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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The B.B.C. and its Works

THERE has been another debate in the House of Commons on certain aspects of the B.B.C. The occasion was a token vote connected with the Ministry of Information. That in itself is a misnomer, for its purpose is to check information which is not considered good for the public. Although the alleged justification for the moment is in the interests of the war, it is a policy that every Government practises so far as it can whether we are in a state of war or in a state that is called peaceful. One of Paine's fruitful sayings was that Governments were the badge of lost innocence, and the passing of the years has not robbed the epigram of its value. If we are ever to achieve a democratic state we must depend for its vitality upon a well-educated and critical public. Power is a great test of character, and present-day politics can hardly be credited with a desire for real freedom of thought and speech.

The history of the B.B.C. offers a good example of the truth of what has been said. It embodies one of the greatest discoveries of man. It is powerful for good and, in consequence, for evil. Once discovered, it becomes impossible to do without it. At present it offers the problem of what shall we do with it. And certainly, so far as it prevents the fullest possible measure of freedom of use, it makes for evil rather than good. Let us put it mildly merely by pointing out that it may restrain the operation of new ideas when its first aim should be to develop and promulgate them. We may take for illustration the fact that one of the most important political and social subjects of recent years, Marxian Communism, with its varied influence on modern life, has never been presented "on the air." In the case of the Bradlaugh Centenary, the B.B.C. showed itself to have neither the courage to be solidly bigoted or reasonably liberal. Asked by a representative committee to permit a fifteen-minute talk "on the air," the reply was that they had no space for it. Then when the public interest in the anniversary grew, and the boycotting of the great Atheist would have been too obvious, time was found—for the presentation of Bradlaugh as a kind of amiable Methodist dissenter who was not quite certain as to the truth of Christianity.

A glance at the history of the B.B.C. with relation to its religious policy may explain a lot. We do not believe that the B.B.C. originally had any desire to turn itself into a mouthpiece of out-of-date theology with a determination to keep the truth about religion from reaching the general public. The trouble, we think, arose when the B.B.C. wished to present Sunday broadcasts. But the B.B.C. was a monopoly, held by charter, renewable at the end of term of years. How to work in Sunday entertainments without offending the Churches was the problem. It was surmounted

by arranging for Sunday services or talks about religion. The public approved the entertainment but showed little interest in the preachments. Actually, the B.B.C. gave public notice that unless more interest was taken in the religious broadcasts they would be suspended.

Then the clergy began to realise that some benefit might come to them and their declining and dishonoured creed if the religious broadcasts were continued. From many pulpits people were asked to write to the B.B.C. and say how much they enjoyed the services. Then God took a hand and sent Reith as Director-General, who inquired of every candidate for a job whether he believed in Jesus Christ. "The Christian tradition" was made safe. Some of the best, but religiously unsound, men were "sacked" or retired, but so far as it could be, "Father, Son and Holy Ghost" were made safe. And we have had it said recently by one of the governors—Government appointed—that the "Christian tradition" must be upheld because the microphone goes into all sorts of homes, and simple-minded, unlettered men and women must not have their faith in Christianity shocked. We believe that Hitler has the same conviction with regard to his own "sacred" mission and gospel.

In passing, we may note that there is now an additional Brains Trust—a religious one. This is presided over by the B.B.C. Director of Religious Broadcasting, and the personnel is made up of a handful of clergymen and one lady. They are all very earnest Christians, but no criticism of religion is ever permitted, and the work of this gallant crew is to try and understand, for their own benefit and that of inquirers, what Christians ought to believe about their creed. It is a case of believe first and then try and find the meaning of it afterwards. The result is the finest exhibition of organised imbecility that one could picture. We hasten to say that we do not mean by what we have just said that this gallant handful of forlorn believers are imbeciles apart from their religious outbursts. In ordinary matters they no doubt come up to a fair level of intelligence. I cite them because they help to explain why the B.B.C. dare not permit any discussion of the truth and social value of religion. To place these people in opposition to an educated Atheist would be like sending an army armed with bows and arrows to meet German tanks and aeroplanes.

A Trust that Cannot be Trusted

In a few months the charter of the B.B.C. comes up for renewal, and the motion for a token vote for the Ministry of Information (a polite, if sarcastic, name for a Ministry preventing information reaching the public) gave opportunity for a criticism of the religious policy of the B.B.C. Those who wish to read the discussion will find it in the official Parliamentary report for June 29th. So far as we are here concerned, our interest is mainly on what was said concerning religious broadcasts. There are many examples of Hitlerite practice in this, our home of freedom, and the

religious policy of the B.B.C. illustrates one of them; there is a quite pathetic interest, on their own confession, to prevent the more ignorant section of the community being shocked by any doubts being cast on their Christian beliefs. In set terms the B.B.C. has made it known that it will permit no criticism of Christianity—first, because we are a Christian people, and second, because the microphone goes into every house, and the confidence that the more ignorant section of the community have in the Christian religion must not be disturbed.

In the course of the Parliamentary discussion there was an amusing interlude provided by Dr. Little, Member for Down. He protested that certain performers used such expressions as "Good Lord," "Good God," "By God," "For God's sake," etc. Very tearfully Dr. Little said: "The name of God is very precious to me. The more we honour God, the more he honours you." Dr. Little is a fine representative of "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Hansard does not say whether members smiled at Dr. Little's outstanding absurdities—probably practice has given them full control over the muscles of their face.

The most interesting speech to us came from Mr. Montague, Member for Islington East. He centred his attention on the Brains Trust, which is rapidly becoming a joke to the wise, a profit to the crafty, and an entrancing exhibition to fools. It is not equal to the level of Hyde Park, and it is below many of the discussions that take place at an East End street corner. It is time that men of ability wiped their hands of the "Brains Trust."

But it must be borne in mind that this intellectual dishonesty runs right through the present structure of the B.B.C. It selects unfairly, it does not hesitate to "doctor" the manuscripts with which it deals and, even with the reports of the Brains Trust, what is said is often "doctored" before it reaches the public. Probably the comments that suffer least are the commonplace puerilities of Commander Campbell. The cardinal fault is, of course, the aim of the B.B.C. to frame public opinion and prevent any departure from the Christian tradition. Mr. Montague said well that, where the Brains Trust is concerned, Schopenhauer hit the nail on the head when he said that "A man must still be a greenhorn if he imagines that he can make himself popular by exhibiting intelligence and discernment."

Mr. Montague pleaded for a free and honest discussion of all religious and even non-religious beliefs. What we are now getting, he said, "is a hand-picked parson who deals with the religious difficulties of an equally hand-picked group of young men and women who could put the parson through his paces when it came to a matter of religious difficulties.

. . . Let us remember that there are millions of people . . . who resent the thrusting of this formal cotton-wool religion down their throats. . . . It is always a coward's castle; no one has an opportunity of putting the other point of view."

Mr. Montague is not helping that never-completely honest course known as a "political career," but we have long had the conviction that what would be of the greatest use to the people of this country would be men of good intelligence, of incorruptible character, who could be trusted to refuse office on any account, but would be content to play consistently the game of understanding and fearless speech. Officials we can get at any time and in any quantity. But there is, in present conditions, not a man who is good in

office who would not be at least twice as good out of it.

There was one part of Mr. Montague's address which we are sufficiently conceited to believe will be of interest to at least "Freethinker" readers. He said:—

I plead for a really grown-up and intelligent attitude of mind to questions of this kind. Why should not the fine intellects of Chapman Cohen or Professor Hogben be called upon to contribute, as well as that of the Bishop of Lichfield, another fine intellect, too.

