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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The War and Prayer

NO one appears to have noticed the fact that prayer in connection with the war has been pushed into the background. We do not mean by this that prayer has been formally and completely set aside. Epidemics of common sense are very rare, and time is required for it to become acclimatised. Outbreaks of foolishness on a large scale are comparatively common. United outbreaks of common sense on the part of a whole people are very rare. The unity of the people of this country with regard to the war cannot be cited to the contrary. When a knife is at a man's throat he does not need pressure to avoid the cutting. But it is the movement of the herd rather than a manifesto of wisdom which finds its expression in individual manifestations.

It will be remembered that when war was declared against Germany there was an immediate outbreak of prayer on the grand scale. A succession of days of prayer were arranged. The King, as one monarch to another, decreed prayers to God, the newspapers advertised them as much as possible, but things went from bad to worse, and at one point it seemed that stark disaster fronted us. Then, probably due to a suspicion that God may not have received the days of prayer, a non-stop period of prayer was adopted, and that left no excuse on the part of deity. Then Russia joined the war, and the Christians of this country began to praise "Atheist Russia" instead of cursing it, our people put their backs into the job before them, and although we still had a number of disasters, hope was seen on the horizon, and step by step the Allies began to make progress. But the days of prayer, the official notice to God that we were in trouble and needed his help were abandoned to the Churches. Of course, when the war is over, the King will be "advised," or ordered, to declare a day of national thanksgiving, and to some extent we shall slide back to the old level of primitive foolishness. But the power of prayer will never be what it was. Vast numbers of people will be impressed with the fact that if we had left the matter to God, Hitler would long ago have been sitting in Buckingham Palace.

Yet prayer is vital to all religions, and for two fundamental reasons. Man, whether primitive or modern, believes in God, and above all worships him, because it is believed, first, that he really does something, and secondly, that he takes a special interest in those who worship him. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, but only when the said lamb bleats regularly, and the Christian, more than any other religious group, has a keen eye on his spiritual profit and loss account. A god who merely sets things going and does nothing more would not exist for long. He may be a god who is quick to anger

and prompt in inflicting chastisement, but he must do something. Man praises God for what he has done, but only because he has a sharp eye for favours to come. The gratitude of the Christian is based on a lively sense of benefits to come. Used in its ethical sense, the Christian is the most materialistic of all godites. If he invests his energy in religion he demands a good dividend. His most enthusiastic outbursts of praise to God are for what he has done for us, and also what he will do in the days to come. The payment of the dividend may be delayed until the worshipper enters heaven, but the dividend must be forthcoming, somewhere and somehow. St. Paul summed-up the outlook of the true Christian in saying that if there is no future life where one can reap reward, what does it matter how one behaves? He insists that if there is no God, then why should a man practise "restraint"? If Christians were not better than their creed, they would be unfit for a decent human community. For *goodness* comes in the pleasure of the doing, not as one goes short of food to-day in order to get a triple allowance to-morrow. What a pity it is that our religious leaders are, apparently, completely ignorant of the nature of morality and the essential quality of the human group.

Prayer

The Christian, the Jew, the Mohammedan, with multitudes of others, join in the cry of "Let us pray." We have no *prima-facie* objection to prayer. If prayer is any good to anyone at any time, or if prayer is useful or serviceable to anyone, it should be serviceable to everyone, and we have no desire to be out of a good thing. Christians will admit, however, that all prayers are not answered, even when the prayer is offered in good faith and for a good purpose. It may be urged that if a man takes to backing horses he encounters some losses, yet he keeps on backing in the hope that one day he will pull off a winner; and then, in the ecstasy of having done so, he gets a renewed faith in betting. At any rate, he is cheered by the fact that winners are found by some. So the Christian who does not get a winner to-day hopes that he will get one to-morrow. And as the racing tipster tells his dupes of the wonderful winners he has given those who relied upon him, so the religious tipster promises his clients some wonderful results—when they reach heaven. It was a shrewd old Greek who, when he was taken to a temple and shown the walls decorated with offerings to the gods from those who had crossed the seas in safety, asked: "Where are the tablets for those who did not return?" It may be that the questioner was set upon for blasphemy, although, as the story belongs to pagan Greece and not to a Christian Church, it is likely that he escaped being lynched, but no Christian theological system could tolerate questions of that kind.

We are told that the only way to find out the value of prayer is to pray, and keep on praying. But if one prays and receives no answer, he is told, on complaint, that it was because he did not believe, and one cannot realise the power of prayer without faith. But if one must believe in order to get an answer to prayer, there is no need for one to test the reality of prayer by trying it. On the other hand, the devised test should be so simple that one could easily realise the nature of the operation, and when the answer comes it should be so definite in character that there would be an end to any doubt as to its operation. The wit of man is certainly strong enough to devise a test that would meet the situation. It is God who appears unable to meet the challenge.

I agree that established prayers, in both form and alleged results, are rather puzzling. Consider the question of the harvest, to secure which we have well set-out prayers. If the prayer is followed by a bumpy harvest, the growers complain that their profits fall. If the harvest is poor, the consumers complain of the little they get for their money. Again, if one turns to the Church of England Prayer Book, he will find that grave doubts are cast upon God's management of the weather. In the first prayer God is asked to send rain, but this is followed by another prayer, which reminds him not to send rain as he once did and so drowned the world; and it is suggested that he should send just enough "moderate rain and showers that we may receive the fruit of the earth to our comfort." He is plainly reminded that he once did drown all "living things." God, when he sets to work, is likely to be what "Alf's Button" calls "too blooming wholesale."

