

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Christmas Myth

THE exigencies of printing a weekly paper force us, if we are to say anything about this ancient myth, to say it well before or well after December 25. On the other hand, one could write in midsummer what in substance will be said in every church on December 25. As a fairy story, the yarn is interesting enough, although it leans rather heavily on the gloomy side. The hero should come out victorious. As it is, the last seen of him is his crucifixion between two thieves, and that is not the right course for a fairy tale to run. To make the situation completely grotesque, his worshippers and claimed followers, instead of being cast down at the brutality shown to the hero and wearing some symbol—say a black rosette—make his birth an occasion for giving presents, eating turkeys, drinking wine, holding parties and indulging in all sorts of jollification. As a fairy story, it does not seem to run as it should. As a page of history, it is either a survival of a primitive superstition or a story that will not bear examination as a fragment of literal truth. To drop into colloquial language, we may say that one of the great distinctions between the mythical Christ and the modern preacher is that the fabled Christ died on the cross and the clergy ever since have lived on it.

Long before, there existed numerous variations of nature worship, a very common one being the worship of the Sun God. He was the Lord of life; and if one must have a god, this one was better than most. It held a promise of poetry and beauty. By converting it into a living personage the story became ridiculous. A god who is born of a woman, with a ghost to take the place of the husband, who passes through all the stages of childhood and youth; who as a baby is petted and fondled, perhaps smacked, by his earthly parent; who grows to manhood and is crucified for blasphemy, and then, in a curious manner, arises from the dead, is just an example of the low intellectual level on which early Christianity moved. I do not wonder that Christians by law have denied man the right to laugh at the Jesus story; and yet, when one remembers the imbecilities of Christian doctrines, it would seem that to laugh is the only way of avoiding tears.

Applying our historical knowledge to the matter, the one fact that stands out is that the date given for the birth of the God Jesus was that given to many sun gods. Take the following from that great law-giver of anthropology, Sir James Frazer. Contrasting the long struggle between the Mithraic cult and the Christian Church, he says:—

"An instructive relic of the long struggle is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival. In the Julian calendar, the 25th of December was

reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the Sun to increase from that turning-point of the year. The ritual of the Nativity as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, 'The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!' The Egyptians even represented the new-born Sun by the image of an infant, which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forward and exhibited to his worshippers. . . . Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, as they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the 25th of December."

Compare that with the story that will be told in every church in Christendom, not as a myth but as an actual historic narrative as genuine as the birth of any human being. It is really very generous to say of all our clergy that they are simply mistaken. One can be too generous in such matters. Large numbers of Christian ministers may be written down as being mistaken; but it is quite clear that the better-educated ones are deliberately lying, and who still their conscience by talking mere ethics with which the Christian myth has nothing whatever to do. It is not surprising that the leading Christian preachers avow publicly that unless they can fill the head of a child with these myths before they are old enough to "talk back" the future of the Church is black.

From another source, the historical one, we have in the sixth volume of that gigantic work by Arnold Toynbee, "A Study of History," the following illustrations from about seventy pages of analogies. He says:—

"In the Hellenic tradition not only Ion and Asklepios, but also Pythagoras, Plato and Augustus have been reckoned among the sons of Apollo. Alexander among the sons of Zeus. The common form of the tale is that the hero's human mother is visited by a superhuman mate who usurps the place of her lawful husband. . . . Sometimes the divine visitor presents himself in the form of a man or of an animal . . . or a ray of light. . . . These tales have their counterparts in the Christian legend of the birth of Jesus, and the version followed by Matthew exhibits the direct influence of the Hellenic motif. . . . Popular ideas have been laid under contribution for the benefit of the Christian myth. Be that as it may be, the coincidence between Matthew and the legend of the birth of Plato is as exact as it possibly can be."

Of course, the analogies given are only concerned with one part of the Christian superstition: that of the miraculous birth. But there are the other parts; and it is not too much to say that there are analogies to be found



for all. And, in fact, the last thing that the early Christians claimed during the first three or four centuries of the Christian era was originality. It is not without significance that the early Church did its best to destroy, so far as it could, the religions and the writings of the pre-Christian cults. Hitler followed the same rule in his attempt to force the German people to have but one thought on the conduct of life.

### God Hunting

Of the Christian religion as a whole there is no doubt as to its origin. The gods have been traced to their lair; they have been examined, their evolution has been made clear, and a scientific sociology writes them down as neither truthful nor useful. But the Churches, however much weakened, persist—and the old tale goes on with increased impertinence on such occasions as that of Christmas. The clergyman, who in open contest is apt to give ground, behaves at certain times of the year, and under certain circumstances, much like a confirmed drinker who remains sober five days in the week in order to get gloriously drunk when his workdays come to an end. So the clergyman, in facing an uncritical audience, falls back to a dishonoured creed and tunes his song to suit an audience that intellectually belongs to a bygone day. He will remind his congregation of the shepherds who were guided by angels and a travelling star which obligingly halted over the stable in which the new god was to be found. He knows quite well that other gods have been born in the same way, worshipped in the same way, and eventually fade away as the Christian deity is now sinking below the horizon of man's intellectual vision.

