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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Ways of God

TAKING things as a whole God does not appear to have gained much kudos out of the second world war. We have not had as many Days of Prayer as we had in 1914 and the lusty liars of the Churches are not quite so prominent in this war as to the religious quality of the men engaged in actual conflict. In 1914-18 we had taller tales of the eagerness of the men at the front to listen to religious talks. In this war the readiness to talk about religion is an expression of criticism, and that is not at all welcome to the representatives of "He who sitteth on the throne." In 1914-18 we had, among other things, the miracle of the Angels of Mons. Our men were on the retreat, and it looked as though the choice before them was surrender or annihilation. Then someone saw in the sky a number of angels who, with drawn swords, stood between our men and the Germans, and a retreat was successfully made. A very large number of clergymen, belonging to all different sections of Christianity, did their hardest to establish this miracle as an actuality. The Bishop of London and numerous other well-known ecclesiastics swore to the reality of the angels, and some soldiers were found and placed before the public as reliable witness. Lying for the greater glory of God never had a better exhibition.

The story was originally placed before the public by a well-known writer, Mr. Arthur Machen. He wrote it, as he explained, as a rehash of an ancient Roman legend of the gods interposing between the Roman soldiers and their enemies. The story appeared in the "Evening News" of September 29th, 1914. All Mr. Machen did was to place British soldiers in the place of Romans, and to alter the place and time where the angels operated. He had not the slightest intention of putting the incident as solid fact. But the "Hounds of God" smelt some profitable copy. They began by reproducing the story in church magazines, which are read usually by old ladies of both sexes. Then Mr. Machen was asked by a clergyman to permit it being reprinted in pamphlet form, and would he write a short preface "giving the exact authorities for the story." Mr. Machen replied that they could reprint it, but the tale was "pure invention." Back came the reply that the story "must be true," and the pious folk of the High Church, Low Church and no Church set to work to supply alleged facts to the godly. The angels were led by Saint George, and one story ran that some dead Germans had been found on the battlefield with arrow wounds in their bodies. (St. George, it will be remembered is our patron saint, but even the clergy could not fit him out with a modern gun; so they had to stick to bows and arrows.) In addition to the story appearing in the Church papers, "Truth," "Town Topics,"

"The New Church Weekly" and "John Bull" (owned by the saintly Bottomley) ramped in, and putting aside common-place friends of God, the Bishop of London, Bishop Taylor Smith (Chaplain to the Forces) Rev. Dr. Horton (a leading Nonconformist), Sir Joseph Rickett (President of the National Federation of Free Church Council) with a large number of others were ready to swear to the Angels of Mons. Ultimately the story broke down, but it had done its work, for the religious mind is not to be frustrated in its search for the work of God, and a strong stand was made. The residue of the silly story remained, and a study of it may help one better to understand Christian origins than any number of elaborate disquisitions as to whether Jesus was or not an historical character. The legend of the "Bowmen," or similar miracles, will be perpetuated in its essence in all our schools if the promoters of the religious section of the new Education Act get into full play.

So far God has not played so prominent a part in this world war, as he did in 1914. We started off well enough. We were a Christian country fighting for the preservation of Christianity, but that did not last long. Then we set off with the usual days of prayer, but disasters followed rather than success, and the cry of "trust in God" gave place to "more guns, more planes, more ships," etc., and when "Atheistic Russia" was welcomed as an ally the religious aspect began to decline. The special days of prayer broke down, for in nearly every case some kind of disaster followed. Then a day and night prayer was tried. No results. Finally someone hit on a device that could not be easily disproved. There was established a continuous praying, day and night, until the war comes to an end. Then who could prove that God did not help us to win the war?

Ever since we invaded the Continent it looks as though God was doing as much as he reasonably could to help the Germans. Heavy and unexpected rough weather nearly ruined the tremendous work done in building landing places on the Normandy coast. After the troops had landed there was continued bad weather which prevented our airmen doing all they might have done, and the roads were clogged with mud that prevented a quick following up of the retreating Germans. It looked as though God was helping the Germans at least as much as he was helping us. But we suppose we ought not to complain of this. After all, we are, if the Christian scheme be true, all his children, and parental affection will tell.

But the most striking exhibition of the quality of Christian ethics that we have met for some time is furnished in connection with the terrible bomb explosion near Burton-on-Trent. In point of numbers the loss of life was not great when measured with the slaughter that has gone on since the war began, and in any case, arithmetical calculations can neither increase nor decrease the quality of an act. The

sorrow of a mother who watches the agony of her child dying from some loathsome disease is neither increased nor lessened by the number of other mothers who may be suffering in the same circumstances. Suffering must always be individual. Religion cannot alter the fact, although in given circumstances it may dull the feeling of agony. This may also be done by whisky or some other form of intoxication. More than one may combine to produce pain in others, but suffering itself must always be counted in units.

Thank God

The Bishop of Burtou-on-Trent is the Right Reverend E. S. Wood, and he arranged for a joint "Memorial and Thanksgiving Service" in connection with the explosion. He could hardly have made the situation more ridiculously repulsive if he had arranged for a song and dance in the middle of the ceremony. I am not, of course, assuming for a moment that Bishop Wood is hard by nature, or careless of the feelings of other people. For aught I know to the contrary he may be naturally kind and thoughtful when dealing with suffering. But he is a Christian, well loaded with foolish ideas, and in addition he is a Bishop sworn to uphold an impossible creed, and we have the Bible authority for saying that a man cannot touch pitch without being defiled. A foolish creed must lead to foolish things, and they who uphold such a creed cannot avoid talking foolishly. Either that, or he must save his intelligence at the cost of indicting his character. Let him consider that if any human being who had been left in charge of this mass of explosives and had deliberately permitted it, he would have been indicted as an accessory to the fact. But the writs of man do not reach to heaven. Can any one who believes in the Christian doctrine honestly release God from a share in this explosion? To have held a service of mourning would have been justifiable so long as the goodness of God was not stressed, but to have with it a *Thanksgiving Service* to God for saving a few is surely to act as foolishly as is possible. It would have been more to the point, more in harmony with normal nature, if there had been an indictment of God rather than for those who were left alive to thank God for his partiality.

But let us be just, even to a Bishop. What Bishop Wood did was bad enough and sad enough, but it is only what his brother godites are constantly saying and doing. The bishop was acting only as a devout people constantly act: There is the common case of a man who misses a train, the train is smashed and many killed. Straightway the saved one glorifies God for saving him and neglecting the others. Some praise God for inducing them to refrain from an intended sea voyage, because the ship sank and many were drowned. There are thousands of what are called private prayers going up—or down—to God for scattering favours on some that are withheld from others. And there is the plain teaching that whatever affliction we have comes from God as a warning or a punishment.

So it is not the kindness of Bishop Wood I am impeaching. I know nothing of his private life or of his character, and have no desire to know. If he is a bad man he and his professed religion will be very well matched. If he is a good man the greater the pity that his religion should distort his natural goodness.

I am rather concerned with the belief in a God who could, if he would, have prevented that explosion, and to whom the congregation of Bishop Wood—those who are left—were praising God for saving *them*. There are plenty of circumstances where it is nobler to die than to continue living.

CHAPMAN COHEN

WHAT IS MR. SHAW'S RELIGION?

("What is my Religious Faith?" By Bernard Shaw, being the first article in 'The Rationalist Annual' for 1945. C. & A. Watts & Co., Ltd., London.)

