

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Man and Morals

NO clearer illustration of a right-about turn with regard to a body of teaching can be found than is given by Christianity concerning what the old preachers term "mere morality." The first generations of Christians made no pretences in this matter. They did not even pretend to be better equipped with regard to either the teaching or practice of morality current with the pagans around them. How could it be otherwise? Not alone are many of the apparently moral teachings in the New Testament to be found in the Jewish Bible—now traceable to other sources; but the New Testament is substantially destitute of social and family ethics: factors upon which morality ultimately rests. The fundamental aim of primitive Christian teaching was not behaviour in this world so much as securing salvation in the next. The essential aim of Christian teaching was to relieve mankind, through an act of belief in an incarnate God, from an original curse placed upon the whole human race for a reputed sin of our legendary first parents. If this brief but accurate account of the Christian religion sounds very old-fashioned and distinctly out of date, the explanation lies in the fact that development is cumulative in quality, and that modern developments have made one body of Christians ashamed of their parentage and others move in so altered an environment that if they were to come across the twelve disciples preaching their ideas, as they once are supposed to have done, they would look upon them as at best a bunch of old-fashioned blood-and-fire preachers. Had the belief in the near approach of the end of the world, and the belief that their God would come to earth again to judge the quick and the dead, been realised, the original Christians would not have been surprised. The series of miracles would have been completed, and in heaven the fortunate would have congratulated themselves in not having followed the best Greek and Roman teaching that morality had to do with conduct on earth.

But a possible, even a fanciful, mode of living may persist in a society for a while on the condition that there are enough mentally well-balanced individuals to recognise the real essentials of collective living. Men may rob or murder, they may lie and decline their share of the social burden, provided there are enough sane and properly balanced individuals to carry on. The Catholic Church could preach the superiority of the celibate life—it does preach it still; and there is a section of the English Church that will talk of the "purity" of "virginal" existence. But the race had to be carried on by those who set aside these fantastic and fundamentally unsocial frames of mind. Nature has a very simple and a very effective way of correcting the society that carries anti-social feeling and practice too far. It just wipes them out!

So it happens that primitive Christian ideas—religious ideas—were possible of continuance despite their socially injurious character. St. Paul, who could see nothing in marriage save that it was "better to marry than to burn," could preach, with others, generation after generation, a gospel that if literally carried out would have left the world barren of human beings. Nature's advice to all is: "You can play the fool as much as you please, you may even bequeath your folly to others, and they in turn may hand it on for ever and ever, providing that there are not enough of the anti-social type to upset the balance of things. If that balance is seriously disturbed, then, like some of the characters mentioned in the Bible, you will all wake up and 'find yourselves dead.'" So it is the Christian belief that only those who believe in the miracles of the sacred books of the Christian religion may get to heaven. In that case, all that non-Christians can say is that their destiny serves them right. But in that case we may picture God looking round at the crowd of celibate monks, Sunday Sabbatarians, fanatical preachers and the like who surround him in heaven and deciding that he had chosen the wrong company for his dwelling-place.

It is quite clear—not even Christians will deny it—that present-day Christians leave much to be desired as individuals. Seven times a week preachers moan and groan through the medium of the B.B.C. machinery that Christians are deficient in courage and intelligence; that they can do nothing on their own account that is worth anything. Up to the present no one has been permitted to question the truth of this by the same medium that indicts us all. We cannot even see the man who so slanders the whole of modern society. It is not, of course, for me to deny the weakness of the genuine Christian; but for the sake of decency we cannot help hoping that the morning preacher is a liar, trusting to get away with it because his listeners have not yet got the dust out of their eyes. In support of the preacher it might, however, be argued, as study of criminals may show, how powerless it is for one to do what is right without a semi-miracle being performed; and he might even add that, from his own experience, all criminals are not detected and imprisoned. I may even point out in support of the Christian gospel of the essential weakness and wickedness of man, that visitors to our prisons could offer evidence that would bear out the preacher's valuation of his "brothers in the Lord." For it will be found that all preparations in prison are made by the authorities to see that a minister of the gospel is handy to keep the prisoner's sense of sin alive. There is even a notice that if, in any of His Majesty's prisons, it should happen that a new religious arrival is not so provided, a minister of his congregation may be brought in to satisfy the convict's spiritual yearnings.

Still more interesting is the fact that no similar arrangement is made for Atheists. Noting this omission, some years ago we called the attention of the Home Secretary

and the Prison Commissioners to the fact and suggested that an accredited representative of, say, the National Secular Society should be permitted to visit Freethinkers in prison on the same conditions that obtain with Christians and members of other religions. We did not succeed in our efforts. The excuse given for not adopting the suggestion was that there were not enough Freethinkers in prison to justify any alteration in the existing regulations. So that, so far as Freethinkers are concerned, they must continue to pay for prison privileges that are given solely to those who believe in some sort of a god.

