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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Notes on God

WE think it fairly certain that the gods will be among the casualties of this war. I do not mean by this they will be counted among the dead, only that they will be fewer than they were, and the surviving ones will be much weaker than they were when the war began. The possibility of developing a healthier social life than we have will be certain to lead to a weakening of the gods and their satellites. Of course, interested people, lay and clerical, will say that we cannot do anything without God, but we think the more level-headed and the better informed will reply, "Well, we can have a try, and, after all, the gods have not given us anything to boast about." Already those of the clergy who are honest enough not to trifle with truth admit that a very large percentage of the armed forces are not, and will not be, interested in religion. They are inclined to be critical in their questioning, and often avow their unbelief. And it is not certain that the compulsory Christianising of the young will do all it is hoped to do.

In this history would seem to be repeating itself. Of the many thousands of gods that man has fashioned and worshipped, few have survived. They did not die a sudden death, but still they died, and their end was not, in most cases, dignified. Men may die in warfare, and at least they will live for some time in the minds of those they have protected; they may end their lives in some picturesque manner and be deeply mourned. Even a man who has committed a world-resounding crime will remain as a warning to people generation after generation. But the gods! The poor things come in their battalions, and they usually die unhonoured and are very soon forgotten. In many cases they do not leave the legacy of their names. For one god who is remembered, there are a hundred who are forgotten. They pass without even an "Alas, poor Yorick," being said over their death.

When Saint Paul went to Athens he saw there an altar to "The Unknown God," and with a facility for misrepresentation that has been common to Christian leaders in all ages, he explained that this unknown God stood for Jesus Christ. It was nothing of the kind. The educated Greeks were not noted for their religion, but they were hospitable in that direction, and with a variety of gods around them the inscription was meant only to include any god who might have been forgotten. It was an act of hospitality of which Christianity was incapable. Toleration does not run well with Christian bigotry, and a "Thou shalt have no other God but me." The time was at hand when the Christian brutality would do what it could to wipe out the culture of both Greece and Rome.

There is, of course, a common Christian superstition that man hungers for God and is never happy till he finds him.

That is plainly not true to-day, and those who have only a passing knowledge of history know that it never was true. The fact that the whole of the clergy are ceasing to quarrel, openly, among themselves in the hope of getting new followers is enough to prove the lie. Taking the whole history of the Church, one could not honestly say that Christians—the real ones—are monuments of happiness. They mainly believed in fear, and rejoiced in having a heaven because the alternative was hell. The monk and the nun could hardly be suspected of being uproariously happy. They are, of course, happy in a way—the way that a convict may welcome seven years when he expected to be hung. One may take the following from so typical a Christian as Bunyan. He writes:—

"And now was I both a burden and terror to myself, nor did I ever know as now what it was to be weary of my life and yet afraid to die. How gladly would I have been anybody but myself and anything but a man, and in any condition but my own."

That is scarcely an indication of happiness. If the Christian was not happy until he had found God, that was only possible because of the terrible sufferings he would have to undergo if he failed to evade the Christian hell. Men have longed for power, for wealth, for social distinction, for truth, for knowledge; but, putting pathological cases aside, he has never been over-anxious to find a god. The gods have been forced on him; he has been bullied and jack-booted to believe in them; he has been threatened with imprisonment and death if he declined to accept them, and when other forces have failed he has been paid to assume a belief he did not hold. Man can, and does, get on without God; it is the gods who cannot do without man.

God Among the Sciences

The functions of the gods have been taken over by science, not by one of the sciences, but by all of them. There was a time when it was said that God made the world as it is. He created all forms of life, regulated the weather, looked after the crops, kept the planets in their places, and was Lord and Controller of everything that is in the heavens and on the earth. To-day all that is gone. The forecast of the weather by a trained human is valued as more reliable than God's promise. Even the B.B.C., saturated as it is with the more primitive forms of Christian belief, and at a time when it gave a weather forecast day by day, never ventured to say that to-morrow would be wet, dry, cold or hot—if God willed it. They just took the reports of skilled men—maybe an Atheist or two amongst them—and relied upon their guidance. It is the scientist to whom we look for guidance to-day. Naturally, habit plays a part in the direction of human action, and with many it is the dominating factor in conduct. Self-delusion is also active, particularly where religious belief and conduct are concerned; and, whether

Freudian or otherwise, the power of self-deception is a powerful factor in the life of myriads. Many a man or woman has died from a disease they never contracted. An Australian native has been known to die of fear after, unconsciously, touching the blanket of a menstruating woman. Hysterical cases present a large number of almost unbelievable delusions. There are cases where a woman has simulated all the outward appearances of pregnancy without actually being with child. Martin Luther was convinced that the pain he experienced in his ear was due to Satan attempting to prevent him writing; and the more severe the pain, the more obvious the activity of Satan. St. Augustine believed that all diseases were due to demons. The New Testament Jesus firmly believed that insanity was due to the activity of minor devils. The Christian Church owes much to the ill-use and misunderstanding of bodily and mental affections. Fasting and solitary meditation on religion often bring men and women into touch with the supernatural. They are common practices with uncivilised people, and have played a great part in the development of Christian theology and popular belief. All these misunderstandings of natural forces form the raw material out of which the religions of the world have been framed.

It is distinctly wrong to say that modern science disdains the stories told of the visions of the saints, the activities of the devil, the virgin birth of Jesus, etc. Science accepts these stories and fits them into a general explanation of their origin, and also finds why present-day men and women use them as evidence of the supernatural. Religion lives by accepting the impossible.

