

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Man and God

IT would be interesting to trace the beginnings of newspaper religious advertising. In a mass form it is quite new. The sermons printed are not of a scholarly character; nor are they intended to be, even though some of the contributors may be men of some distinction. The contributions are usually commonplace; often they display a degree of ignorance, probably as a method of enticing the class at which these sermonettes are aimed. How did these newspaper sermons come to be? I cannot say with any certainty, but I do recall the fact that some years back there was a complaint made that clergymen did not use the Press sufficiently for propaganda purposes. The notion began to appear. We can hardly believe that editors and proprietors were longing for the salvation of the people. It was a clerical move, and the clergy have ways of bringing pressure to bear even on newspapers. The way in which items of news concerning Freethought movements are suppressed suggests that there is more underground work in the newspaper world than most people would think possible. God may work in a mysterious way, but the Press and parson combine is far more certain in its work. Nearly all Sunday papers now carry sermons or religious essays, and most of the dailies devote some space to religion. Never was religion looked after so well; never were the number of unbelievers greater.

While I write I have before me a recent issue of the "Sunday Chronicle." It contains a sermonette by Viscount Cecil, for whom I happen to have some respect. The article is one of a series, and we have the Editor's word that they are "inspiring." Viscount Cecil opens with an anecdote. He asked a young man whether he believed in a God. The reply was, "Yes, but I do not think it very important." No doubt the Viscount was shocked, but he consoled himself with the reflection that "at the present moment numbers of people are said to hold this opinion." Not to believe that God exists may be passed, but to concede that God does exist but people take no notice of him is an act of sheer contempt. It is enough to make the heavenly throne rock. Obviously if God is, he is of first-rate importance. We have seen a meeting of Parliament cowed to silence by a Prime Minister's frown. What may we not expect from a God who is treated in this off-hand manner? We would remind Viscount Cecil that the situation is far more deadly than he appears to realise. If God is to continue he *must* be treated as though he is of first-rate importance. An imposture can only exist so long as it is taken seriously. But let it be said that he is a mere constitutional figure, treat him as though he does nothing—having nothing to do—and he will soon become nothing. God must do something, even though it be merely throwing an earth-

quake or two or spreading a disease, but he *must* do something.

I fancy that Viscount Cecil realised this because, by way of a counter-stroke, he makes God responsible for everything. He claims that all that man does that is really human comes direct from God. We get no "reference" to this, but we have a series of general statements to prove that all that man does that is human is due to "spiritual power." All we get by way of explanation is that "By 'spiritual' I mean that part of a man's nature which is not dependent upon his bodily powers." But what are these things that are not connected and dependent upon man's bodily powers? Of course, we do by way of clarification range things as high and low, but clearly this does not rule out all connection of the high with the low. Mental power is distinct from mere physical power, but that does not break all connection between the two. Given the conditions and quantity yields to quality. What we would like to get from our teacher is exactly what form of "spiritual" power is not ultimately derivable from "physical" power. It looks as though we should be justified in speaking of the spiritual power manifested by a piece of wood when it is ablaze. As a matter of fact it is so accepted by primitive peoples.

Viscount Cecil does not explain—which shows more intelligence than many godites display—he throws out a challenge: "If anyone denies the existence of conscious action apart from bodily powers, how do we explain self-sacrifice? This is really a case of confusion, although it is quite in accord with Christian teaching that if a man behaves decently in this world he must receive reward in a world to come. "Self-sacrifice" is a very bad term, anyway. Would anybody but a Christian seriously argue that if a man does a kindly action with regard to his neighbour he must receive due payment, with interest, in some world to come? After all, members of animal groups help each other and defend each other. A male animal will help his mate; an animal mother will give her life to protect her young; the members of a group protect each other. Is there any reason why Viscount Cecil should place man lower than gregarious animals? I decline to agree with the insinuation that human beings—even Christian human beings—are poorer in quality than the animal world. I suggest that Viscount Cecil substitutes "self-development" for "self-sacrifice." I protest against we humans being classed by Christians as being lower than animals. What our Viscount is heading for is that man is powerless without God. In this he turns things upside down. It is God who is dependent on man for his existence—God is nothing without us.

### Facts and Fancies

Coming down to hard facts, Viscount Cecil admits that the churches are emptying. But he says it is not hostility that empties them; it is indifference. That statement is

not merely incorrect, it is absurd. Facts show that no matter what inducement is held out the church-going population declines. Buildings are made more comfortable, non-religious topics are preached, the newspapers help in advertising religion. All sorts of dodges are tried; the churches go on emptying. Never did the clergy work so hard to collect audiences; never have they met less success.

We should be pleased if Viscount Cecil would oblige us with a statement as to wherein lies the substantial difference between being indifferent to religion and not believing in it? Do not the two statements substantially sink to one? Can we imagine a Christian saying to his God, "Awfully sorry, but I really have not the time to attend your church. We are too busy to pray to you. Sorry, but I just can't bother about you." After all, Christianity is a religion that should not be treated with indifference. If it is true that we are all damned because our very remote ancestors offended God, we should be on our guard. We should remember how God cursed the human race. Can it be that God has awakened: that in damning us he is disregarding his own interests? In cursing the whole of the human race he has been stocking hell and leaving heaven with nothing but angels and trumpets. Then he devised a plan by which his only son—who had been hitherto kept in the background—could be sacrificed so that humans might come to heaven instead of going to hell. The experiment was never a success, although for a time heaven raked in a number of visitors; but heaven never achieved the attractions of hell. And now, with greater knowledge and better taste, the road to hell is more crowded than ever, with the probability of the complete collapse of the Christian scheme of salvation. Hitler, who proclaimed himself as being God's mouthpiece, hoped to establish the universal worship of his God for a thousand years. Now that possibility has gone the God market looks like falling flat.

I do not think I need follow Viscount Cecil's defence of religion in detail. By himself he appears to think that man can but eat and drink and fight and do the wrong thing. But God has given us an "urge" which drives us forward. "The spirit of man," he says, "is not limited by his mortal life." And that contains a truth and a falsity. It is man that lives on; "men" have their day and disappear. The race may continue indefinitely, but the passing of the individual is as certain as is his beginning. The life of which the individual may think with profitable sanity is the life of the race. Always man's thoughts refer to this: to man projecting himself into a world of fantasy. Even the conception of "god" is naught but an elaboration of man as we know him. God—the best of gods—is only an enlarged copy of man. Every time we speak of God as wise, or good, we are endowing a phantom of the mind with human qualities. No one has ever been able to think of a god who was not a reflection of man. It was the last great Churchman this country saw, Cardinal Newman, who said that when he looked into nature for God he saw nothing but a reflection of his own face. There never was any other method of standing "face to face with God." Gods and devils have all the same origin.