Fully appreciating the compliment paid me, I have only two things to say. The first is that I am not anxious to pose before the B.B.C. microphone. For more than fifty years I have, with voice and pen, been carrying on a propaganda which I believe was urgently needed when I commenced, and which becomes more essential to-day than ever. It is to-day comparatively easy to go through life without making any open avowal of disbelief in the Christian or any other religion. Christianity is so weakened that its upholders—those who believe in it and those who think it politic to bow to it occasionally—may go through life unmolested. Their "careers" will be unimpeded so long as they remain quiet. But honest and direct speech, because Christianity covers more hypocrisy and humbug to-day than it did a few generations ago, is of greater importance than ever. An example from the House of Commons will help here. The House has a paid chaplain who before every sitting offers up prayers that the Members will be filled with justice and wisdom. I believe that twelve is a good audience. Yet if it were proposed that this piece of clumsy pantomiming should be abolished, probably four-fifths of the Members would vote for its continuation for fear of the electorate, who are as mentally dishonest as are M.P.s in this matter. Mental dishonesty breeds rapidly when it receives popular endorsement. Human nature has an enormous capacity for humbug, and nowhere else is that shown better than where an intellectually discredited religious system is concerned.

My second reason for not being anxious to figure on the B.B.C. platform is that in no circumstances would I submit to a censorship of the matter to be expressed or the way in which it is presented. That should always be left to the self-respecting speaker. If he has not that self-respect he should be kept at arm's length. The submission to a committee of irresponsible persons is an outrage to decency. It really is an insult disguised as a compliment.

Finally, the B.B.C. has of late years lost caste to a greater extent than is usually realised. I believe I have played some part in bringing this about, and I hope to keep on with the good work. Broadcasting has great possibilities and it wields enormous power. In existing circumstances I believe we can do better work by keeping one's mind quite free than by persuading ourselves that we can cleanse the world by submission to an institution which ties itself to the championship of a discredited religion and a one-sided sociology.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The other day the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered an address to the Worcester Diocesan Conference on the place of religion in National Reconstruction. There should be a number of replies to such a question. We suggest a place where the collections are large and the critical people few.

ROMANIST REACTION TO THE REFORMATION

IN its opening stages the revolt from Rome aroused little opposition, and even Cardinals themselves, in several instances, acknowledged and condemned the increasing decrepitude of the clergy. In successive conclaves the Sacred College pledged itself to the drastic reform of the corrupt Papal court.

Lord Acton, in his learned lecture on "The Counter-Reformation" ("Modern History"; Macmillan), notes that "at the Lateran Council the same men who had imposed on Leo X the obligation to revoke the indulgences suffered them to be renewed; and those who held the language of Erasmus were confronted with a resisting body of officials for whom reform was ruin." And as the Papacy depended on revenues derived from patronage and promotion, dispensations, indulgences and other favours, all efforts to restrict, much less abolish, sacerdotal privileges, nepotism, shady finance and other blemishes were clearly foredoomed to failure.

Yet for a time the Papacy favoured reform, and Paul III offered a Cardinal's hat to the heretic Erasmus. At one period it seemed as if the moderate Reformers and the more enlightened Romanists would calmly compose their differences, for men whose minds had been broadened by the Renaissance were influential in shaping the Papal policy. But the traditionalists were too firmly attached to the thoughts and assumptions of medieval centuries, in which the sovereign Pontiff rose above all earthly potentates, and when the clergy were placed on a pinnacle above the laity, to encourage reconciliation. They rather chose to heal the Church's wounds by restoring the despotic authority of the Papacy over the intellectual and emotional life of Europe. A resolute Spanish Cardinal, Caraffa, who subsequently became Pope, asserted that the only way to extinguish heresy and unbelief was the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition into Italy.

It was in 1542 that the Holy Office was established in Rome; but this institution differed in some respects from the earlier medieval Inquisition, and also from the Spanish Inquisition in its later form, for the Roman tribunal was governed by a priestly camarilla whose head was the Pope himself. In medieval days the Church pronounced sentence and the State carried out the execution of the condemned heretic, as the clergy were supposed to recoil from the shedding of blood. Yet in Rome the accused were not only tried by the Pope but by his orders executed, as the ruler of the Roman State.

Most of the victims of these atrocious trials were disciples of Erasmus and not those of Calvin or Luther. The Holy Office established a Venetian branch, where many trials took place; but executions were not frequent as in Rome. "There," writes Acton, "in many recorded cases the victim was strangled before burning. It is doubtful whether burning was adopted as most cruel; for boiling had been tried at Utrecht, and the sight was so awful that the bishop who was present stopped the proceedings. Roman experts regard it as a distinctive mark of the new tribunal that it allowed culprits who could not be caught and punished in the proper way to be killed without ceremony by anybody who met them. This practice was not unprecedented, but it had fallen into disuse with the rest during the profane Renaissance; and its revival was a portentous event, for it prompted the frequent murders and massacres which stain the story of the Counter-Reformation with crimes committed for the love of God." It is noteworthy that these laws, however inoperative, had not been repealed at the close of the 19th century.

New Orders were also instituted to foster the Catholic reaction. Theatines, Capuchins, Barnabites, Oratorians and others sprang into existence. But the most insidious enemies of religious enlightenment were the Jesuits, founded and skilfully organised by the Basque, Ignatius Loyola.

Loyola was a remarkable man. Fanatically religious, he deplored the ineptitude of the Papacy in stemming the tide of the Reformation. His Order he termed the Company of Jesus, whose main duty was the recovery of those who had strayed from orthodoxy, with the restoration of the power of the Papacy over the minds and activities of men. Well-disciplined and better instructed than the bulk of the clergy, the Jesuits subtly controverted the claims of the Reformers. When oral argument failed, pamphlets were penned against the Protestants; while the Jesuit priests insinuated themselves into the confidence of the rich and influential, and, as their confessors, stimulated their persecuting powers against all Christian or neo-Pagan heretics, even unto death. They spread abroad as missionaries in China and elsewhere; but their chief ambition was the overthrow, by fair means or foul, of the Protestant heresy in Europe.

Loyola sought to establish a system of complete uniformity, but, as the years rolled by, his Company attracted so many men of pronounced individuality that conflicting opinions were entertained and expressed within the Order. Loyola desired his disciples to bow reverently before the teachings of Aquinas, yet several members of the Order dissented. The Jesuits usually defended witchcraft trials; but it was the Jesuit Spee "who broke the back of the custom, although he had to publish his book anonymously and in a Protestant town." At one period the society approved the doctrine of tyrannicide, and certainly put it into practice. In 1611 apparently nearly all Jesuits condoned the assassination of leading heretics, although, as Acton intimates, "a hundred years later this was deplored as a melancholy deviation by D'Avigny and other fathers of the society."

Moderate-minded ecclesiastics favoured the calling of a general Council, ultimately held as the Council of Trent, to remedy the evils of the Church. But the Popes repudiated the proposal, while Protestants demurred. The latter objected "to an assembly from which they were excluded, and their interests were to be debated and decided by men whose function it now avowedly was to take their lives." Thus the Council failed to reconcile, but served to widen separation from Rome.

Various views were expressed at the Council, but its findings were those dictated by the Papacy. It met in 1545 and terminated in 1563; but there were two lengthy intervals. Bribery and corruption very largely determined the Council's decisions. Acton observes that "Father Paul, in a very famous work, describes the Council as a scene of intrigue in which the good intentions of virtuous prelates were thwarted by the artifices of Rome. If the bulk of the virtuous prelates resembled Pole and Lorraine, we cannot say much for the strength of their good intentions." Among others, the Cardinal of Lorraine sold his consent for a substantial sum.

One of the evil actions of the Council of Trent was the institution of the index of prohibited writings. Prior to this, books displaying independent thought were suppressed by the State, the universities and the bishops. Charles V forbade the reading of certain volumes under the death penalty, while Lutheran writings were forbidden by the Papacy even to Cardinals and Archbishops. Books partly approved were tampered with and spurious editions were printed. But, as our historian caustically states, "The best way to suppress a book is to burn it, and there were, accordingly, frequent bonfires of peccant literature. One man, Konias, is said to have destroyed 60,000 books, principally Bohemian. Freedom of speech and sincerity of history were abolished for many years."

