

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Christian Tradition

IT will be remembered that some time ago, as a result of letters from various parts of this country and South Africa, the confession was drawn from the B.B.C. authorities that it would not permit any criticism of Christianity that was likely to question the truth of "the Christian tradition." That was rather a bombastic way of expressing the simple fact that nothing should be put on the air that would arouse doubts of the truth of the Christian faith. And from personal conversations with B.B.C. officials we gathered the information that the standard taken for guidance was not that of scholars and responsible men and women, but the beliefs of the most ignorant believers. They had to be nursed and protected against knowing the truth concerning Christianity. Of course, there is in history no genuine historical Christian tradition, unless we count as such a never-ending quarrelling, untruthfulness and intolerance. There is certainly no regular and consistent body of teaching that dominated the Christian Churches. Of course, there is the foolish and dishonest reply to such a statement that all Christians were at one in worshipping Jesus. We agree that this is true—in name, but is it true in fact? The dissensions between Christians right through the Christian era alone give a sufficient reply. Jesus Christ meant one thing to one group of believers and another thing to another. There has never been a universal agreement as to what "true Christianity" is in terms of understanding. The "Christian tradition," flaunted so much by the B.B.C., is just one more lie added to the stream of Christian disagreements and falsities.

But not for the first time the B.B.C.—or to be exact the person who is in charge of religious broadcasting—has been taken in his own trap. One of our readers wrote a letter to the Director of Religious Broadcasting asking whether he believed with him that the world was flat, and cited in support the New Testament story of Jesus being taken by Satan to a high place and shown the countries of the world. We can imagine the dilemma of the Director. A plain "Yes" or "No" might have lost a follower. He might offend some believers and so lose supporters, and at a time when, as the author of the "Ingoldsby Legends" would say, "they are growing scarcer and scarcer every day." So in a weak moment this champion of the "Tradition" explained why he did not believe this particular yarn of a discussion between Jesus and Satan on the top of a "high hill." He does it in three paragraphs, thus:—

(1) There is no doubt that in the time of Our Lord the belief was universally held that the earth was flat.

(2) It is no longer possible to hold this view in the light of scientific demonstration to the contrary.

(3) The temptations of Christ were something that took place in his mind and in his imagination, because it is quite obvious that even if the earth were flat, there is no mountain in existence from which it would be possible to see the whole world in one glimpse.

The wording of No. 1 is specially worth noting. It is illustrative of the cunning character of those who fight for the faith. The Director remarks, with real Christian artfulness, that "in the time of Our Lord the belief in the flat earth theory was generally held." But the real point is that Jesus, the God, believed that the earth was flat. Of course, the flat earth theory did not begin with Jesus. It was believed in ancient Egypt and other countries, to say nothing of a similar belief being held in all parts of the uncivilised world. But the real point is that it is given in the New Testament, which, it is claimed, was directly inspired by God in the person of Jesus. Honestly, the passage should have read that Jesus believed the earth was flat. But that would have been dangerous.

This falsity by suggestion is illustrated by the statement that the belief in a flat earth was "universally held." It was not. The Pythagorians did not believe it. Neither did Plato nor Aristotle and many others. Finally, it must be borne in mind that, for the authority of the Bible and the New Testament, the Church fought as hard as it could, and with the weapons of excommunication and the prison. To Christian leaders the heavens were stretched out like a curtain, the universe was held to be like a house, the earth was the ground floor and the firmament the ceiling. Heaven was a loft, and hell answered to a cellar. At a later stage, when many leading Christians were rejecting a flat earth, Christians such as Luther and Calvin held firmly to it. Nor must we forget the sufferings of Galileo for not holding to the belief that the sun travelled round the earth. Indeed, it was not until the early 19th century that the Roman Church permitted the movement of the earth round the sun. Right up to the 18th century many Christian leaders preferred the ignorance of the New Testament to the plain teaching of heretical science. The phrase that all people at the time of Jesus believed the earth was flat is, where religion is concerned, characteristic of the "will to lie" on the behalf of the "Christian tradition."

Number three item calls for no extra comment, save that it is a characteristic B.B.C. method of lying where religion is concerned. For the truth was not told by the New Testament Jesus. That we owe to science, not to religion. The glaring fact is, on the face of the New Testament narrative, Jesus was in no degree better than the most ignorant of the people around him.

We recall seeing in an asylum for the insane a patient whose delusion took the form of asserting that he was Jesus come back to earth to fulfil the promise made in the New Testament. He was in deadly earnest, gentle in his

manner, but convinced in his mania. But he was confined as insane.

But the really startling confession comes in the assertion that in the case of Jesus something "took place in his mind and imagination." Why, that was exactly what medical specialists said had taken place in the mind of the inmate of the asylum for the insane. Is it this that the Director of Religious Broadcasting wishes us to believe concerning both Jesus and his followers? That seems to be the only logical conclusion. Jesus was not taken up to the mountain, he only imagined it. The Devil did not try to bribe Jesus; Jesus just thought he did. The whole story owes its existence to the mountain top. It was the heated imagination of a man who believed himself to be a son of God, born on earth by the "Holy Ghost."