Man and his Gods

The story of man and his gods is a curious, but an interesting, chapter in the history of life. Without an understanding of it, an explanation of history becomes impossible. The story of life on this planet which science to-day has to tell is far different from that which was current a matter of a century and a quarter ago. We have been haunted with the ghost of the Bible God to such an extent that it is difficult to get new and verifiable ideas properly before the public. Of course, if the engineers of the new Education Bill have their wishes realised, the significance of the present scientific conception of the origin and the development of the human race will be only partly recognised.

It is substantially evident that man has been on the globe for at least a million years. Not, of course, even paternally, identical with the man of a few paltry thousand years. The point from which science starts is that which took place when a gregarious group of animals (probably of the ape type) produced a variation in the direction that was afterwards recognised as human. That step, it is calculated, was taken something like a million years ago. A few hundred thousand years, more or less, does not matter in these calculations. The central and important fact is that man as he is represents a development from a mere animal group at a very remote date. Everything that we distinguish as human had to develop, and the earliest stages of development must have been both scarce and scanty. Much would depend upon the development of language as a vehicle of transmission; much upon the use of tools. But however slow the earlier stages of development from this break-off from an ape-like stock, the process was set in motion. But it was slow. Even to-day there are tribes of primitive people who are where

their forefathers left them a long, long time ago. They have reached a certain stage, and there they have stopped until they have come into close contact with a more highly developed group. It is quite a mistake to regard human beings as inevitably and everywhere giving birth to a constant string of new ideas and new things. But in spite of the slowness of development of the human group, progress is made, and so this developed descendant of an ape-like group, through many failures and during an inconceivable time, man in his potential fullness arrives, and he finally achieves, among other things, the art of wife-beating and a sense of social sacrifice, a being that—to use a common figure—may rise to heaven or descend to hell, one that is capable of extreme kindness and unspeakable brutality, a being of great possibilities, and carrying with him a cartload of mean and foolish actions.

Of the assumed million years since the first steps of what we have learned to call the human race were taken, three-fourths of the time passed without gods. That was a burden our remote ancestors did not shoulder; and when our parsons and their satellites say that man *must* have a god, it is well to remind them that our remote ancestors developed from animal to human, created language and created something like a *social* group without gods. At that early stage they had no use for them. They could not have been much troubled by the religious question of "why" things happened. Man must have been more interested in *how* things happened, for upon finding an answer to that his very existence depended. He had to learn what was good and what was bad food. He had to get on terms with the weather, with animals, with a hundred and one things if he was to survive. The "why" of things came later. It had to come in time, but he paid heavily for that lesson. It paved the way for the gods.

In passing we note, not for the first time, that "Why" is not a scientific question at all. It is a religious one. Science, like our remote ancestors, is concerned with how things happen. They were not trying to explain certain qualities, when brought into the right kind of contact, and in a particular form. His task is to know how things behave when placed in this or that situation. I do not know *why* hydrogen and oxygen form water; neither does anyone else. All we know, and all we need know, is how two or more factors, whatever the factors are, will behave. All scientific studies are really exercises in behaviours, and if we can foresee what kind of behaviour will accrue with certain combinations, I think we have done all that can be done.

At any rate, it is worth remembering that for three-quarters of its existence the human race was without gods, good, bad or indifferent.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

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THE POPES AND THEIR MEDIEVAL OPPONENTS

DURING the so-called Seventy Years' Captivity of the Papacy at Avignon (1309-1376) Europe awoke from its medieval slumber. The Papal retreat from Rome; the cessation of the rich revenues attracted to Italy from outside lands; the suspension of the Roman Curia's practice of conferring the choicest Church positions on its Italian favourites; all this gave grave offence in the Adriatic peninsula.

Still, from the financial standpoint, the Papal exile to Avignon proved extremely profitable. The Holy Father energetically exercised his powers of appointment. An increased number of bishoprics and other opulent posts were created. Then the Pope annexed to the Papal exchequer the annates—half the first year's revenue—of the bishoprics and other prelatical positions.

By means of liberal payments, those aspirants for appointments to be made on the deaths of their still living holders sought to secure these coveted prizes in advance. Another considerable source of Papal income was the incessant arrival of monetary payments for pardons, dispensations, indulgences and many other Catholic remissions. Also, a shrewd scheme for obtaining money was established throughout Christendom, and the collectors seldom failed in their solicitations.

The magnitude of this ecclesiastical malfeasance is, in the opinion of Professor Thorndike, largely traceable to the brazen rapacity of the corrupt officials who "demanded no end of bribes and fees. One reason, however, why the Popes required more revenue at Avignon was that their possessions in Italy were in a state of rebellion and confusion, and that they not only derived little income from them, but spent a good deal in endeavouring to subdue them. Indeed, the Popes remained at Avignon partly because Rome and its vicinity had for a long time been gradually growing too hot for them." ("Medieval Europe," p. 536.)

The Pope, John XXII, was not only at variance with the German Emperor, but in conflict with the Spiritual Franciscans, as those members of the Order called themselves who still observed the vows of apostolic poverty inculcated by Francis of Assisi, their founder. "The Pope, on the contrary, supported the inquisitor of Narbonne in his declaration that it was heresy to assert that neither Christ nor his apostles individually or collectively possessed any property." Other mendicant Orders, such as the Beghards and Fraticelli, were persecuted as heretics by the Church when they proclaimed apostolic poverty.

The Court physician of Louis of Bavaria, Masiglio of Padua, displayed a pronounced secular predilection in a work in which he asserted that the practically unlimited powers which the Papacy had exercised had proved fatal to the peace of Christendom, and that the only remedy for this deplorable state of affairs was the restoration of civic authority to the temporal domain, with the reduction of the Pontiff and his satellites to their proper place as Churchmen. The clergy, Masiglio claimed, "should not govern or judge the people, but merely preach and administer the sacraments to them. The Church is made up of laymen as well as the clergy." The doctrine of Papal primacy possesses no Scriptural warrant, and the power of excommunication should be severely restricted, concluded Masiglio.

