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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and Morals

It is some time since I expended space on the weekly sermon delivered to the readers of the "Daily Telegraph" by the Rev. L. B. Ashby. I have, of course, no means of saying how many read them. There may be some who feel that they are uplifted by them, but I suspect not many. Still, they are interesting in their way. Those who do not go to church will find in them justification for staying away, and those who wish that the space had been used for more interesting matter may reap the advantage that some weaker brother has been gratified. There are, after all, myriads of people who love to get an explanation of the inconceivable. This was suggested by Charles II., the last intellectual monarch we had. He explained the vogue of a very dull preacher by saying "I suspect that his nonsense suits their nonsense." We certainly have many such preachers to-day.

But after nearly three centuries we might reasonably expect better things, and so may well ask for justification of this newspaper preaching. After all, we are living in the 20th century, not in the 17th. Still more to the point, it is over 80 years since Darwin published his "Origin of Species." It is over 70 years since Tylor published his "Primitive Culture," and since then we have had a steady stream of valuable books which should have silenced the childish Biblical account of creation and all that it implied. These men have written the history of mankind in a way that should dispose of the teachings that satisfied our forebears. The men named wrote the history of the world and the history of man. They have shown us the origin of gods, and in so doing should have disposed of such things as Mr. Ashby's dose of primitive superstition. He should know, as we all know, that the gods are reduced to nothingness.

But the twistings, the shufflings, the prevarications of our clergy, whether of the established Church or otherwise, almost passes belief. Under pressure, and in non-religious magazines, or in the general press, we have one form of religion offered. In Church or Chapel the Bible and the New Testament are referred to as documents that give a plain statement of actual events. We are referred to what "our Lord" said, to what one of the disciples said or did, to dead men called to life, how herdsmen traced the birth-place of Jesus with the aid of a travelling star, and so forth, as though they were records of indisputable facts. Many years ago, Ruskin, when at the height of his power, said of the clergy of his day (and they certainly have not improved in moral quality or intelligence since):—

"The particular kind of folly which leads youths to become clergymen is specially intractable. That a lad just out of his teens, and not under the influence

of any deep religious enthusiasm, should ever contemplate the possibility of his being set up in the middle of a mixed company of men and women of the world, to instruct the aged, encourage the valiant, and set an example to all—and not feel what a ridiculous and blasphemous business it would be if he only pretended to do it for hire. . . . That any youth should ever get himself into the state of recklessness and conceit required to become a clergyman under these existing circumstances, must put him quite out of the pale of those whom one appeals to on any reasonable or moral question in serious writing. . . . In general, any man becoming a clergyman in these days implies that his sentiment has overcome his intellect, and that whatever the feebleness of the latter, the victory of his impertinent piety has probably been owing to its alliance with his conceit and its promise to him of the gratification of being rewarded as an oracle without the trouble of becoming wise, or the grief of being so."

Of and For Asses

Inquisitive readers—and I hope I have plenty of them, for much of what I write is intended to act as a spur for further study rather than for satisfying them to the extent of their not bothering further about it—will find the passages cited in the opening pages of the fifth volume of "Fors Clavigera," which, I believe, contains some of the best writing of one who, to cite a critic of the period, did more for the English language than it was possible to do. A paradox, and yet, like many paradoxes, containing a truth.

Now, to get back to the Rev. L. B. Ashby, and one of his Saturday excursions. His sermon is concerned with Balaam, and we are concerned with it only to the extent of a single point. Says Mr. Ashby:—

"Balaam was a worshipper of the true God, and knew very well that, though the heathen gods were completely indifferent to morals, this was by no means the case with the true God, who, as can be seen plainly enough from the Old Testament, stood first, last, and all the time for righteousness, and demanded right conduct from his worshippers."

Now, I am not really concerned with the story of Balaam and his Ass and God, except to say in passing that the sequence of the three is very common in stories of the miraculous. The Christian trilogy is Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and, with the story cited, God, Balaam and a donkey. I am only concerned with the statement that while the "true God"—true for those who believe in him, but not at all true to those who do not—demanded "right conduct"—again a rather slippery word—other gods were "completely indifferent to morals." It was really that expression that made me turn to Ruskin to get his opinion of a great many clergymen in his day. He found the

clergy of 1870 much as they are to-day — conceited, bombastic, and not over truthful. I don't think the clergy have changed for the better in 1945. What Ruskin would have said had he been alive to-day I shudder to think. His lash would be swung, but it was so beautiful an instrument that one felt inclined to thank the ill-doer for inciting Ruskin to action.

One may note that Mr. Ashby does not merely claim that his God is better than the God of the fellow over the road, but he proceeds from this to downright foolishness, and says that every God except his was, and is, completely indifferent to morals. But morality is concerned with ethics, and between the two terms the distinction is very small indeed. We may, therefore, take ethics or morals, not as chunks of something that is handed down to man by some God, but that it actually begins with the animal world and develops as man finds himself more on speaking terms with the world around him. Of course, the gods were well distributed in the non-Christian world. There were gods by the gross, with each one ruling over his particular department. But the distinction was not so great as Mr. Ashby apparently believes. For if Christians stood by one God, historical Christianity as represented by the Roman Church gave the world showers of saints, who controlled disease, the weather and a variety of other things.

