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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and the War

HE brought it on himself. For many years he held the chief religious position in this country. It was a post that gave distinction without first-class mental ability being essential. The position brought a very large salary, with a retiring pension that could not be considered niggardly. His tenure was more secure than that of a Prime Minister. If the holder of the office might be subject to criticism, it was not the rule to press the complaint far—and in any case it came mainly from outsiders. He could sleep 60 nights without feeling that to-morrow he might be thrown out by some of his followers turned critics; and when he retired he received all the eulogies that are always given when there is some degree of satisfaction that one has gone "for good." The occupant of the post we have in mind was almost level with that of an hereditary king, since he inherited all the virtues of his predecessors and possessed all the virtues that he ought to have without being saddled with any of the frailties that disturb the sleep of an elected leader.

I have hurried on, and in my hurry have omitted to say about whom I am speaking. It is the late Archbishop of Canterbury, who now adorns—or decorates—the House of Lords as Lord Lang of Lambeth—a title which is curiously suggestive of "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road." We were introduced to Lord Lang through the medium of the "Listener," the weekly organ of the B.B.C. The title of his broadcast was "As the Ordeal Approaches," an obvious reference to the struggle of England and her Allies. In addition to the title, Lord Lang takes for his theme "Let God arise and let his enemies be shattered." There is here a quiet assumption that "God and us" are working hand-in-hand. There is nothing new in that because in nearly every war God has done his best to help us; and if he has taken a long while to show his hand, as in the present war, when victory has arrived we are quite certain that God's hand will be well in the picture. Of course, God's help was not entirely unselfish in this war because our enemies were his enemies—that we have on the authority of the ex-Archbishop himself—and in helping us to beat the Nazis he was also wiping some of his own enemies off the map. That naturally introduces the question of whether the angels in heaven ought not to be singing our praise while we are singing theirs. Judging, indeed, from our priesthood the existence of God was at stake, for when gods cease to be worshipped it is not long before they cease to exist.

Lord Lang evidently felt he was on slippery ground here, for he commences by saying that he is "mainly speaking to those who believe that God exists and that he will reward those who diligently seek him." But this does not reflect much credit on either God or Lord Lang; for

if we are on the side of righteousness God should come as a volunteer, not as a pressed soldier or a hired one. What should we think of a man who, seeing another in grave danger, declined to give help because he had not been invited to do so? In serious matters God should not wait to lend a hand. He should not wait for his children to ask for help; it should be given without stint and with no condition or price attached. God, say his followers, knows what man wants. He has the power to enforce his will. We are told he can soften the hearts of men; we know from experience that he can soften their brains.

We are given another example of the quality of the religious mind. Lord Lang says: "We do not ask for God's help as an ally, but as a sovereign who has the right to claim the loyalty of our lives." The analogy is a very poor one. It is true that we have an hereditary King, privileged aristocrats and an hereditary Second Chamber; and although they together show an example of the power of the "dead hand," yet even their power may be broken should they venture beyond bearable limits. And as a mere matter of history we have beheaded one monarch and have turned out more than one. The sovereign has not a legal right in this country to command our lives, save in prescribed situations. Even Lord Lang cannot have forgotten that he was one of the prime agents in turning out one king in recent years, and with no legal basis. Our loyalty to the King has its legal limitations. Does Lord Lang wish us to understand that God may likewise be dissipated by a vote or a legal process? Monarchs may be removed, and gods also. History is littered with the remains of both.

Dr. Lang's conclusion is: "We cannot doubt that at this solemn time God is calling us and our Allies to vindicate his laws of justice, mercy and righteousness. It is for us to try by prayer and penitence and loyalty to Him to prove worthy of His call." We do not agree. We prefer the decision of one of the Roman Emperors who, when invited to protect the gods from assault, replied: "Let the gods protect their own honour." From the point of view of self-respect, the suggestion that we should ask God to vindicate his own laws is pure impudence to the deity. As an Atheist, we can agree that the Christian God, along with other gods, is in trouble and bids fair to be one of the casualties of the war. But to trumpet the message that God is calling on the Allies to vindicate his laws is as clear a case of blasphemy as we can imagine. Lord Lang might well call this section of his address "God in a Fix."

Some of the people who are fighting in this war may have called on God to help them, but we doubt whether any of them were conscious of helping God out of a fix; and if we are to judge men and women by actions instead of by formal professions, we have looked for help not to the Christian God, whose weakness becomes more and

more patent with the passing of the years, but to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and the rank and file of the common people, the vast majority of whom do not—on the admission of the clergy—bother their heads about gods. Even children have toiled at this task. The determination is not to make God more secure in his position, but to see that there shall be no repetition of a world war; and that stands whether God exists or not. God is, indeed, irrelevant to the fundamental issue of winning the war.

Lord Lang says it is God's wish that we should win the war. I have very little knowledge of what God's will is, but from the standpoint of common sense it is a case of "he could if he would but he didn't." If we are to believe the story on which Lord Lang lived for many years, and without which story he might never have been heard of, God has watched his children slaughtering each other for at least many thousands of years; he has seen men, women and children massacred; he has seen the weapons of war grow more and more deadly, and only at long last has it occurred to him to call for the abolition of physical warfare. Once, and once only, did he, according to the Christian tradition, devise a plan for a better world than his first attempt at world-making turned out to be. He adopted the Hitlerian method of slaughtering all living things, leaving just enough to perpetuate the race. But if ever a plan failed unmistakably it was that one, for the sins of the new population that sprang from Noah were far worse than those of the population which God in his wisdom had drowned. Now a second world war in the space of twenty-five years is raging and has threatened whatever is good in the world; and all that one of his ex-representatives on earth can say is that God means well, and he asks that his good intentions shall be carried into action by his worshippers. Apparently, Lord Lang is only certain that God works when something is done that he, as a specialist in godism, agrees with; but there is an old politico-ethical saying that power should carry responsibilities in proportion to the degree of power exercised. That maxim should apply even more to gods than to humans. The degree of human responsibility for the war may be difficult to assess; but if one believes in God, there should be no question as to his responsibility in the matter. Sedulously we have sent praise for every victory we have won, but we have never yet had the courage to charge God with responsibility for our setbacks. The gods play a safe game, while man pays forfeit to the gods whatever occurs. One wishes Lord Lang would explain whether God acts on his own initiative, or does he act as does a wary politician and pay special attention to a majority number?

Dr. Lang is very fond of such phrases as "We are God's children." If we grant that, there goes with it the corollary that God stands in the relation of a parent; and the first duty of parents is to do the best that can be done for their children. Human law is, in fact, so far ahead of the ethics of the gods that there are prescribed punishments for parents who neglect their duty in this respect. Let anyone think not merely of the deaths that have occurred in the last four and a-half years, but also of the degradation humanity has undergone, and then imagine the feelings of a decent-minded man who has by some mistake arrived at heaven—his asking why God has not looked after his children at least to the extent that men and women look after theirs. And consider the effect of God's answer to

the question—"They never praised me nor asked me for help." I think that the questioner would inquire from some loitering angel to show him the nearest and quickest route to hell, where the company would be decidedly better even though the climate was a little trying.

On the grounds that Charles II explained the popularity of a famous preacher and the large audiences he gathered—that his nonsense suited their nonsense—we may account for Lord Lang's eulogy of prayer. People have asked him—or he thinks people have asked him—whether they ought to pray to God for victory. Naturally, as late manager of one of the largest praying stores in the country, Lord Lang says we must pray diligently; but "all prayer must be offered in submission to the sovereign will of God." A very old-fashioned answer, but in fact a very stupid one. If our prayers have no effect in the changing of God's intentions, why waste time in praying? If they to any extent changed God's actions or decisions, why add "Not my will, but thy will be done"? Probably with a half-conscious feeling that he has said something not very wise, Lord Lang adds that if we prayed "only for some policy or advantage, we might hesitate to pray for victory; but in this tremendous struggle there is a vast moral and spiritual issue at stake."

