

THE FREETHINKER

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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Dream

WONDERFUL things have happened in dreams. For example, the only evidence we have that Jesus was born of God is the dream of Joseph. An angel came to him in a dream and told him that the child that was to be born to Mary was of God. And so Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary, was content. My own dream was not of that kind. I dreamed that I was in a church. But more than that, I was in a pulpit preaching a sermon, and the title of my sermon was "Man's Thirst for God." And it ran thus:—

"Brethren, my text is an unusual one. It was not taken from the Bible, nor from any other book. It came from the lips of a poor storm-tossed soul anxious to be at peace with God and yet uncertain of success. In my anguish I cried aloud:—

'O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul, from hell, if there be a hell. Amen, if necessary.'"

This is surely one of the most heartfelt cries that ever came from a distressed human being. We will examine it under three heads—God, the Soul, and the After Life.

We have first the simple cry for God, the torment of a soul seeking something of which he knew nothing, craving for God, although he would not recognise him if he found him. For man does not know God as he knows his human neighbour. He feels God because he knows God to be different from anything he knows or ever will know. For untold ages that cry has gone up to God, but no clear response has been forthcoming. It is true that here and there, by fasting, by living in solitude, by self-inflicted torment, certain men have caught glimpses of God. Women also, when they have thrown on one side the temptation of marriage and the worldly pleasures of a family have felt God and experienced heavenly pleasures. They have felt the embrace of the Son of God. But these are divine pleasures, impossible except for but a few. The Kingdom of Heaven cannot be taken by force.

Yet the craving for God does not die. In moments of distress we fall back upon his holy name. When we read of disasters on the land or on the sea, when we are exposed to the havoc of disease, or the slaughter of men by the thousand, our spontaneous exclamation is "Good God!" The criminal in the dock, with his cry of "Gawd blimey" indicates a conviction that God is truth. Such spontaneous outbursts are a confession that truth rules in Heaven as it should on earth. The lack of education may be one of the conditions for getting nearer to God.

Yet God is not easily found. The wisest may find it difficult to reach him. God may reveal himself to the fool and pass the wise unnoticed. Had the existence of God

been as patent as the wind or the rain, as evident as the sun, as direct as a flash of lightning, God would have become as common as the sun and of no greater importance than a mere natural object. God reveals himself to whom he will—the convicted murderer marching to the scaffold, the ignorant and the lowly; he makes himself known to the fool and passes the wise unnoticed. It is indeed a vital part of our religion that man should for ever be searching for God, and yet cannot recognise him when he is nigh. Spiritual grace is gained by believing that which we cannot understand. It is the duty of our spiritual guide on earth to inspire us in our unending search for a God we cannot picture.

We can now realise the importance of the cry of this distressed soul, "If there be a God?" Let us be on our guard lest we fall into the trap Satan lays for us and conclude that that which is unknowable cannot be known. A scepticism which believes God does not exist puts an end to the adventures of our spiritual life. But the sceptic who feels he needs something that does not exist may yet find what is not there. We must persist in our search for the impossible and so by the grace of God find Him. We must be humble, for it has often been that while a man has been upon his knees with eyes closed that he has seen the vision beautiful. God's accredited representatives on earth have informed us that man on his knees, with his eyes closed, is likely to get nearer to God than one who stands erect with eyes open. It is a rabid Atheism which insists that where nothing can be known nothing should be believed. It is this form of teaching that has inflicted so great an injury on God's earthly Church. We show our faith in believing the solidarity of that which cannot be touched, and the truth of that which baffles understanding.

Soul Saving

Consider our next cry, "Save my soul, if I have a soul." No one knows, no one has any reasonable hope of ever knowing until we stand face to face with the God that sitteth on the throne. Then we shall recognise each other because each of us will be completely changed as in the twinkling of an eye. On earth we knew each other by likenesses; in heaven we shall recognise each other because we are completely different from what we were. Our faith is not built upon what we know, but upon what we cannot understand. "Behold," says St. Paul, "I bring you a mystery," and the very essence of a mystery is that it cannot be understood. But in this the real Christian finds no ground for complaint. He knows that what is established without evidence cannot be destroyed by criticism. Put on one side the vast number of those who have discarded all belief in a "soul" and we may find that all people believe that man has an immortal soul. We live in an age where great value is attached to evidence; but which of

our great religious doctrines has been established by cold proof? The existence of God, the reality of a soul and a future life, the importance of religion in the sphere of morals, the actuality of miracles, the interference of God in the life of man, none of these was established by evidence. We Christians must remember that Jesus confessed that he could not work miracles unless people believed in them beforehand. It is enough for we Christians that we *know* certain things are true and therefore do not look for evidence. We may not be able to prove the truth of our doctrines, but we will not give them up until we have absolute proof of their falsity. God is above criticism, and religion rises above the tests of earthly arguments.

Once more we appeal to the common mind. Look back and we shall find that for our remote ancestors there was no question as to whether man has a soul. All primitive peoples believe that there is a "double" inside man which can leave the body from time to time, and which leaves it altogether at death. There is not a single savage tribe that does not believe this. It is as though God had given wisdom to the ignorant. Philosophers have doubted whether this soul actually exists, but may it not be that God in his wisdom has revealed to the ignorant as an unquestionable truth something that is withheld from the learned and wise? Only direct inspiration from God could have given to the ignorant savage a truth which has been withheld from the learned and the wise.