I cannot say that Viscount Cecil will read what I have written. I am certain he will not reply to it. He is not a fool, and in this case silence indicates wisdom. But I would suggest that he reads the following pertinent passage from

the work of an Atheist philosopher, George Santayana, one of the world's greatest philosophers, who transforms prose into poetry without losing the strength of the first or dulling the music of the other. The quotation is taken from his "Reason in Science" (one of the five volumes under the general title of "The Life of Reason"):—

"The artificial prejudice against mechanism is the fruit of party spirit. When a myth has become the centre or sanction for habits and institutions, these habits and institutions stand against any conception incompatible with that myth. It matters nothing that the value the myth was designed to express may remain standing without it. Social and intellectual inertia is too great to tolerate so simple an evolution. It divides opinions, not into false and true, but into high and low. . . . Imagine Socrates 'viewing with alarm the implications of an argument!' . . . If you are in the habit of believing in special providence, or of expecting your romantic adventures in a second life, materialism will dash your hopes, and you may think for a year or two that you have nothing to live for. But a thorough materialist . . . will be like the superb Democritus, a laughing philosopher. . . . The panic that seems to seize some minds at the thought of a merely natural existence is something truly hysterical. . . . The death of individuals, as we observe daily in nature, does not prevent the reappearance of life; and, if we choose to indulge in arbitrary judgments on a subject where data fails us, we may as reasonably wish that there might be less of life as that there might be more. The passion for a large and permanent population in the Universe is not obviously rational; at a great distance a man must view everything, including himself, under the form of eternity: and when life is so its length or its defusion becomes a point of little importance. What matters then is quality. The reasonable and humane demand of the world is that such creatures as exist should not be unhappy and that life, whatever its quantity, should have a quality that may justify it in its own eyes. This just demand, made by conscience and not by an arbitrary fancy, the world describes by materialism, does not fulfil altogether, for adjustments to it are tentative, and much friction must precede and follow upon any vital equilibrium attained. This imperfection, however, is actual, and no theory can overcome it except by verbal fallacies and scarcely deceptive euphemisms. What mechanism involves in this respect is exactly what we find: a tentative appearance of life in many quarters, its disappearance in some, and its reinforcement and propagation in others, where the physical equilibrium attained ensures to it a natural stability and a natural prosperity."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

No act of piety is it to be seen again and again with veiled head turning to a stone, approaching every altar, falling prostrate to the ground, spreading out the palms before the statues of the gods, sprinkling the altars copiously with the blood of beasts and linking prayer to prayer. Rather is it piety to be able to look on all things with a mind at peace.—*Lucretius*, "On the Nature of Things."

## THE ORDEAL OF THE HUGUENOTS

THE story of the Huguenots is a sad one. The French Calvinists were, at least in their earlier history, the devout adherents of a sinister creed. But as time went by many prosperous Huguenots departed from their stricter tenets. Social and economic considerations broadened their outlook until their adored hero, Henry of Navarre, after an interval of hesitation, eventually decided that the Crown of France was well worth a Mass.

Catherine de Medici and her scoundrelly sons; the Duke of Guise and his brother the Cardinal, were conspicuous on the Romanist side, while Admiral Coligny, Condé, Rohan and other heretics led the other. The long tragic story has been retold with a wealth of detail by Otto Zoff in his "Huguenots" (Allen and Unwin, 1944). The work is well balanced: the shortcomings of the Calvinists, as well as the enormities of their adversaries are not minimised in a volume which is evidently the outcome of a sustained study of a century-long contest, which terminated in the revocation of the charter of toleration granted the heretics by Henry IV, in the later reign of Louis XIV.

But apart from their inherited Romanism, the enemies of the Calvinists were consciously or perhaps unconsciously, preparing for the unification of France with a kingship virtually independent of a semi-feudal aristocracy. The Huguenots, on the other hand, were fighting for social and religious freedom. Also, their political aspirations were far more democratic than those of their assailants and this suggests why so many of their supporters were artificers and other townsmen who claimed recognition of their rights in a community of landed proprietors. As Zoff intimates: "History knows no purely religious wars. At that time, too, there were other issues at stake, social, economic and political in nature—issues that were settled in that crimson century. Their solution made the France we know in history; that which as kingdom, empire, republic, has always remained one nation in different garbs. This France was cemented, if not created, in the blood and tears of the Huguenot wars."

In the days of Francis I and his immediate successor, the Calvinists' grievances and disputes mainly concerned theological subtleties and differences, and the scandalous abuses within the Catholic Church. But with the appeal to arms, equal ferocity was soon displayed concerning economic and constitutional anomalies. The sentiments of the conflicting parties grew more and more embittered, while the wanton massacre of men, women and children at Vassy by Guise's licentious soldiery, with their commander's approval, intensified the trouble.

The crowning infamy of St. Bartholomew's Day eclipsed all preceding atrocities when all the leading Huguenots gathered in Paris (save the princes, Navarre and Condé who were spared) were mercilessly massacred with all their co-religionists who failed to flee. After the Paris slaughter, at least eight other cities including Orleans, Toulouse and Bordeaux, suffered a similar fate. Our author cites the conservative estimate of 2,000 victims in Paris and 20,000 for France. The real number of those that perished is still conjectural and several authorities place the number murdered at a far higher figure.

His Holiness was enraptured when he heard of the holocaust. In Rome, as Zoff reminds us: "Pope Gregory XIII had the blood-bath celebrated jubilantly. The messenger who first brought the good news received a thousand talers, and a Te Deum was sung before the whole College of Cardinals. Gregory requested the French Ambassador to inform his King that the events in Paris had delighted him more than fifty victories like that of Lepanto. The city was illuminated, a great procession arranged, and a medal struck in commemoration of the event."

The contest between the dissenting parties continued, both diplomatically and in the field, with varying success. The Duke of Guise was assassinated by order of the King and his Most Christian Majesty soon shared his fate when a Dominican priest plunged a knife into the King's abdomen. On his deathbed, Henry III summoned the Catholic nobles and ordered their acceptance of the Protestant Henry of Navarre as the future ruler of France.

Navarre, however, was faced with many perils. Paris was possessed by his most deadly enemies, and the illiterate masses hated the idea of a heretic King. Moreover, the Catholic notables refused to ratify the oath they had sworn to the dying Henry III unless Navarre consented to renounce his heresies. A compromise resulted, and Henry agreed to listen to the arguments of Catholic ecclesiastics and announce his decision within six months.

Henry, however, was driven to an appeal to arms and having won the famous Battle of Ivry in 1590, ensuing desultory warfare led to little result. So at last, in 1593, his conversion to Catholicism was announced and he entered Paris amid the plaudits of the populace.

Their leader having become King, the Huguenots craved more than they received. Surrounded as he was with suspicious enemies, Navarre could confer few favours. They must show patience until he was able to grant them the liberties they desired. But little reliance was placed on Henry's promises, and the stream of emigration continued to flow into Protestant countries beyond the French frontier.

The Edict of Nantes came at last, but the struggle to gain this had been bitter. Freedom of conscience and worship was granted and the Huguenots were now eligible for all public positions. Their children had access to the schools, and their sick were admitted to the hospitals and their poor received alms. Also, provisions were made for their possession of certain strongholds, which might be necessary at any emergency.

In reviewing the bloodstained past with its passion for uniformity, Zoff notes that: "The financial loss caused by the religious wars was beyond calculation. But one thing was certain, 2,000,000 people had lost their lives. Stake and axe had killed for seventy years, and civil war had raged for thirty-five. France was devastated, half its towns and castles lay in ruins, the fields were so ravaged that thousands of peasants had emigrated because the soil that had nourished their fathers no longer bore enough to sustain them."

Under Navarre there was room for reconciliation, and the heresies soon developed industry and husbandry. More secular-minded men served as administrators. Among these was the Calvinist, Sully, who retained his religion to the last. He became Minister of Finance and, curiously enough, it was he who persuaded the King to accept Catholicism.