The foreshadowing of the coming rejection of all Papal authority was evident in England when, in the 14th century, Parliament repudiated the tribute extorted by Pope Innocent III from King John, while legislative proposals were put forward to utilise Church properties for civic purposes. Also, the enmity exhibited by the peasantry and their spokesmen towards the opulent clergy during the Peasants' Revolt is suggestive. The author of "Piers Plowman," while professing the strictest orthodoxy, lashes the clergy for their ignorance, covetousness and hypocrisy. As Dr. Thorndike indicates: "The sin of sloth is personified by a clergyman," and confesses:

"I have been a priest and parson passing thirty winters;
Yet I cannot tell the notes, nor sing, nor read a saint's life.
But I can find in a field and under a furlong a hare,
And hold a knightly court, and account with the reeve;
But I cannot construe Cato, nor speak clerically."

It was in such surroundings that Wyclif commenced his career as preacher and reformer. Once Master of Balliol College, he entered into a wider sphere of public life and openly denied the doctrine of Papal overlordship. He enlisted the sympathy and support of John of Gaunt, a younger son of Edward III, and zealously encouraged anti-clerical Parliamentarians in their opposition to Papal pretensions in political and economic affairs. Deploping the pitiful ignorance in which the people were left by the clergy, Wyclif composed tracts for the times in our native tongue, and assisted in the translation of the Bible into English; and, as Green notes, if the sceptic Chaucer was the father of modern English poetry, Wyclif was the parent of modern English prose. His modernism is also evident in his condemnation of auricular confession; masses for the dead and the doctrine of purgatory. In our day he would have been a Rationalist. As it was, Wyclif denied the theory of transubstantiation and derided the idea of any real conversion of bread and wine into body and blood in this allegedly priestly miracle. This was a deadly denial, for, in the words of J. R. Green, "It was by his exclusive right to the performance of the miracle which was wrought in the mass that the lowliest priest was raised high above princes."

In 1377 the Pope strove to silence Wyclif when the reformer denounced the political intrigues and worldly wealth of the clergy, but he was saved from suppression by the influence of his Court admirers and the support of the general community; but his repudiation of transubstantiation, in 1381, cost him the protection of John of Gaunt and he was driven to surrender his post in Oxford University. He was charged with complicity in the Peasants' Revolt, and this lessened his popularity. Yet, as Thorndike states, "The House of Commons declined to cooperate with the Archbishop of Canterbury in persecuting him, and, while he retired to his parish in Lutterworth, he continued to produce pamphlets until his death in 1384."

Wyclif's adherents, the Lollards, persisted through the later reign of Richard II, but that King's supplanter, Henry IV, in order to stabilise his usurped throne, made his peace with the Church. In the opening years of his reign the infamous Statute "De Heretico Comburendo" was enacted; and this Act provided that any Lollard deemed guilty by the Church Courts should be burned alive by the secular power. Consequently, this heretical sect was nearly exterminated, although a few Lollards survived in secret and aided the coming Reformation.

The Papal schism served to weaken clerical authority, and thus for a time enabled dissenters to openly profess their convictions. Gregory XI reappeared in Rome in 1377, and when he died the Romans insisted on the selection of an Italian as his successor. Urban VI was chosen, but his attempt to cleanse the Augean stable of priestly corruption was hotly opposed as an attack on sacerdotal privileges quite indistinguishable from pitiless oppression. For the Roman Cardinals claimed half the Papal revenues as legitimately theirs, and they insisted on their share in the shaping of Papal policy. The French Cardinals also protested against Urban's actions. They forsook Rome and elected one of themselves as Clement VII. There were now two Popes—one in France and one in Italy—each claiming the dignity of God's earthly representative.

The two colleges of Cardinals each elected its separate Pope whenever the office fell vacant, and the rival Pontiffs were sustained by the support of their adherents, some secular rulers favouring the Roman, while others supported the French Pope.

ACID DROPS

DEAR, dear! Here is the Archbishop of York, second-in-command of God's official representatives in this country, telling the York Diocesan Conference that the world's only hope for peace is by a combination of the three great Allies—Britain, Russia and the United States, and he says this without mentioning the name of God! Probably Dr. Garbett felt that, on the one hand, it was rather dangerous to leave the peace of the world to God, and if God was mentioned it might arouse curiosity as to why God did not act on his own earlier and so save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. But it would not be very dignified for God to say, through Dr. Garbett: "I am willing to help you win a victory, provided you can create an army that will win victory without me."

Another gem from the same quarter is the expression of belief that "there should be some relationship between the Church and State." We also think this should be the case. But we would like to see the State independent of the Church, to become neutral, and to leave every person to have whatever god he pleases, and a return to the State of a liberal portion of the wealth that has been drawn from the people whether they believed in the Church or not. A final delivery from Dr. Garbett was that: "There should be reform in financial arrangements so that adequate incomes and pensions are secured for all its workers." Dr. Garbett evidently believes in the Church getting from the State all it can give, while retaining all the power it has.

The last "Anvil" session of the present series must have caused not a little dismay to very religious listeners, for, faced with a crucial question, its members showed the most amazing dexterity in avoiding its implications. The question was, bluntly: "Was Christ a myth?" and Prof. Dodd, who was given the chance of demonstrating he was not, had the greatest difficulty in doing so. He pretended that never, except in modern times—that is, from the beginning of this century—was such a question raised, and it was no longer discussed by intelligent people. As a matter of fact, it was often made an issue, and as far back as the first century the Docetists claimed that "the sufferings and actions of Jesus were not in reality but only in appearance," as Dr. Hook put it. In other words, the Docetists did not believe in the "reality" of Jesus.