More impudent than all will be the statement that Jesus Christ came to bring to mankind peace on earth and good will to all men. Well, if that was the mission of Jesus Christ it must be counted as one of the greatest failures that the world has ever known. There was a time in the world's history when from Babylon to Scotland the world came nearer to a general peace than the world has ever seen. But that was a pagan world, not a Christian one. Ancient Rome had gods of war and gods of peace; but they had at least the decency when war came to close the temple of peace. But the Christian world has always kept its temple of peace well in the foreground. Our Christian cities and our temples of religion are decorated with the effigies of soldiers. The wars of Christendom have passed from brutality to brutality with a steadily increasing crescendo, until we have reached a stage when a world war threatens to destroy whatever measure of secular development we have gained. The one thing that war will not destroy is belief in gods; in praying to them for help; in grovelling lower and lower as disaster looms more certainly ahead. For how long during the past two centuries has this country of ours been without a war in some part of the world, and how many have honestly felt that we were carrying on the work of bringing peace on earth and good will to all men? The Christian religion has never weakened war; it has merely covered it with a cloak of religion and so helped to hide to men the real nature of the conflicts that were raging.

Let us suppose that the world had remained pagan. Certainly the world of human endeavour would not have died out. And can anyone reasonably imagine a worse state

of things than is given by the existing world war? Christianity did not make greed and cunning less than it would have been in its absence. Largely, it provided a cover for the worst passions of mankind. It is time that the history of the world was re-written with greater frankness and complete truth. We should then recognise how the people have been duped by a living lie.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### VARIOUS VIEWS CONCERNING LIBERTY

THE security of intellectual and social freedom is essential if civilisation is to survive. And it is gratifying to note the publication of a work entitled "Freedom Its Meaning" (Allen and Unwin, 1942, 16s.), a symposium to which many contemporary thinkers have made contributions. Among these are Croce, Bergson, Dewey, Beard, Laski, Haldane, Whitehead and Einstein. The opinions expressed are naturally diverse in character and range from the scepticism of Salvemini, the piety of the Romanist, Jacques Maritain, to the realism of Hogben and the metaphysics of Bergson and Whitehead.

The volume under review is the first of a projected series entitled the "Science of Culture." The editor, Ruth Nanda Anshen, states in her prologue to this work that it comprises "a positive estimation of freedom not only as embodied in institutions, but also as moral and spiritual power . . . And above all, it is an apotheosis of Reason which, in the final analysis, is the real mark of freedom and beyond which there is no true unifying force."

Dr. Charles Beard deeply deplors the transient success of Nazism and Fascism. Still, he seems convinced that the forces of humanism will ultimately triumph, so lovers of liberty may take courage. He opines that "Despair and defeat may threaten them but the conviction of the noblest thought of thirty centuries belongs to them, and not to tyrants, sustains them in a conflict that is never won triumphantly and yet never lost beyond hope of recovery." As for the tyrants themselves: "Death is as merciless to them as it is to common clay." Indeed experience proves that their autocratic systems have their day and cease to be.

Bergson's essay, despite its literary grace, possesses little practical importance, nor does that contributed by Benedetto Croce. Boaz and Stefansson, the famous explorers, narrate their personal experiences among the Eskimo when they dwelt with them, and Stefansson contends that these Northern tribes in many respects enjoy a measure of freedom which law and convention deny to communities that look upon the Eskimo as a very primitive people. Certainly the Eskimo have their taboos, but so have we.

Professor Dewey seeks the underlying causes of the widespread revolt against representative government and he finds them very involved. He considers that: "The problem of freedom of co-operative individuals is a problem to be viewed in the context of culture. The state of culture is a state of interaction of many factors, the chief of which are law and politics, industry and commerce, science and technology, the arts of expression and communication and of morals, or the values men prize and the ways in which they evaluate them; and finally, though indirectly, the system of general ideas used by men to justify and to criticise the fundamental conditions under which they live their social philosophy."

Dr. Einstein eloquently pleads for complete freedom in science and teaching, while J. B. S. Haldane contends that certain restrictions on personal liberty which minister to the common good are unavoidable in any well regulated community. As



for religious freedom, which he would increase to the utmost possible, Haldane declares that: "The highest degree of religious liberty is probably found in the United States where the State is formally neutral in religious matters. But complete religious liberty is impossible, simply because all religious bodies are somewhat intolerant when their supporters control the government. They may be very intolerant like the Catholic Church, or slightly so, like the Society of Friends, but they cannot from their nature, be completely tolerant."

President Kingdon, of Newark University, concludes that man is never even approximately free until he is in unison with his environment. All organisms that fail to adapt themselves to their ever-changing surroundings perish. A rational system of education is therefore indispensable if humanity is to resume its onward march. Kingdon contends that education "must train minds to think in cosmopolitan terms that will enable them to see local cultures against the perspective of world experience and so fit them for the creative emergence of a comprehensive culture of mankind. It must maintain an active international fellowship of free minds meeting and sharing each other's research and discoveries in the assurance that facts and their implications know no boundaries of parish or nation or race." This is certainly an ideal, but one to be aimed at and, if possible, secured.

Professor Laski justly views fanatical nationalism with aversion, and he traces much of the evil from which we now suffer to its malevolent influences. Its most malignant form is that of Hitlerism, but its overthrow, Laski urges, will not solve the world's problems. The preservation of peace can only come "when we recognise that the boundaries between nation-states cannot be permitted, as they are now permitted to interfere with the total well being of the 'civitas maxima.'" As things are, democracy may be said to obtain in the political field, but it has not yet reached the economic and social domains.

Dr. Macmurray considers the circumstances under which we exercise freedom of choice. Still, our choice is determined by certain influences. One is obviously freer when walking abroad than when one is detained in prison. But as Macmurray points out: "Freedom has clearly some relation to our desires, and our desires have their roots in the same nature of things that determines the possibility of an action."