The Voice of History

It is, then, quite plain that, taking contemporary life as a whole, in both this and other countries, there is no evidence that people who believe in the Christian religion are in any degree morally superior to those who do not. And that generalisation is not merely true to-day; it holds at any stage of human existence. It never was the case—it never could be the case—that men were better parents and citizens because they believed that social and family relationships were not adequate to sustain decent behaviour. Could one count in this age or in the last century, or in the 18th or 17th or 16th century, that a man's moral worth could be calculated on the basis of his Christian belief? Was that ever the case? Was it the case in the days of the Reformation, when each side used the loose living of the other side as evidence against the other? Was it the case when the Holy Roman Church held substantial control over the peoples of Europe? Or perhaps it occurred in the earlier centuries; perhaps the first flush of Christianity induced good behaviour—at least among Christians. No, the farther back we go the more deplorable the situation. The historic fact is that ancient Roman writers and leaders needed no revelation from God to appreciate the nature of morality. Philosophers taught them all that could be taught of moral duties, and wit lashed humbugs and exposed dishonourable characters. There is not the slightest evidence that it was the superior moral quality of Christians that attracted the attention of the pagan world. The Christians—to do them justice—made no claim to moral superiority either with regard to their teaching or in the practice of morals. If Christ came to save sinners, the sinners were not moral defaulters; they were those who believed that man suffered from the primitive curse upon Adam and his descendants. Take that away and nothing is left to justify the only son of God going through his performance on earth. I say "performance" because part of the story in the Gospels, as the late J. M. Robertson insisted, is probably nothing higher or better than a rehashing of one or more ancient miracle plays.

A Bad Record

But there is one line of evidence, provided by a 17th century scholar, and a confirmed Christian, which does offer some valuable evidence as to the ethical quality of the Christian revelation. Moshem goes over the ground-century by century, and here is his summing-up of the moral influence of the Christian faith:—

SECOND CENTURY.—He brands the Christian leaders as "the very worst" of moral teachers.

THIRD CENTURY.—Church rule "was soon followed by a train of vices which dishonoured the character and authority of those to whom the Church was committed. . . . The

Bishops . . . abandoned themselves to the indolence and luxury of an effeminate and luxurious life."

FOURTH CENTURY.—When we cast an eye towards the lives and morals of Christians we find the number of immoral and unworthy Christians began so to increase that the example of real piety and virtue became extremely rare.

FIFTH CENTURY.—The vices of the clergy were now carried to the most enormous lengths, and all the writers of the century whose probity and virtue render them worthy of credit are unanimous in their accounts of the luxury, arrogance, avarice and voluptuousness of the sacerdotal orders.

SIXTH CENTURY.—The various orders of the clergy were infected with those vices that are too often the consequences of an affluent prosperity.

SEVENTH CENTURY.—The progress of vice among the subordinate rulers of the Church was at this time truly deplorable.

EIGHTH CENTURY.—The clergy abandoned themselves to their passions without moderation or restraint; they were distinguished by their luxury, their gluttony and their lust.

NINTH CENTURY.—The licentiousness of the greatest part of the clergy arose at this time to an enormous height, and stand upon record in the most unanimous complaints of the most candid and impartial writers of this century.

TENTH CENTURY.—Both in the eastern and western provinces the clergy were for the most part composed of most worthless sets of men, shamefully illiterate and stupid, capable of the most abominable and flagitious deeds.

ELEVENTH CENTURY.—All the records of this century loudly complain of the vices that reigned among the rulers of the Church. Few among them reserved any remnants of piety and virtue, and, we might add, of decency and discretion.

TWELFTH CENTURY.—Wherever we turn our eyes among the various orders and ranks of the clergy we perceive the most flagrant marks of licentiousness and fraud, ignorance and luxury, and other vices whose pernicious effects were felt both in Church and State.

THIRTEENTH CENTURY.—Both the Greek and Latin writers, provoked beyond measure by the flagitious lives of their spiritual rulers and instructors, complain loudly of their licentious manners and load them with the severest reproaches; nor will these complaints and reproaches appear excessive to such as are acquainted with the history of this corrupt and superstitious age.

Here, then, we have the indictment against the Christian Church brought century by century—and not by an Atheist, but by a Christian historian. The indictment is one of the most deadly ever brought against the influence of the Christian religion. The moralising of the world by the Christian religion is one of the most impudent lies that history has produced. If one requires a further example of impertinent Christian propaganda up to date, one can find it in the canting concern for morals that takes such a prominent part in our modern "advanced" Christian preachers. The religion that began with a rehash of ancient mythology reaches its last phase in a canting chorus of falsehood and imposture.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

PLINY THE ELDER'S MASTERPIECE

IN the foreword to the second chapter of his monumental survey, "A History of Magic and Experimental Science" (Macmillan, 1923), Professor Lynn Thorndike expresses his conviction that: "A trio of great names—Pliny, Galen and Ptolemy—stand out above all others in the history of science under the Roman Empire. By their voluminousness, their generous scope in ground covered, and their broad, liberal and personal outlook, they have painted in colours, for the most part imperishable, extensive canvases of the scientific spirit and acquisitions of their own time."

Pliny was a statesman devoted to culture. Galen was not only the greatest medical authority of his age but also its leading philosopher, while Ptolemy became eminent as a physicist, geographer, astronomer and mathematician. These illustrious pagans illumined the fading glories of Old Rome, until the invasion of the Galilean cult and the barbarian onslaught precipitated the destruction of the Latin civilisation centred on the Seven Hills by Tiber's side.

Although Pliny's scepticism was pronounced, he was never completely emancipated from the thraldom of magic. Still, his main viewpoint was strictly scientific. Dedicated to the Emperor Titus, Pliny's "Natural History" appeared towards the close of the first century A.D., and Dr. Thorndike regards it "as perhaps the most important single source extant for the history of ancient civilisation." Indeed, it mentions nearly every important feature of Roman life. The public spectacles and amusements, the fine arts, geography, industrial processes, economics, commerce and agriculture; the pagan attitude towards a future existence; mining operations in Spain, and innumerable other themes all appear in its pages.

