

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Again the Church and the Children

I AM returning to the question of the Church and the children, but I have to touch a rather different angle; and in any case we ought to bear in mind the fact that the new Education Act gives the clergy greater direct power than they have had since 1870. Moreover, the school-leaving age is to be raised, and that gives the Churches a greater opportunity to saturate youth with religion. Thus the new Education Act promises us a minimum of good and a certainty of the maximum of evil.

Probably it was the new Act that incited the Surrey County Council to lend the Churches a hand. That Council recently issued an order that youth up to the age of 16 is to be barred from cinemas on Sunday. Noting the manner and character of our young people, "16" seems too early to accomplish the aims of the Council. The "16s," male and female, have long left the Victorian policy of calculated humbug far behind them. They are in offices, they take charge of the home, they are called up by the Government to play their part in war work, boys and girls walk together, and the females are made, by the Government, to look as neat and attractive as possible. And there is made plain the fact that girls at 16 really have legs.

If the Council—and the Churches associated—are to succeed in their aims, 16 is really too low. The age limit should be extended to at least 25, or more safely to 30; for to permit boys and girls of 17 to go to cinemas, to sit side by side, and perhaps "hold hands," is to invite catastrophe. And what of the weekdays? Sex attraction operates as powerfully from 16 to 30 as it does from, say, 12 to 16, and on all days of the week. And why should not all days be under control? After all, the appetite of the Christian Deity for praise, more praise, and still more praise seems insatiable. Humans would get sick of a continuous stream of praise in a week.

Raising the age to a particular date is, therefore, not enough. If the Church is to succeed in so "kidding" God that he can be made to believe that his worship is secure, the age of freedom should be raised to 30.

On the other hand, there is just one other way of meeting the Surrey County Council's move. That would be to tell the Council to go to the devil and carry on as usual. If they have the courage to do this, they will act as those have acted whose names record the source of those freedoms which we have to-day. The final way to kill a really bad law is to break it; and sometimes it is the only way that succeeds. English freedom did not grow out of Churches or derive from the graciousness of vested interests. Sunday laws are religious laws, and religious laws are overwhelmingly bad laws.

Some Questions

But there are several things in relation to the County of Surrey Council we should like to know. First, we are curious to know how many clergymen have friends on the Council? Next, how many clergymen are on the Council? To anyone who knows how these things are worked they are questions of some importance. For note that this agitation is a Church agitation. If it were otherwise, the parents would settle the question by simply forbidding their children to attend Sunday cinemas. It is surely monstrous that an interested body of men who cannot get youth into church voluntarily should succeed by disguised force. Even the Churches have not had the impudence to say that all or even most children love Sunday school. There are few children who would not prefer to run wild in a forest, or indulge in games, or go to a cinema. The motive here is to accustom children to going to church. It is a forced attention so far as youth is concerned, and a matter of life or death where the clergy are concerned. Of course, going to church may become as fixed a habit as anything else. Let us note also that attendance or non-attendance cannot be counted as "good" or "bad" so far as secular conduct is concerned. The whole aim of the clergy is to familiarise the young with beliefs and practices to which modern civilised thought gives the lie.

The position really reminds us of a story which appeared in one of Thomas Hardy's novels. A couple came to be married at the village church. When the parson saw the bridegroom he turned to the woman and said: "How dare you bring this man to church to be married in such a state. The man is drunk." "Well, sir," said the woman, tearfully, "He wouldn't come when he's sober." I think this puts the case in a nutshell so far as religion is concerned. Once upon a time the whole of society was so saturated with religion that the vast majority took it as a matter of course. But that situation has gone—save in out-of-the-way places—and it is very difficult to picture its return. Like Hitler, the Christian Church sought to eliminate opposition by force. It aimed at a form of life which we now recognise as Fascism, with a fixed science, a self-created history and an elimination by force of all opposing opinion.

The Church has always recognised the importance of controlling education, and to-day the capture of the child is the single thing on which the different Christian bodies are in agreement. It is a case of hanging together in order to avoid being hung separately. How long this unity will last it is impossible to say, but it is quite plain that religion is losing its hold on the people with increasing rapidity. The situation reminds one of a famous saying of Lord Palmerston. Someone said he was a pillar of the Church. "A pillar?" said Palmerston. "Not at all; I am just a buttress." He supported the Church without, and that to-day is a very common situation. Governed by various

interests, men support the Church from without—and smile at what goes on within.

The Church in Action

At this point I think I may subjoin some citations from an address given by the Rev. H. S. O'Neill to a meeting of the Derby Ruridecanal Conference. I am quoting from the "Derby Evening Telegraph" for February 12. It is worth quoting because it bears out all that has been said in these pages concerning the working of our new Education Act, where religion is concerned. Mr. O'Neill said:—

"We must get to work and *graft the local* authority school on to the life of the parish. . . . There was provision for the Church to organise classes within the school building if they could obtain the signatures of parents on forms saying that the children required such classes. They could go round to the headmaster and demand a room. . . . Of every 100 children born in this country only 54 went to church or to Church of England Sunday schools. We could get to the others by developing and extending classes to the schools. . . . In these (State) schools there would be reserved teachers whose job it would be to teach religion. To the foundation managers would fall the responsibility of seeing religion was taught. They would have power to dismiss teachers if it were not."