Thomas Mann's essay is interesting and suggestive, but for some inscrutable reason he traces all that is ethically valuable in modern civilisation to the moral teachings of the Nazarene. He alleges that if democracy is to endure it must be sustained by a spiritually and socially established liberty. "Only then can democracy resist the assault of the dehumanised spirit of violence and fulfil its great conservative task, to preserve the Christian foundations of occidental life and to protect civilisation against barbarism."

As usual, Bertrand Russell is both witty and wise in his survey of the inconsistencies and absurdities of human life. Nationalism, especially in its conduct in international affairs he considers an unmitigated evil. So far as personal liberty is concerned, he would confer the fullest freedom socially beneficial in any organised community. He holds that: "Freedom of opinion is closely connected with free speech, but has a wider scope. The Inquisition made a point of investigating by means of torture, the secret opinions that men endeavoured to keep to themselves. When men confessed to unorthodox opinions, they were punished, even if it could not be proved that they had ever before given utterance to them. This practice has been revived in the dictatorial countries." This infamy he attributes to the fact that totalitarian governments never feel secure, and this was obviously true of the Romanist Church. Still Russell concludes that "the dark times in which we live are probably no more permanent than the progressive epoch which rejoiced our grandfathers." Dr. Salvemini reconsiders the claims of

democracy, a term he deems ambiguous as it is made to denote so many different and even discordant concepts. It is true that the right to self-government is essential to a really democratic regime but, apart from this, a variety of divergent views may be championed in its name, for instance, as Salvemini notes, the so-called Christian Democracy, as interpreted by the "Catholic Encyclopaedia," endeavours "to comfort and uplift the lower classes, excluding every appearance and implication of political meaning."

Totalitarian Governments also profess their anxiety to promote the well-being of their subjects "after depriving them of the very political rights without which it is not possible to conceive of 'government by the people.'"

Salvemini acclaims John Stuart Mill's "Representative Government" as "a monument of common sense" and approvingly cites Mill's statement that "instead of the function of governing for which it is radically unfit, the proper office of a representative assembly is to watch and control the government," and to dismiss it, if it fails to act in accordance with the wishes of the people.

Our essayist regards the Roman Church as the most efficiently organised despotism in the religious world. Nor are its claims modest. So recently as August, 1939, Pius XII claimed that through his voice all the secular rulers of the world heard the commands of Christ and the Holy Ghost. This, of course, is mere rhetoric and as Salvemini says: "The Catholic Church to-day is disarmed and no longer burns heretics. It has to be satisfied with sentencing to the eternal fires of the hereafter."

The dictators, on the other hand (those that survive) are armed with full authority and replace heretical sin with treason to the State. For this crime death is inflicted in this world, whatever's supposed to happen in the next.

T. F. PALMER.

## SECULAR EDUCATION

QUITE apart from the financial aspects of States provided or State-aided schools, where attendance is compulsory, the question arises: "Should religious dogma and beliefs, about which there is no consensus of opinion, but great differences, among adults in this country, be imparted to children in these schools unless parents claim special exemption for them?"

State Education should surely be limited to subjects which are historical, or which stand, so to speak, on their own footing. From this point of view it follows that the teaching of religious beliefs to the young as though they were to be accepted as implicitly as the other subjects taught at school, should be ruled out in schools dependent upon or aided by public funds and rates. Therefore "Dual Control" should go.

Churches, State and Free, and religious sects, are thick on the ground in this Protestant country. The prime responsibility for the teaching of religion to the young is their province, and parents can be approached through them.

Roman Catholicism stands on its own arbitrary footing whether here or in any other part of the world, and its teaching in State-aided schools would not, I imagine, involve control outside its own department.

Some knowledge of the authorised version of the Bible and its history could always be included in Protestant Education in this country. If this could be given without teaching the mysteries of Biblical theology, the teachers would not have to pass any test of religious beliefs.

Otherwise Freethinkers may justly claim that State Education, paid for largely by Secular votes, should be limited to Secular Education and include only Secular subjects.

There can be little doubt among Freethinkers that the teaching of "Comparative Religion" is the ideal in religious education for scholars of a suitable age.

MAUD SIMON.



## ACID DROPS

THE people of Durham want a system of electric lighting. At present they have gas, and those who know the difference between the two will appreciate those who want electricity. But the Dean of Durham, Dr. Alington, says it would be an outrage if an electricity system is set up. It would ruin the skyline from the City of Durham and spoil the view from the Cathedral. What should we do without our clergy?

Durham has also given us an edition of the Angels of Mons. It appears that in 1943 intelligence reached us that the Germans were contemplating a raid on the "Cathedral City of Durham." It was a clear moonlight night—it had to be if the miracle was to be performed. News came that the German planes were making for Durham Cathedral. (The mere knowledge of this was a minor miracle.) "Everybody thought it was all up with the Cathedral"—again, that had to be to make the miracle complete, and God is an old hand at staging miracles, and in these unbelieving and critical days miracles must be properly arranged for.

Runs the legend—"Everybody thought it was all up with the city, as the weather showed no signs of worsening. A few minutes later the door burst open and a warden rushed in. 'A miracle! Look at the Cathedral,' he shouted. They all crowded out and saw to their astonishment that the city, starkly moonlit a moment ago, was shrouded in a thick blanket of white fog. Where the Cathedral towers should have been, high above the river, loomed a pillar of fog, completely hiding all trace of the Cathedral. A minute later the bombers arrived and could be heard droning round looking for the city and, above all, for the Cathedral. At last they gave up the search and returned to Germany." The miracle is attributed to St. Cuthbert. He is buried in the Cathedral, and it is believed that he put up the smoke-screen. Naturally, the saint did not want his remains scattered over the countryside.