Consider also the difficulties in the way of a sane and honest believer forming a satisfactory opinion upon the power of prayer. Five years ago we found ourselves at war with Germany. Immediately our leading clergy ordered the King to call for a day of national prayer. But things looked blacker. More days of united prayer were ordered, but without any recognised improvement. Then other plans were tried. It even went to the length of a non-stop system of praying to God to slaughter his children in Germany. Things began to look very serious. Then Russia, which had set God, officially, on one side, entered the arena, men and women in this country worked with unprecedented vigour and gradually the war turned in the direction of the Allies. But it was in terms of human labour and courage, and the clergy have been more cautious in their movements. It is true that General Montgomery persists in giving full credit to God for the advances made, but it is noticeable that he does not move unless he has a sufficient body of men at hand and an almost unbelievable stock of death-dealing weapons. The war is being won in the workshop and by the strength and courage of men and women. To argue otherwise is equal to claiming that the aims of Hitler were purely humanitarian.

Divine Intervention

Now, I am far from arguing that God cannot win a war, or that he should not be able to cure disease. I merely suggest that at present the issues are mixed and the results confusing. It is, for example, always open for evil-disposed persons to argue that God only cures a man when a doctor is present or when the case is one in which some simple remedies are effective. He wins a war only when one side

has superior courage, greater resources, or better generalship. The question at issue is whether God can do any of these things in such a way that his generalship is unmistakable. If man is helpless without God, it is equally clear, nay, clearer, that God can do nothing without man. The effort is mutual, and there should be a fair distribution of thanks and praise. The present method reminds one very forcibly of the wife who insisted on giving her sick husband medicine of her own concoction, and at last turned on the protesting doctor with a "Look here. You give him your medicine and I'll give him mine, and we will see which one cures him first."

At this point the believer in God introduces what the Chinese would call a "face-saver." He says that the Christian prayer is "Not my will, but *thy* will be done." But as in any case, so far as the Christian belief is concerned, God's will is bound to express itself, why waste time and energy by—rather artfully—offering God suggestions? By this plea the Christian appears to suggest either that God needs human advice, or men need fooling in order to get praise for God. I think that if I were God I should object to receiving sly hints as to what I ought to do, or being drenched with praise for behaving in a way that any decent human being would behave if he had sufficient power. Christians should behave with greater circumspection. To say "Thank you" to God may be a mere act of politeness, but slyly to suggest in prayer that he shall do this or that, is a thinly disguised insult. The whole situation becomes ludicrous when it is slyly suggested that God will do as he pleases, and then advising him how to behave. If Jesus was right when he said that not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge, human advice becomes an insult.

Primitive man behaves in a more logical manner. Without the freedom that civilised man has with regard to gods, he is yet more manly than is the theoretic Christian. Frankly, without the humbug of the civilised godite, he feeds his gods with honesty. On the other hand, if his gods fall short in *their* duty, he is apt to throw them on one side and adopt another. But Christians have theoretically reduced the gods to one, and that leads to pious humbug and want of courage. Primitive gods are, in their way, a logical deduction from existing knowledge, but the modern believer has to set modern science behind him. And that inevitably leads to self-deception and deliberate falsehood.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

POPE JOAN

I.

ONE of the most interesting—and for that matter instructive—stories in connection with Roman Catholic history is that of Pope Joan, the famous female Vicar of Christ. It is particularly interesting for outsiders like us because of the delightful squabbings between very religious Protestants and very religious Catholics on the authenticity of the story.

The average Roman Catholic is quite prepared to swallow anything, no matter how silly, stupid, or credulous, so long as his Church vouches for it. Some of the stories about Catholic saints are the last word in sheer stupidity and superstition, yet they will be defended to the death by Catholic sheep if they know the Church is behind them. But Catholics draw the line

at Pope Joan. She is a thousand times more credible than, let us say, St. Christina, yet there are few things that will get Catholics more angry than insistence on the truth of the story of Pope Joan.

Of course our sceptical historians have almost given up any belief in this lady Pope. Gibbon contemptuously rejects it, as do Mr. Joseph McCabe in his "History of the Popes;" and Peter Bayle in his great "Critical Dictionary." And there followed a very acrimonious discussion when Blondel, who was a Protestant, wrote an acute analysis of the legend in A.D. 1647-49, rejecting it as a ridiculous forgery, a position which his fellow Protestants bitterly opposed.

For those who are not familiar with the details it may be briefly said that Joan—she is also called Agnes—was an English girl who went disguised to Athens with her lover, and later to Rome, where she showed great ability in theological discussion and learning. Her sex was never discovered, and she gradually rose in the estimation of the Church and eventually was elected Pope in A.D. 855. Two years later, as the result of a love affair with one of her valets, she gave birth to a child in a public procession in the streets of Rome and was lynched by an infuriated mob.

It is when we ask for evidence for this most intriguing tale that the fun commences and the feathers fly.

It was a Greek, Emmanuel Rhoidis, who collected all the proofs he could find in favour of the reality of Joan in a little work published by George Redway in 1886 entitled "Pope Joan: A Historical Study." It has a preface by a rather rabid Protestant of those days, C. H. Collette who supplements Rhoidis with further proofs—if that were possible—and reasons why the story must be true in spite of Gibbon, Blondel and Bayle.