In the name of all that is sane and sensible, why should we pray at all if there was not some policy or advantage to be gained by praying? Praying, taken generally, cannot be considered as a kind of massage of the vocal parts of our anatomy. Neither is it a breathing exercise. It is certainly to our advantage to beat the Germans, and we cannot do that without some kind of a policy. When we pray for good health we are asking for some advantage. One can imagine Lord Lang saying that the true Christian prayed for benefits for others. But then the "others" are also praying for us, so that all we get is a very widespread mixture of humbug, dishonesty, self-deception and the desire to have a good share of anything that is going. When it comes to humbug, insincerity and self-deception, commend us to the modern up-to-date Christian. We should say he is unique—if there were not so many of him.

CHAPMAN COHEN:

A MESSAGE FROM GOD (Official. Exclusive to "The Freethinker")

I HAVE a message from God. Yes: I assure you I have. Why not? Other people—see the Scriptures of all times and all peoples—have had messages from God. Then why not another, up to date?

Here it is.

"Thus saith the Lord: I have been reading the 'Daily Mail' recently and—"

You are shocked. So was I. For I am a person of rather fastidious taste in journalism and I remember hearing the late Lord Balfour (who had some of a god's aloofness) reply to a question as to whether he read "The Times": "Well, 'The Times' is not one of those newspapers that I abstain from reading." I imagined that the Lord God might have journalistic abstentions resembling the Lord Balfour's. Or even mine.

I indicated as much.

"No," said God. "I keep a sharp eye, a Janus-eye, on Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook and all other British newspaper proprietors."

The British nation will be glad to hear that. For we all feared that our noble newspaper-proprietors were getting away with it, like Hitler with Austria and Mussolini with Abyssinia, although we knew that, like the ancient Kings of Israel and Judah, they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord—and in our sight, too.

Since God read the papers, I at once mentioned the war, for there is little else in the papers. As to the war, I said, reproachfully, that God's eccentric conduct had made many excellent Britons fear that he was neutral like Sweden, or at best, a half-hearted co-belligerent like Italy. Certainly he had been very pro-Axis at first. But now I hoped he had seen the errors of his ways and was turning pro-Ally—like others. Especially after our long-scale anthropomorphic, prayer-bombardment led by H.M. the King against Germany's prayers.

"Of course, you are always on the side of the big battalions. That is to say—generally—the wrong side," I told God.

"I move in a mysterious way," God answered.

But I had heard that "crack" before, and I retorted that if this was all he had come to say—

"No," said God. "I have a message for the War Damage Commission. I am highly annoyed about what I have read in the 'Daily Mail.'"

I said we all knew he was a jealous God and always annoyed with somebody about something, like those children of Israel of old. But like Jonah, I did not want to take his message even to the War Damage Commission. For I myself have a War Damage Claim of my own and do not want to offend the Commission.

"After all," I argued, "O Lord, you allowed 14,000 of your churches and religious buildings to be bombed. I had only one and that was bombed without my consent. Why did you Almighty God, permit your 14,000 churches and houses to be bombed?"

"As a property-owner like myself you ought to know better than to ask such a silly question," replied God. "If you owned a lot of slum-property like my old dirty, dusty, neglected parish churches, full of cheap, shoddy furniture and meretricious ornaments in the worst possible taste, wouldn't you have it bombed and get compensation if you could?"

I praised God for his business-like regard for his own interests—a characteristic most of his admirers have missed.

"Then what have you got to grumble about, O Lord?"

"Don't you know? The 'Daily Mail' says that a Committee presided over by Dr. Fisher, Bishop of London, has the greatest difficulty in arriving at a fair basis of valuation for a blitzed church. I ask you!" said God. "These Bishops!"

"Very annoying to a property-owner," I agreed. "An ordinary builder could assess the damage."

"Yes," said God. "But the Commission has resolved the Bishop's problem by deciding now that they will only rebuild me a 'plain' substitute or just do 'plain' repair, whichever costs the less."

"Good God!" I exclaimed in genuine indignation at such treatment of a property-owner. Then I begged God's pardon for my outburst.

"I forgive you," said the Lord. "I said as much, and more, myself on reading the news. I call it dreadful; treating one's only God like that as though the cheapest is good enough for Me. And these people pretend to believe in me, to fear me, to love me, and to worship me—I ask you!"

"My respectful sympathy, O Lord."

"That's not all. Just because there are not many visitors to the City churches of London they won't rebuild them. Fancy if they calculated the value of your blitzed house on the basis of its visitors and wouldn't rebuild because Aunt Fanny didn't call!"

"Outrageous," I said. (And I meant it, for my property-owning sympathies were stirred.)

"Yes," said God, "and if the church site is valuable enough to provide funds for a new plain church on a new site and a balance is left, that balance will belong to the denomination. Pinching the proceeds of my property—do you call that honest?"

"I don't," I said. "Nor would an Old Bailey jury if it wasn't the Commission or the Bishops concerned."

"Quite," said God. "But worse still! My new houses are to be smaller. 'Of a type and size the denomination would erect if it were neither financially embarrassed nor unduly rich,' they say. What on earth do they mean by that idiocy?"

"It means," I said firmly, "that you are going to be cheated as usual by your worshippers, O Lord."

"Just what I thought," said God. "The dirty dogs! And then I'm expected to win the war for them. Well, I may! But wait till it's all over. Someone will get it in the neck. That Church of England—always—always trying to get the better of me. Once they built me Gothic cathedrals. Now it's 'plain, small substitute churches.' Could they act so and really believe in me?"

"No," I agreed. "They only think they believe. Or they would build God's house of the best material, of the most magnificent size, with the finest of everything in it."

"What a life," sighed God. "Being the God of Britain is a dog's life. Threepenny-bits offered in the plate on Sundays and total neglect from Mondays to Saturdays. And the bad music and worse poetry they howl at one! And always pestering me with petitions for their greedy selves. And that awful Archbishop Temple pretending that all I want from Britain is a little milk-and-water Socialism and a few mild reforms in the Joint-Stock Bank system. Caiaphas, the High Priest of ancient Jerusalem, was better. Will you kindly warn the War Damage Commission and the Church of England of my wrath to come?"

"Certainly," I said. "And if you're going back to Heaven you might tell my mental ancestors, Swift, Voltaire, Landor and the rest, to send me down a double portion of their spirit. We can do with some of their skill and courage. . . . Well, I'll give your message in 'The Freethinker?'"

"A paper I never abstain from reading," said God. "In fact, the only paper that pays me the compliment of not saying that I am what I'm not. . . . You can print this unsolicited testimonial to them if you wish."

Such was God's message to Britain in general; to the Commission, to his faithless worshippers; to "The Freethinker."

It is authentic and official, as you will at once recognise on reading it, for what else could God or Man or any other property-owner say about the War Damage proposals as reported? Those War Damage Commissioners must be worse than a Society of Atheists, for a Society of Atheists would not treat a blitzed property-owner so unfairly.

If the War Damage Commission treat *my* claim as badly as they treat their God's. . . . But they won't. For I am not as powerless as their God; I am not to be cheated. To be cheated is what their God is for, apparently.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

AN ACT OF GOD?

At an inquest in Kent on the death of 22 soldiers killed by an explosion of three boxes of anti-tank grenades, an officer, giving evidence, said, there were three possible explanations, an act of God, the heat of the sun, or the head of a match falling into a box of detonators. In the end the verdict of accidental death was returned. That lets out God as having had a hand in causing the explosion. Yet can any jury be quite sure on this point? And if a similar series of explosions had occurred to the Germans it is possible, that quite a number of English juries would have agreed that it was an act of God, and the parsonage would have thanked him for it.