I think that fully endorses what we have repeatedly said, namely, that the real aim of the Bill was not education but the re-establishment of the parson in the school, and the teaching of a definite form of religion. The Churches can now demand that a definitely dogmatic religion shall be taught in the schools and by reserved teachers, who may be sacked if they do not please the resident clergy. In practice, however, we may rely upon the religious tone of the whole of the staff, who will be carefully watched. We should never forget the demand of the late Archbishop of Canterbury that religious teaching should saturate the whole of school life. With that in mind we may take it for granted that the finer teachers will not stand much chance of securing a headship. The teachers may be soothed by an increase in salary, but in most cases the elementary schools will bid fair to become an annex of the Churches. The chance of our seeing an educational ladder from the common school to the University has been shelved. The public school has scored again. Of course, a reaction will come some day. Meanwhile those who believe in freedom of teaching and a real democracy must do what can be done to set things right.

There is, however, one step which could be taken in the right direction. The "Conscience Clause," which gives parents and guardians the right to withdraw children from religious instruction, remains intact. This may be done without any reason being given. Not even the Government had the courage to abolish this protective clause. Had it been attempted it might have caught out the Bishops and the Government. And the method of going to work is simple. All that need be done is to send a note to the headmaster with instructions to withdraw the child from religious teaching. No questions of any kind should be asked, and none should be answered.

The duty of parents is to feed, clothe and protect children. But that word "protection" should include mental as well as material things or situations. The

intelligence and independence of a child should form part of its development. Parents might also remember that children are terrible critics. The worst thing I have ever heard an adult say concerning his parent was said in all affection, but was terrible none the less: "Dad was a fine man in many respects, and I loved him, but he was very silly where religion was concerned."

The Conscience Clause is still with us, and my advice is *Use it* whenever it is possible. I am pleased to know that many have followed my advice and have thanked me for the giving. And, after all, there is no greater help to independence of mind than to feel that there is a *fact* in life that, in spite of hardships that may follow, pays its way. We all agree that the greatest crime Hitler has committed was that of twisting and distorting the minds of the young. We should be careful lest we, unconsciously, follow that road.

One of the great men who in my early years taught me much, and whose books look down on me as I write, was Herbert Spencer. And I have often to thank him for two things. First, for the things taught that time has endorsed. Secondly, even greater was the service when he taught me to contradict one whom I held in such great esteem.

"It is our duty," he said, "for each one to realise the fact that his opinion is a unit of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power to work out social changes, and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost convictions, leaving it to produce what effect it may. He, with all capacities, aspirations and belief, is but a product of his time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future, and his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. The highest truth he will fearlessly utter, knowing that let what may come of it, he is playing his right part in the world."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

FILMING LOURDES

THE film now going the rounds of the Odeon cinemas, "The Song of Bernadette," is one of wide interest. It tells the story of the Lourdes shrine in a manner which makes it perfectly clear that it accepts in substance the miraculous vision and the healing miracles which are reputed to have taken place. On the whole, it follows the accepted account fairly faithfully though tending to translate it into the language of pure Hollywood and, for example, to make a Roman Catholic dignitary speak rather more like a Chicago business man than a prince of the church. It ends with a shot of the church at the shrine and Bernadette victorious as a revealer of divine purposes. Certainly, the film is magnificent propaganda for the Roman Catholic Church, commencing as it does with the assertion that it will be understood by those who believe in God whilst no explanation is possible to unbelievers—a somewhat question-begging admission.

At the opening the audience is shown the family of the peasant child, Bernadette, miserably poor and wretched with a rather shiftless father. The child is on an expedition gathering sticks when she claims to have seen the vision of a beautiful lady in a grotto by a rubbish dump near the town. The community is thrown into upheaval and numerous crowds follow to the sacred spot. Official efforts fail to put down the demonstrations as a piece of undesirable religious fanaticism. The parish priest opposed to them but even he is unable to stem the enthusias-

of his parishioners. In spite of the fact that nobody else can see the vision, the child reports various conversations which she holds with it, ending with the proclamation of her identity by the lady, "I am the Immaculate Conception." One by one, those hostile to Bernadette are converted; the local magistrate alone remains sullen and sceptical. The film passes into a semi-tragic note. Bernadette enters a convent, only to die young of cancer and tuberculosis. Her sufferings convert the last of her antagonists, one of the Sisters at the convent who had once been her teacher at Lourdes. She dies, leaving her family prosperous and their wants met. Numerous miracles of healing are taking place at the spring to which she was guided by the vision. At the last, the Magistrate, whose scepticism and attempts to intimidate Bernadette had led to his removal elsewhere when the Empress herself had been impressed by the happenings, wanders back to Lourdes. He is dying of cancer in the throat and, roaming into the magnificent church built over the shrine, he realises that his own scepticism has shut him off from hope. Bernadette has conquered and has brought an immense revival of faith.

It is somewhat surprising to pass out from the cinema and to realise that one has been witnessing not the filming of a pretty legend, but of something which the Roman Catholic Church places in the midst of the Twentieth Century among the credible happenings of the last hundred years. There is no mention in the film of the somewhat astringent criticism which Zola imported into his novel, "Lourdes," calling attention to the number of poor wretches who go there in good faith and who return either uncured or even worse for their visit. Still less is there any explanation of the extent to which such cures as have been reported may be due to neurosis and therefore become either permanent or only temporary. The observer is shown the claims but is not permitted to make examination. Even friendly medical testimony is far from complete whilst a revealing situation occurs in the dismissal of the suggestion that Bernadette was mad by showing her as under medical observation. In fact, the observation was slight and its full explanation was hampered by the parish priest after he had become a convert. Again, the interest of the Royal Family is mentioned, but the attention of the audience is not called to the extent of superstition under the Second Empire nor to the fact that the incidents took place at a period when Napoleon III. was in one of his moods for social improvement and was taking an interest in artisan dwelling. His mind, never robust, was then in a state to encourage anything making for an increase of popular religion for tactical ends.

