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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Finding God

A COMPLETE understanding of Man must take in all men, black and white, brown and yellow, wise and foolish, good and bad. Only on that basis can we ever learn to understand human nature as a whole. Shakespeare paid almost as much attention to his fools as he did to other characters, and put much shrewdness in their mouths. He studied humanity as a whole. Ordinary men deal with it in sections, and the result is often misunderstanding. It is good to study fools; they will often repay the time spent—if we are shrewd enough to appreciate the problem before us.

I am writing this by way of apology for my not paying adequate attention to those gems of folly that the B.B.C. arrange as a talk on religion every morning at 7.55. A very interesting game might be created as to whether the speaker is (a) a born fool, or (b) an intelligent rogue who pretends to be a simpleton.

It was on August 2 that I was reminded I had neglected the opportunity of analysing the finest dose of religious nonsense that had ever come my way. The remarkable thing was that it ran in line with another similar incident a few weeks earlier. Together they certainly deserve to be immortalised. I see no reason for giving wisdom complete control of the platform. Both of these persons—clergymen—were concerned with searching for God, and I think come under that heading, at least I am interested in gods, and so far as that is concerned, the preachers would find me a quite willing subject. I certainly have no objection to meeting God, and he can have no reasonable objection to meeting me. I have never blamed him for bad weather, or for a shipwreck or a volcanic eruption, as so many of his followers do, by imputation. If I am one of God's children, I have never given my parents a moment's trouble.

The first of these two B.B.C. preachers pressed upon his listeners the importance of *finding* God; and wound up by saying that "we must not merely look for God, but we must be sure that we have the *right* God." This looked like a very simple thing, but examination proved it to be a very knotty one. Suppose, for example, after listening to this exhortation, I set out to find God—any God to start with—how can I be sure that I have found one? I do not know what a God looks like or feels like, and whatever I am looking for, I must have some kind of an idea of what it is. After all, recognition is re-cognition, that is, it is either a repetition of something previously seen, or it falls into line with a description given. But the nearest I have ever come to seeing a god was when I once paid a visit to an asylum and saw a man who believed he was an incarnation of Jesus Christ, just that and nothing more.

The attendant told me he was quite harmless. That is the nearest I have ever been to a god. To my own knowledge I have never met a god, and I fail to see how I should recognise one if I fell across him.

If I am walking in the City, I may say of the people passing "That man looks like a lawyer," or "an actor," or "an athlete," because the characters of their occupation may be written on them. But by what means can I prove the identity of a god? How can I say that I have come across a god? Of course, there are some tangible gods, black, white, yellow, some with animal heads, etc., but that is not the kind of god that is believed in by our B.B.C. preachers. They will tell us that God is a spirit, and that may mean no more than that he evaporates into nothingness the moment you analyse him. There are many spirits of that kind.

The difficulty here is plain. I cannot go out looking for a god unless I know what a god looks like. The only picture of him that I have ever seen is in a large 17th-century Bible, in which God is pictured as a stoutly built man of about forty, with flowing hair and robes, dividing the light from the darkness by pushing them on opposite sides. But I cannot expect to find that kind of thing in any part of London, neither can I rush up to a man and ask him whether he is the kind of God mentioned by the B.B.C. preachers. I should possibly be marched off by a policeman to the nearest station, where I would be put through some medical examination.

I really would like to meet the *right* kind of God. He is the only one that I could enjoy a talk with, and I can hardly be accused of conceit if I say that I suspect any decent God would much rather talk to a decent-minded Atheist than to one of the foolish B.B.C. preachers.

God and Co-operation

The other preacher, the August 2 one, worked along another line. He had no doubt that he had the right kind of God, and he seemed quite certain that he knew his character through and through, but his God appeared to be one of the limited quality sort. The preacher did not stress the power of God, he seemed more concerned about his weakness. We might call him the "Limited power God." The last words of his sermon ran thus. (It really was about all I heard, but it was important, and pulled me up with a jerk.) He said that the key word was "co-operation," but it was not co-operation of man with man, it was the co-operation of man with God. Here are his exact words: "The key word to-day is co-operation. God can do nothing without your co-operation." That was alarming, but I do not recall it being stated by any other preacher. It reminds one of the appeals of political parties before the election of a new Parliament. It sounded also like an echo that we have heard for five years from the

Government—to co-operate in the war by doing this or that. This preacher had no fear of our picking up the wrong God; he was concerned only with getting followers who would lend God a helping hand. Apparently God cannot do anything with us, or for us, or for himself, unless we co-operate. Or he may be afraid that the people will turn on him and say: "You made the world, you made us. You could have made both different if you had felt so inclined, but you did not, and now you ask us to co-operate with you to set *your* world straight. How are we to know that you will be able to straighten things out, even if we do co-operate by lending a helping hand? Beside, if we do lend a helping hand, if we do co-operate, can we be certain that we shall get the credit for the work done? In earthly matters we have worked while others reaped glory for *our* labour. And it was not you who turned an uninhabitable land to fruitfulness. It was Man. It was Man who found cures for the evils you created. It was we who turned swamps into habitable places. It was you who legalised slavery, it was Man who gave the slaves freedom. Whatever evil we committed we did most of it out of sheer ignorance. But you did evil deliberately. If you made Man, you must take the responsibility for whatever ill-work Man has done. And now you offer us forgiveness if we will help you in your decline. Man has done his best, and if his best has fallen short of what he would like to achieve, the fault does not lie with him. You boasted that you made everything. You must take the consequence of your confession. Mankind has learned slowly, but it *has* learned, and the outcome of his learning is that Man must, and will, work out his own salvation." It is all very puzzling, and we must leave it at that.

