a "mixed marriage" is no marriage. The Catholics also tell the people that baptism by a non-Roman Catholic is not valid. We do not see that there is any complaint to be made over this. It is only an example of the non-social aspect of the Christian religion, whether Roman, Church of England or High Dutch. Sensible people would tell both of these—the parson and the priest—to go to hell and have done with it.

People should realise that in England there is no validity at law in any religious marriage. The only valid marriage is the civil marriage before a Registrar of Marriages. When a marriage is performed in a church the parson must hold a certificate from the Secular State that he is appointed to do in the church what may as easily be done in a Registrar's office. Leave the Registrar, and the man and woman might just as well jump over a broomstick. The State does not say that people must be married; what it does say is that they will not be considered by the State to be married unless it confirms to the secular law on the matter.

Another thing worth noting is that until Registrar marriage became common and "people of position" adopted openly the civil marriage, the Church of England and Nonconformist preachers both told their followers that a civil marriage was not valid. Now the lie is no longer profitable the truth is allowed to have a moderate innings.

We note that the general secretary of Sheffield Teachers' Association objects to a local clergyman saying that the number of teachers from non-religious homes are increasing. The secretary appears to feel hurt by such an assumption. Well, unless Sheffield is very backward, the parson is right. The number of non-Christian homes are increasing, and in proportion that must be true of the number of homes. We should like to see teachers stand up more definitely than they do where religion and the clergy are concerned. Teachers will soon have a taste of what clerical influence means—that is if the Education Bill goes through Parliament, and since the Prime Minister has threatened a House of Commons, that can be brought to heel by the mere presence of Mr. Churchill, it will go through. And then the calibre of the teachers will be lowered for a certainty. The Churches do not want scholars—they want worshippers.

According to a letter in the "Halifax Courier and Guardian," the Halifax Council of Free Church Women is very much upset by the appointment of a Roman Catholic as temporary head of the town's Modern School. Although the letter hypocritically claims that the Free Church women are opposed to religious tests, it also declares that the appointment of the R.C. is a "most unwise decision." It is added that "Roman Catholicism is a dictator religion . . . which disintegrates the democratic principle for which our forefathers fought and died."

Now although this controversy demonstrates the quality of Christian brotherly love—or should it be sisterly love?—one can sympathise to a certain extent with the objection to a Catholic being in charge of Protestant children, Catholics being what they are. But we feel that our Nonconformist sisters have got their forefathers all wrong. When their forefathers were a fighting minority they did not seek (as the Halifax women do, according to their letter) to "make religious teaching statutory in schools," but rather to bring about the secular solution of the problem.

It was because their forefathers of a recent generation "sold the pass" on this issue that present-day Nonconformists are faced with the farcical position in which their children may be taught religion under a Catholic headmaster. Rome is "on the rates" with a vengeance. Such are the fruits of past dishonesty and present-day weak-kneed compromise. With some measure of honesty in their activities during the present century, Nonconformists, with Secularist aid, could have removed entirely the religious problem from our schools—to the great advantage of the children's education.



## HISTORICAL FICTION YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

WE are sometimes told that fiction as written in our day is infinitely inferior to the fiction of bygone ages. Supercilious critics are wont to point to the great masters from Defoe to Thackeray, and to ask, pointedly: "What is being done to-day which can compare with what past periods can show?" Now, as I see it, there are two ways of answering that question. The first is to say that, after all, the novels which we remember from the past are the cream of their period. When we discuss nineteenth century fiction, for example, we usually mean half-a-dozen great names—Jane Austen, Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Meredith and Charlotte Bronte. We do not mean Miss Mitford and Wilkie Collins, or Henry Kingsley and Mrs. Gaskell.

But I think that is too easy a fashion to get out of what may at first sight seem an awkward dilemma. A better way is to show that the novelists and short-story writers of to-day are not trying to vie with novelists of the past in their own sphere. The art of the fiction writer has developed, as have the other arts, and therefore the novelist of to-day has different objects and different methods from those which were in vogue a hundred or even fifty years ago. To consider this for fiction in general would be too long a task for a brief essay of the kind which I am attempting, and I will therefore restrict myself to one type of fiction—the historical novel.

One reason why I have chosen this somewhat artificial literary form as a suitable example is because I have recently had the striking experience of reading immediately after each other two books which, to my mind, present admirably the contrast between the methods of the Victorian novelist and those of the present-day writer. Those two books, which on the surface might appear parallel in aim and in method, are Harrison Ainsworth's "Windsor Castle" and Philip Lindsay's "Here Comes the King." Both novels deal with the matrimonial tangles of that much-misunderstood monarch, King Henry VIII. They both attempt to portray some of the great figures of history in a period which was, at any rate superficially, romantic and colourful. They both contain a background drawn with loving artistry. And yet no two books could possibly stand in greater contrast than these.