Under Sully the finances were reformed. This was a primary consideration, as the follies and wanton extravagance of the Court had made France insolvent. The peculations of the collectors of the taxes were curtailed and the money made to flow into the Treasury. But the new ruler was far from thrifty. Still, Sully seized the advantages of this peaceful period to reduce expenditure and promote the production of useful commodities. He said that: "The raising of crops and the breeding of livestock are the two breasts on which man feeds." And so pronounced were the improvements in rural economy that the King himself declared: "If God lets me live, I shall see that every peasant in my kingdom has a chicken in his pot."

Chambers of commerce were created in the leading cities. The silk industry was initiated, linen mills were erected in Picardy and Champagne, lace-making prospered, and factories for the manufacture of rugs, tapestries, glass, watches and perfumes provided labour for an enormous number previously unemployed.

But this relatively bright period was of brief duration. The King was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic.

After his untimely death, decay set in in the State. Later, Richelieu restored affairs to something resembling stability. He respected the provisions of the Edict of Nantes, as did Mazarin, his successor, as chief Ministers of the Crown. But under Louis XIV the Edict was revoked and many thousands of France's most industrious and enterprising citizens were driven into exile to enrich the resources of England, Holland, America and other non-Catholic lands to which they fled.

T. F. PALMER.

## "HIS WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS"

A BOOK of Press cuttings will "reveal" more about God and his ways than will the Bible. Here is a random selection from such a book of my own.

That God may interrupt his worshippers with the sirens is one of the astonishing conclusions drawn by the vicar who, when organising a service for old age pensioners asked other vicars to follow his example by approaching residents near a church to post up a sign on their gates as to their willingness to shelter a member of the congregation!

One hears much to-day of the empty churches. Recently a church in Holland was emptied of its congregation by a lion which entered during High Mass. After knocking over several people, many of whom fainted, the lion went up to the altar and choir and refused to budge. It was finally dragged out by the police. Strange that God does not impart similar keenness for "staying put" in church to people!

Another inexplicable incident is that of a woman who was so engrossed in the communion service that thieves stole her hand-bag from the pew.

Bombing has taken its toll of the churches. A cutting before me reads:—

### "FLYING BOMB HITS CONGREGATION"

Numbers of worshippers killed. The vicar was about to read the lesson when masonry collapsed on the congregation. The east wall was left standing so that the words "Glory be to God" showed through the rising dust of the destruction. (After that it would seem they'd had their "lesson").

### "GUARDS CHAPEL WRECKED BY BOMB"

A direct hit was scored during Sunday morning parade.

### "SHATTERED CHURCH, BUT CROSS REMAINS"

In this church 21 children who were gathered for christening were killed.

### "CONGREGATION GASSED"

During the invasion exercise the few in the congregation who had gas masks tried in vain to sing their hymns. But the service had to be abandoned. . . . And so on.

Talking of gas masks, here is a cutting recalling the King's order that everyone attending service in the Royal Chapel must carry a mask! Apparently it is wise to play for safety first, even in church.

Here are two incidents about pilots. One prayed, the other didn't. The pilot who prayed as his plane crashed asked God that the "plane might land in the sea" to avoid injuring civilians. The plane crashed on a car instead, killing three people. Later the pilot died from injuries. The verdict of the coroner was that the pilot was not to blame. Who was?

The other pilot who did not pray found himself crash landing, but was unhurt!

Bible reading is not likely to increase these days if God allows such incidents as the following:—

### "LIGHTNING HITS SPEAKER WITH BIBLE IN HAND AS CHILDREN WATCH"

Children listening to a London missionary saw him struck by lightning, Bible in hand. The children ran screaming from the tent. The missionary seriously hurt was taken to hospital.

"From all perils and dangers of this night good Lord deliver us," we pray. But the Press cuttings answer:—

"FIVE CHILDREN KILLED DAILY ON THE ROAD"

"300 GASSED IN THE STREET"

"PRIEST WHO JOINED THE R.A.M.C. KILLED ON ACTIVE SERVICE"

"Give us this day our daily bread," we pray. And what happened in the Indian famine? Children were "too weak to eat," "husbands died after vainly hunting for food for their families," "white bread mob has hysterics," while finally Smuts (not God) sent food to India, and the Secretary for India stated that "the Indian famine problem so far as help here was concerned was entirely one of shipping." That would seem to put the Lord's prayer in its place.

Yes, a collection of Press cuttings certainly supports the text: "His ways are not our ways."

RUBY TA'BOIS.

## "BE HUMANE!"

So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind;  
When just the art of being kind  
Is all this sad world needs.

—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

"BE HUMANE!" Those were the bold, outstanding words on a poster which caught my eye recently, and which imprinted themselves on my mind. They were actually a plea on behalf of the local Dog's Home for the kindly treatment of strays, but their significance is far wider, far greater than that. What wonderful possibilities would be opened up to mankind, if only the peoples of the world would take heed, and endeavour to replace their hatred and distrust of each other with humanism and kindness! Some may object to the little quotation which heads this article, on the grounds that "the art of being kind" is not "all this sad world needs," but it can be safely replied that, at any rate, the kindness is essential.

A sad world, alas, it is, and a mad one too, or, at least, as William Blake said, "made up of contradiction." This becomes apparent when one considers that, in the long run, the interests of nations are mutual. Certainly, the interests of the peoples are, and it is they who make up the nations. But the peoples are too-often subject to the whims and follies of their rulers; while they, in turn, are too often victims of the desire for power and supremacy, and are liable to undertake intrigues and machinations to satisfy this craving. As a result, the peoples, sooner or later, are driven into conflict with men and women who are very much like themselves, and with whom they have no quarrel.

Then the hounds of propaganda are unleashed to ravish the population! To brutalise and fill with hatred of the enemy is the main object, and it is only too successful. Our opponents become "pagans" or "heathens" overnight, even as our leaders become demi-gods, and our cause is identified with that of God and the Right! Atrocity stories fill the national Press and a kind of satanic delight is exemplified in the narration of horrors.

Is it to be wondered that the people lose their sense of values: that the primitive, bestial impulses show themselves at the expense of their finer feelings and their reason? On the contrary, it is amazing that anybody is able to retain his balance. Fortunately, a minority do. Recognising that war itself is the greatest atrocity, which completely overshadows the rest, these few try to keep alive the flickering light of humanism in a barbarous world. Their task is difficult in the extreme, and at times it seems almost impossible. A public which listens with indifference to the news of the complete destruction of a town

by bombing or the wholesale slaughter of thousands of men, is not likely to be much affected by appeals for tolerance, in thought or treatment.

The "Hun" and the "Jap" are represented as cruel and brutish and all consideration of them as fellow human beings has virtually disappeared in the eyes of the ordinary person. That they have parents, wives and children who will mourn their death or rejoice in their safe return, is entirely overlooked. So is the all important fact that they are—like our men—fighting because they were forced to do so by their respective governments. They were not consulted on the question of the war, any more than we were, and they were no more responsible for it. Foolish and sheep-like they may have been, and too ready to rely upon leaders instead of upon themselves, but were not we also? Let us, then, try to show a little sympathy for them; let us try to remember that they are, in most respects, very similar to ourselves and deserving of humane treatment.

It behoves the Freethinker to set an example if he is to be worthy of the name and if he is to carry on the glorious record for humanism of his forebears. He must, by all means, condemn brutality, but he must condemn it no matter which side commits it, and he must strive to end it all as soon as possible. I am not writing as a pacifist—though I should feel no shame if I was—but I am desirous, like most, that this carnage should end quickly. I am also concerned with the state of the world when the war is over. I am aware too—as Chapman Cohen has many times reiterated—that the great problem is to learn how to live with Germans, not how to kill them, and I am impatient for the opportunity to acquire this knowledge.