Religion in Action

I have been writing in a sarcastic vein, but we have reached a stage where it is very difficult to take the gods seriously. I have certainly retained a serious attitude under the veil of sarcasm. If God exists, and if he is worthy of respect, he should certainly thank me for my criticism of the early morning clowns who offer men an insult in the name of God. I would end these notes with another example of the way in which God-worship shames mankind.

We have been going through one of the most blood-thirsty wars the world has ever seen. The people who have been engaged in this war have been, mainly, worshippers of God, but I think that if I were a Christian I would not brag about it—for two reasons. First, because the soldiers belonged to different countries, they were of different religions, and a great many were of no religion at all. They were reasoned Atheists. Second, it is a war that stands alone for its savagery. It will leave its mark on the peoples of the world for generations. The essential feature is not who started this war, the essential question is whether the leading countries will each outlaw war as a method of overcoming differences. Multiplying the number and quality of weapons will never bring peace. No danger can be so great that people will not take the risk of facing it. If we cannot take this lesson to heart we shall have missed the most important lesson of the world war. Consider the following:—

Into a little Sussex village there recently marched 400 battle-worn soldiers. They were in full dress, and they

had gone through some of the fiercest fighting of the war. Four hundred marched home, natives of this village, but from that same village 1,200 had marched out. Their bodies were buried in foreign soil. The 400 were gladly welcomed, but that welcome must have been mixed with tears on all sides. The ghosts of that missing 800 marched side by side with the 400 through the village. It would have been well had the men, after reaching their homes, silently dispersed.

But the 400 marched to the village church. For what purpose? The men who survived did not wish for praise. If tested, the dominant thought of that 400 would be the memory of those whom they had known from childhood and are dead. I decline, in the absence of convincing evidence, to believe otherwise. I do not believe that the men of the 400 desired to march into church to thank God for saving *them* without wondering why God did not save the other 800. They also had parents, wives, children and friends. What did God do in the direction of saving all? The men who came through the war would be the first to disclaim that they were better than those who were lying in foreign soil, and more than a few would be thinking "Why, if God could do so much, did he not do more?"

That the 400 were pleased to be home is certain, but that is a different thing to marching into church to thank God for saving *them* and doing nothing for the rest of their friends. It was not a moment for displayed gladness; there was no need to emphasise the sorrow of others by parading the good fortune of some. If there be a God, it was an occasion for his indictment. And in one way and another many of those men who marched into church, and also many who welcomed the homecomers, must have felt it.

The shame of it is that some of the finest feeling of men and women should be so used for the upholding of a primitive superstition.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF MONKERY

THE story of Christian monasticism is startling and instructive. While the world in general was mainly concerned in mundane affairs, many enthusiasts who wished to escape from the duties of domestic life fled to a hermit existence in the Egyptian desert where with prayer, fasting, laceration and other austerities they might make themselves fit subjects for salvation in the world to come.

As the great Gibbon noted: "The Ascetics who obeyed and abused the rigid precepts of the gospel, were inspired by the savage enthusiasm, which represents man as a criminal and God as a tyrant. They seriously renounced the business and the pleasures of the age; abjured the use of wine, of flesh, and of marriage, chastened the body, mortified their affections, and embraced a life of misery, as the price of eternal happiness." These morbid conditions for some time prevailed, but the rigours of monastic life were gradually relaxed, until the monks became notorious for their easy and affluent lives, and little resembled their austere and penurious predecessors.

In the third century of our era, monasticism was introduced into the Christian world, and was apparently of Oriental origin. Paul of Thebes and St. Anthony were the earliest anchorites whose names have descended to us. But these victims of religious mania are so shrouded in myth and miracle in the legends concerning them, that it is difficult to distinguish fact

from fiction. There is, however, sufficient evidence to justify Professor Westfall Thompson's pronouncement that: "In their excessive austerities, dwelling with vermin and sitting amid filth, eating revolting food or starving for days, in the belief that such mortification of the flesh edified the spirit, Paul and Anthony made an orgy of asceticism and isolation. Ignorant and illiterate they confounded a sane sensuousness with sensuality, and counted beauty an enemy of holiness. They condemned cleanliness and comfort as self-indulgence, and exalted privation and poverty as expiations."

In the fourth century, cloistral communities largely replaced the rigours of hermit existence. One Thebaid, an Egyptian, retired to the desert where his solitary experiences disillusioned him when he witnessed the insanity of other anchorites, and he then advised the creation of monastic groups in which solitude might be alleviated.

Communities of monks and nuns then spread through the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The earlier harsh discipline was lightened, and contemplation was supplemented by labour which must not be evaded as detrimental to devotion. Personal possessions were so far forbidden, but husbandry and domestic occupations were deemed praiseworthy among the monks.