Prof. Dodd also had to agree that you could only accept the Resurrection on "faith," for the story of the Resurrection, with the other stories about Jesus, were handed down and perhaps they were expanded, and stories crept in which may or may not have been true. In addition, he very hesitatingly said that the earliest date for a Gospel was that of the fragment in the Rylands Library in Manchester, which was written—well, at least before the year 150 A.D. He would not go further than that. When Miss Trevelyan asked him to give the name of a "simple" book which would reassure listeners, Prof. Dodd could only apologetically name one, by F. C. Birkett, and Dr. Welch thought it best to close any further discussion on such a dangerous subject.

We have deluged our fighting men with a certain number of official believers in God. Some of our leading Generals have gone out of their way to emphasise their conviction that God does really exist, although why should we conclude that a capable General, in overcoming the enemy, should also be an authority on the existence of God? We have often had a suspicion that they have looked upon God as part of an army's equipment. Probably their plea would be that it is best to have a God as part of the discipline of the men. What we should like to hear is a quite plain statement, subject to questioning, in what way they think God helps us win a war. They do ask very peremptorily for more men and munitions. Do they ever say that they want more parsons?

Says the "Universe" (R.C.): "Catholic hospitals must form a bulwark against the inroads of the materialistic concept of medicine." We agree that "materialistic," that is, scientific, medicine runs dead against the historic teaching, and the financial well-being, of the Roman Catholic Church. That Church

has a "Saint" for almost every ill that troubles humanity, and also, if we can trust the word of Catholic writers and preachers, these celestial medicos do cure all kinds of diseases. And when faith is strong enough and the disease weak enough, prayers and the touch of "holy" fingers will work a cure. But we notice that when a Pope is very ill a mere doctor is usually on hand to prevent His Holiness going to heaven, and His Holiness makes no complaint at his being held back from the throne of God.

It has been set before the world that the bombing of Rome by the Allies, or destruction by the Germans in their retreat from Rome, was prevented by the Pope asking "Our Lady" to intercede. It is a pity that the Pope was not sufficiently generous to ask for the same protection by the Saints of the rest of Italy, or the people of this country. But it is plain that God and his Saints have their favourites, and that he will protect those while letting the rest of the world go to hell. Heaven should be more generous in the distribution of its favours.

The clergy are, under the Education Bill, to be given substantial control over the schools. In the Army, Navy and Air Force they are also given positions with a good salary. In the workshops they are now establishing themselves with semi-governmental patronage, even to the extent of wasting a good many hours in factories that are engaged in war-work. It seems about time that those men and women in factories who object to this intrusion of preachers made some definite and unmistakable protest against this attack on the workshops by the black-coated army. Any help we can give will be given. Meanwhile we should be pleased to hear from those inside the factories the extent to which this crusade is being carried on. The information will be treated "in confidence" if desired.

Mr. Douglas Newton writes in one of the Catholic papers that now the Germans have been driven out of Rome there will be freedom of expression in the Vatican. That is very cryptic. It may mean that the *people* of Rome will have freedom of expression, and what that is worth is very little where the Papacy rules. But we think all it means is that the *Vatican* will now be at liberty to say what it wishes. And that leads one to inquire as to the moral or intellectual value of God having a direct representative in Rome if he is muzzled just like any ordinary Tom, Dick or Harry.

Another gem from the same source. Bishop Gawlins told some Polish soldiers that it is to be hoped "Our Lady will soon allow the Poles to return to a free and independent Poland." Well, when the Poles return to their native land it will certainly not be due to the assistance of "Our Lady," or Our Lady's son, or Our Lady's husband, but very largely to Atheistic Russia. And one hopes that when the Poles do get back there will be no Fascist Government re-established.

The Earl of Selborne, Minister of Economic Warfare, says that when the Education Bill is passed the Government will forward a regulation to provide the right and duty of the citizen to defend his native land. If that means no more than it says it is of poor quality. We take it that it should be the right of everyone to defend his land from any sort of attack, whether made by a foreign Power or by groups of people inside the country. But we do not think that the "Government" has this in view. What it envisages is a return to the old policy of each country having a sufficiently large military force capable of making war on other countries. And in that situation we shall return to the same policies that has brought two world wars into existence. The only sound policy is to prevent any country being able to make war on others. Private armies should be abolished.

It is more than forty years since we advocated in these columns the creation of an international police force (armed) directed by an international court with enough power to enforce its decisions. There is little more to be said on behalf of international duels than there is to be said in support of private duelling. There has been more blood spilt and more evil done by making each man the sole or final judge of his own honour than can be traced to any other single cause.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. IRVING.—We have not seen Mr. Cattell's "Psychology and the Religious Thought," and from what you quote we are not tempted to spend time in doing so. A man who can write that Mr. Cohen, in his "Religion and Sex," has traced all religion to sex, is proof that he has either never read the book or has failed to understand it. His criticism of Bertrand Russell appears to be explainable on the same lines—either lack of understanding or of reading. "Religion and Sex" has been out of print for years. Thanks for compliments. Hope we deserve some of them.

J. R. WOOD.—Next week. "The Freethinker" has always been noted for the freedom given to all reasonable opinions, and leave the rest to its readers; they are well able to judge.

A. RADFORD.—It was the declared object, both by word and official notices, to give freedom to religious worship. But to bring that about the Soviet had to guard itself against the Czarist clergy, helped by Churches in this and other countries. The story of "all churches closed" was one of the many lies told. Now the lie runs in the other direction, namely, "The Soviet is re-establishing religion."