Unfortunately, the lesson of world war number one seems to have been in vain and the same disastrous methods of 1919 seem likely to be used again when this war is over, and the same fatal results must inevitably accrue. "Unconditional Surrender" is the only "peace" offer made to the Germans, and it is not surprising that they choose instead to fight to the last. After all, what does capitulation involve? The indications are that they will become little better than slaves. Russia wants German forced labour to rebuild her cities, and intends to transport whole populations from large areas and replace them with Poles who have been similarly transported, thereby facilitating the alteration of boundaries and transference of territory. The other Allies, too, are resolved to set up new frontiers and to take land from Germany. Is it necessary to remind readers that one of the great mistakes of Versailles was the creation of 7,000 extra miles of frontiers?

Pessimistic, indeed, is the outlook for the peace, while in the meantime the war drags on with more and more bloodshed; more and more evidence that "liberation" in Europe is not proving such a godsend as it seemed; and more and more ruin of homes, lives and all that goes to make up civilisation. And the Japanese war has still scarcely begun, though hatred of this enemy shows signs of becoming more intense even than of the Germans, because of the emphasis on "racial" distinction. It is common in this country—and commoner still, I believe, in the U.S.A.—to speak of the Japanese as "ape-men" or "sub-humans," and as for barbarism—well, they are regarded as personifications of it. Yet, talking of barbarism, it is perhaps useful to remember that some months ago the American magazine "Life" printed a photograph of a girl writing with a skull in front of her. The caption read: "Arizona war worker writes her navy boy friend a thank-you note for the Jap skull he sent her."

So war draws out all that is worst in man, and it carries with it a terrible aftermath. How long will it take mankind to

appreciate that retribution only kindles ill-feeling and solves no problems? How long will people be in realising that tolerance and fair treatment now may help to prevent another catastrophe in the next few decades? Nearly nineteen and a half centuries ago, God's representatives are reputed to have declared: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." At Christmas, 1944, His representatives still ironically repeated the old saying, but it should be obvious that neither God nor His representatives have brought the desirable state of affairs to the earth. As always, it is man who must do it, but before he can do so he must forsake his present narrowness of outlook and adopt the superbly humanistic view of Thomas Paine: "The world is my country, All mankind are my brethren, To do good is my religion." Then there will be real hopes of a true and lasting peace on the earth.

C. McCALL.

## "THE" MIRACLE OF LOURDES

THE scepticism of Freethinkers where miracles are concerned, and particularly the miracles at Lourdes, causes me considerable dismay.

Thousands of pilgrims, in organised parties, visit the shrine year by year and whilst the number of "cures" may be small the Freethinker is not prepared to accept even this small percentage and must need cast doubt on their "authenticity." Often, he will assert, the "incurable" person was suffering from an "imaginary complaint"—a most preposterous statement as the patient would emphatically declare, for who can be more convinced of ill-health than the one who "knows" he is ailing.

Even when a cure is recorded the Freethinker is dubious as to its performance.

Perdition to these "doubting Thomases" who attempt to undermine a really great work—a work which even Freethinkers must admit is "profitable" to a vast number of people though all of them are not necessarily pilgrims.

Let me therefore place on record what may be described as "The" Miracle of Lourdes—a miracle for which I shall adduce such incontestable proof as will astonish the sceptics.

My story concerns a pilgrim—a lady from Erin's Isle. As she passed through the English Customs on her return journey, a bottle, most carefully protected against possible breakage, was found in her luggage. "What," asked the Customs Officer, "is this?" "Sure," came the answer, "it's only a bottle of Holy Water I'm taking back to the 'Ould Country.'" The officer after removing the cork and smelling the contents remarked: "It smells suspiciously like brandy," and passed the bottle to the lady, who, after herself smelling and tasting the contents, cried ecstatically: "Glory be to God there's no end to the miracles of the Blessed Virgin."

I said I would give proof, incontestable proof, of the truth of this incident. I cannot, "for security reasons," give the name of the vessel, nor the date and port of arrival. Neither must I divulge the name of the Customs official—as is well known only the higher ranks of the Civil Service are referred to by name, and I see no reason why I should break the custom. As for the lady she is of a retiring disposition and expressed a strong desire that I would "keep her name out of this," and I, being a gentleman, can do no other than respect her wishes, and despite the possible scorn or blandishments of my readers, shall refuse to satisfy their curiosity.

These details are after all of minor importance, I can, if called upon, produce the man who told me the story—and what further proof can any reasonable man require?

"WILCOL."

## ACID DROPS

NOT for the reasons usually given we have, ever since Hitler started his career of murder, insisted on the religious quality of the man and his work. To-day, when his troubles are greater than ever, and his complete downfall seems certain, his religious aspect appears more vividly than ever. More than once he came near coming to terms with the Papacy. The final failure of any such partnership was due to the fact that each fought for the complete control of the rising generation. If German Nazism was to be firmly established, even in Germany, complete control of the younger generations was imperative. But the Roman Church had always fought for exactly the same thing—the capture of the child. If anyone has any doubts of this we refer him to the history of the Church in Spain. A country that stood well in the forefront of civilisation was brought to ruin by religion. History has repeated itself in Germany.

The churches complain generally of a shortage of preachers. We are not surprised. But it is not merely the quantity that is thinning, but the quality which is dropping lower and lower. Still worse the number of people who attend the churches is declining at a more rapid pace than ever, and there is no possibility of any improvement where congregations are concerned. The higher clergymen are hoping for a move for the better with the return of clerical influence in the schools. There may be a glimmer of hope here, but it is easily over-valued. For outside the school there is the influence of the outside world. Science will not grow weaker and the new generation cannot be shut out. Hitler's plan is the only one here that could help the clergy, and now that is nearing extinction. Summarising the factors at work the outlook for religion is very grim.

And now the cry is rising of a shortage of recruits for missionary work among the "heathens," particularly with regard to China and India. With India getting home rule, and that must come sooner or later, and China with its schools of philosophy that were in full blast when these islands of ours were inhabited by "savages," the chances of Christianity increasing its hold on the people of either nation are very slim indeed. China is almost certain to lean more to Russia than to Britain for many reasons, but largely because of the fact that a very large, well trained body of people, running into many millions, are already established, and have played a great part in the resistance to Japan. Polite towards Christians the Chinese will remain, but it will always be accompanied by a smile at our idea of being able to teach them how to live.

The "Times" reports Lord Templewood as saying during an address to the Cambridge Union that there should be "specially" created "Freedom of Religious thought." But what we should like to know is where Lord Templewood stands with regard to non-religious thought. We recall that while Home Secretary in the Baldwin Government, he wrote his "dear friend," Captain Ramsay, regretting that as Home Secretary he had no power to forbid an International Freethought Congress. The immediate cause of the opposition was that there would be representatives from Russia.

After all, there is more logic in the position of the Roman Catholic Church in standing for what it claims to be real Christianity, and therefore declining to join hands with a presentation of Christianity which is neither fish, fowl or good red herring. The Roman Catholic says: "This is our religion, nay it is the only religion that is Christian, and we will not join in forming a school syllabus that is neither one thing or the other." On the other hand the non-Catholic Christians say: "We are not very particular what is taught to children so long as the name of Jesus and God and the Church is kept well in front of them, as Protestants we cannot agree on teaching children any particular dogma, but if we can get children familiar with an atmosphere which is called religious, it gives us a good chance of capturing them for this or that church when they grow up." It is a nice position in either case. A religious form of kidnapping.