Has anyone ever set to work to calculate the kind of stage army that is set forth by the Catholic Church in this country? If one pays attention to them the result is interesting and illuminating. There are a Catholic Mothers' Association, a Catholic Women's Group, a Girls' Association, and other feminine groups, all of which are so many duplicates of Women's Groups. Then, turning to the male side, there are a Catholic Group which comprises all Catholics (men and women), a Teachers' Group, a Youths' Group, a Labour Group, a Catholic Men's Group, and so forth, all of which are counted over and over again, and resolutions—which are dictated by the heads of the Church—pour in to Members of Parliament and frighten the timid into obedience. It would be interesting if someone would take the trouble to take the number of these duplicate groups and compare the result with the actual number of Catholics. It is an old trick, but it appears to work.

The Bishop of New Guinea has been visiting England. It is announced that he was welcomed at a public meeting with great enthusiasm, but the Bishop had to confess that he had not received a single offer from curates to go and save the souls of the natives. Of course, this may be because the natives to-day are a little more wide-awake than they used to be. We people in this country are apt to underrate the intelligence of the natives in Africa, New Guinea, and elsewhere. Most often it is not the intelligence of natives that is at fault, but the material to develop their mental capacity. Given that, and the outlook for the sucking curate who goes out to save the souls of undeveloped peoples is very black. To quote again, "You can fool some of the people all the time, but to fool all the people all the time is simply impossible." After the war we should not be surprised to find an association of coloured people formed to instruct the white man in better methods of living. There seems to be room for it, and we expect many coloured folk will think so.

There is more religious agony in Glasgow. This is because an application has been made for a licence to have dances on Hogmanay, which this year falls on a Sunday. It is being fought tooth and nail by the very pious and, for those who are not, it will stand as an example to the outside world as to the kind of liberty we have in these islands. All over the country, Wales, Scotland and England, there is a general testimony that the absence of Sunday entertainments is a cause of much trouble to the police and the cause of much misbehaviour. But we here have a survival of one of the most stupid things that exists—the belief in sacred days, and the Churches insist on it. So we go on, oblivious to the sensible, and an occasion of rejoicing for the upholders of a stupid superstition.

A writer in the "Bolton Evening News" lets himself go on the subject of fairy tales and Christianity. He says that some people hold that God should follow the course that has been taken by Father Christmas. But, he says triumphantly, religion belongs to the childhood of the race. Well, so does the belief in fairies, in Father Christmas, and the like. In point of origin, there is not the least difference between the "Our Father which are in heaven" and our "Father Christmas who cometh down the chimney to give presents to good children." The same level of social life that saw the advent of one saw the advent of the other. We retain Father Christmas because he is a jolly looking, benevolent figure. But Christians keep to God because they will catch it hot if they don't. But there really is no substantial difference between the two.

Lately we have come across several articles in the religious Press on what the writers please to call the Free Church tradition. Once upon a time that phrase really meant something of consequence. It stood for opposition to a State monopoly in religion, and quite logically it denied the right of the State to compel adherence to a State religion, and held also that all religious teaching should be free from legal coercion. Of course, the claim sounded better in theory than it shone in practice, for not only were most of the dissenting sects intolerant with regard to forms of religion with which it was not in agreement, but so soon as it could it demanded all sorts of privileges from the State to do what was possible to harass, if not suppress, freedom of expression that attacked Christian beliefs.

One great historic case of "selling the pass" occurred in connection with education. When the shocking state of education in this country forced the State to take it in hand, the general agreement among Nonconformist Christians was the principle of "Education free and secular." But when the Anglicans proposed that there should be a form of religious teaching with which all Christians could agree, principles were thrown to the wind and a policy was agreed upon which allowed a form of Christian teaching with which all Christian sects might agree, and so prevented an educational system that should favour none. The culmination of this came with the new Education Act which replaced the priest in the school—in fact if not in form.

In addition, it must always be remembered that the so-called Free Churches take every possible financial help that is given to all Christian organisations. Their chapels are free from taxation, which amounts to imposing a tax upon non-Christians for the maintenance of a religion in which they do not believe. Paving rates, from which Anglican churches are free, should, legally, be paid by Nonconformists. But release from it is asked, and is generally given. And the medieval Blasphemy Laws find good support from the Nonconformist world. All of which justifies one in saying that the Free Church in practice is remarkable for throwing freedom to the winds when it finds it is profitable to do so.

The Rev. W. J. Sym, of Edinburgh, tells the world that more chaplains are needed for the Army. Now we wonder from whom the call for them comes? We would wager that the cry comes from the parsonage. We have not heard of such an appeal from the soldiers.



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### SUGAR PLUMS

WE have received a lengthy letter from Mr. Bernard Shaw on his alleged invitation to replace G. W. Foot as President of the N.S.S. We regret that the conditions under which the "Freethinker" is produced prevents our printing it this week. It will appear in our issue for January 7, with a few comments from the editor.

We have in the Press a pamphlet dealing with Thomas Paine, which we hope to have on sale early in the New Year. When the character of Paine is realised, and the importance of his writings recognised, the treatment of a great Englishman and humanitarian will be recognised as one of the most criminal policies of which even the Christian churches have been guilty. The essay is by the editor.

