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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and Mr. Lewis

SOME time ago we amused ourselves in examining the quality of Mr. C. S. Lewis as a defender of the faith. He was then being boomed by the Churches and the B.B.C. as a new and brilliant advocate of Christianity. The result was not very flattering to Mr. Lewis. On analysis, his presentation of the Christian faith did not encourage a further expenditure of time and paper in that direction. If we wished to read theology we prefer some of the older theologians who decorate our bookshelves, and who could honestly profess belief in Christian doctrines. That type of preacher is almost extinct; evolution and comparative anthropology have almost destroyed the possibility of educated folk honestly professing belief in historic Christianity. Mr. Lewis and his kind have therefore a clear run.

It will also be remembered that as a kind of introduction Mr. Lewis was presented in the religious Press as one who was an Atheist until he was *fourteen years of age*. We do not recall whether the statement was made for him or by him, but it was widely circulated. After all, Mr. Lewis was a champion of Christianity, and miracles have flourished in its history. Jesus could talk fluently while he was in his cradle, so that Mr. Lewis might well have understood all about Atheism before he was in his teens. But from an article published in the "Coventry Evening Telegraph," written by Mr. Lewis, we gather that the dates have been altered. His conversion to Atheism occurred after his fourteenth year; it did not precede it. The wonder boy is therefore withdrawn from the scene. In his place there appears the youthful theologian, explaining how he came to waste twenty years—from fourteen to thirty-four—of his life. The change may have been partly due to God, and partly to the B.B.C. observing that Mr. Lewis was the kind of converted Atheist who might collect some of God's wandering sheep. A man with twenty years of Atheistic experience was a first-rate proposition for conversion. But in that case the twenty years were not wasted. From the Christian point of view, they represented the years of preparation. A man who has merely taken his religion from his mother's knees is not very impressive. But the convert who comes to Jesus with a fine record of criminality offers something juicy to those who look for something more exciting than singing hymns. Converted burglars, saved drunkards, repentant wife-beaters, are all juicy bits to a wearied congregation. Whether Christ delights to save sinners or not, it is certain that his jaded followers love the excitement of listening to the crimes of a new convert. Next to indulging in the sadistic pleasure of committing crime comes the satisfaction of hearing about it from others.

But it would have been interesting if Mr. Lewis had told the world what good deeds he did *before* his relapse into Atheism, and after his re-conversion twenty years later, that he could not have done without God. After all, there are really good men and women, happy men and women, intelligent men and women, who do not bother their heads about God and his miracle-working son. Until we get evidence to the contrary, we decline to believe that Mr. Lewis is made of such poor stuff that he could not live a useful and intelligent life without the forces of heaven coming to his aid. Mr. Lewis is too modest. We believe that what Atheists can do Mr. Lewis can also do if he tries.

Confession or Afterthought?

How did Mr. Lewis come to waste twenty years of his life? Other things equal, he appears to have made a *good* start. And if he lost anything of a spiritual quality, his commercial value as a converted Atheist compensated for his material losses. Let us take his own description of the cause of his downfall. He says:—

I was about fourteen when I gave up believing in the Christian religion, and my reason for giving it up was this. I was doing Greek and Latin at school. That meant one was reading about the gods and goddesses of the ancient Greeks and Romans every day; and one's schoolmasters always took it for granted that these gods and goddesses had never existed—in fact, that the ancient religions were simply a fairy tale. It never occurred to them apparently that this would set me asking myself, "In that case, why shouldn't our own religion be a fairy tale, too?"

We must again remind readers that this is a complete reversal of the original story, but we will take the new version as authentic, although it weakens its conversion value. Mr. Lewis would have been following a truer Christian line if he had run the historical gamut from wickedness to wickedness until some startling event brought him to the foot of the Cross. He says that the more he read about the gods of Greece and Rome the more convinced he became that

Christianity was just the same sort of thing as all other religions. . . . It had a kind of sacrifice. It had a sacrificial feast . . . so had most of the others. It had a story about a divine person who was killed and came to life again. The Greeks had just the same story about Adonis, and the Norsemen had it about Balder, and the Egyptians had it about Osiris.

Evidently Mr. Lewis had plenty of *knowledge* but, alas, he had little understanding of what was in front of him. He might have taken steps that would have brought him into touch with modern anthropology. That would have prevented him becoming one of the religious staff of the

B.B.C., but life is full of awkward decisions. Had he taken that step he would have lost his religious market. It is strange that he never had the wit to ask the meaning of this multitude of gods with identical births and deaths? He was, he says, very intimate with pagan gods—he was, so to put it, on speaking terms with them, and yet he never—years after Tylor, contemporary with Frazer—had the ghost of a notion of the significance of what he saw. What different world he might have lived in had he possessed the wit to understand it!

But it is not too late, for I gather that he is not an old man, and the road to truth is so plainly before him, and so open to him, that he may yet undergo another change in favour of sanity. Perhaps he would get a help if he paid some attention to the six volumes of that gigantic work, "A Study of History," by Arnold Toynbee, which will one day be recognised as the chief scientific study of history we have. It will reduce other histories to the level of mere records. Mr. Lewis will find there crowds of gods, and he will write himself down a dull dog if Toynbee's work does not open his eyes and enlarge his understanding. It is really a pity that Mr. Lewis ever broke "brass rags" with the ancient gods. They could have held him to understanding.

A Happy Muddler

A peculiar illustration of the ease with which Mr. Lewis evades sanity and embraces folly is given in his ignoring the lesson that lay before him. He says that what gave him his first real fright was that he could not place Jesus as being "just one of the great religious teachers." So, when he discovers common sense in the ancient world, he automatically places great pagan teachers below Jesus because they happen to be above him. Thus: "No Confucian ever pretended that Confucius was God; no Platonist ever dreamed of saying that Socrates was Zeus." It never occurred to him that these and other leading minds in the ancient world had outgrown the primitive beliefs that are so common in the character of Jesus Christ. The Atheistic current in the ancient world was evidence of a high development. The story of Jesus the God takes us back to lower levels of savage superstition. When Xenophanes writes: "If oxen and horses and lions could draw and paint, they would picture gods in their own images," no simpler truth concerning the gods was ever uttered. The demonism of the Christian saviour was absolutely below that level. It is no wonder that pagan culture shrivelled with the advance of Christianity. Pity it is that Mr. Lewis was so near the key to at least one aspect of godism and yet lacked the wit to assimilate the lesson. His study of the ancient gods brought no enlightenment; his loyalty to the Jesus God forbade him understanding what it was he took for his guide.

Mr. Lewis, in fact, has a curious but unmistakable knack for giving himself away. It must be remembered that it was his childish saturation in ancient history that led to his rejection of Christianity. In his later years—after thirty-four—we have the same muddled mentality; and he adds to his confusion by saying "I really wished Christianity to be untrue." So that even then he could not be honest to himself. For no man can get rid of a belief by merely pretending that it is untrue; and all one gathers from his childish analysis of himself is that he never did

give up his religious belief. He never gave up Christianity, and his pretence that he did so and wasted twenty years of his life is just advertising foolishness. He had no right at any time to write himself an Atheist. His story of twenty wasted years is so much humbug. It may have been an afterthought. He never, so far as we can gather, called himself an Atheist. His story of twenty wasted years, intended to be the record of a tragedy, ends as an harlequinade. His whole story is rubbish. Perhaps the B.B.C. suggested the tale; it is quite in their religious vein. The converted criminal is a very old Christian dodge. Mr. Lewis should be above it.

