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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

In Defence of the Faith

CHRISTIAN defences are among the most curious things in the world. Taken singly, they are strange enough; taken as a whole, and with the various parts contrasted, they almost beggar description. For example: If one attacks Christianity on account of what it has done, or left undone, one is met with the reply that these faults were merely the corruption of Christianity, that genuine Christianity is a doctrine, an ideal, or to use the cant phraseology, a life. If, on the other hand, the attack is made on the nature of this ideal, or the teaching, then the reply is that we have to judge the teaching, not by its logical character, nor by its satisfying the demands of a strong scientific canon, but by its effect on the lives of the people; and we are referred back to the very historic record we have just been cautioned against. So that "genuine Christianity" is an historic phenomenon or not, just as it suits the argument of its defender. Of course, the truth of the matter is, that Christianity is both a set of doctrines and an historic phenomenon. Doctrines do not exist apart from flesh and blood men and women, and teachings that have borne fruit for centuries in the lives of people, become, of necessity, a matter of history.

A very common method of evading criticism is to plead that recorded history shows that *real* Christianity has never yet been tried. What history presents us with are various phases of a corrupt Christianity. If that plea be admitted one form of the attack on Christianity drops to the ground and the anti-Christian attack is, of course, defeated. There is no use in attacking something that does not exist, and if all that has passed muster hitherto as Christianity is a spurious article, the genuine Christian, whatever that is, and wherever he is, might join the Free-thinker in the attack. But, if Christianity is acquitted of evil on this ground, it must also be relieved of the credit of good; and all the claims made on behalf of Christianity for abolishing slavery, improving the position of women, refining manners, and advancing civilisation, must also be given up. Christianity has never existed in anything like a concrete form, and it can neither be blamed for any evil nor praised for any good that has existed. Both good and evil must find their origin in some other cause, and the Free-thinker must reserve his criticism of Christianity until it appears.

Now, if writers took up this consistent attitude, one could appreciate it, even though one did not endorse it. But they do not. In the very act of stating the defence, its grotesque character obtrudes itself upon even the Christian understanding; with the result that one gets an illogical jumble, giving up one moment what is claimed the next. In one sentence, we find writers dwelling upon the vivifying

and regenerating power of Christian belief, and in the next, declaiming against the corruption and caricature which the world has hitherto experienced under the name of the Christian religion.

The truth is, the Christian is in an impossible position. On the one hand he realises that if Christianity is to justify its long record it cannot do otherwise than appeal to history. Service to the race or to civilisation, if a fact at all, must be an historic fact. But he also realises that history is far from endorsing his claims. Defenders of the faith like the writers referred to are aware that, instead of civilisation advancing under Christianity, it receded. The old civilisation was crushed out, and the official Churches fought against the growth of a new one. They are aware of the Christian opposition to science in all branches; that those ages were the lowest in the scale in which Christian belief was least questioned; that heresy has been the outstanding feature of nearly all who have helped to make the world what it is, and that even to-day the European countries where Christianity is strongest are the least progressive, are facts perfectly well known to all who have an adequate knowledge of affairs. The Protestant game of throwing all the blame upon the Roman Catholic Church has been tried, but it is no longer effective. For there is not a fault of which the Roman Catholic Church has been guilty that Protestants have not also committed so far as opportunity permitted. They, too, have obstructed, tortured, imprisoned and killed. And, in addition, we observe that the modern revolt is not against one Church on behalf of another; it is an attack on all, without exception. There is growing a clear perception that organised Christianity in all its forms is obstructive, and is bound to be obstructive. And seeing this, in sheer desperation they are striving to save the ship by throwing all the cargo overboard. Christians are fond of the appeal to experience. Well, here is the appeal to experience with a vengeance—the universal experience of the race in all ages and countries where Christianity has had the power to work its will.

A more grotesque defence than this championship of Christianity could hardly be conceived. Here is a religion with a power for good, as it still contended, such as no other system or religion ever possessed. It has enjoyed a long record, and wielded a power such as no other religion ever possessed. It had the power to make and unmake kings, and claimed and exercised dominion over the thoughts of men from the cradle to the grave. Yet throughout its long history no one can point to a single generation during which the world was clearly the better for its guardianship. It has not corrupted, and so lost its usefulness, argue the defenders. Well, but was there ever a time in Christian history when the best men and women were not more or less ashamed of the Christianity around them, and looking back to some mythical period of Christian purity and perfection?—a period that never had an existence outside

the imagination of Christian believers. For the more certain our information concerning the primitive Christians becomes, the more repugnant does their teaching and conduct become to the modern mind. Here, then, we have the religion so powerful to save and yet unable to maintain its own purity for a single generation—of such tremendous importance that the only ones who understand it aright are those who live two thousand years after its inception, and whose minds are influenced by an environment in which the better influences are definitely anti-Christian. And, finally, we are informed, substantially, that the only way to defend Christianity from attack is to reject all the Churches, all the creeds, and to admit that historic Christianity is a ghastly blot upon civilised history. A more wonderful defence was surely never attempted. The one thing that stands out from such a defence is that Christian apologists find Christianity's record is incapable of defence.