The objectives of those who separated themselves from the busy world of men were purely self-regarding. Although it was partly a protest against the ever increasing avarice and ostentation of the clergy, the predominant desire of every ascetic was the safeguarding of his own soul. The monks were almost invariably indifferent to the welfare of others and even their meagre charitable activities were intended as an insurance against the torments of hell. Also, monasticism acted as a disintegrating force in a State tottering towards extinction. As Dr. Thompson intimates, "the government showed alarm over the numbers withdrawn from shops and crafts, and legislated to prevent men from evading military service through becoming monks especially when there was most need for troops. Again, the monks were far more fanatical than the secular clergy and incited the populace to violence and riot against heretics and pagans."

It is noteworthy that the last struggles of a dying Paganism coincided with the rise and development of monkery. All the literary, artistic and scientific splendours of ancient centuries—all their culture was Pagan in spirit. But the unwashed, ignorant and intolerant monks indiscriminately doomed all these treasures to unpitied destruction. As Dr. Thompson mournfully observes: "The spoliation of the temples, the destruction of exquisite works of ancient art, the burning of libraries—notably the second Alexandrian library—the persecution of peaceful and cultivated philosophic scholars, the ban upon classical literature, the ruffianism of mobs—such as that which tore Hypatia to pieces—all these sinister and malignant deeds, were instigated by fanatical monks."

Monks and Nuns were supposed to lead celibate lives, but before the advent of monachism matrimony was to some extent deemed incompatible with the priestly office. But for the first three centuries of our era, the greater part of the clergy were married. In the fourth century, however, orthodox opinion became distinctly opposed to wedded prelates while allowing wives to the lower clergy. During the seventh century, deacons and priests were still permitted matrimony, but married bishops were ordered to put away their spouses and bachelor bishops were forbidden wedlock. This rule is that still operative in the Greek Church. "In the East," states Ayer, "the parish clergy have always been married; the bishops formerly married have long since been exclusively of the unmarried clergy. The clergy who do not marry become monks."

From the fourth century onwards, successive Latin Church Councils condemned a married priesthood but their admonitions were constantly disregarded.

Although hermits existed, there was no organised community of monks in Western Europe until the sixth century. St. Benedict was the real founder of the monastic system in the West. As an adolescent, Benedict was afflicted with religious hysteria with its accompanying hallucinations. His later asceticism caused him to be regarded as a chosen vessel of God, and many converts were his.

The site selected for the first Benedictine monastery was at Monte Cassino, midway between Naples and Rome, and here a monastery was erected from the ruins of an ancient temple of Apollo. The evils of Egyptian monachism Benedict strove to avoid, and the Benedictine Rule became the model of every subsequent monastic order.

Italy soon abounded in reports of Benedict's miraculous powers and the Roman Church became infected with his missionary zeal. Pope Gregory, who dispatched Augustine to Britain for the conversion of the heathen Saxons was himself a Benedictine who advised a policy of conciliation when dealing with the unconverted. So with the conversion of Kent, Sussex, Anglia, Essex, Wessex and other districts, the heathen fanes and their sacred possessions were converted into Christian Churches and their heathen customs adapted to the new creed.

The weird observances of monastic life were brought from Egypt to Rome by Athanasius. The uncouth appearance and demeanour of his Egyptian companions at first aroused disgust and contempt in cultivated Roman society. Still, energetic propaganda at last succeeded in winning adherents. Sage senators and more frequently, staid matrons, transformed their palaces and villas into religious sanctuaries, and many monastic structures were erected on the ruins of Pagan temples.

Gibbon has shown how a virtual idolatry of monks and nuns pervaded the Roman world in its declining days. The enormous increase in the number of anchorites became a deadly menace to the safety of the State. Each novice who deserted the duties of domestic life was assured that in discarding the world he was purchasing a passport for paradise. The great historian of the Decline and Fall notes the meek and lowly demeanour, real or feigned, of those who had renounced the pomps and vanities of the profane world, who were afterwards chosen for religious rule in the mundane sphere itself. In any event: "The reluctant hermit was torn from his cell and seated amid the acclamations of the people on the episcopal throne; the monasteries of Egypt, of Gaul, and of the east supplied a regular succession of saints and bishops; and ambition soon discovered the secret road which led to the possession of wealth and honours. The popular monks assiduously laboured to multiply the number of their fellow captives. They insinuated themselves into noble and opulent families; and the specious arts of flattery and seduction were employed to secure proselytes. . . . One indignant father bewailed the loss, perhaps, of an only son; and the credulous maid was betrayed by vanity to violate the laws of nature, and the matron aspired to imaginary perfection by renouncing the virtues of domestic life."

Women who afterwards died in the odour of sanctity were known to have deserted their infant children to gain their own salvation. Moreover, the miracles, the faith cures and other marvels that were ascribed to saintly recluses were so devoutly cherished by the credulous multitude that they amaze the modern mind.

No wonder then that the light of science and philosophy was extinguished during this long reign of mental darkness. Well might Gibbon conclude that: "If it be possible to measure the interval between the philosophic writings of Cicero and the sacred legend of Theodoret, between the character of Cato and that of Simeon, we may appreciate the memorable revolution which was accomplished in the Roman Empire within a period of five hundred years."

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

Sympathy is demanded for the Bishop of Burnley. We learn from the "Burnley Express" of August 1, that on a certain Sunday, when the Archbishop of York preached there, it was to an audience of 600. But, alas, on the Sunday after the congregation amounted to six. We are not surprised at the general statement, but we expect that six and six hundred need not be taken literally. The truth of the matter is that people who are opposed to religion will go to see an archbishop in full war paint, just as crowds will gather to see a king, or a queen, or a princess, or a multi-millionaire, or the trial of a multi-murderer, or any other thing out of the ordinary. The people love a show, and that goes from the kings to dustmen.

