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THE

FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The War—and After

THE world war draws rapidly to an end—to its military end. But it will surely mark an approach to insanity if the triumphant Allies do not seize the opportunity to end national wars as a method of settling national differences. It will be comparatively easy for the Allies to impose conditions on Germany, but the conditions, whatever form they take, will largely derive their strength from the degree of friendly conditions which obtain among the Allies. The first step will be, of course, to prevent Germany ever again making war on its neighbours. Will equal care be taken to put out of court the possibility of Germany making war in concert with some of its neighbours? The slave trade was bad enough, considered in its effects on the slaves, but it also left its marks on the slave dealers. If private, national wars are not ended, then we may safely regard another world war as inevitable. The old plan, that of securing a balance of power on the Continent, is worn out. We have fought with France and against it, with Germany and against it, with Spain and against it. None of these alliances brought us nearer the end of war. The existing war did at one time threaten the security of civilisation. Another world war would wipe it out.

Re-Moulding Germany

It is common ground with the Allies that severe steps must be taken to re-mould the German outlook on life. At first glance that seems a colossal task, one that will test human ingenuity to the utmost, to say nothing of the time such an operation must take. Among our own politicians and publicists and pseudo-philosophers who delight in making play with a completely unscientific use of "Race," it would seem that the Allies have before them a task that may show indications of partial success about 100 years hence. Fortunately for everyone concerned, nature has a habit of side-tracking these semi-scientific agitators and presenting us with the "impossible" as a proficient conjuror produces a couple of live rabbits from an empty hat. But we have now placed before our own generation examples which promise us greater and earlier results. The two examples come from Russia and, curiously enough, from Germany itself. The new Russia has been in existence for about a generation. It has had to fight the opposition of our pseudo-civilised world; it had to fight enemies from within and very powerful enemies from without, and then played a great part in the world war. And it has given the Russian people a greater sense of helping the development of social life than has ever before existed in Russia. I hope that readers will not confuse here quality with changeability, although that is a test from which intelligent Russians have no need to shrink. But my endeavour here is to defend the

malleability of peoples, not the quality which that malleability discloses. That can be defended when necessary.

The other example is from Germany, to understand which we must clear our minds from the completely irrational idea that Germany, any more than Russia, Spain, Italy or England, is composed of a single, or almost single type of character; then selecting a certain group of people and by careful elimination, as a result, produce a fairly uniform type. But, as breeders and botanists know, there has to be a constant weeding out. And unless our newspapers and politicians are greater liars than we believe them to be, and far more skilful than they really are, that weeding out in Germany has continued on a large scale ever since Nazism made its appearance. We can, as Bacon long ago pointed out, obey nature in such a way that we may become nature's master. But set nature at open defiance and the end is disaster. If we had sufficient faith in the intelligence of Nazi German leaders we would credit them with an understanding of what they were doing, but they were very clumsy and could neither see far enough nor deep enough.

Man Moulding

The first problem before the Allies will be not merely disbanding the Youth formations established by the Hitler regime. Those who are in a position to speak with some authority as to the young men who have been taken prisoners of war have been struck with the sullen and ferocious glare with which they faced their conquerors. They were young men not yet out of their teens, but they had been trained from childhood to repeat daily and hourly their devotion to Hitler and to hate with a purely religious hatred all his enemies. Their gospel was that those who were not Germans were inferior people. To live and die for Hitler had become a religious gospel. If the German youth were slack in a formal worship of Jesus—a theory of British-Christian origin—they were unflinching in their loyalty to Hitler. But point by point one may parallel all the phases of the thorough-going religious fanatic. The Christian died for Jesus, the Mohamedan died for Allah, the German youth died for Hitler. The value of the capture of youth so that there may be an automatic response in a kind of unreasoning social litany is not unknown even in this country. In any case, the number of features in which the development of Hitlerism repeats the development of the Christian superstition is very striking.

In the case of patterns for the establishment of Hitlerism there was one system that stood out above all others and which runs suggestively parallel with the German plan. This was the Roman Catholic Church, of which Hitler was and is a member. The Church, as we have always insisted, is essentially Fascistic in character. It has its supreme leader in the Pope; it has its body of appointed chiefs, and a host of priests blind to everything but obedience. And

if it is said that the Pope derives his authority from God, Hitler has many times asserted that he was called by God to save the German people. And, both it will be noted, insist upon control of education, morals and religion.

It is true that in operation to-day the Roman Church does not proceed with the same calculated brutality that marks the German Pope but, clearly, this will be determined by opportunity. Essentially the Roman Church claims the right to dominate religion wherever it may be, but the conditions are not always favourable to the claim. Those who have watched the manner in which the Church places its followers, the way in which it controls political voting, when it is to its interests to do so, will recognise that step by step the Roman Church and Fascism march together. The recent declarations of Franco with regard to Spain and other peoples is another pointer that is worth bearing in mind.

In cold fact, the reader who will study Nazism with reference to its historic similarities will find nothing so useful as a study of the Christian crusades of the early centuries. I can give but one illustration of the brutality, the intense cruelty that followed the track of the "soldiers" of God. It is the ravaging of a Mohamedan centre which had fallen into the hands of soldiers who fought in the name of Jesus, soldiers who bore on their bodies the Sign of the Cross.