Lastly, "If there be a Hell?" It is obvious that man does not always suffer in this world the consequences of his sin. The wicked sin and the innocent suffer. The patient merit, the unworthy take. Can we believe that God will have left himself without power to punish the wicked? What does it profit a Christian if, when he reaches heaven, he cannot enjoy the fact that the wicked are burning in hell? Justice, Christian justice, demands the eternal torture of the unbelieving. "Depart ye into hell fire," "Plee from the wrath to come," "After death the judgment," these are historic phrases in Christian history. Without the fear of hell there is little incentive for the Christian to struggle for a place in heaven.

And behind all this lies the question of a future life. Every Christian feels, nay, he sees, that he is of too great a consequence to be blotted out at death. He believes that this vast Universe was created for *him*. Every Christian, in all humility, believes that he is of so great importance that the whole cosmic scheme would be meaningless without his perpetual presence. The Christian believes that the Universe has a moral significance, and that this is exemplified in *him*.

My brethren, take no heed of those who say there is no future life, that Heaven and Hell are exploded superstitions. Who can say that man will not live after death? It is not a subject that one tests as one does a chemical compound. The faith of the Christian rests on his faith in Jesus. We believe in a future life because we believe in Jesus; we believe in Jesus because we believe in a future life. We believe that our Saviour rose from the dead, and we know he rose from the dead because he was God incarnate. No man can say what lies beyond the grave, therefore we are free to believe whatever our creed teaches. When and where has the message come from the dead that there is nothing after death? Until some such message arrives, the Christian is entitled to indulge in his faith to the uttermost.

Let us consider what the world would be without a belief in a future life. To those who suffer there could be offered only the prospect of death. We could have said to the suffering that things ought to be better; we could have told the suffering to rise up against their oppressors, and that is all. It is the Christian gospel that taught men to suffer under wrong because of the promise of a glorified life in Heaven. We have taught men to be patient under wrong, and to submit to oppression in the full conviction that all would be right in the Heaven that was awaiting them; that their patience under wrong here would count to their credit in a world where food is not necessary and clothing is everlasting.

Finally, there is that little but tremendous word "If." If there is a soul? If there is a future life? If there be a God? If there be a Hell? If we do not believe in the existence of John Smith, no harm will follow. But if I do not believe in God eternal torture may be my reward. For God is not as we are. If we ignore him we shall surely suffer for it. God owes this to his own dignity. God will be recognised. Indeed, eminent theologians have held that God made man for the express purpose that they should worship him. More than that, we may say worship is one of the necessities of God's existence. Gods have died from no other cause than want of worship. We Christians believe that we owe our existence to God, but so closely are we connected with God that we may claim that he owes his permanency to man. God may overlook our sins, all save one, that of neglecting him. Perhaps this neglect of God is the real sin against the Holy Ghost. God gives much to his people, and asks for little in exchange. He asks for obedience and praise, above all praise. We Christians believe that God is love, but we do not always remember that love may die when it meets with neglect. Forget God and he may take his place among the myriads of deities that once lorded it over the ancient pagan world.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE RISE OF ARABIA

DESPITE its proximity to the great ancient centres of civilisation, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia and the Greek and Roman cultures, the Arabs had never been subjected to their sway. Apart from a few tribes at its periphery, Arabian life remained uninfluenced by neighbouring communities. Its immunity from foreign contacts was largely due to its extensive desert which separated it from Western Asia, while on three coasts it was only accessible from the sea.

Before the advent of Mohammed, the nomadic Arabs were segregated into tribes and septs; conflicts between the clans were chronic, which were waged for the possession of water wells and oases, or as reprisals for sheep or camel stealing. Thus, their fighting disposition, their bravery and endurance, proved invaluable when Allah's prophet had organised the contending tribes into a social and religious unity.

Mohammed was born at Mecca about A.D. 570. An orphan boy, he was reared by relatives and, at the age of twenty-five, he entered the service of a wealthy widow, Khadija, whom he subsequently wedded, and their union seems to have been extremely happy. According to tradition, at the age of forty, the founder of Islam, for the first time in his life, became the recipient of spiritual influences, and he soon persuaded himself that the angel Gabriel was revealing religious truths to him of transcendent value. Mohammed himself was apparently

illiterate, so his revelations were first recorded in writings by his friends, but were later dictated by the Prophet to a scribe and later grew by revision into the Moslem Bible, the Koran, as it exists to-day.

In his standard "History of the Middle Ages" (Kegan Paul, 1931), Dr. J. Westfall Thompson, Professor of Medieval History in the University of Chicago, notes that:—

"Islam consists primarily in the observance of five duties by every Moslem. He must testify that there is but one God, pray five times a day, give the legal alms, observe the month's fast (Ramadan) and make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once. . . . Remembering his own childhood and his own poverty, Mohammed guarded the rights of children and made legal charity compulsory for all save the very poor. As before praying a Moslem must wash, if not with water then with sand, he promoted physical cleanliness. He was lenient towards debtors and recommended the strictest honesty in performing private contracts."

At first the new faith made little headway outside the Prophet's family circle, and his early endeavours among the Meccans were derided. He and his adherents were boycotted and, as public resentment became more pronounced, some of his converts fled to Abyssinia. Medina, however, proved more receptive than Mecca, and Mohammed migrated to that city in 622. The Moslem calendar still dates from this exodus—the sacred Hegira of the Moslem world.