Some commentators on Pliny's *magnum opus* have demurred as to the validity of its title and consider it as more of an encyclopædia than a history of old time knowledge and belief. Still, its chief subject is natural history, and the greater part of his 37 books concerns flora and fauna, astronomy, geography, meteorology, man's scientific researches and discoveries, with various other allied themes. In fine, the Roman philosopher was ever in touch with Nature and, as a monument of ancient scientific knowledge, legend and tradition, his work pre-eminently remains.

Invaluable as Pliny's History is, from our modern standpoint it possesses the uncritical character of its period. Sceptical as most Roman patricians were, they retained a belief in astrology and the magic art. As Dr. Thorndike observes: "Pliny's credulity and lack of discrimination harvested the tares of legend and magic along with the wheat of historical fact and ancient science." Yet, his omission of any reference to the astounding miracles that are alleged to have been performed a few years earlier in Palestine is certainly suggestive. As Gibbon notes at the close of his celebrated fifteenth chapter of the "Decline and Fall," these marvels occurred "during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny. . . . Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of Nature which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe. A distinct chapter in Pliny is designed for eclipses of extraordinary character and unusual duration; but he contents himself with describing the singular defect of light which followed the murder of Cæsar. . . . This season of obscurity, which surely cannot be compared with the preternatural darkness of the Passion, had been already celebrated by most of the poets and historians of that memorable age."

Pliny spent part of his career in the service of the State. He travelled abroad and served as a soldier in Germany, and he was commander of a Roman fleet when, at the age of 56, he

succumbed to suffocation when striving to rescue those overcome by poisonous vapours discharged during the great eruption of the volcano Vesuvius.

Apart from his "Natural History," Pliny's writings survive only in their titles. He was evidently a very industrious man, and he assures us he was so deeply immersed in official tasks that his literary labours were undertaken at night. His nephew, Pliny the Younger, confirms this and states that his uncle never wasted a moment of his spare time. "He would dictate or have books read to him while lying down in his bath, and on journeys a secretary was always by his side with books and tablets." He took elaborate notes when reading and left to his nephew 160 notebooks inscribed on both sides of their pages in a small hand.

Dealing as he does with some 20,000 topics and laying 100 authors under contribution whose works comprised 2,000 volumes, Pliny claims that "no single writer, either in Greek or Latin," had ever previously essayed so laborious a task. Nor is his varied information entirely dependent on earlier writers, for Pliny displays an independent acquaintance with the Druids of Gaul and instances various discoveries unknown to his predecessors. Some of his contemporaries scoffed at what they deemed his misdirected activities, but he consoled himself with the reflection that his purblind critics condemned their own culture unconsciously. Also, Pliny's contrast of "the blood and slaughter of military history with the benefits conferred upon mankind by scientists," anticipates Herbert Spencer. The inordinate scramble for lucre in Rome, he unfavourably compares with the devotion to science and philosophy so widespread in ancient Athens.

Pliny also adumbrates the eternal conflict between religion and science. "In a single chapter on God," notes Dr. Thorndike, "he says pretty much all that the Church Fathers later repeated against paganism and polytheism. But his discussion would hardly satisfy a Christian. . . . He questions whether God is concerned with human affairs; slyly suggests that if so, God must be too busy to punish all crimes promptly; and points out that there are some things that God cannot do. He cannot commit suicide as men can, nor alter past events, nor make twice ten anything else but twenty." Indeed, the forces contained in natural phenomena constitute what divinity there is. Man is mortal and perishes when he dies. The theory of personal immortality he dismissed as "puerile raving" arising from the dread of death. As already intimated, Pliny did not discard all faith in magic. Still, as Dr. Thorndike pointedly observes: "If any reader is inclined to belittle Pliny for this, let him first stop and think how Pliny would ridicule some modern scientists for their religious beliefs, or for their spiritualism or psychical research."

Pliny scarcely ranks as a scientist, but as a chronicler of the then known facts of natural history his record is indispensable to the seeker of ancient knowledge. Moreover, science had not in his day ramified into the many specialised sections of ours, and it was possible for one investigator to embrace the whole field. Also, Pliny invariably cites his authorities and renders them full acknowledgement. In keeping with his contemporaries, however, he never abandoned his belief in the influences of the stars on human destiny and, in spite of the scornful attitude he adopts towards magical pretences, he remained under occult dominion to the last. Nevertheless, he dismisses the claims of the books of magic as absurd and stigmatises the magicians as fools or charlatans whose stories are impudent lies. Pliny's incredulity also appears in his assertion that "magic is invalid and empty, yet has some shadows of truth which, however, are due more to poisons than to magic."

Some of the magical conjurings of ancient times were criminal and loathsome, and it seems strange that so many distinguished men accepted the claims of the wonder workers at their face value. And in the light of the fact that so many dabblers in

(Continued on page 204)

ACID DROPS

PROFESSOR CHAU, Director in Melbourne, Australia, of the Chinese M.O.I., is reported in the London "Times" as expressing whether the East has benefited much from its contact with the West. He said:—

"The Japanese had become more interested in the gun than the Bible. The West's emphasis on race prejudice was similar to that Hitler was preaching. The East could teach the West that there was no need for political fanaticism. High church dignitaries had proclaimed that the war was to save Christian civilisation. They forgot that 450,000,000 Chinese and millions of Hindus and Moslems had ideals of their own."