HUMAN beings, being all more or less mentally dishonest and cowardly, find it extraordinarily difficult to define their religious faith. Most of them prefer to tie a tag on themselves, such as the Catholic or Protestant labels, and hope that by the kindness of the guard they will, like a piece of luggage, reach their heavenly destination safely. But these luggage-labels are a mere disguise, for the Catholicism of Hitler is not the Catholicism of Jacques Maritain, to take one modern example.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, being more truthful and less frightened of gods and men than most of us, ought to be more successful in explaining his own religion than most of mankind. He is not, I regret to say. He, too, ties a tag on himself—the tag of Creative Evolutionist, and tells us that he formerly carried the tag Atheist. This tells us too little—the fact being that, like most people, Mr. Shaw does not know his own religion when he sees it, and badly needs to have it explained to him.

For instance, it is really shocking to find him stating that he can only believe two tenets of the Anglo-Irish Church (the Communion of Saints and the Life Everlasting). He does himself a gross injustice. Anyone who knows him better than he knows himself (and most of his attentive readers do, since no artist-philosopher can fail to reveal himself as he is, for human truth, like murder, will "out") can tell Mr. Shaw that Mr. Shaw believes in God, the First Person, as well as in the Holy Ghost, and that he partly believes in Jesus Christ, though probably as a man and not a god. To be a Creative Evolutionist you must believe in a God the Father; and what does it matter if you call him the Creative Spirit in ourselves, the Life Force, the Elan Vital, or what you will? And if Shaw, like the rest of us, finds it impossible to love our neighbour and, unlike most of us, will not hypocritically pretend to, and though he rejects the Atonement with contempt and loathing, he does accept Christ's Communism and the Christ-doctrines of mercy and peace as against the diabolic doctrines of judgment and war. Also, he believes in the Holy Spirit most earnestly. For him God is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth for that is how Shaw worships his god instead of in the conventional way of ritual-observance, fancied propitiation, flattery, and the like.

As to Shaw saying that he does not believe in the 39 Articles, I never met an English clergyman who did believe in every word of every one of them, they being what they are. But Shaw must not mislead himself and his newer readers: he certainly believes in part of the first Article, that part which postulates a God "without body parts or passion."

Mr. Shaw is right in not calling himself an Atheist to-day, for he is only an Atheist in the sense in which Buddhists are Atheists. For he will accept the text: "There is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty (he might boggle at this name as incorrect and prefer "Striver" or "The Most High," or some such name) giveth them understanding."

He is right, too, in rejecting descriptions like "Rationalist" and "Materialist" for himself. For such descriptions are used

to deny the mystery behind matter and reason, and Shaw admits and indeed affirms, the mystery. Human reason is futile indeed before the fundamental questions of the purpose and meaning of life. The phrase "Creative Evolutionist" certainly describes with sufficient clarity and accuracy Shaw's belief in the purpose of life, but does it explain its meaning?

Creative Evolution is really a statement of what the universe has been, is being, and will be, but it is not an explanation of it, and surely religion involves an explanation. What is creative evolution for? Can our Methuselah say no more than: "It is enough that there is a beyond"—thought reaching no further than a whirlpool in pure intelligence? It may be that Shakespeare's word is truer: "The rest is silence."

Though we should live by our "religion" rather than "by bread alone," few of us can or do. We generally live by something bigger, better, and more real: our sub-conscious selves. This, and not the religion-we-profess, is our religion. The real religion of Mr. Shaw is not creative evolution, but his artistry-philosophy, his lifelong action of self-sacrifice upon his chosen cross of literature, his honour and public spirit and sterling courage, his international patriotism, his love of truth, justice and kindness, his hatred of their opposites, superstitions, scientific, religious or political, injustice, cruelty and violence, especially in its forms of war and "scientific experiment." It is this religion if his, or, as conventional people would say, this irreligion of his, which makes him, as men go, a very great man, whether you judge him by the standard of our dead or our living.

Incidentally, in this article, he tells again that he was a runner-up candidate for the Presidency of the National Secular Society at one time, and makes a highly-picturesque tale of it. But having read Mr. Chapman Cohen's answer to this, I think Mr. Shaw should admit that the facts are against his theory. He is right, however, in saying that free thought has its "fundamentalists" really believing in bond-thought, as well as any Salvation Army. And what a tribute (as always) he pays to Bradlaugh! I, however, refuse to believe, unlike Mr. Shaw, aged 88, that Mr. Shaw aged-much-less could not have talked or written Bradlaugh into silence! But I have never heard or seen Bradlaugh, and so I may be wrong about that "heroic and almost supernatural platform personality" as Mr. Shaw calls him. To me and my generation Bradlaugh seems mediocre except for his courage in refusing the oath, and in maintaining his militant Atheism. But he must have been a great man indeed to have impressed Bernard Shaw, who is not easily impressed.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

ADVERTISING THE CHURCH

II.

IF the Roman Catholic hierarchy are just a little dubious about the way in which "The Song of Bernadette" manages to "sell" the Church to the general public, they have no doubt whatever about Bing Crosby's "Going My Way." The "apparition" of the Virgin Mary, in the Lourdes film, which the audience sees on the screen and which was, of course, just a made-up imitation of the kind of cheap lithograph that the Church still sells to the French peasantry, might have passed in 1858; but we are living in a little more sophisticated age, and it is not easy to get a modern Catholic in England to swallow Bernadette's vision quite as easily as a French farm labourer. I sometimes wonder whether our Catholic "intellectuals," men like Belloc or the editor of the "Catholic Herald," really believe that Bernadette saw Mary in the grotto at Lourdes—I mean a living Mary straight from "heaven."

This kind of difficulty has no place in the Crosby film. There the Church is meant to be one huge delight. Theological diffi-

culties, like the Immaculate Conception, or the reality of miracles, are simply not touched. One's credulity is not strained in the least, and there is not the slightest reason for indulging in any hard thinking or speculating. Just as among those ardent-imitators of Roman Catholicism, the Nazis, any thinking on the part of laymen is strongly deprecated, and indeed in some things absolutely forbidden. The Catholic hierarchy, like the Nazi hierarchy, is ready to do all the thinking necessary for the continuation of its cult.

I am bound to admit that I enjoyed "Going My Way" as genuine entertainment. Whether one likes Bing Crosby or not, the fact remains that he is a huge success, both as a film actor and as a singer. I expect the sales of records of his songs must run into hundreds of thousands, and his name and fame is familiar all over the civilised world. As a young priest in this film, he plays just the kind of part which wrings the utmost sympathy from the audience. A Catholic himself, he obviously enjoyed his role, though in real life I should imagine he would think twice before giving up the world, the flesh, and the devil, for the spiritual consolations of unmitigated celibacy.

The direction of "Going My Way" was obviously under the utmost censorship, for the very greatest care is taken not to introduce anything savouring of religious difficulties. With one exception, all the people introduced are—however slack they may be in fulfilling all their religious obligations—thorough believers in Romanism. As far as I remember no Protestants come into the picture and nobody even hints that there are such people as unbelievers, or that such a movement as Free-thought exists. You are introduced to a world of believers all imbued with the sacredness of the Church, and the greatest care is taken to let you see that priests, though undoubtedly God's representatives on earth, yet are not little gods, but ordinary men who love to play with the boys, sit and smoke, go to the theatre, and have—and enjoy—a glass of whisky when necessary for human happiness. Protestant Puritanism is scorned.

The one exception is an Atheist—you can describe him as a "nasty" man, not a criminal, not a wife-beater, or a child-torturer, as perhaps a Protestant director of the film would have made him, but just a kind of unthinking brute. He had his windows broken by the boys who were playing a ball game with Bing (in his clerical collar) helping, and he got very angry because, like presumably all Catholic priests working among the people, Bing could not pay for the damage right away. The subtle suggestion is that priests are always helping the unfortunate in their flock, and so never have any money. Only an Atheist could be angry when his windows are broken and naturally he was forced to refuse the sympathy of a Catholic priest.