Playing a primitive and mythically pure Christianity against a later and corrupt form is now a tolerably old game, but it is a hopeless one. In one sense, primitive Christianity was "pure," but that is not the sense intended by apologists. Its purity consisted in the presentment of a number of teachings, of beliefs, of which Christians would now be ashamed. The belief in miracles of a more or less spectacular character, of demoniacal possession, of the approaching end of the world, a flat earth and a solid sky, the constant presence and warfare of angels and devils, are all beliefs that belong to Christianity in its "pure" state; while, on the contrary, many or most of its "corruptions" are modifications in Christian teaching necessary to secure its survival. Had Christianity remained "pure," it would have died out long since. It survived only because its "corruptions" enabled it to do so.

From this point of view modern apologies, such as those criticised, are only additions to the long list of "corruptions." Like apologists of all ages, they are trying to interpret Christianity in terms of current knowledge and needs, instead of interpreting it in the light of its origin and historic teaching. With the primitive Christians social regeneration was nothing, and individual salvation from future torments everything, Jesus the social reformer non-existent, and Jesus the miracle-worker supreme, because to the people who became Christian the supernatural and the miraculous dwarfed everything else. Right through the ages the supernatural was still the dominant belief in the minds of people. But science gave the people a new conception of things, a more orderly social life gave them better feelings and new desires, the supernatural began to lose ground, and, late in the day, Christian apologists discovered that the true message of Christianity had never been discovered until non-believers had made it plain that humanity, and not God, was the proper object of devotion; earth, and not heaven, the proper goal of our labours.

To preach such a Christianity is really tantamount to a surrender. For the conception of a society of men and women on earth, well fed, well clothed, well educated, as an end in itself, and the only important end, did not originate with Christianity, and owes nothing to Christianity for its development. It is essentially a non-Christian—even an anti-Christian—conception. And its adoption by Christians, even on paper, shows that they realise the game is up. They cannot defend Christian

teachings, they dare not defend Christian history. The unreason of the one is too clear, the villainy of the other too patent. They stand watching the triumph of a spirit, a temper, which for a thousand years the Church has held in check, and which for more than half that period it has done its best to obstruct. They see the almighty deity of early generations reduced to plexus of mechanical forces, the wonder-working, god-begotten Jesus reduced to a simple Jewish peasant with amiable aspirations after social reform. In the face of the enemy they profess to be delighted at the change. In their heart of hearts they realise that the game is up.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

VICTORIAN MEMORIES

I.

ONE of the generalisations which so often brings a sneer from some of our bright, young things is known as "Victorianism." My own early days were certainly passed in that delectable period, and I hold no brief whatever for some of its worst features; but whenever that sneer comes my way, I generally want to defend Victorianism with all the weapons I know. After all, any era which contains such giants as Dickens, Darwin, Spencer, Tyler, George Eliot, Thackeray, Bradlaugh, Millais, Charles Keene, Cruikshank, Gilbert and Sullivan, Tennyson, H. M. Stanley, Lovett Cameron, Florence Nightingale, and dozens more, could not have been quite as bad as its detractors try to make. I agree, of course, that another side could be made out which would take some of the gilt off the gingerbread, but we are not dealing with a paradise peopled with angels. The Victorian era was the period of the first real awakening of the people when, at long last, they began to learn something of the world they lived in, and of the part they could play in its development, and that could not be done in a day, nor without some bitter suffering.

It is not difficult to get books dealing with many aspects of the 19th century but one of the best which has come my way is that by Mr. Kellett: "As I Remember" (Victor Gollancz Limited, 1936). Mr. Kellett, it may be remembered, wrote "Ex-Libris," a book about books which fascinated me, for it dealt with many books which also came my way, and which were not the eternal masterpieces one is always advised to read. It was refreshing to find a lover of books to tell us how he enjoyed "Jessica's First Prayer," or remembered that old "Argosy" thriller, "In the Dead of Night," whose author, by the way, he did not name. It was by T. W. Speight.

Mr. Kellett's memories of Evangelism, of Politics, of Business, of the Family, of Games and Examinations, and, of course, of Literature, are packed with keen observation, and spiced with a lovely collection of good stories. But, above all, he has given us a splendid defence of Victorianism as he knew it, and he seems to have had some very interesting experiences.

"In any case (he says), having spent many of my best and happiest years in the Victorian age, I do not quite like to hear it disparaged. I do not agree that those years were one long nightmare of priggishness, narrow-mindedness, self-complacency, hypocrisy and goody-goodness. (Not all the parents were tyrants, keeping a tight hold on the latch-key, nor were all the children smug and crawling little toadies or sullen rebels . . .")

For me—and I expect also for the readers of this journal—the two chapters dealing mostly with Victorian religion were especially fascinating, for Mr. Kellett, "brought up in a theological family," was always interested "in the varieties of religious belief and practice which can be seen in England."

People were always recounting their religious experiences or indulging in religious controversy. There was far less—if any at all—of that religious indifferentism which is so prominent these days. In my own native town in Yorkshire, the prominent religion was Wesleyan Methodism, but of course Roman and Anglo-Catholicism were also strong, while the religion which fixed itself most strongly on my very youthful mind was that of the Salvation Army—due perhaps to the fact that the maid under whose care I was placed for my Sunday afternoon outing almost invariably insisted on following that light with many other maids, dazzled, no doubt, by the brass band, and its hymns played to popular music hall ditties as a way of salvation.

Prayer and providence were the great watchwords, and a parson was veritably a man of God. He undoubtedly was treated like one, and in some cases no doubt firmly believed he was one. Parsons are not quite so sure about it now.