But why did Mr. Lewis wish that Christianity should prove itself to be untrue? (This is another ancient Christian trick.) The only reason Mr. Lewis gives is that "Christianity was a nuisance. It meant not telling lies, and all sorts of other things." Really, this is very poor. It has a kind of stale fishy smell. A Christian, unless he is half crazy, could say all the necessary prayers while he was putting on his shirt in the morning and while he was taking it off at night. Or any clergyman would advise him that prayers could be said anywhere, and any Atheist would add the information that prayers are just as useful when said in a pub as they are when said in a church. Of course, in church is best—it carries the largest advertisement.

If that plea is weak, the assumption that a Christian must not tell a lie is uproariously funny. What sort of Christian did Mr. Lewis meet towards the end of his twenty years? He will get from the highest Protestant scholars that the Roman Church is one mass of lies; and get the same testimony from Catholics concerning Protestants. Has Mr. Lewis never read of the death-beds of great Freethinkers as pictured by Christians of all denominations? Is there a merchant in the City of London who will take the word of a Christian as adequate to secure unlimited credit? Mr. Lewis does not strike us as being a man of a humorous cast, but one can only take it that he is more humorous than he seems. At any rate, we will give odds to Mr. Lewis that if he will appear in an "Itma" performance and tell the audience that he cannot tell a lie because he is a Christian, he will score the greatest laugh of the evening.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE SPIRITS ARE ANNOYED!

SINCE I wrote my last article on the Spiritualist question, which dealt with certain points of criticism of myself and "The Freethinker," raised by "Psychic News," there appears to have been some agitation in the spirit world. Probably after a rustling of wraithly forms, and violent exudations of ectoplasm, the spirit guides of the Editor of "Psychic News" (Mr. Maurice Barbanell) got busy indicating that another attack on "The Freethinker" was overdue. So, like all good spirits should, they finally materialised in the form of three editorial paragraphs in "Psychic News."

Unfortunately, the spirits that inspired Mr. Barbanell's paragraphs are not well versed in the ethics of journalism, and in addition to persuading Mr. Barbanell to attack me, as the writer of the offending article, they incited him to an unwarranted attack on Mr. Chapman Cohen, whose only offence (in this matter) was to allow a fellow Freethinker to say what he thought.

However, I considered the time now ripe to test the sincerity of Mr. Barbanell's former pretensions to be a lover of freedom of expression and fair play, and I sent the following letter for publication in "Psychic News" in answer to his attack. With the Editor's permission, I offer it here, first because I consider it may be of interest to "Freethinker" readers, and then because it may never see the light of day in "Psychic News." It may be worth while, if it only brings a smile.

Dear Mr. Barbanell:—The fact that it took two months for my reply to your leading article to appear in "The Freethinker" has nothing whatever to do with your curiously conceived notion that Chapman Cohen is now 300 years old, and does not work as quickly as when he was 100 years old. I take it that Mr. Cohen (like myself) had a hearty laugh at this feeble attempt to return some of the rapier thrusts with which "The Freethinker" has now and again made your spiritist movement squirm. Both he and I are thick-skinned enough to smile at such puerilities—but more sensitive people will probably curl up with disgust at your dismal effort to make controversial capital out of a man's age in years.

Physical age, however, is no criterion of mental age, and, against the modern, scientific outlook of Cohen's "Freethinker," the stuff of Barbanell's "Psychic News" places your own mental age at least back in the Paleolithic, where Stone Age seers sought out the spirits that rustled the leaves of trees, caused the babbling of the brooks, and a thousand other "spirit possessed" phenomena which any intelligent child of to-day, with six months' schooling, can account for by the scientific Freethought method.

Merely because your spirits have changed their abode, or even their form, does not alter their nature fundamentally; they still represent the mental infancy of mankind, while Freethinking has attained mental stature, and left you far behind, wriggling still in the soiled napkins of man's superstitious babyhood.

Come, come, Mr. Barbanell. Let us have something more worthy, in discussion, than personal puerilities. Let us talk about ideas, not about individuals who are elderly in years only for the same reason that you, with due care on the part of your spirit guides, will one day also be elderly.

But you don't like to talk about ideas, do you? For when I ask for some evidence of your survival theory you retort that my plea does not interest you. "We are not evangelical missionaries," you say. What, then, is your movement—a spiritist mutual admiration society? To make claims without being prepared to convince others (even those pig-headed people like myself, who require evidence) can only be egocentric folly, and a waste of time.

But after declining me the evidence I seek, you do a slippery somersault, and chide me for "not producing a scrap of evidence" of my allegations about damage to private lives, via Spiritualism. Consistency, my dear Mr. Barbanell, is a quality that should be at least more substantial than an ephemeral spirit form.

You say, "In 24 years experience of Spiritualism, which comprises thousands of seances, I have never heard one medium give a spirit message dealing with alleged sexual infidelity."

I accept what you say. No doubt that is true. But I am afraid you are unacquainted with, or are trying to avoid dealing with, the side shows of the movement.

In the fairground fortunes are not told on the roundabouts, but in the little enclosed booths, where Gypsy Jane can delve quietly into the personal problems of her victim, without the distraction of the crowd. So in Spiritualism. The sexual and domestic affairs of "clients" are not discussed in the public seance room, but at the little *tete-a-tete* affairs which take place privately. Have you never seen those notices that are so common in connection with Spiritualist centres? :—

MADAME MIX-YOU-UP

CLAIRVOYANTE

CONSULTATIONS ON PRIVATE AND BUSINESS MATTERS

Even "Psychic News" carries them in its advertisement columns! It is here that the corrupting and corroding influence of your creed does its worst work—sometimes around a crystal, sometimes over the tea leaves, and sometimes in circumstances linking up directly with witchcraft days, for I have known the witch's cauldron to be literally used at such affairs, concocting love potions and the like, and "detecting" domestic irregularities which, I repeat, have shattered hearts and homes. One day I may produce my chapter and verse in a form that will astonish even some Spiritualists, but in the meantime, to reverse your own phrase, I am a missionary, and just now I have better things to do trying to help our youngsters to escape the influences of movements such as yours.

Your answer, no doubt, will be that such things are not true Spiritualism. Very well; but they are done under your banner, and it is for you to cleanse your own house before asking in to it any who are repelled by the smell that comes from the dark corners.

And by the way, I see no contradiction in Chapman Cohen's point that God was probably introduced into Spiritualism to make ghost-hunting popular. He does not deny that Spiritualism has a god to-day, and the relevant point would seem to be, "How long since is it that Spiritualism adopted 'The Fatherhood of God' as one of its seven principles?" The answer to that question, far from proving Mr. Cohen to be out of date on Spiritualist dogma, may, indeed, prove the truth of what he says.

Finally, Mr. Barbanell, you do us an injustice to describe Freethinkers as being "among your enemies." We are not your enemies, but we are the enemies of your ideas. That is somewhat different, for, ultimately, by opposing your ideas, or challenging them, we may prove to have been your friends. At any rate, many who have shed their Stone Age superstitions as a result of our opposition to their former ideas, insist on putting it that way.

May we hope—some day—we shall have been your friend, too?

F. J. CORINA.

EVOLUTION : SOME OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

"REASONS Why Biologists Refuse to Debate Evolution" is the title of a leaflet published in 1943 by The Evolution Protest Movement, which maintains that various societies and professors "adopted a wise policy in flatly declining to debate in writing the subject of organic evolution with Lt.-Colonel L. M. Davies and Mr. Douglas Dewar." Three reasons are given for this declension, viz. :—

"First, to most Biologists evolution has become a religion, a doctrine, accepted on faith, which it is not easy to defend."

"Secondly, as the great majority of educated and half-educated people . . . believe evolution to be a law of nature, the adherents of the doctrine have nothing to gain by a debate on the subject."