But Mr. Ashby appears to hold a very curious belief about morals. He believes in the Bible legend of the origin and development of man, and that will certainly not do. For, in the first case, man is a creature that developed slowly, so slowly that anthropologists are substantially agreed that the beginning of the human race goes back at least a million years, and also that for about three-quarters of that time he was without any gods, good or bad. I do not think it would be scientifically correct to talk of gods *appearing* on the scene, for in other important changes there must have been a lengthy period during which gods assumed a definite form.

But we have come to call conduct ethics or morals, so morality must have been in operation as soon as that "sport" in some gregarious ape-like group appeared. What human consciousness does, and human unconsciousness, is to realise in speech what has for long been evident in practice.

Now, I should not be at all surprised if Mr. Ashby is as well acquainted with the facts of the matter as I am. But then, most of the more respectable of the clergy appear to be oppressed by a dual personality. In one situation they may be a well-educated body of men sufficiently endowed with intelligence to understand and agree with what I have said. But at one moment Personality No. 1 talks rationally and is acquainted with the main truths of modern science and recognises that what our forefathers call the word of God is a mere hodge-podge of ancient superstitions; and then suddenly, for a longer or shorter period, comes the deeper-set partly suppressed Second Personality that takes command and utters the rubbish about the pagan gods being perfectly unconcerned about conduct.

Creed and Crime

By way of a postscript I am noting a few interesting facts concerning religion and crime. I owe the information to a review by Professor J. B. S. Haldane of "Race and Crime." "Race" is a quite unscientific term in this

connection, but we will let that pass. According to the writer of the book—which I hope to deal with fully later—Jews were less likely to commit murder, manslaughter, assault, theft, embezzlement, or sexual crime. They were more prone to forgery, swindling, fraud and fraudulent bankruptcy. But on the whole they committed fewer crimes than the rest of the population.

In the Netherlands the number convicted annually per 100,000 of population between 1901 and 1925 were: Catholics 416, Protestants 309, Jews 13, "No religion" 84. Professor Haldane comments that these figures are, of course, a complete refutation of the view of the B.B.C. on most Sundays that religion is needed for morality. That is very B.B.C.-ish. But no one who knows the B.B.C. can deny that it has from the first day of its being lied lustily in the interests of Christianity. And it has stubbornly and persistently refused to permit anything "on the air" that will reflect on that creed. So this huge machine is filled year after year with misrepresentations of the nature and influence of religion. But it never forgets to proclaim a love of liberty and fair play.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE LORD'S APOLOGY

IF only the Lord would be honest enough to write an apology for his people, one could imagine its running somewhat as follows:—

"Thus saith the Lord, with so much in my Bible needing retracting, modifying and explaining, it is difficult to know where to begin. Perhaps I should begin with myself and retract the statement that there is only one God. There have been multitudinous gods. I also repudiate the claim that my Bible is 'the' sacred book. Sacred books abound. The Vedas are sacred to the Hindus. The Avesta is sacred to the Zoroastrians. The Koran is the Word of Allah. The Jains of India, the Bahais of Persia, the Buddhists, all have sacred books.

"It is incontestable that the sacred book attributed to me as my Word is man-made. It is a vast fabrication of anonymous and pseudonymous documents, full of myth and legend, with almost uncountable corruptions in the text. Full of lies, my Bible is used, paradoxically, as an encouragement to speaking the truth in taking oaths. Layer upon layer of interpolations in the gospels are the work of the church for the purpose of bolstering up its fictitious claims, answering criticisms, and obscuring the pagan origin of the religion it produced.

"Many of these interpolations make me appear quite foolish. The one in Matthew XII., v. 40: 'As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,' represents me as accepting the Jonas myth as historical, as really having been crucified and resurrected, and as being unable to measure correctly a period of three days and nights.

"I sincerely regret to state that apart from interpolations, there are significant omissions in the text as well as innumerable contradictions. Historical discrepancies are common, as are also errors and stupidities in astronomy, meteorology, geology and biology. There are childish mistakes in elementary arithmetic that, if copied by a schoolboy, would send him to the bottom of the class. Talking of arithmetic, I know nothing of any Trinity whereby 'three ones are one' is substituted for the first line of the multiplication table 'three ones are three.' The Trinity was added unofficially to Christianity by an unknown person at an unknown date at an unknown place long after the council of Nicea. Incidentally, these meagre details remind me of the similarly meagre ones surrounding my birth; unknown persons have fixed my birth in various years at different places. In

fact, to reconcile the disharmonies of the 'Harmony of the Gospels,' (so-called), has driven the harmonists to despair.

"The interpolated miracles attributed to me are quite embarrassing. I never 'stilled a tempest,' though it is said Dionysos did so. I never 'changed water into wine'; that was a feat performed by Bacchus, the wine-god, and by Mr. Neville Maskelyne, the well-known London illusionist. I certainly never 'raised the dead to life,' though Horus, Krishna, and many others were reputed to have done so. And to make me 'cast out devils' and make me state that sin is a cause of disease, is to accuse me of crass ignorance of elementary medicine. As a matter of fact all such miracles were artfully attributed to me to support the claim that I had superhuman powers. Likewise all stories that I was divinely-born are 'stories.' The early Syrian MSS. make no such claim. Nor do I. Apparently I have been roped in with the Grecian and Roman mythologies which claim divine births for the long list of their gods. Oh! And I never created the heavens and the earth, though two Hebrew gods of the Babylonians apparently did so in exactly the same way as did the two gods in Genesis. No, evolution has disproved creation.