"The one certain mark of Victorian Evangelism," says Mr. Kellett, "as I remember it, was the insistence on the necessity of conversion." And for myself, I am quite sure that conversion often did change a brute into a more decent citizen. There may have been other causes—perhaps a few years in "quod" helped—but we can allow the drunkard, the wife beater, the child or animal torturer, his change of heart when he found Christ. Anyway, it is the conversions which lasted which are remembered—the many "relapses" are conveniently forgotten.

We are apt to think also that "revivals" were always, or very nearly always, associated with Nonconformists, or with the freak religions when, as a matter of fact, there were some conducted by High Church clergymen like Father Ignatius. His revivals "were outwardly indistinguishable from those of Primitive Methodists," while a revival service conducted by V. S. S. Coles, the Vice-Principal of Pusey House, "apart from the fact that it was in a Church, might have been a Salvation Army service with General Booth in the pulpit."

Mr. Kellett has a word about Cardinal Newman, the mention of whose name seems to paralyse many of our critics, particularly when they recall the way in which Charles Kingsley dealt with some of the Cardinal's views—characterised by Professor Saintsbury as "an awkward attack." It brought forth, it is true, the "Apologia" in which Newman defends his sincerity in fine prose; but surely, in the ultimate, it is not his prose but his views that matter.

Says Mr. Kellett:—

"Anyone who reads Newman's 'Essay on Miracles'—even apart from the additions Newman made in his Catholic days—will be astonished at the naivete of the argument. The stories of Eve and the serpent, of Balaam's-ass, of Jonah's whale, are all literally true. There is not the slightest tinge of the critical spirit, nor any idea of the progressive nature of revelation—which is the very basis of modern Christianity. One sentence, and perhaps one only, will carry the consent of readers in our time: 'It must be recollected that what is evidence in one age is often not so in another. . . .' I am not concerned here with Newman's later views. After his conversion for example he believed in the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, and defended the story of the flight of the Holy House from Palestine to Loreto by saying that God, who had saved all the species of animals from the Flood by means of the Ark, could easily provide a house with the power of flight. The point is that in the 40's, Protestants, believing as they did in the story of Noah, would have had some difficulty in refuting the argument. To-day they are not troubled by it for an instant. They reject both tales alike."

I feel here that Mr. Kellett is very optimistic in imagining that Protestants reject the Flood story. Some Protestants do, of course, but I think I am right in saying that it is still taught

in all State schools as being absolutely true by teachers who are in the main quite as sincere as Newman. And the new Education Act is specially designed to see that such Bible "truths" must be taught. Under Victoria, "the whole Bible was equally inspired, Leviticus and Esther as much as the Gospel of John, and the list of Patriarchs as certainly true as the list of Apostles. . . . What was more important, moral flaws were ignored also . . . even the marginal notes were sacrosanct; the world was created in 4004 B.C., and Solomon's Song was an allegory of Christ and the Church. It is hard to exaggerate the perniciousness of all this . . ."

Mr. Kellett managed later to emancipate himself, and the fact that he can admire Prof. W. B. Smith's "Ecce Deus"—an admiration which I share—shows how far he has advanced in his pilgrimage towards sanity in matters of religion. It would be interesting to have his comments on the Act which wants, if possible, to compel children to believe more than ever in this absurd, outworn Victorian Protestantism, long ago proven to be childish myth and legend.

H. CUTNER.

A FACT

IT is a problem of harassing perplexity in all forms of controversy to find a definite something which can be said to constitute a fact. To the average man a fact is something that has been, more or less, scientifically proven. But what after all (if viewed from the standpoint of the universe at large) is science but a system of knowledge important only to a certain insignificant race of beings who dwell on an equally insignificant planet. Indeed, if one ponders on the constitution of matter or meditates on the first cause one is brought into real contact with the triviality or, perhaps, illusion of our existence. And even while pondering thus one cannot say for certain that one is at grips with reality. So surely, even when debating subjects concerning everyday generalities, it is desirable that we should be able to assert certain backbones to controversy. These backbones, it is obvious, must be facts; but how to arrive at a fact?

Suppose I wish to prove that I am here, how can I best set about it? Obviously the most immediate at my service is the testimony of a fellow being. So I ask this imaginary person to give me information concerning my whereabouts, structure and appearance. Fearing lest my ears should have betrayed me I have them seen to. Can I now, having had my ears examined and proved perfect, say for certain I am here? Being an agnostic, I have my doubts. So wishing to be sure, I have the specialist examined by other specialists. And now that I have had the specialist's specialists examined by others, I know that within the domains of terrestrial testimony there can be no such thing as a fact.

S. WOLF.

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ACID DROPS

Our readers will not have forgotten the case of Mr. George Hawley, a magistrate's clerk. He dealt with the case of a Roman Catholic priest who was charged with indecently assaulting a boy thirteen years of age. Mr. Hawley changed the location of the court; the trial was held one hour earlier than the usual time, with the result that no member of the public knew anything about it, not even the police. The case is among the most serious in the calendar, but thanks to the arrangement the priest was bound over to keep the peace for twelve months. One recalls the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde.

The Lord Chancellor ordered an inquiry which, of course, condemned the action of Mr. Hawley, and he has now been dismissed from any connection with the Courts. The surprising thing is that a new trial was not ordered. There may be some technicality in the way, or it may be that the friends of the Roman Church are in operation. We are sure that the Catholic papers will not condemn the artfulness of Mr. Hawley. But what would have happened had the man charged with the offence, or the clerk of the court who manoeuvred to keep the matter quiet, had either of them been an Atheist or a Communist? The Catholic papers have remained silent. Perhaps Mr. Hawley has been privately thanked by his religious superiors.