"Thirdly, there are a number of serious, even fatal objections to the theory of organic evolution . . . which can be briefly stated in a debate on the subject."

The pamphlet then proceeds to give some of these "objections."

Unfortunately, it is impossible to answer them anything like so briefly as they presented. The most that I can do now, is to graze the surface, replying to the points raised as concisely as possible.

It is pointed out that men of science have not yet "succeeded in changing non-living substances into living matter. Yet the

theory of evolution supposes that blind, unintelligent forces of nature have succeeded in accomplishing what intelligent and learned men cannot do. Nor is this all; these forces are supposed to have endowed the living matter they produced with intelligence—an attribute they themselves lack!

We must beware immediately, that the unscientific language of this passage does not give rise to a misconception. If we can guard against this the major difficulty is overcome, for, although it is true that scientists have not yet been able to convert inanimate matter into animate matter, the evidence undoubtedly points to this having taken place at some period of the earth's history. What the conditions were that caused matter which had previously been "non-living" is ground for speculation; but such speculation is by no means idle, as reference to Prof. J. B. S. Haldane's essay on "The Origin of Life" will clearly show. The following short quotation from this work indicates the extreme difficulty (if not impossibility) of clearly dividing living matter from non-living matter, for—as the evolutionist would expect—there are borderline cases. Prof. Haldane says ("Fact and Faith"—Pages 43-44):—

"The bacteriophage is a step beyond the enzyme on the road to life, but it is perhaps an exaggeration to call it fully alive. At about the same stage on the road are the viruses which cause such diseases as smallpox, herpes, and hydrophobia. They can multiply only in living tissue, and pass through filters which stop bacteria."

"Intelligence," like "life," is merely a concept, and is known only as an attribute of certain forms of animal life which—due to various conditioning factors—have developed a brain and a nervous system. Once again, Prof. Haldane may be quoted with advantage, this time from another work. ("The Causes of Evolution" Page 5):—

"The strangest thing about the origin of consciousness from unconsciousness is not that it has happened once in the remote past, but that it happens in the life of every one of us. An early human embryo without nervous system or sense organs, and no occupation but growth, has no more claim to consciousness than a plant—far less than a jelly-fish. A new-born baby may be conscious, but has less title to rationality than a dog or ape."

Messrs. Davies and Dewar should muse on this!

Meanwhile, to objection number two, which claims that "the theory of organic evolution has failed to stand the test of experiment," that "practical breeders and geneticists have failed to change any kind of plant or animal into a different kind," producing "many breeds, but no new species." Now—as evolutionists would expect and as investigation has proved—species are by no means so fixed and stable as was once thought—and as the leaflet before me would have us believe. Gradations are everywhere to be found, and many examples could be given of new species in the process of formation through geographical, ecological and genetical factors. Here is what Dr. J. S. Huxley has to say about the fly *Drosophila*, to which the pamphlet makes specific reference:—

"Even in *Drosophila* where the species originally seemed exceptionally well delimited, careful analysis has revealed the existence of all grades in speciation, both as regards geographical sub-speciation and the formation of sterility barriers. All its species so far investigated carry large numbers of recessive mutants in nature, and are thus provided with an adequate reservoir of variability for future adaptive change and possible further speciation." ("Evolution: The Modern Synthesis" Page 372).

Huxley states also that speciation in most large genera of higher animals is essentially similar to this.

The principal difficulty in this second objection is once again that of language and its association. "Species" is a term that carries with it an idea of fixedness which belongs to the belief in special creation. No such conception is valid to-day. Dr. T. H. Morgan says ("The Scientific Basis of Evolution" Page 105):—

"The infertility between species has sometimes been regarded as one of the criteria of species, although it is seldom utilised as such by systematists themselves. However, infertility between 'species' is by no means universal. All gradations exist."

It is simply not true to say—as the pamphlet does—that experiment "has demonstrated the great stability of species." If a particular example is needed to destroy this idea, there is *Crepis artificialis*, a hawkweed cross which breeds true, and is, indeed, classified as a new species!¹

The third objection states that not "a single indubitable fossil" has been discovered in rocks earlier than the Cambrian. It must be confessed that the abundance of diversified Cambrian fossils and the rarity of fossils in the pre-Cambrian deposits has considerably puzzled geologists, but several plausible theories have been put forward in explanation of this. The pamphlet claims:—

"The rocks could not furnish stronger proofs . . . of a great creation at the beginning of the Cambrian period," which is untrue, for—although they are rare—traces of living organisms have been discovered in pre-Cambrian strata.² These include indirect evidence (burrows and trails of worms³ and graphite beds) and direct proofs of "unquestioned authenticity." "In this category belong the blue-green algae, brown algae, sponges, 'worms,' and a few arthropods, such as those discovered recently by Sir T. E. David in Australia."⁴

Objections four and six may be linked together, for both are concerned with "intermediate animals between land quadrupeds and their descendants which are highly specialised for flying or swimming. The former objection deals with the lack of fossil links, whereas the latter one considers that the "transformation would have involved a line of intermediate animals unable either to swim or walk properly." Now whales and bats—particular examples of extreme specialisation—are undoubtedly illustrations of "adaptive radiation" and, although we cannot exactly trace their development from terrestrial forms, the difficulty is not so great as the pamphlet conveys.

C. McCALL.

(To be concluded)

¹ See "An Introduction to Modern Genetics" by C. H. Waddington, Sc.D.—Pages 262-263.

² "The Earth before History" by Prof. Edmond Perrier—Page 22.

³ Article "Geology" by Dr. W. W. Watts, in "Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge"—pub'd. Blackie—Page 75.

⁴ "Down to Earth" by Croneis and Krumbein (Dept. of Geology, The University of Chicago)—Pages 309-310.

IS DEMOCRACY CHRISTIAN?

The Bishop of Chelmsford says authoritatively that "Democracy is Christian, and it will never come into its own until it recognises it." We suggest that the Bishop looks up the New Testament and the official Prayer Book of the Church to which he belongs. He could also strengthen himself if he studied closely the attitude of his Church to the people—there was no talk of democracy then—who were fighting to get just enough food and shelter to enable them to live with an approach to decency.

THE ANGLER'S TIN

An Allegory

"If Man does not fulfil his (self-appraised) high destiny, the Creator may abandon him and select some other organism for His favour; even though it take millions of years to evolve a promising candidate.

It took quite a long time for Man to wriggle from the ruck of his biological rivals for the exalted office—The Lord of Creation(?) but there is still plenty of Time; as much as ever there was."—BERNARD SHAW.

FYTTE I.

I looked inside an angler's tin,
A host of maggots writhed within;
And what an aimless maggot din!

Worming and squirming in maggoty strife,
All were affirming their maggoty life;
Some of them, topmost, triumphantly rode,
Others, beneath them, groaned under their load.
Then from beneath a stout squirmer upthrust,
Puffing and blowing his maggoty dust.
Down went a "rider" from bossing the show,
Down to the stratum of groaners below;
Up went the thruster to join in the spoil,
Up from his nightmare of wriggling toil.
Naught did he reck of the rider he'd thrown,
Strong were his thrustings, the fatter he'd grown;
Then, when he got there, his squirming became
Stately and dignified—playing the Game.

Maggoty craft;
Riding the daft;
Stately and dignified maggoty game.

FYTTE II.

Most at the top, though, in fatness secure,
Managed a permanent place to procure;
Managed, by craft and their casuist wile,
Those underneath to cajole and beguile.
Teaching to all the old unctuous rot—
The maggoty joys of a satisfied lot;
Teaching them all they should squirm for and love
Those who complacently ride them above.
Preaching, maybe, with a wink and a nod,
All is ordained by a maggoty god;
All in six days (with a sabbathy rest)
Subtly devised for the maggoty best;
Preaching contentment with Life, which is hard,
Preaching of Death and eternal reward.
Some few of the maggots the blah-blah will take,
But most broadly grin at the transparent fake;
The preaching ones also, while wagging their chins,
At times join the concourse of sceptical grins;
Or the maggot equiv. of such risible sins.