F. COLLIN AND A. COMFORT.—Thanks. Will appear as early as possible.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges a donation of 5s. from Mr. A. Radford to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

A. E. DENT.—Too late for this issue. Pleased to hear the debate went off so satisfactorily.

T. D. S.—Next week. Owing to printing conditions, notices should reach us by Saturday at latest.

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

WE have had complaints during the past two or three weeks from some subscribers that their copy of "The Freethinker" has not come to hand. Usually when such complaints reach us we are able to make good by sending on another copy. Unfortunately we cannot do this, as every copy printed is sent out at once. But all our readers do not preserve their copies, and we should take it as a favour if they would help by returning their copy to the office. The issue of June 25 is the one that has suffered most. Perhaps the new form of raiding is responsible for the missing copies. So far as we are concerned, it adds to the annoyance of having to refuse new subscriptions.

Those who have any doubt that the new Education Bill, camouflaged though it may be, was an expression of a scheme which aimed at, first, the re-establishment of definite religious teaching in State schools; and second, warding off the demand for placing all schools—primary, secondary and public, right up to and including universities—open to all, with fitness the only key to admission. The higher schools and universities remain as they were; the age attendance may be raised in the future. Everything must wait save religion; definite Christian religion is to come at once.

Well, here is the question that is put to all candidates for appointment under the Hendon Education Committee: "Do you believe in the Christian religion and are you ready to teach

it?" It is tolerably certain that any applicant who answers in the negative will either not be appointed as a teacher, or if appointed he will be marked and his, or her, chance of promotion will be very thin indeed. No Freethinker, Atheist, Rationalist, or one who is without religion of any sort, or who is not favourable to the Christian religion will be rejected, or if accepted will be marked. If ever there was a sign: "None but Christians must enter here," it is written in the new Education Act. The combination of the English Church, the Nonconformist Churches and an essentially Tory Government has done the trick.

Our readers will remember the appearance some time ago of a Crucifix in the sky above Ipswich. The local Vicar made a great splash—he collected witnesses who saw the Crucifix, and the newspapers, ready to get all it could from an excitement of the moment, used it as a front page item. If testimony could establish the impossible, here it was. Then quite suddenly the booming of the miracle dropped. Had it been in Roman Catholic hands it would have weathered whatever storm arose, and a new miracle would have been registered. They do these things well in Rome.

The truth of the matter appears to run as follows. It seems that some airmen noticed an accidental smoke formation thrown out by an aeroplane which bore resemblance to a crucifix. Some religious folk saw it and set the miracle going. Then some airmen, by way of a joke, began to plant other sky crucifixes. The Vicar preached sermons and the papers published articles with, probably, other parsons looking on enviously at the publicity the Vicar was getting. But the airmen felt it had gone far enough and the miracle was "busted." But the remarkable thing is the silence of the Vicar and the newspapers as to the nature and origin of the crucifix. They knew the truth, but were silent. We have said many times that of all the lies Christian preachers have told to boost their creed, none of them have ever had the decency openly to confess their "mistakes" when exposure ensued. Christianity runs true to form.

We think the following will be read with interest by many of our readers. It comes from an old "Freethinker" reader who is now in his seventy-eighth year. It is human.

In 1881 he spent a few days at the seaside at Whitsuntide. Being fond of watching a game of bowls, he inquired if the bowling green was open on Sundays. He received the reply: "No, sir; the only places open on Sunday in Colwyn Bay are 41 chapels and the police station!" The visitor hardly found this correct, for he was one of a crowded audience at a concert on the pier on Sunday evening—which seemed to indicate that there were a lot of people in Colwyn Bay who preferred a concert to the allurements of 41 chapels and the police station.

The Birmingham Branch, N.S.S., have arranged a ramble to Lickey to-day (July 9th); all members and friends are cordially invited. Tram 70, and meet at Lickey terminus at 3-30 p.m. Tea to follow at Cofton Tea Rooms, 5 p.m., should round off a very enjoyable afternoon. Arrangements for fine weather are in the hands of the local secretary.

We have had days of prayer to God, but in the larger number of cases they have been followed by either a setback or a shortcoming in the advance made. In the case of the attack on Normandy, the clergy were artful enough not to offer a day of national prayer, but they did arrange that there should be a continuous prayer until victory was achieved. But, curiously enough, the weather—which used to be under the direct control of God—has been much less favourable to the Allies than they had reason to expect. Judged by all the available data, while it looks more strongly for a German defeat, God, if there be a God controlling affairs, appears to help one side, while every now and again gives a "shove up" to the other one.

We repeat our old advice. For five years we have been praying to God to give us victory. The victory has not yet come. Why not try another plan? Instead of grovelling to God, let all believers warn the deity that if victory does not come within a given time, not a prayer will be said nor a church door opened until he mends his manners and gives us a victory that shall be decisive.

THE DEVIL'S CHAPLAIN (1784—1844)

III.

FOR some reason about which I am not at all clear the name and fame of Robert Taylor is more connected with the Sun-myth theory than with his work as a New Testament critic. But in both the "Syntagma" and in the "Diegesis" will be found a very able attack on the "evidences" of Christianity from the only standpoint acceptable to modern believers and theologians—that based on the documentary side. Taylor did, of course, even in these works hint at the Sun-myth theory, and at what we now call "comparative religion"; but his real business in them was to attack the authenticity and credibility of the Christian documentary sources, and his opponents found it very difficult to deal with such a determined and informed adversary.

But he did not stop there. What was the explanation of the Christian myths? For it was absurd to imagine that these stories, unless literally true, were just written for the fun of the thing. And Taylor set to work to explain to the best of his ability the real key to the mystery and to give the solution of many Biblical enigmas.