Collette gives a number of librarians, theologians, and other writers, who testify to the truth of the history, including Platina who, writing in the fifteenth century in his "Lives of the Popes," admits that "he could not omit the relation, because almost all men believed it to be true." And certainly for about three hundred years the Roman Church does not seem to have denied it.

Mr. McCabe declares that this "absurd" story is not found before the fifteenth century, though Collette claims that Anastasius, the Librarian of Leo XI., relates it in A.D. 1049; and in addition, he says that Spanheim, the learned German author, "professes to have examined upwards of five hundred old MSS. which confirm the history."

Not only do we get the story confirmed from literary sources, but the "Nuremberg Chronicle," dated 1493, "not only records her succession as a fact, but actually gives what purports to be her portrait, with those of other Popes." Her bust was actually in the Cathedral of Siena in the early part of the fifteenth century with the busts of the other Popes, and no one appears to have made any protests.

Then a statue was erected by Pope Benedict in Rome "of a woman who was delivered of a child" in order to inspire a horror of the scandal which took place on the spot where Joan gave birth to her baby; it was thrown into the Tiber by order of Pope Sixtus V. in A.D. 1585. Quite a number of other proofs are given by the supporters of Joan, culminating in what Rhoidis thinks the greatest of them—the declaration of John Huss at his trial in A.D. 1414. Huss had declared that it was impossible for the Church of Christ to have existed on earth without a visible head as the Church of Rome had done when "Joan occupied the See for over two years." The Church of Rome was, therefore, not the true Church of Christ. Not a single member of the Council, which included one Pope, twenty-nine cardinals, forty-nine bishops, and one hundred and seventy-two theologians, "charged Huss with lying or of uttering a blasphemy" when he asked if Joan, who had a baby in public, was as a Pope "pure

and immaculate?" They never insisted there and then that the whole story of a female Pope was myth, pure and simple. That is a most astonishing fact.

And now what about the other side?

The first thing to be noticed is, as Baring-Gould in his "Curious Myths of the Middle Ages" says, that "the great champions of the myth were the Protestants of the 16th century, who were thoroughly unscrupulous in distorting history and suppressing facts, so long as they could make a point." I have given Collette's quotation from Platina—he gives the original Latin as well—but here is Baring-Gould's: "These things which I relate (about Pope Joan) are popular reports, but derived from uncertain and obscure authors, which I have therefore inserted briefly and badly, lest I should seem to omit obstinately and pertinaciously what most people assert." Of the two, Baring-Gould's translation seems to me to be the truer.

The earliest writer who mentions Joan is Anastasius the Librarian (died 886) and the objection is made that the various copies of his work do not all contain the story. Blondel, who went very carefully into the question, says that he examined one of them in the Royal Library at Paris "and found the story of Pope Joan inserted in such a manner as to convince him that it was a late interpolation." In dozens of other writers and chronicles the story has either been deliberately inserted in the same way, or one writer has merely copied from another writer. Baring-Gould deals with many of these and comes to the conclusion:—

"It need hardly be stated that the whole story of Pope Joan is fabulous, and rests on not the slightest historical foundation . . . a paper war was waged upon the subject, and finally the whole story was proved conclusively to be utterly destitute of the truth."

Mr. C. H. Collette is very angry at such blunt speaking and does his best to discredit such an out-and-out unbeliever, but he cannot deny the forgeries and interpolations. Instead, he appeals to the statue erected by the Pope as a warning to other ladies who want to be Popes—a statue that appears to have really been in existence. The only question here is—how can it be proved that the statue was one of Joan? Fr. Thurston claims that it never was destroyed, but is still in the Vatican, and that it represents Juno suckling the infant Hercules. In the fifteenth century, when the story of Joan was so widely circulated to the detriment of the Papacy, it is only natural that the superstitious and ignorant people of Rome should imagine it to represent her—just as some Catholics at this day genuinely believe that a statue of Isis suckling Horus really represents Mary and Jesus.

It was the Catholic Dr. Dollinger who very thoroughly investigated the legend of Pope Joan, and made mincemeat of the "evidence"; and it was he, as Fr. Thurston has to admit in his pamphlet "Pope Joan," "made plain that the statue of the mother and child played a very large part in the evolution of the legend." Joan, in fact, was a literary creation, and I want to show in the next article some of its analogies to that other literary creation—the myth of Jesus Christ.

H. CUTNER.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

What is the Use of a Future Life?

By CHAPMAN COHEN

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ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Southwark has at last discovered one thing connected with the war that has escaped general notice. He says that the people must be led back to "sanity and right values." That sounds good until one discovers that the chief material for doing this will be Christian literature—of a not very lofty character. He says "the need for Christian literature will be enormous" in Europe. We have our doubts. There was no shortage of religious literature in pre-Hitler times, nor was there in any other part of Europe. If religion would have prevented the world war that war should never have occurred.

Moreover, what all the churches have to face is not a world hungering for more religion, but a world that has witnessed the rising of Russia to a greater human level than it has ever before enjoyed, and without any religious aid whatever. Far from securing religious aid, the new Russia had to fight against the most sustained examples of religious lying that the world has seen for some time. More than twenty-five years ago we said that nothing so vital as the Russian Revolution has appeared since the French Revolution. Without confusing issues, Russia has shown that it lies in the hands of humans to make the world what it will. It is the fact that this is being recognised by men and women in all parts of the world that marks a further decline of religion as a social force.