With the accession of Pius V the Counter-Reformation had triumphed. Among the many endearing actions of this pitiless Pontiff was his approval of the ferocious conduct of Alva; his deposition of Elizabeth; his marked success in plunging France into civil conflict. Executions for heresy and the elimination of those of his own faith who stood in his path soon culminated

in the extinction of religious dissent in Catholic countries. And the crowning infamy of the massacre of St. Bartholomew occurred shortly after this Pope's death.

Acton considers that "The quarter of a century from 1564 to the death of Sixtus V in 1590 is the active period of the movement. It begins when the Council, having determined doctrine, dispersed; and it declines when, by the death of Mary Stuart and the flight of the Armada, the Protestant succession was secured in England and Scotland and the Churches acquired their permanent limit."

With its repudiated authority and restricted sphere, the Roman hierarchy displayed greater energy in Catholic domains than when it claimed complete control over Western Christendom. This victory was won by acts of violence; and these were committed by men who never hesitated to spill blood, Sanguinary sacerdotalists and their adherents, who gave no quarter, succeeded where the sceptical and refined ecclesiastics of an earlier day suffered defeat when confronted with the intransigent Luther and the inflexible Calvin.

T. F. PALMER.

THE RATIONALISTIC SPIRIT AND ACTION

I.

Watchman, what of the night?—
 Storm and thunder and rain,
 Lights that waver and wane,
 Leaving the watchfires unlit.
 Only the balefires are bright,
 And the flash of the lamps now and then
 From a palace where spoilers sit,
 Trampling the children of men.

* * *

Liberty, what of the night?—
 I feel not the red rains fall,
 Hear not the tempest at all,
 Nor thunder in heaven any more.
 All the distance is white
 With the soundless feet of the sun.
 Night, with the woes that it wore,
 Night is over and done.

SWINBURNE.—*Songs before Sunrise.*

IN a previous evaluation of Rationalism in these pages we were concerned mainly with its cosmic connotation and relation to religious and philosophical psychosis. As its chief signification, broadly regarded, one might leave it at that if our responsibility herein ended there. The position, however, is not so simple. For the means to the approach and open discussion of the interests included under this term is contingent on a favouring atmosphere; on certain political and legal conditions and institutions. Even if disposed to quietism and letting the world "gang its ain gait" we may not allow ourselves this indulgence. We cannot reckon on the stabilisation of "This freedom," while its sleepless foes are active within and without the gate.

So lately, we have missed by a damned near thing, destruction of our hopes and independence through lack of adequate foresight and preparation by Libertarians in face of a burgeoning menace. Happily averted at the moment by resolute leadership, and the courage and resource alike of the Services, and commonalty—man, woman, and child . . . But involving us all in a bloody, protracted struggle to be fought to a finish at any cost for the triumph of the priceless issues which are at stake!

Mais revenons à nos moutons . . . We will take up our parable at another point—that aspect of religious concern implied in its Latin root *religio*: to bind. Beyond giving to their devotees an

explication of the nature of things, the developed cults, linked with the more civilised and settled communities, vouchsafed a corresponding code of law and regulation of a sacrosanct order. Some of these codes were tribal and exclusive in their incidence as with Judaism. Others partook of a more general dispensation imposed on all who came under their domination as in Christendom (Christentie) and Islam. Each of these rival faiths is associated with a related polity, and as the first is more closely connected with Western fortunes let us note some of its comprehensive features.

The Christian Church (*ecclesia*) as an organised movement emerges into prominence about the end of the 1st Century, A.D. The Roman dominion, inheritor of the antique culture of the Mediterranean region, facilitated intercourse between its varied ethnical groups and expansion of their numerous cults. This Church, whatever the cause which affected its progress, continued to advance until in the 4th Century it received recognition as a State Cultus by the Emperor Constantine from his new capital at Constantinople. Its greatest expansion had been in the Greek or Eastern provinces of the Empire; and it shared Byzantine fortunes as a State institution for a millennium until its overthrow in the 15th Century by Islamic forces and their usurpation of its former domain. It continued under a restricted Ottoman toleration; but meanwhile passed into the rising Russian Empire as the Muscovite State Church or Communion.

These sectaries were largely the "bond" uniting nationalities submerged beneath Moslem rule. With the emancipation of these peoples and restoration of independence during the 19th Century, as in Serbia and Greece, the Church retained its influence as a cohesive factor in national life and usage, apart from doctrinal consideration, from the depressed conditions they had survived, and must be estimated relatively from a cultural view of their affairs and prospects.

Far different was the course of the Western or Roman Communion. The story is an involved one. With the fall of the Roman Empire it had reached a commanding residuary position. Amid barbaric inroads and the general confusion it became a centre of supernatural authority and sovereignty which through vigorous Pontiffs it was enabled to assert over the rising countries and nations which followed the Empire's demise. It was indeed that power under a fresh guise incorporating elements of the old regime and adapting them to its system; imposing its decretals as Rome formerly imposed laws; governing by its Cardinals where once ruled imperial legates and pro-consuls. The dangerous circumstances of the age favoured the growth of an institution like the feudal order where each one has a defined place and an assumed protector. So there slowly coalesced Medieval "society"; a system of regulated status headed by the Church, a theocratic unitarian polity where the king or ruler is consecrated by the hierarchy as ordained of God—the "divinity that doth hedge a king."

All which is illustrated by the nature of the Law that animated this authority—the Canon Law of the Church extended into secular affairs, dealing with offences, real or imaginary, which are now left to civil justice or to private judgment. . . "The rules enacted by the early Church for its relations with the secular power, its own internal administration, or the conduct of its members were called Canons (*regulae*) in contra-distinction on one hand to its articles of doctrine, and on the other to the enactments of the civil lawgiver (*leges*). . . During the growth of the Canon Law the Church extended her influence into all departments of life. Churchmen filled high offices of State and performed the duties of practical lawyers, while prelates often exercised civil jurisdiction over a considerable tract of country. Hence the legislation of the Church embraced many subjects which properly belonged to the domain of municipal law. It was decided by early councils that questions between Churchmen be

decided by spiritual tribunals. In course of time the Church Courts absorbed many departments of civil jurisdiction. All matters connected in the most distant way with the Church or religious duties were deemed proper subjects for disposal by her tribunals. The Clergy dispensed the sacraments, and their assistance was required on the occasion of baptisms, marriages, and deaths. Hence the *Curiae Christianitatis* took cognizance of questions relating to legitimacy, marriage, and succession. They assumed jurisdiction over not only the clergy, but all who were under the obligation of religious vows (Crusaders) as well as widows and orphans and minors. In the department of criminal law they were particularly active, punishing both ecclesiastical and religious offences, such as heresy, simony, blasphemy, sacrilege, and violation of personal and social morality as adultery, bigamy, fraud, perjury."

Of such was the nature of a polity which, against its historic setting, may be classed as Christian in its traditional concomitants. Disintegrating factors operative from the 15th century on undermined this theocratic unity; evoking new political, social, and psychic forces which lead to our modern world.

AUSTEN VERNEY.