GEORGE MEREDITH ON RELIGION

IT is maintained by some Christian critics that Meredith has something of vast importance to say upon religion, though they find it extremely difficult to cite passages in which that something is definitely and beyond question stated. One of the sanest and most intelligent of the great thinker's Christian admirers is the Rev. Professor James Moffatt, D.D., who endeavours to show, in an article in the "Hibbert Journal," not only that he "is profoundly alive to the trend of the religious current in man's nature," but also that he is not "slow either to recognise the validity of devotion or explicitly to state his eager mind upon its true and false expressions." Dr. Moffatt omits to tell us, however, in which passages Meredith formally recognises the validity of devotion or worship, and we are convinced that the omission is due to the fact that such passages do not exist. If they do, why not produce them? It is perfectly true that, in his poetry, Meredith is fully aware that countless multitudes of human beings have what may be called an "aspiration after God," but the number of those who experience it is not sufficiently large to justify its being spoken of as "man's aspiration after God." It is not a characteristic of man, as such, but of certain individuals specially instructed and trained. Dr. Moffatt makes the following curious and significant concession:—

"Curtly he rules out of court all that is known in the religious world as Revelation or the Supernatural. Doctrines of this caste are in his dialect 'the Legends' or 'fables of the Above,' superfluous and misleading efforts of the human soul to get behind and above that natural order which alone renders it intelligible."

With supernaturalism curtly ruled out of court, we should like to know what becomes of the validity of devotion. In the absence of a Supreme Being, how can his worship be honestly or intelligently pronounced valid? As a matter of fact, Meredith regards Nature as all in all, and love of Nature, and consequent obedience thereto, as man's complete duty. Veracity and courage in the study of Nature are admittedly the most radical counsels he can issue. "The Legends of the Above" are both needless and useless, and their interest for us is of a purely historical character.

"Let but the rational prevail,
Our footing is on ground though all else fail:
Our kiss of Earth is then a plight
To walk within her Laws and have her light."

Now, if Nature is all in all, does it not inevitably follow that religion, in any accredited acceptance of the term, is at once anti-natural and anti-human? The divines teach that love, for example, is of God, and that if there were no God, there would be no love in the world. Meredith assures us, on the contrary, that love is Earth's gift, and that "else have we nought":—

"Her gift, her secret, here our tie."

Our knowledge is commensurate with our requirements. All the guidance we need is supplied by our instincts. Indeed, as Dr. Moffatt himself points out, the trustworthiness of our ethical instincts is Meredith's cardinal principle. It is a principle from which he never departs. Man represents Nature at her highest and best:—

"Meanwhile on him, her chief
Expression, her great word of life, looks she."

Of course, we must bear in mind that we are dealing with poetry, not prose, and that to the poet Nature often "becomes almost as transcendental amid her realism as Goethe's Earth-Spirit." Dr. Moffatt, however, misunderstands and misrepresents this apparent transcendentalism. He quotes the following verse:—

"Shall man into the mystery of breath,
From his quick beating pulse, a pathway spy?
Or learn the secret of the shrouded death
By lifting up the lid of a white eye?"

and observes that the physics of the brain are not the last oracle of Meredith's Nature. From a merely naturalistic point of view, the question is to be answered by an emphatic No; but to say "I trow not" is not to overleap the boundary of the material Universe. Even to declare that the gloomy wherefore of our battlefield is to be "solved in the spirit," is by no means equivalent to a condemnation of scientific Materialism, "the black knights" of which are so objectionable to this Scottish divine. To get outside Nature is utterly impossible; she hems us in on all sides; but it is a mistake to represent Meredith as saying that "she does not reduce us to the level of the beasts that perish," because he does not believe in man's immortality. To die is the fate of all living things. The fact that we have an educable and educated brain does not put us outside Nature, but only helps us to understand her demands upon us and to intelligently conform ourselves thereto. Man's business is to be—

"Obedient to Nature, not her slave;
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows."

So far we have come across no religious teaching in Meredith's poetry. Obedience to and enjoyment of Nature seem to constitute the whole duty of man. The term "God" is frequently used; but a wide survey of the poems, taken chronologically, leads to the conclusion that God and Nature are identical. At this point, however, Dr. Moffatt makes the startling assertion that the poet "turns briskly round to press on men the habit of prayer"; but no sooner has he made it than he hastens to nullify it thus:—

"His eagerness in this counsel is quite notable. Let us add, it is not unreasonable from his point of view. Prayer, to him, is the genuine expression of a man's belief in the living spirit of the Universe. It is the logical outcome of his ethical idealism, this overflow of the soul, this lift of heart and conscience, this supreme resignation of the heart."

Are we to infer that, in so much as prayer is not unreasonable from the poet's point of view, it is the very height of unreason from that of a Christian? It is noteworthy that in "The Test of Manhood," wherein Dr. Moffatt pretends to find such an urgent call to the habit of prayer, prayer in the Christian sense is denounced in the curtest of language. Listen:—

"He [the Christian] drank of fictions, till celestial aid
Might seem accorded when he fawned and prayed
Sagely the generous Giver circumspect,
To choose for grants the egregious, his elect;
And ever that imagined succor slew
The soul of brotherhood whence reverence drew."

Does Nature, another name for God, hear and answer prayer? Meredith answers thus:—

"The solitary his own God reveres:
Ascend no sacred Mounts
Our hungers or our fears.
As only for the numbers Nature's care
Is shown, and she the personal nothing heeds
So to Divinity the spring of prayer
From brotherhood the one way upward leads.
Like the sustaining air
Are both for flowers and weeds.
But he who claims in spirit to be flower
Will find them both an air that doth devour."

Here Nature and Divinity are but one, in that both are "sustaining" to him who devotes his life to the welfare of society, and in that both are like a devouring flame to the self-centred egoist.

Now, the whole philosophy of life, as understood by Meredith, is beautifully and convincingly elaborated in four successive poems, namely, "The Vital Choice," "With the Huntress," "With the Persuader" and "The Test of Manhood," all written in the year 1901. These poems fall under the general heading of "A Reading of Life," and such they verily are. The choice which every youth is called upon to make is between the rival claims of Artemis and Aphrodite. The peculiarity of the problem is that, whereas both goddesses claim all from every youth, wisdom consists in giving each only her dues.

"Both are mighty;
Both give bliss;
Each can torture if derided;
Each claims worship undivided,
In her wake would have us wallow."

That is a bare statement of the rival claims presented to every human being.

"Youth must offer on bent knees,
Homage unto one or other;
Earth, the mother,
This decrees;
And unto the pallid Scyther
Either points us shun we either,
Shun or too devoutly follow."

Artemis, or Diana, as the goddess of chastity, forbids love and generation as fatal evils, whilst Aphrodite, or Venus, as goddess of love and beauty, denounces the followers of Artemis as "the irreverent of Life's design," being "the despisers of love and generation," and makes war upon them, often quite successfully. Now the poet preaches a golden mean. Artemis and Paul pronounce the flesh vile and its pleasures sinful. Such has been the doctrine of the Church in all ages, with the result that large numbers of people have always indulged, more or less clandestinely, in thoughts and practices which they believed to be contrary to the will of God, and punishable by eternal death. Creed and conduct antagonised each other, and character was hopelessly degraded in consequence, all kinds of hurtful excesses being the result.

The poet asks and answers thus concerning man's future:—

"—What hope is there?

'Tis that in each recovery he preserves
Between his upper and his nether wit,
Sense of his march ahead, more brightly lit;
He less the shaken thing of lusts and nerves;
With such a grasp upon his brute as tells
Of wisdom from that wild relapsing spun.
A Sun goes down in wasted fire, a Sun
Resplendent springs, to faith refreshed compels."