We suggest that our readers should note that now the war in Europe is drawing to an end the clergy are showing a renewed activity in suggesting days of prayer for victory. Of course, if they keep it up some burst of praying is bound to hit the nail on the head. But we should like to ask some responsible clergymen that, if God can bring the war to an end, why did he not stop it occurring? Perhaps the noise of the war has not yet reached the celestial throne. But the perpetuation of this kind of idiocy has made even Jahveh tired of the game.

The low level of Roman Catholic reasoning is well shown by an article in the "Catholic Times" recently. The writer—he has at least the decency not to sign the article—says:—

"The man who believes in God and who has a conscience often seems to be handicapped in this world. Dishonesty often seems to be the best policy. And if there were no God and no hereafter it certainly would be so."

Now that is sound Christian teaching, although it is often wrapped up nowadays so that the careless reader fails to see its application. The plain statement here is that truth, honesty, kindness, loyalty—nothing has any value in human life, and a sense of decency can only be counted on while a policeman—heavenly or earthly—has his eye on one. Well, we are loth to think that even Roman Catholics are such inborn blackguards as this writer believes them to be. One could hardly place Christians lower than does this writer.

We were pleased to note that the assistant school mistresses recently passed a resolution: "That there shall be no compulsion to schools providing religious education." That shows a little more courage than is usually shown by our teachers' organisations. If the teachers in this country had stood up, the present step backward that is taken in the Education Bill would never have occurred.

Says the Jesuit Father, George Burns, writing in the "Catholic Times": "If Christianity merely means individual freedom and not the duty of obedience to revealed law; if Christ merely stressed the dignity of men and not the reality of their sin, it is possible for any godless politician to assume the mantle of the preacher." Now that is plain, straightforward Christian doctrine. We commend it to those who note the wishy-washy, weak-kneed and dishonest rantings of our leading Protestant preachers, and the cant of some of our politicians about "true Christianity." The Roman Catholic preacher is speaking with downright honesty—at least for the time being. All the chatter about Christian freedom, the liberty of man, the dignity of man, etc., etc., is just nonsense, and they who use these terms must know it. It is blind obedience to God, which in practice means the Church that gives us historic Christianity. We think that Brother George Burns is letting loose a lot of stupid and demoralising ideas, but it is real Christianity, and we give him credit for being honest—within limits.

Take, on contrast, to what we have just said, the newspaper cant and humbug that is given us by the "Daily Mirror" for January 27, one instance out of scores that might be given. An editorial informs us that "the task of the Archbishop is to accelerate our moral progress." That is sheer nonsense, and the writer knows it. The people of this country are not yet so far gone that they are waiting for an Archbishop to tell them how to behave. The nonsense of the statement made is illustrated by the same writer continuing with: "But before trying to reform the people the churches must reform themselves." Well here is a very nice little problem for one to while away a dark evening: (a) The Church must moralise the people. (b) But before this can be done the people must moralise the Church. And that leads to what we may call a final question—How the deuce is it to be done? But perhaps we might begin by moralising some of our newspaper scribblers!

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. EFFEL.—Too late for this issue. Next week.

J. EDWARDS.—Thanks. Will use next week.

D. PEMFOLD.—It is within the right of any priest to issue dispensations whenever he pleases. But the same right is possessed by any subject. The operative principle is that any person may do what he pleases so long as he is not infringing the law of the country. A Roman priest may doom a man to hell. But it lacks the legal power that lies behind the issue of a railway ticket. Pantomimic performances are as permissible in a Church as in a theatre. The difference is that the theatre has to pay rates. Churches are rate free.

A. GEORGE—"Freethinker" Fund, £20.

C. A. MORRISON.—Your article to hand, but it cannot be printed by the date desired.

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

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## SUGAR PLUMS

WE think that the following, which we take from the "Spectator," of February 2, will be of interest to our readers. It is by one of the regular contributors to that journal, who writes under the pen name of "Janus":—

"Having occasion to take an oath the other day in connection with a function I was called on to fulfil, I could not help wondering why the alternative, and equally legal, method of affirmation is not resorted to more commonly. I am bound to say I dislike the oath procedure. I am no more impelled to tell the truth through holding a Bible in my hand than if I held the Oxford Dictionary. The Bible, indeed, in words which come with the highest of all authorities, tells me to swear not at all. Apart from that, people in the habit of telling the truth more often than not should not need to invoke the help of God for the purpose of making a simple statement. The plain and dignified words of the affirmation: 'I, X. Y. Z., do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that . . . ' seem to me very much preferable. But when I told the Commissioner for Oaths who was handling me that I wanted to affirm, he was completely undone. Such a thing had never happened to him before; he wasn't familiar with the formula, the little book that had it in was in another room. In the end, to save time and trouble, and not regarding the matter as a major moral issue, I took the oath with the usual (to me) empty symbolism. But I should like to put in a word for affirmation—in courts of law and anywhere else where the occasion arises."

Now that is not an uncommon experience, although in most cases the court officials are at least acquainted with the law on the subject. On the other hand we are impelled to say that Freethinkers are much to blame for not merely court officials, but for the general public being unaware of the law on the subject. For more than half a century a mere affirmation is enough, and no court has the power to go further than to ask on what grounds. The reply should be either "Without religious belief," or "Contrary to my religious belief." No official has the right to question further and no further enquiry should be answered. To do justice to the courts, it is not common that any further inquisition is made. The fear that one will arouse prejudice should not be regarded. It seldom does nowadays and heretics should not flinch from facing prejudice in such matters.

For our own part we only met with one inconvenience and that happened at a coroner's inquest. When the "swearing" time was reached we asked for an affirmation. We were told to stand down. Naturally we obeyed. When the case opened we asked to be released. It was refused, and we were told to remain in the court. We refused and walked out. We believe that we might have been summoned for not obeying the order, but we took the risk and nothing happened. It is really idle to grow lyrical over the beauties of freedom and to shirk doing something to make it secure.

"It should be our aim," says the Dean of St. Paul's, the Very Reverend W. R. Matthews, "to see that Britain is more Christian after the war than before." There was once a cobbler who made himself famous by saying "There's nothing like leather." The Dean, however, is quite disinterested in the advice given.

We don't know anything about Miss Clare White, but from a very brief report in the "Western Morning News" she carries a punch in each fist. Speaking at a meeting of the South Devon Debating Society on the question "Have the Churches failed?" she said:—

"The Christian Churches would never attack a great evil like war, greed or poverty, unless someone attacked it first so that they might feel safe in doing the same. They had not even the courage to demand humane divorce laws for fear of shocking intolerant church-goers and subscribers to church funds. Any little good the churches had done in the past paled into insignificance beside the evils to which they lent their names."

We should like to hear more from Miss White. She appears to have courage and a punch. After all, Torquay is not a very large place, and the clergy can get at people quite easily. Quite curious too is the curt summary of the opposition: "The Churches were defended by Rev. A. T. Jones."

There are at the moment some very good books written by Chinese, in England. We invite all to make themselves acquainted with them. We recommend for the purpose of understanding, "My Country and My People," by Lin Yutang. If it does nothing else it will provide material for a laugh at the idea of turning the Chinese into Christians.