Well, that is what a great many really do forget. And when some of our leaders speak of the Chinese, and of the East generally, as being inferior to the whites, but in current fact and with the assumption of a superior race, we begin to realise that plain speaking like that of Professor Chau should be welcomed.

The Rev. Doctor Dakin recently told the Baptist Union Assembly that it was time we found a conception of God with more punch in it. Well, there is one advantage that one has when dealing with gods. With men we are tied down to some basic facts, however different the conclusion may be. But when we are dealing with gods we make them any shape, colour, size or strength we please. If anyone chooses to teach that God has three heads, seven or eight heads, with tomato plants growing out of his elbow, we defy anyone to prove God is not like that. All one need do is to challenge the dissenter to produce any god who is different.

The "Universe" solemnly informs its readers that "A Catholic may not become a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain," and goes on to explain that "the Church" has over and over again condemned Communism and has declared it to be incompatible with the Christian religion. That's the stuff to give 'em! From the cradle onward take care that a child is never permitted to listen to anything but Catholicism. Send them to Catholic schools, let them read nothing but Catholic books, see that they attend a Catholic Church, and none other, if that doesn't turn them out staunch Roman Catholics, then let 'em go to hell.

Our clergy seem unable to decide whether it is more profitable to publish the news that Christianity is now losing ground daily, or that it is making converts at an unprecedented rate. This war, as was the case with the last one, has set the clergy, for the most part, singing songs of praise for the souls that are saved. On the other hand, the more level-headed among them are inclined to warn the clergy at home, and are alive to the fact that never before has the power of belief in Christianity been lower than it is today. An example is offered by the Bishop of Chelmsford, in an address to the Christian Evidence Society. He said:—

"There is a growing conviction that right down in the hearts of the people of this country they are very religious. I do not believe a word of it. What we have today is a sentimental humanism based on a rather vague theism that somewhere there is a God, and if we all do our best it will turn out right in the long run."

That is, to some extent, an advance on the stale tale we get from travelling Padres and a number of home parsons who are afraid to tell the people of the tremendous lapse from real believers in Christianity and religion in general. The war has given the churches one of the greatest shakings it has had for a long time.

The "Vision Vicar" as the vicar of St. Nicholas, Ipswich, is called has announced that he is "working on a document concerning the vision of the crucifixion seen in the sky during a raid." He says he has had large numbers of letters from people who saw it. We are not surprised, as mass delusions, backed up by religious lying, built up the Christian Church generations ago, and human nature is still easily fooled.

The Rev. J. Stanley Reed, Baptist minister, of Bradford, informed the readers of the local "Telegraph" that "there are no natural Atheists." Really, we do not know how to distinguish a natural from an unnatural Atheist, but there were certainly nothing but Atheists for many hundreds of thousands of years, and now we know that the gods did not make their appearance until just a few thousand years ago, and after a comparatively brief number of years of rapid multiplication, began to decline even more speedily than they developed. Once upon a time it was common for Christian preachers to say there was no such thing as an Atheist. Then they bethought themselves that there might be Atheists who were afraid to admit there was a God. Then they decided there were people who had no belief in any gods, but not many of them. But the humans of the Stanley Reed type were always very common, right through the age of humanity, and if we believed in a God we should say that God created such men so that sensible people might have something to smile at.

The Chairman of the Baptist Union certainly managed to put the largest number of blunders in the fewest words possible. First he told his audience that: "Thirty years ago Europe was a Christian Continent." Europe was not a Christian Continent—it was called so by the impudent Christians. We have the same kind of lie when we are informed that this is a Christian country, when probably more than half the people do not believe in Christianity. Neither is correct, but it suited preachers to call a country Christian or Atheistic just as it suited their immediate aims. Europe has been for many centuries under the domination of people who called themselves Christians. And the best comment on the value of that domination is its present state.

The Chairman, S. J. Price, did, however, let go a truth, the significance of which we are certain he did not see. He said: "In the era before Constantine, Christianity was in the minority." That is true, and had Constantine, cunning and unscrupulous, not adopted Christianity, it is very probable that Christianity would now have been known as one of those queer survivals that existed a few centuries ago. It was due to Constantine that the Christian sects weakened the fight with each other and developed the physical fight against all who declined to believe in Christianity. It was Constantine who, historically, made the existence of Christianity certain. Christianity survived in conditions in which a healthier creed could not live. To use Gibbon's phrase, "The downfall of civilisation followed the triumph of barbarism and religion." Christianity has been fighting civilisation ever since. Its weapons have varied. Its aims and methods remain unchanged.

There has been a lot of concern among Roman Catholics concerning marriage with non-Catholics. Such agitation seems to hint that the number of Catholics marrying either at a Protestant church or a Registry Office is considerable. They dare not admit this in set words, since that would encourage others to do likewise. The game, therefore, becomes one of pretending that the number of theologically false marriages are very few. Close search would show the opposite. The number of marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics is steadily increasing—of that we feel certain.