A convolute crowd in a fisherman's tin;
In maggoty loudness of maggoty din;
Endlessly writhing and striving within . . .

And thus I saw,
In embryo,

Life in its squalid pageant-flow;

Feeding!
Seeding!
Breeding!

Tireless; urgent; as centuries roll;
Ripeness and death being the sum of it all.

FYTTE III.

Suddenly, rebellion—urged,
A horde of maggots upward surged;
Down went the "riders" from above,
Down in a drench of maggot blood;
Fouling the tin with their vital streams,
Ending in blood all their puny dreams;
A symbol of Life in its cannibal climb
Out of the primal, conditioning slime.
Then a mad chaos of squirming ensued,
Each one (as ever!) with self-love imbued;
Striving for topmost with unswerving will,
Crushing the weaker ones under until—
The Angler, weary, arose on His feet
And threw the job lot for the fishes to eat.
Ending, for ever! the maggoty din;
Ending the strife in the fisherman's tin.

ARTHUR GODFREY.

ACID DROPS

THERE is some trouble in connection with repairs to war-damaged buildings. It seems that at Streatham the Congregational church is having its roof repaired at the Government's expense, while dwelling houses, soaked with rain, are still waiting. The minister of the church says that this process was not due to any wire-pulling on his part. We take it that it is really an act of God. After all, houses may wait with little damage to the prestige of the deity. On the other hand, churches that are not usable mean a dead loss to the deity. No roof, no prayers.

It seems that 2,000 men are needed by the Anglican Church to carry on its business at home, and 600 are needed for abroad. Up to the present about 800 have volunteered from the Forces, which leaves a shortage of 1,800. The outlook is serious—for the Churches—for once let people accustom themselves to not going to church and they will wonder why they ever went.

Cannot something be done about it? It must have been noted by God's agents on earth—the Christian clergy—that over and over again the weather has been dead against us and in favour of the Germans. If our own national clergy are helpless, cannot the attention of the Pope be called to the matter? The heavenly forces are evidently not playing the game. What price closing the churches as a kind of protest against God helping the Nazis?

The B.B.C. Brains Trust continues to toil along mistaking muddle for wisdom. If it deserves complimenting at all, it must surely be that it manages to evade a simple answer to a comparatively simple situation. For example, in a recent gathering the question was put whether those who had done so much "gardening" during the war would keep it up after the war. The general opinion was that they would not; but none of them able to perceive two questions were treated as one. Gardening is one thing, growing potatoes or cabbages is another. Certainly the majority of potato-growers will give it up. Why should they not when they can be produced by plain labour? But gardening is something that appeals to one's love of flowers, and that people will not give up because it marks the æsthetic side of life. It appeals to one's sense of beauty, of colour, and so forth. But there is nothing that can come under that head when one is growing potatoes.

It is interesting to note that the Pope has informed President Raczkiwicz that he was constantly praying for the well-being of Poland. Moreover, they were not ordinary prayers; they were, as the Pope explains, "offered to God in a particular manner that the abundance of divine help may be in accordance with the suffering endured." And after all this elaborate tomfoolery the Germans took Warsaw, very many of the Polish men, women

and children (many of them Jews), and the Pope looks round to see where he can exercise crafty foolishness.

Now that the war has naturally broken up a great many marriages, the Churches are talking much about the Christian doctrine of marriage and divorce. Well, if they will turn to the New Testament for guidance they will find that the advice given by Jesus—himself a bachelor—is that in heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage. And St. Paul, who probably had much more to do with the establishing of Christianity than did Jesus, said quite plainly that the excuse for marriage is that it is better to marry than to burn. Finally, we have the Catholic Church still holding out that celibacy is a *puer* state than marriage. Christianity is a pretty system when one analyses it carefully.

Mr. C. W. Dresser asks the "Church Times" a question. He wishes to know "When will the Church lay it down that the clergy must be taught to preach?" That is intended to be a nasty smack for Church leaders. But the answer is that all the clergy are very carefully taught to teach, but it is not the lack of good preaching that is emptying the churches; it is the fact that the clergy are tied to worn-out ideas. There is really only one thing that has ever emptied the churches—that is by parsons being found out. This is not a new fact, nor is it even a Christian fact; it is the fate of all religions to be sooner or later found out. We suggest that Mr. Dresser spend a few hours reading some of the satires on religion such as were written by Lucian about the end of the first century of this era. Change the names and it fits the present situation from A to Z. There is not much that is new in the history of religion.

Church titles read almost as ridiculously as do many of those borne by laymen. Neither are a certain indication of personal merit; they indicate rather that the recipient pleases the title-giver. There is, for example, a certain Roman Catholic in Liverpool who calls himself Vicar General of Liverpool. He is nothing of the kind. The overwhelming majority of Liverpool folk smile at his title. This titled gentleman is horrified there should be such a thing as limitation of birth. But he has—at least he is expected so to have done—himself set an example of limiting the population. And the only thing that we know of that would justify him is that if he had been a father he would have brought up his children as Roman Catholics. So that even Mgr. Atkins may truthfully claim that he has done some good to Liverpool.

Dr. J. W. Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting, boasted at the Diocesan Conference at Chelmsford that the B.B.C. was the only instrument that has used radio in the interests of the Church. He omitted to say that the B.B.C. had accomplished this feat in a truly Christian way—by shutting out all who dissented from Christian doctrines. Hitler did the same thing in another direction.

The Archbishop of York says that the new Education Act "gives great opportunities such as we (the Church) never had before." We agree. That is the damnable part of the Act. And it represents a fine Tory-cum-priestly plot that will make for a lower standard of character, instead of a higher one. It will mean in action more subordinate teachers and a partly poisoned body of pupils.

We are indebted to the Roman Catholic "Universe" for the information that the Spanish Foreign Minister has solemnly declared that "In a world dominated by violence, Spain wishes to abide by the rules of international courtesy, humanity and reciprocal justice. . . . We shall not deviate from the line personified by General Franco of resolutely defending the eternal Christian values." All we need add is that General Franco, the ruler of Spain, has shown his sincerity by the help he has given Hitler, by the crowded prisons in which those who disagree with Franco may meditate on his sincere Christianity, and by the warnings this country has to issue to this most Christian ruler and his supporters.

From the "Liverpool Echo": "The applicant handed in testimonials from three clergymen. 'We don't work here on Sundays,' remarked the employer. 'Haven't you a reference from someone who sees you on week-days?'"

The question of what will the men in the Armed Forces do when the war is over is before those who are dependent upon their daily work for their living. That is the problem. But the clergy also are on the alert, and we see that there is a move on foot by those who at present live by being with the Forces. The move is that, as the schools become more and more saturated with religion, it may be possible to convert these clerical out-of-workers into school chaplains. On the whole, we are not surprised. Partly, the Education Bill was drafted by a series of back-stair meetings between the Board of Education and the Churches, and the clergy are not of the type of people who forget their own interests.

Sometimes one almost pities the clergy when, after lying loyally and fervently, one of their own friends lets out a little of the truth. For example, directly the war commenced in earnest the Churches tried to make capital out of it. When the state of the slums was made clear to the world, the clergy discovered that a large number of the children who were sent away had never heard the name of Jesus, although they had been in schools where prayers were said regularly. Then, turning their attention to the Forces, they discovered that there was a great interest in religion shown by the men—they almost worshipped their padres, and longed for more. That did at least give the soldiers something to laugh about. So far the Churches should have credit for amusing the soldiers; they have not had much to laugh at otherwise.

