

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Mr. Maxton and Religion

WE have always had a considerable appreciation for Mr. James Maxton, M.P. This was not based so much on the opinions he holds as upon the courageous manner in which he has carried on a propaganda that holds out no prospect of yielding personal or political advantage. He has, we believe, won the respect of a large section of the House of Commons, although by the standard of those who take up politics as a "career" he would probably be counted as a failure. He has never held office, and one may safely wager that he never will. But it is precisely at this point that his value chiefly lies. He is not a good party man, and is never likely to become one, for that implies a docility of action, a readiness to obey orders that is quite foreign to his make-up. Political leaders do not like men of his kind, but that need not, or should not, depress anyone. It is of far greater importance to note that most people do not care for such men. What they clamour for is action, and they get it—usually in the wrong direction. A good House of Commons man is one who is out for a "career," and that means more or less slavish obedience to orders. The people should beware of careerists. They sell themselves, which is a preliminary step towards selling people.

Mr. Maxton has, we believe refused to broadcast in the Brains Trust. We were pleased to learn this because only when men decline to encourage dishonesty of practice by suppression and expression will the B.B.C. practise complete honesty towards the general public. It is equally useless for speakers to plead either that speeches are not "doctored" or that the alteration made is not of consequence. When a man works for a censorship he can hardly avoid censoring himself. Every word he writes is submissive to the party that has the final decision. Besides, it has been openly confessed that one reason for having a luncheon for the Brains Trust, and then announce from a disc, was that it enabled "cuts" to be made with greater ease. Mr. Maxton hit the nail on the head when he said, "The B.B.C. don't want my kind of knowledge." In this case Mr. Maxton receives the compliment of not being permitted to use the machinery of the B.B.C.

But Mr. Maxton has a Brains Trust of his own. It functions—we should not be surprised if it was always functioning—at the annual meeting of the I.L.P. At that gathering Mr. Maxton answers all kinds of questions. From the "New Leader" we learn that one of these questions was of a kind that the common political careerist would have dodged, unless he happened to be of the type of Christian who never hesitates to introduce much irrelevant matter on the character of Jesus, his love for the poor, etc. Mr. Maxton meets the question, but he opens badly. He begins his reply by saying, "I am not irreligious," and that is not true. An irreligious man is

one who is either indifferent to religion or is openly hostile to it. But it is almost impossible for any thoughtful person to be indifferent to religion. Religion continues to play too great a part in life for thoughtful men and women to be indifferent to it. Multitudes of men and women in the political, social and commercial worlds remain silent concerning religion, but their silence is not an indication of indifference; it is rather because they are afraid of the consequences that follow open speech. Shopkeepers are shy of talking religion to their customers; politicians avoid religious conversations with constituents each for the same reason. And it is quite common in small public, friendly gatherings that the rule "No religious discussions" obtains. Religious discussions are avoided for the same reason that children are warned not to pick up in the streets or fields undischarged shells.

Mr. Maxton gives a statement of his position by saying that his attitude towards religion can be summed up in Julian Huxley's "Scientific Humanism," which happens to be pure Atheism. If one wishes to be guided by clear thinking, and to indulge in honest speaking, one must either believe in a God or be without belief in one. One cannot reasonably say, "I don't know whether I have a pain in my leg or not; I am quite agnostic on that matter." A man may classify his god with angels or devils—the latter seem to be the most interesting; one may doubt, granting a god, whether god is good or bad, useful or merely an ornament; but one must figure him as being something if he is to be anything. The opposite of something is always nothing.

### Science and Religion

But here is Mr. Maxton's reply in fuller measure. He says:—

"I regard religious people as being persons who have accepted inadequate explanations of the origin of this universe, inadequate ethical codes, and entirely imaginary views of a future life. . . . The great majority of people hold religious views, and while most of them do not attend church, this is only a drift away from the church and not an acceptance of another philosophy."

So far so good, although such a term as "inadequate" is surely inapplicable to a summary of the general attitude of the people who believe in a number of Christian dogmas. The views of, say, the Catholic Church and an enormous number of Protestants on the existence of a localised heaven and hell, the miracles that operate in the national Church, our days of prayer to help us win the war, the miraculous birth of Jesus, etc., surely all these things are not inadequate; it is just everyday damned nonsense. Miracles are not inadequate, as miracles; they are just impossible. When the Roman Church, through its agents, circulates a story of the Virgin appearing to a multitude of people only a few years ago, and that the sun then left its space in the heavens to dance a can-can before a number of Portuguese half-wits,

this is not inadequate; it is common religious fraud. A statement is inadequate when it falls short of stating a degree of truth that will prevent misunderstanding, or something that falls short of the whole truth. The case against religion by modern science is that it sanctifies a number of lies, fancies and follies that belong to the childhood of the race; that it is based upon ideas that has no logical place in the intellectual life of to-day.

We fancy it is dropping into an apologetic habit for being without a religion that leads to this passage:—

"At certain stages religion may have stifled free scientific thought, but equally at certain other stages *great progress was due to the Church* (italics mine). As for to-day, I do not know of any way in which any religious organisation in Britain can prevent the free development of scientific thought. Nazi Germany, a declared anti-religious State, made a more deliberate attempt than any Church to stifle free scientific thought."