Bing Crosby is presented as a real athlete as he was at college, for religion and the priesthood must never be shown to prevent a man from indulging in games or even in excelling in them. The faith never stands in his way in attempting all things human provided they are "pure," and the film shows us Bing as a young priest played with consummate artfulness and with an eye on the audience to present a picture of God's own religion if possible without a flaw in it.

The effect is much heightened in the contrast between the old priest whose heart is always with his flock, and Bing, the young one, destined to supplant him; but religion has made Bing so tender-hearted that he simply cannot tell this to the old man, and it is only towards the close of the fable that he learns the truth. And all the time you are shown priests indulging in all the good things man likes on earth, just like a layman, with no confessional box, or counting of beads, or penances, or sudden miraculous cures, or apparitions of saints or deities.

As I have said, everything is helped by Bing's portrayal, so kind, so thoughtful, so generous, and good-hearted and sym-

pathetic. What more, indeed what else could a religion emanating from God himself do for mankind?

"Going My Way" is a fine lesson in advertising. Twice I have attended meetings held by the Publicity Club of London to discuss the best way of advertising the Church, but the Bing Crosby film proves that the old Church of Rome need not bother with advertising agents or consultants, or the bright young men from the Universities who want to prove that they and their ideas can rejuvenate the world of advertising. In vulgar speech Rome has them all taped.

Yet there is one consolation. One of the slogans insisted upon by the Publicity Club of London is "Truth in Advertising," and I am sure its members do their best to carry out that eminent and practical message. What, if they are asked to initiate a campaign for advertising the Church, are they going to do with their slogan? How are they going to prove that the "goods" are true—in substance and fact?

With the omission of everything theological in "Going My Way," and with the emphasis entirely on ethics and conduct, it was not, after all, the Catholic religion that was advertised—though that was the intention of the producer, and that is the impression which it was hoped the audience would get. This was Roman Catholicism, this was the real thing. But that a man should be kind and considerate, a sport, is just not religion; or, if you like, any religion could produce him, or even no religion at all.

And the upshot of all this is that you simply cannot advertise religion as such. You cannot put on the screen Gods, Angels, Devils and Miracles, and all the mythological nonsense which surrounds a faith like Christianity, and expect that people will be converted. "Going My Way" does not really advertise religion at all, but only that very small part of it, a decent man who happens to be a priest. And that is simply not Romanism or Protestantism or Judaism. It is, in fact, pretty near to Secularism.

The whole propagandist might of the B.B.C., as well as that of the screen, can never put religion back to its one time power. Like Humpty Dumpty, it can never be put together again.

H. CUTNER.

COBBLING CHRISTIANITY

THE destructive actions of science on religion is nowise more plainly shown than in the attempts that have been made to reconstruct the crazy edifice of Christian superstition in line with scientific requirements.

Books have been written by leaders of religious thought, some of them highly placed dignitaries, in which many of the fundamental beliefs of historic Christianity are pronounced to be no longer tenable. We are told that in face of the piled-up proof to the contrary the Bible cannot now be regarded as divinely inspired, and that such doctrines as have no other warrant for their truth than that assumption may be discredited.

In his book—"Should such a Faith Offend?" published some years ago, Doctor Barnes, Bishop of Birmingham, says: "If we discover that old Christian beliefs which did not come from Christ are erroneous, let us not be troubled . . . views of ancient Jews or apostles we can abandon when we discover they were wrong . . . Christianity does not consist in the scientific value of Genesis."

Then we have W. R. Inge, late Dean of St. Paul's, whose expressed views on some of the traditional beliefs of Christianity have shocked many unscientific Christians. He tells us that the Copernican cosmology and the theory of evolutions have made such doctrines as the Fall, the Atonement, the bodily resurrection of the "Crucified" and a localised heaven and hell impossible of acceptance. He admits that the messianic

hope of the apostles and early Christians was a delusion which Jesus himself probably shared. He discards scripture inspiration in favour of the "inner light," and styles himself a Christian Platonist.

The rise of Fundamentalism has had a disturbing effect on the American churches which represent it appears nearly two hundred different kinds of Christianity; and the question how far the facts of science may be allowed to supercede the fictions of faith has exercised the ingenuity of the pundits "over there." Prominent among those who have handled the subject is the Rev. N. E. Fosdick who, in a series of essays entitled "Adventurous Religion," has done his best to persuade the benighted Biblist that there is no necessary connection between scientifically exploded beliefs and "real religion." What he means by real religion would be hard to say. He may have some idea himself, but he has failed to get it into his book. If he means religion without such beliefs he is imagining the impossible—it would be no religion at all.

Such clerical impugners of Holy Writ are the vocal few; the majority of their professional brethren think the same, but are discreetly silent about it. Notwithstanding their scientific convictions they profess a hundred per cent. Christianity. As ex-Dean Inge puts it: "There is not the slightest tendency among those who think as I do to question the divine authority of Jesus Christ or to build on any other foundation than that which was laid in the Gospels and Epistles." But it is first of all necessary to ascertain on what occasions Jesus Christ exercised his divine authority, and how much of the foundations laid in the Gospels is safe for building purposes. In settling these points they use a freedom of rejection that pays little respect to the inspired character of these productions. The legendary accretions that have clustered about the figure of Jesus must be cleared away. He can no longer be regarded as the vicarious victim of "divine justice"—that idea is repugnant to our modern sense of what is just and proper. His virgin birth, his miracles, his messiahship, his apocalyptic pronouncements must be interpreted in the light of deeper knowledge.

The bewildered believer is told that such "episodes" are not to be taken as literal facts, but as "the innocent interpolations of enthusiasts, the utterances of faith and love set free from the restraints of historical reality—metaphors, allegories and symbols of ideas, not records of events." In short, Jesus must be delivered from the misconceptions which an age, credulous and ignorant, had formed of him, and a new role found for him scientifically unexceptionable and critic-proof.

Now the unscientific Christian or Fundamentalist regards this hacking and twisting of the Bible as simply undermining the foundations of his religion. He contends that the interdependence of the inspired records is such that to question the truth of any part is to destroy the credibility of the whole, and that those who are guilty of it have no right to call themselves Christians. As he represents the belief of the Gospel writers, the Fathers of the Church and the great body of Christians throughout the ages, his case is a strong one.

To an attentive reader of the New Testament it must appear that so far from being in themselves "the foundation of belief" the Gospels and Epistles divorced from their Jewish origins are a baseless fabric without either divine warrant or historic sequence—as the saying is, they don't make sense. The nature of the connection between the two is evident, for, besides that Christianity is historically an offshoot from Judaism, the events recorded in the Gospels have always been accepted by Christians as the consummation of a divine scheme of salvation prophetically shadowed forth in the earlier narrative. Moreover, in order to establish this connection and give authenticity to the character and claims of Jesus, the Gospel writers were careful to indicate every occasion on which, in their view, such prophecies were fulfilled in his person.

"The whole biography of Christ from birth to death, the scene of his labours, the scope of his power, the method of his teaching, the reception of his message, the hour of welcome and the day of doom, was written beforehand in the scriptures for those who held the key to these mysteries."* But these modern innovators on the Faith, conscious of the extreme vulnerability of the Old Testament to scientific attack, have done their utmost to lessen the doctrinal dependency of the offspring on its parent. To save him from the discredit attached to this collection of tribal myths the person of Jesus is isolated from his Jewish antecedents, and he is presented minus the equivocal character with which scripture prophecy, interpreted by Christian credulity, had invested him. They ignore the fact that the validity of his claims depends entirely on old scripture attestation, and that without it he is a god without credentials—a divine nondescript.