It is not easy, at first sight, to decide where lies the difference between the two volumes. But the flavour of Victorianism is quite unmistakable in Ainsworth's massive tome, and the flavour of modernity is equally discernible in Lindsay's racy tale.

I think that one point is the lack, in the modern book, of any attempt to teach a superficial lesson in English history. Ainsworth was always unable to resist turning aside from the main stream of his story in order to deliver a lecture, in the style of the guide to historical antiquities, on the wonders of the background. In other words, the novelist, after carefully building up an atmosphere of the period of which he is writing, invariably destroyed that atmosphere by bringing the reader back to the present with an unwelcome intrusion of his own personality. This Lindsay never does. In fact he makes an effort not to write a word or to use a metaphor which is out of period. The result is that his story grips from first to last, and the attentive reader loses his sense of the present in his fascination at this evocation of the past.

That, of course, is a matter of technique. But I feel that there is another and more important difference, which is a matter of political and moral feeling. One senses when reading Ainsworth that he rather admired these swashbuckling old monarchs, with their mistresses and their favourites. Never did he once allow himself to show any interest in the working-class during the period of which he wrote. The only occasions (save, perhaps,

in "Rookwood," where the friends and companions of Dick Turpin come to life in the most surprising way) on which he includes working-class characters are those when he wishes to find a foil for the high and mighty ones of the court who are his favourites.

Now, turn to Philip Lindsay's work, and what do we find? The very reverse holds good. Though Henry VIII. is the central character around whom "Here Comes the King" revolves, he is in actuality only one man among many. There are to be found a whole host of others, including some who are definitely working-class folk. And they are not mere clowns, introduced to make an amusing contrast to the supposedly great folk; they are human beings, living out their own lives as best they may under conditions of extreme difficulty. This is even more so in "London Bridge is Falling" (a story of Jack Cade's revolt), and in "The Duke is Served," where all the main characters are the servants in a noble household.

I do not think that this is accidental. And I think that it would be equally true if, instead of Harrison Ainsworth and Philip Lindsay, I had chosen for my typical representatives of two ages, Lord Lytton and Robert Graves or Charles Kingsley and Marjorie Bowen. In fact, I feel that the comparison which my reading of "Windsor Castle" and "Here Comes the King" brought into my mind is of extremely wide application. No longer, indeed, can the novelist live in an isolated position, writing delightful tales which serve to take people out of themselves and entertain them. More and more is he concerned with the reality of the days in which he lives. And, even when he is ostensibly concerned with the painting of a period prior to his own, he is bound to read into that period the problems and the difficulties of his own time.

It is not so very long since every novelist worth his salt felt compelled to write of the adventures of lords and ladies, dwelling in gilded palaces remote from the everyday life which most of his readers were condemned to lead. Those days, I am pleased to announce, appear to be over and done with. Now it is necessary for the serious novelist to deal with real people, not puppets in high places. And consequently the historical writer is driven towards a description of the way in which the working-class lived in earlier times.

I am sure that the supercilious critic whom I mentioned at the beginning of this essay will long ago have thrown this paper aside in disgust. Still, in case any such critic has persevered thus far, I will add one thing more. It is no use comparing Philip Lindsay with Harrison Ainsworth, Marjorie Bowen with Scott, Robert Graves with Lytton, and then deciding that the second of each of these pairs was definitely superior to the first. They were attempting to do completely different things, and there is fundamentally little in common between them. We live in an age which is destined increasingly to become the age of the ordinary man. Under a sensible form of society, he may turn out to be not quite such an ordinary man after all. As Herbert Read has said, an artist should not be regarded as a special kind of man; a man should be regarded as a special kind of artist. And it may well be that, when the history of our age comes to be written, the novelists (and especially the historical novelists) will be found to be the first people to realise the truth of that profound saying.

S. H.

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**THE CROSS**

Now blows the wreathing smoke down  
 'Midst grey roofs, and sky more grey is still.  
 Atop the spiky chimney-pots looms in the haze a cross,  
 Symbol of man's fettered will.  
 The cross of Christ through ages set on high,  
 The lives of men to dominate and hold in sway,  
 While they below, unconscious of their own inherent power.  
 For Christ's mercy meekly pray.  
 Yet man it was who made the cross  
 'Neath which he kneels and bows his head.  
 Raised as a symbol of a credulous prime  
 And now a sign of mortal dread.  
 Christ, too, of outstretched arms,  
 And all gods, old, new, east and west,  
 Are of man's own creation.  
 Yet man, oh man, who should know best,  
 Still bows his head before the cross.

S. B. W.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**A QUESTION**

SIR,—In a fairly recent "Times" there appeared a short article headed "Bishop's Support of Bombing."  
 The Bishop in question writes frankly and convincingly about his position—which he obviously regards as necessary if the right side is to win the war—but he makes no claim to support from the Deity, whose representative his Church has made him.