Ten thousand (men, women and children) were murdered. It was not only the lacerated and headless trunks which shocked the sight, but the picture of the victors themselves reeking with the blood of the slaughtered enemies. . . . All the captives whom humanity or the lassitude of carnage had at first spared, all those who had been saved in the hope of rich ransom, were slaughtered. The Saracens were forced to throw themselves from the tops of towers and houses or were burned alive; they were dragged from subterranean retreats; they were hauled to the public places and immolated on piles of the dead. Neither the tears of women, nor the cries of the little children, nor the sight of the place where Jesus Christ forgave his executioners could mollify the victors' passion."

Truly, that reads like a description of one of the raids of Hitler's hordes passing through a village belonging to the "enemy." If Hitler had read some of these records he might well feel justified in regarding himself as God's emissary.

Party Questions

Much more might be said, but I refrain in order to mention another feature that is not likely to appear anywhere outside the columns of "The Freethinker." First of all, we have noted that the Allies will be compelled to wipe out the existing "Youth" formations. They would otherwise be used to both continue Nazi ideas and to hinder youth getting more healthy ones. May we not then remind everybody concerned that we also have our Youth groups? Among these is the Scout Movement. But that, while it has a certain amount of ideas and practices which are quite harmless, has also a number of rules that run in the same way as does the principle of Nazi "Youth Movements." Religion is a prominent part of its work. And the ideas of life as given, while apparently quite harmless in words, is manoeuvred to turn out likely candidates for Conservatism,

both religious and political. We are quite sure that any boy or girl who introduced either Freethinking ideas or advanced ones on economics would be invited to join some other movement.

The second item has to do with education. Thanks to the underground arrangements between a Tory Minister of Education, a number of leading Bishops, and other representatives of the larger "Nonconformist" bodies, it was managed, at the cost of promising to give some secular advantages, to place one of the most reactionary features that has yet existed in our State schools. There is, for the future, to be taught a very definite compulsory form of religious belief. Religion will be one of the qualifying subjects, if the teacher is agreeable (and if he does not he evidently need not hope for promotion), and there is a strong agitation by influential groups to permit regular entrance of clergymen who will note whether the religion taught is suitable or not. There are other evils, but this much will suffice.

Now it will be noted that we have in this a full adoption of the spirit of Nazi education. Children up to the age of 16 will be fed with established church religious ideas; they will not merely be kept ignorant of truths concerning the origin of religion and the real part it has played in human life, but there will be established a decided predilection to believe in a form of religion that a large number, perhaps more than half the grown-ups, know to be mere folklore and primitive superstition. A greater, a more damnable method of perpetuating exploded ideas, it is impossible to picture.

So I close with a question, but not a very hard one. If the German "Youth" Movement is to be destroyed because it mis-educates, what are we to say to a Government and a collection of religious folk, the larger part of whom know that their beliefs will not withstand educated criticism? Yet both school education and youth training aim at preventing that freedom of speech and independence of opinion without which profitable social development is an impossibility.

I think that will do for some of my readers to study the problem. It is really worth attention.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CHRISTIAN BOWDLERISING

IN a recent article I pointed out how cleverly our Christian editors, publishers, or printers, or all combined, managed to "expurgate" some editions of Gibbon in the interests of religion; but I did not know then how thoroughly, in some cases, it was done. For example, in the "Freethinker" office copy of Gibbon, Warne's "Chandos" edition, claimed on the title page to be a verbatim reprint, the passage about Christians and this world is entirely omitted; and it would prove very interesting to find out how many similar passages, not friendly to Christianity, have been also carefully deleted from this "verbatim" reprint.

Expurgating and "bowdlerising," as it is sometimes called, was the direct result of the "evangelicism" of England in the early decades of the nineteenth century. A school of "reformers" appeared on the scene, whose avowed object was to bring England back to the fold, to the Christian fold, if it was at all possible, from which it had strayed during the sad and naughty eighteenth century. The enormous success of Paine's "Age of

Reason" was received badly in the Christian camp, and efforts were made to counteract his terrible influence.

Bishop Porteous, for instance, was at his wit's end to know what to do, and appealed to Mrs. Hannah More to help him. This estimable and well-meaning lady, aided by her sister Sarah, began a series of highly religious tracts called the "Cheap Repository" which appeared every month and had an enormous circulation. Her idea was not only to teach the "poor" to read—a rare acquirement in those days—but to provide them only with what she called "safe" books. "Safe" meant for her thoroughly Christian works. Anyhow, it is as well to remember that she sold in the first year two million copies—and they must have had an enormous influence. As Mr. M. J. Quinlan says in his valuable "Victorian Prelude" (Columbia University Press, 1941) the "Cheap Repository" not only counteracted the "Age of Reason" but became "a manual of conduct." And he adds, "It was no accident, of course, that the conduct recommended in the Cheap Repository would greatly accommodate the sense of security of the upper classes. Nor was it surprising, with Mrs. More as lawgiver, that the principles extolled were those associated with the religious revival."

Mrs. More's tracts are these days as dead as the proverbial doornail—but the "Age of Reason" is as alive and as engaging as it was when first written—a fact which would have surprised all those early tract writers. But of course, Paine was a genius, and Mrs. More, a bore. This is admitted by Mr. Quinlan when he says: "To-day the popularity of the 'Cheap Repository' seems baffling, for it antagonises the modern reader, with its condescending attitude toward the poor, its convenient and narrow morality, and its frequent uses of cant phrases." Personally, I should like to read the "History of Mr. Fantom" the particular tract designed to show the evil which inevitably followed reading the "Age of Reason." But I doubt if many copies have survived the past hundred years.