This is really very lax, and we begin with the statement about Germany—and we can afford to be both just and truthful where she is concerned. The crimes of German Nazis rises to "high heaven," and it needs neither calumny or even a distortion for her indictment to secure a prompt verdict of "Guilty." But we must not call Nazi Germany an anti-religious thing. It is a very religious movement, and was proclaimed so by its leaders, particularly by Hitler, who said over and over again that the whole movement—right up to Hitler himself—was carrying out God's wish. Besides, Hitler is a Roman Catholic; he never threw off that title, and the Pope has never used his great weapon of punishment, "Excommunication," and which would have set every Roman Catholic in the world against him. If Mr. Maxton turns to a history of the Crusades he will find that this religious movement came very near supplying Hitler with a pattern from which to work. It was the Russian leaders who were avowedly irreligious, and who aimed at reducing religion to a comparatively harmless level, so far as the well-being of the country was concerned.

### Christianity and Science

Our knowledge of history—ecclesiastical and scientific—leaves much to be desired; it is certainly far from being exhaustive, but we must confess complete ignorance at any period when the progress of "free scientific thought was due to the Church." Naturally, in the course of centuries, some men who were connected with the Church were of a scientific turn of mind. But we are not concerned with these. What we are concerned with is the statement that stages of progress in science were *due to the Church*. I really must point out that Mr. Maxton is claiming for the Church what the Churches would not claim; the utmost they will say under this heading is that many scientists were believers in Christianity. That is true. It could not be otherwise, for the leaders of the Church were forced to make some concessions to scientific views and discoveries.

Mr. Maxton must reflect that when the Christian Church came upon the scene there were schools of medicine in Greece, in Alexandria, in Rome, and in the East, they were getting acquainted with the West. What became of this culture? It was displaced by the Christian Church. In place of the medical science of Athens we had the miracle cures of Jesus. The science and philosophy of the ancient

world withered, and after 1,000 years mankind had to retrace its steps and begin anew where paganism had passed. But as it was, Roger Bacon narrowly escaped the charge of sorcery. Later, while the Christian Churches were revelling in witch-hunts, Copernicus was writing his works in fear of the Church; Galileo was imprisoned by the Church; Newton's great work was, on religious grounds, denied entrance to Cambridge, and it finally entered by a trick. The tale runs right on through every branch of science. If all Christians had followed the example of the Christian Church we should still be living in the Dark Ages. As it was, some Christians were better than their creed, and the world was richer because of their religious unfaithfulness.

One word further. Mr. Maxton says he cannot see that any good would be done to the Socialist Movement by a frontal attack on religion. I think he must have in mind political movements alone. We take a broader view. The attack on worn-out ideas and mischievous institutions must be carried on by both methods. But the experience of purely political attacks proves that their purpose may be altogether forgotten, and in the long run reinstate the old evils that we are trying to remove. It is the attack direct that keeps intentions firm and leads to principles established.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### ISLAM'S ADVENTURES IN INDIA

THE rapid emergence of Islam is one of the most astounding events in history. In A.D. 622 a prophet, derided in his own city, sought security in Medina, some 200 miles distant from Mecca. Yet little more than a century later the disciples and successors of Mohammed were ruling an immense domain which extended from Western Europe to the Asiatic Indus; ranged from the Caspian to Egypt, embraced Spain and Portugal, some of the fairest regions of France, and occupied widespread territories in Asia reaching as far as Western India.

In his essay on the "Arab Conquest of Sind," in the "Cambridge History of India," Sir Wolseley Haig fully endorses Gibbon's conclusion when he states that the Arabs "threatened Christendom almost simultaneously from the East and the West, besieged Constantinople three times and advanced into the heart of France, and but for the decisive victory of Theodosius III before the imperial city in 716, and the crushing defeat inflicted on them in 732 by Charles the Hammer, the whole of Europe would have passed under their sway. The Battle of Poitiers decided whether the Christian bell or the muezzin's cry should sound over Rome, Paris and London; whether the subtleties of the schoolmen, and later the philosophy of Greece, or the theology and jurisprudence of the Koran and the Traditions should be studied at Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge."

The swift attainment of Moslem ascendancy completely eclipses the tardy growth of Christianity. By the beginning of the eighth century of our era the Arabs had reached the western frontiers of India, occupied Melkran and cast covetous eyes on the Hindu province of Sind, then ruled by Dahir.

An act of piracy occasioned—or served as a pretext—for Arab intervention in Sind. Apparently, the King of Ceylon sent by sea the daughters of Moslem merchants who had died in his domain, when his ships were assailed and plundered by pirates near the coast of Sind. Conflicting accounts of this episode survive; but whatever the details of the outrage, its sequel made history.

Hajjaj, the Moslem viceroy of the Caliph's eastern provinces, soon demanded reparation for the piracy committed on the coast of Sind. Dahir, its ruler, however, replied that the pirates were uncontrollable and that he was powerless to inflict punishment. Hajjaj then promptly sent an expeditionary force against Sind, which failed. So he dispatched a second, which was also unsuccessful. Chagrined by these defeats, the Viceroy prepared a third expedition under the command of his son-in-law, Muhammad, a mere youth.

This expedition was successful. According to the records, Muhammad's army comprised 6,000 Syrian horses, the pick of the Caliph's forces, a camel corps of equal number and a baggage train of 3,000 camels. Reinforcements arrived on the way, and the commander's artillery was transported by sea.

Debul, the chief port of Dahir's dominions, was taken by storm, and its Brahmans and the civil population advised to adopt the Islamic religion. When they refused they are said to have suffered death, whilst their wives and children were sold into slavery. A mosque was erected and a Moslem quarter established.

Several cities surrendered in succession to the invaders, but the inhabitants were usually spared when they loyally obeyed their conquerors and paid the poll-tax imposed.