Now they have received a smack clean in the face from Sir James Grigg, the War Secretary. Someone had been asking for more religious films. Sir James replied that there was no demand among the men for religious films. Poor parsons. Still, people have short memories, and the lie that there is an increased demand for religion will live. Every lie, it has been said, has nine lives. Religion seem to have an almost impossible number of resurrections.

What queer religionists they have in Stoke Newington! Consider the following from one of the London papers: "The Vicar of All Saints went to his church and found that the offertory box had been broken open; but the Vicar had written on a piece of paper he placed in the box, 'The curse of God will fall upon anyone who robs this box.' And the parson found the money in one of its corners." Evidently God is on good terms with the Rev. T. Sykes. For other church boxes have been broken open, and there is no evidence that this particular thief will cease operations. The moral is, "Get right with God." But other places may have to suffer.

Per contra. It is reported that the Germans at Aachen had been using a great Crucifix for observation purposes. But if God had not been paying attention to the Rev. T. Sykes' money-box he might have so distorted the aim of the Germans that their shots all missed the target. Really, saving a few shillings is not so important as saving the slaughter of soldiers.

The Rev. E. L. Allen, writing in the "British Weekly," says in support of our new Education Bill that "a great many teachers have been waiting for years for the opportunity of placing the teaching of Scripture on a level with that of the other subjects in the curriculum." Now we deny emphatically that a great many teachers, in proportion to numbers, are longing for religious teaching to be placed on a level with all other subjects. Some, and not the better type of teacher, may welcome compulsory teaching of one form of religion. But the better type of teacher does not want the priest to be permitted to trespass on his ground; they would sooner have religion left out altogether. The pity it is that so many teachers are afraid to speak out publicly in this matter. And that is what confronts us when the religious sections of the new Bill are in operation—a poorer type of teacher and a mentally misdirected type of pupil

"THE FREETHINKER"

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- F. HOEY.—Thanks for leaflet. Will be useful.
E. C.—Thanks for your reminder. The Roman Church is not likely to get rid of "indulgences" without finding some other method of providing an equivalent that will replenish the funds of the Church.
F. J. CORINA.—Thanks. Next week.

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SUGAR PLUMS

ACCORDING to the "Evening Standard" there is a great demand for the writings of William Cobbett. We are pleased to hear it because Cobbett, if he cannot be called a great writer, was yet a very powerful one, and exerted considerable influence among the advanced minds of his day. There was no paper the Government of the day hated more than his weekly "Political Register." If he had not the breadth of view that characterised Thomas Paine, he was relentless in exposing bogus reforms and disclosing the real aim of the Government. When a reply was given to his attacks in the shape of reforms that were cited against his demand for greater freedom, his retort was (in 1816):—

"It is notorious that where one person could read and write 100 years ago, 50 persons can now read and write; it is notorious that where one Bible was printed 100 years ago, 100, and perhaps 1,000, Bibles are now printed. . . . It is notorious that where one man was then hanged in England, 50 men are now hanged; it is notorious that where one person was a pauper when Pitt became Prime Minister, there are now more than 20 persons paupers."

That gives as good a specimen of Cobbett's attack as one could find.

But perhaps the thing that brought him the bitterest enmity was his attack on the Established Church, in his book "Cobbett's Legacy to Parsons." The copy before me is dated 1835, and is the fourth edition. It is a scathing attack on the Church for its quality, its greed, and its falsity to the people, and a demand for its disestablishment. Perhaps the most interesting chapter—nowadays—is the manner in which what came to be known as "Queen Anne's Bounty" was manoeuvred until the people, and not the Queen, paid the whole of the bill. The dishonesty of both Church and Government are made quite clear. The story is too lengthy to be told now. It is enough to say that a purely Christian reply was made—silence, and after that—boycott. Historians ignore Cobbett or pass him by with a few sentences, thus combining the tactics of the coward and the liar.

So we are very pleased to hear that there is a growing interest in the writings of Cobbett. We hope that the demand will grow and some truthful aspect of the great band of men—and women—who worked so hard for the betterment of the people in the first

forty years of the nineteenth century be known. We might paraphrase a famous saying of George Eliot by saying that the world of to-day would not be as developed as it is were it not for these pioneers of whom the world know little.

Harrow, Middlesex, Freethinkers now have an opportunity of forming a local Branch of the N.S.S. if those interested will communicate with Mr. T. Morgan, 4, Springfield Road, Harrow, Middlesex. There are many ways in which groups of Freethinkers in branch formations can add to their own interest and serve the cause at the same time.

A dozen clergymen belonging to the *Free Churches* sent a combined protest against American soldiers playing football on Sundays. Of course, the football matches have not interfered with the progress of the war, but they might have done. Besides, ministers of religion must live (at least in theory), and how are they to get a living if football is allowed to compete with sermons? The competition is not fair. There is neither the interest nor the importance in a groan to God as there is in man's nimble feet securing a good shot. Why will people actually pay a high price merely to see a football match? How much would they pay to listen to the average messenger from God? And on top of it all two ladies write to the local Press suggesting that the Government should stop people making munitions on Sunday.

A Catholic priest, who is described by the police as being full of the "joys of spring" (in October), misused the petrol allowed him for (religious) business purposes, and was fined £1. There will be a few more days in hell for that policeman.

Very kindly and full of concern that youth shall feel itself dependent upon the Churches, the Bishop of Stafford asks: "Where are young people going to get to know what is right or wrong apart from a religious basis of ethics?" That question sets one wondering what kind of "young people" the Bishop comes into contact with. If they cannot see some commendation for decency, or honesty, or truthfulness in the life around them and in their own inclinations, they must be a very poor lot indeed. But even if that were the case, and we wished to see children grow up as they might without religion, is it really true that children under religious tuition turn out better than others? We challenge the Bishop to produce his cases and his evidence. Until he replies he is just a common slanderer and might, without straining words, be called a liar in his assumption that decency in thought and behaviour comes only from religion and cannot exist without it.

Blackburn Town Council decided by 34 votes to 10 that the people of Blackburn cannot be trusted to behave themselves properly if they are allowed to attend cinemas on Sunday. But in that case, why not reverse matters and have cinemas just one day a week, and have that day—Sunday? But the people of Blackburn ought to take notice that 34 members of their Council believe that the people are such poor stuff that Sunday cinemas cannot be trusted with a Free Sunday. Or is it that the 34 wish to help their clerical pals in their business as much as they can?

The Rev. L. G. H. Farley publishes an agreement with the Vicar of Braintree in refusing to marry anyone in the Parish Church who is not a Christian and a churchgoer. He says that "a couple go to a church to receive the blessing of the Church." Which, stated in that way, is simply not true. They come, broadly, just to be married. What the Bishop and the parson fear is a falling-off of attendance in church if people understand what the value of religion is. But it is noted that neither of these parsons cares the proverbial damn about taking a secular situation and then refusing to carry out the contract they have. A falsity more or less never alarms the parsonry.

The Kintyre Presbytery has asked the Education Committee of the county to arrange for more time to be given to the teaching of religion. We presume that is one example of marking approval of the plot worked out by our Government and the Churches.

A NOTE ON BYRON

IN Mr. Edgar Syers' otherwise very interesting article, "The Isles of Greece," he makes a few statements about Byron as if there was not the slightest doubt of their truth; when, as a matter of fact, they are, to say the least, highly debateable. So much so indeed, that scores of books and articles have been written about them, and so far the matter rests, as the Scots would say, "Not Proven."