Dupuis, in his "Origin of All Worships," had preceded him in the claim that the key could be found in Sun-worship of the ancients—that many of the stories surrounding Hercules, Apollo, Atys, Osiris, Dionysus and other gods, including Jesus Christ, were really more or less identical—all are based on the imaginary adventures of the Sun in the various signs of the Zodaic, with of course many other things put in, due in the main to the inventive faculties of the various writers responsible for the different stories. Taylor worked out many of the problems for himself, and the result is found in "The Devil's Pulpit," which has nearly 50 of the discourses he delivered during 1830-31, and upon which, seemingly, his fame rests.

For example, in his "Dictionary of Rationalists," Mr. Joseph McCabe tells us that Taylor's exposition of the Sun-myth theory will be found, not very reliable, in the "Syntagma" and the "Diegesis"—the two works I have shown not dealing with it; but somehow Taylor's name had to be connected with that subject as if he had never done anything else. In any case, a good deal of work done in the astro-myth field is bound to be "speculative," and anyone can say it is "not very reliable." It is obvious that Mr. McCabe had never read the works in question.

As a matter of fact, Taylor had to pay very dearly for these lectures, for some passages in them brought him once again before the authorities on a charge of blasphemy—passages which to us at this day seem utterly harmless from any point of view. But before some brute of a magistrate they were blasphemous enough to procure for him two years' imprisonment and a felon's treatment.

When he was released he once again attempted to lecture on the same subject, and brought out a small magazine; but the chance of marrying well came in his way and, with his wife, he went to France, where he spent the last ten years of his life. Little is known of his doings abroad except that he practised as a surgeon and wrote a good deal. He left many manuscripts behind him, but they were all probably destroyed by his widow. One thing I can vouch for: Taylor protested he was a Deist at his first trial; but there can be no doubt whatever that when he left prison the second time he was a complete Atheist. The lectures he published then prove this indisputably.

In trying to find out what impression the work of Robert Taylor made on his contemporaries, and many later Freethinkers, I came to the conclusion that, while his great ability was admitted, there was always a tendency to belittle him in some way. Over and over again I find him referred to disparagingly, especially by those who had never read him, or heard of him only at second hand.

Take as an instance—I have space only for very few instances—"Courses of Study" (1908), by John M. Robertson. He admits that the "well-known 'Diegesis'" is "a work full of suggestion," but it is "never to be followed without great caution." Now, the curious point to note is that this reference to the "Diegesis" follows on the notice of Dupuis—as if they both dealt with the same subject. I have shown that they do not, and it proves that Robertson could not have read the work.

But in "Courses of Study" (1932), though the "Diegesis" is still bracketed with the astronomical mythologists, this time it "is still worth attention." Nothing about "great caution" here.

In Robertson's "Short History of Freethought" Taylor gets less than two lines (with a mistake in the date of the "Devil's Pulpit"). But in his longer "History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century" Robertson seems to have awakened to the fact that Taylor was one of the first English writers—or perhaps the first—to insist that Jesus was a myth, that he claimed in the "Syntagma" that "such a person as Jesus Christ never existed," to use Taylor's own words, with the result that something like justice was at last meted out to a man who not only had fought brilliantly for Freethought, but had suffered also three years in the kind of prison we were famous for 100 years ago—the last word in brutality and beastliness.

Not only does Robertson deal more fully with his work, but gives the opinion of C. C. Hennell on the "Diegesis"; and he devotes nearly a page to the "Syntagma" and to the fact that "Robert Taylor had propounded very definitely the non-historicity doctrine on critical grounds." Robertson does not care much for Taylor's style, but is forced to admit that his "general criticism of the assumption of historicity is on the line of modern argument and raises the central issues"—which appears to me to be pretty good praise for a book written in prison 116 years ago. But again Robertson makes the mistake of claiming that the "Diegesis" followed Dupuis, when it was the "Devil's Pulpit" which dealt with the Sun-myth theory.

Robert Taylor's adherence to the non-historicity of Jesus theory was, I suspect, partly the cause of his shabby treatment by Christians as well as Freethinkers, who mostly had never read him; and I think also the fact that he had been a clergyman. Some things are simply not done; a layman to give up religion was one thing—but a clergyman! It just wasn't cricket. And then to say Jesus never existed! That was too much when such Freethinkers as Paine, Strauss, Renan, Lecky and John Stuart Mill all held up Jesus as almost if not the greatest man that ever trod this earth.

For my own part, I honour Robert Taylor not only for his learning and courage, but also because he was a pioneer in the solving of many a Biblical riddle, as well as for his steadfast adherence to such an unpopular theory as the non-historicity of the Christian Diety. In an age dominated by the primitive and stupid Fundamentalism of a Pye Smith, Robert Taylor shines in the full light of Reason at its best and highest. He had few followers because he was far and away above most of his contemporaries; but if from the shades he could see some of us now, who salute his centenary as that of a remarkable Freethinker, I feel sure he would not be displeased.

H. CUTNER.

ARTILLERY VERSUS PRAYER

THE "Sunday Graphic's" tame parson, the Rev. W. H. Elliott, has been letting himself go again, and advises the people to help the war effort by prayer. He does not say if this is to apply to old women and children, or to workmen engaged in the war industries, or even the soldiers at the front in the battle line. Wisely, he does not particularise, as it must occur even to the foggy-headed parsons, that a workman found taking

"time off" for prayer, would find that a very thin excuse for neglecting his job if he were prosecuted for being absent. In the case of the soldier, one need not strain the imagination to guess what the Germans would do if the Forces left off fighting and took to the Elliott weapon of prayer.