The question must, however, be asked: Does his Deity act in this war by responses to prayer, or does "He" also retaliate, through and by means of bombs, which drop—so to speak—as freely upon the just as the unjust, the civilian or the soldier?—  
 Yours, etc.,  
 REGULAR READER.

**RELIGION AS OPIUM**

SIR,—One of your readers was recently expressing doubt as to Charles Kingsley being associated with such an idea. The following is an interesting passage in "The Common People, 1746-1938, by G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate:—

"Repentance was also needed on the Christian as well as on the working-class side. 'We have used the Bible as if it were a special constable's handbook, an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they are being overloaded,' wrote Kingsley, so sending on its travels a phrase which was to end up on the walls of the Red Square in Moscow in 1917."—Yours, etc.,  
 W. KENT.

**THANKSGIVING SERVICES AND MODERN WARFARE.**

SIR,—The British easy-going temperament makes many of us an easy prey for religious hypocrisy, even though it may not always recognise itself as such. The scientific materialism of modern warfare seems left out of consideration by the Churches.

From time to time they organise services of thanksgiving to the Christian Deity for success which, as often as not, must involve the massacre of helpless civilians of both sexes and all ages, while turning a blind eye to the *methods* by which victory must be gained if the world is to be freed from Nazism and all that goes with it, and horrifies us.

The question remains: Are thanksgiving services playing fair, so to speak, with an Ethical God, or with the God still regarded by many as the Father of the children's "gentle Jesus"? Is it fair to thank *Him* for success which is inevitably dependent upon modern methods of scientific warfare? Are we prepared to place responsibility for these *methods* upon a higher power than mankind?

If not, many honest and thoughtful people may feel that they will further the cause which we all have at heart, by staying away from, rather than attending, thanksgiving services—should the future bring them along—which do not appear to fit the situation.—Yours, etc.,  
 MAUD SIMON.

**THAT CHRISTIAN TRADITION.**

SIR,—I have just read carefully through "Jesus Not a Myth," by A. D. Howell Smith, B.A.

It is very curious that among the writers, and investigation upon this matter, he never mentions Gerald Massey. Now seeing that Massey argued for a mythical Christ, and that his researches upon the subject were very extensive, and also in view of the fact that the Pioneer Press continues to publish Massey's "The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ," I shall be glad to know whether Mr. Smith has read Massey's work, and if so, what objection he has to Massey's conclusions upon the subject.—Yours, etc.,  
 "ALERT."

**OBITUARY**

**ROBERT BOXALL HARRISON**

A Freethought veteran has passed away by the death of Robert Boxall Harrison, which took place on April 5 in his 84th year. Quiet, kindly and dignified, he will be remembered by many in the West London area. A member of the Parent Society N.S.S. and reader of "The Freethinker" for very many years, he took a keen interest in the movement and served it faithfully by example of character and material help. The death of his wife and, more recently, that of his son, were heavy blows which he bore with the calm courage expected by those who knew him. The remains were cremated at Mortlake Crematorium on April 12, where before an assembly of relatives and friends, a Secular Service was conducted by the General Secretary, 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.  
 Messrs. WOOD, PAGE, and other speakers.

**LONDON—INDOOR**

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE: "England and St. George."

**COUNTRY—OUTDOOR**

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place, Blackburn).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. J. V. SHORTR: A Lecture.  
 Colno, Lancashire.—Wednesday, April 26, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.  
 Enfield, Lancashire.—Friday, April, 21, 7-15 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market Memorial Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Messrs. T. W. BROWN and J. W. BARKER.

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Bigg Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. T. M. MOSLEY: "The Beliefs of Unbelief."

Padiham, Lancashire.—Sunday, 3-15 p.m. and 7 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

**COUNTRY—INDOOR**

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute). — Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. E. STOCKDALE: A Lecture.

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## THE BEGINNINGS OF RELIGION

(The verbal nonsense that is current regarding an assumed need of man for religion can be appreciated only when one makes acquaintance with the mental habits of uncivilised people. Study these and one can see religion emerging in its infancy, not fundamentally different from religion among the more advanced races, but freed from the disguises that it of necessity assumes when it is in contact with the more enlightened views of man and nature. But the great thing is the social environment which lacks the accumulated knowledge and experience that civilised man has at his service. Proof of this will be found in what follows.)

THE capacity of the Bantu peoples of the Lower Congo for the intellectual acts of perception, recognition, memory and so forth, is well developed and appears early in childhood. In this respect the natives are much on a par with the civilised races; but the limit is reached early in life, and but little mental progress is observable after adolescence is reached. The ideas are mostly of the simpler form, seldom passing the concretes of actual experience, generalisations being, as a rule, beyond their power. Association of ideas, though good as implied by good memory, only takes place in the concrete from of contiguity in time and space as actually already perceived; analogies are confined to the very crudest forms, and a very simple figure of speech is apt to be unintelligible. . . .