In such an atmosphere it is not surprising that earnest Christians thought it time to take a look at the "classics" of English and other literatures and to see that nothing derogatory to Christianity appeared if possible in them—especially as, for some unaccountable reason, no "Index" of objectional works on the lines of the Roman Catholic one had been formulated in this country. So a gentleman of the name of Bowdler, shocked and even horrified at the "loose" expressions found in Shakespeare, set to work on an edition which deprived our national poet of everything which did not suit the taste of his editor; and he also managed to insert his own compositions into the plays as a substitute for Shakespeare's. One would have thought such Christian impudence would not be tolerated, but Bowdler's "Family Shakespeare" ran through many editions. And it is certainly surprising that such a severe critic, as he often showed himself to unlucky authors, like Jeffries, should, in his "Edinburgh Review," laud Bowdler up to the skies.

This success made Bowdler take up Gibbon, whose anti-religious irony and unconcealed contempt for Christianity were very bitter pills to swallow for an age dominated by a Hannah More and a Mrs. Trimmer. So he proceeded to "bowdlerise" the great historian by cutting out the infernal fifteenth and sixteenth chapters altogether, and at the same time he "rearranged several other chapters," says Mr. Quinlan, "explaining that he wished to have the history follow a better chronological sequence. All this was done in a spirit of mixed vanity and humility. In his introduction, Bowdler said that he hoped the time would come when his edition, without its prefaces and notes, would be read as the authentic one." It requires a thorough going Christian to make such an impudent and pretentious pronouncement. Although Cardinal Newman declared that Gibbon was about the only real ecclesiastical historian England has produced Bowdler insisted that his edition should exclude all reference to the Christian Church. That

Bowdler was ever accepted seriously proves how great was the degeneration in literature and scholarship under the dominance of evangelical Christianity.

The domestic chaplain to the Duchess of Kent, Queen Victoria's mother, a Rev. J. R. Pitman, went one better even than Bowdler. He produced a "school" Shakespeare carefully excluding everything that offended his Christian susceptibilities—which, by the way, included even Bowdler's version. He considered his predecessor had not judiciously altered Shakespeare. "Few of them," (the plays) he wrote, "were sufficiently purified from coarse and profane expressions." It is a pity that Bowdler was dead then, otherwise his reply to that unctious humbug might have added to the gaiety of nations.

It should never be forgotten that side by side with all this Christian "purifying" of our great masters of literature was the vilest and most inhuman treatment of children in factories and in other kinds of work, and the most terrible misery and poverty among the poor. In their books on the social condition of the working classes in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Hammonds give the most heartrending details of what those two words, misery and poverty, really meant in practice. And all the tract writers could urge was the acceptance of Christianity so that the horror of hunger, filth, disease, and cruelty could be faced with fortitude in the knowledge that God would make it right in the other world. As Jesus put it so beautifully—"Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." Laughing in the other world was the great prize dangled before the poor by the meek and lowly Jesus.

Other times, other manners. I doubt whether those, of our "intellectuals" who still profess Christianity would care very much to propagate their faith as their forefathers did a century or so ago. The highly moral tracts which well-meaning old ladies sold by the million then would cause roars of laughter these days. The fires of Hell have been put out, and the diamond-studded pavements of Heaven no longer have that attraction which once was supposed to make such a fervent appeal to the "poor."

The passing of Heaven and Hell foreshadows the passing of Christianity. And that is "a consummation devoutly to be wish'd."

H. CUTNER.

THE "DEPRAVITY" OF YOUTH

The clergy, quite ignoring the fact that they have had greater opportunities in the past for regulating youth than ever they are likely to get in the future, are still busy in proclaiming that youthful conduct has deteriorated as a consequence of the decline of religious belief. The Vicar of Leeds, for example, says: "It is now being realised that there is a general moral landslide due to the slackening of the nations' hold on any religious faith." The evidence offered in his case is that the windows of Emmanuel Church are riddled with holes by children throwing stones. If that is the strongest proof that the Vicar can produce, and that probably will not bear examination, we do not think it will have any effect save to force people to conclude that children should be kept free from the clerical grasp. Was there ever a time when children would not throw stones? And if that is their major offence we can face it with considerable cheerfulness. Children will be mischievous, and throwing stones is a very common enjoyment with young boys, and even with girls. What is made quite clear is the poor mentality of this Vicar of Leeds. But, like the Vicar of Bray, he will not give up his job. Besides, once upon a time when the Church held full sway, tying cats' tails was not an unknown sport. So even breaking church windows, which is not a very common event, may be taken as an improvement. A boy free from mischief may have in him the making of a priest, but he is not nearly so valuable as one chockful of mischief.

ACID DROPS

WE expect a great many people have noted that ever since we invaded France the weather has been more than usually bad. Those who study the weather have said that the past couple of months have been the worst experienced for a very lengthy term. And it has told against "Us"—the Allies. Still, that will not prevent the clergy thanking God for what he has done to help the Allies. The old saying that Camels and Christians take their burdens kneeling still holds good.

The Rev. Frank A. Bullock, of Bradford, recently told the world: "I hate a fierce Christian—I would rather have a fierce savage." That leaves us wondering wherein lies the difference.