Islam's astounding career was now inaugurated. Hostilities were evidenced by the plundering of the rich caravans of the Meccan merchants by the Prophet's adherents. As nothing succeeded like success, Islam's increasing power induced many desert tribes to embrace its cult.

The Meccans retaliated by besieging Medina but failed to take it, and when they retreated, Mohammed decided to attack Mecca. The city surrendered in 630 and he marched through its streets as conqueror. Flushed with victory, the Prophet declared before his death in 632 that Islam's message must be carried to all the Gentile peoples.

Considering the truculent age in which he lived, Mohammed's character appears a high one. He spent a simple life, was affectionate and loyal to his family and friends, and considerate towards the poor. Above all, the religion he founded was on a far superior plane to the superstitions he sought to supersede. Moreover, its ethical code was far in advance of that to which the Arabs had been accustomed.

When Islam had become militant it spread with amazing rapidity. Half a century after its founder's death, Persia, Syria and Egypt had all been overrun. Another fifty years later, the Moslem cult had stretched over Northern Africa, across Spain and beyond the Pyrenees, while in the Orient the borders of India had been reached. The Moslems now appeared inflamed with fanaticism inspired by the promise of future rewards for the faithful, or a pitiless hell for the wicked. Still, the Arabs displayed remarkable powers of adaptation to the customs of alien peoples and their triumphs owed much to a long succession of remarkably able military commanders.

Another cause of the striking success of Arab arms was the exhaustion that had paralysed both Persia and Byzantium, as a result of the prolonged warfare between these Powers. Also, the Nestorian and other Christian heretics had long been systematically persecuted by the Greek Church, so in Syria the Arabs were regarded as liberators. By 639, the Imperial army had been driven from Syria and the invaders were eagerly converting its inhabitants to the Islamic faith.

Egypt was a coveted prize. It was an important Byzantine naval base, while its possession gave the Arabs control of the Syrian coast towns. The conquest of Egypt also assured the Arabs of bounteous supplies of grain. Here again the natives were discontented. "The persecution of the Coptic Church," writes

Professor Thompson, "and the grinding taxes imposed by Heraclius during the long wars with Persia had disaffected the people. They, too, looked upon the Arabs as liberators and by 643 the Arabs had driven out the Byzantines and mastered the country as far south as Abyssinia and as far west as Libya. The hoary tale that the Arabs destroyed the great library at Alexandria is false. There was no library to destroy. One great library was burned in 48 B.C. The second great library was destroyed in A.D. 389 by fanatical Christian monks and never rebuilt."

The Arabians subdued and converted the Berbers in Morocco, a country never conquered even by the Romans. Carthage fell, and Constantinople itself endured a prolonged siege, but the Imperial City remained secure until it was stormed and taken by the Moslem Turks in 1453. But outside its European possessions, the only lands still held by the Greek Empire were its provinces in Asia Minor, and it was only in the 11th century that these were annexed by Islam's armies.

Weakened by internal troubles Gothic Spain was an easy target for the invader. In 711, Tarik crossed what are now the Straits of Gibraltar, and in one decisive battle destroyed the Gothic State. The invaders rapidly overcame the entire peninsula save the upland districts of the Pyrenees and made Cordoba their capital. But by 725, the Arabs had crossed the mountains and entered Frankish Gaul. Then they were checked when Charles Martel defeated them at Tours in 732 and the Arab expansion in Western Europe ended.

Despite their brilliant achievements in Persia and Spain, the Moslems failed to found an enduring State. Still, they carried a superior culture to most of the territories they occupied. As Professor Thompson testifies:—

"They improved the agricultural methods of the Copts in Egypt. Arab water-works and canals enabled the farmers to irrigate the higher ground, and much sterile land was made to yield rich harvests. . . . Under the Ommeyad dynasty, Spain was the richest and most advanced state in Europe. The Arabs introduced the palm, the carob tree, sugar cane, the mulberry and silk culture. Their agriculture was as ingenious as effective. An intricate system of irrigation carried water from the mountains to the plains and opened immense tracts of arid land."

The vine was extensively grown, and amid widespread prosperity towns and villages arose in previously depopulated districts. The Jews contributed greatly to the growing civilisation, while countless Christians, with six churches in Toledo and four in Granada enjoyed freedom and security under Moslem rule.

As Professor Thompson judicially notes:—

"In an age of ruthless religious persecution, the Arabs displayed an unusual toleration. Their conquests were much less cruel, much less destructive of life and property, than is usually thought. . . . In general the Arabs adopted the institutions and political forms of the conquered peoples who thus had their masters changed but not their habits. All non-Mohammedans were judged by their own laws."

It is true that non-Moslems were more heavily taxed than true believers, and this seems to have encouraged wholesale conversions to Islam. It seems that in the 14th century, 500 only of the 200,000 Islamic inhabitants of Granada were of Moslem ancestry. In conclusion, we gather that: "Islam, which swept so violently over Christianity . . . was a real deliverer, for in despite of its defects and barrenness it was a more spiritual power than the Christian religion, which in the East had well-nigh become a religion of the amulet, the fetish, and conjurers." Even now, Moslem missionaries are frequently far more successful than their Christian competitors.

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

Strange things are said in election times. Of course, no one expects the candidate to tell the truth, and everyone looks with lenience on those who lie for their side. Still, it seems hardly necessary for Sir Archibald Sinclair to tell a Caithness audience:—

“Scottish character has its roots, and has grown and developed in the religion of its forefathers. Scotland owes all it has achieved to the Bible.”