There is, so far as a very large section of the religious world is concerned, a great deal of difference between a preacher who quietly puts aside some of the essential features of Christianity and the one who flaunts his heresy in the eyes of true-blue believers. One remembers, years ago, when the Bishop of Birmingham shocked Christians by publicity announcing that he did not believe in the Garden of Eden story. If he had set it on one side quietly and gone on preaching—carefully—evolution, the more intelligent Christians would have winked the other eye, and the less intelligent would hardly have understood him. That is the way things are usually managed in the Christian world. That ancient myth flourishes most lustily in a fog. The first thing is to believe. Then one may, if he is curiously a Christian, try to find out the meaning of what it is he believes.

We were reminded of this when glancing over a newspaper report of some remarks made by Bishop Barnes in reply to some questions put him at a meeting of the Guild of Undergraduates. He was asked why religious people were so reluctant in recognising the good done by science. The reply given was that "generally" Christians recognised the good science did, but they also recognised the evil that had come from science. The Bishop was in a tight corner, but he need not have so obviously laid himself open to reproof. For the real answer is that Science is not concerned with the social value of anything. Its sole

function is to achieve knowledge. The responsibility for the use made of that knowledge depends upon those who receive the message.

The Bishop was dodging the question. What was asked for was an explanation of, or the reason for, the opposition to science by Christians. And the honest answer to that is: "Because the Christian Church based itself upon a sacred book that was a mere cluster of folk-law of no scientific value to those who were seeking to understand natural phenomena." The Bishop might have answered in the words of Dr. Johnson, who was asked why he had made a glaring blunder in his Dictionary. Johnson replied: "Ignorance, Madam, sheer Ignorance."

Ex-Dean Inge—one of our remarkable old men—continues his contributions to the "Evening Standard," and ersted Tory as he is, he is always worth reading. For Christmas he cheers up doleful religionists by saying that: "The leaders of thought are more friendly to religion than they were half a century ago." That may please many, but it is not true. It is not a case of leaders of thought being more friendly to religionists, it is one of Christians being more accommodating to science. Only the most ignorant of Christians dare nowadays to oppose science, as such. In sociology and in science men are to-day more open in expressing their opinions than they were a couple of generations ago. It is true there is still too great timidity with many of our leading scientists where religion is concerned, but they are becoming more open in expressing their opinions than they were. And that is something to be thankful for.

The Archbishop of York professes grave concern over what he calls the decline in Bible reading. We have heard that lament before, in fact so often and for so lengthy a period that we strongly suspect its truth. We fancy that the regular reading of the Bible is not a fact. First of all, if we go back, say, a century and a half ago, large numbers simply could not read at all, and the picture of the family sitting round the fireplace listening to an elderly person reading the Bible is, we feel sure, just a fanciful exaggeration. Another piece of evidence is the constant sale year after year of our Bible Handbook, which contains hardly anything but Bible quotations, but which come with a shock of surprise when for the first time they have the Bible—the real Bible—placed before them. The truth is that the Bible, as our forefathers read it, and as the Church taught it, is dead to seventy-five per cent. of the population. The same book is with us in appearance, but in understanding it no longer exists.

But the Archbishop professes to be anxious that more people should read the Bible. In all friendliness, we would advise him that this is indeed a very dangerous policy. For if people start really reading the Bible, and with an intention to understand it, the glamour of the book, or collection of books, will be gone. Hitherto the Church has relied upon the Bible being read by people who read to believe, not to understand. And it is an absolute certainty that if a man reads to understand the result is another vacant seat in church. It would be a good thing if someone, with more time than we have at our disposal, would boil down into a single, not too large a volume, Frazer's three fat volumes on "Folklore in the Old Testament," and then follow it up with a still smaller but similar volume on the New Testament. The latter would be a perfect bombshell.

It happened that the five foolish virgins were observed, in their perplexity, by five wise men.

"Permit me!" quoth each of these, and stepped up and filled a virgin's lamp for her, adding: "Now, you just about need somebody to look out for you, don't you, eh?"

And the five foolish virgins, blushing violently and looking slyly down, the five wise men lost no time in procuring licences, and they all lived happily ever after.

As for the wise virgins, they sniffed some when they heard the news, animadverted with considerable acerbity on the ancient mystery of the way of a man with a maid, and let it go at that.



## THE CHURCH IN POLITICS

IN dealing with the influence of the Church in politics, I am referring chiefly to the Roman Catholic Church: not that the Protestant Churches are guiltless, but their influence and political power are so much less. The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest; it is numerically the greatest; it is easily the richest; and it is the most corrupt. If we glance over the history of the last few years and study it, we shall find that the Catholic Church has been in the forefront of every movement that has opposed democracy and championed reaction.

Let us take a few examples—We will commence with Austria. In February, 1934, 1,500 Socialists were killed by Dolfuss and his Fascist thugs. The American Catholic paper, "The Commonwealth" on July 24, 1936, page 317, said:—"When a man's faith is menaced it cannot be without danger to his immortal soul. Since there was no other way of removing the menace, Dolfuss would have been justified, on this score alone, in blowing the Socialists to pieces."

It is considered an act of piety to murder 1,500 men, women and children because they protested against Catholic Fascism, and the murderer is excused his crime.

Then we take Italy. The Catholic Church blessed the banners of Mussolini's soldiers before they went out to murder 250,000 innocent, helpless, unarmed people in Abyssinia. After the Italian victory, the church bells in Italy were rung. We must not forget that the church bells in Italy were rung after the massacre of Saint Bartholomew. The Church would now have us believe that they are opposed to Fascism, yet that did not prevent the Pope from making a highly satisfactory bargain with Mussolini. The latter gentleman gave back the control of the schools in Italy to the Church after they had been free of church influence for half a century.