An Imaginary God—and Devil

Well, suppose we follow the lead of the Director of Religious Broadcasting. We surely cannot stop with the imaginary Devil trying to bribe an imaginary God. For the evidence of the most important things in the Christian scheme, as laid down in the New Testament, hardly varies in quality from the struggle with the Devil and the overheated imagination of an almost mythical character. When the Angel came to Joseph and reassured his agitated mind that the child that was to be born came from God, and Mary was innocent, was that the product of an overstrained mind? And if not, why not? There is the story of a multitude being fed with a few loaves and fishes, with more food left after the banquet than existed beforehand. Was that an outcome of a weary, overstrained mind? Again, if not, why not? And the raising of one from the dead at the mere word of Jesus, or the restoration of a blind man's sight by spitting on his eyes, or the raising of Jesus from the dead three days after his execution, and so forth. Are all these things mere products of heated fancy? Of course, an Atheist may answer with a plain "Yes," but can the Christian act thus? I think not, and I wonder what on earth made the Director say, as plainly as he dare say it, that one of the important adventures of Jesus Christ was due to his overheated imagination? The miracles performed by Jesus, and which, it must be remembered, rested upon these wonders. And of these we get a semi-official decision that they took place in his mind or imagination.

Probably unknowingly, the Director of Religious Broadcasting has hit upon a very important truth. Of course, it is not a new one, but it is a boycotted one so far as the B.B.C. is concerned, and so as the Churches could hide the truth. Over twenty years ago—without any claim to originality—I wrote a book tracing the connection of the powerful part played by drugs, abnormal states experienced while fasting, of mental abnormalities, and so forth, in the development of religion, Christian and non-Christian. It is as clear as daylight that if we take away all these factors, add to them the careful creation of theories of life and nature at large, but based upon what we know to be unjustifiable grounds, there is nothing left of religion.

Of course, I am not assuming that the Director of Religious Broadcasting is able to appreciate the power of the facts we have detailed. The poor devil was probably born of very pious parents, and was brought up with the

conviction that he must, at any cost, hang on to religion. And with a well-paid position and a status that outside the field of religion he could never have obtained, there are small doubts that he says in a letter what he will never allow himself to say openly to the world at large.

Now, instead of writing letters, we would like the Director to give a course of lectures on what was in the mind of Jesus when the Son of God said that the Devil took him to the top of a mountain and tried to bribe him; when Jesus said he raised the dead and fed a multitude of people with a few handfuls of food and finished the banquet with more food than was there at the beginning, and so on. Were these things due to something that took place in his mind and imagination, but had no existence in external reality? All the same, I doubt whether the B.B.C. Religious Director will say as much publicly. In all the mediæval stories in which a man sold his soul to the Devil for certain favours, the borrower tried trick after trick to evade payment of his soul. But it was of no use. The Devil always got him in the end. The Director is past saving.

And so it is with those who occupy high positions in the world of religion. The better specimens discover one day that they are believing in a lie and are teaching others to believe in a lie. So the majority wriggle and wriggle, trying to let in a little truth here and a little truth there. But the lie remains. There is but one cure for this dilly-dallying with one's real convictions. Act upon them, at once, and with thoroughness. You cannot profitably bargain with truth. Begin that game, and you are most likely to deteriorate yourself and lead others astray.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

G. K. CHESTERTON AND G. B. S.

MAISIE Ward's biography of Gilbert Keith Chesterton (Sheep and Ward, 1944, 21s.) makes piquant reading. A slave to paradox, a penman of ability, Chesterton's appraisements were invariably determined more largely by feeling than by reason. Unfortunately, he was never influenced by the intellectual revolution occasioned by the stupendous scientific discoveries of the 19th century and never, at any time, devoted any serious attention to the study of natural phenomena.

On the other hand, G. K.'s parents shared in the broader outlook which the growth of Freethought had created, and G. K. and his younger brother, Cecil, were reared in an Agnostic environment. Still, in later years, their emotional cravings impelled the two brothers to successively succumb to the allurements of the Romanist cult.

At the time of the South African conflict, when Blatchford, Wells, Shaw, the Webbs and other progressives supported the British cause, Chesterton, who professed a greater patriotism than any of the others, stood forth as a doughty defender of the Boers, and it has indeed been said that, at this stirring time, "Chesterton was the one British writer, utterly unknown before, who built up a great reputation . . . through nationalistic support, but through determined and persistent opposition to British policy."

Apart from his eccentric proceedings, Chesterton's printed pronouncements made him a prominent personality in Fleet Street. Moreover, a marked amount of log-rolling went on. Maisie Ward admits: "In the 'New Age' Shaw wrote about Belloc and Chesterton and so did Wells, while Chesterton wrote about Wells and Shaw, till the Philistines grew angry, called it self-advertisement and log-rolling and urged that a Bill for the abolition of Shaw and Chesterton should be introduced into Parliament."

Consequently, G. K.'s publications were selling, and their writer sustained interest by rushing into a religious wrangle with Robert Blatchford in the columns of the "Clarion." In the course of this discussion, when dealing with the truism that all the leading Christian legends have their counterpart in savage and barbarous superstitions, Chesterton feebly urged that: "If the Christian God really made the human race, would not the human race tend to rumours and perversions of the Christian God? If the centre of our life is a certain fact, would not people far from the centre have a muddled version of this fact? If we are so made that a Son of God must deliver us, is it odd that Patagonians should dream of a Son of God?" Now, incredible as it may seem, this pitiful drivel was penned after the appearance of Frazer's "Golden Bough," that painstaking study of comparative religion.

G. K.'s biographer exalts the merits of his "Orthodoxy." Yet, amid all the incoherencies and absurdities of that work, one fact clearly emerges: the only haven of rest for the mysticism and muddlement of G. K.'s mind, was an infallible faith, in which the uncertainties of philosophy cease from troubling and the wanderer may repose.