CHURCH AND STATE

I DO not know how many readers of these columns have seen accounts in the Press of a statement recently issued by the Russian Orthodox Church. I take my details from the "Observer" of April 16, and, whatever one feels about the political complexion of that journal, I do not think that anyone has ever impugned its accuracy in statements of fact. The particular things that were said by the Patriarch Sergei, the head of the Orthodox Church in Russia, were so interesting as a particular example of a general principle that I make no apologies for reproducing them here. The statement originally appeared in the "Church Bulletin" of Moscow, and was apparently inspired by someone who asked whether a "Vicar of Christ" (i.e., a Pope) had any real basis for existence. The Patriarch's reply was "No," and as a basis for this he added:—

"In the Patriarch's view the mystical marriage between Christ and His Church renders the existence of an intermediary Vicar of Christ on earth altogether inconceivable... The Gospel teaches us that Our Lord Jesus, while quitting the world bodily, had no thought whatever of handing over His Church to the care of anyone else... He has sent His Apostles and their successors, the Orthodox Bishops, that they may preach the Gospel and lead the faithful."

The "Observer" points out that this is in line with a recent statement in "Izvestia," criticising the attitude towards democratic institutions taken up by the Pope, and it is, of course, in this that the Russian Church, which is as opportunist as all other Churches, has seen its chance.

I suggest that a fruitful piece of research to be undertaken by one of the learned historians who have sympathy with Freethought would be to see how far the Churches have taken their political complexions from the States in which they live. Consider a few examples for a moment.

The Roman Catholic Church has always been openly Fascist, thus bringing it in line with the ruling classes of Italy in the past twenty years or so. It has only begun to "hedge" on this point since the fall of Mussolini. The Church of England has always been the docile representative, as some one once said, of the Tory Party on its knees. And Toryism, either naked and unashamed or under a thin veil of "National Government," has been in power in this country for many a year. In Russia, on the other hand, where the ruling class is the working class, bitterly anti-Catholic and anti-Fascist, the Church sides with the

powers that be. Incidentally, it is not for nothing that, under the present Archbishop of Canterbury, the Church of England, which has supported political reaction for a long period of time and has always been against the working class, is now supporting closer relations with the Soviet Union and advocating the very sort of political reforms which it has for so long opposed. After all, the political prophets have said that the next General Election will bring a considerable swing to the left, and the Church of England is therefore only paving the way for a resumption of power under the benevolent wing of a Labour Government.

The fact that in no country in the world has the Church the support of the masses of the people will not prevent these discreditable manoeuvres from going on. In Italy, in Britain, in Russia—the motives are the same. Only, in fact, when the ordinary people see through these imposters for the bogus reformers that they are, will the thralldom of theology be lifted.

S.H.

ACID DROPS

TAUGHT by experience, the Churches, before the invasion of Normandy by Allied forces, did not adopt the policy of having a day of prayer for success. Its previous days of prayer led to nothing worth writing about, in fact, it looked as though God was getting annoyed with them. So more cleverly the Churches adopted the plan of keeping their doors open all the time the campaign lasted. That was artful, very artful. It could advertise the benefit of prayer whenever something good occurred and remain silent when they were bad. It was an example of that cheap trickery in which the Churches shine.

But it is worth noting that—to speak theologically—God is not mocked, and he was not to be caught in that manner. We have, thanks to the skill and courage of the armies engaged, made a greater advance than most people anticipated. But it must also be noted that our generals in Normandy have time after time commented on the unusual state of the weather, which has involved a greater length of time in landing men and munitions, and so far has helped the Germans rather than us. We should like to have the private opinion on this from: first, the generals; secondly, the fighting ranks; and thirdly, the clergy.

The Vicar of St. Paul's, Leicester, is very angry indeed over a very simple fact, and one of the facts that our Government tells belongs to a body of facts that are essential to the safety of the country. It seems that in Leicester, and we presume elsewhere, the A.T.C. practice parades and is given instructions on Sunday mornings. The Vicar believes all that to be good, except for the Sunday mornings, and that keeps them from coming to church—which is not good, at least for a parson. He says nothing is "more wicked." He says it is "a widespread attempt to destroy the souls" of those belonging to the A.T.C. Reduced to simple facts and plain language the Vicar says that he and his preachments ought to come first. But the members of the A.T.C. are not greatly disturbed by the existing arrangements.

In the debate on the Government's Education Bill, Lord Quickswood moved an amendment that it should be part of every teacher giving religious instruction to teach his pupils that every pupil had a religious obligation to attend public divine worship. Now England is a free country, at least it thinks it is, but it is a strange conception of freedom which denies it to children; and what kind of freedom of choice is there left if they are not only taught religion before they understand it, but that they are marched off to Church by parents and teachers to take part in a service they simply cannot understand. That, of course, was the method Hitlerite Germany adopted, and we are cursing him for all we are worth. It is not enough that teachers are substantially compelled to teach to children a religion they do not believe, but they must see that they do not dodge the teacher's lie when they grow up. Of all the poisonous things that exist, compulsory religion is about the worst.

Mr. Emrys Jones complains in the "Daily Mail" on the way the B.B.C. deals with controversy, particularly in its "Week in Westminster." He says they do not get a fair presentation of cases, and blames Government influence. He may be right in this instance, but the case against the B.B.C. goes farther than that. It runs right through its texture, and finds its most evil opportunity where religion is concerned. If the writers on the "Daily Mail," and the "Daily Mail" itself, have a genuine desire to see the B.B.C. play the game fairly, it would throw its columns open to a discussion of the policy of the B.B.C. It is, particularly where religion is concerned, careless as to truth and shameless in the way in which it presents the alleged truth about religion.

Attempts at "Unity" in the Christian religion never gets much encouragement from the "Church Times," unless it supports its own Anglo-Catholic kind of fundamentalism. The other day there was a general gathering in Keightly of all the Christian sects—or all who would come—in a "Religion and Life" orgy. So the "C.T." utters a very solemn protest against this kind of merry-making, or we perhaps ought to say exhibition of deadly difference over a number of completely ridiculous points of Christian superstition.

We are intrigued, to use a common phrase, by the declaration of the editor of the "Nottingham Journal" that "the Press is compelled to tell the truth because falsehood, like a base coin, is instantly nailed to the counter." We must confess that we never regarded the newspaper from that point of view. We assume that it is equally true with regard to the B.B.C. We must seriously consider the making of a public apology for having so frequently misjudged these two examples of undiluted truth.

Says the Bishop of Chelmsford in the "Union Jack" for June 13:—

"If we draw up a list of all the men and women who have lived splendid lives in the service of their fellows, we shall find they were all followers of Christ. This is a very remarkable fact."

We agree it *would* be a very remarkable fact. But our feelings are overcome for the moment by the performance of a very worthy liar. The Bishop is not an artistic example of Christian lying, but he will pass with very honourable mention.

Just a gem from the Melton Mowbray Parish Magazine dealing with the war. "The best thing is the reassurance given by the success of the invasion that God does answer prayer." We have only to say that it is a pity that God did not send better weather during the invasion, for nothing has told more against getting the necessary supplies than did the weather. We ought also to feel thankful that God did not prevent the Germans from ill-treating the women and children of France, otherwise it would have robbed our troops of the glory of conquest. Still, God is peculiar in his ways—damned peculiar. And humans who acted in a similar way would be slaughtered by an infuriated public.

"The Church Times" is very gloomy over the outlook for the type of Christianity it loves. It says that in spite of the "Tracts of the Times," the "Oxford Movement" of Keble, Pusey and others, there is "nothing gained from blinking the fact that for some time the Catholic movement in the Church of England is dead." The Church has no outstanding leaders, no enthusiasm, and so on. But it does not see, or will not admit, the plain fact to all students of history. This is, that current scientific and sociological facts have no place and no genuine respect for any sort of religion, and treats with contempt the doctrines on which Christianity is founded.

What has the world of modern science to do with a God who made his appearance in historic times, who produces the world millenniums after it was in existence, which tells man a story of creation that is more in line with "Hans Andersen" than with what we know to be true? Put the Christian religion in its proper place and it becomes an informative contribution to

the long, long story of human development. Present it as "sacred" truth that man must accept as 20th century truth and it is an insult to intelligent men and women, even to school children. We can really respect an ancient religion; we have nothing but contempt for a modern one. Religion was born of misunderstanding. It should have no honoured place with a civilised people.