Bishop Spellman, of America, recently paid Europe a visit. He could hardly find words strong enough to express his admiration for Salazar, the Fascist President of Portugal, while he expressed the deepest regard for the faith of the Portuguese. Portugal is held up by the clerical Fascists as a country deeply religious and democratic. The former statement is probably correct but the latter is a clerical lie. Democracy, as known in England and America, is unknown in Portugal. Here is a country in which over 70 per cent. of the people are illiterate; but if its illiteracy proportion is high, it is not as high as its venereal rate which is the most appalling in Europe. Tuberculosis is rampant while the condition of the general run of the workers is disgraceful. Not that these things count with the Vatican policy. After all, it doesn't matter, in the eyes of the Church, if the worker cannot read so long as he can memorise portions of the Catechism: nor does it matter if he does not wash so long as he puts his dirty paws into Holy water to cross himself. Dirt and ignorance have always been the handmaidens of the Church.

And now we skip to Spain. We glance at the regime of that "gallant Christian gentleman, Franco." To-day, the synagogues in Spain have been closed. Jewish marriage, circumcision and burial banned, and Jewish children required to attend Catholic religious instruction in the schools or go without schooling. Jesuits have returned and their property has been restored. During the brief period in which the Republican Government functioned, there was an honest attempt made to wipe out the illiteracy which has disgraced Spain for so many centuries. During the Spanish war it was very extraordinary to me that one found men who called themselves Freethinkers and yet supported Franco. How could such people call themselves Freethinkers? It was a disgrace to a noble word. Let them call themselves Atheists if they like; but to oppose Christian theology and support Vatican politics is absolutely contradictory. If clerical Fascism won throughout the world, how much free-thought would be left? Fascism is the negation of everything that men who have fought and died for freedom believe and

believed in: and the Church is just as totalitarian as Nazism and Fascism. At this stage it may be argued that I have quoted only from foreign countries. Well, let us turn to Canada and compare Catholic Quebec with non-Catholic Ontario. With regard to reading, Ontario, with the same population as Quebec, has seventeen times the number of public libraries. The book circulation is eleven times greater; nor is that circulation effected by the scores and scores of books placed on the index in Quebec. The priest-ridden French Canadians are as badly off culturally as any people in the civilised world, for the Church always tries to keep its dupes in intellectual darkness. The banning of books of liberal opinions and, of course, those dealing with the criticism of religion, are banned, not only in Canada, but also in Eire, in fact, the list of books placed on the index in Eire, is growing at such a rate that soon the only books that will be admitted will be Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales and the fairy tales of the Catholic Church. Now let us look at America. Few people realise that 80 per cent. of all the money to the Vatican comes from America. Father Caughlin, that anti-Semitic, anti-Democratic, pro-Fascist Radio Priest, who boasted that his audience on the wireless numbered nearly 5,000,000, in his paper, "Social Justice," urged America to refuse material and moral aid to England. In this he was supported by the Jesuit paper "America," "The Paulist," "The Catholic World," "The Brooklyn Tablet," and "The N.Y. Catholic News." These papers wanted Fascism to win. They praised Petain for having destroyed French democracy and for having restored the power of the Church. They approved of Franco's influence in the Argentine, because the priest can expect more privileges from Franco and Fascist Argentine than he can from a democratic government. Before America entered the war, ten priests out of 33,000, signed a statement denouncing Hitlerism. The man who would look for or expect tolerance from a Church whose main creed has been intolerance, must indeed be a simpleton. It is interesting to read the Catholic views on the subject of toleration. In the Catholic Encyclopædia, volume 7, page 262, we read: "Toleration came in only when Catholic faith went out. Lenient measures were resorted to only where the power to apply more severe measures was wanting." (One can almost sense here, the regret that they cannot still use the weapons of the Inquisition).

The Rev. Father Garvin, in an article "Catholicism and Americanism" in the July, 1940, issue of "Catholic Truth," writes: "The authority of the Catholic Church is as superior to that of the State as the authority of God is to that of earthly rulers." No wonder then, that some of our R.C. M.P.s seem to take, as their inspiration, the opinions of Pacelli, the Fascist Pope, and consider that their first duty is to the Vatican and their second to their constituents. It is not alone in those countries where Catholics are in the majority that we find this intolerance—here in England, which is nominally at all events a Protestant country with a Catholic minority, we see the desperate attempts made to prohibit the teaching of birth control and to make divorce illegal. If the power of the clergy is so great with their own dupes, why interfere with people who do not profess the Catholic religion? It does go to show what they would do if they had the power. It wants a Protestant majority to pay for the poisonous education of a Catholic minority who will teach the children that "the authority of the Catholic Church is superior to that of the State"—in other words—to teach sedition. F. A. Ridley sums up the situation so well in his book "The Papacy and Fascism," when he says: "The destruction of modern civilisation has therefore become a sine qua non if Rome is to survive the crisis that at present confronts her. As the Papacy has clearly realised, the victory of Socialism means the end of the Catholic world and of the Catholic Church. Hence the fanatical and morbid fear of a militant Socialism that characterises her utterances at the present time. A Church whose declared motto is



'For ever the same' cannot hope to survive for long in a world that is never the same. Fascism and Catholicism are both anti-Socialistic, anti-Communist and anti-Labour. For both, the destruction of the Parties that are Left, is necessary for their continued existence. Both alike, can only solve the crisis of the twentieth century, the crisis pre-eminently of Socialism and of social evolution, by the destruction of socialism and the consequent repudiation of economic democracy and the denial of economic and social justice."