Chesterton confessed that he had once been inclined to become the prophet of a cult, but that he was warned against this by the sceptical friends he had surveyed in his "Heretics" who each appeared to approach the world's problems from an individual point of view, while the Catholic Church provides all things essential to man's salvation. He claims that the Church circumvented and overthrew all the heresies that opposed her and became sovereign over all. The apologist ignores the nefarious means by which the Church triumphed, and pleads that: "To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect."

In the light of such rhapsody, even the "Times" protested that G. K. placed emotion above intellect, while Arnold Bennett dismissed Chesterton's dogmatic assertions as the product of a second-rate mentality.

Chapter xiv. of this biography was read in manuscript and annotated by G. B. S., while a page in MS. is reproduced with his revisions. That Shaw occupies, and has long occupied, a very prominent position in the republic of letters is obvious, although one suspects that G. K.'s biographer greatly overrates her hero's standing in public regard at any time. But there is little doubt that the two deliberately advertised each other, even if Shaw gained the greater share of the limelight. As Maisie Ward concedes: "The audience watched a Shaw v. Chesterton debate as a sham fight or display of fireworks, as indeed it always partly was; for each of them would have died rather than really hurt the other." Still, she suggests that cherished conventions were being satirised, and that this was disconcerting to the onlookers, for the smug contentment of the well-to-do was challenged and attention drawn to widespread poverty and misery in the midst of plenty.

There was certainly a community in diversity between the two actors. As Maisie Ward observes: "Shaw would not accept the old Scriptural orthodoxy; G. K. refused to accept the new Agnostic orthodoxy; neither would accept the orthodoxy of the scientists."

Shaw remarked that G. K. was driven to Popery to save Belloc's soul from damnation. Yet, G. B. S. and G. K. became still more intimate and, in the guise of a letter advising Chesterton to write a play, Shaw recalls his own spiritual adventures. Bradlaugh was several times mentioned and so was Foote, but meanly enough neither name appears in the index, while the old Press indecency of giving Foote incorrect initials is repeated in the text of this biography.

In this characteristic epistle, G. B. S. implies that his "Quintessence of Ibsenism" saved many "tired young Atheists" from allegiance to Kipling and Ruskin, and then tells the many times repeated story of his relations with Bradlaugh and the N.S.S. According to his own account, he was invited to address the party in view of his suggested nomination for leadership. This address was delivered at the Hall of Science in Old Street and was entitled "Progress in Freethought." "I was received with affectionate hope," Shaw tells G. K., "and when the chairman announced that I was giving my share of the gate to the memorial library (I have never taken money for lecturing) the enthusiasm was quite touching. . . . I ridiculed and exposed every inference of science, and justified every dogma of religion, especially showing that the Trinity and the Immaculate Conception were the merest common sense. That finished me as a possible leader of the N.S.S." Shaw states that he repeated his fantasy in the South of London, where it was not acclaimed. "The Leicester Secularists," G. B. S. audaciously continues, "a pious folk, rich and independent of the N.S.S., were kinder to me, but they were no more real Atheists than the congregation of St. Paul's is made up wholly of Christians." No wonder that Foote was amazed at Shaw's perversity, and that Blatchford dismissed contemptuously his monkeying with the truth.

Another Shavian epistle displays its writer's impishness. Shaw asks Chesterton: "Do you think it would be possible to make Belloc write a comedy? If he could be induced to believe in some sort of god instead of that wretched little conspiracy against religion which the pious Romans have locked up in the Vatican, one could get some drive into him. As it is, he is wasting prodigious gifts in the service of King Leopold and the Pope and other ghostly scarecrows."

In his biography G. K.'s domestic life and his political and social opinions are fully revealed. A special chapter recalls the Marconi matter, with its anti-Semitic innuendo. The notorious Chester-Belloc prints, successively known as the "Eye Witness," "New Witness," "G. K.'s Weekly," and the "Weekly Review" are also surveyed. Still the progressive principles for which many of their contributors stood, stand out in glaring contrast to the theocratic tyranny encouraged by its Catholic section.

If G. K. and his wife ultimately entered the Catholic fold, the mother of each remained Rationalist to the end. Indeed, Mrs. G. K. Chesterton informed Maisie Ward "how she suffered at the difficulty of giving help to two dying Agnostics." Still, when G. K. inherited money from his sceptical mother, legacies were planned not only for friends and relatives, "but also for the Catholic Church in Beaconsfield."

Chesterton died in 1936, 14 years after his reception into the Roman fold. Born in 1874, he was not an old man and one cannot escape the conclusion, despite the protests of his biographer, that Mrs. Cecil Chesterton was right when she averred in her work, "The Chestertons," that G. K.'s excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages shortened his life. Moreover, Maisie Ward admits that he was always thirsty, apparently a man born with a spark in his throat. T. F. PALMER.

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ACID DROPS

In its report, "Towards the Conversion of England," the Evangelic Commission of the Church Assembly declares that England is "as a country still Christian on the surface." That is a rather curious way of putting it, and yet it comes nearer the fact than the usual drivel about people being Christian at heart. It is a very clear admission that the decline of belief in the Christian superstition is gaining ground at a more rapid pace than ever. And what is worth stressing is that, in spite of reinstating the clergy in the schools, the decay of religious belief in general, and Christianity in particular, goes on at an increasing rate.