Where now is Meredith's religion? In any orthodox sense all his poems testify to his utter lack of it. His prayer is not prayer, his God is not God, and the spirituality he enjoins is not spirituality, after the order with which the Churches are acquainted. Dr. Moffatt complains that "Meredith's language is neither clear nor full upon what most religious people would agree to term the personality of God"; but on no other religious topic can his language be even intelligible to the bulk of Christian disciples. Like Shelley and Walt Whitman, he is the poet and prophet of Nature, whose only religion is conformity to her laws.

(The Late) J. T. LLOYD.

DEATH

It is clear that in normal death, or the death of decay, or the death of debility, the sentient state is the farthest possible from that which accompanies vigorous life, and that sensations and emotions all gradually decrease in intensity, before they finally cease. Thus, the dread of dying, which most people feel, is unwarranted.—HERBERT SPENCER.

HAPPINESS

THE pursuit of happiness takes on many forms and it varies in accordance with the age and character of the individual. As breast-fed babes we love to be in our mother's arms, even if we punctuate this with an occasional kick and a squeal; when we begin to trot about we turn to our toys and other children, and laugh and cry with them; at school we are—or most of us are—far more inclined to play games than listen to what our teacher has to say, with a frequent scrap thrown in just to let the other boy see who's who; as young men and women we go in for sport and love-making, taking study and self-improvement—if we take it at all—as a side line or a damned nuisance, or both; and when we grow up into manhood and womanhood, and our minds are fairly well set, we go our various ways. It is then—when we think we are somebody and no mistake!—that our character really begins to show itself and the onlooker gets our measure and not a little fun.

It is as well that we are such a mixed crowd, and mostly black sheep. Life would be terribly monotonous and boring if we were all very much alike. Nature produced a great variety of creatures, and to look in the mirror now and again and to note our own peculiarities, in particular our weaknesses, and have a jolly good laugh at ourselves makes for—or should make for—sanity.

Of course, some of us have an overdose of what is commonly called "original sin" and we usually glory in our possession; others seek enjoyment in money-making or politics, or wine, women and song—or maybe a mixture of all the lot; some prefer to work for others, others for themselves; there are the preachers and the preached-at; the sea-dogs and the land-lubbers; noise, hustle and bustle appeal to a good many, while a few prefer their fireside. And so on down an almost endless list of pleasure pursuits. We each adopt that course which attracts us most, and by so doing we try to find what to us is happiness.

Very few become thinkers, and maybe that is all to the good. Maybe not. Most certain it is that for many a long day the "practical" people will treat the dreamers with disdain, if not contempt, and trample them underfoot if they dare to get in their way. Philosophy is all very well in its place, but it can wait—till the day of judgment if not later—says the self-styled, "hard-headed" business man, and in his opinion it is only practical politics that count, "practical politics" meaning, in his case, anything that makes for the success of his particular venture.

The truth of the matter is, of course, that in the final analysis it is to the thinkers and dreamers that the world owes so much that really counts. The majority of us tell ourselves that we have no time to sit down and think about the deeper aspects of life—the fact being that, because of our ingrained habits, we are, now that we have reached maturity, mentally lazy and quite incapable of facing the issue. No, we've no time (no inclination, we mean) and we prefer to leave life's problems to those with a philosophic bent.

Whether we like it or not, the thinker will exercise his mind and the dreamer dream his dreams. That is where they find their outlet, their happiness. Unlike us, who are so absorbed with our prides and prejudices, our pleasures and our profits, they are content with their quiet, intellectual—and generally lonely—life, and they care little or nothing for our bickerings over our status, and our quarrels over our pounds, shillings and pence. They are concerned with the things that really matter in the long run as between man and man—the whence and whither of the human race, and how best to organise ourselves that each may enjoy the fruits of the earth and one and another's companionship while here—and all they ask is to be left alone to pursue their studies for the sake of mankind.

But so often we laugh and jeer at them, sometimes crucify them, then we are happy . . .

GEO. B. LASSENDEN.

ACID DROPS

THE new Portal houses for the people that were so praised by many members of the Government are not having a good passage. It is true that some of our political leaders were pictured *inside* without knocking their hats on the roof, and they declared that they were admirable houses—to look at. But since then, other opinions have been registered, and amongst these the L.C.C. experts said that the buildings are—

ugly in design. Every drop of rain will be heard on the roof, they will be hot in the summer and cold in the winter. They have no back door and will be oppressive to live in.

But this is not fair criticism. The houses are not intended for members of the Government, or for graduates from Eton and the like, for wealthy people, or for the clergy. They are meant for the common people, and the new houses must be judged by what so many of these used to live in. And, as nothing could be worse, there is nothing for the poor to grumble at.

Rev. Donald Frazer is alarmed at the state of Scotland with regard to the younger generation. Young people of to-day, he says, are being "sorely tested." We think it must be with reference to their religious tendencies, since there is no worsening in other directions. The younger generation does not come to church in adequate numbers; and parents do not force their children as was once the case. So Mr. Frazer suggested to the United Free Church Assembly that by some method "ministers and office bearers of the Church must go into the homes of the people and strive to bring parents and children into the active organisations of the Church." Well, once upon a time in Scotland not to attend church was almost an offence. But time has shown that even religion must give place to common sense; and we do not think that even Mr. Frazer has hopes of turning the clock back to the 18th century.

In the case of one of the bombed and ruined London churches, it is reported that the painting of angels with outspread wings remained above the altar, with the text "Be thou faithful unto death" untouched, and on a wall near there stood, also untouched, the inscription "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace to men of goodwill." Angels are not usually credited with a sense of humour, but they must have "winked the other eye" when they noted the difference between theory and fact.

Many of our readers will remember that a great deal of indignation was expressed through the Press at undertakers, working on the basis of published casualties, visiting homes for the purpose of securing orders for monuments to their dead. Special terms were offered. It was a ghoulish business, but for sheer racketeering it was poor stuff at the side of a plan adopted by a United States Roman Catholic Archbishop. An account of the racket reaches us in the form of a leaflet containing a reprint of a letter addressed by Archbishop Sinnott, of Winnipeg, to his flock. The circular letter is dated March 1, 1944, and is reprinted by "The Gospel Witness and Protestant Advocate," 130, Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2. It is a document worth noting. We have space for summarising only. The leaflet commences by reminding those who have boys overseas of a provision for securing their welfare in either this world or the next by enrolling their "boys" as "perpetual members of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith." But the spiritual advantage of membership is not without price. The cost is \$40, but the whole need not be paid at once. Salvation may be secured on the instalment plan.

The guarantee offered is, apparently, a direct entrance to heaven. We must let the Archbishop speak for himself:—

"What better guarantee for any boy exposed to all the hazards of war? A guarantee, should he be killed, that he will go at once to his Maker, to be with Him for eternity. . . . What, then, is the reason for inaction? Some say they cannot afford it. . . . This is a spurious excuse, unworthy of a Catholic mother. You receive a portion of the boy's

pay, and what better use can you make of it? . . . Do you not think that, with a little economy, you will be able to set aside \$1 a month until the full amount is paid? You can pay any sum you wish by instalments. You can pay \$5 a month, or you can send \$10 every three months. You can take a year, two years; you can even take three years. . . . The important thing is to ensure the boy's safety as far as we can do so—his safety in time and eternity.

"One Catholic mother in this Archdiocese enrolled her boy on February 20. He was killed on February 22. Do you not think that the mother's heart found some consolation in what she had done?"

There is plenty more of this kind of stuff, and gross as it is in form, it should be borne in mind that it is in line with the general policy of the Church. And the one certainty is that if this kind of fraud was practised without religion a police case would follow. A few days ago a woman was sent to prison for shamming communication with the dead. It was foolish to run risks while an end can be achieved through the use of an established religion.