Sir William Muir, a standard authority, noted a new departure in Moslem policy during the conquest of Sind; and as Sir Wolseley Haig points out, "The Islamic law divides mis-believers into two classes: 'the People of the Book'—that is, Christians and Jews, as the possessors of inspired Scriptures—and idolators. The first, when conquered, are granted by the authority of the Koran their lives, and may not lawfully be molested in any way, even in the practice of the rites of their creed, so long as they loyally accept the rule of their conquerors and pay the "jizya" or poll tax; but a rigid interpretation of the Koran, subsequently modified by commentators and legislators, allows the idolators only the choice between Islam and death." But a legal fiction was devised which elevated the Zoroastrian Scriptures to the privileged position of the Hebrew and Christian Testaments, which enabled the Magians of conquered Persia to escape persecution. The bigoted Hajjaj, however, denounced this evasion, and in the central Asiatic possessions of the Caliph idolators were exterminated.

Much to Hajjaj's annoyance, Muhammad pursued a tolerant policy in India. Save in instances of rebellion or when his troops were maltreated by religious fanatics, Muhammad permitted the Hindu temples to remain standing and their services proceed. The invasion of Sind was obviously a military adventure and not a missionary enterprise. As Haig intimates, "it was undoubtedly politic in the leader of a few thousand Arabs to refrain from a course which might have roused swarms of idolators against him."

Muhammad added Upper Sind and the Lower Punjab to the Caliph's dominions, when the successes of this capable commander ended in tragic circumstances. Several stories have gained currency concerning his early death, and some of these have been accepted by European writers; but the truth apparently is that after Hajjaj's death a new Caliph appointed an official named Yazidas governor of Sind, when Muhammad was sent as a prisoner to Mesopotamia, where he and his near relatives were tortured to death by the orders of the brother of one of the numerous heretics executed by the frantically orthodox Hajjaj. All of which recalls the sad reflection: What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue!

Subsequent happenings in Sind are shrouded in obscurity, but the cult of Islam continued to flourish and maintained its ascendancy over Hinduism; but the complete authority of the Caliphs over the province virtually ended in 871, when two insurgent Arabian chiefs declared their independence in Sind. These upstarts appear to have proved tolerant towards

non-Moslems, who seemingly assisted in the administration of the country, and Hindu worship was unmolested by the authorities. So late as the opening of the 11th century it was still pretended, despite Sind's autonomy, that Moslem rulers in the province officiated as the Caliph's representatives.

Although the occupation of Sind was of local influence, it exercised very little sway over India as a whole. Yet the Moslem incursion introduced a cult which now numbers adherents of some 80,000,000. The Islamic wave overflowed Sind and the Punjab and then receded. Little danger threatened neighbouring States. That, states Haig, "was to come later; and the enemy was to be not the Arab but the Turk, who was to present the faith of the Arabian prophet in a more terrible guise than it had worn when presented, by native Arabians."

The Moslem monuments still scattered over a wide Indian area testify to the pronounced influence of Mohammed and his cult. It is very remarkable that two civilisations so diverse as the Arab and the Hindu should blend to form an Indo-Islamic art. To what extent the one influenced and moulded the other is a controverted question. Sir John Marshall, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, favours the view that "On the one hand, examples might be adduced of Muhammedan architecture so closely resembling the Hindu as to be all but indistinguishable from it; or, on the other hand, of monuments so entirely devoid of all indigenous influence that they might almost equally well have been erected in Samarcand or Damascus. Such examples, however, would be misleading. . . . Broadly speaking, Indo-Islamic art derives its character from both sources."

It appears unquestionable that wherever the Moslems settled they skilfully adapted to their personal requirements the form of art they encountered. In their earlier conquests of Palestine, Syria and Egypt this concession was necessitated by the absence of Arabian architects, and they were consequently compelled to utilise the services of native craftsmen in the erection of their religious and secular edifices.

Under the stimulus exerted by classic Greece and Rome, a Moslem civilisation arose in all the European, Asiatic and African lands swayed by Islam's sovereignty. Yet the moulding influences of their surroundings is everywhere evident in their art. "Nowhere but in Spain," remarks Marshall, "could the romantic gateway of Toledo or the fairy-like courts of the Alhambra have taken shape; and nowhere but in India could the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque of Old Delhi or the chaste and stately fabric of the Taj Mahall have been designed."

T. F. PALMER.

## ACID DROPS

WE wonder whether when Mr. Churchill and Mr. Attlee visited the Pope either or both of them remembered that so long as Mussolini was successful the Papacy and he got on very well. Not one word of condemnation was made, nor was any rebuke offered in the case of attacks on other small countries. Our own Nonconformists, and probably the leaders of the established Church, would plead that they did not interfere in political or secular affairs. But that plea will not serve the Papacy. For that does officially interfere in a variety of secular subjects. Why if for one week all the churches in Rome had been closed Mussolini must have held his hand. Of course, the retort might be made that we also winked our eye, and even expressed admiration for what Mussolini was doing. But these were the sayings of political adventurers. The Pope is, theoretically, not that, so one might expect something better—if one did not know the Papacy.

To do the Roman Catholic Church justice, it has always been careful to see that those appointed to important positions in the Church should be men of ability. But they seem to have departed from this rule with the appointment of the Rev. Griffin to an

Archbishopric, for he appears to have neither tact nor wisdom—unless we mistake cunning for intelligence. Recently he informed all non-Catholic Christians in this country that it was the privilege and duty of English Christians to “bring England back to God and religion.” That will certainly not please anybody except very high Churchmen. We believe that Roman Catholics have a fairly large birth rate, and also a markedly high prison rate, and it is also said that they make a fair number of converts; but in relation to the whole population, the number of Christians is diminishing rapidly, and that is the real fact with which we are concerned. Whether the Protestants swallow the Catholics, or the Catholics swallow the Protestants, is quite a matter of detail. It does not affect the essential question.