One factor in this decline is worthy of a note or two, the more so that it has received small attention. This is the factor of extreme poverty among the very poor. We are old enough to remember when slum visiting was almost a form of daily recreation. Many visited the slums and were genuinely shocked; to others it was just interesting, and a donation to this or that charity wiped out any sense of personal or even collective responsibility. One remembers the shock the dock labourers gave to good Christians—and others—when the dockers demanded sixpence per hour for their labours. In sober fact it took nearly a century of hard fighting to convince the public that even the unskilled labourer had the right to a life that guaranteed decencies.

There were many private charities for the relief of the worst cases, and a great many were dominated by the clergy. Some, of course, acted from a motive of pure humanity, but a great many used their position to forward the sale of their theological goods. At any rate, many of the poor attended Church because the distribution of alms was largely in the hands of the priesthood, and, as one writer said at the time, there was a contest among the Churches to rope-in the poor. But rising wages, a more liberal form of relief from local government, the growing demand of the people for some share of the country's wealth, took away a great deal of the power and popularity of the clergy. The abolition of extreme poverty became a secular and a political matter. "Relief" no longer depended upon the good will of this or that Church or religious association.

The upshot of this development is seen to-day in the growing lament of religious gatherings at the decline of faith among the people. (Note, it is still the lack of church attendance among the poor that is chiefly lamented.) That was the chief feature of a recent Church Commission, emphasising its alarm at the extent to which religion is declining. The Archbishop of Canterbury again warned them that Atheism is developing rapidly among the people, and he must be very stupid indeed if he does not also realise that, once an Atheist, always an Atheist; for Atheism is not a frame of mind that can be here to-day and gone to-morrow.

One of the members of the Assembly informed everyone that if every member of the Church knocked off half a pint of beer per week and gave the money to the Church, it would bring in about £3,000,000 per year. We are afraid that suggestion will not be adopted. After all, the beer is something real—even to churchgoers. But the Church of England is falling rapidly when it is suggested that it must depend upon a multitude of half-pints of beer.

The Churches have had their way so far in planting definitely religious teaching in the State schools. But it will not be a path of roses for them. Teachers did not want it, and the better type of teachers will resent—not always openly—against slapping religion over any or every subject. And there is, when we have done with parsons and teachers of the kind who merely want a comfortable well-paid job, others to be considered. There are the scholars. They will not revel in religious lessons, and the better type will not be long before they begin to wonder what and where is the connection between the secular lessons and the religious ones.

This point was raised by Mr. J. L. Longland, Dorset County Education Officer, at a discussion on "Religion and Life." (We are quoting from the "Dorset Daily Echo"). He said:—

"We could not expect the schools to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. Most children of the up-adolescent age were quite uninterested in formal religion; they found religious instruction, however well given, dull and irrelevant to modern life . . . Schools were not monasteries; they had to prepare for workaday life . . . They had to face the fact that we were no longer in any but the sloppiest use of the word, a Christian country."

We think that a very good summing up of the situation. The better class teachers will be to some extent lost, and the pupils will suffer from an inferior body of teachers.

Another example of this playing with words we find in a recent issue of "The Record," one of our religious journals. "We must," says the writer of a leading article, "have thankful remembrance of what the Lord has done for England." But we take it that if a visitor from another planet looked at the way in which London was knocked about he would wonder why, if God could protect London from some of the bombs, did he not stop the German havoc at the beginning. In some respects God is always "too blooming wholesale" in what he does, or he comes in very, very late when the work has been done with other hands.

We place on record the fact that the Catholic Hierarchy of England has invited its clergy and the faithful laymen to pray long and intensely in honour of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More from the 1st of July until the 9th. We wonder whether that is an attempt to direct the elections of a new Parliament?

The "Daily Mail" announces in large letters that "A grocer's son is now Bishop of London." But that is nothing. Once upon a time, so runs the story, a maiden woman in Jerusalem gave birth to a boy who became a God. After that it seems hardly worth while bothering about a grocer's son who was selected by a Prime Minister to be a Bishop.

The Pope has declared to 5,000 members of "Catholic Action" that in the non-bombing of Rome they saw and still see the finger of God and the intercession of our most amiable Mother. We are impressed by the information that God was gracious and that the mother of God's son is most amiable. But we gently wonder why God and the Mother of his son did not exert their power over the whole of Italy. The worst of gods is that they never seem to do a job thoroughly. We quite expect that the Catholic Church will say, with some of our own distinguished preachers, that God saved us from invasion. We cannot prove he did not, but we do wonder why he did not prevent bombing. What he did for Italy he might have done for England.

The Rev. W. Welch—who is responsible for the religious idiocies that the B.B.C. loves to make public—told an audience at Exeter that more people listen to the 7.55 a.m. B.B.C. broadcast than are found in church on Sunday. That gives us some idea of the number of people who want to listen to that daily dose of mush and stupidity—it is not more than 15 per cent. of the population. And many of the listeners only get there by accident.

But even Dr. Welch cannot quite avoid letting out the truth. He laments that "the substitution of a secular for a religious attitude to life has gone very far indeed . . . that is the most serious feature of our age." We agree, and that feature is developing rapidly. And the lies of the religious section of the B.B.C. cannot prevent this development. It is a world movement.

Someone has called Mr. D. J. Williams, M.P. in the dissolved Parliament, an Atheist. That was really a compliment, but we accept Mr. Williams' disclaimer. Still, there is no really good way than he has done hitherto. The curious thing is that Mr. Williams takes the compliment as an insult.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. WHYKES.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

E. E. KELLET.—Thanks. It shall appear, but are very crowded for the moment.

E. STEVENS.—We know nothing of this person who proclaims himself as converted Atheist. For an Atheist really to revert to Christianity indicates brain trouble. One may do strange things as a result of not understanding the nature of Atheism. But if he becomes a real Atheist, that is, one who understands the development of religious ideas, he cannot get back to his earlier frame of mind unless he is subject to some form of mental decay.