The question asked of the "Universe" is whether it is not risky for children to become acquainted with fairy stories, since they may take some of the stories about Jesus of the same order? Now that is a very tricky question; so tricky that it looks to us as though it had been set by those who wish to put the "Question Master" in a very difficult position. The loaves and fishes business, the story of Jesus leaping up from the grave after he had been truly killed, the story of Jesus addressing his mother as "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" which in actual life might have brought the speaker a good spanking. Certainly, there is a certain religious risk in telling children fairy stories.

But, as an Atheist, we are in favour of giving children all the fairy stories they care to have. They may believe these stories for a time. Then comes the steady, not volcanic, discovery that they are mere stories and nothing more. It is a phase of child development. Leave the child alone when it is beginning its education and it will, in most cases, in all probability dismiss the magical stories, with which all real religion is filled, as belonging to the group of fairy stories it has discarded. And this in turn should give way to the nature of the origin of the fairy stories of Hans Andersen and the religious legends of the New Testament. In other words, the child does in a very broad sense duplicate in its mental development the stages that belong to racial growth.

Mark, we say in a broad sense and if let alone. But children are not left alone sufficiently to form reasonable opinions for themselves. Parents and governments feel that their own outlook is so fine that the best thing they can do for their children is to tie them down to respecting their absurdities. Prominent as this is with regard to most matters, the greatest group of criminals in this distortion of and misdirecting of the minds of children is religious bodies. They know that nowadays any honest appeal to the rising generation would fall flat. The Roman Church is the chief distorter of the youthful mind, but it would not be quite as successful as it is if it was endorsed to some extent in the lives of the people. What we need is a crusade on behalf of the intellectual future of the young.

Bishop Yu Pin, as befits a Chinese Roman Catholic, has started talking very much as his opposite number talks in England. Roman Catholic bishops here are always swanking about the way England is once again ripe for the Pope, if only she would take true Christianity to heart and listen to the faithful's prayers with true humility. Bishop Yu has been saying much the same about China—"There is a great harvest for the Church in China among the 500 million people there, especially as they have a natural aptitude for Christianity." One is irreverently reminded of Blucher's famous remark the first time he saw London—"God, what a city to loot!" How alike run the minds of the German and the Roman Catholic!

In the House of Commons the Government gave an informal promise that when religion becomes a regular part of the School curriculum there should be no surveying of the schools by the clergy. Now in the House of Lords it was said that teachers will have nothing to grumble at if the regular priest or minister of a denomination is asked to inspect religious instruction. So much for the brave new world we are to have. The one thing we can be fairly sure of is that the majority of teachers, particularly the less competent ones, will not go against the clergy. The second thing is that in most respects the new world will show an astonishing likeness to the old.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- J. F.—There seems no end to the absurd displays that professional Christians will adopt. It never strikes them that there is a form of swindling through the methods of Christian belief that is as intellectually criminal as is the physical robbery of property. There may be some highlights in the Christian religion, but that it develops many kinds of injustice and dishonesty is beyond questioning.
- H. W. SCOTT.—Thanks for paper. Some papers do not consider the absurdities with which they fill space, so long as the nonsense is of a Christian character.
- W. F. GREENFIELD.—Thanks for paper. We could have told a better kind of a lie with our eyes shut. The Bishop of Chelmsford will not even rank in the first row of historic Christian liars. They did give at least a possible degree of truth in their absurdities. But the Bishop does leave even that.
- Mr. K. CLARK (Ruislip).—Very much appreciate your efforts in obtaining new readers.
- C. HOLLINGHAM.—For "The Freethinker," £1.
- H. HOLT.—Thanks for June 25 issue of "The Freethinker." The service now seems to be working more smoothly. Will bear your offer in mind.

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 manner in which the Press generally, and the B.B.C. in particular, manage to avoid mentioning anything that would rebound to the credit of Freethought has as a background the manner in which such an institution as the Roman Catholic Church keep their religion in front of the public. If a Roman Catholic soldier or sailor is mentioned favourably by his superiors, that is immediately given a place in the Catholic Press. This is done so frequently that the careless reader is apt to form the conviction that to a very considerable degree the welfare of the British campaigns depends upon the support given by Roman Catholics. And there is no recognition of the opposite side of the picture. Certainly, the Christian churches generally are becoming past masters in the art of suggestive advertising.

Circumstances over which we have no control have prevented our noting earlier one of the two greatest events in the history of modern Europe during the past century and a half. First comes the French Revolution of 1789. It was indeed more than a revolution in France. It might fittingly be called a European revolution that broke out in France. In 1779 French society was divided into two distinct classes. An aristocracy possessing all power and privilege and well supported by a Church that considered mainly its own well-being. And on the other side a people without power, wealth, or even rights. It was the one country where the two orders stood cleanly cut and facing each other. So in the case of Russia we had in 1917 a much larger people, broadly split into two classes and living together without making a real contact. A country rich in both physical wealth and human possibilities dominated by a mere handful of governors. Again we might well describe the Russian outburst as a world revolution that broke out in Russia.

The part played by England was substantially the same in both cases. All that England could do to crush the aims of the new France was done. Aristocracy and finance worked together, and the new-born France found in our leading statesman its greatest enemy. It was mainly through this that the French revolution was changed from a crusade for the equality of man to one of conquest. And again the greatest obstacle the new Russia had to fight was the opposition of British finance and British prejudice. In the case of France and Russia the greatest recognition of the new world that was opening was found among the people of this country. In each case societies were formed by those who saw the light that was being held before them. Self-interest was the main element acting with regard to the opposition of Russia in revolt. Misrepresentation was unlimited, and we are paying the price for it in the present war—the most brutal that history offers us. We are writing these notes with the sound of crashing bombs and the heavier sound of ruined homes in the distance.

July the Fourteenth has, since the fall of the Bastille, itself a symbol of cruelty and tyranny, been accepted by the French people as a symbol of the dawn of a new humanity. It gave the word "Freedom" an austerity, a greatness, it had never before possessed. Revolutions are terrible things, but they are made by societies and years of ill-doing. Man merely carries them out. We may stand in fear at the sight of revolution, but, as Carlyle said, there is one thing worse than revolution, and that is when men live without decent homes, a sufficiency of food, legal rights, and without hope for the future and yet not have the courage to revolt. There is a brutality that is inevitable with war, but is it ever worse than the brutality which repeats itself generation after generation unopposed? July the 14th has never failed to rouse the enthusiasm of all French men and women, and we may all take the two revolutions with which we have been dealing as evidence that man can and will determine his own destiny and lift his vision above the fears and injustices of the moment.

A soldier serving in India wishes to contact Freethinkers in the Barry, Glam., district as a preliminary to forming a Barry branch of the N.S.S. after the war. Will those wishing to respond send to this office, 2/3, Furnival Street, London, E.C. 4, for the Indian name and address.

Mr. F. Smithies, of the Edinburgh Branch N.S.S., has been debating with the Rev. Gordon Livingstone on The Mound, and interesting discussions have resulted. To-day (July 23) the last of the series of debates will be held. The local branch is fortunate in having such a capable speaker in Mr. Smithies, who in spite of health trouble continues his platform service to the movement.

We wonder whether the relics that the Church of St. Omer possessed, and which are mentioned by Dr. G. G. Coulton in one of his six volumes on "Life in the Middle Ages." Here is a short list: A piece of the wood of the true cross, the stone on which Christ's blood was spilt, a piece of our Lord's cradle, a bit of the stone tablet on which God wrote with his finger the laws for Moses, the window through which the angel Gabriel entered when he saluted Mary, Mary's blessed oil from Sardinia, Aaron's Rod, some of the Manna that came from heaven, some hairs of Mary's. There are more, and would be worth seeing—if the Germans have not taken them away. What a collection! But we don't like that bit about Gabriel climbing through the window of Mary's bedroom when Joseph was absent.