The result of the inquiry was that Mr. Hawley has been dismissed from his post. He is, or was, the oldest magistrate's clerk in the country. But he is not ashamed at being found out. It was in defence of religion—his religion; whether he was advised to act as he did we do not know. But Mr. Hawley said quite plainly that what he did was in the interests of the Catholic Church, it was "to prevent a priest being held up to public scorn." We wonder what would have happened if a member of other Churches, or even an Atheist had been charged with an identical offence? We hardly think there would have been any hushing up.

A National Basic Outline of Religious Instruction is soon to be issued by representatives of the Church of England and other religious bodies, the Anglican signatories being Canon Hall, and that great "victor" over Freethought, Canon Cockin. The chief task of this religious instruction appears to be teaching children the Bible as the Word of God, and, of course, the life and teaching of Christ. From the account given in the "Church Times," it looks as if the teaching will be of the thoroughly Fundamentalist type, the miracles of Jesus, and such O.T. stories as the Garden of Eden and the Flood being taught as literal truth. We perhaps ought to have said Christian truth, for that and literal truth are as poles apart—as indeed most children will discover for themselves when they grow up.

A Chaplain of the Forces recently had the impudence to invite a number of soldiers to send a letter on Confirmation. Very few wished to have anything to do with it, and a large number informed him that they were not at all interested in religion. Some went so far as to inform the Chaplain that they were "Agnostics with a strong inclination to Atheism." Many of the replies were positively contemptuous of the claims of Christianity. We hardly think that this Chaplain will venture on another letter. The truth is that the personnel of the Army has undergone a change and there are two factors operative in broadening men's minds. One is education, the other is compulsory service. In the last case men of all kinds and social grades are forced into service, and that has its influence on the Army as a whole. The state in which the Army welcomed illiterate men, and the official ranks had most of the education, is dead or dying. We have a relic of this in musical fashions, one still common with the B.B.C.'s alleged humorous shows. The plain soldier is not supposed to speak decent English, but is put speaking a dialect that is only used by the minority. The rank and file read, and reading broadens their vision.

Education has also played its part with both officers and men. It was once almost part of the business that officers should be religious. Of course, there were numbers who were not religious, but the belief that to get good soldiers one must encourage religion among the officers is to-day wearing thin. Our own post-bag bears witness to the large number of unbelievers that exist in the Armed Forces. Officers have more self-respect, and in conversation with privates are likely to stand on a more human level. The armies taken as a whole, appear to have become socially communistic in their intercourse. That also makes for greater freedom of thought, and religion never flourishes under that condition.

What we are really trying to say is that, in the higher sense of the word, we are, in spite of many obstacles, getting "humanised," and religion is feeling the pinch.

As can be expected the "stab in the back" France received at the hands of Mussolini, has made many Frenchmen, even those loyal to the Church, begin to think a little more about the Vatican and its hordes of Italian priests and cardinals. In a recent issue of "Combat," a French periodical, a French priest has vigorously criticised what he calls the "Italianisation" of the Holy See. Out of 267 Popes only 58 were not Italians and out of the last 46 Popes, actually 45 were Italian. Not only that but almost everything done by the Popes or proclaimed by them is in Italian, and the conclusion drawn by this "rebel" priest is that while the Catholic religion has need of a Pope, it has no need of Italy.

One of our readers asks us how many people are married yearly in our non-religious Registry offices. We do not know, but we should say that taking the cities there must be somewhere five out of ten. Of course, the proportion would be smaller in small towns. But the vital point is that whether a marriage takes place in a church or out of it, it is the secular marriage that is performed everywhere. If a clergyman officiates in a church it is because he holds a licence to perform marriages, and the Church also holds a secular licence to perform a marriage. These two conditions fulfilled, any one may add whatever tomfoolery he or she prefers. They may break a saucer with a Chinaman, or a glass with a Jew. It is the secular marriage that is always legal.

The wisdom of theologians appears to centre round such unusual sayings as "we must get rid of the slums." But we very humbly point out that the slums were made while the Churches held full power and were building innumerable churches. The cry to provide decent homes and the desirable amenities of life, did not begin with the Churches, and so far as the English Churches are concerned they derived much profit, monetary and spirituality from the Churches. Money because of the slums owned by the Churches, and secondly by keeping the poor as content as possible.

We think that this paragraph might well be headed "Impudence in high places." Consider: A little while back Professor Joad said that the Church of England was "financed by the State." That was a rather clumsy way of putting it, but it was substantially correct. But Lord Selborne writes to the "Sunday Dispatch" and says quite bluntly that it is not true. And that is most certainly a substantial untruth. For putting on one side the amount of money voted by Parliament for the support of the Church in the early part of the last century, there is the fact that the Church pays no rates or taxes of any kind to the State. There are the levies made by the Church, and those made by the Church on the authority of the State, and one can realise how far from the truth is the statement of Lord Selborne. We may put it down as a religious truth; it certainly is not a secular one.