The Catholic "Universe" presents us with the following gem: "Catholics who marry in a register office are doubtless married in the eyes of the State, but they are not married in the eyes of God and his Church." We do not know what authority the eyes of God has to do with the matter, and certainly the reply, in substance, by the English law is "Nothing." The English State says deliberately that if a man and a woman wish to live together, there is nothing in the law to prevent their doing so. But if the said couple wish the State to enforce the rights of one person against another, then the contract entered into by the two must be properly registered by an appointed official. That is the sum and substance of the State's interference and, so far as it goes, it is perfectly just and reasonable. The edict of the Roman Church is, in a civilised community, sheer impertinence.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. EDWARDS, A. D. HOWELL SMITH, JOHN ROWLAND.—Letters received, but thanks to limitations of space, will appear next week.

E. L. WALTERS.—Pleased to have your appreciation of "God and the Co-op." It is a very useful propagandist pamphlet and is selling well. We should like to see the pamphlet given as wide a publicity as possible. It should bring many to see the social dangers of religious belief.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: A. R. Williams, 3s.; Max Kaplan, 17s.

J. HUMPHREY.—Much obliged for cuttings.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—W. T. Hawks (Durban), £1 3s.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

TO-DAY, Sunday, May 28, the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society takes place at the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. The chair will be taken at 10-30 a.m. prompt by the President. Admission by member's ticket. Those who have by any chance mislaid their tickets should see the Secretary at the Hall. At 12-30 p.m. adjournment for lunch at a neighbouring restaurant will take place. Tickets, 3s. each, should be applied for as early as possible. The afternoon session will commence at 2-30 p.m. and last till 4-30 p.m.

In the evening, at 6-30 p.m., there will be a Freethought Demonstration at the Holborn Hall, with speeches from Messrs. Brighton, Clayton, Corina, Ebury and Rosetti, and Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair. This will afford an opportunity for introducing non-members to the Society and its work.

Oxford contains a large number of Freethinkers, and there should be no difficulty in reviving the activity of the local N.S.S. Branch. Will all those willing to help towards that please communicate with Mr. W. Hawley, 17, Cranmer Road, Cowley, Oxford.

It is not without justice that Christians themselves coined the term "Christian truth." In ordinary affairs and in theories of life philosophers are content to refer to "truth," and let the matter go at that. The poor unenlightened philosophers of ancient Greece, the teachers of pagan Roman, the people of ancient Egypt, right up to secular writers on ethics were likewise content with the plain unadulterated "truth." To these unenlightened souls there was just truth and falsehood. They were opposites, and nothing could make them anything else. Then

came Christianity, and we got "truth according to Christianity," "Bible truth," "Christian truth," "Roman Catholic truth," "Protestant truth," and so forth. Sometimes light was thrown on the situation by reference to the plea of St. Paul that if his lie had rebounded to the greater glory of God there was no justification for upbraiding him for wandering from mere "truth." And from the time of Paul right up to the B.B.C. preachers the gulf between plain, ordinary, scientific truth and Christian truth remained separate and distinct. It is a wonder the Churches never developed a Christian multiplication as distinct from that of ordinary life.

A fine commentary on the truth that is called Christian has reached us in a letter from a man serving in the Army. The letter was not sent to us direct, but a friend of the writer who sends it to us thought it would be at least amusing. And amusing it is, although not surprising to those who are familiar with the twisted tales that come from "spiritual" sources. The son writes to his father, as part of a lengthy letter:—

"I think you would like to hear about our church service last Sunday. Notice was given on the Saturday parade that there would be a service, and on the Sunday morning the parson turned up with a car full of hymn books; up to five minutes of the service commencing only four fellows had turned up. One of the corporals blew a whistle, and the fellows, including myself, walked from our tents with mugs in hand, thinking that it was the mobile "Naafi" that had arrived. We were soon to find out our mistake; it was a call to church service. It was very amusing to see the corporal pleading with the fellows to go, but, believe it or not, they all went back to their tents. The parson had to carry on with a flock of four."

This letter was not sent to us, but to a friend. It is not the only letter of its kind we have had sent us; we have been receiving them ever since the war began. But the parsons read with an eye of faith—a magnifying kind of eye—for in the reports from the parsonic front it is the men who ask for religion, and the parson has simply to call the men together and receive heartfelt thanks for his ministrations. A reprinting of a number of the letters we have received would make a rather amusing book.

The Director of Religious Broadcasting says there is no such thing as B.B.C. religion. There is some truth in this, but it is in the main an example of telling a thundering lie in expressing a formal truth. To begin with, the B.B.C. announces that it will allow no one to depart from the "Christian tradition" if it can be prevented. Secondly, it never permits two sides of a case to be heard where one side is very drastic in its attack on established things or situation. It never permits a criticism of Christianity, it never permits extreme views on economics or sociology. It was mean enough for some time to shut out the National Song of the new Russia and, rather than permit it, dropped all National Anthems for some time. A public institution that to-day blots out attacks on Christianity is just as contemptible as anything can be. That, of course, might be stopped if men of standing in the intellectual world refused to take part in its broadcasts. But the power of advertising is very strong.

The impudent proposals which religionists of all kinds put forward (as they always do whenever they see a chance of publicity) that a National Day of Prayer should be held on the Sunday following the invasion of France—or the opening of the Second Front—is not by any means being received with quite the enthusiasm which distinguished other National Days of Prayer. Some papers point out it will be an awful smack at the Deity if we fail to effect a landing, or get thrown back into another Dunkirk. Others, like the "Church Times," declare rather faint-heartedly that National Days of Prayer "need to emphasise the nation's continual dependence on God rather than its immediate bid for military success." Besides, is it fair to the Germans to call in supernatural aid when our enemy has only his fighting men upon whom to rely? Let's be British, if nothing else, and play cricket.