Let us take Genesis, for instance. This is the book the scientific value of which has, it is pretended, no bearing on Christianity. But it is only here that the existence and first acts of the God in whom Christians believe are recorded. There is no other source of knowledge on these points extant. If, as those Bible-exceptors believe, the Creation described in Genesis is merely a myth, then the Creator must be placed in the same category, for his existence is part of the fiction and has no better evidence to support it. But the god that is herein represented as creating the world in six days, and drowning it in forty is, awkwardly enough, the Jehovah of the Bible, the God of Abraham, the God of the Law and the Prophets and, according to Christian theology, the heavenly Father of Jesus Christ. There is no hitch or breach in the lineal connection.

The question arises. At what particular epoch did he emerge from the mythic state into divine reality, and become the god they write and preach about—the incarnate Christ? The transition must have occurred at some time in scripture history. but when? According to the story, Jesus himself had no doubt of his identity with the god of Genesis. We have his own testimony to prove it: "Before Abraham was I am." (John viii, 58). "And he said unto them. These are the words which I spoke unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning me." (Luke, xxiv, 44).

Thus, in virtue of his own declaration, Jesus is the same god who destroyed a world of his creatures for being no better than he made them, the god whose jealous wrath could be appeased only by bloody sacrifices, the tribal god who sent the plagues on the Egyptians and who condemned to wholesale slaughter and slavery the enemies of his chosen people—in short the god who did all the things they object to.

How do these gentlemen reconcile their belief in the one with their disbelief in the other? If the being to whom these acts are ascribed is only an allegorical figure, a myth, a nonentity, from whom do they derive their "blessed Lord and Master?"

The attempt to remodel Christianity on scientific principles is a failure for the simple reason that no amount of manipulation can harmonise fact and fiction. One cannot but wonder that the attempt could be made by persons professing any critical ability or intellectual honesty. The doctrines they dismiss as historically or scientifically exploded are the essential elements of the Christian system without which it has neither coherence nor congruity.

As the case stands with Christianity there is no decent straightforward course between accepting it wholly, without reservation and rejecting it lock, stock and barrel.

A. YATES.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF T. S. ELIOT

IN the past I have written several articles in these columns, dealing with the work of Mr. T. S. Eliot. For the most part these have praised his acute ear and his general poetical brilliance, while being critical of his High Church Royalism. It so happens that I have recently had the opportunity of studying certain of Mr. Eliot's prose works, and these seem to me to make so pointed a criticism of the direction of Anglo-Catholic thought that I feel disposed to inflict some random jottings about them on my readers, even at the risk of being accused of labouring the matter unduly.

Mr. Eliot is so obviously interested in theology purely as a system of detached dogma that it is a mistake to consider his Anglo-Catholicism in any way a rational affair. It is not the product of consecutive thought; it is merely a succession of unreasoned prejudices. Witness this, taken from his "After Strange Gods":—

"The acrimony which accompanies much debate is a symptom of differences so large that there is nothing to argue about . . . In a society like ours, worm-eaten with liberalism, the only thing possible for a person with strong convictions is to state a point of view and leave it at that."

Do not argue; do not debate. Just state your point of view and hope you will be able to bludgeon at any rate some of your opponents into a calm acquiescence with you. Could anything be closer to the Fascist and Nazi attitude? Admittedly, Mr. Eliot's interest is supposedly political, but no Freethinker should need to be told that the dividing line between religion and politics is exceedingly difficult to draw with any satisfaction.

Again, regard this passage, which appears to me to be even more damaging than which I have already quoted:—

"While they (ordinary folk) should have some perception of how far their lives fall short of Christian ideals, their religious and social life should form for them a natural whole, so that the difficulty of behaving as Christians should not impose an intolerable strain."

The conscious superiority of this, taken from a book planned to advocate a so-called "national Christian society, religious-social community," should be obvious enough. But what so many people are apt to overlook is that, consciously or unconsciously, the whole attitude inculcated by Mr. Eliot and our High-Church mandarins is a very near approximation to that of Fascism. It is not for nothing the Anglo-Catholics and Roman Catholics admire the bloody tyranny of Franco in Spain and the equally vicious though not so openly brutal regime of Christian Fascist Portugal. There is a definite relationship between aggressive Christianity and Fascism. The Pope, until the defeat of the reactionary forces in this war became clear, did everything in his power to oppose democracy and support tyranny. High Churchmen everywhere have similar sympathies. I am not for a moment suggesting that Mr. Eliot would have supported the serio-comic activities of Mosley; but I do in all seriousness suggest that the political and religious philosophy which he supports would, if it were all-powerful, lead to a state of society which would be in practically every respect indistinguishable from the Fascist State.

Only by realising these facts can we hope to be masters of our world, and only by fighting, with all our power, against the triumph of medieval reaction can we preserve such liberties of thought and action as still are ours.

S. H.

SPACE WANTED

A Salvation Army "General," speaking in Liverpool, said he was astonished to observe the large numbers of Bibles that were among the salvage collected for the troops. We take the fact as some evidence that very often space is of some value.

* "The First Three Gospels" by J. Estlin Carpenter, M.A.

ACID DROPS

THERE is trouble between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland. The Catholics say that in Ulster their people are shut out of offices they would occupy if they were not living in a country where Protestants rule. The Ulster authorities deny it and wish to show the intolerance of Southern Ireland where the Roman Catholics are in power.

It is a pretty quarrel and we believe that both of them are right when they charge each other with intolerance, and both are telling lies when they say they give their opponents in religion fair play. There may not be actual legal laws existing, but that does not prevent both parties putting their religious intolerance to work. We are quite certain that in Ulster there will be strong opposition against Catholics and no one would doubt for a moment that in Catholic Ireland there will be an even stronger display of bigotry against Protestants. And letters received from both North and South give many cases of religious intolerance. There never has been complete liberty of speech where Christianity is in power.

Everyone will have noted the strong desire of the papacy to show that it was on the side of "Democracy" ever since the downfall of Fascist Germany became certain. Thus in a leading article the "Universe" declares that Fascist ideas have been condemned by Popes in language that cannot be mistaken. We know that many declarations have been made, but how can the papacy denounce Fascism when point by point the whole of Roman Catholicism is an exhibition of Fascism? And in the same issue, the "Universe" denounces Mr. Michael Foot for paying tribute to the ideas of Paine. One wonders what chance of fair play in the Press and in public life in Catholic Ireland would be measured out to Mr. Foot. But the main aim of the Catholic Press is not to state the truth, but merely to maintain a hold on its dupes.

But we should approach the "Universe" and the Catholic Church with the greatest care, for its knowledge is fearful to study and terrible to question. Thus, in the same issue from which we have quoted, it is explained that real signs and wonders cannot be performed by unbelievers in the true God. Thus it points out that while the Egyptian magicians could repeat "most of the ten plagues they could not imitate them all." That must have been the plague of lice. They knew that came from God.

The "Evening News" reports that Mid-Essex factory workers are finding religious tracts in their wage-packets. It seems that local Christian organisations have asked factory managers to insert them. Some have refused, others have given in to a piece of downright impertinence. But we wonder what would be said if a Freethought pamphlet was wrapped up with a man's wages?

The "Birmingham Mail" informs its readers of the different religious oaths that may be taken in a court of law. It omits to inform its readers that the religious oath may be abolished altogether. It takes a Christian to feel that his word cannot be trusted unless there is some sort of a miracle worked.

We have often been asked what is the wealth of the Church of England. Candidly, we do not know, nor is anyone able to get nearer than a rough estimate. We know there is upwards of ten millions, annually, from what is called "Queen Anne's Bounty." As a matter of fact that sum comes from the secular State. It has a very, very much larger income from property and land, and in addition to these and other direct subsidies there is the fact that the Church pays no taxes of any kind, which must run into another five or six millions. Altogether we could say that, next to the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England is the richest Church in the world. The Church of England Year Book discloses only a part of the income of the Church.