A most interesting correspondence is taking place in the "Church Times" as to why the clergy—note, not lay people—are not recommending their sons to take "holy orders." One vicar bluntly lets out the truth. The whole crux of the matter is finance. That is, are "holy orders" these days a business proposition? This particular vicar does not blather about a "call" from God or a "vocation." He goes straight to the point and says that after 18 years of married life, and after having to spend his own private means to keep things going, as well as some legacies, "ceaseless financial worries are deadly to the soul." And he concludes that he cannot conscientiously ask his boys to face the same kind of "fiscal worries." Nothing, it will be noted, about suffering for Christ's sake, or facing misery gladly with God's help; so his boys, no doubt, will go in for business—and a career for the Lord can go hang.

On the other hand, a "Churchwarden" contends that the "well-to-do laity" are not going to increase the stipends of the kind of men taking "holy orders" these days. This type, to use his own words, "does not encourage the well-to-do laity to continue to contribute, let alone increase" his pay, and therefore the better type of man has to choose between "profession or vocation," for he cannot have both. It is a fact, as we have said over and over again in these columns, the pulpit has never seen such a low average of intelligence as it registers at present.

There are two Brains Trusts connected with the B.B.C. One is the ordinary one which is chiefly remarkable for the display of what approaches to ignorance by men and women who should know better. They are chiefly, with one or two exceptions, interesting because they illustrate the distinction between knowledge and understanding. Perhaps this would require a little qualification if one could get a reliable report of what is said. But since it has been openly declared that most of the reports are not verbatim, but that the B.B.C. policy is to broadcast from records—and this plan was adopted because it permitted anything "objectionable" being cut out, one cannot be sure what was said. This conspiracy to bamboozle the public should be ended.

But there is another broadcast, "The Anvil," which is devoted to discussing, by a number of clergymen, what essential Christian doctrines really mean. In view of the long time Christianity has been before the world, the laws that have been made to enforce people to accept it, the number killed or imprisoned because they did not believe it, and the existence of Blasphemy Laws in this country, it is laughable to listen to this body of preachers who are not only not agreed on what this is, but who frankly confess that they do not know, they can only guess. Meanwhile, the poor layman is left with the advice to go on believing—what? No one knows, but you must still believe it. So stands the religious section of the B.B.C.—dishonest and cowardly to the core.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

THE EDITOR is taking a full week's holiday. This is by way of apology for many things having to stand over this week.

W. BARRETT.—Will appear next week.

C. AND A. WILKINSON.—It is only possible to get the books you inquire about secondhand. They have been out of print for many years. We could insert a "small" advertisement if required.

J. C.—Thanks for collection from Ingersoll. Will reprint as early as possible. We agree with you that Ingersoll was one of our foremost propagandists. Christians agree with us and dislike him accordingly.

W. AND L. A. BARRETT.—Thanks, Probably next week.

H. IRVING.—Thanks for good wishes. We are taking all the care we can, and lately we have taken a few days "off." But some work had to be done even then. We came back in time to get into the midst of one of the new raids, and so am now quite up to date.

E. LONGBROOK.—There is no possibility of our re-issuing the "Age of Reason" until the paper shortage is weakened. There might be an opportunity of reprinting the Editor's lengthy introduction to the "Age of Reason" as a separate pamphlet. Thanks for compliment.

G. H. HYDE, M. FELDMAN.—Many thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper sent.

C. WHITE.—We have read the discussion with much interest and congratulate you. We are returning the papers.

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.

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

THE Roman Catholics in the Houses of Parliament are still protesting against the new Education Bill compelling Catholics to pay some part of the cost of maintaining their schools. What they want is the whole of the costs of education to fall upon the ratepayer. We admit that on the face of it their complaint is justified—but only because the Government has decided to reinstate definite Christian theological teaching in schools. So far as it can be done the whole atmosphere of the schools will be definitely Christian, and that in the face of the rapid decline of believers in Christianity. But what will happen in fact will be that the aim of the non-provided schools will be to keep expenditure in the State schools as low as possible in order to save expenditure on their side. With much talk about the great advance made by the new Bill, the fact is that it will not be of the greatest value until the State schools cover the field and leave provisions for religious teaching to those who desire it.

From the moment the new Education Bill was placed before the House of Commons the Roman Catholics have never ceased to press their claim for full pay without interference from the State. And it looks as if they now have very nearly got all they wanted. According to Archbishop Downey, commenting on the debate on the Bill in the House of Lords, "When Lord Selborne came to reply for the Government he said that he wished to emphasise to the Roman Catholics that, taking everything into consideration, something like 95 per cent. of the costs of Roman Catholic education would be paid by the State,

but he made no secret of the fact that 'I would be glad to see 100 per cent. paid.'" And we need hardly add that Archbishop Downey is delighted at the "admirable sentiments" of the noble Lord—who, with the nation's money, would be perhaps ready to give the Catholics 200 per cent. In any case, as he has got so much, Downey, itching for the other 5 per cent., calls the Bill a mere "stop-gap." It will be most interesting to see what happens when, as Lord Latham suggested, the people will be compelled to pay higher rates to give "religious" education. Curious his name should be "Downey."

The success of the landing of our troops on French territory has been better than most people dared to hope. Probably alive to the fact that disasters have followed many of our special days of prayer, in the case of the invasion of France a special day of prayer was avoided; but as the Churches had to come in somewhere it was decided to keep the churches open for a kind of go-as-you-please prayer racket for an indefinite period. But even then the result was curious. After the landing the Forces required good weather for continuous landing of men and munitions; but the weather has been unusually rough, and so has handicapped the advance. Perhaps the deity has been annoyed at this happy-go-lucky plan. It is almost like having a coronation service when the King and the Archbishops have a little time to spare.

That great Christian gentleman, Henry VIII, just over 400 years ago wrote to Archbishop Crammer pointing out "the miserable state of all Christendom with cruel wars and dissensions." The result was the publication of the first English Litany on June 11, 1544; and in commemoration of this heavenly event a special service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral. Needless to say, the preacher pointed out the remarkable resemblance these days to those of the past in our "miserable state of all Christendom"—and just as the noble Henry VIII called his Christian subjects to prayer, so did George VI call his the other day. But what the preacher failed to show was how reciting the Litany could in any way whatever change the miserable state, etc., into the glorious state of Christendom. Did it do so in bluff King Hal's day? Is it not a fact that following King Henry's decree came the robbing of Catholic churches, the persecution by Protestants of Catholics and by Catholics of Protestants, and back again under Mary and Elizabeth?

The Rev. W. Wallace calls upon the world, through the "Sheffield Telegraph," to "stop the slide into paganism." But as Christianity was originally a slide from paganism, there seems no reason why Christianity should not end up in the religious phases of paganism—the lower phases, of course.

Roman Catholics, particularly the males, never cease to mouth the expression "the Mother of God" when talking about Mary, and they get quite annoyed when asked how God could possibly have a mother. Their reply generally is that Mary was the Mother of "Our Lord" when God decided to come down to the earth to save people—which is quite a different thing from saying that God Almighty had a mother. However, Catholics now will have a good chance to explain away the recent "call" by Archbishop Griffin to prayer, in which he clearly and unequivocally says, "We implore God's help and that of His Holy Mother in this supreme hour. . . ." That is an express declaration that God has a "Holy Mother." There is nothing whatever in the whole prayer about "Our Lord"—a rather surprising omission, for it implies that the two great personages now are God and His Holy Mother.

Why did not God protect his own places of worship from bombs? That question must have occupied large numbers of Christians of all denominations. We are indebted to the "Catholic Herald" for an answer. God, we are told, can do all things if he cared. "He could suspend the law of gravity to prevent a bomb falling in a certain place; but to do so would be a miracle, and not part of his ordinary providence." But if Catholic tradition is to be accepted, this is exactly what Catholics are taught God does. Look at the miracles attaching to the saints. Or the Fatima story of the sun leaving its orbit and careering round and about for the benefit of the "multitude" looking on. If we were a Christian we should feel we had been let down by an ally who was playing with both sides.