The Roman Catholic Church runs a kind of Brains Trust. It is not quite so ridiculous as the B.B.C. one, which week after week calls upon a certain number of (mostly) educated men and women to exhibit what a small amount of intelligence may go with the acquisition of mere knowledge. The Catholic Church has very distinct teaching, and it is the business of its leaders to ward off too much inquiry of the kind that may lead to understanding. That is all, so far, open and above board. It decides only such as say openly that they do not care a brass button whether Catholic teaching is scientifically true or false. There is no religious virtue in believing a thing that embodies an obvious truth. Religious value consists in accepting as true something that one knows to be false. That is why the Government is putting the clergy back in the schools—so that the children will know what they must believe.

THOSE STAGGERING BIBLE PROPHECIES

OVER a hundred years ago a "wonderful" book appeared by a Scottish parson called Keith, infallibly demonstrating the truth of the Bible from prophecy. He got together many of the descriptions of Bible towns which were threatened by the Lord with complete destruction, and produced the testimony of various travellers to show that the towns had been destroyed exactly as the Lord said they would be. Thus the Bible was the infallible Word of God.

Of course, if God really threatened the towns with annihilation, he had to keep his word—and it does not seem to me to be very much to his credit; but the snag is, did God really want to impress upon his "children" his terrible might by the wholesale extermination of towns and cities? Was the slaughter of the innocent and the destruction of man's handiwork such marvellous proof of a loving and tender-hearted principal Deity? Nowadays, in spite of Keith's famous work on Prophecy, which had an enormous circulation, Christians are a little uneasy as to this proof of the truth of the Bible being quite as convincing as, let us say, the picture of Jesus going about "doing good." So instead, from platform, pulpit, and the B.B.C., the truth of the Bible is focused more on the "sublime" figure of "our Lord"—with many additions of "our Lady"—than on Prophecy.

But Keith is not forgotten in certain Fundamentalist quarters, and dozens of books used to be published, and are still, bought and read, dealing with Prophecy not only with the destruction of Bible towns and cities, but also gloating over the way the Jews have had it hot and strong from God because they had the impudence to reject God's Holy Son as their Messiah.

In case God's prophecies might have misfired, very earnest Christians, most of them thorough Fundamentalists, took it upon themselves to aid God by piling atrocity upon atrocity upon the unfortunate Jews; and wherever they were unable to continue God's holy work in this direction themselves, they very cheerfully recorded it for the benefit of waverers. Obviously, some Jews who hated to be foully tortured by Christians found the acceptance of any Messiah better than torture and death—which accounts for many "converted" Jews in the past. If the Messiah had been General Tom Thumb they would have accepted him. But the majority of Jews stood firm; and they are still rejecting Jesus, God's prophecies notwithstanding.

I am writing thus because a reader has sent me a little work by a Mr. John Urquhart entitled "Wonders of Prophecy," which first repeats, as if it were new, a good deal of Keith and then devotes many pages, with almost savage gloating, as to the way in which the Jews were treated by Christians for hundreds of years. I think this reader is quite upset because so many prophecies in the Bible have turned out to be true—or at least appear to be true. My advice to any reader who feels this way is to get hold of something better to read than such a mass of unmitigated balderdash. I do not mean to infer that every Bible prophecy never came off; it is only to be expected that a few would hit the mark. I could reel off a dozen prophecies a day for years myself, and I am sure some would eventually turn out to have been fulfilled.

Moreover, readers who are impressed with Bible prophecy take statements in such a book as "Wonders of Prophecy" as true without checking them. Even a cursory glance through it showed me the most astonishing credulity and an utter absence of any knowledge of modern Bible criticism. The Bible must be true because of the prophecies; the prophecies must be true because they are in the Bible. This is a favourite argument of Bible idolators.

Mr. Urquhart spends a chapter on what the Bible says would happen to Egypt according to God speaking through Ezekiel xxix. 10-11: "And I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the borders of Ethiopia. No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited for forty years." There isn't a word in this which has been fulfilled, Urquhart notwithstanding. Egypt is as flourishing as ever. But so silly do people like Urquhart judge their readers to be that they can write page after page insisting that the prophecy has been literally fulfilled.

He quotes the prophecy in Ezekiel xxvi. 7-14 to show what would be done to Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, and claims that "the prediction was fulfilled to the letter." The Lord said that Nebuchadnezzar would wipe out Tyre—make it like the top of a rock and be built no more, "for I the Lord have spoken." The Lord has been completely falsified. Nebuchadnezzar never destroyed Tyre, for he left the native sovereigns and their wealth and power quite untouched. One thousand years after the Lord had spoken Jerome declared Tyre to be "the most beautiful city in Phœnicia." And it still stands, as any gazetteer will tell the reader, with over 5,000 inhabitants.

And here I should like to point out that nearly all these ancient cities in Asia Minor or thereabouts were constantly the scene of battles, and often were wiped out—but not by God. There was nothing very clever on the part of God to inspire a prophet to say that such-and-such a town would be destroyed and never likely to be rebuilt. That was always happening in the East. In any case, what we call "progress and civilisation" has shifted from Asia and Africa to modern Europe. More people can live with a high standard of living here than was possible at any time in Asia. That is quite a sufficient reason why, when a town was destroyed, it remained so—and prophets soon saw they could back on a certainty.

The Lord promised, through Isaiah xvii. 1, Damascus would be made into a "ruinous heap"—this word "heap" is very touchingly taken to heart by Urquhart; a prediction that is sheer nonsense. Damascus flourishes to-day with 200,000 inhabitants. And so one could go through dozens of these idiotic predictions.

But it is when he comes to the Jews that Urquhart smacks his lips and settles down to the fun of writing down what happened to them—mostly, by the way, at the hands of his brothers in Christ. And as all Jews who have been approached by Christians know full well, the most popular texts hurled at them are those from Deuteronomy xxviii. Here the Lord went at it full, well and hearty; and I know no chapter in the Bible so utterly funny in its threats as to what would be done to the Jews if they did not hearken to the voice of the Lord. All the other texts on the same subject pale into insignificance.

Of course, the Jews would be scattered—which, when Deuteronomy was finally redacted, they were; but the prophecy goes a little further—and this is rarely referred to by Christians. Verse 36 says: "And thou shalt serve other gods, wood and stone"—when they were scattered, naturally. Now, if there is one prophecy which has been absolutely falsified, surely this is it. So strongly monotheistic are Jews that if any credit can be given to any peoples for putting forward one idea and sticking to it, such credit must be given to the believers in Judaism. Never since Ezra re-formed the survivors of the Babylonian conquest have the Jews believed in wooden or stone gods; and even now they refuse to have anything to do with two of the three Christian deities.

To devote more space to such drivel as we find in "Wonders of Prophecy" would be more than a waste of time, and I hope to be forgiven dealing with it more in detail.

Let me conclude with a quotation from a work not so much read as it should be these days, but which still has a value immeasurably above the kind of devout nonsense we get from our Keiths and Urquharts. It will be found in Greg's "Creed of Christendom":—

"It is probably not too much to affirm that we have no instance in the prophetic books of the Old Testament of a prediction in the case of which we possess, at once and combined, clear and unsuspecting proof of the date, the precise event predicted, the exact circumstance of that event, and the inability of human sagacity to foresee it. There is no case in which we can say with certainty—even where it is reasonable to suppose that the prediction was uttered before the event—that the narrative has not been tampered with to suit the prediction, or the prediction modified to correspond with the event."