We are not given to conundrums, but here is one offered to a Spiritualist paper, probably to provide a guessing game for Christmas: "How can a man hope to prepare himself for a future life unless he has some idea of its nature?" We were almost inclined to give it up, as it sounded to us just another version of "What will happen if an irresistible force comes into contact with an immovable object." As it is, we offer the suggestion that if the next world is of the same quality as this there is no need to bother about the question. And if the next world is not like this, we can do nothing better than attend to the world we are living in. Everything else is just waste of time. Spiritualism when analysed is just about as ridiculous, and just as unreasonable as the Christian theory of an after life. But then it is quite common for people to give up the absurdities of the Church of England in order to adopt those of another form of human stupidity.

Now that the B.B.C. are at last allowing an uncensored discussion to take place over the air, it is very interesting to notice what use the disputants are making of their opportunities. For example, a Catholic speaker, Miss Barbara Ward, on the question of how we should re-educate the Germans, after the war, claimed it would all be useless unless religion was made the basis of everything attempted—her own religion was naturally what she had in mind. A speaker on the other side thereupon let himself go, and pointed out that the Roman Catholic religion was a religion of force, that its object always had been to force religion on to people by violence, if necessary, and that it would do so now, only this was not allowed by the Powers. And all that Miss Ward could reply was to mutter an incoherent "I don't agree with you."

This response did not make clear whether Miss Ward did not agree that Romanism was a religion of force, or whether she did not agree that the power to force religion on people was now taken away from it; but it was good to see that at least one disputant on the air was not afraid to say just what he thought of Popery, without an eye either on the censors, on the B.B.C. or the censors on the Roman Catholic Press. Roman Catholic listeners will no doubt inundate the B.B.C. with squeals of dismay, but millions of listeners will have heard at last a true estimate of a religion which has always been essentially Fascist in its methods.

One of our newspaper preachers, the Rev. W. H. Elliott, has arrived at the conclusion that "the Church must be dead honest" about its doctrines. That is rather hard, for a Church that is quite honest about its doctrines would soon be so dead that its doctrines would not matter.

Another gem from the same quarter. "Obviously a man goes to Church to worship." That is not so certain. He may go because he is a shopkeeper and thinks attendance pays. Or he may be putting up for a local election, or because his wife wishes him to go, or because somebody else's wife entices him; or because it is very noisy at home and he can be sure of having a comfortable nap while the sermon is being preached. There are scores of reasons why a man goes to Church. In fact, it may be that he has no better way of spending his time—poor devil?

The (Scottish) Committee of the "Non-Gaelic Free Church" (part of the Free Church of Scotland), reports that for the past ten years "there has been a steady decline in the number of people attending Church." It is surely a much longer period than that. Probably what the minister means is that it was thought better not to mention it. Now the situation is getting so desperate that the truth must out—even in a church.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland also announces that there are fewer volunteers joining the Services to serve as chaplains. So it is not merely the laymen who are forsaking the Church, but the "shepherd" is beginning to tell the "sheep" they can all go to hell in their own way and have done with it.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. HANSON.—We may consider later a weekly column such as you suggest, but for the present you must remember the limited space we have. We plead guilty on the other count, but we have so much that we must do week after week, that we take every advantage of just lying back and reading for the mere pleasure of doing so. That does not, of course, take away the pleasure we get from old friends.

J. JOHNSON.—We hope we have deserved a little of your high opinion of the "Freethinker."

W. BARRETT.—Hope you will continue your appreciation—in spite of advancing years.—As we are both in the seventy-sixes we may march together.

W. C. BROTHERTON.—You may rely upon the Government discovering that there is a national need for rebuilding churches before the demand for houses is met. And the clergy are quite aware, not merely that some people are foolish enough to give rebuilding churches priority, but that if people once cease to attend Church they are not very likely to resume the practice.

FOR "THE FREETHINKER."—J. JOHNSON, 2s. 6d.; H. BURY, 15s.

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.

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SUGAR PLUMS

THERE have been many discussions as to the relationship between cleanliness and godliness, and the one certain thing that emerges is the decline of the first as the latter became more dominant. Lecky and other historians have given many pages describing the decline of cleanliness under the rule of the Church. Here is a description which enables those who are not able to form an opinion on the matter given in that excellent work, "Rats, Lice and History," by Dr. Hans Zinsser (1934). It paints a picture of Thomas a Becket immediately after his being killed in Canterbury Cathedral:—

"The Archbishop was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral on the evening of the twenty-ninth of December. The body lay in the Cathedral all night, and was prepared for burial on the following day. The Archbishop was dressed in an extraordinary collection of clothes. He had on a large brown mantle, under it a white surplice, below that a lamb's-wool coat, then another woollen coat, and a third woollen coat below this; under this there was the black cowled robe of the Benedictine Order, under this a shirt, and next to the body a curious hair cloth covered with linen. As the body grew cold, the vermin that were living in this multiple covering started to crawl out. The virmin boiled over like water in a simmering cauldron, and the onlookers burst into alternate weeping and laughter."

All that can be said in defence of the Archbishop is that he was a duplicate of many another "sacred" personage in those days.

According to the "Daily Mirror" there was a gathering of ardent Christians at Torquay the other day, and two missionaries

told their hearers that there are 100,000 Christians in the Japanese Army. Well, if that is a fact, we need not be surprised. If the missionaries are telling the truth, and missionaries do not count high in that direction, it is just another proof that anyone who believes in the Bible can make it mean what he pleases.

Leicester Freethinkers are reminded that Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate to-day (December 17) at 6.30 p.m., on "Do We Still Need a Religion?" N.S.S. speakers are always sure of a warm welcome from the Leicester audience, and the feeling between the two organisations is of the very best.

The growing shortage of those who go to Church is a fact that is admitted by all the Churches. The Roman Catholic Church is the only one that claims to be holding its own. But against that claim must be registered the fact that the rule "once a Roman Catholic always a Roman Catholic" remains. The Roman Church does not select its followers and dismiss them when they no longer believe; they are still, so to speak, on the list of believers. Nothing short of excommunication removes them from the list. Of course, the calculation is completely dishonest, and if the Protestant churches played the same game their numbers would also be on the increase. The principle at work here is that the Roman Church is collective while Protestant churches are selective. So the number of Roman Catholics go on increasing. It acts like the character in "Dead Souls," who wanted to become a wealthy man by buying all the dead "souls," and so became a wealthy man—on paper.

But with the non-Catholic churches what is troubling them now is the shortage of preachers. In spite of the decrease of those who attend church, the Churches are threatened with a serious shortage of men. That is to be expected. The forces that are keeping people away from Church are also driving, not merely the better-brained men, but even the poorer type, who cannot altogether be immune to the impact of modern knowledge as to the origin and nature of religion. That is the real position facing the age-long superstition of Christianity. One may sum up the position by paraphrasing a well-known line: "The mills of knowledge grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine." Or to take another well-known saying: "One may fool some of the people all the time, but one cannot fool all the people all the time."

May God bless his impudence! The Moderator (he ought to be called the Stravaganter) of General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, says:—

"In the Christian faith there was that which united all nations, which transcended all territorial distinctions, which bound in one the stolid Dutch, the mercurial French, the passionate Hungarian, and all the nations of the earth."

For downright impudence, even religious impudence, that beats everything we have read for a long while. We should like to hear of a single twenty years for the past five centuries when Christians have not been fighting Christians, and when some Church or Churches were not backing one side. Even in the infamous opium wars against China our Government was not without the backing of the Churches. Hats off to the Right Rev. E. J. Hagan. He really deserves recognition.