It looks as if, after all, the Government is a little concerned as to the part that the clergy may play in the administration of the Education Act. A letter in a religious paper from a cleric says that the Minister of Education "is circulating among a few privileged persons a document," with a proviso that after a specified date "no clerk in holy orders not already in the teaching service will be allowed on the staff of a State school." If true, this is certain to disturb the clerical breast. It may be that, with a General Election in the offing, the Tory section of politicians will feel that the Education Bill will not give the votes in the direction hoped.

As a postscript to what we have said, we again advise all who do not believe in a State-taught religion will show their feelings by withdrawing their children from religious instruction. It means that a poorer type of teacher will become common, and the effect on those whom they teach must be a poorer type of citizen.

We have often pointed out that in France one of the great obstacles to a peaceful development in late years has been the activity of the Roman Catholics. After the Dreyfus scandal France disestablished the Church, and the Vatican has never forgiven or forgotten that (religious) disaster. It is also worth noting the number of good Catholics that have figured in the war trials that have been taking place in the restored France. For example, Petain and Laval are both fervent Catholics, so is Admiral Estiva. It is said that he has never missed holy communion for thirty years. A long list of traitors might be compiled, and we are sure that it would have been forthcoming had all these men been Atheists.

We would not deny that members of other Churches, and those who disdain all sorts of religion, may also be found acting as the men just named have acted. But there is a vital difference between the two groups of religionists and the non-religious man. The latter is brought face to face with facts, and the responsibility is his. The Christian acts as God would wish him to act and so never really and honestly sees himself. And in the case of Roman Catholicism we face a still different position. It not merely claims to be the only correct form of Christian belief, but it also claims to control in civil life marriage, education and morals. It is therefore bound to set up a state within the state, and history proves it will plot and plot and plot again by all means to secure dominance. The Roman Church is the inevitable enemy of a free people.

In the House of Lords Lord Chancellor Simon gave an assurance that military courts would be set up to deal with those who have acted criminally in the conduct of the war. The possible

"criminals" included the Fuehrer. There must be a large number of men in this country and elsewhere who can be indicted for having—before war broke out—petted and encouraged Mussolini, Hitler and their followers.

The war draws to an end. That is, of course, a truism, but when it does end, if only to give time to plan other wars, we shall have the usual pantomimic religious performances, including a royal procession to St. Paul's. They will thank God for giving us peace—at the cost of millions of dead and millions of living people suffering from the war. Those whom we call savages are often more sensible than we are where the gods are concerned; for if their gods did not help them they discharged the old god and took on with a new one. That was at least sensible. But the more the Christian suffers from the carelessness of God the flatter on his knees goes he. What a creed!

At the close of the war that was to end wars, over twenty years ago, the Teachers' Union of Brittany declined to take any part in securing a war memorial unless the inscription deleted "Died For Their Country." In the end they had their way and the war memorial was inscribed with "Victims of the Great War." In London we made the occasion a military parade. Yet the monument of Brittany carried with it a lesson that all could read and understand. Is it likely that we may have something of that kind when our war memorials are scattered over the country?

Liberty takes curious forms. It appears to depend upon who claims it. As it stands, the Pope claims it at the one end of religion and the Society of Friends at the other. In politics it runs from the most trusted of Conservatives down to the advocate of non-resistance. But a very common mistake is that which is connected with religion. Here is an example. Miss Dorothy Jones, a teacher, in the course of an address to the National Union of Teachers, said she could not be satisfied with a secular system of education, but "there should be no sectarian teaching of religion." What we should like to know is: Where is there a religion that is not sectarian? Every form of the Christian religion is one section of Christianity as a whole. There is no logical difference between any of them. Miss Jones is evidently very particular in the kind of nonsense that she entertains.

The Rev. C. W. Harrington told a Nottingham audience the other day that he thinks we ought not to mix the Church with business. We agree. The standard of honesty among tradesmen is generally higher than that of the Church, and business should be kept as good as possible. Those who wish to test this statement, which at first seems rather extreme, should contrast what real Christianity was when it ruled the roost with what they find with the bastard secular philosophy which they now try to force on the people as genuine Christianity.

The Dean of St. Paul's says that, first, there is "a considerable proportion of people who do not believe in God," and secondly, that "it was a mistake to suppose that the existence of God could be demonstrated in such a way as to put it beyond any intellectual doubt or question." Well, that is not a bad admission for a Dean of St. Paul's to make. He was lecturing in the Church of St. Mary-at-Hill, London, which makes it the more striking.

But consider what we have come to. The old form of attack was that the existence of God was obvious, now it is reduced to a mere possibility. His existence cannot be proved. Next, so long as the tale held good the ranks of Atheism were recruited by people who wished to have an excuse for variegated villainy. That has gone by the board among the better type of Christians. The lie was too obvious for it to be profitable. And between the believer in God and the Atheist the gap is not to be bridged. Dean Matthews is evidently feeling the pinch. That does credit to his intelligence. How far it reflects upon his intellectual honesty we refrain from saying, but the admissions are interesting enough for us to deal with them at greater length in a later issue of "The Freethinker."

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. PAULKNER.—Certainly we could write a book in that form but are too busy. Meanwhile we have a pamphlet and a book dealing with the subject of Atheism.