A good story: A little girl, of religious parents, was afraid of the dark. "Darling," said the mother, "Don't be afraid of the dark, Jesus is with you. When mamma takes away the candle Jesus will be with you." "Oh, mummy," wailed the child, "Can't you take Jesus away and leave the candle?"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 from the West Ham Branch N.S.S. to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

A. JENKINS.—We are quite willing to insert a letter, or even an article criticising some that have appeared in these columns. But writers must bear in mind the fact our space is very restricted.

E. FEASK.—Much obliged for quotations. Will be useful.

G. WILLIAMS.—Thanks for suggestions, but at the moment we have our hands pretty full. The "Bible Handbook" will be reprinted as soon as possible.

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

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

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

On the first morning of August we turned on the wireless just in time to hear the closing words of those foolish sermons that poison the morning air. The speaker was preaching on the miracle of the loaves and fishes, how Jesus faced a hungry "multitude" with only a couple of loaves and a handful of fishes. So Jesus took the banquet in his hand and after he had given thanks his disciples set about distributing the handful of loaves. And there was not merely enough to feed the "multitude," but after they had fed they gathered up seven basketfuls.

How was it done? The preacher explained, "If Jesus was God, as Christians must believe, he would act with a freedom that we have not." That is quite clear—to fools and rogues—if you believe that Jesus was God and God can do anything and everything. Reason is paralysed and common sense is ruled out of court. But did the preacher really believe what he said? We do not care to so insult him, although the alternative is an ugly one. Foolishness has no limits, credulity and ignorance flourish in every community. Christians parade their foolishness in order to demonstrate their love of God. But it is certainly time that this combination of fraud and fiction was banished from our broadcasts. We do not see how we can wipe out roguery and foolishness, but we need see to it that they are not encouraged.

But if the loaves and fishes yarn should be accepted as truth, there was never a better occasion than now when the loaf and fish miracle might be performed with benefit to the world. All over Europe, at least, millions are living on the verge of starvation, or are being underfed, in spite of what may be said by political campaigners and medical "patriots." People may be underfed without being hungry. They may starve with plenty of food around them. If doctors do not know that they should take to street sweeping, or politics. To repeat the New Testament's fish miracle would save the lives of millions and would usher in a period of real peace. "God" has a chance to distinguish Himself, and the B.B.C. to prove that it has some regard for truth and decency. And the preacher we have quoted, well, he probably in his prayers thanks God for what He has given him—but particularly for the fools—and the B.B.C.

The West Ham Branch N.S.S. has made a very promising start towards renewed activity. Plans have been worked out and will be announced when ready. In the meantime the next meeting of members will be held on Tuesday, August 28, in the Stratford Locomotive Men's Hall, 62, Forest Lane, at 7.30 p.m. All members and prospective members are asked to attend. West Ham is a strong Branch but owing to the various calls of national service that strength has had to remain dormant until this call for revival.

Why in the name of all that is sensible do people go down on their knees when they are, or believe they are, talking to God? Of course, that is also the way people approached kings, but originally the God was incarnate in the King, and as a matter of fact the present King is a god as a result of the Westminster performance. The service had nothing to do with making the King, he was King by birth; the ceremony at Westminster had an entirely different significance. The previous King, who was hustled off the throne—the truth about which has never been told—never went through the religious ceremony.

But to get back to our question. Why should people who wish to "commune" with God go down on their knees? To grovel on one's knees is the attitude of a slave, or a fool. We take it that any god worth bothering about would not expect men to grovel, and people with proper self-respect would not do it. One goes on one's knees to look under the bed for a runaway collar stud, but not for a god. The whole attitude is that of a slave. Of course, those who bend the knee do not know what they are doing, but neither does a dog know why it tramps round and round before settling down. The explanation of the dog's is that that was the method of the wild dog making sure that no injurious animal is concealed in the grass. We leave it for readers to draw the conclusion.

When we get beyond the stage of primitive mentality at which man believes that he has discovered God, ever after man is engaged in getting rid of him—piecemeal. He drives his god from one department of activity after another, he strips him of one quality after another until he resembles nothing at all, and does nothing at all. If that is discovering God, it is a process which threatens soon to leave nothing to find out. What man really finds out is his own ignorance of anything about God, and what the religious apologist calls discovering God is in actual truth the recognition by man that all he has thought about the gods has been vain imaginings. Man only finds god at one stage of his existence—the most primitive. After that he finds him out, and that is fatal to all shams.

It is really time that we shook off the stupid superstition that in dealing with the clergy we are facing a body of high-minded men, attracted to the pulpit by love of religion and devotion to the people. That may be quite true of some, but the majority are attracted to the Churches because it offers them a decent income and it gives them a position of some social distinction. Certainly if a large section of the existing clergy were put to the tests that meet young men in the non-religious world, they would come a cropper. The lawyer, the doctor, the engineer give us none of the talk of a "call," and they must earn whatever social standing they achieve. It is sheer humbug from beginning to end. The average priest is one whose parents were only looking for a "job" for him. We would like to hear less talk about "calls," a "sacred profession," their "devotion to the people," etc. Sometimes this may be so, but with the majority it is just humbug.

An editorial in the "Methodist Recorder" remarks that "The Christian man refuses to be satisfied with anything but the best for himself and for his fellows." We agree with all this save the last four words. We have never noted that the majority of comfortably clothed, housed and fed followers of the Lord Jesus trouble very much about the success of others in the fight for material advancement.

FIFTY YEARS OF—?

"Oft expectation fails, and most oft there
Where most it promises; and oft it hits
Where hope is coldest and despair most fits."