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

## WEATHER CONTROL

JESUS said: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" Had He lived under our variable climate He might have said: "Which of you by taking thought can change the weather?" That would have been valuable for such a statement would have done much to prevent a lot of the preposterous nonsense which is uttered to-day. Sober contemplation of the unpredictable requires knowledge and "nous": when these are absent the most improbable fantasies can take root and Man becomes the dupe of quacks and witch doctors. That this should be so in regard to weather matters is not surprising. Everyone experiences the weather, and as the average man is ignorant of what has been discovered regarding the control of atmospheric phenomena he is unable to refute the most fantastic notions about it.

The same view has been well put by Einstein. He says: "When the number of factors coming into play in a phenomenological complex is too large, scientific method in most cases fails us. One need only think of the weather, in which case prediction even for a few days ahead is impossible. Nevertheless, no one doubts that we are confronted with a causal connection, the causal components of which are in the main known to us. Occurrences in this domain are beyond the reach of exact prediction because of the variety of factors in operation, not because of any lack of order in Nature. The more a man is imbued with the ordered regularity of all events, the firmer becomes his conviction that there is no room left by the side of this ordered regularity for causes of a different nature. For him neither the rule of human nor the rule of Divine Will exists as an independent cause of natural events." Einstein was addressing an educated audience, but when he said "No one doubts" he could not have been aware of Mr. Hawke.

Mr. F. L. Hawke, M.A., F.R.A.S., is the Secretary of the Royal Meteorological Society, one of the leading world societies for the study of the atmosphere. In 1937, he wrote for the layman a book on weather entitled "Buchan's Days" wherein is a serious flirtation with the notion that human thought can exert a control over the weather. In the most naïve manner Mr. Hawke records happenings, of which he, Mr. Hawke, approves, and which were favoured by fine weather. He cites, among others, the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of King George III's accession, the Silver Jubilee of King George V, 1935, the opening of the People's Palace at Mile End in 1887 by the Queen, and the garden parties at Windsor and Buckingham Palace in 1897. Things disapproved of were rebuked by bad weather; thus Mr. Hawke cites "the remarkable snowstorms which swept over the Midlands and Southern England towards the end of the General Strike in May, 1926." And Mr. Hawke was bold. He wrote: "There are multitudes of King George's subjects who are already convinced that the elements will be kind to us on the great (Coronation) Day . . . The annual liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius is declared by scientists who have witnessed it to be inexplicable except on the assumption that the anticipation of the 'miracle' by

the composite mind of a cathedral congregation produces the effect. Is it, after all, a stranger thing that the mass thoughts of many millions of a king's loyal subjects rejoicing in the accession of their lawful ruler, and in their preservation from the more dictatorial forms of government, should operate to bring about the atmospheric motions necessary to ensure a fine day for the monarch's Coronation?" (Alas for Mr. Hawke and his theories, Coronation Day was not a good day).

So the weather god favours democracy and was so taken with Queen Victoria that he saw to it that her decorous garden parties had plenty of sunshine! This is indeed sorry stuff to come from the Secretary of the Royal Meteorological Society. One wonders what the Fellows think of it! And what would Mr. Hawke expect the weather to be when a Secularist Society has an outing?

But this sort of thing is really too serious for joking. The well-being of mankind—now so fearfully in the balance—is dependent upon the growth of knowledge and wisdom, and we have a right to expect that our scientists shall be true to their high calling and uphold before the common people the necessity to probe unceasingly the secrets of Nature in the light of what has already been discovered, and, when faced with a problem, not to revert to untutored gropings befitting primitive man. If Mr. Hawke had aired his fancies at a meeting of the Fellows of the Royal Meteorological Society, no harm would have come of it—only gaiety—but to don his secretarial robes on the title page of a book addressed to the uninformed multitude and to promulgate notions therein for which there is no warrant whatsoever in all that meteorological science has discovered cannot be too strongly condemned.

DRANOEL SEKWAIL.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### Report of Executive Meeting held December 10, 1944

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Ebury, Page, Morris, Barker and the Secretary.

The President drew attention to the death of Mrs. Clifton, wife of Mr. H. R. Clifton, a member of the Executive and Treasurer of the Society, and a motion expressing condolence with Mr. Clifton was passed.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Glasgow, Bradford, Branches and the Parent Society. Lecture reports and Branch activity were noted from various centres. Messrs. Morris, Hornibrook, Barker and Griffiths were elected as a committee of preparation for an N.S.S. Handbook.

Correspondence from Birmingham, Bradford, Glasgow, London, Secular Services and pending legacies were discussed and instructions given.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for January 14, 1945, and the proceedings closed.

## Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Deity and Design. Did Jesus Christ Exist? Agnosticism or . . . ? Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. Atheism, Freethought and the Child. Christianity and Slavery. The Devil. What is Freethought? Must We have a Religion? Morality Without God. Gods and their Makers. The Church's Fight for the Child.

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## A GERMAN HUMANIST

"I pray thee then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."

—LEIGH HUNT.