While we are on this topic we may return to another consideration with which we have dealt more than once. It is not to be expected that although the necessities of war compelled the Christians of this country to admit the great human advance among the Russian people by their “godless” revolution, it is also most likely that China will come to some agreement with Russia, and that will give us a population of about six hundred millions with governments that treat religion as a purely personal matter, and as something that is in a state of decline. We must, therefore, look forward to all sorts of religious plotting to protect the Christian religion, and to prevent a too cordial friendship with both China and Russia. And in this underhand work there is no greater instrument than the Roman Catholic Church. Years ago Charles Bradlaugh said that the ultimate battle will be between Atheism and Roman Catholicism. Things seem to be going that way.

There was a strange case the other day in one of the London police courts.—A young woman was charged in May, 1943, with “tampering with a coupon book and for assaulting the police.” She had also absconded from the hostel where she had been ordered to live. She had been working steadily since and had a good character. Nothing very bad in her case.

But there was an American soldier in the Court who wished to marry the girl, and the magistrate “looked grave.” But the American was a soldier and the magistrate did what he could to dissuade the man from marrying her. He even went far enough, and said to the soldier “he therefore could not be a Baptist.” But the young man was firm. He knew the girl, and on the face of it there would be an abuse to call her a criminal. The magistrate persisted; perhaps because the police were “assaulted.” But the couple agreed to marry and the magistrate had to give way. We wonder why he persisted in his first attitude. Certainly the Baptists will have little to be ashamed of.

Said Viscount Bennet at a service of thanksgiving for recent victories: “Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain were miracles.” All we can say is, “Please don’t give us any more miracles.” Dunkirk cost us the deaths of many thousands of men; it gave to Germany many thousands of our men as prisoners. And the Battle of Britain was just touch and go whether the Germans invaded Britain or not. Viscount Bennet—he must be a fine example of a fool-man—also believes that “God has given a special trust to the British Empire to uphold the Christian faith.” Well, if we have not been a failure in other directions, the British Empire has certainly made a mush of saving the Christian religion, for that grows weaker generation by generation. Of course, there is Viscount Bennet left alive and fighting for the faith; but unless God is a close resemblance to Viscount Bennet, he is probably asking, to paraphrase a well-known poster, “Is the preservation of such really necessary?” And if heaven is covered with such men, we can understand why the larger number rush straight to hell.

Senor Juan de Cardanas has assured the United States Government that the Spanish Government has never contemplated providing a hiding-place in Spain for the Hitler gang. Bearing in mind how much has already been done by Spain to help the Nazis, one may be excused winking the other eye. Senor Cardanas also says that the Spanish Government is based

on Christian principles. We believe it was in the days of Torquemada, and also when it tortured its prisoners after the last civil war. But the closing point is his assurance that Spain can have nothing to do with German National Socialism and the Spanish Government is Christian. Well, we have been asking for a distinctive difference between Roman Catholic rules and Fascism. We have not yet had an answer.

It seems impossible for Christians to draw up a method of talking to God that does not imply both foolishness and mental degradation. Why, for example, should Christians approach their God on their knees? If we wish to talk to anyone, be he man or God, the only decent way is to stand erect; or both of you sit down and talk over whatever is interesting to both. Why should the classic attitude to talk to God before going to bed be that of kneeling with one’s arms resting on the bedside? Of course, if God was under the bed there might be some utility in whispering to him through the bedclothes. But, in sober truth, all the classical attitudes for prayers mark a degradation of human dignity. It is that of a slave crouching before a tyrant. Of course, we do not mean that Christians feel that their prayers and the attitudes adopted imply this much—but they do, all the same.

One of the recent Church congresses busied itself with discussing how to help the poor clergy. We have always been under the impression that the clergy are not very bad hands at helping themselves. But it is worth noting that, when these religious discussions about the poor clergy occur, they never suggest that the matter should be left to God. It is directly directed to the churchgoers, or to Parliament, or to the generosity of churchgoers. The clergy are never quite so foolish as one would imagine at first glance.

The “Church Times” thinks when the war is over the first thing we should do is to “invite the people of England to prefix a united act of thanksgiving to Almighty God.” But only a section of the people of England would take part in the thanksgiving to God. Moreover, it is not a united act of thanksgiving we should have, but a commission charged with an inquiry why God did not nip in the bud the commencement of a world war. It is time that men and women asserted themselves.

We have often noted the fact that while the men of the Forces can eat together, sleep together, work together, live together and die together, the one thing that divides them is religion. Everything that is really human binds men together. But, apparently, the main effect of religion is to divide. We were reminded of this when glancing down a two-columned article in the “Church Times.” It seems that the Roman Catholics were attracting people because the “show,” dress, music, etc., were better than the Protestants had, but there remained a solid body that would not worship in a Roman Catholic show. So the Rev. Arthur Cotton explains how he set to work and brightened up a prayer show so much that he was able to build up something like a congregation. And we would wager that if there had been a good music hall show even the padres’ prayers would have had a good show of empty benches. War is real, but religion remains, largely, humbug.

A Peckham man who had been blind for 28 years is said to have recovered his sight while walking in the street. Such an event would no doubt bring great happiness to the man and his family, but there is a very sad feature of the case from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church. The man had been on the last pilgrimage to Lourdes before the war without any benefit accruing from his visit. Now, without help either from Lourdes or the Lord he can see again. The bitterest pill of all for the Church is that his recovery could have taken place at Lourdes, as a medical authority said the blindness had not been organic and the recovery was “spontaneous.” But the position is not entirely without hope for the Church; some artful Jesuit may be able to persuade the credulous faithful that God can perform “delayed action” miracles.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. GEORGE.—Good work. Nothing would have suited the Germans better than our really depending on prayer. Still, this particular piece of humbug is weakening steadily.