Sir Archibald must have but a poor opinion of the Scottish people if he thinks they will swallow rubbish like this without a grin. The debt Scotland owes to poets, philosophers, scientists, and to other great men is very marked, but we take it that Sir Archibald had in mind the more foolish voters. We can imagine him grinning inwardly when he announced the words cited.

We are not surprised to find the Pope declaring that “the war should never have begun.” That may be said of most wars and of most countries. A genuine universal and true account of wars has never yet been officially written by any country. Perhaps the chief difference between accounts of ancient and modern wars is that the ancient ones are apt to be more honest in narrative. It is, perhaps, something to the good that each warring country dare not tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but the fact remains none the less.

All the same, we doubt whether the Pope would have looked with marked disapproval if 20 years ago the European peoples had declared a religious war against Russia. In this country, in Spain, in the United States and elsewhere much praise would have been given in crushing a Russia that has proved itself greater and better than any other Russia that has yet existed. But in this war the Papacy stands to lose heavily. Its hold on Poland has gone. If Franco and his crew are cleared out—in spite of their being blessed by the Pope—the Church is bound to lose much of its influence. France is likely, as it settles down, to have religion weaker than it was. And in this country, with its capacity for avoiding a logical development, our leading Christian preachers are shouting the growth of Atheism. The old cry was “God will protect his own.” The real issue to-day is “Will God’s own protect him?” They appear to be rattling.

It is interesting to note how the Church, though desperately wanting new blood, has to reject candidates for that honour. The “Church Times” gives three typical examples: The first man, though up to elementary school standard, could not speak King’s English; the second appears to have been very quarrelsome; the third had a large family, too big for the financial aspect of the call. As the Apostles were notoriously “unlettered,” the first objection cannot hold. The quarrelsome gent should always have been given the other cheek; while the Church always makes a point of almost yelling for people to have large families. But what a “climb down” for the once all-powerful Church of England to have to select its priests from such recruits.

Here is an example which gives evidence that the old teaching is not dead. It is taken from the “South Wales Times.” The speaker is the Rev. J. William-Hughes, Principal of the Baptist College, Bangor. He says:—

“No man has the right to be in the ministry who has not been frightened by God. We have to preach the Cross in such a way that people will be frightened by it. . . . Everybody, except the Roman Catholics, has ceased to be frightened.”

Now that is good, plain, historic Christianity. When people could be frightened the Churches flourished. Now that people have ceased to be frightened the Churches are not so popular.

Here are some other examples of the working of Christian morality. This time they come from one of our University Cities—Cambridge. We quote from several leading men in the ranks:—

The first is Professor Farmer: “Of whatever else God’s nature consisted, it included a will or purpose directed towards

good.” Well, we should like to know what kind of “good” is possible *with* God that is not possible *without* him? In the absence of a reply God is a decided superfluity.

From the same source: “The wisdom of the Christian marriage service was that two people made a vow, not only to each other, but to a higher will, which claimed them both absolutely.” The only way to prove this statement would be to contrast the number of Christian marriages with non-Christian ones, and note the differences. To take police court cases would enlighten the mind of Professor Farmer.

At the same gathering, Professor Murray, advocating the use of the Christian version of the Bible, said: “Children learned that way, and if they did not understand, they still derived benefit from the music of the words.” That is very interesting. The children benefit from something they don’t understand. Perhaps the printer is to blame here. Perhaps he meant to say that the parsons benefited. In that case we agree with him.

Under the heading of “War Bride’s Romance is Shattered” the “Daily Mail” gives an account of the way in which the Roman Catholic Church upholds the sanctity of marriage. A Canadian soldier married a Scots girl, and with her baby joined him in Canada. But Mr. Justice Forest, of the Superior Court in Montreal, pronounced the marriage invalid, one of the reasons being that the husband, as a Roman Catholic, was not allowed by Roman Catholic law to marry a non-Catholic. The chief point to note, however, is that it was the *husband* who applied for a divorce, and he admitted that he never said when he got married that he was a Catholic. And we do not doubt for a moment that he will get full pardon from God (through a priest, of course) for this romantic “subterfuge.”

The Bishop of Newcastle has just returned from a visit to Burma, where he went to see how the chaplains were doing their bit, and how the men in the Forces were responding. He was deeply “impressed” with all he saw, and from all sides—naturally—came tributes to the splendid work of the padres, but—there’s always a but in these wonderful testimonials—“there will have to be drastic reforms in the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department.” Needless to say, we are not told what these reforms are to be, and we are wondering what in the world is wrong, considering that, according to the Bishop, everything was—almost—a bed of roses for the Church.

A gleam of common sense. The Harrow Council have decided against clergymen of any denomination being co-opted as members of the Council’s Education Committee. We hope that other councils will act with similar common sense and justice. We are well aware that in numerous cases councils do not wish to see the clergy lording or even influencing the schools. Here, at all events, is a method of acting justly to teachers, pupils and the future.

We have always insisted that the essential feature of Christianity is fear. Its champions may have a lot to say about love and brotherhood, but fear dominates. Take the days when Christianity was at its greatest, and it will be found that the chief fear was the fear of what awaited the unbeliever in the next world. The essence of its preaching was the fear of eternal damnation. Of course, there was some stress put on behaviour, but over and over again the greatest preachers never forgot that “mere morality was not enough.” The thief on the cross was a clear example of this. Evangelical Christianity is steeped in it.