Of all the pieces of sheer impudence Liverpool Roman Catholics have reached the limit. On Sunday, February 11, every Roman Church in Liverpool had read to it a demand that the Pope should be given a seat at the Peace Conference. This will be repeated, we expect, in every Catholic Church. The Liverpool effort is just feeling the ground. To place on a level with a country to be represented is one thing, but to claim that the Pope shall be placed on the same level as countries because he has friends and followers in Italy and elsewhere is enough to raise a laugh. After all, the National Secular Society has supporters in America, China, Russia and in every country in Europe. What would be said if we were to apply for representation on the Peace Council? If the claim of the Pope is good, why not a host of others that might be named. Perhaps they are building on the fact that the Prime Minister paid the Pope a visit? It would have been better if he had stayed away.

## VICTORIAN ATHEISTS AND GOD

IN trying to say so much in so little space in my recent articles on propaganda I probably left open the door to a misconception which, as Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner pointed out, might be drawn from my remarks.

In no sense did I mean to claim that Atheism can to-day give itself superior airs in contrast with Victorian times. The Victorian Atheists were a grand team, despite the occasional clashes of giants, and for the greatest giant of them all, Charles Bradlaugh, I have a respect bordering as closely upon veneration as an Atheist could permit to himself.

My real object was to show that technique in presenting our case has necessarily changed consequent upon our great facilities for explaining gods scientifically, and to plead for a wider use of that technique. With all their skill and their immense courage, the Victorian Atheists were more or less limited to the denial of specific gods (I am borrowing Mr. Bonner's term) or to an admission of ignorance about an unspecific god. It is clear that nothing could be known about such curiosities as the "Unknown," "Undefinable," "Unknowable," "Incomprehensible," and other figments of philosophic fancy with capital letters, and I have myself been frequently indebted to Charles Bradlaugh's "Plea for Atheism," which impressed and fortified me as a youth, when dealing with people who pictured (!) the general manager of the universe in such terms.

But to-day—and I repeat, without giving ourselves airs of superiority—we have a distinct advantage which our Freethought fathers did not possess. In their days the threads of anthropology and psychology were hanging very loosely, and it was hardly possible, with the safety that should always back Freethought arguments, for definite conclusions to be drawn concerning either the primitive or the modern human mind in its relationship with the gods.

To-day, those threads have been drawn much tighter. A good deal of the primitive (and modern) mind-stuff of human beings has been laid bare for our inspection, and now we need no longer deny even the specific gods who rather vulgarly expose their back parts and sometimes in phallic lore, the generative parts of their anatomies.

Instead of denying them as the objective impossibilities which we know them to be we may now admit them into the sphere of human mental reality, and by explaining and recognising them for what they are—stop gaps in the mental development of mankind—we can eliminate them as the psycho-analyst can sometimes eliminate a phobia by bringing it out into the sunlight from the darker recesses of the mind.

Probably our failures will be more numerous than those of the psycho-analyst, for the god-phobia is deeply seated; but I feel that our cures, on these lines, may be more effective than in the past, when much of our work has tended to produce that "half cured" condition of former believers who, although they have given up the Holy Ghost, have also given up the progressive ghost by fearing to stand by their conclusions, sometimes by being afraid of their conclusions, and also by allowing the Holy Ghosts to continue to force the Phobia of the Faith into their children.

Other sciences, too, have strengthened our position in dealing with gods, but as these do not bear quite so directly on the question of the denial of the gods I will leave this matter at that. Generally, however, just as the advance of science has enabled the savagery of warfare to be conducted with V2s in modern times, against the cannon balls of Crimean days, so the development of scientific knowledge has enabled the battle for intellectual advancement to be conducted with the more effective weapons of fact and explanation, which are more deadly to false ideas than denials of their falsity.

Again, I hope I shall not be misunderstood. Many Victorian Freethinkers, Bradlaugh among them, were most painstaking in their researches into the beliefs of the other side, and they usually knew more about their opponents' case than their opponents knew. But to-day we may not only study the beliefs but also the reasons for the growth of those beliefs, and we have, therefore, a weapon with which they were not armed and could not use.

I am afraid this little explanatory effort, inspired by Mr. Bonner, has rather run away with me. First it was to be a letter to the Editor, now it has become almost an article in length, if not in value. But before closing I must reaffirm my admiration for the Victorians and those who preceded them. One thing I always insist upon. Their fight was harder than ours in the sense that bigotry and boycott were blunter cudgels then, and more widespread than now, when probably every tenth person is somewhere near to being an Atheist, and eight out of the other nine care almost nothing for religion.

Modern hypocrisy is perhaps even more contemptible than Victorian bigotry, but it doesn't hurt the pocket quite as much, and it enables even the parson to be reasonably nicely mannered to one, whatever he may think privately. At least, that is my experience, and for the smoother path which I can tread to-day (there are still wrinkles in it, of course) I always feel humbly grateful to those brave pioneers who toiled so hard to dig out the rough cast for us.

There is a rather good story about an illiterate politician who, when asked what he was going to do for posterity, retorted: "What has posterity done for us?" Let us turn his nonsense into sense.

We are the posterity of the Victorian Freethinkers and we can do something for them. We can make their work even more worth while by remembering what we owe to their efforts, and by using our memories of them as a grand inspiration for our own task in the days ahead.

F. J. CORINA.

## THE YOUNG FREETHINKER

### (2) Winnie Goes to Church

GOD kept cropping up in Winnie Martin's life after the incident of Jimmy Gordon's knee. The next Sunday morning her father took her for a walk to the nearby park and on the way they passed a large building from which came the sound of singing. "What's that place, Daddy?" she asked.

"St. James's Church," he replied, "which I suppose won't mean anything to you yet. The best way to learn about it is to go inside and ask whatever questions occur to you, but we can't do that while the service is on. So let's wait till we've looked at the flower beds and seen how the rabbits and water fowl are doing, then we'll turn church-goers for a change on the way home."

"Are the people we can hear singing church-goers?"

"Yes, dear. That means they go there more or less regularly."

"Do most people?"

"Not these days. Hardly one in ten do. It's a custom that's dying out, though when I was a boy nearly everyone went, except Freethinkers, who were generally thought to be very wicked on that account."

"But Mummy told me that Freethinkers like you and her are people who don't believe things that other people say they must, but try to find out the truth for themselves."

"Yes, and that's why they don't go to church, for in church people are told what they must believe. Obviously, then, it isn't a place that suits Freethinkers."



"I don't think I want to go inside very much if that's what it's like."

"A Freethinker is always ready to look into anything he doesn't know much about, and as you don't know anything about churches yet I think it could do no harm if you found out something about them to-day. Still, here's the park so it can very well wait till we're on our way home."

It was an hour later when Mr. Martin and Winnie again approached St. James's Church, which now seemed silent and deserted. As they entered the porch her father removed his hat and pointed to a framed notice on the wall. "Let all who enter this church remember it is God's house," he read aloud. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Oh, yes," replied the little girl, "Jimmy's mummy says God is someone who made everything and can do all sorts of wonderful things, but Freethinkers say that people made him up, like giants and fairies, when they didn't know any better. If this is God's house, I should say that when Mrs. Gordon comes here she thinks she's paying a call on God."