C. J. WILLIAMSON.—We cannot say when Mr Cohen is likely to be lecturing in the North of England. He has so many calls on his time in addition to the call of age that he has to exert some little care.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Little things, if they are little things, may point to big consequences. Two or three days before Easter Sunday we were glancing over three illustrated weeklies. The articles noted each had an Easter heading. But, alas, for the Churches, not one of them mentioned Jesus, or the Church, or religion of any kind. They were all concerned with the brilliant green grass, the lovely apple trees, and the joyousness of the season. Of course, the festival of Easter, with its celebration of the killing of the God with his resurrection three days after is a very ancient religious story, and belongs to other religions beside that of Christianity. In fact, so much was admitted by some of the early Christian writers. Thus, St. Augustine took occasion to warn his brother believers not to "celebrate the day like the heathen on account of the Sun, but on account of him who made the Sun." One could hardly have a clearer admission than this, and it is well known to our clergy. But where religion is concerned one fraud more or less does not matter.

And here is Frazer's account of the crucified and his resurrection:—

"The death and resurrection of Attis (the God) were officially celebrated in Rome on the twenty-fifth of March. . . . According to an ancient and widespread tradition, Jesus suffered on the twenty-fifth of March. Thus the tradition which placed the death of Christ on the twenty-fifth of March was ancient and deeply rooted. . . . The inference appears to be inevitable that the passion of Christ must have been referred to that date in order to harmonise with an older festival of the spring equinox. . . . His resurrection coincided exactly with the resurrection of Attis. The coincidence formed a theme of bitter controversy between the adherents of the rival religions, the pagans contending that the resurrection of Jesus was a spurious imitation of the resurrection of Attis, and the Christians asserting with equal warmth that the resurrection of Attis was a diabolical counterfeit of the resurrection of Christ."

Unfortunately for the Christian claim the execution and resurrection of the pagan god was long before the Christian one was heard of. An explanation was given by Christians that it was due to Satan, who knowing of the coming of Christ forestalled him. But the important thing is that our leading clergymen of to-day are quite familiar with what we have said. They know that the historic story is pure myth. And the inference is that in preaching the resurrection of Jesus as an historical fact they are fully aware it to be a lie.

A course of lectures has been arranged by the Blackpool Branch N.S.S., in the AMO Hall, Abingdon Street, Blackpool. Mr. R. H. Rosetti will open the course with two lectures to-day, April 8th. At 2-30 the subject will be "Do We Still Need Religion?" and at 6-30, "Shall We Live When We Die?" Mr. J. V. Shortt will be the speaker on April 15th, and Mr. C. McCall will follow on April 22nd. The new Branch is developing into a very healthy unit, and the secretary, Mr. W. J. McMurray, 30, Woodland Grove, Blackpool, will be pleased to contact any local offers of support.

To-day (Sunday, April 8) Mr. F. J. Corina will be lecturing for the Manchester Branch of the N.S.S. in the Chorlton Town Hall at 3 p.m. His subject is "The Moral Landslide," and it should lead to a good audience and plenty of discussion.

One of our daily papers says, quite seriously: "Housing is essentially a religious question." Let us hope not, for we all have to wait for the joys of heaven until we are dead. There is some little hope for betterment if we trust to humans; a Government may be turned out or a Minister sacked. Besides the specific order of Jesus is that we must take no thought for the morrow, what we shall eat and what we shall drink. Moreover, while there is a story told in the Apocryphal Gospels that Jesus, to help the husband of his mother, stretched a plank to its required length, it would not be wise for the homeless to expect anything of that kind happening. And if God remained disinterested to the vile hovels in which people had to live before the war, we have no guarantee that he will be more active afterwards. What God appears to value most is prayers and praise, but praise and prayers is the nectar of the gods.

In a war where millions of men risk their lives and large numbers lose their lives, it would seem unnecessary to mark out certain individuals for special mention. For it is quite obvious that of these millions all risk their lives, and the vast majority face the possibility of death with equal courage. But if distinctions must be made, it would seem that the most foolish thing is to link the displayed courage with some religious sect. Generally speaking, this is not done. Certainly the Army leaders do not indulge in this kind of religious dishonesty. They are content to say that they have done their duty with great courage.

But it is left for the Roman Catholic Church, surely the most dishonest of all Christian Churches, to emphasise the fact that some *Roman Catholics* have received military decorations, with no mention of non-Catholics. Week after week the attention of the world is called by Roman Catholic papers to sons of the Church who have received this or that distinction. But there is no mention of other Christians or of any other religious body. Roman Catholics do furnish men of courage, and so do other sects. If the account is to be an honest one it should surely read that good, bad and indifferent qualities are manifested by all groups of humans. But that would be asking Roman Catholic leaders for a degree of honesty that is generally met in ordinary human nature.

We have said over and over again that the Roman Church must act as an ill influence in any community where it exists. It does not bring people together, it separates them. For example, in Cincinnati, U.S.A., according to the "Universe," "Catholics should not participate in conferences nor in any public presentation with those of other faiths under the auspices of religion. Debates and conferences, especially of a public character, with those who are not members of the Catholic faith, are forbidden by Pontifical law. The responsibility for this rule is the Catholic Church, which cannot give the impression that one religion is as good as another, or that she must strive with those of other faiths for a common denomination of religion."