Catholics are much upset because the Church is not returning to Poland with its pre-war power given to it in full. There is no obstacle to Roman Churches, or any other Churches, returning to Poland, but there will be a small chance of ruling in the way it did in the old Poland. And the Polish State will be the better for it.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Our readers will remember the case of a Roman Catholic priest charged with and convicted of an indecent assault on a boy thirteen years of age. We should not have bothered about this had it not been for other features. But instead of the case being tried in the usual way, it was tried in another court, and the court was opened half an hour earlier than usual. No members of the public were present. The result was that the priest was bound over to keep the peace for twelve months, and the magistrate who should have tried the case waited in vain for it to appear. Interviewed by newspaper men Mr. George Hawley, the Clerk of the Court said that "Churches are losing their congregations fast enough without a priest being held up to public scorn, so in the interests of everybody and to please his people" the policy outlined was adopted. Of course, not a word of the case appeared in any of the Catholic papers.

But the matter was not permitted to rest there. Complaints were made to the Lord Chancellor and the matter came before Lord Goddard, Lord of Appeal. "The villains of the piece" were George Hawley—wrongly reported by the "Daily Mirror" as an Atheist—Superintendent Edge and Mr. Phillip. The Rev. William Walsh, rector of Longton Roman Catholic Church, said they were members of the Roman Catholic Church. He also said that he went to see Mr. Hawley and bailed the accused; he also pointed out to Mr. Hawley that it was an unfortunate thing for the Church. It should be said that Lord Goddard's comments on the case were very scathing, and his report to the Lord Chancellor should stir things up a bit. We do not know whether it can or will be done, but it is clear there should be another trial. What would have happened if the offender had been a prominent Atheist?

Quite obviously the vast majority of the Belgian people do not want a king. It is equally clear that some of our own leaders would like to see the King back again. For he is, after all, a King. Meanwhile there is a minority in Belgium who want a King; others have for a slogan "The father made a country; the son may break it." A curious cry when we remember how the King had the hands of natives chopped off if they did not bring in a stated quantity of rubber. We are old enough to remember the horrors that were disclosed. Finally, the greatness of the Belgian people was *not* made by the father of the present King. That was built up by the sturdy character of the people. The reign of the Kings was a mere decoration.

West Ham Branch N.S.S. members are asked to attend a meeting in the Stratford Locomotive Men's Hall, 62, Forest Lane, E.15, on Tuesday, July 24, at 7.45 p.m., to discuss plans for future activity. A full house is the best encouragement for those ready to act and it is hoped all members will make a point of being present.

Quite naturally we have had a good dose of rubbish during the war. One of these is that the war has made the people healthier through the medium of rationing food. Taken in the lump that may be true, but it is one of those truths that are first cousin to a lie. There has been a better distribution of food, and so numbers of people have fared better, but, on the other hand, numbers have been pinched, and their resistance power has declined. Medical men are aware of this, and their silence has misled many. Moreover, many medicals voiced what they know is not true. The extreme poor have been bettered, those who are above that level have paid a price.

So we are glad to see that the Chairman of Stratford Police Court has had the courage and the sense to prick the Governmental bubble. A man was charged with having a greater quantity of pork than his rationing allowed. The man was fined because he had broken the law, but the Chairman of the Court said:—

"We know that a lot of people could do with more food, yet the Minister of Food tells us that the health of the nation was never better than it is to-day. I just do not believe it. I see women queueing up morning after morning, and you can see that their faces are pinched. It is a big temptation when they can get a bit extra. The whole community is suffering from it. These people cannot afford to go to hotels and get two or three lunches a day. If they could, I don't suppose the temptation would be so great."

That is solid truth, and carries with it a lesson in sociology worth considering.

The "Methodist Times," in its issue for June 28, notes that from 1908 to 1932 the number of members have declined by 141,000. That seems the characteristic Christian progress also in the case of other Churches. To rub it in, the "Recorder" points out that while religion half a century ago was in the centre of the stage, it is now in the wings. It might have been said with truth that it will soon be off the premises.

For downright impudence it would be hard to beat some of the statements of the Rev. J. W. Welch, Director of B.B.C. religious broadcasts. Addressing the Carlisle Diocesan Conference he said he was appalled at the clergy's lack of understanding of the secular society in which we are living. But the clergy are not lacking a knowledge of the growth of Secularism. They know it as well as does Dr. Welch, and they adopt the same practice as Dr. Welch, that is of false and misleading statements and a complete opposition to the "other side" ever getting a hearing. In fact, Dr. Welch receives a very substantial salary for trying his hardest to prevent the other side of the case. We shall believe in the honesty of Dr. Welch when he advocates that the unbelievers shall have a hearing. Until that is done we are justified in what we have said.

We must add to the list of moaners the Bishop of Southwell, who says: "It is almost impossible to exaggerate the gravity of the long spiritual crisis into which not only Britain but the whole world is plunged." One almost pities these poor clerics who, after lying and lying about the strength of religious belief, are now compelled to let the cat out of the bag.

The following, from the U.S.A. paper in this country, is worth reprinting. It explains itself. It was headed "Freedom of Anti-religion":—

"An unthinking chaplain recently made several wild, un-American remarks in regard to Mrs. Vashi McCullum's attempts to discontinue the teaching of religion in public schools. Our country has always tried to be impartial toward religion. Americans have always upheld the policy of not trying to force it on anyone, of keeping it separated from the State as an institution. If religion is taught, Atheism and Agnosticism should also be part of the curriculum."