We are all, of course, entitled to our opinion on the evidence, and if Mr. Syers wants to make such accusations against Byron, he has a perfect right to do so; but he must not complain if he is criticised—or if he prefers it, challenged to substantiate his attacks. Byron has been my favourite poet ever since I could read poetry, and I have always claimed that "Don Juan" has no peer in any literature for wit, humour, satire, irony, and a dozen other qualities. It is possible that the writer of such a masterpiece, and a dozen others, was also a first-rate cad—but I do not believe it. Of course he had faults and grave ones too, but it will require a great deal more evidence than I have managed to see to make me believe that he was quite the cad described by Mr. Syers.

Byron happened to be one of those who kissed and told and boasted; whereas so many of us, I'm afraid, prefer to kiss and never tell; and perhaps very often Byron never kissed at all but said he did. Now, just at that time, England was in the throes of a spate of Hannah Mores, of Mrs. Trimmers, and of Legh Richmonds, and was inundated with tracts propagating a kind of narrow Evangelistic Christianity even worse than anything spewed up by the Puritans. And just as poor Shelley was vilely attacked for his "Atheism" and his other advanced ideas, so the British public let loose upon Byron the foulest abuse when he became separated from his wife. The kind of Christianity put forward in the tracts was made the arbiter of everything, and woe betide anyone who made the slightest departure from it. I can understand Christians still talking like Mrs. Trimmer—but Freethinkers? Surely we can look at the moral conduct of anyone on the evidence alone without bothering about the moral standards of a Hannah More?

In the case of Shelley, the attacks have to a great extent died down, and far more excuses are made for him these days for his treatment of Harriet than the reverse. But for some reason not at all easy to explain, everything that can be raked up against Byron still makes its daily rounds, and often his moral delinquencies are made an excuse for an attack on his poetry. The way some critics write is enough to make one wonder often whether he could write poetry at all. It is only a personal opinion, of course, but for me Shelley is often unreadable, while Byron is a joy almost every time.

But let us look a little more at details.

Mr. Syers tells us that Medora Leigh was Byron's daughter by his half-sister Augusta as if there was not the slightest doubt about it. The reader can rest assured that there is the very gravest doubt about it, and that quite a number of people who were in a position to know strenuously denied it. Actually Medora turned out a "bad lot" and later, in 1869, wrote her autobiography. This was edited by Dr. Charles Mackay—who was in his day a considerable *littérateur*, a poet of great merit—he wrote one of the most popular songs ever sung during the nineteenth century, as well as many books; (and I must add, his daughter Minnie became known later as Marie Corelli, the author of the "Sorrows of Satan," and a number of other highly sensational best-sellers). Now there was no conceivable reason why Mackay should not have believed the criminal libels directed against both Byron and Augusta Leigh, and which were repeated with such gusto by Mrs. Beecher Stowe, the famous author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"; but an examination of this

"Autobiography" convinced him that the libels were untrue. I prefer Dr. Mackay's opinion on the matter to Mr. Syers'. He was at least a little nearer the time and could examine some things at first hand.

But there is additional confirmation. Byron's life-long friend, J. C. Hobbouse—later Lord Broughton—published what he called "A Contemporary Account of the Separation of Lord and Lady Byron," and of this, Prof. Chew says in his "Byron in England"—"The most important part of this long book is the definite statement that Hobbouse brought pressure to bear upon Byron 'to make a clean breast of it,' and that after his interview Hobbouse continued to support his friend unwaveringly." Again, I prefer Hobbouse to Mr. Syers.

After giving us details of numerous eulogies of Shelley by his friends, Mr. Syers adds, "There are no such eulogies of Byron. The beauty of his verse and his many amours were topics of which his admirers never tired; but for tributes of affection we look in vain."

This seems to be an extraordinary statement for any man to make. Has Mr. Syers read everything that has been written on Byron? I could give him a hundred tributes of affection without going to the well known work of the Countess Guiccioli who surely knew Byron and whose recollections prove the very opposite of Mr. Syers' absurd statement. What does Hobbouse say? Writing twenty years after Byron's death, at the age of fifty eight, he gives these "tributes":—

"Lord Byron had hard measures dealt to him in his life time, but he did not die without leaving behind him friends—deeply and affectionately attached friends . . . they were not blind to the defects of his character, nor of his writings. . . but they know that some of the gravest accusations levelled against him had no foundation in fact. . . . (Lord Byron's) virtues—his good qualities—were all of the highest order. He was honourable and open in all his dealings; he was generous and he was kind. He was affected by distress, and rarer still, he was pleased with the prosperity of others. Tender hearted . . . he shrank with feminine sensibility from the sight of cruelty. He was true-spoken—he was affectionate—he was very brave . . . he was incapable of any mean compliance . . . was totally free from envy and from jealousy . . . he was neither vainglorious nor overbearing . . . he was a gay companion and free, but never transgressed the bounds of good breeding . . . Indeed he was, in the best sense of the word, a gentleman."

I prefer this estimate of Byron to that of Mr. Syers, and it would be very easy to give dozens of others—even some from the people who acted as his servants—in the same vein.

That Shelley was foully attacked without cause we all agree, but even then not all of us see him as a sort of angel—ineffectual or otherwise. Must Byron for ever be credited with all the vices, and Shelley with all the virtues?

Not all critics agree about the beautiful moral character of Shelley, as witness what an American critic, Mr. J. F. A. Pyre, writing in the "Atlantic Monthly" for April, 1907, on "Byron in our Day," says about Byron's treatment of women:—

"It may be doubted if the critics have done justly in treating his delinquencies less leniently than those of Shelley and Burns. There was less cowardice and cruelty in Byron's treatment of women than was the case of either Burns or Shelley."

Finally, it is interesting to note Henley's championship of Byron's work as against other critics. In an article in the "Pall Mall Magazine" for August, 1900, he agrees with Mr. E. H. Coleridge that Byron's poetry "holds its own," and adds, "Does Shelley's? Has 'The Cenci' never been found out? Do people still find sustenance in 'The Revolt of Islam,' 'The Witch of Atlas,' 'Rosalind and Helen,' and the 'Sensitive

Plant?" Were these things anything to anybody? I'll not believe it. Henley points out how Matthew Arnold thought that it might be Byron and Wordsworth who would head the procession of English poets of the nineteenth century, and he adds: "It may be Shelley and Byron; it may be Byron and Keats; it may be Byron and Coleridge. But, whoever the one, the other will certainly be Byron."

With which sentiment I heartily concur. H. CUTNER.

THE REGIMENTATION OF YOUTH

(Concluded from page 407)

THE members of the Home Guard in particular are men who, at a moment of great danger, answered the call of the Government. Though working exceptionally long hours at an unparalleled speed in the factories, they selflessly sacrificed not merely their Sunday morning leisure but several nights per week, including a night's sleep. They did this not for any monetary reward, not under compulsion, but in a spirit of patriotism that would, one would think, acquire the commendation of the Vicar. The Youth flocked to their organisations with a similar spirit. He chooses to ignore it. It matters nothing. It is a thing to be protested against. The national effort must be subordinate to the pulpit. Prayer must precede training. The church must be filled and the parade ground empty, or, failing this, the parade ground must become the church.

The Rev. Hutchcroft is equally perturbed. He complains of "unnecessary interference with Church organisation." He recognises that this development is "national and part of the policy of getting on with the war." Unlike the Vicar, he can at least see the obvious. He says: "It has practically destroyed the Christian work done among the adolescents, which is the vital time the Church wants to have them."

Precisely! The undeveloped must have their minds filled with myths and miraculous events, their outlook warped. He realises that if it cannot be done to the young it never will be done, and failure means the ever-waning influence of the Church.