H. CUTNER.

RE "THE OATH"

NOT only are the futility, absurdity and stupidity of the custom of requiring the swearing of oaths for the purposes of the Courts, undeniable, but the issues involved are even more deep-seated and worthy of consideration.

This "ceremony" is of exceeding antiquity and together with other "pagan" ideas and practices was incorporated into the Christian dispensation of compromise and superstition which the authorities found more "practical" and convenient than the teaching of the Palestinian Jesus. (For the purposes of this letter I am assuming that he lived and that the records, such as they are, present the substance of his teaching; whatever the truth of the matter this Jesus presents as interesting a problem as Shakespeare's Hamlet, for, whether he lived or not, similar persons have).

It seems to me, writing from a freelance point of view (free insofar as one brought up to Church ideas and now a critic of the Churches, can be reckoned to be) that a new understanding of the issues involved in the oath must lead to its abolition and a re-statement of the problem set by the religious urge. For, whether we like it or not, religion—and that almost implies some form of Christianity—is not only part of our environment but equally part of our hereditary make-up; we are tied to the apron strings of what is known as a Christian democracy. Wherefore we are governed by a dual system, namely a constitutional monarchy reinforced by an established Church. A striking instance of the working of this system is that the King, as temporal head of the State, has to be consecrated, crowned and sworn in to office by the head of the Church. At the ceremony held in 1937, the oath, revised on account of the Statute of Westminster, took the following form.

The King swore to govern the peoples of Great Britain, Ireland, the Irish Free State, the Dominions, &c., &c., according to their respective laws and customs; further, he undertook "to maintain the laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel" throughout his domains; but to maintain "the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law," in England and Scotland only, and "to preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline and Government thereof, as by law established in England," in England alone. (Vide Encyclopædia Britannica Book of the Year—1938).

It is apparent that valid criticism of the oath must bring to light not merely error within the Christian Churches (in particular the Established Church of England) but also flaws in the Constitution. That fact, bound up with the fact that the Crown has a sworn duty "to maintain inviolably the doctrine &c. of the Established Church . . ." raises a very pretty problem involving widespread reforms. For, following the example set by the Crown, practically all offices and many positions in or under

the Crown are in part held on the basis of the holder having sworn his loyalty &c. *on oath*. This affects, for instance, Ministers, Bishops, officers of the Forces and Officers of the Law, besides rankers and the less elevated servants of the public. Conscripts are sworn indirectly, by virtue of Act of Parliament passed by sworn Members. Whilst it seems open for anyone who may realise the unsoundness of the oath to query his position on such grounds, yet, inasmuch as presumably he took the oath—at the time—in "good faith," no question of intention can be raised but only on a case based on "conscientious" grounds arising subsequent to the occasion. Whilst that may dissipate certain legal misgivings that arise, yet it cannot justify retention of the oath, but, on the contrary, is further reason for its abolition. "Something must be done," and that in the near future, for these are times not for mere unquestioning loyalty to traditional formalism, but rather for democratic substantiation of progressive common sense.

Ultimately the issue is simply that it is impossible to codify and order religion by Statute; there is no lack of historical proof of that matter. So that all forms of organised religion which enjoy the protection of the Law are suspect, in the long run, of being merely expedient forms, compromises; consequently, a traditional Church which boasts of its unchanging authority must evoke doubt and criticism on the score of its very authoritarianism—and the Established Church is found to be, in effect, an early form of National Socialism. All such compromise systems can, however, only be of temporary interest; sooner or later principle, whether manifested by zealots or critics, will intrude its inquiring head.

In so far as our English practice is concerned, the oath is specifically supported by the 39th article of the Church of England's 39 Articles of religion, as set forth in the Prayer Book which was ratified as recently as 1928. As we have found, the King, his Ministers and officials are required to maintain inviolably this settled form of doctrine, worship, etc. What does that involve in the case of the 39th article? The article commences as follows: "As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ and James His Apostle . . ." But this introduction, which purports to be a confession, is really in the nature of a positive assertion on which to peg the remainder of the article. In fact, this introductory statement is false in every material particular. For reference to Matthew v. 33-37 shows that Jesus forbade swearing of any kind of oath; his counsel was unqualified by any reference to oaths "other than vain or rash oaths" being permissible; on the contrary, having recalled to his hearers that, "It was said of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths," he went on to say, "But I say unto you, swear not at all," etc. Likewise, the Apostle James has it, according to James v. 12, "But, above all things, my brethren, swear not at all," etc. (As a matter of interest, these passages are similarly expressed in the Authorised Version, the Catholic version and Moffat's translation.) Thus it is obvious that, in this matter of oaths, Jesus was not content with the compromise values of the Mosaic code. So in his "New Testament" he fulfils the Law by absolutely negating what had already become a much-abused practice.

But not only did the authors of the Article quite misunderstand the principle involved, they reverted to the Jewish custom and went on expressly to nail their judgment to "the prophet's teaching," namely, that stated in such passages as Exodus xx. 7, mentioned by Jesus as stated above, i.e., "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless," etc. One lie leading to another, this example of Christian apostasy has been most logically completed by insistence that the oath must be sworn (in the case of a Christian) on the very book which expressly forbids the practice. And this book is still supposed to be the

very word of God; in proof whereof, does it not go forth to all and sundry, including members of H.M. Forces, with a printed message from the King therein, "recommending this book as being of Divine comfort and inspiration"? Verily, Jesus showed unusual foresight when he turned on his following and said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?" 'Tis left to the critics and non-Christians to exemplify his teaching in practice! And as for the lawyers—well, they still "have the key of knowledge and enter not in," etc.

Having thus confused matters well and truly at the outset, the authors of the article wound up, as I have more or less already explained, by concluding the article thus: "So we judge that Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in the cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgement and truth." (Vide Jeremiah iv. 2.)

It is apparent that the 39th Article is a typical State-cum-Church compromise: an example of Christian apostasy rooted in confusion and error. Doubtless others could similarly reduce all the other articles to nonsense, or at any rate substantiate a good case for their reform, etc.; but this instance of the oath is a particularly good one wherewith to test the claims of Christianity as popularly applied. No hardship is involved in refusing to swear oaths; one has not "to sell all," etc.; no cross is involved: merely a regard for the truth. "Merely," did I say? But how many look at the matter in that light? And that introduces a further point for consideration in so far as the legal (Courts) oath is concerned. For both the oath formula and that of affirmation require that a person shall "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Surely this amounts to prejudging the issue, for is it not the concern of the Courts to examine the evidence presented, and thus arrive at such an appreciation of "the truth" as will serve the legal issues involved? Moreover (whether the materialists will admit it or not), it is of the nature of the case that there is admitted, in general, to be a valid distinction between "truth" and "fact." In truth and fact, that is the issue between the religious view of life and the materialistic way of facing life. Generally speaking, it is held that "truth" is subjective and "fact" is objective; the former is from "within" and the latter from "without." Truth is all-inclusive, but fact is partial, etc. This is borne out by the requirements of the processes of Justice, for to arrive at the "truth" necessitates knowledge not merely of the facts of the case but also of all other relevant matters, general issues involved, personal motives, etc. The point is no mere quibble, for the members of the legal profession are supposed to set great store by the precise meanings and use of words! So, whether the oath is abolished in our time or not, the formula should be altered to require that witnesses and others should, at any rate, tell the Court the facts, such as they know or can (more or less correctly) recollect! To insist on the "truth" is to prejudge the issue and to require what is impossible.

Finally, although the oath is supposedly a religious ceremony, that assumption has never been granted by those responsible! For, although any person who has thus guaranteed his evidence is surely entitled to be unquestionably believed, the common and everyday practice of the Courts implies that every person who gives such evidence has committed blasphemy and perjury. For the giving of such evidence "on oath" is but the preliminary to cross-examination!