The Christian appetite for freedom of thought and speech is never very strong, and when it is concerned with Free Thought it is quite microscopic.

"ECCE DEUS"

AMONG the many forms of unorthodox Christology there is one which seems to me to have received far less notice than it deserves. There are plenty which emphasise to a greater or less degree the humanity of Jesus, and, to take but a few examples out of many, the names of Wellhausen, Harnack, Loisy, are not likely to be forgotten for a long time to come, while the "Nine Pillars" on which Schmiedel rested the structure of the historicity (miracles apart) of the Gospels are still spoken of with respect. Even Renan's "Vie de Jésus" retains its position, if by nothing else, by the charm of its style. All these "Liberal" works, with a hundred minor differences, endeavour to convince their readers that Christ was a mere man; and readers in multitudes they have had. But there is another view, equally hostile both to "Liberalism" and to rigid orthodoxy, which, whether sound or not, ought, in my opinion, not to be ignored. This is the conception of Christ as exclusively divine, ridding him of every vestige of his manhood. As "Liberalism" robs the God-man of one-half of his being, so this theory robs him of the other.

The writer who, as far as I know, has set forth these ideas most fully and convincingly, is the American, William Benjamin Smith. Beginning with his German "Vorchristliche Jesus," he followed it up with "Ecce Deus" in English, which was published by Watts for the "Rationalist Press" in 1912, and is now, like so many noteworthy books, out of print.

I cannot do more than summarise, in a few paragraphs, Professor Smith's arguments, the strength of which is derived from their cumulation and many-sidedness. I must content myself with a few hints.

Let us begin with the Apocalypse, which there is no wonder that Luther wished to cut out of the Canon. We have here the Little Lamb, but where is the human being? He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last—epithets scarcely applicable to a man; he is the bright, the morning star; and, if the offspring of David, also his root.

Again, was the vision Paul beheld on the road to Damascus that of a travelling dervish? As a matter of fact also, it could not have been a human being whom Simon Magus preached in Samaria, whom Apollon had half-learned in Egypt, and whom the author of the Fourth Gospel, more or less accurately, tried to represent as the Logos—a Gnostic conception. This leads the Professor to notice how early the disciples are bidden to "hold fast the traditions." Traditions are not the growth of a few years. It follows, therefore, that we must date the beginning of Christianity much earlier than is usually done; and it is remarkable how the Pauline epistles, urging the churches to be "teleioi" or "perfect"—that is, almost, to complete their degree-course—neglect the human aspect and dwell, with hardly an interlude, on the divine.

The Professor is thus led to pay closer attention to the Gnostic elements in the Epistles. When these are once noticed, they stare the student in the face. To take but one instance. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul, speaking quite casually, and obviously expecting his readers to understand him, talks of himself as the latest of the Apostles, not worthy to be called an Apostle, in fact "the Ectroma." This is the Gnostic term for the formless void which made the earth at the beginning, when darkness was upon the face of the deep, before God said, "Let there be light." Now if the Corinthians understood the word when Paul wrote to them, and could even take it in its metaphorical application, they must have had a long period of training, far longer than the eighteen months which he had spent among them. If one writes letters in which words like hyperbola or elliptic functions are used familiarly, it is plain that the readers have studied mathematics for some time.

All this, of course, involves a system of more or less allegorical interpretation of the documents, and the Professor does not shirk the task. I can give but the merest outline of his method. "Little children" is the heathen peoples; Galilee is the heathen world; casting out devils is getting rid of the Olympian or Roman deities and substituting Christian monotheism. The idea that the disciples, returning from their mission, boasted that they had cured a number of Galilean maniacs, is absurd. Were there no lunatics in Judea?

It will be seen that, as I said at the beginning, whether the Professor is right or wrong, he is worth hearing.

E. E. KELLETT.

THE FREETHINKING OUTLOOK

WHEN reading scientific and social works written previous to the advent of the twentieth century, one cannot help being struck by their hopeful outlook. The people of those times, it is obvious, could see before them nothing but steady periods of progress. How sorely disappointed, one can't help thinking, those that have survived must be. For it seems that before the first fifty years of the twentieth century will have passed, this earth will be scarred by two world wars; another one of which, some seem to think, will mean the end of civilisation. Here I beg to differ. It is my opinion that this world is destined to see more war and equally more "social reform hallucination" before the mass of people can be brought to a state of mind that will coincide with a lasting peace. From my opinion one has not to search far to realise the valid truth of this statement. The mass of people are not yet in a state to think with reason, clearness, and above all, freedom.

The prejudices of nations, harassing to progress and unreasonable as they are, must be wiped out before that state of mind necessary to a lasting peace can be attained. All forms of superstition, and this includes all religions, must be cast contemptuously aside as not befitting man the thinking animal. Yes, even Christianity, the altruistic ideals of which are claimed to be the backbone of Western Civilisations, will be cast aside, for man needs not an ultra-rational sanction to stimulate his altruistic feelings.

Man, being a thinking animal, it is desirable that he should think; and if he must think, it is but right that he should think with freedom. This piece of common logic alone, is at once antagonistic with a powerful religion. Religions, if only because of their strong conservative tendencies, are anti-progressive and are therefore social evils.