He couples this with the effect of Sunday cinemas, and says: "The effect in the life of the next generation of parents is going to be very serious."

We can agree with his reverence on this. It is going to be very serious indeed—for the Church and those, like himself, who derive a livelihood from the cultivation of ignorance and the spread of mass superstition; who teach that belief is better than knowledge; that to drown incredulity and live on faith is better than the following of reason and reliance on fact; that to fawn and cringe and mumble prayers to some heavenly phantom is better than courage and reliance on self; that to accept, to follow is nobler than to search and lead.

It is serious enough now, for the reverend gentleman adds: "Throughout my mission, which covers 13 churches, we have found the greatest difficulty in countering the influence of Sunday parades; . . . before the war there were 2,200 children attending Sunday schools . . . that figure has fallen to one-third."

The military authorities were not slow in replying to this spiritual cannonade, this frontal assault on their Christian integrity. As one might expect, they hastened to assure the reverend gentlemen that they had got the facts wrong.

Group Captain J. A. Cecil Wright, M.P., and Commandant of the Midlands A.T.C., informs us that "The Air Ministry fully realises the very important part the Church should play in these pre-Service organisations. We have provided," he continues, "and are providing, every facility for the Church. It is up to them to co-operate."

He proceeds to describe the nature and extent of these facilities. There is a chaplains advisory council, liaison chaplains from every denomination in each squadron, facilities for a service before each parade, and a weekly ten-minute chat to the boys.

Col. F. G. Danielson, of the Warwickshire Brigade of the Army Cadet Corps, with a strength of 6,500, affirms: "Religion has always been considered a necessary part of the training of good citizens, and . . . the A.C.C. has always co-operated with the Churches of all denominations. In addition to a Brigade chaplain, each of the ten battalions has also a chaplain. . . ." These gentlemen, with the battalion commanders, watch that no boy is kept from church who wishes to attend.

Group Captain Wright, M.P., and Col. Danielson deserve our thanks for disclosing the extent of this spiritual infiltration, of how deeply the Church has penetrated; also for showing how close is the co-operation of Church and State in this matter. This regimentation and Christianising of the Youth is worth watching.

To what, in view of the above, do the parsons object?

The new Education Bill provides them with greater power than they have exercised for a considerable time. It increases their influence over the children in the school. The parson dominant in school cannot be content with less outside of it. The provision of advisory councils is not enough. Co-operation with commanders to see that a boy who wishes to go to church must not be prevented is a long way from what they would consider to be desirable.

The voice of the Church must be primary. Its influence must be dominant. A boy must be compelled to go whether he wants to or not. The idea of a boy having wishes in the matter is an intolerable thing. The parson knows—none better—that if church-going was left to any boy's volition they would never see any at church.

Again, a drumhead service is not a church. A ten-minute chat is woefully inadequate for the purpose of the Church; and neither fills the collection plate, a not inconsiderable factor in the case.

This protest against the so-called regimentation of Youth and the Nazi conception looks singularly like a screen behind which the Church is working to increase it, and to head it for a Christian conception. The introduction of the word "Nazi" is the bait by which they hope to catch the unwary. They aim to exploit popular sentiment and hitch it to priestly aims.

The Church decays, its influence wanes. Protests such as this reflect clearly the growing conviction of its ministers that every avenue must be explored, every weapon used, in the struggle to survive.

The period of adolescence, as the Rev. Hutchcroft perceives, is the vital time for the Church to get the Youth. It is losing them. Protests will not prevent the continuation of this process. They know that. This kite is being flown for a purpose. They will find the masses unresponsive.

J. H. R.

THE STAFF OF A GREAT CATHEDRAL AND ITS JOB

"THEY also serve who only stand and wait"

If one had to inspect a large factory, some time might be devoted to its output, the numbers employed with the work of each, the supervision, the markets for its production, prices, profits, etc. With some factories, other than those engaged on secret works, such inspection might be frank and above board, and might be really educative.

When one turns from a great factory to a religious foundation, the greatest secrecy is encountered, especially as to the work done and its rewards. The function of a great cathedral should be to convert the people to religion (Christian of course), but as all ministers appear to preach only to the converted, it would be no exaggeration to put the number of "souls saved" at one person per annum per cathedral—if that. With any other industry, the staffs would be regulated by the production and the payments for services to correspond, but not with the Church. With these rewards, Crockford is not very illuminating, and as far as work done, is silent altogether. Sometimes, in the history of the past, the "cat is let out of the bag," but very rarely.

The old Cathedral of St. Paul in London, which was burned in the Great Fire of 1666, and which, by all accounts, was anything but a godly institution, it may be interesting—possibly amusing—to examine the records, numbers and rewards of its staff, in part only, and the enquirer may wonder how little was accomplished by so many, and how richly this many were rewarded. I am indebted to Dr. William Benham, D.D., F.S.A., for much of the following, and the quotations here are from his book of 1911, on Mediæval London.

At the head of the Cathedral was the Bishop who "was received with great honour and ceremony on his visits to the Cathedral" from which we may assume that these visits were rarities, compared with those of the heads of any commercial enterprise, only more highly paid. The next to the Bishop was the Dean, who, probably, had more to do, but he had a Sub-Dean to help him. Then there were four Archdeacons, to which a fifth—he of St. Albans—was added in the reign of Henry VIII., possibly to help with the arrears. Then there was the Treasurer, assisted by the Sacrist and three Vergers. Followed the Precentor and the Succentor, with organists, who had the music in charge. There were no less than thirty Canons or Prebendaries, whose duties, and even attendances, appear to have been ill-defined, but each had an endowment, with an estate, attached to his stall. From the fact that each Canon had his Vicar, we can assume that these duties could not have been onerous. Some Canons were residentiary and had each a house in the Cathedral precincts, but whether these were rated, or charged with a rent, history does not say. The Canon's job, if any, appeared to be to recite daily a portion of the psalter, but whether he recited this himself, say in the Carolean equivalent of the bath-room, or whether he left this to his Vicar, is obscure. Anyhow, a Canon could not be regarded as over-worked, with an estate and a house thrown in among other rewards, including his "stipend." Each Canon was "expected to show large and costly hospitality," but to whom is not stated.

Then there were twelve Minor Canons, who had estates of their own, and large numbers of Chantry Priests who had to attend to the altars under their charge and were, probably, the most expensive candle-lighters the world has ever known, if they did not depute this, Cathedral fashion, to the "other fellow." As Dr. Benham puts it: "It is impossible to estimate the number of persons who lived within the Cathedral Close and were connected with its establishment. Besides the minor officers, such as the almoner, vergers, surveyor, scribes, book-binder(s), brewer, baker, etc., there were the chaplain and the household of the Bishop, the higher officials already enumerated, the choir-boys, the bedesmen and poor, and a host of others."

"The baker's task was no sinecure. It is calculated that the yearly issue of bread amounted to no less than forty thousand loaves. The weight and quality of the loaves, varying according to the rank of the persons supplied, were matters of sufficient importance to be regulated by statute." (What would have happened if the Bishop got, say, a chaplain's loaf by accident?)

It is interesting to compare results, in terms of souls saved per annum, say, with the 40,000 loaves made by the Baker. Were the former graduated in weight and quality also? Comparing methods with results, what a holy balance sheet is here disclosed! Reversing Mr. Churchill's famous statement: "Was ever so little accomplished by so many."

HERBERT CESCINSKY.