There is no good reason for thinking that the girl was a conscious imposter, put up to the fraud by her family. In fact, she talked absolute rubbish; "I am the Immaculate Conception" is a phrase entirely without meaning. The efforts on the screen to show that she had never been taught the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and could therefore have heard no reference to it are puerile; proclaimed in 1854, it was in every Catholic mind at the time of the supposed Lourdes happenings. But there is every reason to think that the poor child, reared in a strange and superstitious orthodoxy, was suffering from delusions and that coincidence played into their hands. The French peasant classes have always tended to be superstitious; strange nature rites have lingered on in the remote spots. The vision of Bernadette was exactly the incident to set aflame a small mountain town off the main routes. Its reception and the ready turning to acts of worship at the grotto is a reminder of the extent to which nature-cults have entered into the minds of the local peasantry. It is also interesting to notice the points in common with emotional religious revivals of a non-Catholic type. Conversion of the sceptical is a clever piece of artistry in the film. But, unfortunately, it only serves to call attention to the slight weighing of evidence, in any modern legal sense of the term, which the visions underwent; nor is the repentant Magistrate a convincing character as a Rationalist. In the last resort,

the fact remains that the sole basis for the tremendous claims made concerning Lourdes was the unsupported word of a semi-illiterate peasant girl. To those willing to accept such evidence for events so transcending the common run of human experience, all things are possible. The universe becomes one in which Cardinal Newman's boyhood wish that the "Arabian Nights" were true has been granted.

The film, however, does leave one impression. It is often urged that the battle between religion and science died with the days of Huxley, Gladstone and Wace. "The Song of Bernadette" gives the answer to any such assertion. Superstition of this kind is shown on the cinema screen at the present time. Admitting that, for many of the audience, it is a film and no more, or that many who witnessed it were frankly sceptical, it still managed to make an impression upon some ill-informed and uncritical minds. Again, the film reminds any observer that he is witnessing something put forward by the Roman Catholic Church as literal history. So long as claims of this kind are made, there can be no truce between science and the churches which make them. The universe must either be a scientific one of comparison and experiment or the universe implied by "The Song of Bernadette"; it cannot be both at one and the same time. There is clearly need still for a Rationalist propaganda which can teach the general public the value of exact evidence and the undesirable ends to which some forms of religion can sink by encouraging ecclesiastical cupidity in the form of crude money-making at shrines of this type or popular ignorance through the inculcation of sheer superstition.

"SIGMA."

ACID DROPS

There have been legions of religious meetings held for the worship of Satan. These existed well into the seventeenth century, and were thought of with horror by Christians. Then they began to die off—save stories that were told by Roman Catholics, which have, we believe, still kept in being the idea of Satan as an enemy to mankind. We could never find evidence for this aspect of Satan, and in fact many of the better forms of existence we owe to Satan. It was he who first tempted Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, and without that impetus the human race could never have amounted to much. And if we are to trust our Christian leaders, most of the developments of human knowledge, most of the great scientific thoughts of the world were prompted by the Devil. God took the credit for it only when man stood by these great truths of nature that could no longer be denied.

In the face of all we know of Satan, it seems to us that if man needs to worship anyone he should turn his prayers to Satan instead of God. There are several reasons for this. First, because all our great scientific discoveries were declared on the authority of the priesthood to come to us via Satan. Secondly, if God is our Father, and, as Christians now claim, all Goodness, he should not need constant worship to do all he can for the welfare of his children. An ordinary parent does not need petitioning before he will look after his family. He does that because they are his children, and most parents would never think of continuously punishing their children because they did not do as he would wish. So, all things considered, we suggest that prayers should be given where they are needed. To pray to God to look after his children looks like an insult to parentage.

Looking over the Catholic papers in England and Scotland it becomes quite plain that the mouthpieces of the Vatican are not at all satisfied at the way things are developing. We are not surprised. Russia has been a great threat—a beneficial threat—to the whole world. It has shown that changes in the constitution of a State and in the outlook of masses of people need not take generations, and move so slowly that a drastic change can be made in a single generation. And that kind of outlook is not one that will be welcome in this country. We prefer to promise and again promise, and then give with one hand and take away with the other. It is an old game, and the game is played by "old hands."

The attitude of the Vatican is an illustration in point. Roman Catholicism is certain to lose heavily over this war. And it looked as though it might gain. But there occurred several setbacks to the resident on the Seven Hills. First of all Russia came into the war, and in spite of the frantic assertions that we were only working side by side with "Atheistic Russia" for the duration of the war, a twenty years' association was decided on. Then the thick screen of religious lies about Russia was broken, and the influence of Russia began to grow. As the matter stands Roman Catholicism looks to lose ground in the Balkans, heavily in Poland, and generally in the eyes of the Continent. It is for the R.C.s not a very pleasant outlook.