UNDER present war conditions, hatred of the Germans has been raised to a fantastic height due to the influence of propaganda, and the never-very-discerning public has long since failed to distinguish between the people of Germany and their leaders. Very opportune, then, is William B. Chamberlain's study of the great, yet neglected, German humanist, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) under the appropriate title "Heaven wasn't his Destination."\* For, if ever there was a philosophy of love it is that of Feuerbach, and if ever there was need for it, it is to-day.

Feuerbach was no mere moralist, however; he was—as J. M. Wheeler says: "A deep thinker and a lucid writer," particularly on the subject of religion, and whilst earning the admiration of Freethinkers—he incurred the hostility and ostracism of orthodoxy. So much so that he lost his chair at Erlangen through publishing "Thoughts on Death and Immortality" in 1830, whilst a clerical namesake of mine—William MacCall—attacked both Feuerbach and his English translator of "The Essence of Christianity," Marian Evans ("George Eliot"), with a Christian venom which is disgusting and unworthy of repetition here.

We may note instead that his great contemporary and fellow-countryman, Ludwig Büchner—who similarly lost his university chair—paid him high tribute. "It has been reserved for our time," says Büchner, "to complete theoretically and scientifically the victory long since won in practical life by the human principle over the divine. As a star of the first magnitude we are met here by the name of Ludwig Feuerbach, the philosopher *par excellence* of emancipated and self-contained humanity."

Certainly Feuerbach's great influence on modern thought cannot be doubted, no matter how much one may disagree with his ideas. It was he who made the first and vitally important break with Hegel, which later produced Marxism, and Engels has described "the liberating effect" of "The Essence of Christianity." Unlike the Marxists, however, Feuerbach concentrated mainly upon religious problems rather than economic ones, because, as he expressed it:—

"The question of the existence or non-existence of God is to me precisely the question of the non-existence or existence of man. Doubtless I will only cure ills which have their origin in the head or the heart; and it is from the stomach that men principally suffer . . . But are there not, none the less, many ills, even ills of the stomach, which come from the head? For my part I propose once and for all, under the influence of psychological tendencies and external circumstances, to determine and to cure the maladies of the head and of the heart of humanity." It is in the light of this passage that Feuerbach must be judged. The concluding sentence presents his avowed aim and, personally, I know of none greater.

For the difficult task of truth-seeking he versed himself well in philosophy and theology, and when "The Essence of Christianity" was completed it was virtually unanswerable, for, where others merely *attacked*, Feuerbach *explained*. "Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions, such is his God; so much worth as a man has, so much and no more has his God. Consciousness of God is self-consciousness; knowledge of God is self-knowledge." So, Feuerbach may be said to have naturalised the super-natural. It should be added that this is the basis of the anthropological study of religion.

He was, of course, accused of being merely destructive and negative by the pious individuals who had no other defence against his reasoning, but he replied to them in a typically

calm and logical manner: "This reproach is thoroughly superficial. If I prove to a man that he is not in reality what he believes to be in imagination, I am certainly negative toward him; I do harm to him; I take away his illusion. But I am only negative toward his imagined, not his real, self."

How "superficial" the objection really was, becomes obvious when we consider his closing words after a series of lectures on the "Essence of Religion" in 1848—an appeal which Freethinkers will wholeheartedly endorse:—

"I hope that my auditors will be converted, that they may henceforth be no longer friends of God but friends of men, no longer believers but thinkers, no longer devotees who pray but workers who work, no longer candidates for the hereafter but students of the here below, no longer Christians who according to their confession and their own avowal, are half-angels and half-beasts, but men, entirely men."

Feuerbach's philosophy was, indeed, completely secular. In his own words, it "knows no gods," and much of it is valuable to-day. One needs to think only of the useless metaphysical meanderings purposing to discover "what things are in themselves," as distinct from how they appear to us. Feuerbach deplored this waste of time and words, pointing out that such a distinction could only have meaning if we could see things as they do not appear to us—which is absurd. Mr. Chamberlain sums up Feuerbach's argument: "No matter in what flights of imagination we try to envision things, symbolically, upside-down or metaphorically, *we see them*"; and the German himself says: "When I speak of how things might appear to God, I am simply writing Him large and askew in letters of my own nature."

Not without justification, then, did Feuerbach call himself "the philosopher of the common man." Humanity was always his main consideration; always his starting point, and—further more—his end. Even his "truism" or ethic of love, which has been called religious, is essentially human, for he always made it clear that man is not made for ethics, "Ethics, in fact, are made for man." Significantly, too, he altered the Biblical passage (1 John. 4. 20.) and asked: "He who loves his brother whom he sees, how can he love God whom he does not see?" Nor was Feuerbach concerned with seeing God! He sought, instead, through philosophy, to "bring to light the treasure hid in man."

Quite definitely, then, "Heaven wasn't his Destination," neither was it his desire. He said exquisitely:—

"Nature is to me a mother; I can feel myself redescend without inquietude into the bosom of the earth; I wish to be interred completely in this earth which is my native earth. *Ubi patria, ibi bene*. To wish to emigrate into another world is to desert. What matter if our canton is poor? The simple fruits of my village are better than the most exotic figs; I prefer my black bread to the delicate biscuits which would be served to me in your celestial palaces. Achilles, the Greek hero, preferred to be a labourer on earth than king in the kingdom of shadows. I do not need to be consoled about my death; I do not wish to be consoled about the death of others. Grief is sacred to me; your consolations are impious . . ."

We, who think likewise, should express our thanks to Ludwig Feuerbach, and to Mr. Chamberlain for his excellent book.

C. McCALL.

\* Published by George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London; 8s. 6d.

**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, INDECENCIES AND OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.