THE GOD QUESTION

"WELL, for God's sake——" Yes, it's a handy expletive. But do we sometimes wonder what we mean by the words? To get a clear idea of its meaning we should clear our minds first of prejudices and preconceptions and examine the question from its fundamentals. Is there a God? And if so, what is he like? It is equally pointless to deny the existence offhand as it is to say "I have faith, and only contempt for disbelievers." A definite idea is called for, and as a rule a person's idea of God depends mainly upon his intellectual level, although tradition or other teaching usually presents him with a god, sometimes at a higher intellectual level than he would normally aspire to, and sometimes the contrary occurs.

All sorts of deities have been or are believed in at various times and places, and some very wide differences can be noted. As has often been said, "Man makes God in his own image," and so we find inherent human qualities in different races reflected in their gods.

The ideals of the African races are predominantly physical. They admire above all the well-built and tough individual with great natural powers of endurance and skill. They will forgive the stupid or the unpractical, or the morally bad types, but never the weakling, coward or the physically defective.

The European above all things admires the mentally great. Physical infirmities are quite overlooked, and so to a certain extent are moral shortcomings if an individual is clever and "has brains," as we say.

Note the difference, however, where the Asiatic is concerned. With him it is mysticism, holiness, doing so-called "good works," as the Buddhist has it—where one gives to the priest and ignores the starving. The fanatic may lie upon spikes and be admired, not for his tough hide, but for following a course calculated to please or appease his god.

So we find the African's all-powerful spirit very well portrayed in the film "Green Pastures" as "De Lord," with his great personal powers all emphasised; and the pagan Africans' gods only differ in detail from the so-called Christian negro's. The ancient Greeks' Zeus, and again Diana or any of the other European gods, including those super field-marshal, Thor and Odin, all possessed the powers the would-be clever persons envied. They could control the powers of nature: raise the wind, move mountains, effect rapid long-distance transport, and cause their devotees to win wars (or women) or secure other aims.

The ideas underlying the Asiatics' conception of their gods, and their behaviour towards them, ignores physical and mental limits and sets store upon "spirituality," which appears to be the origin of codes of behaviour, ultimately of ethics and morals, although the latter have only evolved where rationality has been applied. One can get an inkling then of how the "Christian" Churches "explain" Christ's birth by an unmarried mother by claiming that she spent a gay night with "The Holy Ghost," this being for some reason a sufficient excuse.

All these old gods, then, had qualities the individual might envy but never acquire, and he would expect to be punished if he as much as hoped to do so, so that the idea of a God of Love, introduced by Jesus, must have caused a jolt to the conventional outlook of that day. The benevolent God to be emulated was a novelty which could scarcely be assimilated,

and very few do so even to-day. Everyone who taught and upheld traditional views of a god were not always actuated by altruistic motives, however, and there are and were many only too ready to exploit the credulous, and who claimed to satisfy their yearnings. But those who genuinely had the welfare of the people at heart would also have to work by the superstitious approach! for whereas people will always take risks with their health, they will literally do anything in support of their superstitions or religious fears, and public opinion would be most easily impressed through those beliefs, so that the structure of a society depends ultimately upon its religion or the sort of god it believes in, which in turn depends upon the interplay between its average intelligence and the various interested parties anxious either to control or alter it. The latter will always seek for their support not among the intelligentsia—unless honestly wishing to base alterations on the nearest approach to truth—but amongst the great mass of non-philosophers and non-thinking public, who are most impressed by things nothing to do with religion, but upon some conjuring trick or the repute (understood to be a miracle, of course) of some ability which is in excess of the usual, such as the ability to conduct a successful war or the ability to forecast with sufficient accuracy as to get general credence as a prophet; or, of course, Virgin birth or other irregular occurrence where so-called Divine intervention is alleged to have operated.

It is easy to do this in a community of low intellectual and educational level owing to the tendency there to accredit all things not readily understandable to Divine action. Epidemics are the "will of God." Natural phenomena of all sorts are regarded as under the control of the capricious whim of the god (including the weather, of course).

A. H. PHILLIPS.

(To be concluded)

CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHINKING?

SIR,—Heaven forbid that those who write for "The Free-thinker" should follow the pattern indicated by Mr. Robertson! For even Atheists to be issued with mental blinkers!—so far we have thought them the prerogative of Christians. Are we to squabble among ourselves like our hair-splitting, bigoted brethren? Let Mr. Robertson join the ranks of the "faithful," where he will be in more suitable company.

An Atheist can with justifiable pride lay claim to the title "iconoclast." Mr. Du Cann's articles are interesting, invigorating and spicy because they represent a point of view different from the orthodox, accepted opinions of our day. Long may he continue to give our smug citizens, law-abiding in thought as well as in deed, shocks even more galvanic. Mr. Robertson should remember that those who refuse to think according to pattern, or along accepted lines, have ever been subject to the mud-slinging and vilification of the commonplace mind.—Yours,
L. M. COWE.

WORTH READING.

SIR,—I have recently read the book "Psychology for Musicians," by Percy C. Buck, which is published by the Oxford University Press.

This book will be found to be full of most interesting psychological facts, and even with its musical background can be read by any person interested in the interpretation of human life.

My action in obtaining a copy of this book was purely "internal," since I am a musician, but in connection with Free-thought I came across interested "external" ideas (both these terms being fully explained in Dr. Buck's book), which result in this letter.

Without going at length to describe the book or to acclaim the genuine style of the lectures therein, it can be said that the book has been written quite honestly and with a more than usual show of wisdom.

One particular passage the author quotes from the great thinker W. K. Clifford about "Conscience" should appeal to every Freethinker, as well as underlining the intellectual clarity of Dr. Buck. Here it is as written:—

"I cannot believe that any falsehood whatever is necessary to morality. It cannot be true of my race and yours that to keep ourselves from becoming scoundrels we must needs believe a lie. The sense of right grew up among healthy men, and was fixed by the practice of comradeship. It has never had help from phantoms and falsehoods, and it never can want any. By faith in man and piety towards men we have taught each other the right hitherto; with faith in man and piety towards men we shall nevermore depart from it. . . . It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood, or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot be asked without disturbing it—the life of that man is one long sin against mankind."

Dr. Buck does not elaborate upon this rock of wisdom, nor does he need to, nor do I.—Yours, etc.,
D. FELLOWES.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND DOUGLAS REED.

SIR,—As the person who started this correspondence I see no reason for apologising for my late reading of Mr. Reed's best-known book, since I have been awaiting this from our public library, and in the meantime had read most of his other books. Mr. Cotes' suggestion that Mr. Reed's books are to be compared with the circulation of those of popular fiction writers is absurd. Mr. Reed is a journalist, and for a work of this kind, which may be described as "contemporary politics," to reach an issue of 18 editions is extraordinary and a proof of his intimate knowledge of men and events on the Continent over the past 15 years. Mr. Reed's books would interest neither pro-Nazis, Bible punchers, nor the majority of readers of light fiction, which makes the popularity of his several books more remarkable. When I recommended his books I did not anticipate being accused of "touting" for readers, and I strongly resent Mr. Cotes' unwarrantable remark to this effect. He has suggested that anyone who criticises the Jews is pro-Nazi, but this is incorrect, and I again repeat that anti-Semitism is a product of the Christian religion. If Mr. Cotes desires to "get anywhere" instead of "nowhere" he must either (1) Give "chapter and verse" for his charge that Mr. Reed has stirred up racial hatred and so helped the enemy; or (2) retire from a correspondence in which he has been critical but has carefully refrained from one single statement of fact.—Yours, etc.,
T. D. SMITH

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.): Sunday, 11.0, Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.—"Religion and Primitive Life."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute): Sunday, 6.30, REV. DUDLEY RICHARDS—"The Origin of Morality—Was it Religious?"

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Mr. T. L. SMITH—"The Question of France."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 6.30, Mr. JOSEPH McCABE—"Crime and Religious Education."

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