COUCHOUD'S "CREATION OF CHRIST"

IV.

NO one can read the Gospel of John and compare it with the other Gospels without seeing how vastly different it is in tone and spirit. As Dr. Couchoud insists, for John, Jesus "is the pre-existing Wisdom of God, the everlasting Word, the Life, the Light." The Gospel is full of hymns, some of which are rhythmically set out by Couchoud—like the one beginning with "I am the Vine, you the branches, He who dwells in me and I in Him," etc. Certainly the Jesus of John is myth—or invention—and even those Rationalists who believe in a real Jesus rarely quote the speeches put into his mouth by John as a proof of their belief.

And dealing with the marriage feast in Cana, Couchoud says: "Dionysos performed this miracle of changing water into wine every year on January 5 at the island of Andros. John had no hesitation in attributing the same miracle to the Christ." Modern Christians, particularly temperance cranks, do not seem particularly fond of this miracle, and some prefer to admit it is only "symbolism." This is Couchoud's own opinion, and he thinks the raising of Lazarus is symbolism also. The fact is, John is all symbolism, and that is why he is of very little use to the Historicist. Even they must feel the utter absurdity of a man who "did" so many things that "if they should be written every one . . . even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written," which is the last verse in John. The very next verse, the first in Acts, immediately contradicts it: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach. . . ." Luke (or the author of Acts) managed to get a double quantity in one book—acts and speeches which even the world could not contain. A real mystery!

Couchoud says that Marcion, who was so much responsible for the spate of Gospels which followed him, was hated by the other Churches, and even old Polycarp called him "the first-born of Satan." What else could be said of a man who hated Jews and Judaism and their Old Testament, and who "insisted that Jesus had no true flesh, that he could not grow old, that his being was not corruptible . . . that there could be no resurrection of the body"? Though Marcion's sect lasted another three centuries after his death, it eventually passed into Manichaeism.

The Church in the meantime wanted another Gospel which would replace the evil done by Marcion, and it found—says Couchoud—just the man of genius wanted for the job in Clement, the Church Secretary. He was exceptionally well read in sacred and profane literature, was not a Jew though he knew the Jewish books by heart, and he wrote fine literary Greek.

The work he produced was the Gospel according to Luke—pretending it was by the friend of Paul gave it better authority—and "he endowed the Church with a doctrine of the Holy Ghost which was to ensure its stability. . . . The Holy Ghost is a celestial being derived from God and Jesus; at times it appears in the form of a dove, at others in the shape of tongues of flame." In addition, his Gospel gave the "unbelieving" Jew another proof in a genealogy that Jesus really was descended from David, and making his parents go from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be born in order to fulfil a prophecy.

It would take too much space to deal critically with Luke—sufficient here is to say that it differs considerably from the other Gospels—though, of course, agreeing where the author was compelled to borrow from his predecessors. Most authorities also agree that Luke wrote a sequel in Acts—as Couchoud claims, "Starting from an utterly mythical point of departure, Luke undertakes the history of the early Church." In this, Luke shows how "the same ritual had to be repeated; the Gospel is offered to the Jews, who reject it, then offered to the Gentiles.

who accept it." We can carry this ritual down to this day—for the Jews are nearly always rejecting the Gospel, and the Gentiles accepting it, though not now with quite the same credulity or alacrity as formerly.

By this time the New Testament as a solid book was well on its way, and Couchoud speculates as to how it was compiled and edited. No one can really know, for the editor or editors have left no memoranda, but I think we can accept his detailed exposition as coming very near the truth. The Gospels, those that are known as canonical and those in the N.T. Apocrypha, are simply various attempts at a biography of Jesus produced by the many sects into which Christianity was split. There is no doubt whatever that the rejected Gospels were often quoted by the early Church Fathers as "gospel truth"—and, when it suits their purpose, they are quoted by Christian theologians even now.

"Jesus," says Dr. Couchoud, "has been definitely formed." That is true. He is God Almighty "in the flesh," a "holy sacrificial Lamb," a Fish, the Messiah, the Redeemer, "our Lord" and God knows what besides. One American writer, Bruce Barton, in "The Man Nobody Knows"—a work which even in these columns received encomiums from a Freethinker—made him the world's greatest Business Man; and Jesus can be easily made anyone's ideal.

All the same, he is a mere literary creation, though I am by no means ready to accede to the whole of Dr. Couchoud's exposition. I think it can be demonstrated that in the story of Jesus Christ, carefully though it has been edited by the compilers of the New Testament, we can discern not only many elements from Pagan mythology, but a good deal of Phallicism and Sun Myth clearly indicated to those with eyes to see.

That Marcion was actually the first to bring Paul's heavenly being down to earth, clothe him in the flesh of man, and make the whole read like an historical narrative, may perhaps be the truth; but the other Gospel writers certainly borrowed a great deal of material not fully accounted for by Couchoud.

And it is curious to find that just as in the past the "most ruthless warfare was engaged over Jesus' human nature," as Dr. Couchoud declares, so that battle is still being fought, with quite a number of eminent Rationalists siding with the Historicists. Most of these people throw overboard the miracles related in the New Testament; they are ready even to do the same with a good many of the non-miraculous stories, and they will almost go to the point of denying the existence of God, but they will not give up Jesus "in the flesh." They are ready to admit that they know practically nothing about him or his family, whether he was an Essene monk, a wandering preacher, a desert hermit, a King of the Jews, a great business man, or a brigand captain; but that there must have been someone to give rise to the Christian legend, they are all quite positive.