CHRISTIANITY AND COWARDICE

CHRISTIANITY, it can hardly be denied, is a religion of Fear, especially in its modern pseudo-Christian form, and from that point of view, it may be regarded justly as putting a premium on cowardice. For what, after all, is its teaching?

You must fear God. You must fear at least three out of four of those Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven. You must fear for the future of your own soul. You must put its salvation, that is its safety, first. You must fear for the souls of your relatives and friends; for even if you are going to heaven, they may be going to hell. You must fear to sin; you must fear the consequences of not only your own sins (whether of commission or omission) but you must also fear the consequences of your own original sin inherited from your legendary first progenitors, Adam and Eve.

A load of Terror to carry through life indeed! It is but little offset by the Blessed Hope of Everlasting Life through the Redemption of Jesus Christ, because you may not be one of the saved Elect after all.

No wonder weak intellects have given way under the strain of such ghastly fears. No wonder some religionists have developed "religious mania" and ended in lunacy and suicide. Fortunately for their sanity, most Christians or pseudo-Christians, have a healthy and hopeful incredulity about the baser side of their religion. Burning for ever in unquenchable flames in Gehenna or Purgatory may be true, but they hope, and more than half-believe that it is not. After all, they wouldn't chuck even a cat or dog into the fire: why should a loving God chuck me, or even Aunt Mary, in—though the Church still half-teaches it?

In this weakened form, the Gospel of Fear persists, especially amongst the more ignorant Protestant sects.

One cowardly aspect of the pseudo-Christian religion—an aspect that has so deeply revolted Bernard Shaw and other modern minds—is its Doctrine of Christ's Atonement. The idea of casting one's burdens of sin, or any other burden, upon any scapegoat, Divine or human, is repugnant to a gentleman. It is also more than doubtful whether Nature allows this cheap and easy escape from consequences, Nature having its inexorable laws of cause and effect. But whether Nature allows it or not, who but a cad and a coward would allow an Innocent to suffer for one's own guilt?

Old-time religious folk gladly "cast their burdens upon the Lord." They felt quite nice after doing that. They bathed in the blood of the Lamb and felt clean, instead of feeling, as they ought to have felt, more disgusting than ever. To do wrong is bad enough; but to add to your wrongdoing by putting it on the shoulders of Jesus Christ or anyone else, is surely much worse! To a modern mind, the doctrine of the Atonement is indefensible—a cowardly and crude invention, a legacy of the scapegoat, or even older and more savage superstitions of substitution.

If one accepts the thesis that Jesus died for the sins of his fellow-men, so have thousands of other men. For the sins of German, British, Russian, French, American and Japanese politicians, men, women and children are dying in myriads at the very moment I write these words. But their sacrificial deaths do not atone in any fashion for the politicians' sins, the consequences of which the world is bearing itself, and will have to bear, probably beyond the life of our generation. Then why should it be supposed that the death of a Jesus can evade the consequences of other men's sins?

Indeed, it can be reasonably argued, as the great World-thinker Nietzsche argued, that Christ, in fact, upon the Gospel-story died for his own sins, not ours, not those of the whole world. No wonder he made enemies of "the priests and the rulers" of the people! Those abusive attacks on the rich, on

the Pharisees, on the Sadducees, and the rest of the contemporaneous powerful, were bound to provoke hostility, as was also his claim to be King of the Jews, and his constant assertion of personal superiority. Indeed, if Jesus were indicted in England at the Old Bailey to-day for treason and sedition, either under the ordinary law or under the Defence Regulations, it is difficult to see what valid answer he could possibly have to the indictment.

Of course it will be objected to the charge that present Christianity is a religion of cowardice, that past Christianity has produced its martyrs and heroes, and that many Christian soldiers have been men of great courage in action. But martyrs and soldiers can be brave whether they are religious or irreligious. And a religion in itself brave can be professed by cowards, just as a cowardly religion can be professed by brave men. Certainly there are brave Christians and pseudo-Christians: indeed, in this pseudo-Christian England the true Christian is brave indeed, for he must stand by Jesus Christ's doctrine of loving his enemies in time of war, as the Quakers do. That certainly takes courage in a war-lunatic world.

Put the tenets of Christian theology against the meditations of Marcus Aurelius and instantly one is struck by the difference between a pusillanimous and heroic creed. Jesus Christ himself, as depicted in the Gospels, showed plenty of intellectual as well as physical courage—indeed his courage is shown as temporarily failing only twice—but the same is not true of what so-called Christians profess to be the Christ-creed. In fact, present-day pseudo-Christianity, the creed of the Churches, runs away even from its own teachings to wage war, litigation, profit-seeking, self-aggrandisement, and all the rest of the evils Jesus so definitely denounced.

Can you imagine a single British parson in war-time daring to say to soldiers what Jesus said when the soldiers demanded "What shall we do?" Jesus replied "Do violence to no man." If a British parson preached Luke III., verse 14, he would commit a crime and find himself in the dock. For no "Christian State" can, or will, tolerate the true Christ-creed and no "Christian Church" countenances its Master's teachings in peace time, let alone in war.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

THE LOSS OF GOOD FRIDAY

I WONDER how many Freethinkers noticed a curious little exchange of opinion which took place in the House of Commons on March 14, 1945? I think that due attention should be paid to this, since it demonstrates something which is exceedingly common in religious circles, and which is nevertheless frequently ignored.