We are not quite sure whether the Bishop of Southwell was trying to be humorous or whether he was pulling the legs of his listeners. At all events, he told a meeting of the Newark Discussion Club that "We are still primitive Christians," and also that "Christianity is in its infancy." No one who understands real Christianity will doubt that it is primitive enough, neither will it be questioned that belief in the reality of Christian religious doctrines belongs to an infantile period. Still, one does not expect a Christian bishop to let out the truth in this wholesale manner. We expect he counted on his listeners not having wit enough to appreciate his humour.

ATTITUDE TO PRAYER

I AM a veteran. I have served my country. For two years, although well over the age limit, I was a fire watcher in England. One night weekly I played cards, dominoes, billiards, darts, listened to radio, fraternised with policemen and soldiers, drank innumerable cups of tea, smoked O.P. cigarettes, slept in a shake-down, and shared these hardships manfully with others equally brave. We were invited to take our place in a "Day of Prayer" and in the typed invitation to our unit, it was suggested that we marched to church in a body, wearing our armlets and tin hats! Only one of our chaps was in favour of the project. Asked why I wouldn't go, I replied that I was not anthropomorphic. "Don't be a ruddy fool," said my superior angrily. Curiously enough when I asked an old hard bitten soldier was he going to pray he glared at me and gave the same answer.

I thought I would be polite and write the vicar giving my reasons for not praying, either publicly or privately. Probably I was the only person in the town courteous enough to acknowledge the invitation, but no notice was taken of my learned treatise on the origin and use value of prayer.

This incident came back to my mind the other evening when I attended a lecture "Does God Answer Prayer?" under the auspices of the newly formed Freedom of Thought League in Belfast. The speaker was a scholarly man who had travelled a long and hard road to atheism. Having preached the Christian gospel for over twenty years he had some knowledge of praying. He discounted all chanting, vain repetition, and professional exhortation, and stressed that only sincere and individual pleading ranked as prayer.

My investigations prove that the physical attitude to praying is equally important. One may pray standing, or lying in bed, or walking in a garden, but the most satisfactory attitude is the kneeling one. In my youth there was a little stir over an incident of insubordination in the Navy. Apparently it was not thought fit for a common sailor to stand when taking an order from a superior. "On the knee you dog," was said to be the command that was resented. Subsequently that's what is said always by the priests; "On your knees you dogs." And if you shut your eyes also, better results will be obtained.

Man, as we know, ought to be quadruped. Pithecanthropus Erectus was a sort of Lucifer, with a tip about his social standing. Hence all our troubles. Biologically an excellent case could be made out for reversion to the four-footed stance. Quite useful, peaceful, harmless lives could be lived if proud man only humbled himself and again took his rightful place in nature. But a kneeling man is helpless, and that's all there is to it. About twelve years ago I was travelling to Dublin to see the Eucharistic Conference—a sacred performance where men in petticoats carry a biscuit in a gold box among bead counting lunatics from all over the world. In my carriage was an old Scotsman I hadn't seen for years. He was a professional sharper and had served terms of imprisonment for petty thefts. A congenial companion. I asked what he was going to do in Dublin. He had no idea, no fixed plan. "But," he said with conviction, "with a million people on their knees I would be a bit of a stiff if I couldn't pick up some dough."

So, pray upon your knees, that your needs may be preyed upon. The Clergy are the Jackals of Privilege working for the perpetuation of social inequality, but I admit that does not answer the question, "Does God Answer Prayer?"

Let us approach the matter scientifically. God is the Creator of the Universe. You know how far our sun is, and that the distance to the nearest known star is measured in "light years." And, of course, sound travels slower than light, and there are more stars than there are figures in the National Debt. Now I have calculated how long sound takes to reach the furthest

known star and the ear of God. Prayer is vocal, reception is aural. And what an Ear! Its size is beyond me. But, here's the result of my calculation. A prayer takes 997 years, 3 months and 20 minutes to reach God, and the return journey takes 998 years, 7 months and 4 days. Don't ask me why the answer takes longer. Einstein and Bertrand Russell are the only other mathematicians in the world who could understand my calculations. The layman may perhaps be content in saying that a Priority prayer to God, would get an answer—if any—in 2,000 years. The war might be finished by then, so is it worth the effort?

Still, reason must be satisfied and Time is not the only factor operating against answers to prayer. The peoples of this earth use many thousands of difficult languages and dialects. Mostly they mumble and jumble, whine and groan, incorporate extraneous trifles into their prayers, and state their difficulties badly. To avoid complication I am conceding that this is the only inhabited globe with creatures who pray. Countless millions of prayers must be arriving hourly to be dealt with by the interpreters. God's latest tongue is Yiddish, which incidentally gives an unfair advantage to these low Germans. Naturally the Celestial Secretariat is efficient, but it is no easy matter to make decisions concerning matters of urgency and delicacy, of alleged tragedies, tomfooleries, by procrustian pleadings and bleatings, bullying and leg-pulling. Of course, dilution and a rubber stamp can work wonders. "No" or "Yes" or "Go to Hell" could be stock answers that would save poor old God's time. Now, ask any postman about the carelessness of correspondents, and meditate on the fact that not one person in a million who prays gives his name and address. Mistakes might occur. I heard of two Mrs. Murphys in the same street, one of whom prayed that her husband would come home. The other woman's husband arrived unexpectedly and his wife's lover got a beating up.

My science may be overruled by the fact that most Christians are pre-copernicans, and their God is not so far away. A parochial, Nosey Parker sort of God fond of trifles. Tuppence to the Sacred Heart that father may stop drinking. A shilling for St. Anthony's bread that Jimmy may get a job. A God that answers that sort of intelligence in his own way, and not without humour is the same God who in answer to Moses who prayed that he might look upon His Face, merely showed him his second front.

Then modern Christians will tell me about Ether, about thought transference, and that a thousand years are as a second in Infinity, and that with God all things are possible. As I write a Radio padre is doing his stuff in London. I am told that actually I hear him a split second sooner than a man at the back of the room where he is talking. A case could be made out, using Algebraic formula, for prayers being answered before they were uttered. But it's all beside the point. There has never been an instance of an answer to prayer worthy of a minute's consideration of a sane mind. Take all the tabulated and attested cases of cures at Lourdes. And think of the phrase of Ingersoll "Where man is powerless, God cannot save." Was there ever a case of a man who had lost a limb, getting it replaced by prayer? That would be proof.

I can speak feelingly on this question for I once prayed. When I was ten I had a little black kitten. It was called "Lady" and I loved her with all my heart. She got lost and I wept and would not eat. Actually I was getting ill, but though my parents offered me anything, a puppy or a rabbit, I was inconsolable. Then I thought I would pray. If ever any distressed mortal prayed from his heart, I prayed to God to send me back my pussy. And in the morning "Lady" came back, my prayer was answered. I took her to my bosom, and covered her with kisses and caresses. It was said she had been

shut in a cellar four days, and certainly she seemed to have suffered. Indeed my Aunt said one would hardly think it was the same pussy. Then I saw my elder brother laughing. He handed me a "poem" which he said he had written to commemorate Lady's return. It was the most fearful document I had ever read. The first line seared my soul with an awful revelation. Either a miracle had taken place or I had been deceived. I verified my brother's physiological acumen—the returned pussy was a tom-cat! I have never prayed since, but I have frequently meditated on the incident. These were the dark Victorian days when children left their parents in ignorance of "the facts of life." My mother's ideas on sex were that all cats were females, and all dogs were males. Had she been more discerning or luckier in her kindly desire to comfort me, most likely I would have been to-day a devout believer that God answers prayer. But it is a solemn thought that one's spiritual values may be determined by the genitals of a cat.