"Now I see I must explain that there are many different kinds of churches, and Mrs. Gordon doesn't come to this kind, and would not agree that this is God's house. All sorts of people say they believe in God, but if you examine their beliefs you find that one is altogether different from another. The various sets of beliefs that different groups of people accept are called religions, and generally speaking people of different religions don't get along very well together. So each religion has its special kind of church, and church-going parents usually make their children go to their own church, so that they rarely learn anything about the beliefs of any church except that of their parents. Freethinkers, on the other hand, are not satisfied unless they know lots about all the different religions they come across, because they think that this is the only way to find out which of them is true, if any. That's why we're going in here now," said Mr. Martin, opening the door before them, through which they passed into the church.

Winnie felt that the tall pillars supporting the high roof with its many arches made the place seem very grand, and she liked the way the windows were made of coloured glass into pictures of people and animals. There were so many questions she wanted to ask that she did not know where to begin. It was not like any other house she had ever been in. Nobody seemed to live there. "Why is it called God's house?" she ventured, after looking round.

"Ever since people first thought of gods," replied her father, "they have always been afraid of them. Believing that the gods would use their wonderful magic powers against people who displeased them, men and women devoted a great deal of their time to trying to win the favour of the gods, and one of their chief ways of doing this was to build homes for them, which were called temples, tabernacles, synagogues, cathedrals, churches, chapels and other names. You can see such buildings in all parts of the world and they are dedicated to whichever of the large army of gods the local people believe in. And in every church the members say that the god of that church is the only true god. And in no church do they take very much trouble to find out whether that is so or not."

"What do people do when they come to church, Daddy?"

"Having provided their god with a house, they must not neglect him or he might get angry with them. So they come here regularly to pay him compliments, bring him gifts and ask him to do things for them in return. The singing we heard when passing here this morning was an example of the kind of compliments that believers pay their gods; the congregation was singing what is known as a hymn, that is a song praising the power and goodness of a god."

"And what kind of gifts do the people bring?"

"They used to bring sheep, goats, fowls, corn, fruit, vegetables and whatever else they thought would please the god, but now they nearly always offer money. You see a kind of decorated table against the wall at the end of the church, past the barrier and up the steps? That is called the altar and that is where the gifts are placed as a sign that they are offered to the god."

"And what happens to them afterwards?"

"They are disposed of by the priest or minister of the church. Of course, every house of god has always had to be looked after. Sometimes men only and sometimes men and women did this. Known as priests and priestesses, they were regarded as holy, which meant that they were different from ordinary people in knowing what the particular god they served wanted. To-day, every church still has its priest or minister who makes very much the same claims to be on specially close terms with his god as did the early priests long, long ago."

"You said there was a service here this morning. What does that mean?"

"It means that the people who belong to this church, who are known as the congregation, came here in the same way as people have done as long as there have been churches. They came to gain the favours of their god by means of flattery and prayers; they put money into the collection plates that were passed round, and this was placed on the altar and later put away by the priest for the upkeep of himself and the church; and they listened to a sermon, which is a talk by the priest about what god thinks and desires. That briefly is what happens at a church service."

"Does it do any good, Daddy?"

"Freethinkers think it is all a great waste of time and effort, but you will be able to judge for yourself as you learn more and more about it. People are now not nearly as sure as they once were that church-going is all-important. Instead, they are becoming increasingly aware that what matters most is whether they lead good and useful lives, and not what church they belong to or how often they go there. And now we must get along home to Mummy."

"It seems to me, Daddy," said Winnie as they left the church, "as if people are becoming more sensible than they used to be."

P. V. MORRIS.

## THE CRADLE OF CHRISTIANITY—5

CONCLUSIONS, in brief, that must follow from the preceding Lecky articles are:—

(1) The conversion of Rome was in no way due to Pagans being impressed by the alleged miracles surrounding Christ. Miracles had long been a part of every-day Pagan life. (2) The persecution of Christians in an Empire that had hitherto tolerated all religions, was prompted by the exclusiveness of Christianity—by the terrifying threat that all who rejected that faith were doomed to eternal hell-fire, and by the contempt and insults heaped upon the Pagan idols. (3) Christianity could have been eradicated if the persecutions had been waged without any let-up for a sufficiently long period. (4) Above all, the conversion of Rome was due to the promise of heaven—to an unending life of delirious happiness beyond the grave.

From Lecky, too, we have already seen what followed the conversion of Rome—the hypocrisy, corruption, bloodshed and intellectual stagnation which he alternately describes again and again as "the mournful record" and "the melancholy record" of the Church.

Some of the Lecky extracts in these articles have been purposely compressed for reasons of space. But in every instance there has been the strictest adherence to the purport of his statements. I would now like to conclude with these few further

extracts; typical of the comments—revealing and denunciatory—with which his "European Morals" is studded:—

"Religion is the romance of the poor.

"Catholicism has been admirably fitted at once to mitigate and to perpetuate despotism.

"It is difficult to look upon Catholicism in any other light than as the most deadly enemy of the scientific spirit.

"Nearly all the greatest intellectual achievements of the last three centuries have been preceded and prepared by the growth of scepticism.

"The medieval credulity had a direct influence in producing the indifference to truth which is the most repulsive feature of so many Catholic writings.

"The seventh century—which, together with the eighth, forms the darkest period of the dark ages—is famous in the hagiology as having produced more saints than any other century, except that of the martyrs.

"In invention as well as in original research the medieval monasteries were singularly barren and they diffused, wherever their influence extended, habits of credulity and intolerance that are the most deadly poisons of the human mind.

"Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities—not till Mohammedan science, classical Free-thought and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church—did the intellectual revival of Europe begin.

"The triumph of the Catholics in Egypt was accompanied, if we may believe the solemn assertions of 80 Arian bishops, by every variety of plunder, murder, sacrilege and outrage, and Arius himself was probably poisoned by Catholic hands.

"We read of a bishop named Cautinus who had to be carried, when intoxicated, by four men from the table, who, upon the refusal of one of his priests to surrender some private property, deliberately ordered that priest to be buried alive.

"To amass relics—to acquire the patronage of saints, to endow monasteries, to build churches—became the chief part of religion; and the more the terrors of the unseen world were unfolded, the more men sought tranquillity by the consolations of superstition.

"It was the custom then, as it is the custom now, for Catholic priests to stain the imaginations of young children by ghastly pictures of future misery; to imprint upon the virgin mind atrocious images which they hoped, not unreasonably, might prove indelible.

"The monks, partly by reason of the natural cessation of their old enthusiasm, partly by the absence of any hostile criticism of their acts, and partly too by the very wealth they had acquired, sank into gross and general immorality.

"An elaborate process of mental discipline, with a view to strengthening the critical powers of the mind, is utterly remote from the spirit of theology; and this is one of the great reasons why the growth of an inductive and scientific spirit is invariably hostile to theological interests.

"Ecclesiastics have, no doubt, taken a very large share in political affairs; but this has been in most cases solely with the object of wresting them into conformity with ecclesiastical designs; and no other body of men have so uniformly sacrificed the interests of their country to the interests of their class.

"In addition to the personal restrictions which grew necessarily out of the Catholic doctrines concerning divorce and the subordination of the weaker sex, we find numerous and stringent enactments which rendered it impossible for a woman to succeed to any considerable amount of property, and which almost reduced them to the alternative of marriage or a nunnery.

"In seasons of sickness, of sorrow, or remorse—whenever the fear or conscience of the worshipper was awakened—he hastened to purchase with money the favour of a saint. Above all, in the hour of death, when the terrors of the future world loomed darkly upon his mind, he saw in a gift or legacy to the monks

a sure means of effacing the most monstrous crimes, and securing his ultimate happiness.