But we must go deeper than this. We must take into consideration that even if in so many years time religion is universally disclaimed, religion's damaging and anti-social beliefs will still continue to occupy the minds of men.

Religion is strongly antagonistic with reason. It is, I think, a psychological fact that religion is an unconscious attempt of man's to escape his relentless reasoning. Man's reason tells him to believe in one life only. Whether man thought that this would not exactly be the thing to induce good behaviour, or whether his selfish feelings prompted him to believe otherwise, I would hesitate to say. But I feel sure that this was the beginning of man's belief in life after death and its accessory beliefs such as hell-fire, the hosts of heaven, and all the rest. It is these beliefs that a Freethinker must fight and subdue. A true Freethinker can never tolerate religion. And a person who looks forward to reward in a second life which common sense dictates to him does not exist, cannot be a good member of a progressive society.

S. WOLF.

CORRESPONDENCE

CALL TO WORSHIP.

Sir.—This "Call to Worship" business is a very curious affair. The Rev. Douglas A. Griffiths (Secretary for Youth Clubs, etc., Methodist Youth Department), in the "Bradford Telegraph and Argus," Saturday, June 30, advertises as follows:—

"Would you care to live and die in a land where no church spires point the people heavenward?"

Well, now we really do know. Heaven is a geographical place somewhere in the skies.

Then he says "That young people produced by a secularist society are disillusioned about the standards and values which have held it together."

Bless his heart, of course they are. They are disillusioned about the state of society produced by 1914 years of Christian civilisation, during which time people have failed to extract sane ideas from the mass of contradictions of the New Testament. Of course, nowadays parsons don't desire to talk about the Old Testament. Freethought criticism has spiked their guns in that direction.

Again, Mr. Griffiths says "Man is not fit for community." What a curiously naive statement.

It is only in the community sense that mankind has been able to live together and, seeing that communities are man-made, it is a very illogical statement to say that man is not fit to live in a state of society, admittedly good, which he has built up himself. It may interest the reverend gentleman to know that religions do not bring people together. They do, and always have, separated them. Religious wars have produced bloody results.

Next he says the world "Needs the spirit of community, which is the Holy Spirit."

What mutterable humbug. The Christians, their priests and parsons have been in business over 1900 years, and look at the results. Has there ever been a concerted effort on the part of the Christians of all nations to prevent war? In the realms of social progress the Church has never intervened save as another stunt to bolster up its dying creeds. The reverend gentleman will have to think hard. His knowledge of history is well-nigh negligible.—Yours, etc., "ALERT."

FREETHOUGHT QUOTATIONS.

Sir.—In a recent number of "The Freethinker" an appeal was issued to Freethinkers to send quotations (with origins) from Freethought writers, to Mr. William Kent, 71, Union Road, London, S.W.4, for inclusion in a collection of these which he hopes to publish at or near next Christmas. From a letter I have received from Mr. Kent it appears that the response has been rather disappointing. I am, therefore, issuing an appeal to my fellow Freethinkers to do all they can to help Mr. Kent in this laudable venture. Such a publication will be of real value, and Freethinkers must surely be alive to the penetrative capacity of the printed word.—Yours, etc.,

JAMES FARMER.

REFORMERS' MEMORIAL AND RICHARD CARLILE.

Sir.—Your article in the issue of June 24 was an admirable one, but based upon a bad text—through no fault of yours.

I have obtained a copy of the article in the "Co-operative News" of March 17, 1945, and it is mentioned that the name of Richard Carlile is on the memorial! It is amazing that two readers should so carelessly have read it, and surprising there was no editorial correction. However, an Editor may be excused for not assuming that two readers are partly blind.

The name has been there since 1885, as mentioned in my "London for Heretics," and I saw it recently. When writing the book I had considerable difficulty in finding the grave of Carlile, as there was no stone to mark it.

What I was pleased to discover from the "Co-operative News" was that the London Co-operative Society proposes to renovate

the memorial and to add new names. I am sure readers of "The Freethinker" can suggest some. Graham Wallas, Delisle Burns, G. W. Foote, J. M. Robertson, F. J. Gould, Lord Snell, are names that occur to me. I wish, however, the memorial could be removed to some more public place. How appropriate it would be near Orators' Corner, Hyde Park!—Yours, etc.,

W. KENT.

OBITUARY

GEORGE SMITH.

With sorrow we report the death of a loyal veteran of the Freethought movement, George Smith, in his 78th year. Among his mental treasures memories of the days of Charles Bradlaugh were always foremost. A regular reader of the "Freethinker" and member of the West London Branch N.S.S. for many years, he maintained his interest in the Society and its work till the end.

His remains were interred in the Fulham and North Sheen Cemetery on July 9 where before a gathering of relatives a Secular Service was read at the graveside by the General Secretary N.S.S.

R. H. R.

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., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: "Wars of Religion."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON 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.

Cornholme (Lancs.).—Wednesday, July 25, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mr. E. JOHNSTONE 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. F. J. CORINA (Bradford) will lecture.

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

Padiham (Lancs.).—Sunday, 3.15 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Read (Lancs.).—Monday, July 23, 7.30 p.m., Mr. JACK CLAYTON will lecture.

Worsthorne (Lancs.).—Friday, July 20, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

B.B.C. RELIGION

MY time is limited for listening to the B.B.C. religious services and talks, but there is value in this for that is the position of most people.