J. E.

GEORGE MEREDITH: FREETHINKER

(Concluded from page 462)

MY own correspondence with Meredith—I should rather say his correspondence with me—did not run to many letters, but they cover some thirty years of time. I was far from forcing myself upon his attention. Words of encouragement that he sent me from time to time were never solicited, but always spontaneous. Only once did I write to him first; on all subsequent occasions he reopened the correspondence; and this, I conceive, is a fact of great importance. It shows that there was a special deliberateness in his letters to me, and in consequence a peculiar value. Nor do they seem to me—though in this I may be mistaken—to read like any other letters in the collection.

I wrote to Meredith first in the middle seventies. The letter contained nothing about myself. I wrote as one of his readers remonstrating with him for what I thought gratuitous difficulties in the way of people finding him out. His reply staggered me. He had watched me fighting for Freethought, and I never knew it. I was proud of his recognition, but I did not blazon it to the world, I kept it in my heart. When I started the "Liberal," a few years later, Meredith wrote congratulating me on the prospectus, and stating that he would write for the magazine if anything occurred to him. I begged him to keep to his own work and leave me and my colleagues to fight our own battle as we could. In 1883 I was prosecuted under the Blasphemy Laws on account of "The Freethinker," and a Roman Catholic judge sentenced me to twelve months imprisonment. A protest was signed by a long list of leading men in science, literature and art, but it was treated contemptuously. I see a mention of my imprisonment in one of Meredith's letters to Maxse: "Nothing done yet for poor Foote. I wish to send him my last volume of verse, but fancy it would not be handed." Presumably, he wrote "handed in"—but that might have told the reader of the Letters too much. I got the volume, however, by the kindness of the Governor, who is now beyond the reach of injury. But I did not print Meredith's name in the story of my imprisonment. Several years afterwards he sent a cheque towards a testimonial that friends were raising to enable me to continue my work. He was asked by the treasurer if his subscription should be publicly acknowledged. He replied that the name should go with the subscription when it was "in recognition of high and constant courage." Why did Meredith go out of his way to say that of me? I do not like this personal part of my task, but I cannot

avoid it. Surely there were many brave men known to Meredith besides my poor self. Why did he single me out? It was because of the object for which I was fighting. His heart was in that battle too. And he was not frightened from intercourse with me because of the evil reputation fixed upon me by orthodoxy; on the contrary, it was honourably confessed by Mr. Edward Clodd, after Meredith's death, that he had more sympathy with my methods of attack on Christianity than with the slower methods of the Rationalists, of whose Association, by the way, Mr. Clodd is himself Chairman.

"I admire the fight you are making," Meredith wrote in his first letter to me. "You carry on a brave battle for the best of causes, personally profitless as you must know it to be, and my good wishes are with you," he wrote many years later. Here are two extracts from a letter dated February 25, 1889:—

"When I hear that my little book of verse has given a touch of strength to a man like you, I feel that it has done its right work. . . .

"If I speak of a life that is a lasting life, it is not meant to be the life of the senses—which is a sensual dream of the Creeds—whereon our good Mother looks her blackest. She has more forgiveness for libidinousness than for the smoking of such priest's opium. Those who do it stop their growth."

That was the last letter from Meredith to me printed in the official collection. But it was not the last letter he wrote to me, and I have wondered why the editor stopped at that particular point. At any rate, it does me, and I think Meredith too, an injustice. It almost suggests that he had dropped me—for I am known to be still living; and in dropping me had also dropped the "best of causes" for which he had said I was fighting. But this was not the fact, nor anything like the fact, and it seems to me a point of honour that this should be made clear.

After a long silence, which did not disquiet me, as I felt certain that Meredith still kept me in remembrance, he wrote me another letter, and a very striking one, which the editor of the Letters could have printed if he had chosen. The battle over the "Boulter blasphemy" case was finished, and I had settled down to routine work again, when I received a welcome epistle from the Master at Dorking. He had joined the General Council of the Secular Education League, and he made me (a member of the Executive Committee) the medium of conveying his subscription to the Secretary. "The enclosed" was a cheque for the amount. Sending it through me enabled him to start less abruptly in what he really wanted to say.

On February 24, 1908, Meredith wrote to me referring to a subscription to the Secular Education movement, saying that it was one of the "certainties of the proximate future," and referred to my "valiant fight that is destined for victory"; he went on to say it demanded a combination of ardour and patience rarely to be found, and he ends up: "You will have the credit of it when the day ripens for biography."

That letter is explicit enough. Meredith still stood where he had stood of old. The compliment to me was extremely handsome, but that was a small matter in comparison with what it implied on Meredith's part. I kept his letter private, as usual, but it gave me the means of contradicting any false statements that might arise after his death in relation to his views on religion.

Meredith did another significant thing before he died. He sent a cheque "as a contribution to 'The Freethinker'" in April, 1909. The cheque was indubitably in his handwriting, but the letter itself was written by a female hand—"for Mr. G. Meredith," but without a signature. Meredith was asked, as on a former occasion, whether he wished his name to accompany his subscription in a public acknowledgment.

Meredith replied to me on April 23, 1909 (Box Hill, Dorking):—

“As a question of supporting your paper, my name is at your disposal.”

Inside the sheet of notepaper there was a postscript which I nearly overlooked. What it was we shall see presently.

Now that postscript was in Meredith's own handwriting. So was the address on the envelope. I fancy he posted it himself. I believe he saw personally to the whole thing. I also think he had an object in doing so. I feel confident that he determined to place his undiminished interest in my “fight for the best of causes” beyond all cavil. I am further of opinion that this was the very last letter he wrote. And what that means is explained by the postscript. “Watts-Dunton, as I have to suppose,” Meredith wrote, “was ill and feeble at the time of the funeral.” The funeral was Swinburne's. Watts-Dunton had allowed Swinburne's burial at Bonchurch to take place with Christian rites. It was scandalous; I had strongly denounced it in my paper, and Meredith's postscript was in allusion to the incident. Unfortunately, the illness and feebleness of Watts-Dunton allowed him to thank the vicar of Bonchurch for the “magnificent” way in which he had obtruded his Christian shibboleths at the burial of an Anti-Theist.

Unfortunately, the betrayal of Swinburne was followed by the betrayal of Meredith—whose death occurred on May 16, 1909. Those who stood round his dead body ignored his ideas and convictions. They had the law on their side, for the disposition of a dead body belongs to the living, except in the case of bequeathal to a public institution for scientific purposes. Meredith's body was cremated, and the ashes, in a sarcophagus adorned with “weeping angels,” were laid in the grave bought by the poet when he buried his wife. Two clergymen officiated—one being deemed unequal to the occasion. Meredith himself had not been to church for any number of years. He told the public, through Mr. Nevinson, only two or three years before, that he left off going to church because he was ashamed of what he heard there. Yet a brace of black birds, that he would not listen to when he was living, were brought to whistle their nonsense over his ashes. Simultaneously with the burial at Dorking a memorial service was performed at Westminster Abbey. Dean Robinson refused to let Meredith's ashes be laid there, but he agreed to the ceremonial part of such a burial, and officiated himself as the principal showman. It only required Meredith's comment—if it could have been obtained—to make the farce complete.

Meredith's last letter—who has it? The editor of the official collection, after the fine letter of condolence with Watts-Dunton on the death of Swinburne, adds: “This was George Meredith's last letter.” But that letter is dated April 13, 1909, and mine is dated April 23. I gave the editor a copy, but he appears to have overlooked it. Certainly if Watts-Dunton's letter is the last that Meredith wrote, leaving mine out of the question, mine must actually be the last letter. It follows, therefore, that the last document from George Meredith's pen was a letter of encouragement to the editor of “The Freethinker.” And that fact tells its own tale. There is really no more to be said.