Christians used to attack Freethinkers because they were very, very bad. That was the kind of Freethinker the Christian could appreciate. He was a scarecrow useful to all the Churches—a kind of living evil. But then Freethinkers became common, and the better they were known the more they were respected. Preachers had told their unbelievers the kind of crimes they ought to commit. Good, robust Christian liars had drawn up plans by which Freethinkers should regulate their lives, and here they were behaving better than does the average Christian. From the Christian point of view the Freethinker was good so long as he was bad. He became wholly bad so soon as he was obviously good.

There is a discussion going on in Protestant circles as to whether the Apocrypha should or should not be printed with the Bible. We should like to see both the Old and New Testaments carry the Apocrypha with them. They were once accepted as genuine, and they are in fact just as genuine as the Bibles in use. A reading of them would show the absurd ideas on which the Christian religion rests. The Apocryphal Gospels were discarded for the reason that their republication would make both books less honest than they are as now presented, and would throw too strong a light on unwelcome facts.

Who says prayers are not answered? Of course, in a piffling Protestant community one must not expect prayers to be answered, though the Almighty sometimes does favour his sheep in that way. But it is quite different in God's own Church. The Rector of St. Teresa's, in Princess Risborough, prayed for £3,000—not to the Lord, by the way, but to St. Teresa—and a few days later a cheque turned up anonymously for the full amount. To this day no one knows whether God, St. Teresa, or a mere human sent it. Recently the Rector had another shot at prayer, and promptly came a cheque for £1,000. Such successes make one wonder why it is that prayers for peace so signally fail, even when they come from the Pope himself. It is suspected the Rector wishes he had asked for more.

Although the Roman Catholic Church is quite content—or has to be—with a convert here and there, in England it never ceases boasting of the number made among the "natives," that is, among the so-called "lower" black races. In England converts are increasingly harder to get because the Church is increasingly being found out. But who among the "natives" ever reads a book on the Church? Coloured people in remote African villages are most unlikely to learn anything whatever about the Church except what is told them by the priests. To win in this way thousands of "natives" for Christ is a farce, and the astute business managers in the Vatican know that quite well.

Archbishop Griffin (R.C.) believes he has thrilled the world by the fact of St. Teresa helping him in his work, and is also his great protector. We can assure the Archbishop that most people would be surprised were it otherwise. Almost since the Christian religion was heard of, these maiden lady saints have spent much of their time in the company of male worshippers; and vice-versa. Christian female saints have been consoled with apparitions of the bachelor Jesus. There is nothing really surprising in such things. Nature will out whether one believes in religion or discards it. Readers will please note that these visions of female saints do not apply to the married clergy of the Protestant

Churches. There is the same thing to be found outside the Churches. The young people are apt to give the married ones the cold shoulder in a ballroom or when sitting in the semi-darkness of a cinema. Yes, human nature in its phases does not alter much.

The latest effort of the B.B.C. was to engage a Mr. G. Hoyland to show to "Agnostics" how to bring their children back to Christianity. That serves these Agnostics right; they deserve the insult offered, and we trust they will note the opinion Christians have concerning them. But that, of course, does not justify Christians in their attempted assault on the child in question, for the method of teaching children to be Christians is to keep them as ignorant as possible until they will stand it no longer, and so find out the truth about religion for themselves. Of course, parents have duties to their children, but to hide from them the significance of the very large percentage of people who do not believe in Christianity, and who have strong grounds for their disbelief, is comparable to a crime as serious as one can commit.

One of the staff of the Bolton "Evening News" who signs himself "Wayfarer" says that people would have no difficulty in believing in a future life if they began by believing in God. We agree. If one can swallow the first absurdity there should be no difficulty in gulping down the second. It was Voltaire who said of the saint who walked thirty paces with his head under his arm, that it was the first pace that offered a difficulty.

A little time ago the Home Secretary was asked about the matter of a hall that had been let for a Spiritualist meeting. When the bills announcing the meeting appeared, the news was also given that there would be present a spirit of a dead man who would give an address. The police gave information to the Watch Committee of Altrincham, pointing out that this might warrant a prosecution under the Witchcraft Act. Many of the M.P.s approved, as did the Home Secretary, and the meeting was forbidden. But what we would like to know is the actual difference between this dead person talking to living ones and a person turning a piece of ordinary cake into the flesh and blood of some person who is alleged to have died nearly 2,000 years ago? If the talking dead person is a fraud, what is the one who performs a miracle with wine and cake? Why should fraud be a monopoly of a Church?

The B.B.C. Assistant Director of Religious Broadcasting says that to get one-third of the listeners taking an interest in the religious broadcast was as much as could be achieved. This is truly B.B.C. method of telling the "truth" where religion is concerned, for it leaves out of sight—assuming the correctness of the figures—all those who listen without the remotest chance of their believing what is said. People may listen to pass away the time, or because they do not take the trouble to switch-off, or to add to their study and understanding of imbecility in action. If one wishes for evidence of this, let him listen to the 7.55 a.m. daily insult to the British public.