The obvious implication of this advice is that the Almighty or his Recording Angels keep a tally on the numbers of prayers thus offered, and that if these are sufficiently numerous, the Almighty may make up his mind—presumably now in a state of wobble—to give the Allies the victory, of course, at a price in blood and treasure, the latter including His Churches, which he has allowed to be bombed into rubble. Otherwise, what would be the use of all these prayers?

If the Rev. Elliott admits that the Catholics worship the same God as hundreds of other sects—and even he would hardly have the impudence to deny this proposition—he seems to be blissfully unaware that the Germans and their allies may also be offering up similar prayers for victory, and one must suppose that even in heaven majorities count for something.

May one suggest that the reverend gentleman go to France or Italy, or even Russia, and try out this prayer business in which he professes to believe so fervently, and see what happens. At the most, if the Allies do not incarcerate him in a lunatic asylum, some German bomb or bullet may cause him to join the ranks of the Christian Martyrs, those who have died in the attempt to fill the churches instead of the columns of the "Sunday Graphic," presumably for an "honorarium."

H. CESCINSKY.

OBITUARY

MRS. PAULINE BARNES.

At Edgeside Waterfoot there died Mrs. Pauline Barnes, wife of one of our active Lancashire Freethinkers, Mr. J. Barnes, jun. She came home from a sanatoria at Easter, but in spite of every care passed away. She had outgrown the religion of her early years and fully shared her husband's convictions. She leaves two young children. At her own request, the undersigned conducted a brief Secular service at the home and at Rochdale Crematorium before a gathering of relatives and friends. Our sympathy goes out to the husband and family in their bereavement.

J. C.

MRS. F. E. WAKEFIELD, J.P.

A link with the militant Freethought Movement of the days of Bradlaugh and Holyoake has been broken by the death of Mrs. Frances Emma Wakefield, aged 79, of Hipperholme, near Halifax. She was the widow of the late Mr. A. B. Wakefield, a veteran Freethinker, who died in 1928, aged 74, after a lifetime of service to the movement, which included a period when he was one of Charles Bradlaugh's "lieutenants." For 17 years he was a Freethought lecturer.

Mrs. Wakefield, who shared her husband's Freethought outlook, was a prominent and active worker for progressive social causes. She was the first woman to be appointed (1921) to the West Riding magisterial bench, serving in the Halifax Division. Especially interested in the work of juvenile courts, she brought to bear a humane and intelligent outlook on a class of delinquency which has too often been mishandled by those whose inspiration comes from the Mosiac savagery of "an eye for an eye . . ." It is worth adding, also, that both Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield, 60 years ago and since, worked hard to promote the Co-operative idea, and took an active part in the movement all their lives. A little more thanksgiving to such people as the Wakefields, and a little less caterwauling to the Almighty, would more adequately represent the true interests of the movement at the centenary celebrations.

The Wakefields were great friends of the Yorkshire dialect poet, John Hartley, and when that worthy fell on bad times they toured the West Riding and other parts of Yorkshire giving dialect recitals and raising a substantial sum of money. This they gave secretly to Hartley, and it is typical of their characters that the gift remained a secret for many years. I believe I was the first to wrest it from Wakefield by diligent questioning some time before he died.

Mrs. Wakefield, like her husband, was constant to her convictions to the end, and she thoughtfully arranged for her husband's Freethought literature, etc., to be examined by me, after her death, for anything that may be of value to the movement. This task will be carried out.

The cremation took place at Scholemoor, Bradford, Mr. W. Hayhurst (president, Bradford Branch) representing the N.S.S. F. J. C.

MRS. GERTRUDE HALL.

I regret to announce the death of Mrs. Gertrude Hall, wife of Alderman George Hall, which took place on June 23rd after a period of illness in Withington Hospital. Mrs. Hall was 72, and had been a member of Manchester Branch almost since its foundation.

Mr. Bayford, who conducted the ceremony at the crematorium on June 28, said he had known Mrs. Hall for some 24 years. Her service to others sought no public office; it was service in the home and amongst those who enjoyed the privilege of her friendship. She was, in Mr. Hall's words, the best friend a man could have had during the 47 years of their married life, and she was a wonderful mother of three sons and one daughter. Home had been her major concern, and she had been the centre and pillar of it.

The hall was full, and the address was heard with marked attention.

On behalf of the Manchester Branch we desire to express our most sincere sympathy to Mr. Hall and family in their grief.

C. M.

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, 11-0, C. E. M. JOAD, D.Litt.—"Prospect for Civilisation."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Birmingham Branch, N.S.S.: Ramble to Lickey; tram 70; meet at Lickey Terminus, 3-30; tea, 5-0, at Cotton Tea Rooms.

Blyth (Market Place): Monday, July 10th, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Various speakers.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End): Saturday, July 8th, 7-30, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch, N.S.S. (Mound): Debate—Rev. Gordon LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES.

Herrington (The Burn): Tuesday, July 11th, 7-0—Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch, N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner): 7-0, Saturday, Messrs. J. W. BARKER and T. W. BROWN will lecture.

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

New Kyo (Durham), Thursday, July 13th: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Deity and Design. Did Jesus Christ Exist? Agnosticism or . . . ? Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. Atheism, Freethought and the Child. Christianity and Slavery. The Devil. What is Freethought? Must We Have a Religion? Morality Without God.

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BOOKS

"Books which are no books"—Charles Lamb.

"For what can a book be more than the man who wrote it?"
—Frederic Harrison.

"Choose an author as you choose a friend."—Earl of Roscommon.