"I fear the idea that 'prophecies' were predictions must be resigned as false. My priests either misread these prophecies, or they were misquoted, as in Matthew, who altered the text to suit his 'story.' Theists, as well as non-Theists, long ago declared that miracles originated in the desires of the early church to manufacture agreement between the O.T. prophecies and the Messiah. As my servant, Thomas Paine, put it: 'Translators have, of their own imagination, erected into prophecies passages of the O.T. . . . Many prophecies were unfulfilled, others are too vague to admit of prophetic interpretation, others again are obviously written after the events pretended to be foretold.'

"I must disclaim responsibility for much of the doctrinal matter in the Bible. The words have been put dishonestly into my mouth. Large portions, in fact nearly all, of the doctrinal material in the Gospel of St. John are acknowledged by the most expert Biblical students to be spurious.

"The Lord's Prayer is *not* mine. It is pre-Christian. I regret to point out that this prayer has been built up by Christians, with more zeal than honesty, from phrases already in Judaic use. Again, the Sermon on the Mount was never given by me as a discourse. I was never on a mountain; but there is a 'mountain' of evidence that this sermon is a pen-made compilation of old and current moral lore. Whenever the Bible puts me on a mountain, it is a case of the old God-and-mountain-myth all over again, as when they put me on Mount Sinai to deliver the mythical Ten Commandments.

"All that can rationally be claimed is that a teacher or teachers named Jesus may have uttered some of the things credited to me. The Pauline epistles apparently know nothing of my doctrine. Paul knows nothing of my twelve disciples. In fact these epistles, nowhere quite genuine, fail dismally to support the gospels.

"The book of Proverbs pays me the following compliment, which I appreciate, but must repudiate: 'Every Word of God is Pure,' but many Biblical passages report my saying the most obscene things. The book of Lamentations says of me: 'He doth not afflict willingly,' while many passages accuse me of willingly afflicting people with the most horrible and filthy diseases. I have been called a god of love, while all the time my character has been more like that of a devil. I have been made to condone slavery, bigamy, lying, to mention only a few examples.

"To those Christians who are 'banking' on salvation, I issue a warning: 'The whole story of Calvary originated in sun-worship, from which source came the yarn that I was crucified and resurrected. Mythology teems with saviour-gods who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. I cannot for the life

of me see why identical miraculous stories told of other saviour-gods are false when told of them, but true when told of me. Perhaps they are not true when told of me, but it is in the interests of the priests to keep alive the Christian illusion, theology being their living.'

"Therefore, I must deny categorically that I am 'coming again,' as stated in Revelation. My alleged first coming has caused enough trouble. I refuse point-blank to save mankind. It is beyond my power to do so, although I am credited with omnipotence. Man must work out his own salvation. Thus saith the Lord. Amen." RUBY TA'BOIS.

THE DYING AND THE LIVING

(SHORT STORY)

THAT night when I went to bed I had felt uneasy, tired, and certain that I would not be able to sleep. The old man had not been his usual self. His eyes had had a strange glitter and his steps had been unusually tottery. When I made an offer to help him it was repudiated; that was usual. But when I saw how tottery he was I insisted and helped him despite his spirited remonstrances. Above all other things I noticed was the strange, almost unearthly, glitter in his eyes. Never before had I seen anything quite so weirdly mischievous.

It was with a sigh of relief that I closed the door once I had seen him in his bedroom. Outside I stood still and listened with bated breath. What I heard made my blood freeze. I heard sounds like that of a body, weary with age, dropping down to the floor in a state of sheer exhaustion. Perspiring from every pore I fled downstairs. Sitting over a kitchen fire I brooded over recent events. "You are a coward," I told myself. And thus reprimanding, I summoned up courage sufficient to go and see the old man. I opened the bedroom door half expecting to feel the impact of his body. But such was not the case. Once securely inside I looked around myself. He had not turned off the light and his clothes were not to be seen. Where was the old man? Had he gone? No, he was in his bed; lying on his back with the sheets drawn to his face. His eyes, more glittery than ever, were gazing steadfastly ahead. Trembling and white I went up to him. I bent over and asked him if he wanted anything. No, he wanted nothing, except that he wished me to leave.

I left the room, but once more waited outside. Soon he called me. This took me by surprise; his calling was inflected with the assurance of knowing me to be only outside. I went in and asked him what he wanted. His reply was that he wished to speak to me.

With a shaking voice he spoke: "I am leaving this world," he said. "Ay, I know I am . . . 'Cause I've just seen your mother . . . robed in vestal whiteness . . . she was . . . same as when I last saw her. Ay, and she spoke to me too. Said she was waiting for me; waiting for me in heaven. Ay, the dead knows the dead when they sees 'em. Leave me, boy, leave me, I want to die alone."

I left the room; doing my best to walk with slow deliberation. But hardly had I closed the door than he called me back. This time he spoke to me in a husky voice; the voice of a man trying desperately to convince himself of something. He spoke to me of the overwhelming evidence there was to prove the existence of life after death. I nodded gravely in affirmation. Oh, the hypocrisy of it! He died firmly convinced that he would live on. It would have been cruel to reason with him.

S. WOLF.

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

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST, by Gerald Massey. With Preface by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

How very easily one can tell a lie by stating the truth! For example, here is the Archbishop of Wales, who comes forward with the following:—

"Until the last century education was almost wholly in the Church's care, and we have a fine tradition to maintain."

Drop "fine tradition" out of the above sentence and the statement is quite true. Take it in relation to certain facts and it is what one may describe as a thumping lie, for the casual reader will understand by it that the Church has always, "until the last century," provided a satisfactory education for the people.