We are free people! Not merely free people, but we love freedom in a way that other people do not always understand. For example, we have a great many Americans with us at the moment and they wish to play football in Blackpool on Sundays. Our noted hospitality towards foreigners forbids us preventing visitors enjoying themselves in their own way, and permission would have been given but for the Blackpool and Fylde Free Church Council, which objected to the Americans playing football unless they undertook to see that no English subjects were permitted on the ground. The Americans pointed out that they wished to return the hospitality they had experienced. In effect, the pious deputation said they didn't care a damn whether the hospitality was returned or not. It would keep people away from church, and not even the Holy Trinity could expect church-going if a football field was running in opposition. There were limits to what Father, Son and Holy Ghost might do. On which the American speaker waxed sarcastic and said he knew that England was a free country, and he had no wish to "curtail any of that hard-won freedom." But we are still a freedom-loving people—in our own way. Not even Hitler could have shown his love for freedom better.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

For "THE FREETHINKER."—A. Sells, 7s. 4d. D. Henderson, 3s.

DENIS SMITH.—Have booked you a volume for 1944; price will be about 18s., plus postage.

E. C. WILLIAMS.—The editor's "Almost an Autobiography" has been out of print for some time. It will be reprinted as soon as the paper supply permits.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

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

SUGAR PLUMS

THE journal of the "Assistant Masters Association," perhaps better known by its initials A.M.A., notes that Chapman Cohen's "Freethought and the Child," although primarily intended for Freethinkers, might well be read by a wider audience. This pamphlet and its companion, "The Church's Fight for the Child," each of 16 pages, we have no hesitation in saying should be circulated as widely as possible. The two will be sent, post free, for 5d. Their wider distribution would be certain to bring gratifying results.

From the "Letters of Llewelyn Powys," published by John Lane:—

"I think a living faith in Christianity as a divine revelation will not last more than a few centuries more. Our civilisations will absorb the best of the teachings of Jesus and relegate the theologies of the Holy See and all Protestant Churches to that large store of unverifiable fancies that have been useful to the human race during the course of its mental development.

"I think, in-so-far as Christianity has been on the side of the stability of the family, of the state, of the nation, its end will mean the end of war. There will be a revaluation of values; and as the pernicious influence of the acquisitive impulse is more and more recognised, men will seek again in the simple rewards of the senses the rewards of life. In this way they will become happier and happier, and in consequence be less easily persuaded to fly at each other's throats, from the basest motives, at the sound of the racket.

"Once more personal happiness will be universally acknowledged as the only true aim of life, and in order to enjoy life to the full there will be a "spiritual awakening" shown in deeper and more tender human relationships, in more eager intellectual apprehensions, in a more honest and free acceptance of the delights of sensual indulgence.

"We are an ephemeral race of animals with a marvellous capacity for happiness which has been conspicuously thwarted by priestly exploitations of our childish supernatural imaginings."

Mr. J. Clayton will lecture for the Leicester Secular Society, in The Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, to-day (November 19), on "The Birth of the Soul." Those who have heard Mr. Clayton speak will need no further recommendation, those who have not should make a point of being present. The Secular Hall is very comfortable, the lecture begins at 6-30, and admission is free, with questions and discussions, of course.

The "Universe" is very doleful over Poland. In a leading article the editor remarks: "We do not know whether Poland can be saved now. Humanly speaking, it appears doubtful." For a people who used to handle miracles very freely, that reads rather strangely. But it is a feature of the Roman Church never to stage a miracle when anyone with a critical mind is in sight. Speaking humanly, we read into the lament a confession that the Roman Catholic Church is likely to lose one of its strongholds in Europe. Hence the tears: The Roman Church found no fault with Fascist Poland, but Poland without the R.C. on top is a very different thing.

But if the comment leads to tears, there are on the same page opportunities for mirth. It is pointed out that the King of England has no right to the title of "Defender of the Faith." That title, says the "Universe," was given to an English King when the Roman Church ruled. So, says the "Universe," it is "inconsistent" for the present King to use it. Here is a pretty kettle of fish. God in his wisdom makes Henry the Eighth "Defender of the Faith." Straightaway Henry changes his religion but sticks to his title and gives the Roman Church in England almost a k.o. And our Kings go on repeating it. God has to grin and bear it; his representatives decline to stop using and defending the wrong with the correct formula, and all that the representative of the Pope can say is "It is inconsistent." No wonder God cannot give us good weather on the Continent.

In the same column the "Universe" goes on explaining things. It explains to an inquirer that Cain did not marry a female animal. The Bible says Adam "begat sons and daughters" and, therefore, Cain must have married his sister. But marrying one's sister is not the right thing to do. And if the real defender of the real faith came along the man who was caught marrying his sister would get into serious trouble. Why, there would be trouble if a man married his grandmother. When God looks at his current copy of the "Universe" he will probably say, "You call that backing your friend!"

One parting gem in a scintillating number. Still, in the "Universe" we find that "The God of Truth is not pleased when his creatures believe a lie." Mebbe! But in that case his worshippers must cause him an unending stream of agony. He looks like never feeling satisfied until all his followers have left earth. But God's churches are sufficiently empty already without clearing worshippers out because they tell lies.

We are kindly informed by a casual reader of "The Freethinker" that God wishes us all to be saved. Well, so be it, but in that case who is preventing us being saved? God could save us if he would, but he apparently lacks either the strength or the desire to do the saving, and we, being what we are, simply have no desire to be saved. So it looks like a deadlock, with God longing for an influx of human beings, and the said human beings acting as though they are not interested in the matter. Of the two parties in the case God stands to be the greatest loser. We who are without God are gathering followers—or shall we say "comrades"?—rapidly, and none of the growing army of the godless appears to be any the worse for it. They are born, they live, and they die. But they live as happily as others, and they die just as do others. But God is in a different category. A god to live must have followers, people who praise him, worship him, and so provide with the sustentation that gods need. Men may live without god, or gods, and by any test they are none the worse for it. But a god without *some* followers is unknown to human history.