G. W. FOOTE.

CATHOLIC EVOLUTION

One does not look for humour in a religious journal, but the “Universe” is obviously pulling somebody's leg when it informs an enquirer that “the first human body was derived from some animal organism,” and that “woman arose from the first man.” That looks, if one took it seriously, that Adam was the father of Eve, who afterwards became his wife. And this would, of course, make the offspring of Adam and Eve the son brother of his mother. We stop here because the situation would gradually get more and more tangled.

A LOSING CHURCH

THE Convocation of Canterbury, meeting at Westminster in 1944, has had laid before it by Dr. Parsons, the Bishop of Hereford, these figures relating to baptism, Sunday school attendance, confirmation and Easter communion:—

67 per cent. of English children were baptised into the Church of England;

52 per cent. of those baptised attended Sunday schools;

41 per cent. of those baptised were presented for confirmation;

35 per cent. of those confirmed remained as Easter communicants.

Whether or not the form of these figures was intended to hide from average readers of the Press the true picture behind them I cannot say, but only the first of them is a direct numerical relation. Each of the others is a percentage of a percentage and, therefore, does not reveal at a glance what a little analysis will show. That 67 out of every hundred children in this country were baptised as Anglicans is quite clear, and, considering the multiplicity of religious sects, the established Church is extremely fortunate in being able to rope into its fold so large a proportion of the population at the beginning of their lives.

From that moment, however, a progressive deterioration of religious influence sets in. Only 52 per cent. of the 67 per cent. baptised, or thirty-five of the hundred children we started with, attended Sunday school. Practically half those who through baptism became “members of Christ, children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven,” were already “lost sheep” by the time they reached the tender age of five or six. Neither the grace conferred on them at baptism nor the possession of three godparents apiece in addition to the natural pair appears to have had any effect as an insurance that they should be given a proper religious education. Can it be that the decline in Sunday school attendance lies at the root of present-day godlessness?

Hardly, for the Bishop's percentage of confirmations (41 per cent. of the 67 per cent. baptised) shows a further falling off. Of the thirty-five children out of every hundred who went to Sunday school, only twenty-seven were presented for confirmation. During the eight or ten years in which God's ministers and their most devout helpers had the chance of making complete Christians of their Sunday scholars, they seem to have lost the confidence of about one in four of them.

At this stage it may be instructive to consider what the behaviour of the godparents was in respect of their charges. Every batch of sixty-seven children baptised had between them 201 godparents. They all accepted the obligation of seeing that the children should “learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, in the vulgar tongue, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to their soul's health”; also they were admonished that each child “be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him” following such instruction. Dr. Parson's percentages show that 120 out of every 201 modern godparents, all professing church members failed to carry out a solemnly accepted religious duty. I doubt if it would be possible to find an example of such a combination of irresponsibility, insincerity and ineptitude in connection with any purely secular obligation. Yet the clergy, who know better than anyone else how members of their own church let them down in this way, are never tired of asserting the value of Christian teaching in maintaining high ethical standards.

Members of Convocation, if they understood the Bishop's statistics at all, must have found the last item the unkindest cut of any of his figures. Note that again the basis of the

percentage calculation has been changed. First it was a percentage of all English children, then of those baptised, and finally when communion is being considered the percentage is one of those confirmed. The 35 per cent. Easter communicants, therefore, means only nine out of a hundred English children, nine out of seventy-seven who were baptised, nine out of twenty-five who went through Sunday school, nine out of twenty-seven who were confirmed. What an ignominious end-result of all the efforts of the parsons who baptised the sixty-seven, the Sunday school teachers who instructed the thirty-five and the Bishops who confirmed the twenty-seven! No sooner did these young people become free agents than the number of voluntary partakers in the religious ceremony for which all that went before had been a preparation dropped to a mere nine.

These figures, published in the Press without comment, are now to be referred with suggestions of three main courses of action (unpublished) to rural decanal conferences for consideration. It would be still more appropriate to refer them to the great Mr. Butler and all who have connived with him in re-introducing sectarian religion into our publicly-owned schools, so that they may realise the ultimate futility of the contemptible trick they have played on an unwary electorate. Is it likely that day-school religious teaching will succeed where Sunday school instruction has so miserably failed? Dr. Parsons' figures indicate, indeed, what a sorry waste of time and energy are all attempts to impose the beliefs and practices of credulous bygone ages on a generation growing up in a progressive, critical environment.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

BEHIND THE ROW

Without wishing to take sides on the conscription question in Canada, it is interesting to note a point made by the "Daily Mail" correspondent. The French Canadians are bitterly opposed to the measure, they intensely dislike the non-French, but above all, we are told, "they are in the thrall of the Catholic Church." We should read between the lines here. The Catholic Church is all-powerful in French Canada to a degree hardly realised in this country, where the Church is all honey and claims to be entirely out for democracy. In Canada, it rules with a severity almost like that of the Nazis in Germany, if not quite like them. In other words, the Church is behind all the row over conscription—as it is behind most of the bother wherever it is powerful enough to rule the roost.

OBITUARY

ALEXANDER HARTLEY MILLWARD

My father, Alexander Hartley Millward, was born at Southampton, on February 18, 1867, the thirteenth child in a family of fourteen. His early days were spent in an environment of the most rigid Sabbatarianism and fervent evangelicalism. The son of an ardent Primitive Methodist, a solemn family gathering for prayers was considered an essential preliminary to the day's activities during his boyhood. His own father was a lay-preacher for upwards of 65 years, and was the founder of the Band of Hope in Southampton in 1850, for which Christian enterprise he was publicly commended by the celebrated Canon Wilberforce.

As a youth, my father rebelled against the extreme orthodoxy of his family, and became a disciple of Charles Bradlaugh, eventually having to leave his home on that account. Later, he became interested in Unitarianism: A life long admirer of the Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous "Essays" of the latter were a veritable "bible" to him. He travelled extensively in Europe after his retirement from business in 1926, until he

settled down in Torquay about four years before the war, where he died on September 20, 1944, after a very brief illness. In accordance with his expressed wish, no ceremony of any kind was held in connection with his subsequent cremation at Plymouth on September 23.

Always ready and eager to take up the cudgels on behalf of a rationalist outlook, and revelling in argument, my father's outlook, and the life he tried to lead, were exemplified by the following quotation from his writings:—

"I cannot serve any 'God'—nor is there one in need of my help—but I can, and I will, as far as in me lies, serve Humanity."
T. I. M.

To this well-deserved tribute we beg to add our own. We had known A. H. Millward for many years. He was a firm Freethinker, strong in his opinions, firm in his friendship, and never afraid to express his opinions when necessary. My only regret is we had so few opportunities of meeting.
C. C.

MRS. H. R. CLIFTON

The sympathy of the older members of our Movement will go out to Mr. H. R. Clifton on the death of his wife, Emily Jane. Her death at the age of 82 brings to an end a lengthy companionship marked with unbroken happiness. There are four sons and daughters left, all forming a family group where the happiness of all has been of an unbroken character. Mr. Clifton has been a constant worker in the N.S.S. ever since 1890, persistent in his work and holding office as a member of the Executive and treasurer of the N.S.S. for many years. He was also a director of the Secular Society Limited. The cremation took place at the Croydon Crematorium, the service being conducted by Mr. Rosetti. Death, whenever it comes, means a snapping of relationships; but nothing can take away what has been, and the memories of a long and happy family life remains as a source of pride and comfort that nothing can remove.
C. C.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Dr. R. H. THOULESS, M.A., Ph.D.: "Some Questions on Psychological Research."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. CLIFFORD ALLEN: "Is Russia Socialist?"

Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds 1).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. H. DAY (Bradford): "Why I am an Atheist."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "Do We Still Need a Religion?"

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