The matter arose in connection with a Prayer to annul an Order in Council which provides that Good Friday shall not be regarded during the war as a public holiday. Sir Herbert Williams, the die-hard Tory Member for Croydon, moved the Prayer, and said that he thought it was inimical to production to suspend the workers' customary holidays, while Major Manningham-Buller, whose eager efforts on behalf of the working-class have, of course, been obvious for years (or have they?) said that it was wrong to make a woman go to work on a Good Friday when she might wish to go to Church. Why this was wrong in the case of a woman and not in the case of a man is not quite clear, although possibly the honourable member has realised, as so many Tory Christians have realised, that the days when men flocked to church are over.

Mr. Tomlinson, who replied on behalf of the Ministry of Labour, pointed out, very wisely and rightly, that it was possible, under the Order in Council, for employers to substitute another day for Good Friday as a general holiday for the workers, and

Mr. Lawson, speaking for the Labour Party, brought the matter down to rock bottom by calling attention to the fact that the members who had supported this resolution belonged to the Party which had in the past forced the workers to work long hours in order to make a bare living.

What strikes me most forcibly about the whole discussion, however, is that no one seems to have taken the workers' opinion in the matter. No one asked whether people wanted Good Friday as a general holiday, and whether they would not prefer, what has now become fairly general, to take Saturday and Monday, or Monday and Tuesday, as holidays instead.

The average worker, whether with brain or muscle would, I am sure, far prefer the long week-end which he has had for the last two or three Easters, rather than to have Friday off, work on Saturday, and then have Monday off.

The old religious taboos die hard. People will not admit that religion is a declining force, and that all the old paraphernalia of Lent, Easter, Whitsun, and the remainder of the religious festivals really mean nothing at all. These periodical week-ends are holiday week-ends. We enjoy a few days of laziness to do as we like, or to work in our gardens and our homes instead of our workshops and our offices—and that is all that the religious festival really means.

The House of Commons now, after about ten years from a General Election, is completely out of touch with public opinion on this as on practically every other question of the day. It is fortunate for the workers that this Prayer was not passed, or the clergy would have been able to prate, with their customary spirit of unctuous rectitude, of the Christian heart of England once more beating steadily and strong.

The moral for Freethinkers is not difficult to see. Here, as in so many other instances, the Churches take no chances. They never lose an opportunity to push their views to the fore, quietly assuming that the orthodox view is the view of the majority of the people. We, as Freethinkers, should learn a lesson from all this, and should realise that, unless we too seize every chance of putting our view before the public, we may lose our case by default.

JOHN ROWLAND.

CATHOLIC CONVERTS

Millard wrote a bibliography of Oscar Wilde and a book on Wilde entitled "Three Times Tries." He introduced me to the writings of the so-called Baron Corvo . . . One can understand Corvo's conversion to Catholicism; it appealed to one particular strain in his character. I never understood Millard's conversion since he had no religious ambitions like Corvo, nor as far as I could discover, any religious convictions at all. Some of these English converts are certainly a puzzling phenomenon to born Catholics like myself. I have known one who carried in his pocket 82 small medals which had been blessed by the Pope; another who took the Communion twice every day; another who became a convert because he fell in love with Sodoma's picture of St. Sebastian; another who used to kneel down on the floor of churches and make the Sign of the Cross on them with his tongue. Can such people be called sane?—From "Adventures of a Bookseller" by G. Orioli.

PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS, by J. M. Wheeler.
Price 2s.; postage 2d.

GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT, by Chapman Cohen.
An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

CORRESPONDENCE

B.B.C. RELIGIOUS BROADCASTS.

SIR.—An interesting sidelight is shed upon these by information in a recent B.B.C. News Letter. It is quite evident that "The Anvil" was dropped because it made no real appeal to the public." Among spoken word programmes in 1944, "War Commentary" was an easy winner, and "The Anvil" was a very bad last.—Yours, etc., "ALERT."

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held March 25, 1945

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair. Also present: Messrs. A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Lupton, Silvester, Morris, Barker, Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, Bradford, Birmingham Branches and to the Parent Society.

Lecture reports and arrangements and correspondence were dealt with from Glasgow, Blackburn, Blackpool, Chester, Belfast, Oxford, Manchester, Bolton, Chester-le-Street, London areas, and Messrs. Brighton and Clayton.

In response to the circular sent to Branch secretaries on February 26, the Annual Conference will be held in London on Whit-Sunday, May 20.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for April 22, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday 11 a.m., JOHN KATZ, B.A.: "Poets, Priests and Prophets."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Burnley.—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON. A lecture.
Colne (Lancs.).—Wednesday, April 11, 7.30 pm., Mr. J. CLAYTON. A lecture.
Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, April 6, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON. A lecture.
Higham (Lancs.).—Monday, April 9, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON. A lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (AMO Hall, Abingdon Street).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "Do We Still Need Religion?"; at 6.30 p.m.: "Shall We Live When We Die?"
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mrs. C. E. M. REYNOLDS, M.A.: "Politics and Literature."
Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. W. F. PRESTON: "R. Cunningham Graham."
Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA: "The Moral Landslide."

BELFAST WOMEN AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

I AM nervous about meetings in Universities. I have an apprehensive complex. For, forty years ago, I asked a professor a question. Only three words of mine were audible, they were: "Votes for Women." The lecturer did not answer me, but the students did—with a black eye, a bloody nose, a torn coat, all-out wrestling down three flights of stairs, and a rumba with several policemen. During my subsequent imprisonment for "disgraceful conduct," I reflected that while I had no complaint on the score of inattention the answer I had received bore little relevancy to the emancipation of women and social progress.