The real fact is that interest in religion is steadily dying. That is, so far as the ancient belief in religion is concerned. A preacher who stuck to religion would soon find his congregation among the Bishop's "sixes." Even if a preacher appeared in church in an ordinary dress, and set aside communal singing, he would soon find his church full of emptiness. The Bishop of Burnley says that with most people "a holiday from work means a holiday from worship of God." But that is only common sense. A holiday is received with joy and carried out with pleasure; neither of these qualities are manifest in going to Church.

The semi, probably unconscious, humorist who must arouse many a smile once a week by pretending to give a sermon to the readers of the "Daily Telegraph," says that "To deny that we have the power to choose between right and wrong is to surrender our birthright." Of course, the catch here is that no one ever disputes that we have the power to do this or that. The only question is "Why do we choose this or that?" It is a pity that some of our newspaper humorists do not study the Rev. J. B. Ashby. His humour and subtlety is miles in front of Fleet Street product.

The Vicar of St. James's, West Road Clapham, asks appealingly, "How can we win the masses back again?" Well, the answer is "You can't." You may be able to prevent a man finding the truth about religion, but once he knows the truth the parsonic game is up.

The Vicar, Mr. J. Bloxam, goes on to say, "The Church is not a club where people can meet together for their own satisfaction." But if they do not come to Church for that reason, what other impulse can they have? The fact is that Christianity is being found out among the people, and if the people break loose, the Churches not alone suffer from their absence, but they lose those who look upon keeping the common people in order as one of their main functions. The Churches are being found out.

If ever the evil that Christianity has inflicted on the world is carefully estimated—and published—its offences against the intellectual life of man will take first place. It commenced with a theory that began by damning men for wrong belief, and so made the critical use of the intellect the most dangerous of indulgences.

So soon as it had the power, the torture and the stake summed up its method. It burned, it tortured, it oppressed, it made speaking what one believed the greatest of sins. The fool could always be sure of heaven, the genius ran the risk of hell. For the essential evil was that the Christian killed the better specimens of men and women and left the poorer specimens to propagate the race. It created and perpetuated an environment which made for lying, for brutality, for ignorance. We are still suffering from this policy. We could have more truth and less lying than we have if we are stern enough to demand it. But to get it we must break the power of a system that has been one of the greatest blights in the history of the modern world.

After boasting for some years about the millions of "Catholic Truth" pamphlets circulated, Archbishop Griffin appears to be rather doubtful of their value. He says that "Treatises are not wanted, while people will not read Papal Encyclicals." We are not surprised at what the Archbishop says, but we do not think he has put the situation plainly and honestly. We fancy that it is not the case that rank-and-file Roman Catholics will not read the prepared pamphlets. A great many of them, having read them, and in their zeal tried to convert others, they come against situations the existence of which they never dreamed of. Set any Christian at work to convince a non-Christian by argument and an appeal to history, and the transfer from the believing to the unbelieving side sets in. The only hope of the Churches, and especially the Roman Church, is to keep the people from disputing. Many gods and a multitude of churches have paid heavily by letting their people discover the truth.

The Waltons—husband and wife—charged with ill-treatment of children, offered for defence the testimony of a local clergyman, who said they were very good church workers and were regular church attendants. On the other side, the Judge described them as "inhuman," and for some time the Waltons will have plenty of time to consider the value of the Bible advice: "Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beat him with a rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with a rod." The Waltons will now be able to consider what ought to be said of the Judge, who so patently sets the Holy Scriptures on one side.

Nine Labour and six Conservative Members of Parliament are the Roman Catholics returned at the recent election. In the last Government the number of Roman Catholics numbered 21. The Roman Catholic does not appear to be overjoyed over the part these members will play. What he would like to see is obviously a strong Catholic party that would submit tamely to the orders from without.

At a recent meeting of the Church Union Mr. R. O'Sullivan traced the growth of Secularism through Marchillo of Padua, Machiavelli and Thomas Cromwell. Of course, one may exercise considerable laxity in such a calculation, but "Secularism" as a fact goes back much farther. Its roots were planted in ancient Greece; by name, it is the Catholic Church that created the distinction. The Christian Church developed amidst a people that had not separated the gods from ordinary social life. But the Christian Church, as a Church, stood as a State within a State, and it was the Church itself that labelled the Secular power from the religious one. With the downfall of the Roman Empire the Secular power and the Spiritual one marked a clear line of separation.

There was, in fact, no part played—officially—by the secular power in religion. There was no State Church until the Reformation. The Church could use its spiritual power against the State, and did use it to disaster. But the Church as an independent power against the State provided all sorts of evils, and they will not cease to do so until the Church is treated, in both theory and fact, to be cut off from the secular State. That revolution has taken place in Russia, and Russia is all the better for it.

We take it that the Bishop of Chichester has a sense of humour. At least, we can hardly think that he meant the following seriously. It was a piece of news given to his congregation and reprinted by the "Eastbourne Gazette":—

"God is knocking at the door of the world, which is closed against Himself, and he says: 'Attend, O modern world to me, answer my knocking, O modern society. If you will open the door I will come in and sup with you, and you with Me.'"