"It is, indeed, one of the most curious things in moral history to observe how men who were sincerely indignant with Pagan writers for attributing to their Divinities the frailties of an occasional jealousy or an occasional sensuality—for representing them, in a word, like men of mingled characters and passions—have nevertheless scrupulously attributed to their own Divinity a degree of cruelty which may confidently be said to transcend the utmost barbarity of which human nature is capable."

With this, then, we may take leave of Lecky, who has so impressively revealed to us the parentage of Christianity, the blighting effects of Christianity upon the human race, and the way in which Christianity has so come to establish itself that even yet a lot remains to be done to free the world of the imposture it has been from its very inception.

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

## GOD AND US

THE Bishop of Chelmsford (Dr. Henry Wilson) assumes the role of a spiritual Field-Marshal in the columns of the "Guardian" when pleading for a Church G.H.Q. Staff. He says:—

"A successful spiritual D-Day is needed for Christianity. Somewhere about the last quarter of the 19th century, Christianity suffered a spiritual Dunkirk. It was forced to evacuate territory which it had held unchallenged. If it is to recover its bridgeheads this can only be by achieving a successful spiritual D-Day, and to accomplish that it will be necessary to develop a long-term and carefully thought-out policy."

That let's the cat out of the bag! Now we all know what has happened. This ignoble confession from the lips of Dr. Wilson, couched in topical battle-front phrasing, says, in effect—the Church sustained a severe landslide towards the close of the last century and has not yet recovered from this set-back.

To be candid, we find such an admission most enlightening because it may account for a host of things—none of which appear retrograde in character. It may easily account for the reasons why, since the date of the alleged spiritual reverse, slave-driving in factories has ceased; immorality, often bred through bad housing conditions, is much less rampant; brawls and drunkenness in the city streets have slowly diminished; educational development has made high strides; sanitation and general health have considerably improved; and, most of all, the outlook of the people displays a common-sense and healthy broadmindedness not in any way consistent with the slushy Christianised atmosphere prevalent in the Victorian era. All this, bear in mind, has come about since the date of the "spiritual Dunkirk." In the light of this progressive evidence, therefore, we feel constrained to suggest that a really good job of work was done when this spiritual withdrawal took effect, and we would further suggest that the best "long-term policy" for the Church to adopt would be that of agreeing to stay put.

If we may borrow the military lingo of Dr. Wilson for a moment, we should like to say that the recent spiritual Dieppe attempt at invasion into schools carried with it the long-term policy of misguided interference with the freethinking of the juvenile mind. If this may be regarded as a sort of preliminary canter prior to the big "D-Day" push, suggested as so vitally necessary by the Bishop, then we should think more of him if he diverted his thoughts into more useful and constructive channels.

One "spiritual invasion" at a time is more than enough.

R. W. MEEKINS.

## RELIGION

How bold the flight of passion's wandering wing,  
 How swift the step of reason's firmer tread,  
 How calm and sweet the victories of life,  
 How terrorless the triumph of the grave!  
 How powerless were the mightiest monarch's arm,  
 Vain his loud threat, and impotent his frown!  
 How ludicrous the priest's dogmatic roar!  
 The weight of his exterminating curse  
 How light! and his affected charity,  
 To suit the pressure of the changing times,  
 What palpable deceit!—but for thy aid,  
 Religion! but for thee, prolific friend,  
 Who peopled earth with demons, hell with men,  
 And heaven with slaves.

—Shelley, "Queen Mab."

## CORRESPONDENCE

## HITLER AND GOD: EPISODE 2.

Sir.—On December 10 last, you published a brief article from my pen, pointing out the religious associations of Nazism, and the fact that Hitler invariably makes reference to the beneficence of providence. His anniversary speech of January 30 provides a really noteworthy example of this, which I hope will not escape the eagle eyes of Freethinkers. The last paragraph of the speech was as follows:—

"By forming a sworn community we shall be entitled to face the Almighty and to ask His mercy and benediction, for no people can do more than that everyone able to fight should fight."

So much for the idea that Hitler is anti-religious. Except for the absence in the English translation of the rolling phrases, that portion of the speech from which I have quoted might have been delivered by Churchill in the dark days of 1940-41.—Yours, etc.,

S. H.

## OBITUARY

## EZRA WATSON

AFTER a painful illness Ezra Watson, of Barnsley, recently passed away at the age of 68, and his body was cremated at Sheffield.

Active all his life in various movements, he was ever one of the most forthright of Freethinkers.

Motherless at four years old, and his father being a dour and devout Baptist, young Ezra got such a surfeit of religion, that he was impelled to doubt its usefulness and question its truth, with the result that the Christian creed in time became contemptible to him.

Believing this creed a hindrance and a danger to social progress, he neglected no opportunity of challenging its upholders.

In his early twenties Watson as a mining surveyor went out to the Gold Coast under a Government contract.

From the port of landing to the camp was a long trek through the jungle.

A young native of the party, on the way, got a nasty cut on the leg. Noticing his distress, Watson took from his kit salve and bandages and rendered first-aid to the injured. The youth repaid with a fidelity that Watson always remembered with deep emotion. A further consequence was the good will of the natives in the camp.

Subsequently, after a fever which might have been fatal but for the devoted nursing of this young native, Watson was advised by his doctor to return home.

It was a few hundred miles to the sailing port. The youth pleaded to accompany him. Watson tried to dissuade him as it was beyond his means to bring him to England. Nothing would stop the lad making the journey to the coast. He effected his own dismissal from the camp by pilfering a little sugar to make certain of going along with Watson. Before he sailed, Watson succeeded in getting the boy fixed up with an incoming English official, assuring that worthy that he was getting a treasure. Watson's sympathies never needed enlisting on behalf of coloured peoples.

The straight bat Watson played in Freethought was doubtless a carry-over from his attitude on the cricket field. Although he missed county honours, he had a hand in the coaching of the famous Yorkshire and England player, Roy Kilner. His own high-spots in the field were the "hat trick" for Barnsley, Pontefract and Castleford, and taking all ten wickets for Stanley against Lofthouse.

Gifted with a fine tenor voice, Watson wherever he went would be found in musical circles, forming and coaching amateur operatic societies, male voice choirs and colliery brass bands. In his latter years he took part in chess teams.

Such were his hobbies, but all the while he would be ready to break a lance for Freethought. In one village the parson came to his house to tell him to stop propagating Atheism in his parish. Watson replied: "When you come out of your pulpit and cease spreading your gospel fables, I'll consider your proposal."

In the Press and by personal letters to parsons, Watson was a busy correspondent. He always declared himself an Atheist, holding with Bradlaugh that the constant use of the word would make it respected.

Some readers will remember his last contribution to "The Freethinker": an interesting article on the novels of H. Seton Merriman.

His widow—a descendant of a family of Quakers associated with George Fox—and their son and daughter hold the same opinions on religion as the one they mourn.

H. IRVING.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

## LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "Greek Ideals and Greek Law."

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Buildings, College Square).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. R. ROBINSON: "An Outline of Geology."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. J. H. THORNTON, B.Sc.: "Some Objections to Secularism."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Dr. J. DUNLAP: "Birth Rates—Do Parents Revolt Enough?"

Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. G. GREEN: "Will the Vatican Win the War?"

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