No possible doubt remains that on every account the oath is a mischievous anachronism necessary only to satisfy or intimidate the foolish, and to justify the legal crime of "perjury." There is no ground in reason, religion or necessity for its retention. And as for the alternative form known as "affirmation," that is almost equally foolish, unsatisfactory and unnecessary.

H. E. EVANS.

NO HUSH-HUSH ABOUT THIS SYDNEY DAILY!

J. Y. Anderoney (Sydney, N.S.W., Australia) writes:—

I AM enclosing a clipping of a report of an address by Professor Duhig, delivered in Brisbane (Queensland), telegraphed to and published in "The Sydney Daily Telegraph," a paper with a circulation of between 250,000 and 300,000.

Publication of this report is entirely in line with its publication of all matters of public interest—religious and anti-religious. In this respect, "The Telegraph" differs from all other Australian dailies with the utterly needless fear they show in adopting a hush-hush attitude where it is anything of an anti-religious character. "The Telegraph" is therefore to be heartily admired—not alone for the courage it shows among the dailies here, but probably among all the other dailies in the world.

Professor Duhig, it is worth noting, is a nephew of Dr. Duhig, Catholic Archbishop of Queensland—a fact which gives added piquancy to the professor's comments and is interesting as revealing what a penetrating, painful thorn he must be in the side of the Archbishop and Catholics generally.

Here, then, is the report as it appeared in "The Telegraph" under the heading "Errors in Religion Attacked"—

"Delinquency is more prevalent among children with a religious education than among those who have been educated in State secular schools, Professor J. V. Duhig said last night.

This was supported by figures from the Children's Court in Melbourne and by investigations on child delinquency made in Bradford (England) and New Zealand, he said.

Professor Duhig, who is Professor of Pathology at Queensland University, addressed a meeting of the Rationalist Association of New South Wales on 'Clerical Errors.'

'A long succession of errors by the Church has resulted in a loss of adherents,' Professor Duhig said.

The Church's principal errors had been:—

Rejection of new astronomical ideas that culminated with Galileo and of evolution.

Refusal to agree to the abolition of slavery.

Refusal of divorce to innocent young women deserted by their husbands.

Belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

Professor Duhig added: 'If it had had the sense to accept the theory of evolution, the Church would have had a sweeping triumph.'

As a result of Church influence, a proposed Bill to abolish child labour in America was side-tracked and never reached Congress.

Nothing had yet happened to prove the efficacy of prayer, Professor Duhig said.

'Nearly every national day of prayer during this war has been followed by a major disaster for the Allies.'

'It might be a good idea if we had a day of prayer for the Germans—just to change the luck,' he said.

Professor Duhig said the Bible was an interesting account of a nomadic people emerging from barbarism.

'But let us look at physical facts expressed in the Bible,' he said.

'Donkeys are made to talk. People live inside whales. The sun stands still. People are flown up into the sky.

But magic is now no longer acceptable to millions.'

Professor Duhig said General Franco was the worst criminal in history because he had brought Germans and Italians to Spain to kill, bomb and torture his own people.

Answering questions, Professor Duhig said he did not believe children in Russia would accept Christianity because they had been scientifically educated and were taught comparative religion."

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that not a word of Professor Duhig's address appeared in any of the three other Sydney daily

papers. To get the contrast they present, in the way of a cowardly crawl to the lingering, superstitious elements in the community, we have to turn to the leading paper of the three, "The Sydney Morning Herald," which every Monday devotes a column to half a dozen of the sermons delivered in the leading churches the previous day. Thus it comes that on the very day Professor Duhig's address appeared in "The Telegraph" we have this as a fair example of what is served up by "The Herald":—

"The Rev. Father Alphonsus, C.P., of the Passionist Order, who preached at St. Mary's Cathedral during High Mass, said that the doctrine of hell was not one that appealed to human nature.

The thought of hell was so distasteful and so distressing to many people that they sought to escape the fact by a simple denial of its existence. There were people who regarded this doctrine as a vestige of the swaddling-clothes days of the human race, and who found in such doctrine either a childish bogey or a matter to be explained away in pseudo-scientific terms.

'You will find, too, people who will grow sentimental about God's love and goodness, and say that God could not be so cruel as to punish men in the eternal torments of hell. Some easily forget the justice of God, and ignore the very important fact that the eternal punishment of the damned in hell is not a cruel and revengeful act by God, but the necessary and eternal consequence of a sinful life and an unrepentant death. Those people forget that the existence of hell is guaranteed by Christ Himself, and that no wishful thinking, however personally comforting, will do away with the objective existence of hell.

By sin, the damned in hell have perverted and destroyed that order in creation which God has ordained. It is eminently just that they should suffer. The damned in hell deserve no sympathy, human or divine.'

But, on reflection, may we not have reason to be thankful to "The Herald" for giving publicity to Father Alphonsus's pronouncement that "the existence of hell is guaranteed by Christ Himself" and "the eternal punishment of the damned in hell is not a cruel and revengeful act of God"?

By publishing such utterances, I feel that "The Herald," consciously or unconsciously, is doing a propaganda service almost equal to that performed by "The Telegraph" in reporting the frankly enlightening comments of Professor Duhig.

For what man or woman—even among present-day Catholics themselves—could be other than shocked and revolted by the archaic slush thus poured out by Father Alphonsus?

RATIONALISM OR SUPERNATURALISM?

"I cannot accept the view, which has found favour in some quarters, that the operation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics constitutes scientific evidence for a supernatural creation at a particular time in a not infinitely distant past. Such a view would indeed dispose of our problem, but not, to my mind, in a legitimate way. Our object in science is to give a natural, rational account of things, not to invoke inscrutable, *ad hoc* powers to explain them away. No one would admit the validity of accounting separately for every observation we make as a supernatural result of the divine will. Such an explanation would be rejected, not necessarily because it was felt to be 'untrue,' but because it would be irrelevant. If, then, we postulate a supernatural creation on scientific grounds, it can only be because we have got into a difficulty from which we can see no escape. The proper course in that case is to try again, or else admit that we are beaten. It is not fair to insist on a rational explanation of easy things and fall back upon supernaturalism for the difficult ones. If we bring in supernatural agencies at one point, we may as well bring them in at all points, and save ourselves the trouble of constructing a trivial man-made rational order."

(From the Halley Lecture, 1944, by Professor Herbert Dingle. Reprinted from "Nature," vol. 153, June 17, 1944, p. 733.)

CORRESPONDENCE

PRIVATE PROFIT

SIR,—In your July 2 issue Mr. F. A. Hornibrook says that "private profit" was "responsible for all the muddles and hardships since the last war and for the incapacity which made us nearly lose this one." Such a statement cannot possibly be reconciled with the facts of economic history. The achievements of private enterprise have been so extraordinary that there must have been great ability behind them.

The first census of England and Wales was taken in 1801. There were then 8 million people in the country. To-day there are 41 million, and statisticians are agreed that purchasing power per head has been quadrupled. Meanwhile the labour of young children has been abolished, and the hours of work for adults have been reduced from fourteen to seven per day. Whatever the faults of private enterprise may be, muddle and incapacity are not among them.—Yours, etc.,

R. B. KERR.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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. J. C. FLUGEL, B.Sc.: "Peace, Prosperity, and Population."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Various Speakers.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End).—Saturday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

Colne (Lancs.).—Wednesday, July 26, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Edinburgh Branch, N.S.S. (Mound): Debate—Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES: "God and Man."

Herrington (The Burn).—Tuesday, July 25, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

Higham (Lancs.).—Monday, July 24, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Lumb-in-Rossendale. — Thursday, July 27, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Friday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. W. A. ATKINSON. Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields), Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

New Kyo.—Thursday, July 27, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

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

Worsthorne (Lancs.).—Friday, July 21, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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