But if God wishes to get in, if he has the persistency of a rates collector, who is to stop him? A parent never waits for his child to find him, or to find what is the best way to walk or to eat. He takes good care that it shall find the way. At any rate, we can arrange the visit, we will leave the door wide open and offer him every kindness. But perhaps the Bishop was just joking.

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SUGAR PLUMS

A new reader of "The Freethinker," who pays us the compliment of saying that he does not agree with our outlook on Christianity, but reads much of our paper with interest and pleasure, asks whether we really think that Jesus was an impostor. Of course we do not. There were, of course, a great many religious rogues even a couple of thousand years ago, and some of the Roman and Greek satirists were quick enough to expose them. But we are certain that if Jesus had appeared for the first time in the twentieth century, and had claimed to be and to do what is claimed for the New Testament character, he would have run a risk of being put under control.

After all, as we have so often pointed out, the past cannot judge the present; but the present can, should and does judge the past. Indeed, it is only the past that we can judge, and we can judge it only in terms of the present. The Roman Church can give us miracles to-day because it produces them to-day. It brings angels from heaven, it can set the sun dancing in the heavens, transform wine into actual blood, a piece of consecrated bread into the flesh of Jesus. And so long as it can do these things it can have "honest" followers. But if we judge the New Testament by what we know to-day, then we must place the Christian religion with the other creeds of the world.

Many years ago—a good fifty years ago—we remember a prominent Christian preacher summed up, in sarcasm, the attitude taken by Freethinkers. Here it is:—

"Jesus of Nazareth. Born in the minds of a few fanatics. Lived and died in a dark and superstitious age. Died from undue exposure to the light of modern thought, and amid lamentations of his followers."

That was written by a Christian attempting sarcasm. But that was a dangerous trick, for the sarcasm has become solid historic fact.

Harrow and District Freethinkers are informed that the recent effort to form a local branch of the N.S.S. had to be postponed because of National Service and other calls. There is now every prospect for a successful effort and will those willing to help communicate with Mr. R. Lynn, 66, Parkfield Crescent, South Ruislip, Middlesex.

POISON GAS IS ILLEGAL — ATOMIC BOMBS ARE APPROVED

IT is to the credit of the public that the news on the afternoon of August 8 informing the world that the Japanese city of Hiroshima had been annihilated by a single atomic bomb was received with the utmost solemnity. Conversation showed that it was not the number of people killed that impressed people, but the nature of the killing, the fact is it was Japan that was the target to-day. Who can say who will be the target to-morrow? The secret of the bomb cannot even be confined to one country; others are said to be already informed on the matter. One distinguished scientist has already said that there is no great secret involved. Experiments in all parts of the world have been made, and members of more than one country have been concerned in procuring the atomic bomb. More than one country will also be prepared to use it when the occasion arises. The example has been set. The last mark of the dignity of war has been destroyed. No great courage will be required for the use of the atomic bomb. Those who handle it will not be able to even see the extent of the slaughter. It is mechanical war, in its most horrible form, exhibiting its full power.

The end of the war is near—it may be over before these lines are read. What then? Some few years of a more or less semi-peaceful world will follow. What use will be made of the lull? The first task of each independent country will be to see that their weapons of war—including atomic bombs—are ready. Those countries who arm are not suspecting anyone in particular, but every country will rank as a possible enemy, and it is against possibilities that all must prepare. In these peace times the making of flying bombs will be as regular an industry as the manufacturing of Christmas crackers. Probably there will be small need to have standing armies or to send them abroad. Germany before her downfall was talking of sending bombs to the U.S.A., and there was nothing theoretically impossible in that threat. The shooting of the future may even be done from home. The sanction given to the use of atomic bombs has stripped war of all its "glories," and marks miscellaneous killing as perfectly proper. The world war has shown armed conflict at its greatest and at its worst. But you cannot marry the higher social qualities by wiping out old and young, good and bad, with complete immunity. To-day, we now call the dropping of atomic bombs war; we are afraid history will give it an uglier name.

What then is the remedy? Or, is there one? Or must it be along the road that means retrogression in fact; however else we may describe it. What is to be done?

I think there is one way out, and only one. I have been pressing it for about fifty years but without much apparent success. I suggest that each of the "civilised" countries—the uncivilised are not really dangerous—should agree to complete national disarmament and leave the settlement of any disputes that may arise to an international court, which alone should wield sufficient material forces to enforce their decisions. But these courts must have adequate power to enforce their verdicts. The courts now existing have no such power. If one of the disputants refuses to obey the court the case drops. So long as the methods that now obtain are in force, chaos and war will continue, and so long shall we be threatened with wars, or what is almost as bad, perpetual preparation for war.

The plan is, in principle, simple enough. We have seen it in action with regard to a country. Why not apply the method to the international duel? The duellists, like our political leaders, talked much about personal honour and the need to use force against the offender. But, lo and behold, the high-minded duellist, very, very often nothing more than a bully, is dead and society is the safer and the better for it. If one of

these heroes returned to earth and challenged a man to a duel he would just make people laugh. I fail to see that a perpetuation of the international union is of greater value than the national one was. We believe that one day this change will come. Further, I believe it will arrive *via* the education of the "common" people. They will be nearer the facts of life than others who are so dependent upon the perpetuation of what has been.