The most redoubtable of Couchoud's opponents, the ex-Abbe Loisy, perhaps the greatest of modern theologians, played havoc with the Gospels, and was ready to admit that if there never was a Crucifixion the whole Jesus story was myth—but he stuck to that event almost with cold fury. For him, it was a case of a Jew deified—a man made God, and never a God made Man.

For Couchoud, "Jesus has to be understood in a different way." Jesus was not a religious performer like Zoroaster, Confucius, Mahomet or Luther. His proper place is among the Gods—Dionysus, Osiris, Attis, Mithra, "whose mysteries before his, but with lesser power, had offered to men the great hope of winning the victory over death." Jesus is a God made into a "human being" by a number of fanatical writers; and thus he is nothing but a literary creation.

H. CUTNER.

"A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT." An Outline of the Philosophy of Freethinking. By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

GOD'S CHRISTIAN LAND!

Breathes there a God, with face flushed red,
Who never, full ashamed, hath said:
"So *this* is my own, my Christian land,"
As down he looked on our seabound strand;
Or whose heart within him ne'er did ache
At the picture of a ghastrly fake?

If such there be, go, mark him well;
In him no self-respect can dwell.
High tho' his prestige, Jehovah his name,
He shall go back to nowhere, whence he came,
Unwept, unworshipped and unsung.

Oh! Christian England, so often beguiled,
How you've betrayed the innocent child.
Land of the parson, land of the priest,
Land of good people, brazenly fleeced;
Land of the Churches—that Christian band
Who've collared the schoolkids and ten thousand "grand."
Land of our fathers, who happily missed
The "Christian atmosphere"—God's greatest twist.

F. J. CORINA.

CORRESPONDENCE

SOCIALIST PARTY

SIR,—Among the "Sugar Plums" in the May 14 issue occurs the following:—

"... We are pleased to see that the official Socialist Party has been compelled to withdraw its intention of dismissing Mr. Aneurin Bevan from its membership."

When you refer to the "official" Socialist Party you obviously have in mind the Labour Party. I would like to point out, however, that the Labour Party and the Socialist Party are two distinct parties whose aims, principles and objects are as different as chalk and cheese. It may interest Freethinkers to know that the Socialist Party stands for Atheism and makes no secret about it, whereas the Labour Party—with one eye on the ballot box and the other on the mob—is decidedly discreet on "God" and religion.

Incidentally, the Socialist Party advocates Socialism, while the Labour Party advocates anything but Socialism.

And thereby hangs a tale—and what a tale!—Yours, etc.,

BILL BROWN.

WAR DAMAGED CHURCHES

SIR,—An article in the "Manchester Guardian" of May 16 points out the arrangements the Churches are making with the War Damage Commission for damaged churches.

The ecclesiastical authorities would seem to be obtaining very preferential treatment, based on—

- (a) The reasonable cost of "plain repair" of war damage.
- (b) The reasonable net cost of building a "plain substitute church."

Arrangements are made for rebuilding a whole "plain substitute church" on entirely new sites. In some cases even stained glass windows will be allowed.

The assessors of the War Damage Commission in this district are attempting to induce owner-occupiers of damaged houses with a 50 per cent. payment against cost of re-roofing on the grounds that much of the property here was roofed with inferior "Portmadoc" slates. This notwithstanding that the houses were tight and rainproof before the bombing began.

In view of the fact that the owner-occupier has to house and shelter his family night and day, whilst the Churches, on their own admission, only shelter tiny numbers of people for an hour or two each Sunday, it would seem gravely inequitable treatment. Yours, etc.,
A. R. ANDERSON.

IRENÆUS AND THE CRUCIFIXION

SIR,—Mr. Archibald Robertson seems to dislike my reference to Irenæus as much as he dislikes my quoting Justin Martyr. However, the reader must judge for himself if I have been "corrected." Mr. Robertson admits that "it is quite true" that Irenæus "says Jesus lived till over fifty." As, according to the best Christian authorities, Jesus was born 4 B.C. or thereabouts—no one knows for sure—and Pontius Pilate left Palestine about 36 A.D., it is as clear as the midday sun, if Jesus lived till "over fifty," he could not possibly have been crucified as related in the Gospels. I do agree, however, if Jesus is not Jesus but somebody else under a similar name, and he was not born about 4 B.C., and did not die about A.D. 30, but lived many years after Pilate had left Palestine—say, until Titus began crucifying Jews—then I do stand "corrected." But may I add that the statement of Irenæus is based on the authority of his master Polycarp, who had it from St. John himself.—Yours, etc.,
H. OUTNER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held May 16, 1944

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.
Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Bryant, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Horowitz, Griffiths, Morris, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary.
Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.
New members were admitted to Manchester, Newcastle, North Staffs Branches and the Parent Society.
Lecture reports and other activities from Bradford, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Oxford and Bristol Branches were dealt with, and correspondence from Messrs. Brighton, Clayton and Smithies noted.
Preliminary details for reviving International Freethought activity were discussed, approved, and instructions given.
Final arrangements for the Annual Conference were reported. The President announced that the next meeting of the Executive would be called after the Conference, and the proceedings closed.
R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

- LONDON—OUTDOOR**
West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Messrs. WOOD, PAGE, and other speakers.
- COUNTRY—OUTDOOR**
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Various speakers.
Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. Debate: "Reincarnation": Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES.
Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, May 26, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.
Higham.—Wednesday, May 31, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.
Lumb-in-Rossendale.—Thursday, June 1, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.
Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. T. M. MOSLEY: "Is Religion Necessary?"