V. F. WALTERS.—Please refrain from taking your scientific ideas from the columns of our Sunday newspapers. "Atoms" are not like lumps of coal which can be broken up to build up a fire. This talk of "breaking the Atom" is just nonsense. It is first cousin to perpetual motion, and a near relative to considering what would happen if an immovable object was struck by an irresistible force.

For "The Freethinker."—M. Feldman, 10s.

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

SUGAR PLUMS

There is something great in Stalin. We have had plenty of special "shows" in this country, but we cannot recall anything that was quite so human as a short toast given at a Victory celebration by Stalin. We take it from one of our London papers. He said:—

"Do not think I am going to say something extraordinary. My toast is ordinary and most simple.

I wish to drink to the health of those people who have not got much in the way of ranks and distinctions.

I wish to drink to the health of those people who are only considered as small screws in the great mechanisms of State—but without whom all of us, marshals and commanders of all the fronts and all the armies, are not worth a damn.

Should we overlook the tiny screw, all our work is ruined. I lift my glass to them—the simple, ordinary, unassuming

people—to those little screws which maintain the life of our great State mechanism in all its branches, science, economy and military affairs.

There are very many such people, they are legions.

They are modest people—these tens of millions I speak about. Nobody writes anything about them. They have no titles. They have few distinctions.

But these are the people who support us as the foundation supports the top. I drink to the health of these people, our comrades whom we revere."

Two thousand five hundred leaders of Russia attended the celebration, and at Stalin's speech they rose and cheered."

There is a note of greatness in that speech that we should like to see more of with our own people.

"Religion," says Sir Brunel Cohen, President of the Jewish Fellowship, "has invariably been the hope of the Jews, throughout their history, and must be their guide to-day." It all depends upon one's outlook. In any case, one would read history in a more scientific manner if one said that religion had always been the curse of the Jews, and it would continue to be so until religion was discarded by being outgrown, and those who had been Jews, that is, believers in Judaism, were merely citizens of this or that country. In no community is separateness looked upon with favour, and when the separateness involves a refusal to intermarriage, and to eating at the same table with fellow-citizens, there is a marked line that is certain to lead to trouble. Sir Brunel might meditate on the question whether Judaism ever had any other standing than that of a religious cult. A recognition of that might put an end to the persecution of Jews. As it is, they stand as a living exhibition of the anti-social character of religious beliefs.

The Bristol Branch N.S.S. is gathering strength and some good work is being done. To-day (July 8) Mr. G. Thompson will pay a return visit and speak on Durdham Downs at 7 p.m. The local Secretary, Mr. P. M. Tovey, 12, Woodfield Road, Redland, Bristol 6, asks unattached Freethinkers in the area to come in and help. Membership forms and other details can be had at the meetings or his home address. Only those taking an active part in our work can appreciate the additional interest it gives to Freethought beliefs.

We are pleased to note that the Leeds Forum, 113, Park Lane, intends carrying on during the summer. The meetings are held every Tuesday at 7.30 p.m., and on July 10th Mr. F. J. Corina will lecture on "Secularism or Christianity?" If Freethinkers make a point of bringing Christian friends, there should be a vigorous discussion. The Forum would be pleased to book Freethought lectures for the winter session.

We learn from "The Stars and Stripes," a publication for Americans, that there is one lady in the U.S.A. to whom we raise our hat. (We do not mean she is the only one. She is only the last.) This is Mrs. Vashii McCollum, physical education instructor of Illinois. She is trying in the courts to stop religious teaching in the schools. She calls religion "A chronic disease of the imagination contracted in childhood." We shall place that description as first in the list of summaries of the character and function of religion in schools. It is forced upon children, every advantage is taken to prevent the child knowing the truth about religion, and their education is thwarted and spoiled in the name of this or that Church.

Mrs. McCollum is the daughter of Arthur G. Cromwell, who is the President of the Rochester Society of Freethinkers, and at Sodus, New York, religious classes held on town property in Wayne County town were ordered to be discontinued by the State Education Commissioner. It looks as though we have something to learn from the U.S.A. where liberty is concerned. In this country a Government gibbering about freedom has just handed over children to have their minds poisoned in the interests of Christian sectarians.

The serious state in which the Church of England finds itself may be seen by the desperate attempts the leaders of the Church are making to bring people back to Church. About £2,000 yearly is to be spent to provide cinema displays, and there is to be special advertising through the Press, with numerous other adventures. We suggest that enticing innovations would be a series of boxing matches by the heads of the different churches, also dart boards hung up in the churches, with contests between laymen and the clergy. In place of the doleful hymns sung, comic songs could be tried, and the Itma caravan might appear in place of the Sunday morning services. There are certainly ways by which more Church attendances might be gained, and as God no longer performs miracles, he must not be angry if unusual steps are taken.

PROGRESSING BACKWARDS

IT has been said that the British Commonwealth is very strong, because she never fights unless the whole world fights with her. It could equally well be said that potential aggressors consider her to be exceedingly weak and vulnerable—spread-eagled all over the world with strategically fragile lines of communication—for she dare not fight unless all her members pull together and the major part of the world backs them up. Since there is no guarantee, as things are at present, that this will be so, the British Commonwealth as now constituted cannot by any stretch of realistic imagination be considered a bulwark of world peace.