I have space now but to say that when the noise of the war ceases, history will say that the use of the atomic bomb must be counted as one of the greatest examples of the prostitution of science the world has seen. Already the newspapers have cited the opinions of those who made the atomic bomb possible, they may feel ashamed of the outcome of their labours.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

RELIGION IN GENLAND

READERS of "The Freethinker" have missed my articles. Well, my flight with Captains Stalinovsky and Vereshenke—those intrepid Russian aeronauts and stratonauts, which culminated in my being shot by a rocket over 25,000,000 miles on to the planet Venus, might well curb even a Bernard Shaw's literary activity. (Not that I am a Shaw!) Still, my papers on the Venusians in general and the Genlish people in particular, have been read before the Royal Geographical Society and have excited the Press of the entire world.

Elsewhere I have described those people, so superior, physically and mentally, to the human animals of this earth, and my account of their political activities ranks now with More's "Utopia," Swift's "Gulliver," Butler's "Erewhon," and makes my friend H. G. Wells—that very great writer—with his Martians look like twopennyworth of cold gin. Especially as my tale is true and owes nothing to my lack of imagination.

Here I have only time and space to give some account of religion amongst the Genlish people. The Church of Genland is, of course, vastly inferior to my own dear Church of England in whose ample, if slightly eructating, bosom, I found refuge at my baptism. Just as Genland itself like any other land (and I daresay the New Jerusalem itself) is vastly inferior, as patriotism and good sense teach us, to the land in which we are accidentally born—in my case, my beloved motherland of England, which God and Winston Churchill have lately so signally preserved, as the daily newspapers know and show.

I was shocked at the Genlish religion (so different from ours) for it seems to be an over-literal and severely-strained Christianity of a comfortless character. The Archbishop who serves, instead of ruling, the Church, is very unlike our dear Dr. Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury. Instead of calling himself "His Grace, the Lord Archbishop," he is styled "His Lowliness the Servant Archbishop" (which is hardly fitting, I think). He has no palace, not even a home, on the principle that Jesus had nowhere to lay his head, which goes too far; he dresses in one ragged coat which he mends himself; he has no money or property (poor beggar! he begs his bread), and when I met him he was celebrating Jesus Washing His Disciples' Feet by blacking the boots of twelve Genlish people who needed this.

He asked me if the English Church did not do the same. I reflected, and then said the clergy only licked the boots of their ecclesiastical superiors. The Archbishop, not appreciating my meaning, suggested that Christianity required it the other way about.

None of his clergy (all homeless, ragged beggars who have given up all for Christianity according to Christ's command) call themselves not "The Reverend" but "The Servant" Jones and the like. They work for their parishioners and carry their burdens, instead of preaching at them. They are doers, not

talkers. Their literal Christism is truly disgusting and they compare very unfavourably with our gentlemanly curates and lordly bishops in England. Ragged, poor, simple, always busy doing things for the sick, the unhappy, and the over-burdened, they would be very out of place in any Church Assembly or Convocation, for they care nothing for theology or Church government or rites or ceremonies but only for helping humanity.

Such lovely shrines as York Minster, or the cathedrals of Salisbury, Exeter, Chester or Canterbury, do not exist in the Genlish Church. Indeed, they have no churches or temples made with hands. I was shocked at this indifference to God's House and tried to make a Housing Question out of it. But their Archbishop only smiled.

I was equally shocked at their Holy Communion service where they sat at table and ate a loaf of bread and drank a whole wooden mug full of wine. I contrasted it with the wafer and chalice-sips and reverent kneeling in which I was bred; and felt quite sick to think that they satisfied hunger and thirst at their "Jesus-Supper" as they called it. No doubt Jesus and his disciples did the same, as they argued with me, but I retorted forcefully that they were neither Jesus nor his disciples. However, being both hungry and thirsty, and recollecting that when one is in Rome one does as the Romans do, I swallowed my scruples, one loaf of bread and two mugs of the wine. Inasmuch as the wine was like a vintage-claret of the best years, I had the less difficulty in swallowing my scruples than I should have thought, considering my strict upbringing.

The sole ornament worn by the Archbishop was a small wooden cross. (Indeed, they have crosses of no other material). I told His Lowliness how in my own dear land the jewellers of Bond Street honour Jesus by selling crosses of 18 carat-gold and even of diamonds or other jewels. He expressed scepticism and dismay, so I showed him my own little cross of brilliants and rubies, to which he quoted from the Psalms: "Their idols are silver and gold; even the work of men's hands. They that make them are like unto them and so are all they that put their trust in them." I thought he might have admired the workmanship of my *objet d'art*—but he was no connoisseur and was indeed a man of no taste or fineness; rather like a common fisherman or carpenter, or tax-collector.

The doctrine of the Genlish Church is very queer. They do not believe in prayer or praise—they called it beggary and flattery to my horror when I described our English Church services. They believe in works, like St. James in his Epistle: "Faith without works is dead." There is no poetry but only practicality in their religion—it seemed to me hardly like religion at all. They even drag Jesus into their legal proceedings, which always end in forgiveness, loving kindness and the like—a fearful shock to me, as an English barrister used to victories like "twelve months' imprisonment" or "not guilty" or "judgment for the plaintiff with costs" and the like. We all know that Victory—as the late war has proved—is the most desirable thing on earth, bringing every happiness too, and solving every problem of victors and vanquished alike.