I have not too often attended an N.S.S. Freethought Conference, but, when able to do so, I have enjoyed to the full the time among my fellow "Frees." There is—or was—an old Scots saying: "Heaven for Climate but Hell for Company," and, truly, there is no company so rare and fine as that of Freethinkers—past and present. "One and all, they live in us." At least two conferences in which, being at home, I did take part, were particularly interesting because of attempts to "capture" our movement for political purposes. Happily those efforts failed. This year I was able to be present for the first time since Bradford was the favoured place, 1940; and the pleasure was the greater, as it was also the deferred celebrating of an unexpected, but happy event.

Sunday in conference bore all the signs of lively confidence in the increasing influence of Secularism for the Progress of Humankind—Individually and socially. The number of young members with ability and energy who took part was evidence of this; and it was noticeable in the discussions on several subjects, all of general basic importance. The debates proved that, while "Frees." may differ about immediate practical measures of change, they are chiefly concerned with the fundamentals in our social existence. I agreed with one speaker on "Frustration of Life by Religion," who said that socially the most dangerous aspect of this was the "mental" corrupting of youth by the fear that any reasoned resistance, in theory or practice, against Religion's, Godism's, vested interests shall prevent them "getting on in life." It is this fear, breeding mental dishonesty and time serving hypocrisy, of which Professor Joad is the leading—or misleading—lay preacher, and personally, I'd rather have the more crude, but candid, Samuel Smiles of 60 years ago.

In closing the evening meeting, Chapman Cohen—as is his wont—concisely concluded: "As individuals, we may differ about some of the obstacles against human progress; but, as Secularists, we have chosen to fight against the most powerful obstacle of all—that is religion." Of the Freethinker it is true: "Our march is everlasting till time's march be done."

On the Saturday and Monday, having a good look round various parts, something was seen of the damage done to London town. I had seen bombed areas in Clydeside, but otherwise I have lived—physically—in regions that suffered no attack. Being "wise in time," a way was made eight years ago to a district more secure. Thus the great open spaces on both sides of "Old Father Thames," marking the places devastated by fearful fire from above, visually emphasised the truths I understood—by "mental processes"—long years ago. Without disparaging the courage of the people in other areas, we must pay a tribute to those of Greater London who bore the brunt of these prolonged attacks with such steadfast courage and fought their way through to victory. Long live the "Coekney!"

All this leads to what "ought" to be the burning, the "No. 1 Priority," question for all who think at all. It is a problem for which the answer "ought" easily to be reached; yet few seem even to desire to try to solve it. Fifty years ago there was a bright prospect of a developing sanity in our public affairs. How is it then that during those 50 years we "drifted"—that is the only suitable verb—along to the Boer War; to the first period, 1914-18 of the world struggle—military, economic and ideologic; to the second period 1919-31; to the third period, 1931-39, during which we slid down towards Fascism and war; to the fourth period, now near an end, with far greater terror, death and suffering, even than in the first?

I write a few days after the 5th July, but before the election results are known. The Party-Political point of view is the

short, immediate, one of those engaged in a pitched battle in a long campaign; with that I am not concerned at present. The Scientific Atheist Philosophy, of which Chapman Cohen is, and has been, the chief exponent in all these years, enables us to have an evolutionary sociology which "explains" the evolution of human social existences, at least as effectively as evolutionary biology "explains" the evolution of human individual existences, i.e., the individual humans male and female. By that means, in scientific analysis, we can trace the forces and processes, economic and ideologic, which have conditioned the political events during these 60 years or so.

In this election the Tory Party stood on the same ideas as those of 62 years ago; the Labour Party on the same ideas as 52 years, or more, ago; the Liberal Party as 61 years ago, plus the social reforms which economic-political conditions compelled Campbell-Bannerman to introduce; while the British Communist Party is now, in many respects, in the same position as that of Keir Hardie and the I.L.P. in 1893-94, when he advocated independent political unity on a practical basis, of all "Workers by Head and Hand, irrespective of nationality, colour, creed or sex." Lack of space, time and desire prevents me dealing with the smaller "fancy parties," as the R.S.M. would call 'em, which often serve economic cum ideologic vested interests diametrically opposite from what appears on the surface.

Can a scientific analysis enable us to understand this seemingly peculiar sequence of events, in which the two most terrible wars in history have, apparently, merely revived the political ideas of 50 years ago? If so, in what way are we, as British Secularists concerned; and in what way has British Freethought in and outside the N.S.S. been a factor in this Sociological Evolution?

"... our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues."

ATHOSO ZENOO.

THE FUTURE OF MAN

IN times of crisis, such as that through which we are now passing so painfully there are always a number of people who produce nostrums which purport to explain the signs of the times, and in these days the majority of these short-cuts to prosperity are anti-scientific and pro-religious. They range from the absurd crudities of the British Israelites to the subtle propaganda of C. S. Lewis or Dr. Joad. One which has attracted no little attention in recent months is the book entitled "The Annihilation of Man," by Leslie Paul (Faber and Faber; 8s. 6d.), which was published last year. This belongs to the more subtle kinds of pro-religious propaganda, and a good deal of the case which it makes out is sound. The early part of the book contains a detailed analysis of the state of affairs which led in 1939 to war between Britain and Nazi Germany, and, though some parts of the argument are vitiated by an extreme anti-Marxist bias, much which is said is so clear as not to leave room for argument.