A BOMBSHELL

"YOUR M.P.," by "Gracchus," published by V. Gollancz, in London, price 2s. 6d., 110 pages, is certainly a bombshell.

"Gracchus," so rumour states, is Tom Wintringham, who fought in the International Brigade in Spain.

This book is the most damning indictment of the Tory Party who have been, and still are, ruling the affairs of this country now for a period of nine years. "Gracchus" condemns the Tories out of their own mouths. Last month, at a meeting of the Tory Party in London, it was decided not to reply officially to the book because it would only serve as a good advertisement. In this respect they showed good sense, because the book is unanswerable. Incidentally, it does not need an advertisement, being one of the best sellers produced for years.

"Gracchus" deals, not only with the war period, but also with the four years before. When we read some of the opinions expressed by these "leaders" of the nation, it is no wonder that this country stood nearer to defeat than ever before in its long history. Take the man who is responsible for our policy in India to-day—the Rt. Hon. L. C. M. Amery. Speaking on July 19, 1937, he said: "We cannot afford to pursue any policy which would bring us into conflict with Germany, Italy or Japan. We should avoid any step which tied us closely to Russia."

Beverley Baxter, one of the most vocal of the Tories, wrote an article in the London "Evening Standard" a few weeks ago, upholding Munich and the Chamberlain appeasement policy. In this, at least, he is consistent, for, speaking in the House of Commons on June 26, 1938, he said: "I believe we are very foolish in this House sometimes, those of us who refuse to believe that there is any good in National Socialism or that there is no unselfishness in men like Goering and Hitler."

C. T. Culverwell, M.P. for Bristol West, speaking three months after war began, said that he deplored the possibility of a British victory, because "the most likely result will be a strengthening of Russia, and the spread of Communism westward. I can visualise our troops fighting side by side with the Germans to defeat the Bolshevik menace."

Sir Samuel Hoare, our Ambassador in Madrid, is another beauty with a queer record. In 1935 he negotiated with Ribbentrop an Anglo-German Naval Treaty. In the words of "Gracchus": "This Treaty allowed the German Navy to be 35 per cent. of our naval strength for surface warships and 45 per cent. in submarines. Our ally, the French, had not been told. To add insult to injury, the new Treaty had been signed on the anniversary of Waterloo."

Turning to domestic policy in England, we read that Colonel J. J. Astor is one of the few people in the world who have received a present, a gift, of over £1,000,000. His father gave him £1,400,000 in 1915. When this kind father died, Colonel Astor and his brother were left about £40,000,000.

Sir Adrian Bailey, M.P. for Tonbridge, was left £140,000 by his brother, and married the daughter of Lord Queensborough, heiress to Mr. Whitney, an American multi-millionaire.

Sir Alfred Beit, M.P. for St. Pancras, said to a representative of the "Daily Herald": "I am a rich man. I shall belong to the extreme right wing of the Conservative Party." His father left him £30,000,000. We take one more from the many:—

Captain Bartle Bull, the eldest son of a Canadian millionaire, married a Miss Bauer at Chicago, who inherited half a million pounds.

When we turn to their Parliamentary records, we find that—Colonel Astor, Sir Adrian Bailey, Sir Alfred Beit and Captain Bull all voted against the proposal to increase the miserable Old Age Pension of 10s. per week!

The Rt. Hon. R. S. Hudson was the British Minister who, in July, 1939 (two months before the war), proposed to lend a vast sum of money to Germany on the condition that she takes

the lead in disarmament—about as insane an idea, considering the previous record of the Nazis, as was ever conceived. But the Government, while quite prepared to spend enormous sums to bolster up Germany—probably with the idea that she would attack Russia—could not afford to increase an Old Age Pension of 10s. per week.

In Chapter IV. of this book, entitled "Where Were the Arms?" "Gracchus" completely destroys the myth that Chamberlain, by betraying Czechoslovakia, gave us a breathing spell that enabled us to re-arm, and thus saved Britain. This is what the writer says: "On February 11, 1937, Mr. Neville Chamberlain moved a financial resolution authorising a loan of £400,000,000 to be spent on re-armament over the five following years. . . . Later, this was again increased, and the Government asked for, and received, the power to spend 2,000 million pounds on re-armament. Two thousand million pounds is a lot of money. Three years is a considerable time; and it is over three years from February, 1937, to May, 1940. Yet, in May, 1940, in France and Belgium, our soldiers were scandalously short of the weapons they needed. ("There was a shortage of guns," said Lord Gort in his dispatches, "in some of the anti-tank regiments of the Royal Artillery, while armour-piercing shells for field guns had not, by May 10, been provided.") We had 23 tanks against the Germans' 3,000 to 5,000.

Again quoting "Gracchus": "So 2,000 million pounds and three years produced 23 modern tanks at the right place and time for decisive action. . . . the guns, shells, tanks we needed could have been made. But we had the Tory Party in power. Some of them must have known where the millions of money went—we are not allowed to know." It is doubtful if we ever will know. Had this scandalous state of affairs happened in another country, how our moral Tories would have talked! Had it been America we would have been told that America was full of graft, but that, thank God, our country was pure. Had it been Russia, there would have been triumphant shrieks of, "What can you expect under a Socialist Government?" But here it is different—we are not allowed to know.

Dealing with Munich, "Gracchus" says: "The Tory Government gave Hitler more aeroplanes than they managed to build for the R.A.F. in most of 1935, all of 1936 and most of 1937! The same story about tanks. Hitler captured, without loss to his forces, 469 Czech tanks in 1939—thanks to Mr. Chamberlain's action in 1938. That is a larger number than all our years of re-armament provided for Lord Gort's army. Over 500 A.A. guns, 43,000 machine-guns, over a million rifles—these were among Chamberlain's gifts to Hitler."

We had M.P.s financially interested in aircraft, in engineering, in armaments. Of course, they might tell us where the money went—but they won't. The Tory Party now says that if we would only leave the destiny of this country in their hands, they will lead us to the New Jerusalem. Perhaps the best description was given by a Tory—Sir Thomas Moore, M.P. for Ayr Burgh. Writing in the "Daily Mail" on April 25, 1934, Sir Thomas says—quoting from "Your M.P.": "The briefest study of the movement (British Union of Fascists) and the most casual examination of its members satisfy one that it is largely derived from the Conservative Party. Give Hitler a chance. I am satisfied that Herr Hitler is absolutely honest and sincere." This chap is still a Tory M.P.

But it is in Chapter VI. that the author of this book puts the whole of the Tory Party in the dock.

Quoting again from the book, we find that during the months of the "phoney war," this country was exporting to Italy, obviously for German use, goods which were needed here. We sent spruce which we needed for aeroplanes. The Italians used it on some of their bombers, and less than a year afterwards these same machines were bombing London. "Several thousand tons of scrap iron and steel went every month during this period

of 'phoney war' from Australia to Japan. Copper and nickel went through Canada to Japan. War materials even went from firms in which the British Government held most of the capital; such a firm is the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which contracted in March, 1940, to supply the Japanese with a million barrels of oil."

So at the very time that our merchant seamen were risking their lives in bringing oil to Britain, Big Business was making a profit out of this oil by exporting it to Italy (then neutral) to be sent on to Germany and used against our men. It is not due to our legislators, but to the heroism of ill-equipped soldiers at Dunkirk, to the courage of our Navy and Mercantile Marine, the sacrifice and daring of our airmen who won the Battle of Britain, and the steadfast courage of the people of Britain who stood up to the bombing, that we have not lost this war. Now the same Tory Party tell us that if we do not return to private profit, which was responsible for all the muddles and hardships since the last war and for the incapacity which made us nearly lose this one, this country will be ruined.