One illustration I must give of their queer religious ideas. I spoke of Jesus (as the Creeds teach) as "sitting on the right hand of God the Father" ever since his Ascension. I suggested that he sat through the Ages (Rock of Ages!) contemplating the sins and follies of mankind with appropriate emotions. "Oh, no," they said, "Your Creed makes him like a broody hen just sitting and sitting and sitting. What about the 100,000,000,000 other worlds than your Earth and our Venus which need him to redeem them by being incarnated and crucified and resurrected upon? This job keeps him busy throughout the 3,000,000,000 years our stellar system of a universe has existed. And there are others, you know, as your English Astronomer-Royal told you and as we know. No: Jesus is very hard at work: He has no time to sit." I was quite stupefied at this Genlish suggestion, so different from the correct ideas of our beloved Church of

England, steering her safe and honourable course between the errors of Rome and dissidence of Dissenters.

I have no patience to descant further on the heresies of the Goshish. Like that admirable man Euclid, I showed them how absurd their propositions were but, convinced against their will, they remained of the same opinion still. One of their Servant-Bishops even went so far as to suggest that my English Church had no religion and no Christianity but was a mere political device to soften religion and keep the populace dull and orderly. Whereupon I quoted my Aunt Fanny, who loved our English Church so much that she said that if she could not go to Heaven by the Church of England, she preferred not to go at all, for it could be no place for a respectable English lady of the better-class if it had nothing but R.C.'s and chapel-goers in it.

C. G. L. DuCANN.

CORRESPONDENCE

A CORRECTION.

To the Editor of "The Freethinker."

Sir,—It is not often that I think I can "improve" on anything that the Editor of "The Freethinker" says on Christianity, but I'm going to chance it!

Under "Civilisation and the Cross" (July 29) he says: "After all, the war has almost brought civilisation to the ground. The situation could hardly have been worse than it is had Christianity never been heard of." I think it would be more accurate to say: "had Christianity been successful!"—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR HANSON.

LENIN

Sir,—Your contributor "Athoso Zenoo" analyses the Russian situation as far as I know it with considerable accuracy, and I am not at all disposed to dispute his views. I should like, however, to have the opportunity of saying that the article on "Lenin and Religion" which I contributed to your issue of July 15 last was not intended to be in any way an exhaustive analysis of the Communist attitude towards religious and theological questions. I was merely endeavouring to tell my fellow Freethinkers of a book which I thought would interest them.

Only on one point do I dispute with my critic and that is in his statement that Freethinkers are not necessarily rebels. I think that the world in which we live is such that the Freethinker must be a rebel. He disbelieves in the supernatural basis of existence on which the majority of people still unconsciously build their philosophy, and that means that he will probably be found with views on politics and cognate questions which will also be minority views, "dangerous" or "advanced" to his more amenable fellow citizens. A man who thinks for himself and does not let a parson, a politician or a newspaper think for him is, in my view, bound to be a rebel.

S. H.

THE HAPPY ATHEIST

I live my life as I go along,
I whistle a tune and sing a song,
And if dark clouds should cross my sky
I whistle on and they all pass by!
Yes, they all pass by as I whistle on,
For when I look up, by God they're gone!
Ha! Ah!

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., MESSRS. SAPHIN, HART, WOOD and PAGE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

Blyth (The Fountain).—Monday, August 20, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

Bolton Branch N.S.S. (Town Hall Steps).—Saturday, August 18, 7.30 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.

Cornholme (Lanes.).—Wednesday, August 22, 7.15 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

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

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

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

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Bigg Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

New Kyo (Durham).—Thursday, August 23, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

North Shields (Harbour View).—Tuesday, August 21, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

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

Oswaldtwistle (near Public Library).—Thursday, August 23, 7.15 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Worsthorne (Lanes.).—Friday, August 17, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Gentleman is willing to invest £500 in any business which will show a fair return on the investment. Advertiser is willing to take interest in the business if good salesmanship is needed.—Box 673, "The Freethinker," 2/3, Farnival Street, E.C.4.

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THE RELIGION OF DEATH

IT is no exaggeration to say that Christianity is opposed to the enjoyment of life. Its doctrines and its record conclusively testify to it, and though some parsons may now try to convey an opposite impression by participating in sport and jovialities, it is of no avail. The moving finger has written and moved on, and not half a line can be cancelled. As Foote and Wheeler rightly pointed out¹, a religion must be judged by the way it acted in its strength, not by what it does when it is on the wane and trying to reconcile its antiquated dogmas with a modern outlook.

In any case, the basic teaching remains in the New Testament, and cannot be gainsaid. Man's sojourn in this life was to be passed in fear (1 Peter i. 17) for the last day would come "as a snare" (Luke xxi. 35). The Christian considered that "to die is gain" (Philippians i. 21) and he was expressly instructed: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians iii. 2), while the supposedly wonderful Sermon on the Mount told him to take no thought for his life (Matthew vi. 25). It is true, of course, that parts of the Old Testament (notably "Ecclesiastes") are hedonistic, but it is the New Testament which presents the specifically Christian attitude and holds out the model of Christ.