It is in the later, more theoretical portion of the volume that Mr. Paul ventures on ground so controversial as not to command anything approaching general assent. Briefly, he argues that science has progressed too fast, and that the growth of Materialism in our day has made people so permanently pessimistic that there is little or no hope in their lives. Hence, he adds, the growth of dictatorship here and abroad, since a leader does give his followers something really concrete to build on. This, of course, completely ignores the absence of a concrete programme in all dictators' policies, apart from a hero-worship of the dictator himself, whether he be Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, or Churchill in Britain. In fact, a

more convincing case could be made out to suggest that dictatorship grows largely as a result of the feebleness of statesmanship in the face of the challenge of scientific discovery.

Mr. Paul goes on to argue that it is necessary to have a return to the traditional Christian philosophy if there is to be any future constructiveness in the world, and not, as his title suggests, a complete annihilation of the human race. This argument arises from the usual confusion of morals with religion which has been seen in half a hundred books from as many Christian writers in the past few years.

In fact, in spite of the enormous success which has been made by "The Annihilation of Man" there is nothing at all new in the book. It merely repeats what has already been said in such previous volumes as Mr. Michael Roberts's "The Recovery of the West" or Dr. Joad's "God and Evil." This is merely a new variation on an old theme. Its attempt to tie up pro-Christian philosophy with anti-scientific ideas and a political analysis which is moderately acute is a little new. But I do not think that this new streak is sufficient to justify any Freethinker spending eight shillings and sixpence on the book.

S. H.

THE TRIAL OF ANNA SCHMIDT

WHAT are our war aims? This question has often been asked but never definitely answered although many replies are on record. In its issue of July 1, the Sunday newspaper "The People" published a description of Allied Military Government in occupied Germany. Amongst other things, the correspondent stressed the efficiency of the legal administration in dealing with Germans who offend against regulation. He gave a first hand account of how Anna Schmidt, of the Hitler Youth Movement, was tried and sentenced by the Military Court. Charged with carrying on Nazi propaganda, she was sentenced, as a warning to all Germans that they must in future obey the laws of God, not those of any party.

This Nazi Youth leader it appears was tried by a court consisting of a Canadian officer as president with two other officers. The correspondent goes on:—

"The Military Government justice was severe but fair, and most impressive. In that biting Canadian accent the president addressed the prisoner. 'Schmidt, you say you looked on the Nazi Party as your parent, having no mother. From now on, Germans will follow the laws of God and not the laws of a party. You will get justice from this court but you will have time to think about your future.'"

Anna Schmidt got eight months imprisonment. So this German girl goes to prison to learn to obey the laws of God!

Now I am not defending the Germans, but this savours of the Inquisition. Such a pronouncement may well have come from a Judge Jeffreys, or a court under the old Holy Roman Empire. Have we then helped to destroy a continent, murder millions, throw Western civilisation into chaos to assert the superstition of a remote desert tribe which wallowed in obscenity some 5,000 years ago?

When one recalls National Days of Prayer, sermons by Generals, Admirals, Air Chiefs and Prime Ministers, one cannot help wondering if, in reporting this minor trial of an obscure Nazi, the newsman has unwittingly told us at last our true war aims. The Nazi Party is, quite rightly, outlawed. But Anna Schmidt was not punished for following an illegal party, but for following any party except God's.

Surely this Canadian president would not have made such a statement off his own bat. If he did, he is obviously unfit to sit in judgment over anybody. But one can see deeper.

British and American imperialism is evidently God's party. It is well known that the horrors of Nazidom emanated from the

conviction of millions of Germans that Hitler was deputed by God to save Germany, and thus could not lose. To do this, however, he would have had to crush British and American imperialism. This, of course, could never be contemplated, so we fought, and beat him, transferring God's command to our own side, after we had won!

I rarely quote myself, but two years ago I wrote in this journal the following on the Atlantic Charter: "Of course, it must be the Bible God as the authors know him, or, to be more exact, as He will be when the authors have made their post-war adjustments to him. Hence, the Charter aims at a new 'Herrenvolk' in the new world, the Fascists of the Bible."

So beware, you party followers in Britain. You may yet taste of this justice which is "severe, but fair and most impressive." But what a come-down for God!

G. L. C.

CORRESPONDENCE

REFLEX ACTIONS AND INSTINCTS.

SIR.—In a recent article you state that "instinct is quite a misleading term at its best, more than any other term . . ." Of course, when the word "instinct" is coupled to religion in the sense (or nonsense) of "a religious instinct" it is misleading, and, indeed, has no meaning. It is suggested that many of your readers may require amplification of the statement that use of the term "instinct" "is responsible for muddled thinking, and for the glorification of downright ignorance." For example, what did Darwin mean when he said that "Conscience is the most noble of all the instincts of man?" J. Howard Moore, in his admirable little book "Savage Survivals" uses the word instinct in dealing with all vestigial "instincts" in living matter, i.e., as distinct from plant life. As Goethe said, "More light," please.—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

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.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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, 6.45 p.m., Mr. G. THOMPSON will lecture.

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

Crawshawbooth (Lanes.).—Friday, August 10, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., a lecture.

Hapton (Lancs.).—Monday, August 13, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON 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. and 7 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.

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

Read (Lancs.).—Wednesday, August 15, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

CATHOLIC INFLUENCE IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE recent sordid facts in the case of Cecil Basil Whelan at Stoke-on-Trent should be sufficient to enlighten the public mind and bring to notice the dangers of Catholic influence in public affairs to-day.