This is the most startling book that has been written since the war commenced. If the Labour Party adopted it, or at all events gave extracts from it in every constituency, they would sweep the country in a General Election; but unfortunately so many of our Labour leaders seem more content to try to "discipline" those of their followers who advocate Socialism, and quite satisfied to bask in the admiration of those newspapers which are owned by the very M.P.s whom "Gracchus" has pilloried.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

HIGH DAYS

I.

TWO great wars in a quarter-century hastened a process already accelerating before the first one: decline of old public festivities and celebrations. Many are dead, others dying rapidly. Machinery, travel, education and the rush to towns have destroyed hoary institutions which less than a century ago were features of England, established, apparently permanent.

Some of them had commercial bases, so changing methods of trade killed them. Such were the big quarterly, half-yearly and annual Fairs held in the old towns of England. Saint Bartholomew's Fair in London, Nottingham Goose Fair, Birmingham Onion Fair, Bromsgrove Horse Fair, Stratford Mop and many another; all that is left of their former vastness is a few roundabouts and stalls of itinerant showmen.

Ancient hiring Fairs, "Statty" Fairs because controlled by official statute, have completely disappeared. One visits old towns and villages and sees broad stretches of cobblestone paving between roadway and footpath, but no Fair being held on the space. Weekly open-air Markets have persisted. One wonders why with so many shops and stores nearby.

As annual public hiring of farm servants and long-term apprenticeship have vanished, so Mothering Sunday has become superfluous. No more do youths and maidens walk home for their visit from their new masters bearing presents of simnel cakes and posies. That spring day's holiday lingers nostalgically in the couplet:

"They who go a-mothering
Find violets in the lane."

Many of the moribund celebrations were half-day or whole day reliefs necessitated by the long hours of manual labour prevalent in former centuries. Holiday from Holy Day is significant. Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday and Holy Thursday as well as Saints days gave such opportunities, especially when there were patron saints for trades, as Saint Crispin for shoemakers. Thus journeymen and apprentices might seize the chance for a few hours freedom and revelry. Nowadays the masses of the people,

abandoning the religious observance of Sunday, are making a holiday of it, chiefly for visiting friends and kindred, eating and drinking, and short-distance travel.

II.

No longer are there bonfires on the hills at Saint John's Eve, Midsummer. Almost for certain that was a festival anterior to Christianity, a relic of ancient sun worship. Similarly Christmas survives from ages before the presumed birth of Christ, Yule or some such feast being natural in the depth of northern winters, both to cheer the gloom and to rejoice that the shortest darkest day had passed.

Yet Scotland wellnigh ignores Christmas and keeps New Year, though probably the reasons for it are much the same. Neither Christmas nor New Year is celebrated with the former enthusiasm. The Dickensian Christmas—if it ever existed in actuality—has fallen on hard times, getting shorn of its exuberance. Twelfth Day is not observed at all; unknown to most people. Saint Valentine's Day gets faint passing notice.

Offenham, in South Worcestershire, has a Maypole standing in the street. This is a revival, not a survival of old days. Some elder people remember May Day being kept spontaneously. One sees a few draught-horses trimmed with ribbons. Organised Labour has half-heartedly appropriated May the First as its dedicated day, otherwise May Day revels have ceased.

A curious case is the Bank Holiday. Created by Act of Parliament in 1871 to give workers guaranteed rest Bank Holidays are out of date. Already partially organised, in their place is needed a system of holidays for all workers spread over the whole summer, to relieve the rush of traffic and congestion of resorts. Also industry can be kept functioning continuously with the workers holidaying in relays.

Most extraordinary was Armistice Day on November the eleventh, when by order of the Government the whole population remembered and mourned its dead soldiers and sailors. It had many objectionable features, but criticism was difficult in the face of general sentiment. Toward the end the country was getting restive, and now that a World War has abolished it, few regret. Yet it was a portent, in many ways a disturbing one.

III.

Villages were the chief scenes of old celebrations. Mechanisation of farms has nearly destroyed the Harvest Home. At East Brent, Somerset, it had become commercialised, a thousand or more outsiders paying for seats at the feast in a huge marquee. Even then it was enjoyable, with the great loaves and cheese and plum-puddings piped in by a band, and free drinks.

Agricultural, Horticultural, Horse and Flower Shows continue chiefly for their practical value. Churches have Harvest Festivals. Halloween has gone except as a subject for sentimental or antiquarian writers, and to quote Burns.

Losing its religious significance Good Friday is the countryman's great day for gardening, potato planting being a feature, gathering loose timber in the woods and other services to themselves.

Before the National Health Insurance Acts, villages had annual parades of Clubs and Friendly Society branches. Led by a band the members marched in regalia with painted banners to Church, to hear a sermon extolling the virtues of thrift and provision against sickness and death.

Oak Apple Day on May the 29th to commemorate Charles the Second's return to the throne in 1660 has collapsed. Yet men still living can remember being chased by hot Royalists and stung with bunches of nettles for not sporting an oak apple in the buttonhole. War has stopped Guy Fawkes celebrations, real bombs and flares making Fifth of November fireworks look petty.

The essence of those old festivals was spontaneity. Most of them sprang from ordinary people's needs, tastes, desires, ideas

or beliefs. As those changed the celebrations changed too, or withered. To revive them artificially is a mistake. All Fools' Day, for example, died of its own fatuity.

The chief regret is that they had an artistic, communal, expressional value. The villagers or countryfolk or whoever observed the festival freely did something. They danced and sang, made clothes and apparatus, put in a personal contribution requiring thought and effort. In them we see elements of folk art, drama, ballet and music. The fragments remaining are most interesting.

Such fresh originality of pleasure-making was vastly different from and better than sitting in a cinema or employing any other mechanical means of enjoyment.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

THEY PRAY

Our General officers

Pray—so they say—every day to God.

On their knees suppliant,

Not erect and defiant,

They pray—so they say—to God.

Dobbie declared: "God saved Malta"!

Bible in hand, he did not falter;

He did pray—so they say—to God.

Monty, who chased them from Africa's shores,

Quotes the Prophets—by "Faith" he scores

By praying to God.

"God will arise, and scatter His foes."

Who are his foes? God only knows.

Monty will pray—every day, so they say—
to God.

He conferred with his Chaplains before the attack;

As all the world knows he beat the Hun back

With his Chaplains—and God.

Winston sent out a message one day

To Roosevelt back in the U.S.A.—

But not to God.

"Send us the tools—we'll finish the job";

We fight to the end, without blench or nod.

He did not mention—God.

We hear Moscow's radio call us and say:

"We've taken umpteen more places to-day."

Be that as it may, 'tis quite true to say,

They don't pray—any day—to God.

Our hard-praying Generals surely alarm me;

I'd transfer the lot to the Salvation Army,

There to pray—night and day—to God.

G. P. O'LEARY.

RELIGIOUS HOOLIGANS

We were struck by a "Church Times" heading — "God's Hooligan Children." It was striking, religiously sound, but rather rash. For to bring up one's children in such a manner that they develop into hooligans opens the parents to police court attention. That may be rough justice, for the parents themselves may have been brought up in a hooligan atmosphere. But with God there is no such excuse. He religiously made the children. He has, therefore, parental responsibilities. God should have looked after his children, not depend upon man rectifying his blunders. And the "Church Times" should be more careful.

THE BRAINS TRUST

It recently came to my knowledge that the following question was sent to the Brains Trust: "Are there any of our wild species immune to adder venom?" An answer to this question would be of special interest to students of natural science, but the query was ignored. I suppose the producer is to blame for that, because he didn't pass it on to the Question-Master. Why? Was he afraid that the Trust could not answer it?

However, be that as it may, and in the interest of natural science I am going to answer it through the medium of "The Freethinker."