When planning a Blitzkrieg on the vital interests of our Commonwealth system, in which there are six Foreign Offices and nominally six foreign policies, an aggressor will be tempted to take the plunge, gambling on our being paralysed by divided counsels into leaving him a free hand until it is too late to recover our collective senses. This state of affairs could almost be said to have provoked two world wars, if unpreparedness against aggression is as reprehensible as active provocation.

At the San Francisco Conference, the U.S.A. has three votes in the proposed International Organisation. Russia has nominally one vote plus one each for two of her component Republics. Even in the new constitution of the U.S.S.R., it is provided that the component Republics are subject to the Supreme Soviet on major matters of foreign policy. Possessed of three votes, the Russians are thus practically certain that they will all be cast together. The British Commonwealth will presumably commence with six votes, but if these happen to be split the result could easily be to eliminate British influence from the poll entirely. If the other members of the International Organisation consent to an arrangement in which all our votes are consistently cast together, the result will be that decisions are made which do not always correspond with the world distribution of political power. Such decisions will be futile, for they will be unenforceable.

If, on the other hand, the conference sets up an Organisation in which voting rights are proportionate to political power, the mutual jealousies of the various States will so circumscribe the duties of the new organisation as to divest it of the right to make any decisions whatever on important matters.

In other words, if the U.S.A. were given 13 votes, U.S.S.R. 17 votes, the British Commonwealth 8 votes (shared by its six members) and the other member states similarly vested with voting powers proportionate to their adult franchise, the result would still be neither democratic nor just, for it might easily happen that a measure could be carried by majority vote, which would have been defeated by a referendum of the people. America's 13 votes would be wielded in a bloc by the U.S. Government, though American opinion might be divided 6:7; similarly for the others.

We are up against the obstinate fact that no government can be composed of governments, combined with the equally unassailable fact that, in this imperfect world, law and order cannot be attained by any device short of government.

In a system of government the laws made by individuals, through their representatives, act directly upon individuals. Police action can be taken against individuals. In the last resort, the only sanction that can be applied against a whole community is war. If we wish to enforce peace by going to war every generation we shall support a League of States. If we wish to enforce law by police action we shall work for a union of the people. "Leagues of nations are worthless the moment one member repudiates his obligations." (Justice Roberts, U.S. Supreme Court).

The world needs an international parliament and government to look after armaments and armed forces, leaving the national governments to look after all other matters, as at present.

Unless the San Francisco Conference faces up to this fact, the world is slipping back into atavism. I regard it as quite impracticable at the present stage in the world's political development to create a world parliament, for this presupposes world-wide democracy. But the first step must be taken now to create an international parliament embracing as many as possible of the established democracies. Such a union would serve as a working model, to show how international problems can be solved by law instead of by war. The hopes of the world should be focused upon it, rather than upon the power-political battlefield of a world league.

As Lionel Curtis has pointed out in his monumental work "The Commonwealth of God":—

"The nations have moved forward and upwards to the brink of a canyon, and now stand in imminent danger of pushing each other into the chasm. The real chasm is in their minds. They cannot as yet conceive a loyalty of that kind which sustains a state and a government, other than a loyalty rendered to a national state. The realisation of one international state would be like a footbridge thrown over that canyon. The nations would little by little find their way over it to the infinite region beyond, in which freedom is the only complete sense of that word can be realised."

Democracy must leap the frontiers, as and where it can. We must unite peoples, not governments; the former is the ideal, the latter an impossibility.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

ROME AND THE MEDICAL WORLD

[WE are a fairly regular reader of "The Nation," but we missed an important article which appeared in that journal for February 10, and which we have just read in that very live "John A. Lee's Weekly." Fortunately the material of the article is as important as when it first appeared; and we offer it as something worth remembering.—Editor.]

"A medical man having read the booklet, 'Some Moral Problems in the Practice of Medicine,' felt impelled to give a wider publicity to some aspects of Rome's teachings and dogmas treated in the booklet. Those who read for the first time these dogmas and the arrogance with which they are supported, will be greatly shocked. It will be noted that the cruel abandonment of a mother in the interest of a child—even 'a child that will certainly die'—is based on the superstition that baptism is essential to future salvation—that by it a soul is given to a child.

There has been published recently (August, 1944) a booklet entitled 'Some Moral Problems in the Practice of Medicine,' a handbook for Catholic Medical Students, prepared by Rev. B. Courtney, C.M.J.C.D., in conjunction with the Medical Students of the University of Otago Catholic Students' Club. It has the usual approval that such books must have.

The book, as its name implies, tells us how an R.C. doctor whatever his position is, must act in certain given circumstances. It is, of course, a technical book consisting of questions put by the medical man and the answers given by the priest as to how he must act. Coming from a group of medical students it is very unscientific. I do not propose to review the book in full but to give a few extracts so that all Protestants may be warned never to put their trust in an R.C. doctor.

The object of the book is stated in these words: 'It is of the greatest importance to the common good of the faithful that we should have good, well-qualified, conscientious Catholic doctors, and again, 'it is undoubtedly to the interest of the Church that Catholics be enabled to pursue their medical course unfettered.'