Consider a few facts in a few brief words. When the Church of England superseded the Roman Church it took as many of the privileges that had been enjoyed by the latter, with as much financial privilege as the State would permit. Among these was the control of education. But the growth of what in the end came to be called nonconformity, or dissenters, led to schools apart from those controlled by the State Church. Towards the end of the 18th century and the early 19th the struggle for the control of the children led to rival improvements, but their value may be gauged by the fact that when the Government gave a very small sum of money for the help of schools, the state of education was so bad that a Royal Commission reported that the Government was not getting value for its money.

At the middle of the 19th century education in England was far behind most of the more important Continental countries. These facts are easily found in almost every book dealing with the history of education. It was the lack of education that led to the Bill of 1870. Naturally the Established Church opposed advances in the State schools for the simple reason that these advances led to the Church Party opposing improvements in order to minimise their own outlayings, and it has opposed almost every advance until we come to the recent Act, which returns to the Churches a control of education that it has not enjoyed for a very lengthy period. This is a very rapid sketch, but it will help to make plain the quality of the statement by the Archbishop of Wales of "fine tradition" in the matter of education. Actually, it is among the most miserable of all our religious histories.

The Catholic "Universe" informs the world that its motto is "Tell the truth and shame the Devil." We agree that if the Catholic Church, or any other Church for that matter, really told the truth where religion is concerned, the Devil might be surprised, and most mortals would be rendered almost speechless by such an unexpected statement. Perhaps the editor wrote it with his tongue in his cheek. Perhaps it was to give the world a sample of what is called "Christian truth," to mark off for what is known as "truth" minus an explanation.

One question asked in the same issue of the "Universe" is "Why is there no account of the Crucifixion of Our Lord in Roman history?" A great many people have asked that question, and the "Universe" dodges the question by replying that there are in Roman history mentions of Christians, and falls back on the very doubtful mentions by Roman writers. But the question was "Why is the Crucifixion not mentioned?" And that is completely ignored. The killing answer was given by the famous sarcasm of Gibbon, in which he exposed the quality of the Christian legend:—

"How shall we excuse the supine inattention of the pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of omnipotence? Not to their reason, but to their senses. . . . The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconcerned of any alterations in the moral and physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius the

whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny. . . . Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature—earthquakes, meteors, comets and eclipses. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."

Could anyone more plainly demolish the essential wonders on which Christianity is built? We are moving in the land of mythology, not of fact, and unless our leading theologians are unbelievably ignorant and credulous, they know it to be so.

Everyone will breathe more freely on hearing, via the "Catholic Herald," that Teresa Newman is alive and well. And yet one is not surprised, for Teresa is in immediate touch with the Saints, and since 1939 she has had no food pass her lips save the "Holy Sacrament," and she has not taken any liquid. Neither has she lost weight. Our readers may remember that some time back we dealt with this holy lady. It is upon such glorious happenings as these that God's Church lives.

Meanwhile the Catholic papers are busy with declarations that the only security against the evils of war is Christianity—Roman Catholic Christianity. The editorial in the paper just quoted says that the anti-Christian Nazis were not incapable of using gas bombs. Of course they were not, but why emphasise the anti-Christian leaders? The vast majority of the German leaders were Christians. Hitler has over and over again described himself as an instrument of God, and the Church has never used its Christian condemnation of him. Nor did the Papacy condemn Mussolini when he used gas against almost unarmed Abyssinians.

Meanwhile we would wager that the Allies will go on experimenting with gas even when this war is at an end. It will not be aimed at anyone in particular, but it will be a preparation by each against others who might use it when war breaks out. The only way to prevent this and other kinds of war is to create an international army, and count as a crime against humanity the building up of private ones. We have pleaded thus for half a century, and we see no grounds for altering our opinions now.

We have all heard of the miracles worked by "Our Lady" and similar weird things. Here is the way in which the trick is done—we take our information from the "Universe" recently. A Mill Hill priest, writing from a Red Cross camp in the Philippines, describes how he was rescued by American soldiers one hour before the Japanese were going to execute him. So thanks were offered to "the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Lourdes." But there is not a word of thanks for the American soldiers. Of course, this kind of thing is not peculiar to the Roman Church. It runs right through the Christian religion. When, for example, this war is finally won there will be any amount of thanks to God. But both the English thanksgiver and the Catholic ghost hunters will fight shy of explaining that both god and the saints would have been helpless without the work and courage of ordinary human beings.

In spite of all the planning and plotting and underground manœuvring of which the Papacy is capable, the Vatican will not be represented at the United Nation's Conference. There is no justification for such representation, and only double-barrelled impudence would ask for it. The Pope represents only a scattered body of believers in his religion. So the Pope has to content himself with prayers. That will be really a good card for him. If anything good results, the Catholics will claim thanks for it. If anything is bad, it will be because no Catholic representatives were present. It is rather a safe stand. Meanwhile, perhaps the Vatican will explain why it has not, by prayer, wiped out the Germans in Italy?