But the puppets of the Vatican, these servants of a foreign overlord, are loyally doing what they can to help Roman Catholicism. Thus the Archbishop of Glasgow has called 500,000 believers in Glasgow to be ready to meet the onslaught of "Godless materialism" that threatens to overcome Scotland. The English servants of the Pope issue the same warning to those in England. The Archbishop says that Catholics are the children of an infallible church, and are led by an infallible vicar of Christ and need not fear the big battalions of the ungodly. Of course, this is all verbal rubbish as it stands, but it should never be forgotten that the Church of God killed one generation, and although he has failed to chronicle the death of another, it has done what it could. Its servants are, in many cases, in high places, and will do their best to achieve success.

Here is a testimony from the Archbishop of Cincinnati that has bearing on what we have said, and specially because it is taken from the "Catholic Times" of March 9. "Atheistic Communism," says the Archbishop, "in thinking is bold and fresh; in action is quick and decisive." Then follows a list of qualities not so good, but it is followed by: "Its adherents are crusaders, some fanatical, many sincere, most of them convinced that they are introducing a new world order that will change our economic and social way of living and give the common man a fair chance of life." That is not at all bad coming from a Catholic chief in the U.S.A.

But there is a piece of advice as a tag. This is that "if Communists were wise they would reject absolutely its Atheism, and would take up all the principles of true Christian Socialism." Quite a case of "Will you walk into my parlour?" But Communists and others have nearly two thousand years of history on which to reflect. They can see the culture of the ancient world shrinking to the dust under Christian rule. They can see complete intolerance established with generation after generation of Christian control killing off the better and breeding the less valuable. And they can also see that in proportion to the decline of faith in religion the belief in human capacity for building a better world has developed. The original and authentic cry of salvation by and through the sacrifice of a god has lost its "punch," and we are asked to follow Jesus because of his social qualities.

It is noticeable, by the way, that in a letter sent by the Pope to the French bishops he appears to be unaware that the Allies did anything to free France. There is not a word of appreciation for the British, the Americans, and other people who helped to throw German forces out of the larger part of France, and so made a new France possible. Mere decency should have brought a few words of appreciation. But mere decency is not the strong point of enraged Catholic leaders.

Meanwhile we are content to chronicle the indisputable fact that the war has opened the eyes of people never before seriously concerned with religion and now alive to the dangers it carries with it. Christianity is not a thing for people to believe, but it is also something that no one can afford to avoid. The Church to-day is living largely on the carelessness of those who do not believe in it.

The Saturday preacher of the "Daily Telegraph" says that God demands our co-operation. There is something in that, for it sounds like a General calling for more troops, or a tradesman on the eve of bankruptcy asking for more trade. Once

upon a time God gave his orders—you will find them set out in the Bible and in the teaching of the various Churches. But that was the time when unbelievers were few and worshippers many. God could then afford to demand obedience and worship. To-day things are changed. There is not a country in the world in which worshippers of God are not declining in both quality and numbers. Once more we have to say that gods exist only so long as people believe in them.

The Poor Curates? A Miss Penelope Woolham left her house to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Grantham for the use of Curates. But, alas, servants and even furniture cannot be found. So the poor Curates are, like Jesus, without a place to lay their heads—unless the Curates do their own housework.

There has been a great deal of writing and talking about rebuilding and new building in the after-war years. The destruction of the thousands of vile dens in which the poorer section of our "glorious" people were forced to herd should live in the minds of every decent man and woman. For generations they were taken as a matter of course, and compensation was made by "charity" of a kind, tours from the "West End" to visit the "patient poor" in the East, with succeeding praise of the contentment of the "bottom dogs" in circumstances where contentment was almost criminal in its quality. Charity in such conditions was not virtue, it was almost a crime, for it did little more than dull the minds of the "upper classes" and soothe the minds of those who suffered, and so perpetuate a national disgrace.

Now we are hearing much of plans, and large sums of money are being paid to officials who often appear to be running round in circles. But there is one point that has not been dealt with. The Churches have suffered, with others, from enemy attacks. God, as usual, has done nothing by way of protection, but his worshippers, as usual, praised him for his goodness, his watchfulness and his power. Of course, they may have been speaking sarcastically but wit and the gods are not things that are connected. The fact remains that places of worship have in proportion suffered as much as other buildings. The worshippers of God left the churches to him—after taking away valuable objects—and God has let them down. It is remarkable that Christians did not resent this; but we remember the saying that Christians and camels take their burdens kneeling. It may be added that there is one difference between camels and Christians. The former shoulders its burden with open eyes.

Now, we are just suggesting that in reinstating destroyed or damaged churches discrimination should be used. We are threatened with a shortage of both materials and men, and in these circumstances priority should be given—and enforced—to building homes, and rigidly confine the use of materials to places of worship in terms of worshippers. That would cut down the Churches to a reasonable number. Of course, the Churches are likely to protest against this, and for obvious purposes. It would give evidence of the small proportion of the population that attend church, and also weaken the religious fervour of those who do.

Mr. Butler declares that the Conservative Party is pledged to give to the English people the largest possible amount of genuine liberty. We do not doubt this for a moment. The English people have always had the largest possible maximum of liberty. They had it in the ages when the large part of the people were serfs to the nobles. They had it in the dark days when children were being murdered in the cotton mills and women were in the coal pits hauling trucks as though they were cattle. They had it when men were jailed for daring to ask for a rise in wages—so long as two asked together. Mr. Butler said it was part of the Conservative plan to give the greatest measure of liberty. We believe him. But the greatest question here is what exactly is the amount of freedom that is to be given—unless the people are able to enforce their demands?