Generally speaking, the Catholic Church in Great Britain is regarded by many non-Catholics as being simply a clerical institution which, although differing in its views to the majority, is quite harmless and amenable to the principles of Democracy. Many British Catholics would be indignant were it even suggested that, as Roman Catholics, they had forfeited their rights of criticism and free speech, or that indirectly they were supporters of the evils of Fascism and Nazism against which we have been struggling for so long. Nevertheless, they would be justified in their indignation, for they have never really learned the true state of affairs outside the highly towering walls of the bastions of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not their fault that such a shocking state of education is their legacy from their religious persuasions. Still, though truth hurts in many cases it is necessary quite often that truth must be heard for the general welfare of the community as a whole even to the detriment of a few who must be hurt by it. It is only through Freethinkers—who are prepared to accept the many insults and slurs thrown at them as the result of colossal ignorance—that such truth can be exposed. After all, the Bible refers to Christians as sheep, and as the Roman Catholics are no exception to this reference, they cannot be expected to think much better than sheep. As a Freethinker, therefore, I consider it my duty to place the truth at the disposal of the general public, regardless of slurs and insults from the many so intellectually weak as to be unable to judge truth from lies and those who, already knowing full well the truth, are afraid to admit it openly because of the dangers of losing their personal and ill-gotten gains.

What are the true facts of the Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain? How many people are ruled through fear of the unknown by this mighty international power? In what way does the Catholic Church assert its power and influence so as to affect the lives of us all—Catholic and non-Catholic alike? These are the questions I shall attempt to answer here, and then I shall attempt to expose the efforts of this monstrosity in pious pretence to regain its lost power much to the detriment of all freedom-loving men and women in this country to-day.

It has been repeatedly stated by the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Great Britain that their Church is not concerned with worldly affairs, but only with the spiritual welfare of its flock. From all evidence obtainable it can be definitely proved that such a statement is a base and wicked lie. The Catholic Church is not only interested in worldly affairs, but actually goes out of its way to obtain entry into every political movement in this country so as to eventually gain power and rule with the iron heel of despotic dictatorship. The greatest aim of these enemies of freedom is to transform Great Britain into a Catholic Power just like the Fascist States. Their greatest goal is world domination by the Church. Such a goal, once reached by these would-be despots, would be sufficient to throw civilisation back to the Dark Ages. Such countries as Spain and Portugal know only too well what such a thing means, for in spite of Catholic protests and denials, the people of those countries are, even to-day, experiencing torture, prison, bad conditions and starvation all in the sacred and holy name of the Roman Catholic Church. The methods towards achieving world domination have always been the same, and have been many and various. They range from suppression of the truth, distorted facts, deliberate lying propaganda, infiltration into political bodies and trade union organisations, and even torture and murder where necessary. As a minority the Catholics are a powerful and

dangerous body. Only as recent as 1939 their methods of infiltration into the trade union movement were exposed repeatedly. Their priests are first guided in their actions by the Vatican and subsequently the poor dupes—the simple and ignorant masses who form the congregations—are instructed from the pulpit. How many people know that it is regarded as a sin for a Roman Catholic to vote Socialist or Communist? The Press is, to a large extent, controlled through a subversive system of Catholic censorship. Newspapers depending on advertisements from Catholic combines, etc., dare not publish true facts of the Catholic menace for obvious reasons. And this, in a land whose inhabitants boast of the freedom of the Press! Wherever Catholic councillors hold sway it is impossible for local library committees to place such journals as "The Freethinker" or any other anti-clerical literature inside local libraries. In 1935 I approached such a committee, but it was only as a result of "accidentally" leaving my "Freethinker" behind when I visited the local library that I was able to put over the views of that journal to the general public.

There are approximately 2,000,000 Catholics in this country to-day, and every one is an enemy of freedom and progress whether conscious or unconscious of the fact. That 2,000,000 has the means to change the whole political outlook of this country through the apathy or ignorance of non-Catholics and their inability or weakness to fight the menace. The Catholics are a minority, but then so were the Germans in Czechoslovakia! It has been said that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. That is always true in a society that contains a Catholic minority.

Fortunately the number of Catholics is on the down grade, but even so, the danger exists. Through blackmail one man can bleed a thousand victims, and one Catholic given sufficient power, may sway the opinion of thousands. Now is the time—when the strength of the Roman Church is in depreciation—for all Freethinkers to keep stern vigil. Not only is it necessary to point out the dangers of this menace, but it is essential to instil as much knowledge as possible into the minds of Catholics who carry out the orders of their Church in all good faith due to ignorance. These poor misguided people need a complete re-education. Until then we cannot hope to live in a real Democracy free from intrigue and Vatican influence, and the poison of hatred that leads to strife. When the Dictator of Rome has no further influence over any of the British population, then we shall be nearer to a free and more intellectual and truly intelligent population. It is then that conditions for the masses must of necessity be changed for the common good. Education and enlightenment are the greatest weapons with which to fight against the influence of the Roman Church. They are the weapons of which that Church is mortally afraid.

LOUIS ROMANIA.

THE MORAL LANDSLIDE. An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Modern Youth. By F. J. Corina. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES, to which is added THE LAW OF NATURE. By C. F. Volney. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an introduction. Price, post free, 5s. 2d.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST, by J. M. Wheeler. Price Cloth 4s.; postage 3d.

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

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

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.