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- F. KEYS.—Thanks for copy of the report. It will be useful.
- R. F. HILL.—Thomas Love Peacock was really a fine writer. To place him in the same category as the one named is an insult to one of the wittiest writers of his day.
- C. D. WESTON.—We hope to have the essay on Thomas Paine on sale very soon after the issue of this copy of the "Freethinker." We are at the mercy of the printers in the present state of affairs.
- H.R.—Shall be pleased to see you at the coming Conference. Please may yourself know.
- J. McMANUS.—Thanks for letter. We may deal with the book later.
- C. M. DOWNES.—Pleased to hear from an old reader but a new correspondent. We agree that the sprinkling of a second rate religion over newspapers says little for their quality. It is, of course, laughable to suggest that the theory of Evolution is questioned. It shows either dishonesty or downright ignorance. The choice lies between miracles or evolution, and there is no doubt to-day on which side science stands.
- NORMAN NORTH.—You are right in saying that advanced thinkers are not yet sufficiently alive to the dangers embodied in the Roman Catholic propaganda. The power wielded is quite out of proportion to numbers. And the solidarity of the Catholic vote, although their strength may be overrated, is enough to make candidates shy in giving offence. One of our greatest anthropologists warned us that our culture was like houses built on a non-exhausted volcano. The outbreak of Nazism is evidence of the truth of that statement.
- N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society, four items per an "Anonymous Freethought Propagandist" as follows: Richard Carlile, 10s.; Charles Bradlaugh, 10s.; Tom Paine, 10s.; Robert Ingersoll, 10s.; Mr. H.E. Latimer Voight, 1s. 6d.; S. C. Merrifield, 3s.; G. Williams, 2s. 6d.
- For "The Freethinker."—L. Organ, 2s. 6d., J. W. Gratton, 3s., M. Feldman, 10s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We are looking forward to a good muster of both provincial and London members at the Annual Conference of the N.S.S. on May 20. The meeting will take place in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m. These will be for members only. In the evening at 6.30 in the same building, there will be a public meeting to which admission will be free. There will be a number of speakers; full particulars in our next issue. Our last public gathering was so crowded that the Executive is providing a number of reserved seats. Tickets may be had free of charge on early application, stating how many are required. Between the morning and afternoon sittings a luncheon will be provided at a charge of 3s., again early application should be made. There is a good opportunity at both the luncheon and the evening meeting for bringing along enquiring friends. Finally, visitors who require hotel accommodation must write at once. London will probably be well crowded on Whit-Sunday.

The question of religion again looks like dividing the French people at the critical moment when it most needs unity. There

is promised a bitter quarrel, similar to that which raged about forty years ago. The Vichy Government, which worked loyally—for the Germans—revived the subsidies from public funds for the support of Catholic schools, and the question now is whether these subsidies shall be continued or not. The Minister of Information, M. Teitgen, has asked the French people to decide without cleaving existing political parties, but to act with a view to the unity and greatness of France. We hope that the right response will be given and that Frenchmen will not forget the Dreyfus scandal, which was saturated with religious influences.

Where religion is concerned common sense and moral values have neither place nor meaning. Quite recently, on the same day, the B.B.C. told us of the screams of Nazi soldiers being burned to death by flame-throwers, then followed the almost unbelievable horrors of the German concentration camps. Afterwards, on the same day, came the religious pomp and ceremony of the induction of the new Archbishop of Canterbury, and God was solemnly asked to defend the Church and protect the new Primate. And this in a world bleeding to death in the sixth year of the bloodiest war in human history. And the Christian legend runs that God himself, nearly two thousand years ago, came down from heaven for the expressed purpose of leading the human race to love and brotherhood. Could anyone have made a greater mess of a job than did the Christian Deity?

The Bradford Branch N.S.S. begins its open-air work to-day (May 6) with a meeting in the Car Park, Broadway, Bradford, at 6.30 p.m. Every Sunday evening at the same time, and place, meetings will be held until August 26. The branch is in good hands, its activity increases and widens, and that should induce unattached Freethinkers in the area seriously to consider taking up membership.

The Cardiff Branch of the N.S.S. is holding an open discussion on "Fetichism from a Secularist's point of view." The date is May 4, the place is the Severn Road Council School, the time 7.30. Mr. W. A. Andrew will open the discussion which should be an interesting one.

A very sharp rap over the knuckles is given to a writer in the "Schoolmaster" for saying that "it is impossible for a good Christian to be a bad citizen." Rather unfortunately the writer supplied an example in William Wilberforce, and a fitting retort is given by Mr. E. J. Orford. He says:—

"What better example could he have chosen to refute his own statement? Wilberforce as a Christian occupies a high place in general estimation. Wilberforce as a citizen was the author of the most terrible set of Combination Laws ever passed in this country. The black slave's wife might hear her husband cry out under the lash; the white man's wife under Wilberforce's Combination Laws had to suffer hunger and deprivation with him—and so did her children. So terrible were those laws that they had soon to be withdrawn.

How many reactionary governments in Europe during the last thousand years could have existed without the support of the Church? Even the bitterness that characterised the Kulturkampf was not sufficient to prevent Leo XIII. from coming to the aid of Bismarck in securing the passage of his great Army Bill, an event that is not without significance perhaps at this very minute. In England the last ecclesiastic to be entrusted with political power was so reactionary that he was beheaded—and let us not forget that Laud has his admirers still. And let us not lose sight of the fact that so far from possessing a great dynamic the churches are now compelled to hitch themselves on to the schools as the only means of coping with a situation that arises from their very obvious lack of dynamism."

Open-air meetings will be resumed by the West London Branch N.S.S. in Hyde Park from to-day (May 6) at 6 p.m. A variety of speakers will occupy the platform during the season, and the new branch secretary, Mr. E. Page, 6, Claremont Road, Twickenham, Middlesex, invites all visitors to Hyde Park who may be in sympathy with our movement to support the N.S.S. meetings.