An accompanying trait is the absence of rational surprise. On seeing something new a vacant wonder is all that is observable—and this very transient—and the new experience is classified as “white man’s fashion.” It almost follows as a matter of course that there is no curiosity, no wish to inquire into the nature of a novel experience; it never occurs to the native that there is a cause of the novelty or an explanation required. In fact, the relation of cause and effect in all but the most patent and mechanical is said to be beyond his grasp.

The natural result is a vagueness on all religious and metaphysical subjects. This is a characteristic of savages all over the world. Nor is it limited by any means to them. Recent investigations have established the evolution of some of the majestic figures of the Olympian Pantheon from not merely rude, but vague and nameless personalities. . . .

The fact is that on these subjects the majority of the human race, whether savage or civilised, think little. Their minds are seldom excited to the point of reasoning on their beliefs. They accept what they are told, and do not even know whether they believe or not, because they have never reflected upon it. One has only to talk to a peasant at home to find out how narrow the border of his knowledge is, how misty and uncertain is everything beyond the border of his daily life. . . . Nor does he differ in this respect from people who are looked upon as his social superiors. . . . It would be making too strenuous a demand upon their intellectual life to expect them to rise above the markets, the newspaper, the latest novel, the county cricket score and the problems of golf and bridge. All the rest they are content to leave to their professional advisers, who in nine cases out of ten, if the truth must be told, have as little taste or capacity as themselves for metaphysical speculation, historic research or theological inquiry, and are bound as tightly in the cords of tradition as the far more imaginative Zulu medicine-man or the Eskimo wizard. For the average man in civilisation appraises the subjects of thought no otherwise than does his brother in savagery.

From “Ritual and Belief,” by

EDWIN SYDNEY HARTLAND.

## SEX EDUCATION AND THE BACHELOR PRIESTS OF ROME

(Continued from page 151)

napkins of the infancy of Christian sex beliefs? I think it is. They lay special stress on the “individual” tuition argument. I would advise them, however, that the individual method carries with it far greater danger of immorality or sexual corruption than the collective method, especially when coupled with religious emotionalism. Our criminal calendars are standing advertisements of the danger of “individual” tuition in sex between young people and their clergymen, choirmasters, scoutmasters, organists and so on; and I feel sure that such “truly Christian instruction” can never be “in conformity with the wish of the parents.” The youngsters would be far safer, and better educated, with their brothers and sisters of the schoolroom.

The following quotation I have left to the last, because it bears upon the Hierarchy’s search for “a remedy for sex laxity”:—

“The sex act is ordained by God to bring new life into being. Its use is restricted to husband and wife in lawful marriage . . . outside marriage (it) is a serious violation of the order established by God, and is a grave sin.”

There is the One True Church giving the One True Set of Facts! Theological bunkum, scientific untruth, lack of social perspective, all rolled up in one statement—a simple pack of priestly lies. The sex act knows nothing either of God or lawful marriage; the only violation it knows is to be denied expression; the only sin involved is that committed by the Church, which put sin where it was not.

If marriage be allowed to enter the question, as a social factor, then all fathers and mothers outside the Roman Church are living in sin, and their children are bastards, for Rome knows no lawful marriage but its own. I wonder how other Christians feel about that! But let us leave the imbecilities of theology, and see how the modern dictum of the Hierarchy fits the present facts.

Several millions of our virile young men and women, at the most sexually vigorous ages, have been taken out of the normal social life of the community, largely denied facilities to marry, totally denied facilities to enjoy married life. It might be the fault of the Government, or of the Churches, or of their parents, or even of God—but it is not their fault. The Church, with its “modern” outlook on this sociological problem, offers them—Celibacy or Sin; with the prospect of “individual” tuition for their younger brothers and sisters, or their children. At the hands of whom? At the hands of the celibate exempted priests, who remain at home to defend moral interests? Not on your life!

The elder brothers and sisters in uniform have their own problem of sex to settle as best they can, with the imperfect moral equipment for which they must thank religion, which denied them better understanding. It is the special problem of their generation, and they are dealing with it magnificently, thanks to the help of a sex-conscious military command—perhaps the most sensible thing about the whole war. But, arising out of the very difficulties that face our older youth in the Forces to-day, there is a growing determination that no subsequent generation shall ever again carry the burden imposed upon youth in the past by the religion of ignorance and sin.

More religions than Christianity can trace their origin to primitive phallic worship. None more certainly than Christianity will see its end as a result of scientific sex understanding.

And when the bachelor priests of the Roman Hierarchy are roasting in their own hell, the youth of to-morrow will laugh (as we smile to-day at the phallists) at the ignorant and devilish dogmas of celibacy and “individual” sex instruction.

F. J. CORINA.