“THE FREETHINKER”

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- A. H. BRIANCOURT.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.
- K. TACCHI.—Will appear next week.
- H. SAMPSON.—Many thanks for your selection of items sent us for comment. We take this present opportunity to thank others who send us items which they think will be of interest to our general body of readers. They are useful even when they are not immediately used.
- J. R. DUNCANSON.—Thanks for letter. Unfortunately we have to by-pass many things, we should much like to notice.

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

SUGAR PLUMS

The Executive of the N.S.S. has a working scheme under which speakers may be sent to outside organisations for the purpose of putting the Freethought point of view to members. An invitation came from a Discussion Group of St. Christopher's Theological College for Ladies, Chester, and on Friday, March 9, Mr. R. H. Rosetti addressed the students on "Man, His Origin and Destiny." The subject was chosen by the Group, and Mr. Rosetti was warmly welcomed by the Principal and students. The address and discussion took place in an atmosphere marked by keen sincerity of religious belief, with an honest desire to understand opposite opinions, even if they could not be accepted. The complete absence of anything approaching bad feeling no doubt helped to make the proceedings as delightful to the audience as they were to the speaker.

The financial year of the N.S.S. closes on March 31 and the General Secretary asks that outstanding subscriptions be forwarded by that date so that they may be included in the Annual Balance Sheet to be placed before the Annual Conference. Will branch secretaries who have not yet replied to the circular sent on February 26 please do so without further delay.

One of our readers has been good enough to set us what he calls a rather "remarkable thing." This is, that so many of the children of ardent Freethinkers do not take an active part in the promulgation of Freethought. The phenomenon is not uncommon, we admit, but the explanation is easy, and really gives small ground for surprise. First of all, we must bear in mind that the ardent Freethinker is not of a very common type. A man who takes up with an unpopular cause and faces a certain amount of social discomfort for that cause is not of the common type. He is, in fact, what breeders would call a "sport," and sports in the animal world—from the lowest to the highest forms of life—are in their very nature uncommon. There is really no better ground for expecting "sports" to be more common in the human than the animal world. But it is

not common for the children of avowed Freethinkers to slip back to Christianity in particular. They may yield to the pressure of the life around them and remain silent; but usually that is as far as they go.

It is also quite clear that there are great inducements for one who is not built of sturdy stuff to fall into line with more orthodox forms of either religion or politics. We think we could publish a fairly lengthy list of politicians, for example, who find that if they wish to achieve what they call success they must keep their non-belief in religion secret. They do not always help religion, save in the sense of remaining silent, and in these days the Churches have to be content with that. Teachers, while we have religion in the schools, find it pays—commercially—to be at least silent on the matter. Business men also yield to the same circumstances.

But the plain fact that remains is that religion grows weaker and weaker. Its advocates are compelled to renounce doctrines which they once announced as vital to their creed. Newspaper editors, while they have not yet developed sufficient courage to permit a plain advocacy of Atheism in their columns, are yet chary in attacking Atheism. The wicked Atheist is now almost defunct. The unbeliever who died shrieking for Jesus to save him is no longer heard. If Christians would compare the Christianity of to-day with that of a century ago they would realise how great has been the advancement of unbelief in its several forms.

But looking at Christianity from the historic point of view, the greatest change, the most penetrating change is that of the relation of religion to ethics. Little more than a century ago the Churches still preached the authentic Christian doctrine that to be saved was an act of Grace. It could not be secured by good behaviour. Indeed, there was once a very hot discussion whether good men who lived before Christ came could be saved. Some said "Yes," but the majority were firm with "No." Death-bed repentances were once the great figure, now one scarcely hears the phrase in decent quarters. And the doctrine of Hell is now mainly backed by the Roman Catholic Church. If Freethought has not made human society as clean as it might be, it is evident that it has played its part in humanising Christianity. One day it will humanise it out of existence.

It is not easy for anyone to believe that even clergymen when under the ecstatic influence of certain forms of religious mania can make statements that are obviously at variance with generally known facts. Here we have the Rev. P. H. Williams, ostensibly quoting Einstein, admitting that, while few writers or newspapers stood against German Nazism, it was the Churches which were the obstacles across the path of Hitler.

Now we do not know whether Einstein ever gave voice to this nonsense, but if he did it is really one of the most startling statements that we have met for some time. Is Mr. Williams acquainted with the fact that there were large numbers of Freethinkers and others fighting Hitler before he assumed full power? And what kind of rebuke did the Christian leaders utter before we were actually at war with Germany? The bulk of the Churches assisted by their silence. And when it comes to "obstacles across the path of Hitler," one might very timidly whisper "Russia." What amount of religion was there in that help? That it was there no one will deny, but the flaming courage of the Russians left religion out—officially and actually. There really are many ways of telling a lie.

Here is a gem from that great Atheist Anatole France: "We call men dangerous whose minds are made differently from our own, and immoral those who profess another standard of ethics. We condemn as sceptics all who do not share our own illusions, without ever troubling our heads to inquire if they have others of their own."

When a young man thinks he knows more than his father, he is just about the age when he discards the religion of his mother.