"TAB. CAN."—Thanks for cuttings; always useful.

C. H. WILLIAMS.—For what should we ask God's forgiveness? If we have never thanked him for anything, neither have we blamed him for things being as they are. If we reach the next world in a good temper we might overlook God neglecting so much, and for his bad taste in the kind of people he selects for his favourites.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of 10s. from the Keighley Branch N.S.S. to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

FOR "THE FREETHINKER."—W. EVANS, 18s. 6d.

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

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

WE have received a fresh supply of two of our "Pamphlets for the People"—"Gods and their Makers" and "The Church's Fight for the Child." These are of great use at the moment, and we commend them to those who wish to indulge in a little propagandea, apart from their own personal reading. The price is 2d. each, postage for the two 1d., or twelve copies of either or both post free.

We have been asked what is our opinion of the suitability of the following to the B.B.C. Brains Trust for its new term:—

(1) Is it possible to justify moral practices without belief in a supernatural deity?

(2) Is it possible to understand the rapid development in the social field and the rapid development of social life in Russia without assuming Divine help?

(3) Is an hereditary aristocracy justifiable? If it is, would it not be wise to extend it first of all to all the civil services and ultimately all public service?

(4) Scientists do not admit, as scientists, any other process at work in nature than that of evolution. That being accepted, to what extent is this process quickened and directed by science?

(5) Measuring the succession of hereditary monarchs in all parts of the world under a given period, against the number of elected rulers for the same period, which gives the greatest amount of stability and service.

(6) Can the Brains Trust explain why, broadly speaking, anti-theistic freethinking grows in extent and influence with growth of culture and freedom?

We are glad to see that the "Sunday Express" is not afraid to stand up to the bluff which the Pope and his supporters have been moving heaven and earth to get over the British public.

Now that the Germans look like having to pay for their crimes against humanity, the Pope issued a circular letter in which the people of London were exhorted to show forgiveness, charity and mercy, "so that God may reward you." The Pope also declared that he sympathised with us "through our black days" and prayed for us—which indeed was very kind of him. It took almost five years for him to let us know. Archbishop Griffin is very angry at the sarcastic comment in the "Sunday Express," and calls it "a complete distortion of the contents of the letter," but we think he is now sorry he spoke, judging from some of the letters the paper has printed about the Pope.

The open-air season is drawing to a close and lecture reports received all tell of good work done and a definite interest in our message. Mrs. M. Whitefield closed the season for the Edinburgh Branch last Sunday. Bradford Branch is rounding off the season with Sunday afternoon meetings addressed by Mr. Day so long as the weather is favourable. Messrs. Brighton and Clayton have held very encouraging meetings in increasing areas of Durham and Lancashire. Nearer home, Mr. Barker at Kingston and Mr. Ebury in London have been continuously at work on their respective platforms, whilst in Hyde Park the West London Branch platform has been a regular attraction to the more serious-minded visitor.

The Oxford Branch N.S.S. is being revived, and on Wednesday, September 20, Mr. W. Hawley will address a meeting at 1, Caroline Street, St. Clements, Oxford, on "The Freethought Case: Any Questions." We do not know the time of the meeting, but that information, with other details concerning the branch, can be had from Mr. W. Hawley at 17, Cranmer Road, Cowley, Oxford.

Birmingham is having a Brains Trust on its own, but the Churches are quite safe. There are five men selected, four of whom are Christians, one Spiritualist (Spiritualism now claims to be a religion), and an Archdeacon as Question Master. It is possible that this one will not be so flagrantly dishonest as the London B.B.C. Brains Trust, but one may expect the usual "hostile" criticism that the Churches do not do all they should, and of the hunger of our people for "true religion." We hope our forecast is wrong, but experience bids us not to be too sanguine.

The case in which the Rev. W. G. White tried to ride the high horse over one of his parishioners excited some attention. The facts are few. A member of the parish, Mrs. Paddy, placed a vase of flowers over the grave of her baby child. The parson ordered its removal. Mrs. Paddy declined and the parson stormed. Finally he prohibited Mrs. Paddy and her relatives to enter the graveyard. This was very silly as the ground was public property and the Vicar had no such power. Some of the papers published a portrait of Mr. White, which was very unkind.

Second stage. Mrs. Paddy brought her case before a Consistory Court (an ecclesiastical tribunal for deciding disputes on religious subjects). The decision was given in Mrs. Paddy's favour. We will summarise the judgment with such comments as may be necessary. (1) The Chancellor said that every parishioner (this includes all people born in England) had a right to be buried in a churchyard whether he was a member of the Church of England or not. (2) All had the right to the administrations of the Church and to call upon the parson to conduct the funeral service. The right of burial carried with it the right of the parents, relatives and friends to visit the grave. (4) The Vicar had no right to remove flowers from the grave. It was a good verdict, and the foolishness involved in it is due to the foolishness in maintaining primitive ideas in a modern society—perhaps it would be better to say "in a society that is only half civilised."

The Archbishop of York is credited with having said that all Christians are agreed upon belief in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Good! All that is needed now is agreement as to what are the fundamentals. Then everything will go along quite easily.