I have asked myself, what impressions do I get from listening? And briefly I would try to answer them.

It seems to those that take an objective interest in religion these services and talks are especially interesting and full of possibilities.

To the writer the possibility that a new religion is emerging, if it has not already taken shape, a religion with definite marks and characteristics which show its likenesses and differences to other forms of Christianity.

My first impression is that it is Britain's Best Christians who are broadcasting, for the B.B.C. undoubtedly wish to represent that their religion is Britain's best.

In this, it seems possible to see one of its marks, it is exclusive. There are many bodies of Christian people who are not allowed to broadcast their interpretation of Christianity; and also Christian bodies who are sponsored by the churches, such as the Catholic Providence Guild and the Protestant Truth Society who seem to be shut out.

It may be some consolation to these Christian bodies that the B.B.C. is just as exclusive to them as Atheists.

Although as far as I know the claim is not made for this religion to be infallible, yet it seems to be, by the way the speakers talk.

Obviously none of the churches are infallible, for the B.B.C. religious speakers sometimes regret the conduct of the Church in the past if not condemning it; sometimes, however, it is represented as the only true Divine voice in the world.

There seems to be some confusion among the speakers and preachers just exactly what the Church is, whether it is a Divine Society here on the earth now or whether it is an instrument or tool to set up the Divine Society.

Meanwhile, while the status or function of the Church is clarified, we seem to be able to take our choice between a Church Triumphant and a Church Repentant.

I have suggested there seems to be some confusion among B.B.C. preachers and speakers and yet that it is an infallible religion. The confusion is on the nature of the Church not in their religion, for whilst speaking on the wireless they are infallible. This attitude can be explained on the grounds that the B.B.C. religion is in some way a manifestation of the mystical Church, that is, "all souls in communion with and under obedience to Christ, and their number is neither coincident with nor confined to the organised churches" (Dr. W. E. Orchard: "The New Catholicism.")

From this point of view we can see that the B.B.C. religion stands apart and above the Church and declares what is true and right in faith and morals, for it is at any moment obedient to the will of Christ.

If the claim for infallibility is not made explicitly it is implicit, or how can such petitions in prayer be explained as, "heal divisions of the churches and make heresy cease" for the churches as they are are teaching heresy from the standpoint of other churches, or such statements as "Church becalmed in spiritual doldrums?"

It must be remembered that this is a very young religion and developing, but these two marks of exclusiveness and infallibility seem already established.

And what are the teachings of this religion? Again, what are my impressions?

The traditional teaching of the churches on Hell and Heaven seem to have no place in it; certainly the representative views of the churches given by St. Thomas Aquinas, Jonathan Edwards

("Sinners in the hand of an angry God") and of the Rev. Father Pinnamonte, S.J. ("Hell opened to Christians") are completely out of date.

It is sometimes said the B.B.C. religion is Fundamentalist; in this respect it seems Modernist.

Possibly this new religion will in time declare the infallible truth on this doctrine; at present it seems, while it does not say Hell and Heaven have passed away, it suggests that both are enveloped in mist or fog.

Obviously this doctrine depends on the nature of God, but we are told that "there is an angry God," in an hymn we get "Sweeter than All"; in other hymns "God the All T. rible," and "Joyfully I walk with Jesus."

There seems to be no doubt that this religion is nonsacramental, salvation can be obtained by the simple acceptance of Christ: we hear this especially in "Sabbath Day devotions in Music" in such hymns as "A little talk with Jesus makes it right, all right," etc. Whilst in the past, most Christian Churches have had some sort of credal test, a test which a person had to surmount before Christians would be in fellowship with him, the B.B.C. religion seems willing to accept anyone whatever sort of Christian belief is held. "Bring what you can to the service, God will sort it out," of Cannon Cockin seems a reverse process to the churches, for they say: sort out your beliefs, then give service.

Before finishing one can hardly help thinking of the well meaning people who conduct the B.B.C. religion.

Perhaps their greatest achievement so far has been the bringing together of antagonistic Christian beliefs to working and praying one with another.

There seems to be some gentlemanly rules drawn up, and to say that "it is not cricket" is the guiding principle curbing those who would expound their Christianity, so pointing out its contradictions in various churches.

There is for instance a difference of opinion in "The Anvil" on the Papal Mass in celebration of Fascist victories in Abyssinia, and, the defender of the Mass is told, "he is batting on a sticky wicket."

Again, they seem to be rather uneasy about their infallibility and so to prove that they are right to themselves at least, if not to others, stooges are introduced to ask the right questions.

To anyone interested in religion this seems to be a pathetic subterfuge.

There is another aspect of this which must cause them concern, for often speakers make statements on other subjects, i.e., economics, etc., and there is no chance apparently for anyone to check them in their statements, however extraordinary. Perhaps their greatest difficulty and possibly their greatest responsibility lays in their dealing with other great Empire religions.

In ever increasing numbers our young people are going out into the Empire and world, and the B.B.C. religion at the heart of the Empire apparently Sunday after Sunday just ignores these religions, hoping no doubt that our young people will. One wonders if the people who conduct this religion have any sense of the grave responsibility that rests upon them. They do not attempt to instruct or help our young people in these religions, neither do they suggest how they can get knowledge of them.

One wonders again, if these religious teachers fail in their duty to teach the religions of the Empire and world to the young, who then is to teach them?

W. J. M.

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

THE MOTHER OF GOD, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by post 4d.