"ART AND CHRISTIANITY"

IN his pamphlet "Art and Christianity" (Thinker's Forum, Watts and Co., 6d.) Mr. R. C. Churchill has chosen a fascinating subject as his thesis, and I only wish that he had been more emphatic in making some of his points.

He opens with:—

"The National Gallery, the Louvre, the Prado, the Uffizi, the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum, the Vatican, and the other great collections of painting and sculpture, would appear to provide one of the best arguments for the value, if not the truth, of Christianity. There, the Christian apologist exclaims, you have modern European art, the finest period of which—the Renaissance—was willingly harnessed to the Christian Faith; if you, a Rationalist or a Liberal or whatever you like to call yourself, think art at all valuable to mankind, how do you explain (on your view) the overwhelmingly Christian nature of it?"

It is a question which has been put very often to the Free-thinker by Christian apologists, particularly by many who, one could easily see, knew very little about art and even less of the artists. The great classical painters turned out hundreds, nay thousands of "religious" pictures, it is contended, and great craftsmen put up all over Europe large numbers of magnificent churches—look at the immense debt, therefore, culture and civilisation owe to the Christian Faith. It is an old but perfectly legitimate argument, and I am afraid it has not often been faced by us.

Mr. Churchill thinks that "seventy or eighty years ago the scientific Rationalist would have had his answer pat. He would have murmured something about the sexual aspect of both religion and art, and, shrugging his shoulders, would have gone on to talk about more important matters." I confess I am not quite clear as to who these "scientific Rationalists" were seventy or eighty years ago, and can hardly believe that they would have been content only with a little murmuring about the "sexual aspect" of religion and art. This would have been no reply, and seventy or eighty years ago Freethinkers were nothing if not aggressive, and ready to face up to any genuine argument.

I have not got the reference handy, but that great art critic (in spite of some lapses) John Ruskin, who certainly had commenced with quite a lot of preconceived ideas about the debt art owed to the Christian Faith, came later to quite the opposite view; and thenceforth no Rationalist ought to have shrugged his shoulders unable to meet fairly and squarely the argument.

If it was the Christian Faith which produced the great artists, where were they for the first thousand years of that religion? Apart altogether from the wonderful cave drawings which command the admiration of all artists, what about the astonishing bas-reliefs and sculptures of the Egyptians and Greeks and other peoples of antiquity? What about the marvellous Pagan temples and other edifices? The Christian Faith certainly cannot claim them.

It was a wonderful heritage of art at its greatest in some respects, and at its highest. Yet nothing was so hated by the true Christian in those early centuries when priest and pontiff were consolidating Christianity and doing their utmost to bring the whole of Europe under the Pope. It is one of the universal tragedies that so much of Pagan art, unsurpassable in its glory, was destroyed by Christian sects like the Iconoclasts.

With art in some form all around them, however, it was impossible for the early Christians to dispense with it altogether; and so we find some attempts at painting in the Catacombs in Rome which can be truly said to be inspired by Christianity. Most of it is pretty poor stuff, at least in comparison with Pagan art. And even if one protests that Byzantine art did produce

some good things, it was based in the main on Asiatic and other Pagan influences.

With the spread of Islam came the Arabic contribution to architecture, which in turn profoundly influenced Christianity especially after the Crusades. The long dark night of nearly 1,000 years of the rule of the Church in which culture and learning in Europe were almost submerged, gave way at last to the light of what is called the Renaissance, and Europe began to breathe freely. What was Christian art worth during these Dark Ages? As that distinguished Academician, Sir William Orpen, says in his "Outline of Art":—

"During the dark ages painting, as a secular art, almost entirely disappeared, and in the early days of the Church the Fathers gave little encouragement to art. 'Cursed be all who paint pictures' is a sentiment not infrequently found in their writings. This antagonism to the joyousness of pagan art was natural in men who regarded this world as a vale of tears and only important as a preparation for the life to come."

It was Cimabue (1240-1302) who first broke away from what Orpen calls "the frigid ceremonial ideals" of the Byzantine artists and he was followed by Giotto. It is true that thenceforth the Church employed the great artists and craftsmen—they were obliged to call in pictorial representation for a people who could not read. Mary and the infant Jesus were bound to be a popular subject not at all because of Christianity, but because the picture of a mother and child aroused everywhere a "fellow feeling," and in any case, one might add that the maternal tradition had never been broken. In Egypt with Isis and Horus, or in India with Krishna and Devaki or Buddha and Maya, in fact in many of the old nations, the most popular representation in art was the mother and child.

The Church also discovered how it could rouse pity for its Deity by realistic paintings of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross—just as Miss Dorothy M. Sayers is doing by the repeated broadcasts of "The Man born to be King." And side by side with this pity was the incitement to hatred for the Jews responsible for the Crucifixion—exactly as Miss Sayers' play does for its listeners. This pity and hatred have proved more than a goldmine for the Church and the two emotions still work.

But as far as the great artists employed by the Church are concerned, they certainly worked loyally for their patrons. If a religious picture was wanted, the genius of Raphael, or da Vinci, or Paul Veronese wrought masterpieces; and it was no business of any Christian to enquire whether the model for the Madonna used by Raphael, for example, was the lady he was living with, not in holy matrimony, at the time.