I have discovered by experiment that frogs, toads and slow-worms are immune to adder venom, and strange to relate the common lizard which, zoologically speaking, is first cousin of the slow-worm is not immune. I submitted a lizard to the fangs of an adder, and the creature was dead in twelve and a-half minutes after being bitten. I am recording these facts in my book, "The Life Story of the Adder," published in 1924.

The cause of the mysterious immunity must be due to a dormal restraint and one antibody in the blood of these creatures which neutralises the action of the poison.

I have also discovered that fish is not immune to this poison. I got an adder to bite a common eel, and it lived for four hours after being bitten. The poor eel was in great pain and I felt sorry for it, but I was out for data and had to carry on to the end. I also submitted a rat to the fangs of an adder and the rodent lived for an hour and a half afterwards.

NORMAND MORRISON.

CORRESPONDENCE

PARADISE REGAINED

SIR,—To-day, looking through an old book containing many odds and ends, I came across the following curious cutting that will certainly cause a smile upon the face of every Freethinker:—

"An artist employed in repairing the properties of an old church in Belgium, being refused payment in a lump sum, was asked for details and sent in his bill as follows:

	£	s.	d.
(1) Corrected the Ten Commandments	1	10	0
(2) Embellished Pontius Pilate and put a ribbon in his bonnet	0	8	11
(3) Put a new tail on the Rooster of St. Peter and mended his comb	0	12	0
(4) Re-plumed and gilded the left wing of the Guardian Angel	0	15	6
(5) Washed the Servant of the High Priest and put carmine on his cheek	0	1	0
(6) Renewed Heaven and adjusted two stars and cleaned the moon	1	16	0
(7) Re-animated the Flames of Purgatory and restored Souls	6	7	0
(8) Renewed the Flames of Hell, put a new tail on the Devil, mended his left hoof, and did several jobs for the damned	1	16	6
(9) Re-bordering the robe of Herod and re-adjusting his wig	0	17	3
(10) Put new spotted dashes on the Son of Tobias and dressing on his sack	0	7	6
(11) Cleaned the ears of Balaam's Ass and shod him ...	0	9	0
(12) Put earrings in the ears of Sarah	0	9	2
(13) Put a new stone in David's sling, enlarged the head of Goliath and extended his legs	0	8	8
(14) Decorated Noah's Ark	0	17	6
(15) Mended the shirt of the Prodigal Son and cleaned his ears	0	15	3

Total £17 11 3

(Costs are put into current English coinage.)

—Yours, etc.,

JOSEPH CLOSE.

"FREEDOM" OF THE PRESS

SIR,—Every student of English law knows, or should know, that phrases such as "liberty of discussion" or "freedom of the Press" are not contained in any part of the Statute Book; nor are they found among the dicta of the Common Law. At no period in the history of this country has any Parliament or Court sanctioned the "right" of the community to indulge in freedom of speech or writing, save at their peril. There is no such thing as a law of the Press; the restrictions imposed by the law of libel very effectively muzzle the Press as much as it does the private person. There are manifold statements with regard to men, and even their institutions, which no one is entitled to publish in word or print. According to English Law, no one is permitted to publish a denial of the "truth" of Christianity, or of the existence of the Christian god, without exposing himself to prosecution. Even an adverse criticism of the Book of Common Prayer, of the Established Church and the "authority" of the Scriptures is a criminal offence in this country. "Freedom of discussion in England," says Dicey, "is little less than the right to write or say anything which a jury, consisting of twelve shopkeepers, think it expedient should be said or written." The Law, in a word, does not recognise any privilege on the part of the Press or a person.—Yours, etc.,

G. E. O. KNIGHT.

SIR,—Mr. A. D. Hunter wants a free Press, and he wants it to be publicly controlled. I submit that he can't have it both ways. He appears to object to censorship of the Press, or at least to certain examples of it. But what is the censorship if not public control?

A certain amount of public control may be necessary in time of war, but in normal circumstances surely all Freethinkers will want the Press to be uncontrolled except by laws which apply impartially to all citizens.

Public control of the Press seems to me fearfully dangerous. It may so easily lead to the suppression of views obnoxious to the majority. See how easily the B.B.C. gets away with its policy of suppressing all adverse criticism of Christianity. If the heads of the Catholic, the Anglican and the Free Churches to-day, flushed with their success in the Education Bill, started a crusade for the suppression of all publications expressing Freethought views, is Mr. Hunter sure that they would not succeed? He says that Truth, though unpalatable to the few, is not distasteful to the many. I wish I could agree. Still more do I wish that I could trust the many to defend the right of the few to make themselves heard.

And, by the way, why attack Tory capitalist advertisers in particular? Are there not capitalist advertisers who belong to other political Parties?—Yours, etc.,

E. H. BASS.

IRENÆUS AND JESUS

SIR,—If the passage now cited by Mr. Cutner from Irenæus is his "best reply" to me, he has a poor case indeed. For the passage cited is not a denial of the crucifixion and does not even imply a denial.

Irenæus thought Jesus lived to be fifty. What about it? Were men of fifty never crucified?

But, says Mr. Cutner, this passage goes "against the authority of all the Gospels." Does it? Mr. Cutner will be hard put to it to discover any passage in the Gospels which says anything about Jesus' age when he died. Luke iii. 23 says he was about thirty "when he began to teach"; but we do not know how long he went on. Some divines say one year, some say three years; but that is guesswork. Irenæus said he went on till fifty; and he had a right to his guess.

Irenæus accepted the four Gospels, and gave ridiculous reasons why there should be four and no more than four. That such a stickler for the Gospels should have denied the central fact affirmed in them—and that in a work entitled "Against Heresies"—will appear probable to no one but Mr. Cutner.

What Higgins or Waite said is not evidence except so far as it proves that Mr. Cutner is not the only careless writer in the world.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

OATHS, AFFIRMATIONS—AND PIMPLES!

SIR,—It may be that Mr. H. Irving (June 18 issue) sees more clearly than I can see when he likens boils and pimples and, by analogy, oaths and affirmations. Candidly, I cannot view the affirmation as a pimpular miniature of the barbuncular oath; but I will think about what he says because he is obviously in earnest.

In the meantime, however, my view is that in legal and official procedure some form of declaration is necessary in order to attach legal strength to the statements to be made. The distinction between perjury and ordinary lying is that perjury is a lie told while under promise not to lie, and in breach of a declaration. This declaration, in essence, is a contract undertaken by the declaring party, and breach of it constitutes an offence at law. I think that position is both reasonable and necessary. But an ordinary lie, told without declaration, is not (normally) an offence at law; and it is very necessary that ordinary lies should not be offences at law, if there is to be liberty.

If telling a lie while not bound by declaration were to become perjury, and therefore actionable, who among us would be safe? So I for one prefer to retain an affirmation, or some other form of declaration (so long as a useless deity is removed from it), because this at least enables me to know where I stand, and does not give the law power to interfere with any statement I may make without a declaration. Apart from breaking a specific verbal contract, which I cannot condone, I must support the most cherished heritage of every man—the right to lie without fear of the law. Life would be dull if that right disappeared.

—Yours, etc.,

F. J. CORINA.

OBITUARY

MRS. N. PERCY

By the death of Mrs. Percy the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. has lost one of its oldest members and helpers in the local Freethought movement. She took a keen interest in Branch affairs and realised the importance of the N.S.S. in its wider activities. No trouble was too much for her if it meant some benefit to Freethought. Birmingham will miss her loyal support and good work. The remains were cremated at Lodge Hill Crematorium. 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. Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.—Tercentenary: Milton's Areopagitica.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m.—Also, July 9, Burnley Market, 7 p.m.; July 12, Higham, 7.30 p.m.; July 13, Read 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

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. Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES: "Should God Intrude?"

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. J. W. BARKER will lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. J. V. SHORTT: A Lecture.

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

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. T. M. MOSLEY: A Lecture.

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