FROM THE SPIRIT WORLD

A VALUED friend sent me the other day a copy of the "Psychic News" with the conclusion of a speech—from the spirit world—by Robert G. Ingersoll, reported in it by Cora L. V. Tappan "the greatest trance medium of her day." I am not sure that this superlative praise will be agreed to by the other people in the profession but, after all, we cannot expect one of the greatest Freethinkers of the last century to waft his oration from Summerland—or whatever his present Elysian abode is now called—through a mere ordinary trance medium. Only the greatest ought to do for him.

In any case here is his "greatest" oration, the word "oration" was, I believe, nearly always used by Ingersoll rather than speech. It is not exactly well done; it has not the touch of genius which somehow or other that fine artist, Sir Max Beerholm, got into his incomparable "Christmas Garland." Ingersoll was very fond of picturesque phrasing, full of word painting, and he often let himself go when he was getting enthusiastic over this world rather than over the next. This oration in the "Psychic News" looks to me as if one had taken a number of what were thought to be Ingersollian phrases, and wherever he spoke of *this* world, the "spiritual" world was substituted. Listen to this:—

"Suddenly in the midst of the great solemn silence of death, in the midst of the whirling thoughts that went surging through the brain into a shadowy something unknown, in the midst of pulsing tides of affection that sought to reach the loved ones who were left behind, in the midst of this which shuts off the mortal breath, came the surpassing glory of spirit life. The sun of splendour rose suddenly, clear and cloudless; there was nothing that could mar its beauty or its perfection, and sweet strains of music, like those Apollo might have given on his harp of light among the stars, floated towards my consciousness and seemed to upbear me from the mortal thought."

Miss or Mrs. Tappan must have been reading Ingersoll for quite a bit, and with the aid of some well-worn clichés—you know the stuff—"surpassing glory," "sun of splendour," "the loved ones left behind," "sweet strains of music," "mortal breath" (what exactly is immortal breath?), "whirling thoughts," and many others even more hackneyed and carefully worked into this so-called "Ingersoll's Greatest Oration," one can get something easy to imagine the readers of psychic journals will slobber over, and cause them to hail Ingersoll as now one of themselves.

It is astonishing how anxious spiritualists are to get into their ranks contemptuous unbelievers. No one spoke more scathingly of spiritualism than the late J. N. Maskelyne and Harry Houdini, yet we are solemnly told that they really were white-hot believers, and it was only because they found they could make more money by opposing spiritualism that, in public, they did oppose it. Both these great magicians have often been called from the mighty deep, but neither seems able to suggest illusions from the spirit world which in any way could outshine those which made them famous here. And somehow or other, this particular oration of Ingersoll makes me laugh—it is so thoroughly unreadable.

Now, whether we conceded greatness to Ingersoll or not, he certainly had one supreme quality. He could hold his audience perhaps better than any of his contemporaries on the platform, and his splendid lectures and essays are among the most readable ever written for Freethought. He always had something good to say, and he said it with grace and power. He fought for humanity with all the strength in him, but it was in the home that he felt the ultimate happiness of man lay; his own home life was something sacred and lovely, and I doubt whether there is anything finer in Freethought literature than passages in that

prose-poem of the home, "The Liberty of Man, Woman, and Child." "I believe in the fireside," cried Ingersoll, "I believe in the democracy of home. I believe in the republicanism of the family. I believe in liberty, equality, and love." And in these days when we are (I hope) horrified at the way in which some poor children are being treated in England, I can fancy nothing finer or greater than Ingersoll's plea for the child—so moving and splendid and, alas, so necessary.

Yet in Miss Tappan's transcript of Ingersoll's "greatest" oration there is hardly a word about this love for children that permeated his life and thought; at least not in the part sent me. Not a word about his wife whom he idolised, or his own children. It is very strange.

Many years ago I had a little discussion in the New York "Truth Seeker" with a spiritualist who also had received speeches from Ingersoll's spirit. One of these showed him taunting the Rev. Dr. Talmage writhing in Hell: "How do you feel down there, Brother Talmage?" I said then that for the tender-hearted Ingersoll this was about the greatest insult one could give him, and reading this "greatest" oration I feel it is also an insult to his memory. Ingersoll could never have written or spoken such unmitigated balderdash.

In the same number of the "Psychic News" we are gravely informed by the editor that the "raps" which commenced with the Fox sisters in America nearly a hundred years ago, "have since echoed all round the globe" and are "God's Telegraph." He—the editor, not God—actually saw "the pedlar's box, which when it was unearthed, confirmed the spirit message by the Fox sisters." This reminds me of the clergyman who on holiday picked up some stones from Mt. Ararat, and on his return proudly showed them to his Sunday-school class as definite proof of the truth of the Flood story.

The further we get from the date of the Fox sisters the more the stories concerning them are believed by spiritualists. Their contemporaries were decidedly more sceptical.

Read the account given with full authorities by Frank Podmore in his "Modern Spiritualism" and you will see why so many people then laughed at the "spirits" of the dear little girls. These spirits answered by rapping, and it did not take long before it was found that a pedlar had disappeared and his bones discovered through the agency of the Fox raps. We are told in the "Psychic News" that:—

"More and more people were attracted by the rapping" and finally it was elicited that a former tenant of the Fox cottage had murdered the pedlar for the money he carried. . . . It was decided to dig for the pedlar's remains and the work begun. . . . so much water was found that the digging had to be stopped. Later the digging was resumed, and they found traces of quicklime, some human hair, human bones, and a portion of a skull."