Dealing with Baptism, John III. and V. is quoted. It is pointed out that any unbaptised child dying has no chance of salvation. This being so, the doctor is advised to carry out the barbaric practice of baptising the child in utero in certain circumstances. 'Baptism can be administered at any stage of a child's existence, even whilst it is still in the womb.' 'Baptism of a foetus in the womb can be attempted by means of a syringe.' Baptism is so essential, it says, that 'When a child is in danger of death any person—is under a very grave obligation in charity to baptise the child—even against the parents' wishes. In such circumstances one would be obliged to risk one's life if need be to baptise the child.' The assistant or onlooker could sometimes show special interest in the case and whilst making a close examination wet his finger—and baptise the child without this being noticed.' So important is this act that it should be done by deceit if necessary, but on the same page, 'If a doctor or student would be endangering his career—by intervening—in order to baptise a child, it would seem that it would be better for him not to baptise in the case.' Strange! He is told to baptise, even to risking his life, but not his career!

Chapter III. is devoted to the subject of abortion. On this subject there is absolutely no disagreement among doctors. Simply stated, abortion should never be resorted to unless to save the health and life of the expectant mother. Rome has other ideas. 'Abortion is never lawful in any circumstances, even though it be quite certain that the foetus (child) will surely die anyway (unbaptised) and the mother can be saved only if abortion be procured.' This is quite plain, a doctor has to stand by and see a woman die who otherwise could be saved. Likewise, the husband must stand by. But to make sure there is no misunderstanding it goes on, 'It would be gravely sinful to procure abortion even in this case and those responsible would be ex-communicated should it be procured. The reason is that a living foetus is a human person with human rights. It is not lawful directly to kill an innocent person.' This statement is repeated on the following page in answer to a further question. 'It would be gravely sinful to remove it (the foetus) because this would be direct abortion. This holds good even though the abortion seems the only means of saving the mother's life and both mother and child will certainly die if it be not brought about.' (Page 29.) Again if this were not sufficient it is stated on page 37: 'Any direct attack on a . . . foetus is only a form of direct abortion and seriously sinful even though the mother will certainly die if the foetus be not destroyed.'

These laws are made by men whom we are led to believe live lives apart from women. What kind of husband would he be who would stand quietly by and see his wife die for want of an operation? What kind of women would submit willingly to such treatment? What kind of man would the doctor be?

The students asking the questions seem to be somewhat upset about their Church's attitude because they ask: 'It may be pointed out here that the moral law and existing system of medical practice make it difficult for a Catholic to specialise, say, as an obstetrician.' One is sometimes asked: 'How can you be an obstetrician? You cannot be a Catholic and gynaecologist.' A Chief Justice of the English High Court has pointed out that if a Catholic neglected to do what the average practitioner would do in some of these cases, and the woman died, such a Catholic doctor would be liable to be charged with manslaughter or criminal neglect. Nevertheless, obstetrics is a branch of medicine in which the Church would probably be only too pleased to have skilled Catholic practitioners.

The learned Father replies to this: 'The Church is infallible. Medical practitioners are not infallible. Who is the Chief Justice of any Court that can dispense doctors from this commandment of the natural and Divine Positive law in so far as it concerns unborn infants?'

From what I have quoted, could any sane Protestant trust his wife in the hands of any Catholic doctor?

Apart from the legal aspect there is another very serious aspect which is easily overlooked. A good number of the students at Dunedin, if not the majority, are in the receipt of Government assistance, yet these men are taking directions from a small group of celibate men which directions are quite contrary to the laws of our country and our Government allows such directions to be given without protest."

CORRESPONDENCE

CHALLENGE TO MAYORESS OF HAMPSTEAD.

SIR,—May I offer a challenge through your columns to Mrs. Sidney Boyd, Mayoress of Hampstead. According to the "Daily Worker," June 21, she is quoted as saying: "The youth organisations of Germany were marvellous, except Hitler forgot about God." Either Mrs. Boyd is very ignorant or never read or listened to the speeches made by Hitler. For every speech Hitler made and left out God I am prepared to give £1 to the N.S.S., providing she will give a similar amount to the Red Cross Fund. In fact, Hitler always made it clear that he was sent by the Almighty to emancipate the world.—Yours, etc.,

A. HEWITT.

NEWSPAPER POOLS.

SIR,—As the result of a recent case brought under the Lotteries Act of 1934 these popular football pools are held to be illegal. There are few countries in the world so overruled by silly Statutes, by goody-goody minorities, by the Stigginses and Dombyses, who are more apt at spoiling the harmless pleasures of the people than they are in acquiring scientific knowledge of man's place in the universe and enlightening their minds.

The mental Peter Paus are still in the dark ages of "Jonah and the whale's belly." If anti-gambling Puritans are after really big fish, let them nose around the Stock Exchanges and amongst the cartels and trusts of big business. But perhaps they would bump against some Church pillars in doing so.

State lotteries would do nobody any harm, would do some people a lot of good, and would bring much-needed revenue to the national coffers.—Yours, etc.,

A. D. H.

To be published shortly. "Your Bible." What it is and is not. Post free 7d., from The Factual Knowledge (Education) Bureau, 35, Doughty Street (top floor), London, W.C.1.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., various speakers.

LONDON—INDOOR

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

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. HAROLD DAY, and various speakers.

Bristol Branch N.S.S. (Durdham Downs).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. G. THOMPSON will lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. G. GARRETTY will lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER will lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORTT (Preston) will lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Leeds Forum (113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Tuesday, July 10, 7.30 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA: "Secularism or Christianity?"

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CELT

AS far as I am aware, there has been no clearly thought-out attempt to consider a rather peculiar fact in recent writing. I refer to the predominance in English literature of imaginative work emanating from the Celtic countries. In the comparatively recent past a large proportion of the outstanding writers came from Ireland—Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Yeats, George Moore, James Joyce—and even the current sneers at the "Celtic twilight" cannot obscure the fact that the work of these writers showed more vitality than all the fiction produced by Englishmen in the 'nineties and the early years of the present century.