## CHRISTIANITY AND TRUTH

THERE is a passage in Ford Maddox Ford's "The March of Literature" to which readers of this journal who have not come across it should have their attention called. This work is a brilliant disquisition on some of the most remarkable writers and their books in history; though naturally one need not agree with all the judgments and opinions expressed. It was first published in 1938, and is a splendid guide to the best books of all kinds in literature. As it contains nearly 900 pages, to deal with it adequately in these columns is quite impossible; but the passage in question might form an interesting text on one aspect of Christianity: its relation to truth. We all know how incessantly Christian speakers and writers appeal to truth as the backbone of everything they hold dear, the fabric of their Divine religion, and against which no infidel attack can possibly prevail.

In an enthusiastic survey of Gibbon, Mr. Ford says:—

"Controversial writings against Gibbon's attack on Christianity have been innumerable, and the reader should be warned against the very many editions of Gibbon in which unscrupulous editors—Dr. William Smith, the editor of the once almost universally used classical dictionary, is amongst the worst of them—have issued editions of Gibbon from which they have not merely excised Gibbon's most telling passages, but into which they have actually inserted their own apologetics."

This passage is worth pondering over. We have no "index" in England. We would scorn such an infamous way of suppressing freedom in literature, but we manage to get almost the same effect by "bowdlerising" our great classical writers. For if Gibbon is "excised"—if we are now never sure of reading exactly what he himself wrote—how can we be sure of any writer, suspected of heresy, "edited" by good Christians?

The best modern edition of Gibbon is that edited by Professor Bury, himself a Freethinker, and the author of that well-known little work, "History of Freedom of Thought." But it is in many volumes, and for most of those with small pockets quite out of their reach. There is an edition in the popular "Everyman" series, but whether that can be trusted can only be known by collating it with Bury's.

My own edition is that edited by Dean Milman, and as it was the one selected by Sir John Lubbock for his famous "Hundred Best Books" it must have had a large circulation. Ford points out that Milman's preface to his 1856 edition is "the fairest apology" for Christianity he knows—and certainly Milman did his best for his discredited creed. Moreover, he gave Gibbon the highest praise he could as a great historian. "Gibbon," he admits, "it may be fearlessly asserted, is rarely chargeable even with the suppression of any material fact which bears upon individual character." Milman's principal objection to the 15th and 16th chapters—those in which the historian traces the rise of Christianity from purely human causes—is that he "confounds together in one indistinguishable mass the origin and apostolic propagation of the new religion with its later progress." And as in Milman's opinion "Christianity proclaims its Divine Author chiefly in its first origin and development," and then was "left to make its way by its native force," he contends that Gibbon "dexterously eluded," or only "speciously conceded," the main question: "the divine origin of the religion."

It was Byron, in one of his most memorable phrases, who characterised Gibbon as "sapping a solemn creed with a solemn sneer"; and Paley, that nearly forgotten champion of historical Christianity, finding Gibbon almost unanswerable, sadly complained, "Who can refute a sneer?" For Gibbon's irony—and particularly his ironical sneer, which knocked the heart out of the Divine Authority of Christianity—was so truly

devastating of Christian claims that it is no wonder Milman, Guizot and various other Christian authorities felt it was their duty to vindicate their religion by hook or by crook—and certainly by crook, if that were the only way.

Milman's edition is put forward as "carefully revised and corrected"; and he claims to have added "corrective" notes "with no desire but to establish the truth": notes which put right any detected "inaccuracies or misstatements" which he has detected, "particularly with regard to Christianity." There are other advantages also in this edition, as Milman gives all Guizot's notes to his own French translation. Guizot, Milman claims, is "a French statesman, a Protestant, and a rational and sincere Christian," and therefore his notes "would appear to be more independent and unbiassed . . . than that of an English clergyman." Milman evidently considered that at all costs some clergyman was necessary either to elucidate Gibbon or correct him, or even supplement him—particularly on the Christian side. And yet in the same breath he is obliged to admit that his consultation of the various replies made to Gibbon (mostly, by the way, from clergymen) yielded him "little profit." These writers were "inferior and now forgotten."

Milman had a very bad case and he had to do his best with it. This preface is, from his point of view, a very fair one; and he certainly eulogises Gibbon—as well he might. Like Professor Bury, he could find very few inaccuracies in all the great work, and very few contradictions. Gibbon faithfully quoted his authorities.

And so the question remains: Did Milman tamper with Gibbon's actual text? I am sorry to say he did, at least in one vital text; and a careful comparison with the original Gibbon might reveal some more. On page 317 of the first volume we have one of those ironical statements for which Gibbon is famous—one of his many deadly sneers—which helped to wound Christianity to the death. It is:—

"But it was not in this world that the primitive Christians were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful."

At least, that is how it ought to have read; but not one reader in ten thousand would notice that Milman simply deleted the word "not." The implication is plain: Milman can never again be wholly trusted.

The truth is that from its earliest days Christians adopted the practice of fraud, forgery and suppression. In his "Ecclesiastical History," Mosheim, the great Protestant historian, had to admit that, following the Platonists and Pythagorians, who held as a maxim that "it was not only lawful but even praiseworthy to deceive and even to use the expedient of a lie" to advance truth and piety, Christians were "infected with the same pernicious error, as appears from the number of books attributed falsely to great and venerable names." In other words, they forged on a wholesale scale; and at the same time they suppressed and destroyed any works written against them, like those of Celsus and Porphyry. When the art of printing made it difficult to destroy entirely any infidel work, it was placed on the "index" by Catholics if possible, or, as in the case of Gibbon, was subtly and carefully "bowdlerised" by Protestants. And if these things were not enough, then a policy of personal defamation, or even criminal libel—as in the case of Thomas Paine and Charles Bradlaugh—would be embarked upon. Anything, anything so that the truth regarding Christianity would never see the light.