And, of course, by that time a servant had recalled the pedlar's visit, and then never saw him again.

Unfortunately, all the authority ever given for this came from the Fox family alone, says Podmore. "No corroborative evidence of the supposed murder, or even of the existence of the man supposed to have been murdered, was ever obtained." In their "Explanation and History of the Mysterious Communion with Spirits," by Capron and Barron, published in 1850, two years after the raps had begun, there is no mention of the pedlar.

In his book "The Supernatural" (1891) Maskelyne says:—

"The spirit of the murdered man—a pedlar—declared that his murderer was a former occupant of the tenement. . . . that his trunk was packed up, and all the members of his body neatly disposed of beneath some ten feet of earth in the cellar. Now it is said beyond doubt, some portion of a skeleton was found at the precise spot indicated; but it is said that opinion was mostly in favour of the remains being

not the framework of humanity, but that of a sheep . . . The supposed murderer . . . endeavoured to exculpate himself by swearing that he knew nothing whatever about it . . . It must have been a terrible blow to the Fox family when the murdered pedlar turned up again alive and well 'still clothed with mortality and having a new assortment of wares to sell.' "

I give the two versions—they do not altogether agree—because we are told in the "Psychic News" that "in 1904 the rest of the skeleton was found between the earth and the crumbling cellar walls." The reader can decide for himself whether to believe Podmore and Maskelyne, or the "Psychic News."

One thing, however, is quite certain. In 1851 a relative of the Fox family, Mrs. Culver, made a statement that the girls produced the raps themselves; and much later (in 1888) Margaretta Fox "made public an apparently spontaneous confession that the raps had been produced by fraudulent means." She even gave public demonstrations how she did it, and her sister admitted in the "New York Herald" that "Spiritualism was all humbuggery, every bit of it." It is said that they recanted their confessions later but, of course, they could not very well recant their demonstrations of "how it was done."

I admit that the rappings went round the world though, at the same time, I am rather hazy as to the part God plays in them. But then what can one expect from a sceptic and infidel?

H. CUTNER.

RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA

The following is from the "Daily Express," a paper that is not likely to stretch the truth in favour of anything against Christianity, about Russia:—

"What is the truth about religious propaganda? Substantially as the Constitution lays down—freedom of worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda."

The open churches preach the wonder of the creation, while the newspaper articles by scientists, such as Professor Guriev, assert 'the earth, like every heavenly body, has a beginning and hence will have an end. The universe, however, is everlasting, has neither beginning nor end in space or time, hence is uncreateable.'

Recent articles on Darwin, 'Is there life on other planets?' etc., reassert the fundamentals of materialist philosophy, on which Marxism is based.

Significant, too, is the growth of the Communist Party during the war, now numbering more than 5,000,000, compared with 1,500,000, with 888,814 candidates for membership, in 1939."

Now, this confession is important when one remembers the fierce campaign against Russia that was carried on both by our Government and by the Churches, to say nothing of individuals. No lies were too great, no slanders too indecent than those that were levelled against the Russian people struggling for the light. It was enough that the Russian leaders had the courage to label themselves Atheists. The present world war, with the unspeakable crimes of a country that has been saturated in brutality and brought up on religion might have been avoided but for those years of hatred towards Russia.

CORRESPONDENCE

AN APPRECIATION.

SIR,—I am ever so thankful for your kind letter of December 13 which reached me with the usual delay nowadays, and I thank you most heartily for the kind forwarding of a big parcel containing all "Freethinkers" from November 5 to March 25.

With much pain I read of the grim time you had to suffer during the war and looking through your dear papers I have to state that many names are missing. To all these unknown friends I address my thoughts of grateful remembrance, particularly to "Mimmermus." Let us hope that the war is nearing its end and that time will help us to forget its awfulness.

Hoping that the soon crushing of the Nazi tyranny will free mankind altogether and allow the quick growth of sane ideas, particularly those for which you stand for more than half a century. I thank you again for the goodness you have shown to me and remain with all good wishes for yourself, dear sir, and your worthy staff.—Yours, etc.,

GUSTAVE REX HARAUN.
(Paris)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held April 22, 1945

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair.

Also present: Messrs Clifton, Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Seibert, Ebury, Lupton, Page, Morris, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, Miss Woolstone, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Belfast Branches, and the Parent Society.

A cheque sent to the Freedom Press Defence Committee was reported.

Lecture reports of meetings held and future arrangements were before the meeting. The receipt of a legacy of £200, under the will of the late Charles Rudd was announced. Correspondence from Glasgow, Blackpool, Chester-le-Street, Manchester and London districts was dealt with. The Annual Balance Sheet was adopted, items in connection with the Annual Conference were approved and instructions given.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, May 17, 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., Mr. J. McCABE: "Germany."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Accrington (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway, Bradford).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., a lecture.

Crawshawbooth.—Friday, May 4, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Hapton.—Wednesday, May 9, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Higham.—Monday, May 7, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY will lecture.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

What is the Use of a Future Life?

By CHAPMAN COHEN

Price 2d.

Postage 1d.

THE VILLAGE GREEN

I SUPPOSE that nearly every village in the country has a village green. We have a lovely one quite close to my shop, and on each side is a village pub. "The Cock" one side and "The Magpie Inn" the other. They are both of course controlled houses and neither of them pays sufficient to keep the tenants, so they both go to work. The man at "The Magpie Inn" is a grave digger and general factotum in the Churchyard and Cemetery. The other man runs a little Blacksmith shop. "The Magpie Inn" man, I believe, is a City Police pensioner and it is rather amusing to sit in the Green shelter and hear the old local men talking. I often spend my early closing afternoon with the old boys, all old age pensioners.