THE GOD QUESTION

(Continued from page 419)

BEARING that in mind, one can understand how a thoughtful and intelligent man like Moses, seeking the best for his followers, would silence all arguments when introducing his Ten Commandments by declaring "God wrote them," and that's that; and although to-day democratic critical procedure insists upon projected laws being analysed and examined in the light of experience with regard to their desirability, there are still a vast number of people willing to accept directions in their affairs by the old claims of Divine Revelation.

The explanation turns upon their ultimate distrust of their own mental powers to select the probable from the improbable, and they tend to lean on to the support of "authority," who naturally guides them where it will, as already pointed out.

Why is this mental trait so pronounced? Is it not because, as they say, "it takes all sorts to make a world"? And some are developed to the maximum in one direction and some another, resulting in all the variety of abilities we see in people. Some are good at one thing, some at another. The world will run best where the outstanding abilities of each act in co-operation with the others to produce the best results, so only a small proportion will be philosophers. If I am a poor gardener, I take the guidance of Mr. Middleton or other person with repute in that line. If I am poor at driving bargains, I get an estate agent to buy my house for me. In other words, if I attempt to do something in a line of business I'm not good at I feel a strain. I am concentrated, all out, and am still nowhere near the expert, who does it easily; and so the naturally analytical thinker finds it easier than most to see into the pros and cons of the "God question." And so it is up to all those who find themselves interested in such to be aware of their responsibilities and function in society and not "hide their light under a bushel," but to try to guide society.

Let us therefore bring our minds to bear on the matter afresh and see if we can arrive at a closer approach to the truth and decide, as far as we can see, what God really is. We must be on our guard continually to avoid bias or too hasty a judgment, or to let any of our mental frailties sway our decision.

We are anxious to arrive at truth; and our evidence is so much greater now than in ancient days, with Einstein's explanation of the force of gravity, etc., the theory of a finite universe, the quantum theory, well supported, and all our knowledge of geology and its implications, and in fact the whole field of science in its widest sense at our service.

We find that there is a definite trend or urge to evolve towards some ultimate point as yet not understood, and it is probably too far ahead yet for our comprehension and is apparently much more complicated than it would seem now. This is an idea which seems to be resented by some, as we all naturally try to simplify a problem because it is easier to grasp and saves mental effort when simplified, our minds not being capable of dealing with more than two or three ideas simultaneously. The mind tends to concentrate on one only, keeping others on the edge of consciousness as it were, which tend to slip back into their place in the memory store, to be brought forward as required in turn. The association of ideas works more easily with few subjects to deal with, and the only way to comprehend a variety of things is to classify them, and if necessary reclassify the classes into a convenient order for quick mental review. This is easier when arranged so that one conception involved is only different in a limited degree from the next, mental energy being saved in recasting the new image, and so is less distracting and more efficient.

Some such procedure occurs, no doubt, in the experience of beauty in whichever sense it is experienced. Take a horizontal line curving into the vertical gently. It is easier on the eye

than a sharp corner, with its implication of conflict. It will surely be agreed that there is greater potentiality for beauty in curved figures than in angular ones.

Similarly with musical harmony, where the beat of harmonising notes produces gentle changes in direction of vibration and not sudden jars as in discords. Nervous energy is saved and a soothing result accrues, with such associations as soothing has.

Do not let this temptation to simplify, then, affect our idea of God if evidence is against it. Right! Then what is God? Assuming in the first place the existence of spirit existence, where is the dividing line between this and where God ceases to be God and material things or other "non-God" things commence? The further we examine the laws that govern psychology, or physiology, or electricity, or chemistry, or mechanics, etc., the more we find that there are no sharp divisions, but a gradual merging from one to the next. The sciences are not in watertight compartments. We can proceed in our study of the simplest mechanics up to the most complicated reactions of the human mind in easy stages, and natural laws govern them all. Is it not reasonable to conclude, therefore, that everything from the simplest material substances to the ultra-refinements of mental or "spiritual" activity are all so many facets of the same thing? It would not be stretching the point too far to say that material things can think, provided they are in the correct conditions to react in that manner; or, stated another way, that thought is a particular activity which, like all other natural reactions, occurs when certain conditions exist in a particular manner. One cannot arrive at any other conclusion, therefore, than that God is a being with many facets. The side we see as material things is one, mental activity another, and so on; and so the highest facet of God's existence is probably more subtle, more refined and more noble than we can at present conceive, and is not only Love and all other virtues, but the whole of existence, including ourselves. We are all part and parcel of the Infinite; and, of course, in that sense are all brothers and parts of God with the rest of creation, although still imperfect, as one will realise in considering free-will and prophecy. If we knew the future, free-will would be circumscribed, and the more of the future we knew the more restricted would be our freedom of choice. We conclude, then, that we humans are not designed to operate in a knowledge of the future, but to make choices based on available information and our ability to choose, which is further evidence of our being to that extent part of a Divinity which would, of course, be expected to possess such an ability.