It was believed in those days—a superstition that I never shared—that women would do things better than men. Well, they got the vote, not for their peaceful femininity but for their part in man-made war.

So here we were now, in the Queen's University of Belfast at an advertised "Public Debate" on the Government's White Paper on education, organised by the University Women's Committee. There were several ladies on the platform, but nobody shouted "Go home and bath the baby." Students, nowadays, evidently don't know about woman's proper sphere. Indeed, it was "sticking out a mile" that the women knew their political onions. For, in her first sentences Mrs. McNeill, who presided, disclosed their acquaintance with the knavish tricks which we ask God to confound. That illustrious national figure, Mrs. Mop, has won our love by her persistent politeness. The English charwoman always asks "Can I do you now sir?" But the Irish char-lady has less of la politesse and decidedly more de l'audace. For what she said was, in effect: "We're going to do you now, folks."

It was such a flagrant "sell" that it nearly took my breath away. For, had it been mentioned in the advertisement of the meeting that the question of religious instruction could not be discussed, the organisers knew well there would not have been half the number present. I challenge Professor Biggart to dispute my psychology. Most of the public interest is in the religious instruction proposals. When Mrs. McNeill gave as a reason for the ban that the matter had been fully ventilated from every angle in the Press, I could contain myself no longer. I may say her statement was greeted with loud groans and there were cries of "You are afraid!" I left the meeting and was followed by two others, one gentleman telling the audience: "You are now going to have Shakespeare without Hamlet." There is no doubt that there was considerable dissatisfaction in the audience.

I understand there was a three hours talky-talky after I left, a lady M.P. and a Professor being the principal "opponents" in a resolution "That the White Paper dealt inadequately with some much needed reforms in the educational system."

Couldn't Freethinkers have said something there? What a chance! What a hope! But did the Women's Committee for Social Progress know that? Not 'arf. But all the same it is worth noting here that the voting (46 to 13) was nearly four-to-one against the proposed bill! Will Professor Corkey square that fact with the talk of 100 per cent. in favour of the religious proposals?

Now, as Mrs. McNeill and Professor Biggart know only too well, that's all bunk about all points of view having been exhausted. Secular Society resolutions and persistent letters from rationalists are consistently suppressed. The statement that there is an overwhelming demand for Bible teaching in our schools is untrue. What, it may be asked is the game? Why are such efforts being made to force upon the children of the poor a form of instruction completely at variance with the scientific knowledge of Professor Biggart and the cultural standards of Mrs. Parker and the women of Queen's University?

To the students it is all very simple. Doctor Joad could explain it, but I also have read Plato. That philosopher frankly recommended teaching the citizens "a noble lie" to frustrate the revelations of the profits of usury and slave holding and the shameful contrast then prevailing between rich and poor. Plato, unlike the moderns, was no hypocrite. Later, Polybius is more candid. For he tells us: "The foundation of Roman Greatness is superstition. This has been introduced into every aspect of the people's private and public life with every artifice to awe the imagination. All that can be done is to hold them in check by fear of the unseen and similar shams. It was not for nothing but of deliberate design that the men of yore introduced to the masses notions about God and the after-life."

The Glory that was Greece, the reason that was Rome! Centuries change not Custom. Ulster, the home of Neolithic Culture—and Professor Corkey! And it's "not for nothing" but of careful planning that Mrs. McNeill, Mrs. Parker and Professor Biggart will not allow us to discuss absurd notions that are to be forced into the minds of our children, notions which they themselves do not believe in. For there have always been two interpretations of Christianity almost amounting to two distinct creeds. Broadly speaking there are two main divisions in Ulster—Catholic and Non-Catholic. But there is really a third religion, a form of sublimated Protestantism suitable for the best people. That is the religion of Mrs. Parker, Mrs. McNeill, Mrs. Irene Calvert and of all the intelligentsia of Stormont and Malone, Ballymacaree and the Shankill must be riveted and welded with an iron hand if civilisation is to survive. Our common Christianity must be manifested to these sturdy people in strong terms: Wrath of God, smite enemies, lake of fire, everlasting torment, talking snakes (and ladders) argumentative donkeys, devils, ghosts, star and stable, crown and anchor, verily verily, yea yea, nay nay, wash in blood, original sin, and above and beyond all, blessed be ye poor, for you'll be very rich when you rise again from the dead. Now, no adult would fall for that, so the only way to slip it across is to bludgeon it into defenceless children by Act of Parliament. Sure, haven't we discussed it—so the kind lady said—and aren't the parents after demanding that their children be sand-bagged?

The Malone Road, not being common has, naturally, another conception of our common Christianity. To speak of allegorical interpretation to the children of Islanders, would be as precious jewels to unclean quadrupeds. But to the high-brows of Queen's allegory is a sound word. Symbolism is another good term for spoof. Yes, yes, our children are Christians, for, as the dear professor says, it is really marvellous how creative Evolution reconciles religion and science. Properly understood, they are one and the same—Genesis and Geology. The slight difference of three hundred million years fades away when we think of relativity. You see, it all depends what we mean by a day, and by a million years . . .

J. EFFEL.

(To be concluded)

CHALLENGE TO RELIGION (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester), by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS, by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.