Moreover, if one goes through the works of the great artists he will find that exactly the same care and genius were used to paint pictures from Pagan religions. Paul Veronese has given us a world masterpiece in his "Marriage Feast in Cana," but it is as secular as Frith's "Derby Day." And he gave us a masterpiece also in his more or less erotic "Leda and the Swan." Titian put some of his greatest work into "Bacchus and Ariadne," Rembrandt's Bible pictures are as homely as any Dutch interior, while Botticelli's "Spring" and "Birth of Venus" are absolutely Pagan in spirit.

And this is not all of the story. Nearly all the great painters were just as painstaking when commissioned to paint what book-sellers call *erotica*. These were not for the general public, of course, nor even for museums. They were for the great lords and ladies who in those days almost always professed Christianity. Numbers of these pictures are still in existence in private galleries, and most defenders of Christian art would find them difficult to explain away. Very few of the great names in the Golden Age of Art are absent from the list of their painters.

There is no doubt that in general the artists employed by the Church were believers—perhaps they just took things for granted

and were too engrossed in their own work. But to call their art religious because they painted Biblical scenes, or portraits of the Popes and Cardinals, or incidents from the lives of the Saints, is just nonsense.

Mr. Churchill might have more strongly stressed some of these points in his pamphlet which ranges in some places rather wide, in my opinion, from his title, but perhaps the reader will find in it many things both stimulating and provocative.

H. CUTNER.

OUR NEW CONVERTS

ANY person who cares to make a reasonably close study of human beliefs cannot help but notice a predominating tendency. From it—nobody is immune. The most reasonable men, on retrospection, see where they fell to this curse. It is subtle; it is persistent; and frequently it is unavoidable. I refer to the tendency of man to convince himself, when it is convenient to do so for selfish reasons, of the authenticity of factuality of beliefs he previously doubted. Many Christians and reasonable religious people are quite willing to admit this; but they say that religion takes care of that part of their nature which does not desire a rational or materialistic outlook. This, though true, is as much as to say: "Religion dominates only a small fraction of my life." These people, half Theistic and half Atheistic, are now more multitudinous than ever. Personally, I like to classify them as the "Credulous Intellectuals" of modern times. Though these people are at heart really convinced of the soundness of Atheism, the excuse they put forward for not being Atheists is that it does not provide a moral sanction necessary to the maintenance of society.

Here, of course, it remains for Atheists to prove the absurdity of such a supposition. Bradlaugh's "Plea for Atheism," if people would read it, is more than sufficient to undermine any such false beliefs. But in people, probably because unconsciously they sense the infirmity of their traditional doctrines, the conservative and self-convincing tendency is, alas, only too strong. So to persuade them to read our literature would need a revolution in their characters. But as the aim of this journal is after all to promote more converts to Atheism, the most expedient method I can see is to rope in those who are already half-way there. This brings us back to those whose only complaint is that Atheism has not that moral sanction necessary to the maintenance of society.

To any real Atheist this is just nonsensical rubbish. Two thousand years of Theistic domination, and could the universal society of to-day be in a worse plight. When and where during their career have the Christian brethren, even towards each other, shown an attitude of brotherly love? We have had too much of Theism. Practical Scientific Atheism must and will in future dominate human conduct.

"Atheism, properly understood," says Bradlaugh, "is no mere disbelief; is in no wise a cold barren negative; it is, on the contrary, a hearty, fruitful affirmation of all truth, and involves the positive assertion of action of highest humanity."

And indeed Bradlaugh is right. Too long has man cringed in fear of supposed supernatural force emanating from his formerly superstitious mind. Man's hope and belief in a personal God has been ridiculed and negated by the facts of astronomy. Theism with its accessory superstitions is doomed.

Our semi-Atheists must also realise the dubious moral backgrounds of all theistic religions. They are (it is needless to give examples) merely appeals to the selfish instinct. A poor sort of man is he that does good only in so far that he fears the consequent punishment.

S. WOLF.

CORRESPONDENCE

SHALL WE RESTORE THE CHURCHES?

SIR,—The restoration of bombed churches is a subject which in a Protestant and Freethinking country is likely to be of prominence after the peace. As regards our untouched churches, the present situation appears to be mostly one of "empty pews," unless some special function, national or social, supplies the impetus necessary to call a good congregation together. The Church of Rome drills its congregations and enforces attendance, but Protestantism will have none of that! So the question to be asked by the Freethinker in religion is "How is Protestant Orthodoxy to secure its position?"—Yours, etc.,

REGULAR READER.

OBITUARY

WILLIAM PITT.

The Freethought Movement has lost a veteran of sterling character in William Pitt, whose death, in his 90th year, is announced. Birmingham Freethinkers will remember his loyal support and interest in the local branch of the N.S.S. For many years the arrival of "The Freethinker" was one of his foremost weekly pleasures, and his principles were sound till the end. The remains were cremated at Perry Bar Crematorium, and a Secular Service was read by Mr. C. H. Smith, Secretary of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: "The Outlawry of War."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 3.30 p.m., Mr. T. H. BURGESS: "Which Is The Greatest Evil?" Tea at 5 p.m.

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (173, Church Street, Blackpool).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., Mr. F. MOSSMAN: "Buddhism."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. H. L. SEARLE: "The Coming Decline of Man."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. T. L. SMITH: "The Need for Freethought Propaganda."

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. F. J. CORINA: "Freethought and Modern Youth."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Choriton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK (London): "Freethought, Religion and Politics."