A few weeks ago it was a lovely afternoon and I sat with them and I took particular notice of their conversation. "The Magpie Inn" man was in trouble. It appears that he sold someone a double whisky and they bottled it in two bottles and then sealed them and gave him one back. They were excise men. They found that it was below strength and the Guv' had been summoned over the matter. Being an old Policeman he had something to lose so was trying to get together some evidence that it was some mishap and the girl had done it when he was away at a funeral. He had approached some of the old boys to give evidence. He told them he would tell them what to say and would pay them well. When I arrived that was the topic of the conversation.

Old Jim, who used to be Farmer Smith's Cowman, was talking and he said "Old Magpie was scared to death," and he told Jim he could have a pint a day for a month if he would help him out, but old Jim said "No," definitely, he wouldn't help him as he knew he wouldn't keep his promise to supply the pints. "Besides," he said, "I might get a month for telling lies in Court, and old 'Magpie' would only grin. No," says Jim, "I'm not going to jail just to please old 'Magpie' at my time of life. I've a good record; never been in jail yet, only fined half-a-crown on Mafeking night for being drunk."

"Ah," said old Joe, who originally was the local barber, also the bell-ringer at the Church, both of them practically voluntary jobs. "That fine would condemn you in the eyes of the magistrate. Now look at me." We all looked. "Life abstainer, non-smoker, church-goer, bell-ringer, always lived a good life; that's the way to live. I wouldn't give evidence for 'Magpie,' it would be against my principles as a Christian. I don't drink beer." "And you don't use much water apparently," said old Jim. "Against your principles, eh?, but I bet if he made you a cash offer, you'd swear he wasn't guilty, but you'd want the money first, you undersized little insignificant cross-eyed cuss."

This was getting very interesting and about a dozen of us were expecting to have to form a ring for these two old men who were frequently at loggerheads.

"I've been a Christian for 45 years and gave my heart and life to God in 1898," said Joe. "And a real fine mess you've become since then; look at you, you can't see straight, your hair is nearly gone and you've only 10s. a week now to live on, and your clothes, well, I wouldn't sit next to you, you're lousy," remarked old Jim.

Old Joe didn't get cross, his Christian spirit, that's what it was, or perhaps his cowardice, wouldn't let him.

"Never mind," says Joe. "I'll get to Heaven some day." "You will, eh?" says Jim, "then I'm damned if I want to go there."

All the sanctimonious people in this village are a lousy lot. Look at the Vicar, he only smiled once, then we had a thunderstorm and old Jerry Thomas said that was a terrible vengeance from Heaven, because the Vicar smiled. Then we all laughed,

and Joe thought we were going a bit too far and got up to 5' away from such an unholy crowd.

Poor Old Joe; 45 years a Christian. His wife gave him 35 years of misery. She was a tartar, and she was the first in the "Magpie," and the last out twice a day.

What a life, and he's under the impression that he's preparing for a glorious time somewhere someday. I hope he is, for he's too late now to get it on this earth, although his missus has passed on.

Poor old Joe, he was a human wreck and we all felt sorry for him, and Jim didn't like upsetting him but he would put his spoke in.

The owner of the "Cock" was a different man altogether to the "Magpie" owner and had been in the village almost all his life. Unfortunately for his trade he was very chummy with the parson. The parson often called on him of course to enquire about his health and incidentally to drink it in the parlour, out of sight. This made the villagers a bit shy of going into the bar in case the parson saw them when they couldn't see him, for he was always on about drinking. The "Cock" man was rather good to the old boys of the village and they would not hear a word against him, for they frequently had one on the house and he was one of the most popular men in the village. He wasn't a church-goer, for he often used to pass remarks about the Good Folks and always wrapped up their bottles of beer in paper or put them into their little attache cases and smiled cynically. Whenever one passed the Green shelter, with the case, one of the old 'uns would say: "What another, my word you'll have to give up eating salt pork Ma, it does make you so thirsty. Have you ever tried drinking water?" and other such remarks.

These remarks usually caused the Good Folk to put on a complacent smile and go their way.

Have you ever noticed that complacent smile? It seems to say "I'm all right, blow you Jerry!"

Are they?

Our Church Magazine, it's only a small four-page book at threepence, because there's a war on. I don't buy it now; at one time I used to put in an advert but it never did any good, now there are two undertakers filling one page, it doesn't tend to make one feel happy. The old boys get one occasionally, but they only pass remarks about the Vicar's remarks. Of course he knows, but his job is secure and he's the big pot of the village so he doesn't care. He was asked by the old 'uns to get a front put in the shelter with plenty of glass so that they could meet there when it was wet or cold and have their afternoon confab, but he said it would never do to have an enclosed place like that on the Green, you never know what people would get up to, especially the young folk. The dirty-minded old man for making such a remark or having such thoughts. He calls himself a parson, some of the old boys called him some other "son" when they heard of it.

Anyway for a good afternoon's entertainment come one Wednesday and sit in the shelter, and start talking about religion and about England going to the dogs and some of the old 'uns will tell you a tale.

They are real good old boys not sinners. They have tilled the soil, worked hard and can still do a bit for their country, but they won't have anyone kidding them.

F. G. REEVES.

Speaking for Myself

By Lady (ROBERT) SIMON

Price, post free, 2s. 8d.