What harm was caused to mankind by the attempted emulation of that model! The Jesus cult has forbidden, at times, all that goes to make the happy life. It is, in fact, a denial of life, and it may be calculated that no greater tragedy ever befell the Western world than the triumph of the followers of the pale Galilean. How it contrasted with the love of life and the love of beauty manifested by Paganism! Asceticism had been practised long before Christianity, and it may sporadically arise from a number of causes. Many religions and philosophies have taught a certain amount of asceticism, but Christianity made it a condition for the attainment of Heaven, and held as the only alternative the frightful torments of Hell. Abstention from all the pleasures of life was the Christian ideal: the cold and unhuman (at times even inhuman) ideal of Christ.

Most dangerous was the ordering of celibacy as the holy way of life, and this was undoubtedly responsible for hosts of other evils. But any book of Saints will reveal the extent to which the "greatest" Christians carried their asceticism. St. Jerome had stated that the duty of a monk was to weep,² Origen had castrated himself, while Simeon Stylites exemplified an excellent method of detachment from earthly affairs. The faithful really believed that the Devil was the prince of this world (John xiv. 30), and his enticements had to be avoided at all costs. Charles Reade was historically accurate when he made his monk talk of resisting Satan's wiles by "vigils, fasts, and prayers . . . prayers standing, prayers lying on the chapel floor, and prayers in a right good tub of cold water . . . Nothing he hates and dreads like seeing us monks at our orisons up to our chins in cold water."³ That is a moderate example of Christian monasticism in the Middle Ages.

It is hardly surprising that such severities should cause reactions of the worst kind, and give rise to the gross immorality for which the monasteries became notorious at the time of the Reformation. Lecky has shown that this was not a new occurrence⁴: the Ages of Faith were not ages of moral purity. And J. A. Symonds attributes "the extravagances of the Renaissance" to a revolt against Christian asceticism. Such extravagances were, he says, "guilty, turbid, morbid, because they were committed defiantly in scorn of acknowledged law," whereas "the Greeks had been innocent in their serene unconsciousness of sin and shame."⁵ Christianity perverted the whole of man's natural desires, with disastrous results.

Nor did Protestantism (generally speaking) bring any basic improvement. Where it achieved power it was as harsh as its

parent. Calvin was a supreme degrader of man—as are all true Christians—and he wrote in his "Institutio Religionis Christiane":—

"If we contemplate man only in respect of his natural gifts, we find in him, from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, no trace whatever of goodness. Whatever in him is a little praiseworthy, comes from the grace of God. . . . All our justice is injustice; our service, filth; our glory, shame. Even the best things that rise out of us are always made infect and vicious by the uncleanness of the flesh, and are always mingled with dirt."⁶

Puritanism and Scotch Presbyterianism are noted for their dislike of pleasure, and both have made a deep impression on British life. It is significant that Sunday, specially set aside as the Lord's Day, should be the most miserable day of the week. Well might a Frenchman who visited England in 1784 ask: "Is there in the world anything so wearisome as the English Sunday?" for "If working days are gloomy, they are festal days by comparison with Sunday."⁷

The normal human being cannot accept the Christian view that Life (with a capital letter) comes from denying life. His whole nature is opposed to it, but he may be seriously affected by its influence. Indeed, he can hardly avoid this. Europe, nay the world, is suffering from the results of nineteen centuries of a debasing creed, and it is to the eternal credit of Friedrich Nietzsche that he exposed Christian morality so thoroughly maligned as he was for doing it. "Morality," he said, "is no longer the expression of the conditions of life and growth, no longer the most fundamental instinct of life, but it has become abstract, it has become the opposite of life."⁸

"The opposite of life," there we have it! And we may console ourselves with the thought that such a morality cannot last. It has even now begun to crack and, though its devotees are continuously at work on the job of repair, they labour in vain. For mankind has now really seen the light: the light of life. People are ever becoming more worldly, and displaying a zest for the enjoyment of the only life about which they know anything at all. The tyranny of the Christian Sunday has been largely shattered and, cinemas or no, there are cycling and hiking and other outdoor recreations. Christianity may consider these to be crimes, but the healthy young man or woman knows otherwise.

There is nothing to be condemned in a love of life. On the contrary, it should be encouraged. The Secularist endeavours to do this. His message to the world is:—

"Live your own life to the fullest possible extent;
Help to make everybody's life happier."

He endorses the Epicurean dictum that happiness is the best goal in life, and he lets the next world take care of itself. Hence his difference from the Christian!

Christianity has been, is, and must always remain, a religion, not of life, but of death. In this world there is far too much of death. What we need is more and yet more life: a really full love of life and a lust to enjoy it to the utmost. Spinoza well said that a free man thinks of nothing less than death. Christianity shackled men's minds till they could think of nothing else. That is probably the greatest indictment which can be levelled against it.

C. McCALL.

¹ In their Preface to "Crimes of Christianity," 1885.

² "Contra Vigilantius," XV. (Quoted by George Ives in "Obstacles to Human Progress," p. 188.)

³ "The Cloister and the Hearth," chap. xxx.

⁴ "History of European Morals," chap. ii., p. 329.

⁵ "The Greek Poets," chap. ii., p. 160. Quoted by Ives, loc. cit., p. 186.)

⁶ "The Right to Heresy," Stefan Zweig, p. 71.

⁷ "A Frenchman in England," F. de la Rochefoucauld, p. 70.

⁸ "The Antichrist," Aph. 25.