We can therefore have only evolved part of our destiny, and should in all humility strive ever upwards, and to add to that verse of Genesis that says "Subdue the earth"—"and to evolve to a higher type of man also."

Apart, however, from that definition of God as a fact there is use of the word as an abstraction, which should not be confused with actuality, although it often is. In the sense in which we say that a man makes money his god, for example, we mean he worships the ideal of wealth to the exclusion of all else. This meaning is usually understood; but when it is said that God is Love the meaning is not so clear, although when looked into it is a parallel to the other case. A person who says he believes that God is Love is saying, in other words, that nothing else can supersede it in the direction of human affairs, presupposing that general happiness is the aim of us all. In other words, it follows from the ethical outlook of the individual in both cases, and his choice of god is that which will best bolster up his point of view. He may not be aware that he is doing this, unless he is a person careful to sort out causes and effects. A moment's thought will bring to mind instances, no doubt, where cause and effect have been quoted in reverse by people very frequently, although sometimes one meets examples where considerable doubt may exist in nature.

as, for example, whether rainfall produces the forest or vice versa, or whether slums produce the squalid mind or the reverse way round.

So may the type of mind willing to be guided in religious matters adjust its ethics to match the type of god presented to it by authority; and this type of person usually forms the bulk of the Church membership, and in uneducated or repressed communities are in the majority, and so constitute the greatest obstacle to enlightened progress. As in politics, so in religion, "absolute power corrupts absolutely," to quote, and only a fair democratic control can forestall this. So it is with the Churches. The fiction of Divine revelation must go the way of the Divine right of kings and give way to rationality; and if the existing religious organisations offer no scope for this, then a church that will must be supported by all whose ethical outlook makes them desire the better welfare of all.

A. H. PHILLIPS.

OBITUARY

F. A. W. GUBBINS.

We regret to announce the death of Mr. Frank A. W. Gubbins, of Birkdale, Southport, at the age of 65 years. Mr. Gubbins had been a member of the National Secular Society for many years, and was a regular reader of "The Freethinker." He died in his sleep after a long and painful illness.

A Secular Service was delivered on Thursday, November 9, at the Liverpool Crematorium by Mr. C. McCall, in the presence of the deceased's wife and daughter. Mr. Gubbins leaves, also, a son who is serving in the Royal Navy.

We tender our sincere sympathy to these surviving relatives.
C. McC.

FRANK RUDD.

Death has once more brought loss and sorrow to the Rudd family. Frank Rudd, aged 71, was on one of his most happy occupations, taking his infant grandson for a walk, when both were killed by enemy action. Our most sincere sympathy is with the surviving members of the family in their grievous misfortune. Frank Rudd was a convinced Freethinker, and lived in accordance with his beliefs, winning the respect of a wide circle of friends. The remains of both were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on November 9, where the General Secretary, N.S.S., read a Secular Service over those of Frank Rudd. The service over the grandson was conducted by a clergyman.

R. H. R.

CORRESPONDENCE

A PROTEST.

SIR.—I have waited to see what apology F. J. Corina would make for the libellous comments he printed about me in your issue of November 5. Then, in sending you for publication a letter which I had already printed, he used the phrase, "The spirits that inspired Mr. Barbanell's paragraphs are not well versed in the ethics of journalism."

Then followed the statement, "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 . . . because it may never see the light of day in 'Psychic News' . . ."

As Corina has now explained in your issue of November 12, his letter to me had already appeared and he had written me congratulating me on the way I had dealt with him. "I was allowed to reply without pulling any punches," he said, "and you said your say without pulling punches. That is the type of controversy I like, for it is honest . . . I had a square deal in putting my points."

I complain because no word of regret or apology appears in Corina's letter in your November 12 issue. Surely when a Freethinker, of all people, makes so glaring a blunder and libels a fellow journalist, the least he ought to have done is to have the grace to express his regret.—Yours, etc.,

MAURICE BARBANELL,
Editor, Psychic News.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held November 5, 1944

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Page, Morris, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to Bradford, Glasgow, Oxford, Blackpool Branches and the Parent Society.

Permission was given for the formation of a branch to be known as the Blackpool Branch N.S.S.

The new Yorkshire area would be represented on the Executive by Mr. W. Baldie, Secretary of the Bradford Branch N.S.S.

Lecture reports were received and future arrangements made for Glasgow, Blackburn, Birmingham and Messrs Brighton and Clayton.

The meeting was advised of a legacy of £25 from the late Mr. H. Crossfield for the purposes of the N.S.S. A suggested handbook of the N.S.S. was discussed and adopted. Mrs. Quinton and Messrs. Clifton and A. C. Rosetti were elected as the Benevolent Fund Committee. Mr. J. W. Barker, Secretary of the Kingston Branch N.S.S., was invited to occupy a seat on the Executive.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for December 10, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

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 a.m., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.—"Is a Progressive Christianity Possible?"

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Councillor CRAIG WALKER (Leeds).

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3-0 p.m., A Lecture.

Keighly Branch N.S.S. (Co-Operative Assembly Hall, Keighley).—Sunday, 3-0 p.m., Councillor JOE WALKER (Rawdon): War. Its Causes and Cure. Chairman: Councillor Hermann Shackleton.

Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Sunday, 7-0 p.m., Mr. E. V. TEMPEST (Bradford): "Religion in the U.S.S.R."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: "The Birth of the Soul."