Only a very small fringe of the colossal imposture of Christianity has been touched upon in this brief article; but the reader will, I hope, now smile a little when he hears some bishop or parson passionately declaim in book, sermon or on the air that Christianity and truth are synonymous. For Gibbon himself, that would have aroused his most ironical laughter.

H. CUTNER.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## NOTHINGNESS

Sir,—Somewhere in Southern England the enthusiastic community singing of an open-air prayer meeting rose high above the many though subdued distractions of passing and re-passing crowds:—

" . . . And when by His grace I shall then see His face  
That will be Glory, Glory for me!"

Clearly at first sight a delectable hereafter. But I would ask all believers in an after life, be they of whatsoever religion, what sort of place do they suppose exists beyond the "Pearly Gates" of their fancy? I may have to wait for an answer.

It is known that all living things revert in time to dust. As to death (of which Roman Catholics make so much, even to dressing themselves up in the funereal garments of sheet and shroud), this surely is only an incident which is necessary to life, and is similar in principle, shall I say, to the moulting of a bird in season or to the casting of its skin by a snake.

I doubt whether religious folk pause, even for one moment, to visualise their lauded "hereafter." Nothing tangible. No vital organs to function, no animal world excepting man (rather a selfish outlook, this), and, to complete the hypothesis, an existence passed in an immeasurable void of emptiness. Not even a Pretty Poll to say: "Is your journey really necessary?" or a friendly chimp to smack one on the back and shout: "Why, pal! you're my long-lost brother!"

One could enlarge on this subject, but at the moment I will simply ask Christians and kindred believers to break out of the confines of credulity and then frankly to state their altered views on religious subjects.—Yours, etc.,

J. EDWARDS.

## RADIO "RELIGION"

Sir,—We now know, within reasonable limits of course, that the war-time religious services of the B.B.C. entertain some 17 per cent. of more or less regular sympathisers, that 38 per cent. of listeners are indifferent to all organised religion, and 45 per cent. are positively hostile. This information should be already in the hands of the Corporation. We know, as should the B.B.C. itself, that some 67 per cent. of listeners would welcome a change of heart on the part of the B.B.C. by permitting free and unfettered discussion of religious and political questions, that some 15 per cent. are definitely opposed to liberty of action in this matter, and 18 per cent. are quite indifferent. We know that not all of the 17 per cent. of regular listeners are satisfied with the crude and unintelligible deity presented by the Corporation. We know that the machinery of State, by which is meant the Churches and all vested interests in the profession of political, organised Christianity, are fundamentally at variance to any change of programme on the ground that the foundations of the Church, as by law established, might receive further shocks from which it would be difficult to recover. That is the present situation. Perhaps the most satisfying feature of the deadlock between the public and the B.B.C. is that radio religion contains within itself the seeds of self-destruction. Even if the B.B.C. has a preference for mediævalism, it is comforting to know that among their own friends there are signs of irritation and boredom.—Yours, etc.,

G. E. O. KNIGHT.

## REDBARN WASH AND THE WELLS OF TRUTH

Nature is red in tooth and claw,  
And also Red are Wells and Shaw!  
Not just well-read but read well too!  
Without the Reds what should we do!

—A. HANSON.

For the information of your younger readers, "Redbarn Wash" is the anagram of the name of Bernard Shaw which he occasionally used as a younger man.—A. H.

## LAWRENCE OF ARABIA ON HARDY'S FUNERAL

"I regret Hardy's funeral service. So little of it suited the old man's nature. He would have smiled, tolerantly, at it all: but I grow indignant for him, knowing that these sleek Deans and Canons were acting a lie behind his name. Hardy was too great to be suffered as an enemy of their faith: so he must be redeemed. Each birthday the Dorchester clergyman would insert a paragraph telling how his choir had carolled to the old man 'his favourite hymn.' He was mild, and let himself be badgered out of local loyalty. 'Which hymn would you like for to-morrow, Mr. Hardy?' 'Number 123' he'd snap back, wearied of all the nonsense, and that would be his favourite of the year, in next day's 'Gazette.'

"I wish these black-suited apes could once see the light with which they shine."

From a letter to William Rothenstein from T. E. Lawrence, "Since Fifty," by William Rothenstein. Faber and Faber, 1939: p. 104.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon. Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields: Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Messrs. WOOD, PAGE, and other speakers.

## LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D.: "Religious Guides.—(1) Laski."

## COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture. Hapton (Lancs.).—Friday, September 15, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

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

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

Padiham (Lancs.).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Read (Lancs.).—Saturday, September 16, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. H. L. SEARLE: "The Fallacy of Freewill."

"PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS." By J. M. WHEELER. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

"THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH?" By R. G. INGERSOLL. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

"THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH." By COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

"BIBLE ROMANCES." By G. W. FOOTE. Witty, Scholarly and Devastating. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

"CHALLENGE TO RELIGION." Four Lectures. By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

"SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS." By G. W. FOOTE. Price 2s.; postage 2½d.

"THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS." By C. G. L. DU CANN. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

"GOD AND EVOLUTION." By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price 6d., postage 1d.

## CHRISTIAN ETHICS

(Continued from page 341)

But, taking the New Testament at the Christians' valuation, we are faced with some curious ethical situations.