Oxford Branch N.S.S. (52, St. Clements, Oxford).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Dr. LISBETH GOMBRICK: "Clerical Influence On Viennese Politics Before And After The Anschluss."

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

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FREETHOUGHT PROPAGANDA—IS THE ATTACK ON THE BIBLE PLAYED OUT?

THERE is a tendency among certain Freethinkers to regard attacks on the Bible, or arguments directed against Christian doctrines and beliefs, as obsolete, and to speak of them somewhat disparagingly as "old stuff."

In his article "Modern Atheism and Propaganda" ("The Freethinker," December 31 and January 7), Mr. F. J. Corina tells us that: "We are passing out of the stage when the simple exposure of Biblical nonsense or the historical exposure of institutional religion is sufficient to bestir the tide of thought in the direction of our movement." It seems that the younger generation—"dissatisfied with the burnt offerings of the religious cookhouse," and better acquainted than their elders with the more cogent arguments furnished by modern science, are no longer interested in these antiquated methods of shaking Christian faith.

He complains that the advocates of Freethought fail to take full advantage of the weapons which the "new knowledge" has placed at their disposal, and which would, if employed against the god idea, destroy religious superstition at its source. There is no question that the modern science of anthropology (which with the latest development of other sciences constitutes what Mr. Corina calls the "new knowledge") affords the Atheist one of the strongest arguments against theism. But that is because he is an Atheist, and has already passed from a disbelief in one god to a disbelief in all! With the Christian the case is different. Few cover the distance between Christianity and Atheism in a single stride. With most, the conviction that gods do not exist, is the end of a gradual process of reasoning which had its beginning in doubts of the existence of a particular god—The God of the Bible.

Assuming that, like most of us, Mr. Corina was once a Christian, may I ask did not his disbelief in the Bible necessarily precede and marshal the way to his Atheism? Why then regard what was a necessary stage in his own development as needless in the case of others? In our exposures of "Biblical nonsense" we are not arguing with Freethinkers, who know it to be nonsense, but with Christians who do not and who, simply because they are Christians, make such methods necessary. As Christianity is the stronghold of theistic belief, and as the Bible is its only foundation, to discredit that book is to deal a vital blow at the most widespread and important of all forms of Godism.

We are told that: "Biblical or inspired and revealed grounds for religious faith have disintegrated, largely washed away by the relentless stream of past controversy and challenge." This is, in my opinion, to take a very sanguine view of the position. As a corrective, I suggest that Mr. Corina peruse a few of the modern books by leading expounders of Christianity. Far from being disintegrated and washed away, he will find the "inspired and revealed grounds for religious faith" commended and defended with all the zeal and ability that the writers can muster to the job. If it be objected that these are the views of individuals and therefore not sufficiently representative, he may have more popular proof of the prevalence of these beliefs in the numerous periodicals devoted to sectarian interests. A glance through "The British Weekly," "The English Churchman," "The Methodist Recorder," etc., should convince anyone that the Bible at its grossest is still accepted as the "Word of God" by a majority of those who call themselves Christians.

I have omitted the Catholic organs, and that wishful imitation of them, "The Church Times," because, by them, the "Church" is regarded as the only authority on matters of Faith. While acknowledging the "Holy scriptures as the inspired Word of

God," the Catholic Church claims for herself the sole right of interpreting them—in other words of putting her own construction on their meaning. The object of this manoeuvre is evident. Her present-day apologists* are aware that a literal interpretation of the text could not be upheld, and that, while the Bible is necessary as the historical basis of Christianity, it is, as a narrative of facts, indefensible in the light of modern knowledge. Hence the need of "interpretation."

I think it will appear, therefore, that, so far from being obsolete, the attack on the Bible and doctrinal Christianity is to the "militant" Atheist, the indispensable preliminary to his main aim and objective—the destruction of theism.

But Mr. Corina's chief reason for depreciating the old methods of attack is yet to be noticed. It seems that there are certain persons who, "disgusted by the Christian creed, and having thrown it overboard, yet retain a god-problem," and "who deplore our attacks on something they still believe to be inherent in human kind—the god idea . . . these un-Christian and anti-Christian godists, in moving away from the sectarian to the non-sectarian religious state of mind, have shown that they may be amenable to a more developed and a more scientific appeal to reason."

I confess I have little sympathy with those, who, having turned down the claims of one god, though backed by voluminous documentary evidence, are content to wander in a twilight of vague speculation groping for another for whom there is no evidence at all. To me it seems an indisputable proposition that a god who does nothing is nothing, and that a being hidden behind an inscrutable veil of nescience, and whose reality no effort of reasoning can demonstrate, may safely be considered, for all human purposes, as non-existent, and an object of no further concern.

Those whose mental make-up condemns them to linger in a limbo of dubiety looking for they know not what may be left to their own devices. They are not likely to succumb to any argument, anthropological or other; and, viewed as obstacles in the way of Atheism, must be reckoned of little account compared with the strongly entrenched and veteran forces of Christendom.

While availing ourselves, therefore, of every new method of attack against theism which science may furnish, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are mainly engaged in conflict with the most powerful manifestation of that belief. As the Bible is at once the most vital and the most vulnerable point in the Christian defence, to attack it is as necessary and as effective to-day as when Paine wrote his "Age of Reason," and will be so as long as Christianity exists.

A. YATES.

* Fr. M. C. D'Arcy, S.J., Hilaire Belloc and others.

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