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THE LADY WHO GOES WITH THE WIND

NOW that there is a general feeling that the end of hostilities is not so far away, and that, soon, the question of the Peace Conference for World War Two will have to be considered as an immediate question, the Papal propagandists in the United Nations are raising their voices. The low whisperings that have been circulating for some time, soft, seductive sentiments about "moral" questions, calculated to fool people into believing that the Vatican has a moral contribution to make to the rebuilding of the "new world," have grown now into lusty shouts, demanding that the Pope himself, or some Papal representative, shall have a seat at the forthcoming Peace Conference, where, no doubt, more material matters than "moral issues" will have to be considered.

Well, it may be that in a world where religion still has a stout grip on the lives of people a case could be argued for religious representation at a peace conference—but logically such representation, to be fair to all concerned, would have to embrace representatives from almost every known major religion, and from many branches of the Christian religion, and, again to be fair to all concerned, the door would have to be opened to Atheists also, attending as Atheists. There would be very little room for any statesmen at such a conference, of course, and no doubt the product of the conference would be a peace that passeth understanding.

The efforts of statesmen at peace conferences have never been distinguished by the qualities of honesty and sincerity, and the resultant periods of peace have never been singularly brilliant as a result of their deliberations and decisions; but one dreads to think how much worse a religious peace effort would be, when one considers the peaceable (!) nature of the history of religions, and especially of Christianity!

But Roman Catholic policy is nothing if it is not subtle, and, apparently realising the weakness of an appeal for Papal representation on purely religious grounds, Catholic propagandists are stressing the claim on the grounds of the democratic nature of the Vatican, its sovereign status, and its opposition to dictatorships.

This attitude has nothing to do, of course, with the fact that it now seems that the democratic nations are going to be on the winning side; nor has the sudden dislike of "dictatorships" anything to do with the fact that the U.S.S.R. will also be among the winners, and will present a few knotty problems, especially as regards Poland, brightest jewel in the Papal crown. Oh, no! The Vatican has always opposed dictatorships, and has always leaned to democracy—since it became obvious that dictatorships were a bad bet. So now we hear claims that a Papal delegate should go to the peace conference as "the accredited representative of a neutral, impartial, sovereign state." And some people swallow such gaff.

Let's have a look at this "neutral, impartial, sovereign state"; let us see what it is, and how it came into being. Let us see whether it genetically has any claim to take part in a conference, the ostensible object of which will be to make the world safe against Fascism.

The size of this "sovereign state" is 108 acres—about half the size of an average Yorkshire farm, much less useful in its economic productivity, though enormously richer in the yield that is secured from the sheep who feed on its theological pastures.

The population of the Vatican is 450—nearly half a thousand of scrupulously selected servants of the Lord (and their servants) who live in a highly modern and civilised fashion upon the material fruits of an ancient and primitive superstition. The trade of the Vatican is religion—selling an old Hebrew god, his

mother and his son, to a world market, in the same manner (but with less scruples and less value for money) that a world-wide soap-making organisation would sell its soap. You know, agents and branches in all parts of the world; our dope (sorry, soap) is unbeatable. And the church throws in a Holy Ghost and a few saints as an added attraction, just as the soapmaker throws in a few famous film stars, to make the propaganda more seductive.

And who created this famous "democratic," or "anti-Fascist," State of the Vatican? As the schoolboy would say, "That would be telling." But we cannot work on schoolboys' code of honour in these important questions. Some people would like to know, others ought to know, so we will recall a little fairly recent history. The Fascist, Mussolini, created the Vatican State in 1929. From 1870 to 1929 no States of the Church had existed. Italy had during that time been free from bondage to the Church, and had been rid of that curse of a religious state within a secular state.

How was it created? It was created by the Lateran Treaty, in which Mussolini, in return for the support of the Vatican in his Empire seeking plans and expeditions, handed back to the Church the schools of Italy, which had been free for nearly sixty years; gave the Vatican 750,000,000 lire out of the national exchequer, provided by hard-worked and underpaid Italians (including Freethinkers); and gave the Vatican the income at 5 per cent. on 1,000,000,000—a thousand million—lire State bonds, to compensate the Holy See for loss of temporal power in 1870.

Created, financially bolstered, and politically sustained by the first modern Fascist state, the Vatican played its part in the fulfilment of the Lateran Treaty by aiding and abetting in the brutal Abyssinian affair, and in the later smashing of Spanish democracy, which threatened the Fascist interests of both the Italian state and the Vatican state. It has also played no mean part in subsequent activities directly favourable to Fascism in Europe.

This, dear reader, is just some of the story of this "neutral, impartial, sovereign state," for which so much special pleading is taking place at the moment, with a view to securing for it a place at what we hope is to be a really democratic and anti-Fascist peace conference.

I know that the policy of "my country first," played so often by secular peace delegates in the past, threatens even the coming peace conference, and that we shall have to watch our points if we are to get what we want, instead of what some people want to give us. But even such a policy as that, representative as it is of at least the economic systems of whole nations, is better than a policy which puts before all else God and the Vatican 450.

Vigilance by the people can and does change the ideas of statesmen, but the Church rightly boasts that she never changes. Hence, the Lady Who Blows With Every Good Wind, yet who always stays on her course, must remain outside.

F. J. CORINA.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians. Edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Passages cited are under headings: BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS, BIBLE ATROCITIES, BIBLE IMMORALITIES, INDECIENCIES AND OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

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