In spite of the time-worn platitudes about "Love," which simply repeated the ideas extant for thousands of years, Christ is alleged to have said: "Think not I am come to bring Peace on earth; I am come to bring not Peace but a Sword." Then He goes on to utter some extraordinary incitements to hatred. Clearly, War is an integral part of the Christian ethic, and priests and parsons are quite justified by Christ in making their pulpits centres of international hatred, as they customarily do, and popes are justified in signing, along with gangster tyrants, such a document as the Anti-Comintern Pact, and thus launching a campaign of hatred against millions of innocent people. Paddy Murphy would not hate Ivan Pavlovich, whom he had never seen, if the priest had not told him to do it. It is hard to see where "Christian" love comes in. Christians commonly sing "Peace on earth to men of good-will"—not, as is often thought, "Peace on earth, good-will to men." This has appeared to mean "Peace only to those who show good-will to us—that is, those who believe the same myths as we do, but Hell and Damnation to those who disagree with us."

In actual fact, Christ specifically threatened eternal punishment by burning to those who did not agree with Him, and for over 1,000 years Christians have not attempted to hide their firm belief that He has the power to enforce this brutal penalty for an honest difference of opinion. There are many people whom I know, who really believe that I myself am doomed to this fate, and not a few secretly and some openly rejoice at the prospect.

Think of the effect upon Christians of this horrible ethical attitude. For 2,000 years the principle of punishment by torture for disagreement with Christian doctrine has been adopted and practised by Christians. In the face of these facts, it is simply insane to suggest that Christian Ethics are based on love.

This curious practice of hatred arising out of Christ's teaching is further confirmed, if the sadism responsible for the burnings, tortures and murders of heretics needed confirmation by Christ's attitude to his mother, and to family life generally, relationships said by glib Christians to be particularly sacred. He stated specifically that to be a sincere disciple, it was necessary to hate one's family, and actually to desert them. Any man advocating such doctrines to-day would rightly be put in gaol or in a lunatic asylum, and it is fortunate that Christians do not practise this part of their ethical system as religiously as they might. This deplorable teaching has had the effect of encouraging the unhealthy practices of celibacy and asceticism and contempt for women which have had, and still have, such a bad effect on human thought and action. Scientific psychology and commonsense to-day threaten these ideas with well-merited destruction.

Another couple of incidents in the New Testament which a man of strict ethical outlook would like to have explained are the pointless cursing of a fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season, and the destruction of a herd of pigs without the consent of, or compensation to, their owner.

One of the severest indictments of Christian Ethics is on the score of its view of insanity. It seems undoubted that Christ gave overt adhesion to the theory of devil possession as the cause of insanity. This resulted in unspeakable tortures inflicted on insane persons, who, as the standard treatment of their malady, literally had the devil beaten out of them. I have seen old prints showing lunatic asylums over a century ago in which we

see unfortunate lunatics chained in dungeons and people jumping on their prostrate bodies to knock the devil out of them.

Now if, as Christians assert, Christ were divine, he must have known the truth about Insanity. In adopting the wrong and foolish theory of his time, he showed no sense of pity, since he must have foreseen the appalling results of his act in the torture of millions of innocent human beings for nearly 2,000 years.

And a similar view must be taken of the early Christian attitude to witchcraft. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," said Jahveh. Christ did nothing to enlighten us about this matter, and so permitted the torture of many women, admittedly eccentric, but still innocent of wrongdoing.

According to the extremely naive story of Genesis, the world and man were created by a god who let things get in such poor shape that he had to wipe it all out in a flood. That did not mend matters, since apparently things went to the bad again, and this time the god had to have his son murdered to retrieve matters. No attempt was made to guide men's minds into the right way of planning a reform, no practical measures of any kind were taken, the party responsible for the alleged chaos did nothing to repair his error; he simply had his son murdered in the most cruel circumstances. Not only do Christians admire this sort of thing; they celebrate the murder annually by a gruesome ritual. The kindest and the real explanation, of course, of this sordid story is that the Gospel writers evidently still believed in the validity of the scapegoat as an expiation of "sin," an idea commonly found in the folk-lore of primitive people. To them there appeared to be nothing sinister in asking a man to die for a tribe in expiation of the wrath of an angry god, but to us to-day the idea is revolting.

There are other beliefs found in the Bible which put the faithful in some pretty dilemmas. If the Genesis story is true—which, of course, it is not—mankind started with two people, so that the third generation must have been the result of incest. If the Roman theory of the Eucharist is true, the communicants are cannibals. If the Old Testament is true, then the polygamy of the patriarchs was lawful. To-day, all these things—Cannibalism, Incest, Polygamy—are unlawful. If that is so, when did the Christian God change his mind about them? If Cannibalism is good in church on Sunday, why is it bad in the jungle on Monday? And if the divine mind is so fickle in these matters, why not in others? And if that is so, why do Christians assert that their ethic is immutable, fixed and perfect for all time?

The history of the Christian myths is to be found in any good book on Anthropology, such as "The Golden Bough," "Evolution of the Idea of God," "Jocasta's Crime," and in such wonderful books as "The Churches and Modern Thought," "The Martyrdom of Man" and we are able to see that modern Christians base their conduct on ideas and practices of hundreds of years ago, usually faulty, primitive and unsuited to modern conditions.

PROFESSOR J. V. DUHIG.

(To be concluded)

## MIDDLE-CLASS RELIGION

How well George Meredith understood the mind of the English middle class. Take the following: "The religion of this vast English middle class ruling the land is comfort. It is their central thought, their idea of necessity. Whatsoever ministers to comfort seems to belong to it. . . . Whatsoever alarms it they join to crush. They will pay for the security of comfort, calling it 'national worship' or 'national defence,' if too much money is not subtracted from the means of individual comfort; if too much foresight is not demanded for the comfort of their brains."