During the past few years, however, Ireland has tended to recede in this sphere of writing, and there has been a new emergence of a definite school of Welsh writers (of which the most readily available selection is perhaps the Penguin collection of "Welsh Short Stories"). And now, in "Poetry (Scotland)" and the other publications of William MacLellan of Glasgow, there seems to be a Scottish renaissance. Why, one asks, do these things happen in the Celtic countries, while the great Anglo-Saxon bulk of the British people seem to be untouched by the flash of creative imagination that produces fine literature? As a Celt not connected with the larger number of my contemporaries (I am a Cornishman) I claim that I can look at these things with a fairly detached eye, and yet at the same time with a certain amount of understanding.

What is there in common between Irishmen, Welshmen, Scots, and, to some extent, Cornishmen? For those who would say that Cornishmen should not be included I point to the one or two typical Cornish writers—Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and A. L. Rowse—who, although perhaps a trifle more academic in their outlook than their contemporaries in the more solidly Celtic countries, yet show definite affinities. There are, for instance, close resemblances in literary outlook between Quiller-Couch and Arthur Machen, and the poems of A. L. Rowse are in some respects comparable to those of Idris Davies and Sean Jenet.

I feel that there is something here of a national psychology. We have to beware of the Nazi trap, setting up racial antipathies where none exist, but it seems to me to be impossible to escape from the feeling that people who have been to some extent inbred for many generations, and have lived in an environment which is different from that of many of their contemporaries, will develop an outlook on the world—and especially an outlook on the arts—which is fundamentally varied from that of the rank and file in a more ordinary world.

Wales, for instance, during the terrible years of slump which have been recurrent in recent industrial history, has been driven in on itself in a way which no other country in the modern world has ever had to endure. And the result of this has been a flowering of literary activity such as the country has never previously shown. This is, of course, comparable to the Irish literary renaissance in the days of Lady Gregory, Synge and Yeats—a period when Ireland was being consistently oppressed by England.

It appears, therefore, that the cultivation of small nationalities is a good thing for the arts. But this is necessarily true only when there is a distinct strain that already differentiates the people of the small nation from their greater neighbours. This granted, a progressive decentralisation of culture is a fine thing. It seems obvious enough that after this war there will be an increase in central control of things material. Europe will be in a condition of such chaos that it will be necessary for the Civil Service to retain control of industry for a considerable time after the war is over. It is consequently all the more necessary for the smaller groups to struggle to retain their independence of mind, their own special, peculiar forms of art.

It is here, I think, that the special psychology of the Celt can be

of real value to the world. We have a rather unusual form of imagination. It is not, I think, strongly visual, though there have been, of course, many Irish painters of distinction. But in the realm of literature, as I explained at the beginning of these somewhat random jottings, the Celts have occupied a predominant position for many years now.

In literature we can show the world how the good life is to be achieved. It matters not whether this is done through the plays of a Bernard Shaw, through the prose fantasies of an Arthur Machen, or through the poems of a Keidrych Rhys. All these types of writing have their place. I am sure that they will continue to have their place in the future.

JOHN ROWLAND.

GOD'S IN HIS HEAVEN, ETC.

A FEW side shows had set up their tents outside the entrance to the Petrifying Well. It costs sixpence to go into the Well, said the girl, so we can't afford to do any of the others.

This looks more fun than the Well, said the boy. His eyes were fixed on a fat woman who was wriggling her hips outside a tent.

We came all the way to see the Well, the girl said crossly. I want to write to Mum about it. It turns everything into stone.

Tuppence, said the boy, only tuppence to go into this one. If we can't bust tuppence, we might as well pack up the whole blooming trip.

It was very dark inside the tent. A few people stood about looking sullenly at a large model of some fantastic animal.

What is it? said the boy dully. I don't see what it's got to do with the hooch dancer outside.

A little man sidled up to them. I made it, he said.

What's it got to do with the dancer? the boy demanded.

The little man glanced at the girl's sulky face and sniggered. It's a magnified model, he said.

But what is it? the boy insisted.

Absolutely true to life, the little man declared. I took great care with it. It's . . . the syphilis germ.

The boy pushed blindly at the flap of the tent.

It doesn't matter, said the girl. They say there's a petrified monkey in the Well, she told him.

Have you any old jam jars, dearie? The woman had a man's set of teeth which she had pinched from a market stall and she said, Run and ask your mother, dearie, if she's got any old jam jars she can spare. I might make you a paper windmill.

I wouldn't call you a poor woman, said the child. You look very strong. Mother's dead.

Oh, said the woman. Well, ask your father, dear, if he can spare any empty jam jars.

Father's in the village, said the child.

Oh, said the woman. You must be a very brave little boy to be all alone in the house. Or have you a dog to look after you?

We had a dog, the child said sadly. We kept it to protect us from tramps. It was a very fierce dog. Then a gypsy stole a lot of things when we were out. The policeman heard the dog barking, but he sounded so angry the policeman was frightened to come near the house. After that, Daddy gave the dog to the priest.

Ah, said the woman.

Suddenly the child seemed older than his years. It's no good, he said, Father has our money in his mouth.

The woman looked stronger than ever when she was angry. Father has to keep our money in his mouth, the child went on in a sing-song voice, he hasn't any arms.

The woman's chin quivered and the handkerchief, which was bound round her head, slipped and the child could see a few of the short hairs of her straggly white beard.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.