IT has been said that a "library was dukedom large enough," the contents of which might indicate the owner's character. "Tell me what a man reads and I will undertake to tell you what he is" may seem a bold statement to many readers. Who would undertake to supply the information if the questioner's motives were apprehended? An applicant for a post might tremble if asked about the books he reads, and still more so if the nature of his answers were likely to determine his ability to obtain employment. The possession of common sense, is to most employers, more estimable in their employees than common knowledge of certain kinds of books. One wonders at the man who "reads everything that he can lay his hands on." The problem is not "what shall I read?" but "what shall I avoid reading?" Here, one thing is certain. It is as difficult to learn the art of right reading as it is to learn the art of right living. It is singular that whereas people exercised care regarding the kind of friends they make, or the conversation they enter into, are most indifferent or careless as to the kind of books they read. As books play a part in the formation of mind and character (to what extent may be debatable) is it not important that care should be exercised in the choice of books?

It is difficult to see the wood for the trees, and the invention of printing has not been a gift wholly unexercised with evils. Frederic Harrison in his brilliant essays on the "Choice of Books" written about 50 years ago—and from which most of this article is taken—records the following incident when at college:—

A young man undertook, before a body of serious students to maintain the astounding proposition that the invention of printing had been one of the greatest misfortunes that had ever befallen mankind. He argued that reliance on printed matter had destroyed the higher method of oral teaching; that the making of books had become merely a means of making money; that reliance on books had done much to weaken the powers of memory; that it had destroyed the craving for a general culture of taste; and that the multiplication of printed matter had been fatal to the orderly arrangement of thought, and had hindered a system of knowledge and a scheme of education. Mr. Harrison hastened to add that he was far from sharing this immature view, but warned us of the possibility of creating for ourselves these very evils. Many years ago widespread interest was caused in a movement to decide the hundred best books. A formidable task! The books were issued in uniform volumes. Odd copies may be seen now and again in second-hand bookshops and may be picked up for a few coppers each. Perhaps some enterprising publisher will revive this interesting problem of the "best books" when circumstances are favourable.

"Inventions," said Mr. Harrison, "may after all, leave the poor human brain panting and throbbing under the strain of its appliances, no bigger and no stronger than the brains of the men who heard Moses speak and saw Aristotle and Archimedes pondering over a few worn rolls of crabbed manuscript. Every fresh apparatus for multiplying the work of the brain is a fresh strain, a new realm for it to order and to rule." Of all men, perhaps, the book lover needs most to be reminded that man's business here it to know for the sake of living, and not to live for the sake of knowing. A man may be, as Milton said, "deeper'd in books, and shallow in himself."

To read the first book we come across in the wilderness of books is to learn nothing.

To many people the following indictment of modern fiction may seem sheer rhetoric—"Lurid and irregular streaks of

imagination, extravagance of plot and incident, petty and mean subjects to study, forced and unnatural situations, morbid pathology of crime, dull copying of the dullest commonplace, melodramatic hurly-burly, form the evidence of an art that is exhausted, produced by men and women to whom it has become a mere trade, in an age wherever change and excitement have corrupted the power of pure enjoyment."

The craving for that which is new in literature is shutting out that which is old. It has been asserted that neglect of the "classic" literature would lead to a decline in English literature. A plea is entered for the purpose of effecting a balance of the old with the new. It may be asked for what purpose? A balancing of the old with the new forms a basis for comparison by which we may estimate the progress or otherwise in poetry, drama, and fiction; to broaden the judgment and heighten the understanding. Goethe, who forms a brilliant star in the literary firmament said, "Everything that is worth thinking has already been thought before; we must only try to think it again."

To conclude, in the words of Mr. Harrison, "We need to be reminded every day, how many are the books of inimitable glory, which, with all new eagerness after reading, we have never taken in our hands. It will astonish most of us to find how much of our very industry is given to the books which leave no mark, how often we rake in the litter of the printing-press, whilst a crown of gold and rubies is offered us in vain."

S. GORDON HOGG.

CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—Mr. Hanson has failed to differentiate between the essay "Mysticism and Logic" and the book of the same title. My criticism, as I stated, was of the essay only, whereas the passage given by your correspondent will be found at the end of an entirely separate essay on "A Free Man's Worship." He will understand, then, why I did not quote it, fine though it is.—Yours, etc.,
C. McCALL.

THE POPES AND THEIR MEDIEVAL OPPONENTS

(Continued from p. 255)

The power of the French King safeguarded the Holy Father at Avignon from dethronement. This Pontiff was also approved in Spain, Scotland, Flanders and other lands. But England, most German principalities, Poland, the Scandinavian countries and Portugal recognised the Papal succession that commenced with Urban VI.

To retain the support of their respective adherents, the Popes were constrained to curtail their intermeddling in secular concerns, for the princes' policies were all dictated by mundane considerations. As there were two expensive Papal Courts to be maintained, each anathematising the other, the Popes lost much of their credit with Christendom. Moreover, the cynical scramble of avaricious aspirants to gain rich Church appointments also accentuated the mournful misgivings of the devout.

So a Council was convened at Pisa to heal the breach, but its acrimonious deliberations and dissensions merely resulted in the emergence of three Popes in place of two. And it was not until the election of Martin V in 1417, after the Council of Constance, that the great disruption was brought to an end.

But the restoration of one supreme Pontiff served to unify the Church and enabled it to turn its attention to the growth of heresy in Bohemia. The reformer John Huss was invited to the Council of Constance and given a safe conduct. To this, however, the loving Christians of the Council paid no heed, and both John Huss and, subsequently, Jerome of Prague perished alive in the flames. Thus, Huss became a proto-martyr as well as a national hero to the more enlightened of the Bohemian people.

T. F. PALMER.