GOD AND THE CO-OP.

Will Religion Split the People's Movement?

By F. J. CORINA.

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PEACE

NO matter how well-developed a person's mind may be, he or she never can know perfect peace—the "Peace which passeth all understanding." Indeed, the more richly endowed the person's mind becomes, the less likely is he or she to find utter contentment.

It is notorious that the more of this world's so-called riches that some men have the more they want—or think they want—and they strive continuously to add to what they already possess. Much almost always wants more, and the owner of a good deal of worldly wealth craves for what other men have got, and his craving occupies most of his attention until, more often than not, it becomes an obsession. Such men never are at rest.

And as with some persons so with some people—or so it would appear: there is always a lust for power, which means, either directly or indirectly, robbing other people, another nation or other nations. But there is, of course, a fallacy here, because it is not the people as a body, but those in power who look with covetous eyes across the water or over the frontier at their neighbour's possessions and determine, sooner or later, to grab what they see. In those acts of aggression and spoliation the masses are merely the tools of the robbers, and they suffer all the horrors of wars in consequence.

But to return to the personal and non-commercial aspect of the matter: no man can ever sit back and, figuratively speaking, fold his arms, simply because the more he contemplates what there is going on around him, and the greater—through self-exertion—becomes his ability to appreciate the cause of what he sees, the more he realises—the more he is bound to realise—that a certain measure of responsibility rests upon him to do whatever he can to help the less fortunate. That, of course, is why some men and women strive with all their might, year in and year out, so to equip themselves that they can be of the utmost possible use to the community at large and then devote so much of their lives to the service of others: they understand more and more clearly as they pursue their studies, and their interest in humanity widens, what has occurred and why, and then they try to lend a helping hand whenever the opportunity arises. They are not out for pelf or public approval; quite the reverse, in fact; they would scorn acclamation, and their pleasure is derived from doing what they consider to be right and proper in the circumstances.

Admittedly, all men and women are not altruistic, much less "saintlike," or, from the very nature of things, ever can be; that is one of the reasons why such responsibility devolves upon those whose mental and spiritual development—whose goodness of heart and mind—transcends ours: their eyes are open, whereas ours are shut, and because they are what they are, they come to our aid, seeking neither fee nor reward of any sort.

Many such generous-minded men and women have lived and loved their fellow men, and the world is all the better for it; but let us not overlook the fact that, for the reasons given, none of them ever experienced perfect peace.

There are, it is true, some people—some couples—who are so much in tune, one with the other, that they live together in what appears to be perfect harmony, but having regard to the fact that there are no two human beings exactly alike in bodily structure and disposition, and bearing in mind that no two people are influenced in precisely the same way by the course of events, even in their case—in the case of the apparently perfect couple—there is bound to be, now and again, a clash of ideas if not of temperaments, with the consequent disharmony.

In short, peace is a purely relative term, and the quality and quantity of contentment which any man or woman can enjoy depends upon his or her physical and mental constitution.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

FASCIST IDEAS IN BRITAIN

MANY modern thinkers have pointed out that, though this war is being ostensibly fought against German Nazism (deriving in its turn from the Italian Fascism of Mussolini), there are numerous people in this country whose ideas are, in essence, indistinguishable from those of the Fascists.

It occurred, of all places, at the British Social Hygiene Council Conference on Population. The British Social Hygiene Council, generally speaking, is a progressive body, but Dr. P. D. H. Chapman, of Bridlington, is clearly not to be numbered among its most advanced members. Read what he said:—

"We should make education for boys and girls quite different from the age of 14. Girls should be trained in more feminine occupations, and boys should be given some form of military training."

It only needs the addition of a religious background to make this the formula of the perfect Nazi. Let women bear children, who, if they are males, will have the privilege of dying to support a dying order of Christian capitalism—that is the motto of the Nazi, and Dr. Chapman's prescription for all our modern ills is almost the same.

S. H.

PLINY THE ELDER'S MASTERPIECE

(Continued from page 199)

the occult in our generation, while professing an open mind, really favour the view that there is probably something in it, Pliny's occasional vacillation may be forgiven.

There is also the possibility that Pliny's MSS. may have been interpolated in later and more superstitious Christian centuries. In any case, Dr. Thorndike surmises that: "Very possibly Pliny was as confused in his own mind as he seems to be to us. He could no more keep magic out of his "Natural History" than poor Mr. Dick could keep Charles the First's head out of his book. One fact, at any rate, stands out clearly: the prominence of magic in his encyclopædia and in the learning of his age."

T. F. PALMER.

National Secular Society
HOLBORN HALL, Grays Inn Road,
London, W.C.

A

**FREETHOUGHT
DEMONSTRATION**

WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 28th, 1944

Chairman:

Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN

Speakers:

J. T. BRIGHTON,
L. EBURY,

J. CLAYTON,
F. J. CORINA,

R. H. ROSETTI.

Doors open 6 p.m.

Commence 6.30 p.m.

ADMISSION FREE